Adventus, Warfare and the Britons in the Development of West Saxon Identity[1]

Introduction

Among the many debts of gratitude which historians of Anglo-Saxon England owe to the Venerable Bede is that, thanks to him, we can witness the term 'West Saxon' come into use as a political and ethnic group name. Bede, writing before 731, twice mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that the West Saxons of the late seventh century had formerly been known as the Gewissae.[2] The significance of the name-change, which occurred at a moment of dynastic transition and rapid development in the complexity of Anglo-Saxon kingship, has long been recognised and commented upon.[3] It is unclear why Bede chose (twice) to clarify a dynastic name-change which had happened some forty or more years previously. We might reasonably assume that he obtained his information directly from Bishop Daniel of Winchester, his chief source for West Saxon history, and it may be that his purpose as a historian was primarily to avoid confusion. The name Gewissae is itself curious: in Bede's own time it seems that the West Saxons explained it by reference to a dynastic *Stammvater* called Gewis, a personal name which is unattested in any other contemporary source;[4] more likely is an antiquated group-name with a root in Old English *gewiss*, 'certain, sure, trustworthy',[5] which might render a meaning such as 'the strong ones', or, as Chadwick suggested in 1907, 'confederates'.[6]

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[2]   Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (Oxford, 1969), III. 7, pp. 232-233; IV. 15, pp. 380-381.

[3]   Robin G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1937), pp. 403-404; H. E. Walker, 'Bede and the Gewissae: The political evolution of the heptarchy and its nomenclature', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 12 (1956), 174-186; Barbara Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the origins of Wessex', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Steve Bassett (Leicester, 1989), pp. 84-96 (pp. 93-94); idem, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, New York, 1995), p. 34; Richard Coates, 'On some controversy surrounding *Gewissae/Gewissei*, *Cerdic* and Ceawlin', *Nomina*, 13 (1990), 1-11; Harald Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae and Bede: On the innovativeness of Bede's concept of the *gens*', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Joyce Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 77-102; David P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 2nd edn (London, 2000), p. 38.

[4]   Gewis appears in the genealogy of the West Saxon King Ine (688-726) from the Anglian Collection list of royal genealogies (see below).

[5]   Coates, 'On some controversy'.

[6]   Hector M. Chadwick, *Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), p. 147, n. 2. Myres, in Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, p. 403, n. 2, attempted to rehabilitate Gewiss as a genuine historical figure, but modern consensus has leaned firmly towards Chadwick's view that he is entirely mythical and derived from a pre-existing group name. For a recent discussion see Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae and Bede', pp. 95-98. An alternative meaning of 'westerners' has also been suggested (see Walker, 'Bede and the Gewissae', p. 178, n. 18), while Ian N. Wood, 'Before and after the migration to Britain', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by John Hines (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 41-64 (p. 50), has

Bede, however, finds little support in the late seventh century sources. First of all, the term *rex Gewissorum* appears in only one surviving charter, a relatively late donation of King Cuthred dating from 745, who appears to have been using it as a consciously archaic term.[7] The first 'Gewissan' king to leave behind a genuine charter, King Centwine, who ruled between 676 and 685, styled himself *rex Saxonum*, as did his successor King Cædwalla (685-88).[8] Abbot Aldhelm of Malmesbury, later bishop of Sherborne (†709), poetically referred to both Centwine and Cædwalla as rulers of the *imperium Saxonum*,[9] and Bede himself also records that Cædwalla's funerary inscription in Rome gave him the title *rex Saxonum*. There is therefore little doubt that the 'Gewissan' kings of the seventh century tended to refer to themselves simply as kings of the Saxons.[10]

As significant as this name change is, one may wonder whether it has much helped to elucidate the origins of Wessex, so threadbare and tangled are the strands of evidence in which it is ensnared. The historical evidence comprises the scanty narrative of Bede, who provides our first trustworthy chronological anchor with the conversion of King Cynegils to Christianity in 635 but has virtually nothing to say prior to that, and a loose collection of later annals and genealogical and regnal lists. These texts are the written detritus of ninth-century dynastic myth-making which celebrates the forging of the West Saxon kingdom at the hands of Germanic pirates who landed on the Solent coast of Hampshire at the end of the fifth century and embarked on a centuries-long programme of expelling or subjugating the British population. The archaeological evidence, as noted long ago by E. T. Leeds, contradicts this West Saxon propaganda.[11] It places the earliest Saxon activity of the region decisively not in southern Hampshire *c*. 500, but in the upper Thames

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entertained the possibility that the name is Celtic in origin.

[7] Peter H. Sawyer, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*: *An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), no. 256. We should not ignore the possibility that Cuthred was in fact encouraged to employ the name by its appearance in Bede's work.

[8] For occurrences of *rex Saxonum* see ibid., nos 235, 237.

[9] Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. by Rudolf Ehwald, MGH AA, 15 (Berlin, 1919), pp. 14, 16.

[10] Walker, 'Bede and the Gewissae', pp. 183-184, suggests that the term *rex Saxonum* was preferred in the early charters because the Gewissan kings held a virtual dominion over the other Saxon kingdoms of the south; only when this domination proved to be temporary and the future of the Gewissae was found in western expansion was the term 'West Saxons' adopted.

[11] Edward Thurlow Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 52-53; idem, 'The West Saxon invasion and the Icknield Way' *History*, 10 (1925-1926), 97-107. Later refinement and expansion of the Anglo-Saxon archaeological corpus has validated Leed's observation that the earliest Saxon material in later Wessex appears at Dorchester-on-Thames in the first half of the fifth century. See Sonia Chadwick Hawkes and Gerald D. Dunning, 'Soldiers and settlers in Britain, fourth to fifth century', *Medieval Archaeology*, 5 (1961), 1-70; Audrey L. Meaney, *A Gazeteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (London, 1964); Tania M. Dickinson, *The Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites of the Upper Thames Valley, and their Bearing on the History of Wessex circa AD 400-700* (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford, 1974); Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, 'The early Saxon period', in *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region*, ed. by Grace Briggs, Jean Cook and Trevor Rowley (Oxford, 1986), pp. 64-108; Bruce N. Eagles, 'The archaeological evidence for settlement in the fifth to seventh centuries AD', in *The Medieval Settlement of Wessex*, ed. by Mick Aston and Carenza Lewis (Oxford, 1994), pp. 13-32; Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 31-34.

valley several decades earlier. J. N. L. Myres attempted to reconcile the evidence with a geographical contortion, suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's account was largely reliable, but that the Gewissan invaders of Hampshire, leaving behind precious few archaeological traces of themselves, swiftly absorbed the pre-existing Saxon groups of the Thames valley into a West Saxon confederacy.[12] Martyn Whittock, one of the numerous medievalists of the last century who have peered into this particularly dim and enticing corner of Anglo-Saxon history, asserts that any straightforward account of what Myres called 'the problem of Wessex' is likely to be a poor one;[13] and the fact that his own narrative, derived largely from the work of Myres,[14] differs in fundamental points from the contemporary efforts of Barbara Yorke only illustrates his point.[15]

The problem of Wessex, put briefly, is the mutual antagonism of historical and archaeological sources. Regrettably, the West Saxons produced no narrative sources comparable to the Kentish *adventus* legend transmitted by Nennius in his ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*,[16] but rather a series of annals, a number of genealogies of individual rulers, and the West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List, a short text which recalls the names, regnal lengths and pedigrees of every West Saxon ruler in continuous succession from Cerdic to King Æthelwulf (†858). Each of these three sources, which have been discussed at length by Dumville, is associated with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, whose archetype was compiled towards the end of King Alfred's reign (871-99): the annals comprise much of the early material of the Chronicle, while the genealogies of individual rulers are interspersed throughout it and three of the nine extant copies of the Genealogical Regnal List were incorporated into Chronicle versions A, B and G.[17] In addition we have a genealogy of King Ine from the Anglian Collection, a compilation of royal genealogies and regnal lists covering most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[18] Critical analysis of the annals and genealogical and regnal lists by Sisam, Sims-Williams, Dumville, Moisl and Yorke has revealed the extent of chronological manipulation and corruption to which they had been subjected and all but eroded their remaining credibility as authentic historical accounts.[19] They are now regarded not as genuine recollections of

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[12] Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, pp. 403-405. Cf. Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), p. 26, who leaves the question open.

[13] Martyn J. Whittock, *The Origins of England 410-600* (London, 1986), p. 186.

[14] Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, pp. 394-410.

[15] Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight'.

[16] Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, ed. and trans. by J. Morris, *British History and the Welsh Annals*, Arthurian Period Sources, 8 (London: Phillimore, 1980).

[17] David N. Dumville, 'The West Saxon genealogical regnal list and the chronology of early Wessex', *Peritia*, 4 (1985), 21-66 (pp. 22-34).

[18] The Collection survives in four manuscripts, the earliest of which dates from 934x37, although Dumville has argued for its original creation in Mercia or Northumbria towards the end of the eighth century, and the fact that the West Saxon list ends with Ine implies that the genealogy was composed during his reign. David N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 23-50 (esp. pp. 25-26).

[19] Kenneth Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 39 (1953), 287-348; Patrick

kingship and conquest stretching back into the fifth century, but as products of identity formation which in their present form date from the ninth century. Later in this article I will discuss the likelihood that they were partially based on material from an earlier stage of identity formation which can be related to the late seventh-century name-change from Gewissae to West Saxons.

