Three Types of Non-Corporeal Wights in English Heathenism

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1) Overview

This is a study of beliefs about beings known in Old English as *hægetesse*, *és*, and *ælf*. As such, it is a study of early medieval English culture.

All three types of being share certain characteristics. They are disincarnate (except that *hægetesse* might also reference a human occupation). They exist temporarily, spontaneously or upon invocation. They can operate in groups. They are not enforcers of morals. Belief in them persisted throughout Anglo-Saxon times.

They vary in significant ways. The category of *hægetesse* had at best very low esteem and was not served by landmark names. The categories of *és* and *ælf* had high esteem and landmark names imply they were served by group ritual activity. Catholic authorities were not equally hostile to all three categories, explicitly denouncing *hægetessan* but only implicitly denouncing *ælfe* and *ésa* and doing so only in medical contexts.

2) Preliminary Matters

1.A) Mild Warning

We might as well begin with a notice that this study contradicts most or all of what many readers were told about elves since early childhood. One way to explain away the discrepancy is to decide that the adults were never specifically talking about early medieval England. Another way to explain it away is to decide that the adults did not have to be historically accurate if they were only making up lore to have fun with kids at play. But ultimately, it is up to the reader to find a way to reduce discomfort of the discrepancy if he or she has any. Personally, I decided to just live with it and not be mad about it.

1.B) Lexical Conveniences

Certain lexical conveniences are used in this study.

The abbreviation “EMEC” is used to avoid repetitiously typing the adjectival phrase “early medieval English Catholic”. This terminological precision is useful because the Catholicism of the place and time is not the same as any denomination of Christianity that most readers of this essay are familiar with. Three examples make the contrast vivid. (1)

[1] The license is at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

EMEC culture includes belief in elves.[2] (2) The administrators of abbeys and minsters were feudal lords, with normal slaves, serfs, and military obligations.[3] (3) EMEC liturgy includes appeals with Heathen prayer mixed in.[4]

The abbreviation "NEHP" is used to avoid repetitiously typing the noun phrase "native early medieval English Heathen practice". This precision is useful because the native English Heathenism is not necessarily the same as Norse nor other Germanic Heathen religion. It is also not the same as any modern Heathenism.

For *hægetesse* I decided to show translation by means of a calque (hagtess) instead of a loan word. The Modern English descendant of this word, "hag", is not adequate as a translation, because it denotes an obnoxious, ugly, elderly woman, which is quite different from the meaning of the Old English word. Moreover, I did not find an Old English dominant spelling to use as a loan word. Attested variants of this word are numerous and include, among others, *hægtesse* / *hægtes* / *haegtis* / *haehtis* / *hegtis* / *hætse* / *hǽgtiss*.

In Old English, *és* / *éas* is a word with those two variants. I decided to use the loanword "eas" to designate that type of wight in Modern English instead of "ess", which has previously been used.[5] This way, a place called *Easewrið* can be rendered intelligibly in Modern English as "Eas's Thicket" or "Eas Thicket".[6]

Easewrið is a case where the initial element in Old English is dative-for-possessive or locational dative. Locational dative means "characterized by", "devoted to", "used for", or "belonging to".[7] We will return to the matter of locational dative or dative-for-possessive later.

1.C) Database References

Certain certain online databases are referenced without repeatedly inserting URL's or live links.

All the abbreviations "S-" such as "S 404" are Sawyer numbers for documents in the *Electronic Sawyer* database. The charters in the database give details on landmark and personal names

Also referenced is the web site *PASE*. The acronym refers to the database's full title, Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England. It is cited for data on personal names.

Another database is at the web site *Open Domesday*. It is cited for text summaries and photographic images of the Domesday Book entries.

3) Hægtesse

The following conclusions are supported by evidence cited below.

(A) NEHP culture was apparently ambivalent about these wights. They were consulted, but people did not like them enough to use any variant of this word to name their babies.

(B) EMEC belief accepted existence of hagtesses but disapproved them.

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2. Karen Louise Jolly. *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

3. Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley, California, USA: University of California Press, 1988); Sarah Foote, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Printing House, 2006), 93-4, 123-6,181-3, 214.

4. Karen Louise Jolly, "Elves in the Psalms? The Experience of Evil from a Cosmic Perspective," in *The Devil, Heresy, and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor or Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Brill: Leiden, Netherlands, 1998) 19-44, 73-7; Louis J. Rodrigues, *Anglo-Saxon Verse Charms, Maxims, and Heroic Legends* (Pinner, Middlesex, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1993), 130-5.

5. Gary G. Stanfield, *Three Basic Concepts for Early Medieval English Religions* (Self-published, Kansas City, Missouri, USA, 2019), 3.D.3.

6. Victor Ernest Watts, John Insley, and Margaret Gelling, eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names: Based on the Collections of the English Place-Name Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-4; Robert E. Diamond, *Old English Grammar and Reader* (Detroit, MI, USA: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 20.

7. Olaf S. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names: The South-Eastern Counties. Lunds Universitets Arsskrift, 37.1* (Lund, Sweden: Hakan Ohlsson, 1939), 80. Anderson documented well over a dozen medieval spellings of the place name, but those details are beyond the scope of the present study.