In this respect, provided one is interested in questions of identity, the value of these sources has only increased as their credibility has diminished. Yet even the ninth-century architects of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, whose interests apparently included throwing their dynastic hooks as far back into the Solent past as possible, only reached the end of the fifth century, giving Cerdic an *adventus* in the year 495; and an earlier version of the myth, according to the original (shorter) regnal lengths reconstructed by Dumville,[20] reached only as far back as the early or mid sixth century, a hundred years shy of the archaeological evidence. From the perspective of a text-deprived late seventh-century king, in other words, living memory could reasonably account for perhaps four generations, and mythology add a couple more. Anything before that belonged to a Germanic past which lay reliably hidden behind the fogs of time and the English Channel. If we seek the origins of the West Saxons in the Gewissan past, therefore, it does not help to stand at the end of the seventh century and squint backwards. We must return to the fifth and start from there. The aim of this paper is to examine the two centuries which preceded the emergence of the Gewissae into recorded history, to trace the processes which eventually gave rise to their southern hegemony, and then to explain why, at the end of the seventh century, Ine and his peers chose to portray the past in the way they did. I will argue that while the West Saxon origin story was a fiction, it was also a deliberate and canny manipulation of existing traditions; furthermore, its constituent elements - the glorification of warfare and the violent subjugation of the native Britons - had a certain parabolic quality which echoed both the realities of the late seventh century, and, whether Ine and his followers knew it or not, the realities of the fifth.

Gildas and the *adventus Saxonum*

We do not know how long a group called the Gewissae had existed under that name by the late seventh century. The appearance of the fictional ancestor Gewis in the genealogy of King Ine (688-

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Sims-Williams, 'The settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12 (1983), 1-41; repr. in idem, *Britain and Early Christian Europe: Studies in Early Medieval History and Culture* (Aldershot, 1995); Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection'; idem, 'Kingship, genealogies and regnal lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. by Peter H. Sawyer and Ian N. Woods (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72-104; idem, 'The West Saxon genealogical regnal list'; Hermann Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and Germanic oral tradition', *Journal of Medieval History*, 7 (1981), 215-248; Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight'; idem, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 130-137.

[20] See below; Dumville, 'The West Saxon genealogical regnal list,' pp. 39-40, 46.

726), however, suggests that it carried considerable political weight, especially considering that Gewis was placed two generations *before* Cerdic, the mythical founder of the West Saxon *gens*. We might further suppose that Bede would not have felt the need to explain the name-change from 'Gewissae' to 'West Saxons' were the former not already well established. Kleinschmidt suggests that the name 'Gewissae' was originally a broader ethnic term which only became restricted to a particular dynasty once the term 'West Saxons' came into use,[21] although the absence of terms such as *rex Gewissorum* in the charter tradition makes this uncertain;[22] it is equally plausible that 'Gewissae' had always been a dynastic name, or referred to a local territorial grouping of the sort recorded in the Tribal Hidage, albeit one which had achieved exceptional influence over its neighbours.[23] The foundation of the first Gewissan bishopric at Dorchester-on-Thames in 635 would lead us to locate the Gewissan 'homeland' in the upper Thames valley, and the appearance of extremely early continental Saxon material culture in precisely this area might even encourage us to trace the name 'Gewissae' itself back to the fifth century. Indeed 'Gewissae', should it mean something akin to 'the strong ones', sounds like just the sort of name a band of young mercenaries, newly-settled, politically embryonic and tactically vulnerable, might give themselves.[24]

By this point, of course, we have left our evidence behind, but it may at least have pointed us in the right direction. The earliest Saxon settlement in the upper Thames took place in the immediate aftermath of Rome's withdrawal from Britain *c*. 410. The historical sources for fifth century Britain, while better than for the sixth, are highly problematic. The only insular source of

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[21] Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae and Bede', pp. 97-98.

[22] See above. There are so few reliable charters from late seventh-century Wessex, however, that it would be unwise to make any strong judgements on this point. King Centwine left a single charter in his name, and Cædwalla just six, only two of which are broadly regarded as authentic. The two genuine charters are Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, nos 231 and 235; the inauthentic charters, which may be based to varying degrees on authentic seventh-century material, are nos 230, 232-234. For a discussion of the charter material see H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964); Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 240-243; Heather Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 198 (Oxford, 1988). We must also take into account the flexibility in the use of royal titles before the ninth century: David N. Dumville, 'The terminology of overkingship in early Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period*, ed. by Hines, pp. 345-365 (p. 347).

[23] David N. Dumville, 'The Tribal Hidage: An introduction to its texts and their history', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester, 1989), pp. 225-230. The Tribal Hidage, which varies from 300 to 100,000 hides in its tax assessments of different groups, portrays a highly varied social landscape which could allow for numerous levels of group- and self-identity. It is likely that the vast 100,000 hide assessment of the West Saxons conceals numerous smaller social units, of whom the Gewissae may originally have been one. See Walter Pohl, 'Ethnic names and identities in the British Isles: A comparative perspective', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period*, ed. by Hines, pp. 7-40.

[24] My thanks to Walter Pohl for this suggestion. On the dynamic processes inherent in the formation of early medieval barbarian tribes, see Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. by Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1997), p. 8. It is interesting to note that young men aged between about twenty and thirty seem to have been accorded the highest social status at the early Saxon community of Dorchester, receiving wealthier grave assemblages and enjoying a richer and more varied diet than men over thirty. See Karen L. Privat and Tamsin O'Connell, 'Stable isotope analysis of human and faunal remains from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Berinsfield, Oxfordshire: Dietary and social implications', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 29 (2002), 779-790 (p. 788).

use to us here is the *De excidio Britanniae* of Gildas, a fierce moral polemicist who set his criticism of several contemporary British kings within the framework of a providential interpretation of the island's history.[25] A major concern of historians has been to establish the chronology of his account by means of a few continental references to contemporary events in Britain, later traditions and the structure and contents of the text itself. Most scholars have tended to place the composition of the text in the early or mid sixth century, with Wood opting for an earlier bracket of 485x520.[26] Higham has made a case for the relatively early date of 479x84, which he reached by freeing the text from a pair of chronological anchors: the use of unreliable later Welsh and Irish traditions which tended to pull it into the sixth century; and the traditional association of the British appeal to Aetius ('Agitius' in Gildas's text) with his third consulship, that is between 446 and 454.[27]

While there are numerous debatable aspects of Higham's interpretation of the text,[28] the chief virtue of his chronological reckoning is that it brings the *De excidio Britanniae* into closer harmony with the continental sources, the archaeological evidence and the learned late Latin context in which it was seemingly written. His attempt to locate Gildas in the south west (specifically in the region of later Dorset and Wiltshire), against the older opinion which tended towards the north and extreme west, is more convincing.[29] These chronological and geographical

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[25] Nicholas J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 7-34. The standard critical edition is Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII. vol. III*, MGH Auct. ant., 13 (Berlin, 1898), pp. 25-85; for the English translation, see Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London, 1978).

[26] For the traditional dating, see David N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwyn: Problems of dating', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 51-60; idem, 'The chronology of "De Excidio Britanniae", Book 1', ibid., pp. 61-84. Michael Lapidge, 'Gildas's education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain', ibid., pp. 27-50, judging that Gildas's Latin would have been notably archaic at so late a date, prefers to place the composition earlier in the sixth century. See also Ian N. Wood, 'The end of Roman Britain: Continental evidence and parallels', ibid., pp. 1-26.

[27] For the appeal, see Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 20, p. 36; trans. Winterbottom, pp. 23-24. Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 119-141, was developing his earlier subscription to a date of *c.* 500: idem, 'New light on the Dark Age landscape: The description of Britain in the *De Excidio Britanniae* of Gildas', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17. 4 (1991), 363-372 (p. 364). Michael E. Jones, 'The appeal to Aetius in Gildas', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 32 (1988), 141-155, suggested that the appeal to *Agitio ter consuli* was intended not for the thrice-consul Roman general Aetius, but for Aegidius, who was active in the Loire region *c.* 456-65, and that the Britons were refugees in Gaul who were seeking protection from Saxon, Burgundian or Visigothic attacks; yet see also P. J. Casey and Michael E. Jones, 'The date of the letter of the Britons to Aetius', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 37 (1990), 281-290, where Jones argues alongside John Casey that the addressee was indeed Aetius, but dates the appeal to an earlier phase of his career in the late 420s, with the *ter consuli* being an anachronistic interpolation by Gildas. Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 124-136, takes this line of argument further with the plausible suggestion that entire address and letter which Gildas 'quotes' was in fact his own poetic reconstruction of oral tradition.

[28] In particular his argument that Gildas repeatedly alludes to the Saxons, who are explicitly mentioned only once in the text (Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 23, pp. 38-39; trans. Winterbottom, pp. 26-27), through a variety of metaphors, and that the obscure reference to a *pater diabolus* relates to a purported Saxon high king who exercised some form of hegemony over much of the British people and church. Higham, *The English Conquest*, esp. pp. 160-166. There is little concrete support in the text for such an interpretation.