(C) It is possible that in some uses a hagtess can be a person (a sorcerer or a person who engages in soothsaying by means of trance contact with a deity), but it is just as likely that the word always denoted a disincarnate wight who could be invoked by prayer or spell casting.
(D) Probably, individual hagtesses would arise and terminate based on local, temporary circumstances; and they definitely could operate in groups.
(E) They were not moral enforcers.
(F) In NEHP, either they did not have spiritual gender or they occurred in some instances as male and in some as female.
(G) NEHP did not include a hagtess cult.

3.A) Dictionaries

Dictionaries of Old English clearly imply a negative attitude towards hagtesses, and they raise the possibility of unembodied existence.

However, the dictionaries I cite here depend mostly on glosses of Latin, and a problem with glosses is that they might be approximations where there is no Old English word corresponding to the Roman or Greek word.

Thus, the dictionary definientia include concepts that are contrary to the evidence from Old English textual contexts, which we will examine later. In the dictionaries, hægtesse in all spelling variants denotes: (A) wights in Greek or Roman religion who are not observed directly but who enforce morals; (B) one of the Fates; (C) an ugly, mean, old woman; or (D) a person who does divination by means of trance communication with a deity.[8]

3.B) Textual Contexts

For this word, there are four surviving Old English textual contexts: a medical remedy, a sermon, an aphorism, and a Biblical translation. Three of those documents imply that a hagtess is an unpleasant, disincarnate being; a sorcerer (perhaps one that is conjured); or an illusion. In the other, we see the word used as a pejorative.

3.B.1) Medical Remedy

The remedy *For a Sudden Stitch* has clues related to all three of the types of wights under discussion here, and it implies that they are quite similar in some important respects. Therefore, we will deal with all three wights here, then cross-reference later. Complete editions, translations, and extensive discussions of the remedy are available elsewhere[9]. The remedy also mentions “six smiths”, but that topic is beyond the scope of this essay.

3.B.1a) Lack of Diagnostics

The remedy assumes that the patient complains of at least one sudden, shooting pain, but the healer asks no diagnostic questions regarding possible causes, frequency, nor severity.

The lack of diagnostic questions is an important clue to two fundamental matters.

One of these is that all three of these wights are non-corporeal. That is, we see a built-in assumption that there is no use in asking the patient if he or she ever physically, visually, tactilely, nor auditorily observed any hagtess, eas, or elf being or

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8. Joseph Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1898; Bosworth, et al., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of Joseph Bosworth, Supplement by T. Northcote Toller with Revised and Enlarged Addenda by Alistair Campbell* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1972); John R. Clark Hall and Herbert D. Merritt, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Fourth Edition, with a Supplement by Herbert D. Merritt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960); Dictionary of Old English, queried repeatedly in June 2024; Etymology Online regarding “pythoness”, visited 25 September 2024; Gerhard Köbler, *Altenglisches Wörterbuch (4. Auflage)* (Innsbruck, Austria, 2014), most recently visited 8 August 2025; Latin-English Dictionary “striga”, visited 22 September 2024; Theoi pages on Apollon and Python, visited 24 September 2024.

9. Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore, and Healing* (Ely, Cambridgeshire, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2000), 224-5; Rodrigues, *Anglo-Saxon Verse Charms, Maxims, and Heroic Legends,* 142-3; Benjamin Slade, “Charm for a Sudden Stitch”. Self-published on the web site *Beowulf on Steorarume*. Most recently visited 24 July 2025 at http://www.heorot.dk/suddenstitch.html; Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*, 204-6.

doing anything. Embodied objects cannot be concealed from everyone under all circumstances forever. Therefore, any being that is known only by its results, not by direct observation, must lack a physical body.

The other fundamental matter is that the three types of beings are not functioning to enforce a moral code. It is useless to ask if the patient has done some foolish or immoral deed to cause the shooting pain, and there is no need to reverse or compensate for the deed nor to seek an alternate penalty, such as prayer or fasting.

3.B.1.b) An Aside on "Disincarnate"

The topic of disincarnate wights is analyzed in detail in a book on Eorðe religion,[10] but it is worthwhile to have a brief aside here.

There are at least two ways in which a wight can exist in a theology without also being a physical object.

One way to understand noncorporeal wights is to regard them as spirit only. That conceptualization might involve thinking of spirit as a type of substance.

The other way is to regard them as epiphenomenal, or we might say as a type of virtual object.

A virtual object is not a physical object, instead it is a result of attributes or functions of physical objects or other virtual objects However, (for practical reasons) it must be spoken of, thought of, and treated as though it were a physical object. Moreover, some virtual objects must be dealt with as though they were wights. (A "being" or a "wight" is an object that is sentient and attentive, can analyze complex stimuli, can search for objects, is able to react, and can exert initiative.)

An analogy is the state, which is not an object (it is a collection of people, inanimate objects and virtual objects) but it must be spoken of, thought of, and treated as a wight.

Many people are unaware of making virtual-object treatments, so atheists sometimes refer to "reification of an abstraction" as a fallacy. However, if you do not make required sacrifices (pay taxes) or pay homage (pledge allegiance or sing an anthem) to at least one state, you will likely wish you had.

For this study, we will stop at two ways of conceptualizing a disincarnate wight.