[29] E. A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the history of Britain', *Britannia*, 10 (1979), 203-226 (pp. 214, 225), argued vociferously in favour of a northern context for Gildas. Neil Wright, 'Gildas's geographical perspective: Some thoughts', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Lapidge and Dumville, pp. 85-105 (pp. 100-105), criticised this view,

adjustments, while the former in particular must be accepted with a degree of caution, greatly increase Gildas's authority as a contemporary witness of events in fifth-century southern Britain

This has implications for our interest in the earliest Gewissae (or their predecessors) in the upper Thames valley. Although the provinces of Britain had been suffering economic decline and political disruption since the late fourth century, culminating in the messy usurpation of Constantine III in 407 and his withdrawal to the continent of most of Britain's remaining army, the departure of imperial adminstration *c*. 410 appears to have led to social, political and economic fragmentation of a degree and suddenness quite unparalleled elsewhere in the Empire.[30] The economic impact is best illustrated by the archaeological record, which demonstrates the final cessation of new coinage, the collapse of the pottery industry and the almost complete abandonment of villas and towns, both large and small, by *c*. 430.[31] The end of Roman Britain was, in the words of A. S. Esmonde Cleary, 'nasty, brutish, and short' - but, pointedly, it came about chiefly through long-term economic and political factors,[32] exacerbated by a severe famine and plague,[33] not, as Gildas later imagined, mainly because of barbarian raids.[34] The settlement of Anglo-Saxon warbands was a consequence,

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and Higham further developed the argument in favour of a southern context: Higham, 'New light', p. 369; idem, *The English Conquest*, pp. 90-113. Meanwhile Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 6 (1983), 1-30 (pp. 1-5), made the important observation that the subject of Gildas's writing was Britain as a whole, and one should not try to limit his geographical horizons by imposing upon him a parochial mindset. Andrew Breeze, 'Where was Gildas born?', *Northern History*, 45 (2008), 347-350, giving credence to later medieval traditions surrounding Gildas, has recently argued for his birth near Arclid, Cheshire.

[30] For two useful comparative perspectives, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 306-310; Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 123-124.

[31] A. S. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 140-142. The evidence for the continued occupation of towns into the second half of the fifth century, for example in Verulamium, Lincoln, Exeter and Wroxeter, is so isolated and limited in scale compared to fourth-century urban life that it serves best to highlight the totality of the collapse surrounding it. Ibid., pp. 148-154.

[32] Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, p. 161; Christopher J. Arnold, *From Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984), pp. 159-161. See also Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (New York, 1996), who develops a model of political and cultural 'de-Romanisation' which allowed the Anglo-Saxon to achieve rapid dominance.

[33] Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 20, p. 36; trans. Winterbottom, pp. 23-24, refers to the *famis dira ac famosissima* which struck around the same time as the widespread abandonment of the cities, while in c. 22, pp. 25-26, he refers to a *pestifera lues* which struck shortly afterwards. While precise dating is impossible, these events must have occurred after the Roman withdrawal of 409 and before the British appeal to Aetius, which is dated to 425x435 by Higham, *The English Conquest*, p. 137. C. E. Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', *English Historical Review*, 56. 233 (1941), 353-373 (p. 363), relates the *pestifera lues* to the great plague of 442/3 reported by Hydatius; but see also Malcolm Todd, '*Famosa pestis* and Britain in the fifth century', *Britannia*, 8 (1977), 319-325 (pp. 320-321), whose *a priori* dismissal of Gildas as an ill-informed polemicist inclines him to distrust his authority on this matter. Todd also remarks (p. 323) that no other contemporary source, insular or continental, refers to a plague reaching Britain in the fifth century. There is little reason to connect Gildas's *pestifera lues* specifically with the plague of 442/3, nor to assume that it never happened because of a lack of direct corroboration. The late second-century mass burial outside Roman Gloucester of almost one hundred individuals, apparently victims of a major pestilence, indicates that Britain may have been visited by the infamous Antonine Plague of AD 165-180 (or a similar outbreak) without mention of it being made in historical sources. See Carolyn Chenery, Gundala Müldner, Jane Evans, Hella Eckardt and Mary Lewis, 'Strontium and stable isotope evidence for diet and mobility in Roman Gloucester, UK', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 37 (2010), 150-163 (p. 157).

[34] Cf. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 13. This is not to say that barbarian raids could not have a

not a cause, of British collapse.

If we were to follow Higham in his early dating of the *De excidio Britanniae*, the British despatch to Aetius must have occurred in the late 420s or early 430s, around which time he was regaining control of northern Gaul after twenty years of barbarian control.[35] This success may well have given some Britons hope that their own province might be restored to the Empire, and prompted them to send a formal appeal.[36] Gildas states that although Aetius failed to send any military assistance, the Britons were nonetheless able to defeat the barbarians themselves, winning a temporary respite.[37] This portrayal of events finds some corroboration in Constantius's *Vita Germani* (written *c*. 480), which describes the first visit of Germanus of Auxerre to Britain in 429 in order to combat Pelagianism. In the *vita*, the Britons of the south east are not yet subject to Saxon rule but are threatened by barbarian raids; they have soldiers, but lack organisation and military expertise. Germanus obligingly takes command of the British forces, has them baptised and wins a bloodless victory over a Pictish and Saxon warband.[38] The fact that Germanus also met with an official 'of the rank of tribune' (*tribuniciae potestatis*),[39] may indicate that Aetius did at least send a formal representative of the Empire (apparently with his family) across the Channel, while Germanus's expulsion of the defeated Pelagian heretics demonstrates that Britain, at least to some degree, still lay within the horizons of imperial authority in the late 420s.[40]

After the second visit of St Germanus *c*. 435, during which he purportedly met not a tribune but a more vaguely described 'chief man of the region' (*regionis illius primus*),[41] the next secure date relating to events in Britain is the entry in the Gallic Chronicle of 452 under the year 441: 'The provinces of Britain, which to this day have endured various misfortunate events, are made subject to Saxon rule'.[42] The reliability of this entry has survived the scrutiny of the Chronicle's numerous flaws, and can safely be regarded as referring to an event of sufficient import to have been noted by

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devastating local impact: several villas along the vulnerable Bristol Avon were violently destroyed in the late fourth century, and some were not reoccupied; occupants of the villa at North Wraxall were murdered and their bodies thrown down a well. Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 9-10; Hawkes and Dunning, 'Soldiers and settlers', p. 32.

[35] Ian N. Wood, 'The fall of the western Empire and the end of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 18 (1987), 251-262 (p. 257).

[36] Higham, *The English Conquest*, p. 137. Wood, 'The fall of the western Empire', p. 257, follows precisely the same reasoning when, in accordance with the conventional later dating of the *De excidio Britanniae*, he connects the British appeal to Aetius's second recovery of northern Gaul in the mid 440s.

[37] Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 20, p. 36; trans. Winterbottom, pp. 23-24.

[38] Constantius of Lyon, *Vita Germani Episcopo Autissiodorensis*, ed. by Wilhelm Levison, MGH rer. Merov., 7 (Hannover, 1920), pp. 247-283 (c. 17-18, pp. 263-265).

[39] Constantius, *Vita Germani*, c. 15, pp. 261-262.

[40] Wood, 'The fall of the western Empire', p. 252.

[41] Constantius, *Vita Germani*, c. 26, p. 270.

[42] *Brittanniae usque ad hoc tempus uariis cladibus euentibusque latae in dicionem Saxonum rediguntur*. Richard W. Burgess, 'The Gallic Chronicle of 452: A new critical edition with a brief introduction', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 52-84 (p. 80).

contemporaries in southern Gaul.[43] In the view of the anonymous Gallic Chronicler, the year 441, not *c*. 410, represented the true end of Roman Britain.[44] The entry appears to describe the formal establishment of Saxon rule over at least a significant part of southern Britain, and Higham has associated it with the end of the war which started, according to Gildas, with the rebellion of Saxon mercenaries brought by Vortigern to eastern Britain.[45] Such a view logically places Vortigern's initial invitation to the Saxons some time in the early 430s, allowing roughly a decade for their rebellion, the subsequent war and the truce of 441. This chronology is significantly earlier and more compressed than in previous interpretations of Gildas's narrative, not least that of Bede, who placed the *adventus Saxonum* in 449 and the decisive battle of Mons Badonicus in 493.[46] Such a late date for the *adventus*, however, is rendered unlikely by the archaeological evidence. The chief virtue of Higham's hypothesis is that it corrects this disjunction without doing damage to the essential structure of Gildas's narrative.[47]

The first Saxons of the upper Thames: fifth to sixth centuries

As mentioned above, some of the earliest continental Saxon material away from the east coast appears in the furnished cemetery of Berinsfield, on the outskirts of Dorchester-on-Thames. The cemetery was small, comprising perhaps 150 to 200 burials in total, 114 of which were excavated in 1974-1975. Artefact typology, particularly of continental-style women's brooches, allowed its period of use to be placed between the mid fifth century and the late sixth or early seventh

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[43] Steven Muhlberger, 'The Gallic Chronicle of 452 and its authority for British events', *Britannia*, 14 (1983), 23-33 (pp. 30-32); Michael E. Jones and P. J. Casey, 'The Gallic Chronicle restored: A chronology for the Anglo-Saxon invasions and the end of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 19 (1988), 367-398; Richard W. Burgess, 'The Dark Ages return to Britain: the "restored" Gallic Chronicle exploded', *Britannia*, 21 (1990), 185-196. Despite Burgess's intention being to invalidate the Gallic Chronicle's usefulness as a source for fifth-century British history (*contra* Jones and Casey), he acknowledges the accuracy of the entry for 441. He is somewhat too hasty to dimiss it, however, as bearing no meaningful relation to events in contemporary Britain (p. 192, n. 26). We may accept it as marking an event of singular importance to contemporaries without regarding it as the watershed moment at which Britain 'became' Anglo-Saxon.