3.B.1.c) Operation in Groups

The remedy also implies that all three types of wights at least sometimes operate in groups. Following is my translation of lines 21-24, where we see plural references only.

> If you were shot by eases or were shot by elves
> or were shot by hagtesses, now I will help you.
> This is your remedy for eases' shot; this is your remedy for elves' shot.
> This is your remedy for hagtesses' shot. Now I will help you!

3.B.2) Sermon

Hagtesses are explicitly undesirable to EMEC and implicitly desirable to NEHP in a homily which dates from the late 900's or early 1000's, Ælfric's "On Auguries".[11] This sermon includes extensive scolding concerning Heathen soothsaying and magic, which was apparently quite applicable at the time. Edition of the text was done by Skeat, but the translation given here is mine.

The sermon says in lines 161-165 that "...Christian men should fight against devils with strong belief, like learned male warriors, and despise the hagtesses and such Heathenry and the devil's deceptions." (The Old English: "...cristene men sceolan cempian wið deofla mid strangum geleafan . swa swa gelærede cempan and forhogian þa hætsan and ðyllice hæðen-gyld . and þæs deofles dydrunga….")[12]

It is not clear in the sermon whether the hagtesses Ælfric says to abjure are persons skilled in sorcery and divination or spirit wights who are temporarily invoked or conjured by an ordinary person in NEHP. At first reading, one easily supposes the hagtesses to be persons, but we saw above that this word can denote disincarnate wights.

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10. Gary G. Stanfield, *The Place of the Earth-Goddess Cult in English Pagan Religion* (Kansas City, Missouri, USA: self-published, 2014) 11.E, "Natural Species of Deity".

11. Reverend Walter W. Skeat, ed. & trans., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints, Being a Set of Sermons of Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church, Edited from the Manuscript Julius E. VII in the Cottonian Collection, with Various Readings from Other Manuscripts* (London: N. Trubner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, 1881), 364-83.

12. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 376-9.

3.B.3) Durham Proverbs

Negative evaluation is in another textual occurrence, this one in *Durham Proverbs* #11,[13] which is a set of aphorisms recorded in Latin and Old English. Most of the Latin versions are translations of Old English versions. Because most of the Latin and the Old English versions are defective, the two versions of each saying must be compared to figure out what a given proverb is.[14]

The aphorism in question can be understood as Catholic propaganda or as Heathen cynicism. From either perspective, it advises that those who see hagtesses after experiencing much of the world do not trust the wights, any vision of them, or any apparent evidence of their actions. All of those meanings probably were intended.

Following are Angart's edition of the Latin and Old English,[15] then my Modern English translation of the Old English version. Following that is some discussion of what the early medieval author intended.

> [N]eque confiderem liceat bene ambulasset
> dixit qu[i] uidit [st]rigas capite pregredientes.
>
> Ne swa þeah treowde þeah þu teala eode
> cwæþ se þe geseah hagtessan efter heafde geo[. . .
>
> Not trusted, although it well occurred
> said one who perceived hagtesses after having traveled far.

An aside on the (singular nominative) Latin "striga" that was used to translate (plural accusative) "hagtessan" might be helpful. "Striga" could denote a disincarnate being or a human sorcerer. On 22 September 2024, *Latin-English Dictionary* defined it thus: "evil spirit (supposed to howl at night); vampire hag/witch (harms children)." The definition on *Glosbe* (13 June 2025) was "witch (person who uses magic); vampire (mythological creature); evil spirit". Both dictionaries also included several "less frequent" meanings unrelated the context we see here.

Thus, the textual context is vague enough to be consistent with the concept of hagtesses as disincarnate and with encountering them as persons.

The last word in Old English is incomplete on the manuscript, but the scribe probably intended "geondféred" or "geondfared" if we take the corresponding Latin as a clue. According to a query of Latin-English Dictionary (23 Sep 2024), "pregredientes" is not a word, and it is also not in Traupman's dictionary.[16] It looks vaguely related to Modern English "peregrine", and thus to Latin perego. It is probably a typo for a present tense of Latin progredior (progrediens) = to go forward; make progress; go out/forth.

3.B.4) Biblical Translation

In Æfric's sermon, "The Book of Kings", the focal word is used merely as an insult, not to denote a witch nor a disincarnate wight.

The reference is to Jezebel, who is notable for having Jewish religious leaders executed, not for doing magic nor divination. In Ælfric's Old English, Jezebel's corpse is referred to as "þære hætse" (that hagtess),[17] but in the Latin Vulgate Bible (2 Kings 9:30-37), the expression is "maledictam illam", which corresponds to "cursed woman", in the Douay-Rheims translation.[18] The corresponding expression in a Modern English Catholic Bible is "that accursed woman".[19]

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13. Olof Arngart, "The Durham Proverbs," *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (April 1981).

14. Angart, "The Durham Proverbs", 288, 290.

15. Angart, "The Durham Proverbs", 292, 296.

16. John C. Traupman, *The Bantam New College Latin and English Dictionary* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

17. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 404-5.