[44] Muhlberger, 'The Gallic Chronicle', p. 32. Evangelos Chrysos, 'Die Römerherrschaft in Britannien und ihr Ende', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 191 (1991), 247-276 (p. 268), similarly suggests that the event of 441 was of special significance to a Gaulish audience because it ended any foreseeable prospect of a Roman reoccupation of the island.

[45] Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 23, pp. 38-39; trans. Winterbottom, pp. 26-27. It is this association of the end of the war with the Gallic Chronicle's entry for 441 which leads Higham to an approximate date of 479x84 for the composition of the *De excidio Britanniae*, by adding the forty-four years which Gildas states (albeit in a grammatically problematic passage) had passed since the battle of Mons Badonicus in the latter stages of the war: *quique quadragesimus quartus ut noui orditur annus mense iam uno emenso, qui et meae natiuitatis est.* Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 26, p. 40; trans. Winterbottom, p. 28.

[46] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I. 15-16, pp. 48-55.

[47] See, for example, Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', pp. 361-363, who attempted to resolve the difficulty by arguing that Gildas had misplaced the British appeal to Aetius within his narrative, believing that it had preceded the *adventus Saxonum* when in fact it had come after the Saxon rebellion. His chronology was criticised by J. N. L. Myres, 'The adventus Saxonum', in *Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond: Essays Presented to O. G. S. Crawford*, ed. by W. F. Grimes (London, 1951), pp. 221-241.

century,[48] with some of the material dated by Böhme to as early as 420.[49] The cemetery at Berinsfield has attracted special interest both because of its early date and because of its proximity to the late Romano-British cemetery of Queenford Farm, some 600 metres to the south. Queenford Farm, which may have contained as many as 2000 burials, was partially excavated in 1972 and 1981, and was almost exclusively composed of unfurnished west-east inhumations.[50] It appears to have been one of the main extramural cemeteries of the small Roman town of Dorchester.

The original carbon-14 dates supplied by a number of the Queenford Farm burials appeared to demonstrate the continuity of the cemetery into the sixth century, which provoked some comment in the literature; Yorke remarked upon the oddity of a British community which continued unfurnished burial even in the midst of such concentrated Saxon settlement,[51] while Thomas, Stumpf and Härke cited Queenford Farm as evidence for an apartheid-like social division between Saxon and British populations.[52] A recent re-analysis of the skeletal material from Queenford Farm, however, has corrected the original flawed data and confirmed that the cemetery fell out of use at the beginning of the fifth century. The same researchers undertook carbon-14 analysis of the population of Berinsfield cemetery, and concluded that it was founded very soon afterwards, possibly, though not certainly, with a brief period of overlap.[53]

Whether or not the population buried at Berinsfield were immigrants from across the North Sea is another question, but the sudden and total shift in burial customs and location, the intrusive nature of the Berinsfield material culture and the significantly higher average stature of the Berinsfield burials compared to those of Queenford Farm makes it overwhelmingly likely that they were.[54] Heinrich Härke undertook a comparative analysis of a number of burials from early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, including Berinsfield, and made the important observation that males buried with weapons in the fifth and sixth centuries were on average 2-5 centimetres taller than those buried

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[48] A. Boyle, A. Dodd, D. Myles and A. Mudd, *Two Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: Berinsfield and Didcot* (Oxford, 1995), p. 126.

[49] Horst Wolfgang Böhme, 'Das Ende der Römerherrschaft in Britannien und die angelsächsische Besiedlung Englands im 5. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch des romisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz*, 33 (1986), 469-574 (p. 522).

[50] See R. A. Chambers, 'The late- and sub-Roman cemetery at Queenford Farm, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 52 (1986), 35-69; Paul Booth, 'Late Roman cemeteries in Oxfordshire: A review', *Oxoniensia*, 66 (2001), 13-42.

[51] Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 46-48; see also Heinrich Härke, 'Ethnicity, "race" and migration in mortuary archaeology: An attempt at a short answer', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 14 (2007), 12-18 (p. 15).

[52] Mark G. Thomas, Michael P. H. Stumpf and Heinrich Härke, 'Evidence for an apartheid-like social structure in early Anglo-Saxon England', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 273 (2006), 2651-2657 (p. 2654).

[53] Catherine M. Hills and Tamsin C. O'Connell, 'New light on the Anglo-Saxon succession: Two cemeteries and their dates', *Antiquity*, 83 (2009), 1096-1108 (pp. 1104-1106). The carbon-14 dates from eleven burials from Queenford Farm and five from Berinsfield clearly demonstrate only that the shift between the two cemeteries was sudden and complete; there was neither an extended transition phase nor an extended period when neither cemetery was in use.

[54] Hills and O'Connell, 'New light', p. 1106, faced with the sharp break in local burial practice, express this view with caution; Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 30-31, takes it for granted.

without; his conclusion, in the absence of any obvious dietary or health factors which might have created such a difference, was that the men buried with weapons were descended from Germanic immigrants, or were immigrants themselves. Crucially, the observed height difference breaks down by the end of the seventh century.[55]

While his observations were in general valid, Härke did not comment on one anomoly in his data set, namely that the men buried without weapons at Berinsfield, in contrast to the other early cemeteries, were just as tall as the men buried with weapons.[56] According to Härke's hypothesis, the weaponless men at Berinsfield were either unusually tall Britons, or, rather more likely, Saxons filling the lower social roles elsewhere filled by Britons. Might we not relate this anomoly to Berinsfield's unusually early date, and suggest that the local community, at least in the fifth century, *was* chiefly composed of Germanic immigrants of all social levels, and that they had moved, whether by invitation or invasion,[57] into a district whose former occupants had already left, as the new dating of the Queenford Farm cemetery could suggest? It may not be a coincidence that one late fourth-century burial from Dorchester contained a belt set of a type common in military graves of north-east Gaul and the Rhine frontier, suggesting that late Roman Dorchester may have been home to a garrison of settled continental troops.[58] Even if there was no direct continuity between these troops and the later Saxon settlement (there is certainly no direct archaeological connection between them), both Britons and Saxons must have long known that Dorchester controlled a strategically important Thames crossing at the junction of Dubonnic, Atrebatic and Catuvellaunic territory.

It would then conceivably follow that the political success of these 'prototype' Gewissan warriors enabled them either to expel or to establish direct control over surrounding British communities whose own elites had fled.[59] As Coates points out, it is not difficult to encourage a

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[55] Heinrich Härke, '"Warrior graves"? The background of the Anglo-Saxon burial rite', *Past and Present*, 126 (1990), 22-43 (pp. 39-40); idem, 'Changing symbols in a changing society: The Anglo-Saxon weapon burial rite in the seventh century', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. by Martin O. H. Carver (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 149-165 (pp. 154-155). Härke's conclusion rests upon the similar average height difference between the prehistoric and Roman-period 'Celtic' populations of western Europe and neighbouring Germanic populations.

[56] The difference between the two groups was a negligible 0.2 cm, compared with a difference of 2.2 cm at Pewsey, 4.7 cm at Worthy Park, 3.8 cm at Abingdon I and 2.4 cm at Empiringham II. Härke, '"Warrior graves"?', p. 39, table 4.

[57] Present evidence does not allow a judgement either way on this question. Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 31-32.

[58] The evidence for this comprises four famous burials from Dorchester-on-Thames: a male 'military' inhumation at Dyke Hills, south of the town, which included a set of late Roman belt fittings directly paralleled by examples from the Rhineland; and three female burials, two near the male burial and another north of the town, which together contained five brooches of unambiguously Germanic design. See J. R. Kirk and Edward Thurlow Leeds, 'Three early Saxon graves from Dorchester, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 17/18 (1954), 63-76; Hawkes and Dunning, 'Soldiers and settlers', pp. 4-17. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, pp. 142-144, points out that the remaining garrisons of Roman Britain would have soon evaporated once their pay stopped.

[59] The upper classes of Roman Britain must have stood to lose most from the turbulence of the fifth century. They also

defenceless population to vacate desirable land: the invaders need only destroy their agricultural base by burning their crops or stealing their cattle, and such terror tactics might cause a disproportionate number to flee the area, leaving it open for newcomers with no archaeologically detectable break in land use.[60] If, on the other hand, the Saxons desired to control land rather than resettle it, they could extract tribute by force from the native population. There was early Saxon occupation at the nearby Romano-British villas of Shakenoak Farm and Barton Court Farm, but not necessarily direct continuity.[61] The Romano-British cemetery at Frilford continued directly into the Anglo-Saxon period, but again the nature of the continuity is uncertain.[62] These Saxons, as they moved into new areas of the upper Thames valley, continued the Berinsfield tradition of furnished weapon burial as one means of asserting and advertising social dominance, which may have taken on a new ethnic significance when practiced among a predominantly British lower-status population.[63]

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would have had access to greater portable wealth than the landed majority, which suggests that the mid-century flight of Britons to north-west Gaul included many of the elite. Contemporary historical accounts from Gaul refer to nobles, at least one bishop and an army 12,000 strong among their number. See Thompson, 'Gildas and the history of Britain', pp. 221-222; Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', p. 369. Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 4, p. 29; trans. Winterbottom, p. 17, himself laments that those books which had not been burned had been taken overseas by his exiled countrymen, who evidently belonged to the literate class: *quantum tamen potuero, non tam ex scriptis patriae scriptorumue monimentis, quippe quae, uel si qua fuerint, aut ignibus hostium exusta aut ciuium exilii classe longius deportata non compareant, quam transmarina relatione, quae crebris inrupta intercapedinibus non satis claret*. See also Wolf Liebeschuetz, 'The refugees and evacuees in the age of migrations', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. by Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, Boston, 2003), pp. 65-79 (pp. 77-79), who observes how lands described as 'deserted' in early medieval sources could have been *political* vacuums devoid of large-scale administrative structures rather than unsettled wastelands.

[60] Richard Coates, 'Invisible Britons: The view from linguistics', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 172-191 (p. 185).

[61] A. C. C. Brodribb, A. R. Hands and D. R. Walker, *The Roman Villa at Shakenoak Farm, Oxfordshire: Excavations 1960-1976* (Oxford, 2005); David Miles, ed., *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon: An Investigation in the Late Neolithic, Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, London, 1986).

[62] Howard Williams, 'Ancient landscapes and the dead: The reuse of prehistoric and roman monuments as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites', *Medieval Archaeology*, 41 (1997), 1-31 (p. 8).

[63] Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, New York, 1997), p. 122. It is now commonly acknowledged that ethnicity may have played a part in the expression of identity through early medieval burial ritual, but it was never the only factor, and perhaps rarely a significant one. Nick Stoodley, for example, has examined how certain early Saxon grave-goods served to differentiate particular life-stages among both males and females; Sally Crawford has suggested that furnished burials may have provided a public forum for votive deposition, thus fulfilling a pagan religious function; John King has reviewed the evidence that some grave-goods were offerings made at the open grave as part of a symbolic public discourse; Zöe Devlin has discussed the importance of constructing social memory through burial ritual; and Rebecca Gowland has called for a further shift of interest away from ethnicity towards such approaches. Susanne Hakenbeck has undertaken an informative analysis of two large fifth- to seventh-century Bavarian cemeteries, and judges that the sheer variety of burial customs within and between each cemetery can only be explained by considering ethnicity alongside other facets of personal, communal, social and supra-regional identity. Nick Stoodley, 'From the cradle to the grave: age organisation and the early Anglo-Saxon burial rite', *World Archaeology*, 31. 3 (2000), 456-472; Sally Crawford, 'Votive deposition, religion and the Anglo-Saxon furnished burial ritual', *World Archaeology*, 36. 1 (2004), 87-102; John M. King, 'Grave-goods as gifts in early Saxon burials (ca. AD 450-600)', *Journal of Social Anthropology*, 4 (2004), 214-238; Zöe L. Devlin, 'Social memory, material culture and community identity in early medieval mortuary practices', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 14 (2007), 38-46; Rebecca Gowland, 'Beyond ethnicity: Symbols of social identity from the fourth to sixth centuries in England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in*

The best future hope for scientifically identifying first-generation continental immigrants in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries seems to be through stable isotope analysis, but this is still very much a developing field in early medieval archaeology.[64] Until such a study is made of the Berinsfield population we must rely on more traditional approaches of inferring migrant populations from material evidence.[65] Yet however practically and theoretically problematic such approaches are,[66] Berinsfield offers an unusually compelling example of a community composed largely of incomers with few pre-existing social or cultural ties to the surrounding population. The model proposed here, which may have occurred along similar lines elsewhere in southern and eastern England,[67] is of a pocket of relatively concentrated Saxon immigration focused on a warband near Dorchester, followed by the rapid expansion of Saxon control over British communities left demoralised after the critical political and economic collapse of the first half of the fifth century.[68] Many Britons, indeed, may have thought Saxon rule no worse an alternative than the return of Roman government,[69] and it is entirely plausible that influential locals judged their best option to be cooperation and alliance with the foreigners rather than resistance. In such cases, individuals may have subscribed to such rites as furnished weapon burial as part of a developing political and social discourse which was strongly informed by both late Roman and Germanic martial customs.

Archaeology and History, 14 (2007), 56-65 (p. 56); Susanne E. Hakenbeck, 'Situational ethnicity and nested identities: New approaches to an old problem', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 14 (2007), 19-27 (p. 26).

[64] Archaeologists both in favour of and against models of large-scale Anglo-Saxon immigration have expressed enthusiasm for the potential of stable isotope analysis to help resolve the debate. See Härke, 'Ethnicity', pp. 16-17; Gowland, 'Beyond ethnicity', p. 59; Nicholas J. Higham, 'Britons in Anglo-Saxon England: An introduction', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Nicholas J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 1-15 (pp. 13-14). For a discussion of stable isotope analysis and the results of its application in a number of prehistoric and medieval British contexts, see Paul Budd, Andrew Millard, Carolyn Chenery, Sam Lucy and Charlotte Roberts, 'Investigating population movement by stable isotope analysis: a report from Britain', *Antiquity*, 78. 299 (2004), 127-141. Jane Evans, Nick Stoodley and Carolyn Chenery, 'A strontium and oxygen isotope analysis of a possible fourth century immigrant population in a Hampshire cemetery, southern England', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 33 (2006), 265-272 (p. 271), have confirmed the broad archaeological attribution of a group of 'intrusive' burials in a late fourth-century Winchester cemetery to first-generation immigrants from Pannonia, but also revealed unexpected complexity in the precise origins of the immigrants and their relationship with the local population. Chenery, Müldner, Evans, Eckardt and Lewis, 'Strontium and stable isotope evidence', pp. 158-159, have used a similar approach to examine the diversity of origins of the population of Roman Gloucester.

[65] Privat and O'Connell, 'Stable isotope analysis', have employed the technique to investigate the dietary habits of the early Saxon Berinsfield population, but its geographical origins.

[66] Whether and to what degree ethnicity can be inferred from archaeological assemblages is an old and ongoing debate. For a recent summary and discussion, see Härke, 'Ethnicity'; for a discussion from a historical perspective, see Walter Pohl, 'Archaeology of identity: Introduction', in *Archäologie der Identität*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 16 (Vienna, forthcoming).

[67] Cf. Christopher Scull, 'Before Sutton Hoo: Structures of power and society in early East Anglia', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Carver, pp. 3-23 (p. 8); Wood, 'Before and after the migration', p. 46.

[68] Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 228-229; Heinrich Härke, 'Invisible Britons, Gallo-Romans and Russians: Perspectives on cultural change', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Hines, pp. 57-67 (p. 67).

[69] Thompson, 'Gildas and the history of Britain', p. 213; cf. Walter Pohl, 'The construction of communities and the persistence of paradox: An introduction', in *The Construction of Communities in the Eary Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. by Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, Boston, 2003), pp. 1-15 (p. 7); Nicholas J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), pp. 233-234.

The war between Britons and Saxons appears to have ended in a stalemate in 441. We need not project Gildas's vision of universal devastation across the entire island in order to accord him the respect he deserves as a near-contemporary commentator, especially with regard to his well-informed depiction of the hiring of Saxon mercenaries.[70] There is ample independent evidence for widespread urban abandonment in the early fifth century,[71] for the emigration of British elites across the Channel,[72] and for a shift towards a less intensive agricultural and settlement landscape.[73] Lowland Britain, while far from deserted, offered space for those communities who were abandoning en masse the increasingly marginal Frisian litoral,[74] and there were plenty of opportunities for martially-minded young men hoping to better their social situation in a rich and vulnerable country.[75] Gildas's complaint that he was unable to reach the shrines of St Alban at Verulamium and St Aaron and St Julius at Caerleon due to the 'division of the barbarians' fits well with the expansion of Saxon settlement in the upper Thames valley by the end of the fifth century.[76]

Yet even supposing that there was some degree of Saxon unity following the initial rebellion and war of the 430s, there is little evidence that it lasted. On the contrary, the archaeological evidence speaks of considerable variation in burial customs around Dorchester in the fifth and sixth centuries as well as across south-east Britain as a whole, and this may reflect a high degree of heterogeneity in cultural and political identity at the regional level.[77] The expansion of established warbands such as those of the upper Thames provided the necessary friction for conflict, and the continued immigration of new individuals and communities from across the Channel and North Sea provided the fuel. With no surviving structures of Roman administration to give universal form and

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[70] Thompson, 'Gildas and the history of Britain', pp. 217-218; Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 36-42; Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 243; Chrysos, 'Die Römerherrschaft in Britannien', pp. 266-267.

[71] Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, pp. 144-148.

[72] Thompson, 'Gildas and the history of Britain', pp. 221-222; Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', p. 369.

[73] Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, p. 158; Higham, 'Britons in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 8.

[74] Philip Bartholemew, 'Continental connections: Angles, Saxons and others in Bede and Procopius', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 13 (2005), 19-30 (p. 26); Scull, 'Before Sutton Hoo', p. 8.

[75] Higham, *The English Conquests*, pp. 166-169.

[76] *clarissimos lampades sanctorum martyrum nobis accendit, quorum nunc corporum sepulturae et passionum loca, si non lugubri diuortio barbarorum quam plurima ob scelera nostra ciuibus adimerentur, non minimum intuentium mentibus ardorem diuinae caritatis incuteren: sanctum albanum uerolamiensem, aaron et iulium legionum urbis ciues ceterosque utriusque sexus diuersis in locis summa magnanimitate in acie christi perstantes dico.* Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 10, p. 31; trans. Winterbottom, p. 19. See Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 103-106.