18. The Latin and the modern English translation are quoted from a 15 July 2025 query of *Latin Vulgate*.

19. Catholic Church, *The New American Bible* (Cleveland, OH, USA: World Catholic Press, 1987).

3C) Persistence

So far, no researcher has reported a name for any individual hagtess, eas, or elf in Old English culture. The absence of evidence for individual names for these wights suggests that the individuals did not persist. Perhaps they existed for moments, lunar cycles, years, or some other length of time.

3.D) Personal and Place Names

I have been searching for a personal or place name including as an element one of the Old English variants of hagtess since 2019 but did not find one by 8 June 2025.

Hence, it seems that there was no hagtess cult and that hagtesses were not considered excellent role models, such as parents might reference in their children's names.

4) És/Éas

The case that és is a word has been made indirectly,[20] but a more direct dealing with this matter is necessary, for as of late 2025, sío és / éas is not commonly recognized by modern scholars. Discussion below shows that we can infer that it is a word for two reasons. (A) Failure to recognize it as a word causes the student of English place names to get into a tangle and defy evidence when trying to explain place names. (B) És is the nominative singular of the attested plural possessive ésa.

In addition, some inferences about this type of wight can be drawn.

(A) In NEHP, eases were very highly regarded, although the category label is rare as an element in aristocrats' personal names.
(B) EMEC accepted the existence of the category but avoided mentioning it as much as possible.
(C) Eases were disincarnate.
(D) Possibly, individual specimens would arise and terminate based on local, temporary circumstances, for we know of no name for an individual eas.
(E) They could operate in groups.
(F) They were not moral enforcers.
(G) We do not know if they had spiritual gender in NEHP.
(H) NEHP might have given ritual attention to eases (a cult might have existed).

4.A) Place Names

The need to recognize that *és* / *éas* is a word is clearest in the study of place names, so that is where we will start.

Scholars often try to explain place names starting with the focal word as referring to the tree species "Ash-", the direction "East-", or a personal name, although more conservative use of the data requires that one recognize *és* as a word. The word as an element in place names seems to indicate landmark eas venues; it is unlikely that any of the place names in question refer to a deity named *Ésa*.

4.A.1) Tree Species

It is an error to interpret a place name as referring to ash trees or to a person named Æsc, although no initial element in the place's attested early medieval names resembles "Æsc-". For example, the only attested medieval name for Ashbury in

20. Stanfield, T*he Place of the Earth Goddess Cult*, 12.E.2.a; Stanfield, *Three Basic Concepts*, 3.D.3.

Devon is “Esseberie”.[21] Apparently, the normalized early medieval name for that place was “Éseberie” (evincing that *és* is a word & showing it in locative dative).

4.A.2) Direction

Were it true that the “Aston” and “Eston” places referred to a direction, then Watts et al would have 51 instances of Weston to explain as west of something but 47 instances of Aston plus 21 instances of Eastun plus one instance of Eston (total 69) to explain as east of something.[22] One would expect the totals would be about equal if “Weston” and “Aston” / “Eston” / “Easton” specimens were named as west or east settlements relative to mother settlements. And surely eastern settlements would also commonly be listed in Domesday as berewicks, but no “Aston” / “Eston” / “Easton” is so listed.

In addition, if many places were named as an eastern farm or settlement in Old English, we would expect to find some recorded names including “Eastan-”. By late July 2025, I found no such specimen in 94 cases.

Consider two specific cases.

Watts et al did not try to explain why Ivinghoe Aston is northwest of Ivinghoe, although they account for the “Aston” in the place name as “éast + tún”. [23]

To explain Aston Botterell, Watts et al explain the name as Éastún + manorial addition from William Boterell early in the thirteenth century. They add that the place is east of Great Clee Hill, but without giving a reason to mention Great Clee Hill.[24] However, none of the names they list for Aston Botterell in medieval literature implies “Eastern”. Hence, a more conservative conclusion is that Aston Botterell was an “és-” location in early medieval times known as Éstún, named for a nearby ritual garden which has long since been plowed under or built over.

4.A.3) Wight’s Name

It is possible to object that some of the place name evidence references a personal or deity name, “Ésa”.

There are two answers to that contra consideration. One is that existence of “Ésa” as a theonym or a personal name would not rule out the possibility that at least some Old English place names referenced *és* / *éas*. The other answer is that it is unlikely that any of the possible “es-” place names refers to a male deity or a man named “Ésa”, as will be shown below.

In some cases, scholars posit a personal name of Ésa as accounting for place names, but without making a case that anyone had such a name. For example, Watts et al explained “Easebourne” as derived from Old English for “Ésa’s Stream”, despite finding only *Eseburn (*not *Ésanburn*) in medieval documents.[25]

Nonetheless, I decided to see if a case could be made.

Given the occurrence of the given name “Asa” in Modern English in America, we might suspect that “Esa” was in the stock of Old English personal names. However, the website *Oh Baby Names* asserted on 24 July 2025 that Asa comes from Hebrew via the Old Testament and was adopted into Modern English by the Puritan denomination long after Old English was no longer spoken.

To check on that, I queried PASE and my copy of the Dictionary of Old English corpus 2009 (using Super Text Search) for the word “esa” on 14 June 2024.

PASE did not return an instance of that name.

I found instances of it in the 2009 Dictionary of Old English corpus, in the genealogy of King Ida of Northumbria, in Chronicles C and A, entries for the year 547. In addition, I found the name (spelled “Oesa”) in the Anglian genealogies.[26]

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21. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London: Penguin Books, 1992): 1307.

22. Watts et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names.*

23. Watts et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names,* 24, 25, 335.

24. Watts et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names,* 24.

25. Watts et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 203. A query of the *Digital Survey of English Place-Names* on 4 August 2025 for “Easebourne” confirmed that the only early medieval attestation of the place name is in Domesday, where it is recorded only as “Eseburn”. *Ésan* is the singular possessive and locative dative of *Ésa,* and *Ese* is the locative dative for *és*. I confirmed the place-name spelling using *Open Domesday* on 17 June 2024. You will see “Eseburne” in Domesday because scribes typically put place names in dative declension.

26. David Norman Dumville, “The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists,” *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976): 29-37; G. N. Garmonsway, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1972): 2, 13, 16, 18, 24, 50, 66; John Allen Giles, ed. and trans., *The Miscellaneous Works of Venerable Bede, in the Original Latin, Collated with the Manuscripts and Various Printed Editions, Accompanied by A New English Translation of the Historical Works and A Life of the Author. Volume II,*

Ingram's Modern English translation of the Chronicle's list is:

> Ida was the son of Eoppa, Eoppa of Esa, Esa of Ingwy, Ingwy of Angenwit, Angenwit of Alloc, Alloc of Bennoc, Bennoc of Brand, Brand of Balday, Balday of Woden, Woden of Fritholaf, Fritholaf of Frithowulf, Frithowulf of Finn, Finn of Godolph, Godolph of Geata.[27]

In Old English:

> Ida wæs Eopping, Eoppa Esing, Esa waes Inguing. Ingui Ángenwitting. Ángenwit Álocing. Áloc Benocing. Benoc Branding, Brand Bældaeging. Bældaeg Wodening. Woden Freoþolafing, Freoþolaf Freoþulfing. Friþulf Finning. Finn Godulfing. Godulf Geating.[28]

In the other instances also, Esa / Oesa is the father of Eoppa.

It is not clear from the lists whether Ésa is a personal or a god name, for it is possible that every name beyond Eoppa (including Ésa) was that of a god. We know that in 661 a man named Eoppa was a priest, per the Laud Chronicle.[29] Also, a search of a copy of the Dictionary of Old English 1998 OE corpus (using Super Text Search) returned other instances of "Eoppa" outside regnal genealogies. In contrast, Ésa and his father Ingui appear only in genealogies, and Sandred's essay implies that "Ingui" is a theonym.[30] Likewise, Godulf, the last name before Gateway in this list, appears only in genealogical lists, and the expression "Godulf Geating" refers to the wight "Geata", who is mentioned in Asser's *Life of Alfred* as a Heathen deity.[31] Further investigation of possible deities in regnal pedigrees will have to await another study.

For present purposes, we can infer that in Old English *és* / *éas* is the label of a category of disincarnate wight, and that "Ésa" might be the proper name of a male high deity, but if so, he probably did not have a significant cult following. If any of the dozens of apparent *és-* place names indicated venues for a high deity named Ésa, then at least one would have a recorded name with a first element in possessive, locational dative, or dative-for-possessive "Esan-", but none has been found as of 5 August 2025.

4.B) Textual Context

Eases are mentioned in only one textual context, *For a Sudden Stitch* (discussed above).

Commonly, students of *For a Sudden Stitch* erroneously opine that *ésa* is an oblique form of *os*.[32]

However, it is more likely that the singular nominative of *ésa* is *és* and that the genitive plural of *os* or *ós* is *osa* or *ósa*. This logic was recognized by Bosworth and Toller, even though they failed to define *és*.[33] This matter was also recognized

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Ecclesiastical History, Books I, II, III (London: Whittaker and Co., 1853): 42; Reverend W. Gunn, *The "Historia Brittonum" Commonly Attributed to Nennius, from a Manuscript Lately Discovered in the Library of the Vatican Palace at Rome; Edited in the Tenth Century by Mark the Hermit; with an English Version, Fac Simile of the Original, Notes and Illustrations* (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1819): 18; Keith's History Pages, last updated 27 February 2006, last visited 25 July 2025; Leo Sherley-Price and R. E. Latham, trans., *Bede: A History of the English Church and People* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1968): 56.

27. Reverend J. Ingram, *The Saxon Chronicle with an English Translations and Notes, Critical and Explanatory, to Which Are Added Chronological, Topographical, and Glossarial Indices; a Short Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Language; a New Map of England During the Heptarchy; Plates of Coins, & etc.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), 23.

28. Charles Plummer and John Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles, Parallel, with Supplementary Extracts from the Others. A Revised Text, Edited, with Introduction, Notes, Appendices, and Glossary, Volume 1* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1892): 16.

29. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* 34.

30. Karl Inge Sandred. "Ingham in East Anglia: A New Interpretation". *Leeds Studies in English*, *New Series* 18 (1987): 231-40.

31. Albert S Cook, transl., *Asser's Life of King Alfred Translated from the Text of Stevenson's Edition* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1906): 1-2; William Henry Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of Saint Neots, Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1904): 2-3.

32. Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 224-5; Rodrigues, *Anglo-Saxon Verse Charms, Maxims, and Heroic Legends,* 36-8, 142-3; Theodor von Grienberger, "Das angelsächsische Runengedicht", *Anglia* 45 (1921): 207; Hall, Alaric, "Are There Any Elves in Anglo-Saxon Place-Names?" *Nomina: Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland* 29 (2006): 63; Jones, "The Old English Rune Poem, an Edition", 89-90; Gale R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: Dorset Press, 1985): 41; Slade, "Charm for a Sudden Stitch", lines 21 and 23 and attached footnote; Smith, Edward, "Heathen and mythological elements in English place-names", self-published in 1999 and last edited 2014; Watts et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 203; David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992): 21.

33. Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 235, 768; Bosworth et al., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary.*

in Anderson's study of the place name Easewrith Hundred, mentioned briefly above.[34] The issue is not addressed by the Dictionary of Old English project.

The textual context in *For a Sudden Stitch* implies that eas is a distinct type from hagtess but shares with it characteristics of being disincarnate, able to operate in groups of eases, and affecting human individuals without moral intent.

Unlike hagtess, we have no indication that EMEC authors used the focal word as a pejorative.

4.C) Variants

We can infer that the word has two variants (*és* and *éas*) based on the following considerations.

One consideration is analogous é / éa words such as the following.

Þæt éagor / égor = flood, high tide.

(Ge) eahtian / ehtian/ æhtian = to estimate, esteem, praise; consult about, consider, debate; watch over.

Éc, éac = also, and, likewise, moreover.

Écen, éacen = increased, augmented; pregnant; richly endowed; strong, great; vast; vigorous.

Sio eaht / eht / æht / aht = assembly, council

Also, place name evidence shows both spellings as apparently synonymous in at least four cases.

The case of Aston Somerville, Worcestershire has both spellings in the early middle age. It was *Estun* in 1086 (*Open Domesday*) and *Eastun* in charters of 930 (S 404) and in 1002 (S 901).

The early medieval attestations of Aston Fields, Worcestershire are *Eston* in 1086[35] and *Easton* in 770 (S 59).

Aston Munslow, or Munslow Aston, was *Éstún* in 1086[36] but *Éaston* in 1167 through 1242 (Watts et al 2004: 24).

Easton, Hampshire was *Eastun* in seven early medieval land grants (S 273, S 34, S 689, S 695, S 723, S 748, S 1275) and *Estun* in Domesday.[37]

4.D) Element in Personal Names

The focal word occurred as an initial element in personal names but was unusual, at least among aristocrats. At least two (but not more than five) men were named Esgar, with an alternate spelling of Easgar or Asgar.

I queried the Dictionary of Old English project's 1998 and 2009 editions of the OE corpus using Super Text Search, and I queried PASE on 14 June 2024, then followed up with direct examinations of primary sources. The query terms and numbers of instances returned are indicated below.

Easgar: One item was returned in a corpus search, but the name was not returned in a PASE query. This individual witnessed charter S 1119 sometime during 1042-1044. This person is probably the same as the second Esgar noted below in paragraph number two under "Esgar".

Esgar: Results of querying PASE and the corpus are detailed below in four paragraphs.

(1) The name is in the Exeter list of guild members, which has been dated to the 900's.[38]

(2) Esgar the Staller witnessed 4 charters issued in the mid-1000's. The charters include S 1120, S 1135, and S 1142. As mentioned above, an Easgar also witnessed S 1119. At least three of the four charters were issued by King Edward during 1053-1066. (A fifth charter including the name "Esgar", S 1120, was probably forged).

(3) There probably were more persons with this name. PASE found an "Esgar" in Domesday as lord of (unnamed) estates in Hertfordshire and Norfolk. *Open Domesday* did not have a link for "Esgar" nor for "Easgar" on 14 June 2024, and its very long listing entitled "All Names" was not in alphabetical order nor

34. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names,* 80.

35. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book,* 1308.

36. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book,* 1308.

37. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book,* 1341.

38. Rory Naismith, "Guilds, States, and Societies in the Early Middle Ages," *Early Medieval Europe*, 28, no. 4 (2020): 645.

electronically searchable. However, using clues obtained from PASE, I went to folio 134v in Domesday and confirmed that Esgar the Standard Bearer held land in Broadwater Hundred, Hertfordshire in 1066.[39] Someone named Esgar also directly held land in South Erpingham, Norfolk in 1066.[40] Because Alecto showed the name spelled "Esger", I queried *Open Domesday* for that name on 3 July 2024 and found that "Esger the Constable" was overlord of 107 manors before the Norman conquest and 1 after. I used the photocopy of the entry for the manor of Sawbridgeworth (Hertfordshire) on 13 August 2025 to confirm that the man's name was spelled "Asgar" twice and "Asgari" once and that the man's title was "Stalr" (meaning staller or standard bearer).[41] It is possible that in 1066 all the fiefs in question belonged to the charter witness mentioned above.