[77] Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 44-45; Wood, 'Before and after the migration', p. 42; John Hines, 'The becoming of the English: Identity, material culture and language in early Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 7 (1994), 49-59 (p. 54); John Moreland, 'Ethnicity, power and the English', in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. by William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrell (London, 2000), pp. 23-51 (p. 33). Bearing in mind the fact that personal and group identity can operate on several different levels at once, there is no need to adopt Moreland's view (pp. 34-35) that this variety in burial custom invalidates any notion of a common Saxon identity. Sarah Semple, 'Polities and princes AD 400-800: New perspectives on the funerary landscape of the South Saxon kingdom', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 27. 4 (2008), 407-429 (pp. 422-423), has argued that the clustering of South Saxon burial mounds around particular hills and coastal inlets is symptomatic of a fragmented political landscape which lasted from the fifth to the eighth century.

stability to the exercise of power, the result was a political landscape of great fragmentation and fluidity which lasted until the end of the sixth century.[78]

If the Saxons of the south-east were a fractious, quarrelsome kaleidoscope of competing groups, much the same could be said of contemporary British rulers, whose propensity for mutual aggression, rendered as 'civil war' by his late Roman mindset, so appalled Gildas.[79] Numerous prehistoric hillforts, for example at South Cadbury, Cadbury-Congresbury, Old Sarum and Uffington Castle, were reoccupied by British elites at this time.[80] The post-Roman earthwork of West Wansdyke may have been constructed in the late fifth or sixth century as a physical delineation of British and Saxon territory;[81] it is interesting to note that the enormous Roman temple and bath complex at Bath, which lies immediately north of West Wansdyke, was systematically demolished and left in ruins at some point between 450 and 500, perhaps in a symbolic political gesture.[82] On the far side of Selwood, Bokerley Dyke cut the road from Durotrigan territory to Old Sarum and Winchester, both of which have concentrations of early Saxon furnished burials. At Silchester, one of the largest towns of Roman Britain and the hub of its southern communications network, a similar dyke severed the road to Dorchester-on-Thames, and proved so successful that the road fell permanently out of use. For a space of between twelve and thirty kilometres in every direction around Silchester there is scarcely a single early Saxon burial, producing a large and conspicuous void in distribution maps.[83] Ongoing excavations suggest that the city was deliberately abandoned in the late sixth or early seventh century, its wells filled in and the site left to waste.[84] There is some evidence that its immediate post-Roman hinterland was preserved as a single

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[78] Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 89-90, observes no clear continuity in administrative organisation between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods in the south-east, in contrast to the south-west, where the counties of Dorset, Somerset and Devon appear to have arranged according to former Roman *civitas* capitals. Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1989), p. 49, also comments on the fact that Anglo-Saxon historiographers never sought to invent a 'Roman' past for their *gens*, instead perpetuating a strong tradition of migration and *adventus*. A sharp contrast to the situation in early Anglo-Saxon England is offered by the Visigothic kingdom, which was established within a surviving late Roman framework of law, culture and urban life. Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts*, 5th edn (Munich, 2009), pp. 234-236.
[79] *reges habet britannia, sed tyrannos [...] belligerantes, sed ciuila et iniusta bella agentes.* Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 27, p. 41; trans. Winterbottom, p. 29. Stuart Laycock, *Britannia, the Failed State: Tribal Conflicts and the End of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2008), has recently argued that Britain suffered from incessant inter-tribal conflict throughout the Roman occupation, and that these conflicts worsened during the 'balkanisation' that followed the Roman withdrawal.
[80] Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 19-26.
[81] Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 24.
[82] James Gerrard, 'The temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath and the end of Roman Britain', *Antiquaries Journal*, 87 (2007), 148-164 (pp. 159-160).
[83] Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 13, fig. 4.
[84] M. G. Fulford, *Life and Labour in Late Roman Silchester: Excavations in Insula IX since 1997* (London, 2006), p. 281.

territorial block, even though the settlement itself was never reoccupied.[85] Given this archaeological evidence, it would not be unreasonable to suspect that Silchester was the centre of a British enclave which survived until well into the sixth century.

The emergence of Gewissan kingship: sixth to seventh centuries

There is little doubt that the second half of the fifth century was a period of considerable upheaval across the south. Not until the late sixth century do we begin to see increasing archaeological evidence of social polarisation and the consolidation of new hierarchies in Saxon areas. Furnished burials become fewer overall while a small number display continued wealth, suggesting a significant shift in the nature of burial practice,[86] and there appears to have been an increase in the number of permanent boundaries within settlements, which may be interpreted as a greater tendency towards the delineation and control of space.[87] The late sixth century also saw the appearance and spread of mound burial within the territory of what would become Wessex, a custom which continued for a century and left parts of southern England peppered with barrows. Among the richest and largest mound burials are those at Cuddesdon, Taplow and Lowbury Hill near Dorchester, and in Wiltshire at Swallowcliffe Down and Rodmead Hill.[88] A number of archaeologists have made the argument that such burials, which tend to be situated in physically prominent positions often near important communication routes, are symptomatic of an elite attempting to establish an indelible and highly visible claim on a contested landscape. As Tania Dickinson puts it, 'there is every reason to link the appearance of the grandest of Early Saxon burials in the late sixth and early seventh century with the emergence of regional kingship'.[89]

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[85] Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, p. 198.

[86] Helen Geake, 'Burial practices in seventh and eighth century England', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Carver, pp. 83-94 (pp. 84-85).

[87] Andrew Reynolds, 'Boundaries and settlements in later sixth to eleventh-century England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), 98-136 (pp. 130-131).

[88] Meaney, *A Gazeteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites*, esp. pp. 49, 59, 207, 273; Tania M. Dickinson, *Cuddesdon and Dorchester-on-Thames: Two Early Anglo-Saxon 'Princely' Sites in Wessex*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 1 (Oxford, 1974); Leslie Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Britons and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1987), pp. 271-272; George Speake, *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down*, Historical Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, Archaeological Reports, 10 (London, 1989); M. G. Fulford and S. J. Ripon, 'Lowbury Hill, Oxon: A re-assessment of the probable Romano-Celtic temple and Anglo-Saxon barrow', *Archaeological Journal*, 151 (1994), 185-188; Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 34-35; Elizabeth O'Brien, *Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: Burial Practices Revealed*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 289 (Oxford, 1999), ref. 1111; Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 27-35, 202-204; Stephen Pollington, *Anglo-Saxon Burial Mounds: Princely Burials in the 6th and 7th Centuries* (Swaffham, 2008), pp. 163-166, 168-171, 178-182.

[89] Tania M. Dickinson and George Speake, 'The seventh-century cremation burial in Asthall Barrow, Oxfordshire: A reassessment', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Carver, pp. 95-130 (p. 121). See also Howard Williams, 'Monuments and the past in early Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30. 1 (1998), 90-108 (p. 104); Sarah Semple, 'A fear of the past: The place of the prehistoric burial mound in the ideology of middle and later Anglo-

The distribution of burial mounds is therefore of some importance in identifying areas of special political stress in the emergent kingdom of the Gewissae. Two of the densest concentrations are in the upper Thames valley, particularly along the chalk ridgeline of the Icknield Way, and in southern Wiltshire. Dickinson and Speake have discussed that the Asthall Barrow cremation burial (Oxfordshire), which dates from 710x40, ought to be understood in the context of the contemporary political struggle between Mercia and Wessex for control of the region north of the upper Thames.[90] Similarly, Semple argues that the barrows of northern Wiltshire represent Saxon attempts to assert increasingly direct control over a border region,[91] and the same is likely true of southern Wiltshire, where the custom of burial mounds spread from the early Saxon settlement area of Old Sarum. The proportion of surviving Celtic place-names does indeed suggest that western Wiltshire, in contrast to the east, was largely British-speaking until a relatively late date.[92]

Ceawlin, who died in 593 according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, is the first Gewissan king of whose existence we can be confident.[93] His prominence in the Chronicle is echoed by Bede, who wrote that he was the pre-eminent Southumbrian king of his day.[94] He also gains some credibility from the Chronicle's mention of his victory (s. a. 568) at the unidentified *Wibbandun* against King Æthelberht of Kent, the first Anglo-Saxon ruler to convert to Christianity following St Augustine's arrival in 601. The entry s. a. 591 states that a certain Ceol took the throne and held it for five years, and Ceawlin's last battle, recorded under the following year at *Woddesbeorge* (possibly Adam's Grave in northern Wiltshire), resulted in his defeat, expulsion, and, s. a. 593, death. This ignominious end to a successful king, from whom King Ine claimed direct descent as the basis of his legitimacy, adds a final layer of historical plausibility. Ceawlin's existence, therefore, is not in doubt, but the chronology of his career is much less certain. David Dumville has observed that Ceawlin's reign, which lasted for seven or seventeen years according to the Genealogical Regnal List, was greatly extended to thirty-two years when this tradition was

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Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30. 1 (1998), 109-126; idem, 'Burials and political boundaries in the Avebury region, north Wiltshire', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), pp. 72-91; idem, 'Polities and princes', pp. 422-423; Heinrich Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period*, ed. by Hines, pp. 125-170 (pp. 150-151); Martin O. H. Carver, 'Reflections on the meaning of Anglo-Saxon barrows', *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (London, 2002), pp. 132-143.

[90] Dickinson and Speake, 'The seventh-century cremation burial in Asthall Barrow', p. 123.

[91] Semple, 'Burials and political boundaries in the Avebury region'.

[92] Bruce Eagles, 'Britons and Saxons on the eastern boundary of the Civitas Durotrigum', *Britannia*, 35 (2005), 134-140; Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places: Studies of the Celtic impact on Place-Names in England* (Stamford, 2000), pp. 112-116; Simon Draper, 'Old English *wīc* and *walh*: Britons and Saxons in post-Roman Wiltshire', *Landscape History*, 24 (2002), 29-43.

[93] Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 593.

[94] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, II. 5, pp. 150-151.

incorporated into the annalistic format of the Chronicle.[95] While this had the effect of projecting the battles associated with his name further into the past, rendering the Chronicle dates unreliable, it is quite possible that the sequence, locations and protagonists of the battles were accurately preserved.

We can therefore accept that Ceawlin died *c.* 593, and consider the Chronicle's record of his activity without lending credence to particular dates. He first appears s. a. 556, fighting alongside his (probably mythical) father Cynric against the Britons in northern Wiltshire. Under the year 568 appears his victory against Æthelberht of Kent, and he went on to capture numerous British towns to the east, west and north of the upper Thames by the end of his reign. There is a record of expansion in every direction except towards Silchester in the south, perhaps because its fall, if it happened near the beginning or middle of the sixth century, was simply too early to survive in those oral traditions which were later adapted into the annals of the Chronicle. We receive the picture of an active, aggressive king who was able to extend Gewissan control in several directions at once, largely at the expense of neighbouring British leaders, and to lay the foundations for a style of rule which in its scope and complexity began to resemble more closely the Frankish territories.[96]

As mentioned, the Chronicle claims s. a. 591 that Ceawlin was succeeded by Ceol, who ruled for five years; he was succeeded by Ceolwulf, who reigned until Cynegil's accession in 611. From this point on we enter surer historical territory. In 628 at Cirencester, which Ceawlin had captured from the Britons a generation earlier, the Gewissae were fought to a stalemate by Mercia; even an attempt by King Cynegils to forge an alliance with Northumbria, culminating in the foundation of a bishopric at Dorchester under Northumbrian sponsorship in 635 and the marriage of his son Cenwalh to King Penda of Mercia's sister,[97] could not protect the Gewissan heartlands. In 645 Penda drove Cenwalh, now king, into exile for three years, and in 661 Penda's son ravaged Dorchester and the downlands along the Icknield Way.[98] Even as the ancient Gewissan grip on the upper Thames was loosening, however, Cenwalh was pushing south and west, permanently transferring his bishopric to Winchester and defeating the Britons at Bradford on Avon in 652, Penselwood in 658 and Posbury in 661, breaking through the British-Saxon border which had

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[95] Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List', pp. 39-40, 46. Dumville suggests, ibid., pp. 62-65, that Ceawlin's reign was lengthened because a longer reign was thought more fitting for such an important and successful king.

[96] See Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 35, who discusses the evidence for increasing riverine trade and the minting of runic coinage in the upper Thames region from the beginning of the seventh century. It is reasonable to suspect that economic and political changes in Wessex at this time were the result of contact with Francia via Kent, which had lain well within the Frankish sphere of influence throughout the sixth century. See Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford, New York, 1988), p. 103; Wood, 'Before and after the migration', pp. 47-49; idem, 'Frankish hegemony in England', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Carver, pp. 235-242;

[97] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, III. 7, pp. 232-235.

[98] Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 645, 661. The annal for 661 states that King Wulfhere, son of Penda, invaded as far as Ashdown (*oþ Æscesdune*), an ancient name for the Berkshire Downs.

endured for two centuries and annexing the later counties of Dorset, Somerset and Devon.[99]

The Chronicle states that Cenwalh died in 672 and was succeeded for one year by his widow Seaxburg, who was followed by Cenwalh's distant cousin Æscwine (674-76), who was in turn succeeded by Cenwalh's brother Centwine (676-85/86).[100] According to Bede, on the other hand, Cenwalh's territory was divided between a number of sub-kings for about ten years.[101] This apparent contradiction between our sources is most likely a result of the fluid nature of seventh-century Gewissan politics, which allowed for a number of 'kings' to reign simultaneously, any one of whom might exercise supremacy over some or all of the others.[102] The custom of joint rulership would come to a virtual end in 685/86 with Cædwalla, following whom it appears to have been a particular concern of West Saxon kings, especially Ine and Alfred, to establish their right to exclusive rule by tracing a direct lineage of kingship down their bloodline to Ceawlin and the *adventus* of the mythical founder Cerdic.[103]

The accession of Cædwalla was a pivotal moment that marks the true beginnings of Wessex. His father Cenberht appears to have been a sub-king of the Gewissae before his death in 661, when Cædwalla was still an infant.[104] Cædwalla was sent into exile in the Chilterns and the Weald, the sparsely settled and densely forested regions to the north and south of the lower Thames, where he remained until his mid twenties. In 685 he emerged from exile at the head of a warband, and went on to overcome his rival rulers in Wessex and to conquer Sussex, Kent, Surrey and the Isle of Wight before his abdication in 688.[105] He and his successor Ine claimed to be second or third cousins

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[99]   See the relevant dates *sub annis* in Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; also Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 52-59; idem, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 136; Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, p. 51.

[100] Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 672, 674, 676.

[101] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 12, pp. 368-369.

[102] Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 136; idem, *Wessex*, pp. 64-66; Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, pp. 115-116; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 66-67.

[103] The ruling relationship of Ine to his father Cenred is uncertain. Ine promulgated his law code under his own name while acknowledging the assistance of his father (Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 2 vols (Halle, 1903-1916), I, pp. 88-89), but in a South Saxon charter of 692 Cenred subscribes as *rex Westsaxonum* while Ine appears beneath him with no title, implying that Cenred was the senior of the two (Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 45). Neither Bede, obtaining his information directly from Bishop Daniel of Winchester, nor the Chronicle (except in Ine's genealogy) mention Cenred at all. Since Ine probably had a strong influence over both of these sources, it may be that he preferred posterity to minimise the role of his father during the early years of his reign. See Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, p. 120; Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 84.

[104] Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, pp. 100-101. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, V. 7, pp. 468-473, gives Cædwalla's age at death in 689 as about thirty, which places his date of birth *c.* 659.

[105] Stephen of Ripon, *Vita sancti Wilfrithi*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927), c. 42, pp. 84-85; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 15, pp. 380-381. For further discussions of Cædwalla, see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 69-70; Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight', pp. 89-90; idem, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 137-139; idem, *Wessex*, pp. 57-59; Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, pp. 41-42, 100-101; Richard Sharpe, 'King Ceadwalla's Roman epitaph', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. by K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols, Toronto Old English Studies, 14 (Toronto, 2005), I, pp. 171-193.

descended from Ceawlin himself,[106] unlike the previous six kings, who, with the exception of Æscwine, had been descendants of Ceawlin's brother Cutha. Cædwalla's coup may therefore have been represented by his supporters as the 'restoration' of exclusive Gewissan kingship to the house of Ceawlin.

Cædwalla's determination to sweep the board clear of rival pieces is clear from the course and consequences of his short but bloody career. There is, first of all, Bede's notorious account of the conquest of Wight, during which Cædwalla mercilessly hunted down and executed the two surviving princes of the Jutish royal house.[107] Bede also remarks prosaically that Cædwalla 'defeated and banished' the Gewissan sub-kings,[108] and we may gauge his success from the fact that the line of Ceawlin's brother Cutha, which according to the Chronicle had monopolised rule of the Gewissae for three generations, vanishes from our sources following the withdrawal (or banishment) of King Centwine to a monastery.[109] Where Ine later suffered rebellion against his rule, it appears to have come from his close family, including his own wife Æthelburg, who led an insurrection in the west, and a certain Ealdberht, who may have been his son or cousin.[110]

The survival of seventh-century traditions in ninth-century sources

As Jacqueline Stodnick has remarked, the very name 'West Saxons' implicitly evokes 'contemporary notions of Anglo-Saxon migratory history'.[111] Unfortunately, the dynastic origin myths of the ninth-century West Saxons survive only in the barest fragments. These sources provide a skeletal narrative of invasion and warfare which presumably once formed the frame around which the flesh of dynastic propaganda was wrapped: stories and songs intended to fire the hearts of nobles and assert the legitimacy of their rule, such 'valiant deeds of ancient heroes' as inspired the seventh-century St Guthlac, a fiery teenage scion of Mercian royalty before his monastic

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[106] This is according to the genealogies contained in the Chronicle, which appear to represent the tradition of the late seventh century. Cædwalla's great-grandfather is named as Cutha (s. a. 685), Ine's great-grandfather as Cuthwine (s. a. 688). Since Cutha could be an abbreviation for Cuthwine, these may be the same person, which would make Cædwalla and Ine second cousins (see Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, p. 223). It could also help explain the later insertion of an ancestor named Cutha beneath Cuthwine in Ine's genealogy s. a. 858, if a later annalist was attempting to reconcile two versions of Ine's genealogy, one of which gave his great-grandfather as Cuthwine, the other in abbreviated form as Cutha. In the Anglian Collection this additional Cutha is changed to Cuthwulf.

[107] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 16, pp. 382-383; Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight', p. 90; Patrick H. Hase, 'The mother churches of Hampshire', in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950-1200*, ed. by John Blair (Oxford, 1988), pp. 45-66 (p. 45).

[108] *devictis atque amotis subregulis.* Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 12, pp. 368-369.