(4) In June 2024, I found apparently misleading indications of three other men named Esgar living in the late 1000's. *Open Domesday* showed an Esger of Ruston as holder of two domains before 1066 and none in 1086. It also showed Esger of Cotton and Esger of Surlingham each as holder of one domain in 1066 and none in 1086. However, I disconfirmed the Esgar's of Ruston, Cotton, and Surlingham for the manors in question using *Open Domesday's* photocopies of the manuscript pages and data in the Alecto Historical Editions translation.[42] Apparently, someone inadvertently linked the string "Esgar" to the string "Ralph" in *Open Domesday*.[43]

I also tested other queries.

Easfriþ, Easfrith, Esfriþ, Esfrith. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easgifu, Esgifu. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easheah, Esheah. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Eashelm, Eshelm. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Eashere, Eshere. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Eastan, Estan. No items returned in corpus nor PASE that reflected a personal name. Eastan is common in the corpus as a word meaning "easterly", "eastern" or "eastward".
Easraed, Esraed, Easræd, Esræd, Easred, Esred. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easwin, Easwine, Eswin, Eswine. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easweard, Easward, Esweard, Esward. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easweald, Easwald, Esweald, Eswald. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.
Easwulf, Eswulf. No items returned in corpus nor PASE.

5) Ælf

Regarding these wights, several inferences may be drawn.

(A) In NEHP, elves were very highly regarded.
(B) EMEC accepted existence of elves but disapproved them.
(C) Elves were disincarnate.
(D) Possibly, individual elves would arise and terminate based on local, temporary circumstances.
(E) The could operate in groups.
(F) They were not moral enforcers.
(G) In NEHP, either they did not have spiritual gender or they occurred in some instances as male and in some as female.
(H) Elves received ritual attention in NEHP (a cult existed).

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39. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book,* 373.

40. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book,* 1059.

41. *Open Domesday* did not have data in its names database for "Esgar", Easgar", nor "Asgar" on 13 August 2025.

42. Alecto Historical Editions, *Domesday Book.*

43. I sent an email regarding the apparent error to the *Open Domesday* project on 3 July 2024. Maybe that is why there was no way to find Esgar in the names database in August 2025.

5.A) High Regard

Under NEHP supremacy, elves were generally very highly regarded, although some ambivalence is evident. We see evidence of high regard in personal names, lexical and grammatical developments, and in place names. However, medical texts produced after centuries of EMEC supremacy indicate a less positive attitude.

5.A.1) Personal Names

Attraction shows in the prevalence of "elf-" as a common element in personal names. Words enter the stock of given names because parents typically are in love with their newborns and give them names of praise. For examples, the stock of given names in the USA includes Linda (Spanish for "beautiful") and Joseph (Anglicization of a saint's name).

Examinations of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,[44] various grants in Electronic Sawyer, and queries of PASE in 2023-2025 showed very many "Elf-" names for both genders. For example, one land grant was witnessed by 23 people with "Ælf-" names.[45]

Apparently, a common characteristic of elves was general excellence. Thus, in elf-related specimens, we commonly see combinations such as Ælfgar (Elf-Spear) or Ælfhere (Elf-Dignity) for males and Ælfwynn (Elf-Joy) or Ælfþryð (Elf-Power) for females. The large variety of second elements implies a wide variety of elf-related good traits.

Babies were named for the category, not for any specific elf. Consider that although a query of PASE on 1 May 2024 revealed that there is no one on record named Þurwin or Þunorwin (Thunder-God-Friend), another query of PASE on the same day returned 184 mentions of Ælfwin (Elf-Friend).

"Ælf" is always the first element in a personal name; I searched the Dictionary of Old English 2009 corpus on 2 June 2025 and found that there is no recorded personal nor place name ending in "-ælf". Apparently, it was used as a modifier to make the second element more positive.

(A cursory overview of personal names reveals that in NEHP culture, words literally referencing categories of wolf, stone, flow, et cetera had spiritual or metaphorical references that are no longer obvious. However, the esoteric meanings of those name elements are beyond the scope of the present study.)

5.A.2) Grammatical & Lexical Evidence

Hall inferred that the grammatical declension of ælf implies that the word denoted wights not inherently dangerous to persons. This is because it retained the declension it got before OE was first written, an attribute in common with words for people (ælde), settlers (sæte) and dwellers (ware). In contrast, words for monsters later got revised declensions with plurals ending in -as (e.g. wyrmas, þyrsas).[46]

5.A.3) Place Names

Place name evidence implies high regard for elves.

Some inferences can be drawn, although I have a large study of place names related to NEHP in progress. For now, it seems unlikely that the study will end up agreeing with Hall's assertion that "No *ælf*-place-name can be identified for Anglo-Saxon England with complete confidence."[47] Instead, it looks like one or two dozen elf venues will be found.

For example, the case of Alvington in Devon implies the existence of an elf cult. On 1 May 2024, *Open Domesday* showed that the name recorded (in dative declension) 1086 was *Alfintone*, which implies a normalized nominative *Ælfingtún*. Watts et al inferred that the place was named after a person named *Ælfa*,[48] but a query of PASE for that name on 2 May 2024 revealed that no aristocrat was recorded as having that name. Moreover,

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44. Garmonsway, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* The index is helpful, but I also paged through this book a lot for other purposes.

45. Walter De Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History, Volume 1, Part 2, AD 738-839* (London: Whiting & Company, 1885), 364-366; Searle, William George. *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum: A List of Anglo-Saxon Proper Names from the Time of Beda to that of King John* (Cambridge, England, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1897), viii.

46. Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender, and Identity* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2007), 62-63.

47. Alaric Hall, "Are There Any Elves in Anglo-Saxon Place-Names?" *Nomina: Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland*, 29 (2006): 61-80.

(A) "*Ælfa-*" is not an element in the recorded early nor late medieval record of names for Alvington, Devon, and (B) it is the plural possessive of *ælf*.

An elf devotee could be a person who lives the essence of elfin excellence based on a normal lifestyle, as opposed to someone with a priestly or monkish vocation.

5.A.4) Ambivalence

It is most likely that NEHP and EMEC cultures had sharply contrasting notions of the morality of elves.

Aversion is evinced by EMEC medical texts.[49] Examples: hiccups are called *ælfsogoða*, *ielfig* means "crazy", and an *ælfadl* is a nightmare. In addition, Hall shows that in Beowulf (line 112), elves are categorized with evil monsters, and that they are devils in the Latin Royal Prayer Book.[50]

However, those texts were composed in the middle 900's,[51] after 200-300 years of EMEC supremacy.

5.B) Existence and Operation

As mentioned above, the evidence implies that elves are disincarnate, can operate in groups, are not enforcers of moral codes, and are manifested as individuals only temporarily. Hall observed that the lack of moral diagnostics in elf-related remedies contrasts with diagnostic discovery of moral transgressions in saint's life stories.[52]

5.C) Spiritual Gender

It is not clear whether elves had spiritual gender.

Personal name evidence suggests that NEHP elves were ungendered or included both spiritually male and female individuals, for elf- names were quite acceptable for both human genders.

Hall inferred that English beliefs about elf gender changed: elves were effeminate anthropomorphic males in England in the 700's, then transitioned to include both male and female specimens, then later became all females.[53]

However, the main weakness of his argument is its assumption that in NEHP, elves were anthropomorphic. Additionally, his assertion that NEHP elves were originally all male in the 700's was based mainly on Norse evidence dated long after the 700's.

5.D) Ritual Attention

Currently-known Old English evidence has no direct indication of supplication of one or more elves for any purpose, but the appearance of the category label in personal and place names implies significant ritual attention.

The prevalence of "Ælf-" personal names implies that in NEHP, many parents were wholeheartedly in an elf cult.

One might object that those conditions were especially likely to have occurred when the stock of Old English personal names was created but then vanished under EMEC domination of English states. However we know, based on sermons and laws, that NEHP persisted for centuries after all the English states officially declared themselves Christian.[54]

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48. Watts et al., *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names,* 8.

49. Felix Grendon, "Anglo-Saxon Charms," *The Journal of American Folklore* 22, no. 84 (April-June 1909): 128; Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 99-110, 120; Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms,* 224-225, 396-399, 435-436, 452-457, 470-472, 475; Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*, 197, 201; Pollington, *Leechcraft,* 455.

50. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 66-74.

51. Jolly, "Elves in the Psalms?"; Pollington, *Leechcraft,* Introduction & chapter 1.

52. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 117.

53. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, chapter 1.

54. F. L Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 102-103, 107-109, 202; Alistar Campbell, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1962), xx-xxi, 18; Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 151-152; John D. Niles, "Pagan Survivals and Popular Beliefs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature, Second Edition*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, UK); Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 364-383; Stanfield, *The Place of the Earth-Goddess Cult,* chapters 9 & 10; Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, UK: Oxford

For now, we do not know the purposes or methods of that ritual work, but perhaps the ritual attention roughly resembled that in Norse culture. In Kormak's Saga, a man sacrifices to elves to heal his wounds.[55] Under Heathen supremacy in a district of what is now Sweden, people in one area observed an elf-oriented holiday in private homes.[56]

6) Additional Remarks

6.A) Corroborating Evidence

The inference that these relatively minor wights are disincarnate is indirectly supported by evidence on Proto-Germanic theology. Tacitus' *Germania* chapter 9 says that Germanic peoples opine it "inconsistent with divine majesty" to represent high deities in human form, and that named deities are occult presences perceived only by "the eye of reverence".[57] If high deities are disincarnate, surely lesser beings also can be disincarnate.

6.B) Contra Consideration

A contra consideration is the content of EMEC propaganda, for if all three categories were significant in NEHP, surely Old English EMEC propaganda would roundly denounce them. It does energetically denounce hagtesses, but that makes all the more suspicious the treatment of elves and ignoring of eases. Elves and eases are denounced implicitly in EMEC documents cited in this study but only in medical texts and not explicitly.

The answer is that there must be a limit to how hostile missionaries can be toward their environing society[58] Thus, the absence of explicit condemnation of elves and eases is quite probably due to the same causes as the absence of explicit condemnation of certain specific beings, such as Eostre and Eorðe.

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55. Rory McTurk, trans., "Kormak's Saga," in *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders, Volume 1,* Viðar Hreinsson, et al. (Rekyavík, Iceland: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), 217-218.

56. E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 230-231.

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58. Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People: Updated for the Next Generation of Leaders* (New York: Simon and Schuster Audio, 2022).

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