[109] Aldhelm, in the third of his *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, celebrates Centwine's entry into the monastic life, although it may well have been less than voluntary. Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 14, ll. 2-5.

[110] Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 722.

[111] Jacqueline A. Stodnick, 'The interests of compounding: *Angelcynn* to *Engla Land* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', in *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by H. Magennis and J. Wilcox (Morgantown, 2006), pp. 337-367 (p. 350).

conversion, to lead his warband across the wild British borderlands.[112] These stories, if they were ever written down at all, have been lost, but some of their flavour survives even the terseness of the annalistic format.

The Chronicle account of the West Saxon *adventus* begins with the year 495, when 'two ealdormen, Cerdic and Cynric his kinsman, came to Britain with five ships to the place called *Cerdicesora*, and on the same day they fought with the Britons'.[113] Six years later another party, led by Port and his two sons, landed at Portsmouth (*Portesmuþa*) and slew a young British nobleman. In 508 Cerdic and Cynric fought and killed a British king named Natanleod, capturing the territory from Netley Marsh (*Natanleaga*) to Charford (*Cerdicesford*). In 514 'the West Saxons came to Britain with three ships to the place called *Cerdicesora*, [and] Stuf and Wihtgar fought with the Britons, who fled'.[114] In 519 Cerdic and Cynric 'began to rule, and in that same year they fought with the Britons at the place named Charford (*Cerdicesford*)',[115] in 527 at *Cerdicesleaga*,[116] in 530 they took the Isle of Wight,[117] and in 552, after Cerdic's death, Cynric defeated the Britons at Old Sarum.[118] The link between this mythical phase of West Saxon history and the historically plausible reign of Ceawlin is formed by the battle of *Beranbyrg* (probably Barbury Castle in north Wiltshire) s. a. 556, where a young Ceawlin supposedly fought alongside his father Cynric. The annalistic format remains consistent as it moves towards the seventh century, with each annal typically identifying the West Saxon protagonist(s), the antagonist and the place at which the battle was fought.[119]

Two features of the Chronicle in its ninth-century form are of particular interest to us here. First, the early annals present a narrative of continual Saxon conquest and expansion throughout the sixth century, primarily against the Britons. Second, almost every 'West Saxon' king, both in the

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[112] *Igitur cum adolescentiae vires increvissent, et iuvenili in pectore egregius dominandi amor fervesceret, tunc valida pristinorum heroum facta reminiscens, veluti ex sopore evigilatus, mutata mente, adgregatis satellitum turmis, sese in arma convertit.* Felix, *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956), c. 16, pp. 80-81. See Barbara Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon origin legends', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. by Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 15-29 (pp. 18-19).

[113] *Her cuomon twegen aldormen on Bretene, Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu, mid .v. scipum in þone stede þe is gecueden Cerdicesora 7 þy ilcan dæge gefuhtun wiþ Walum.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 495.

[114] *Her cuomon Westseaxe in Bretene mid .iii. scipum in þa stowe þe is gecueden Cerdicesora, Stuf 7 Wihtgar, fuhton wiþ Brettas 7 hie gefliemdon.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 501.

[115] *Her Cerdic 7 Cynric rice onfengun on þy ilcan geare hie fuhton wiþ Brettas þær mon nu nemneþ Cerdicesford.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 519.

[116] *Her Cerdic 7 Cynric fuhton wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is gecueden Cerdicesleaga.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 527.

[117] *Her Cerdic 7 Cynric genamon Wihte ealond 7 ofslogon feala men on Wihtgarabyrg.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 530.

[118] *Her Cynric gefeaht wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is genemned Searobyrg 7 þa Bretwalas gefliemde.* Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 552.

[119] On this formulaic feature of the Chronicle as a whole, see Stodnick, 'The interests of compounding', pp. 344-45.

Chronicle itself and in the Genealogical Regnal List associated with it, is explicitly linked by patrilineal descent to Cerdic, who was, as Dumville puts it, the 'crucial legitimising factor' for any prince who aspired to the throne of Wessex.[120] Thus the annals for 552 and 597 trace the genealogies of Cynric and Ceolwulf respectively via Cerdic back to Woden; Cynegils (s. a. 611) is traced to Cynric; Cynegils' successor Cenwalh (643-72) is given no genealogy, and only in Chronicle version E (s. a. 641) and in the Genealogical Regnal List is he recorded as Cynegils' son; Æscwine (s. a. 674), Cynegils' second cousin twice removed if the genealogies are to be believed, is traced back via Ceawlin's brother to Cerdic; Centwine (s. a. 676) is traced back to Ceolwulf; Cædwalla (s. a. 685) is traced back via Ceawlin to Cerdic; and Ine (s. a. 688) also via Ceawlin to Cerdic. Ine abdicated in 726, and the Chronicle does not provide any genealogical information for the next four rulers. The fifth is Beorhtric (s. a. 783/4), whose 'direct paternal line goes to Cerdic'.[121] His successor Æthelwulf, however, is given a fully Christianised pedigree (s. a. 858) which links him via Ine's brother Ingild and Ceawlin not only to Cerdic, or even Woden, but to Noah and ultimately Adam.

Æthelwulf owes his important place in the Chronicle chiefly to having fathered King Alfred the Great, during whose reign the text was originally compiled. When we see the history of the West Saxons as embodied in the Chronicle, it is from the point of view of Alfred and those of his contemporaries to whom it spoke. It is evident that the compilors drew on earlier annals and genealogical material, but the nature and provenance of this material is extremely uncertain. Dumville and Whitelock have suggested that the West Saxons began to keep annals and regnal lists from the mid eighth century at the latest,[122] while Moisl has argued that the preservation of myths and genealogies was based on oral traditions that reached back well into the pre-Christian period.[123]

The immediate question here is whether, and to what degree, the Chronicle's account of the kings prior to Ine was already in existence at the end of the seventh century, when the West Saxon name first came into use. We should not expect too complete an answer. The annals of the Chronicle, the individual genealogies it contains and the Genealogical Regnal List are inconsistent with regard to dates and regnal lengths, both compared to one another and between different versions of the same text. Dumville demonstrated that the Genealogical Regnal List, which lists each king of Wessex along with the length of his reign, embodied an older tradition than that

[120] Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List', p. 23.
[121] *his ryhtfędren cyn gęþ to Cerdice*. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 783/4.
[122] Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List', pp. 22-23; Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (London, 1961), p. xxii. On the dating of the Chronicle, see Janet Bately, 'The compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as evidence', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 64 (1978), 93-129.
[123] Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies'.

incorporated into the Chronicle. Once the difficulties of the internal textual variations are resolved as far as possible, it is a straightforward matter to count backwards from Cynegils, the earliest king whose reign is fairly securely dated, subtracting the regnal lengths of each king as given in the Genealogical Regnal List. This results in a date of 538 for Cerdic's *adventus*, far short of 495, the date given by the Chronicle, and 494, the date supplied by the Genealogical Regnal List itself. Two kings in particular had their careers drastically lengthened when they were fitted, not altogether happily, into an annalistic format: Ceawlin's reign was extended from seven or seventeen years to thirty-two years, as already mentioned, and the period from Cerdic's landing to the founding of Wessex grew from six to twenty-four years.[124]

The reasons for these extensions are no more obvious than the date at which they were made. Yorke has suggested that the beginning of Ceawlin's reign was placed earlier so that he should clearly precede King Æthelberht of Kent, since, according to Bede, Ceawlin was the second king to hold dominion over the southern kingdoms, and Æthelberht the third.[125] This, however, may have depended upon a misreading of Bede, who appears to have placed the beginning of Æthelberht's *life*, not his *reign*, in 560, but expressed himself in a way that was open to misinterpretation.[126] If the scribe responsible for establishing an absolute chronology for the West Saxon tradition believed incorrectly that Æthelberht's reign had begun in 560, it is not surprising that he was forced to extend Ceawlin's reign to match it. This would have taken place after Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, completed in 731, was widely disseminated.

Aside from the fact that Ceawlin's reign lasted for seven or seventeen years according to the Genealogical Regnal List and thirty-two years according to the Chronicle, there are also the fingerprints of an extension within the Chronicle itself. Stenton noted that the Chronicle appears to duplicate the arrival of the West Saxons (in 495 and again in 514) and the foundation of their kingdom six years later (500/1 and 519 respectively),[127] an interval that mirrors, and perhaps imitates, the arrival of Hengist and Horsa in Kent in 449 and the start of their rule in 455.[128] Kenneth Harrison identified a further duplication of a battle of Cerdic and Cynric against the

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[124] Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List,' pp. 39-40, 46.

[125] Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight', p. 87.

[126] Nicholas Brooks, 'The creation and early structure of the kingdom of Kent', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Bassett, pp. 55-74 (pp. 65-67). Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, II. 5, pp. 150-151, writes: *Anno ab incarnatione dominica DCXVI, qui est annus XXI, ex quo Augustinus cum sociis ad praedicandum genti Anglorum missus est, Aedilberct rex Cantuariorum post regnum temporale, quod L et VI annis gloriosissime tenuerat, aeterna caelestis regni gaudia subiit.* 'In the year A.D. 616, twenty-one years after Augustine had been sent with his companions to preach to the English people, King Æthelberht of Kent, after the earthly realm which he had held for fifty-six years, entered the eternal joys of the heavenly realm.' Brooks, observing that a regnal length of fifty-six years both grants Æthelberht unusual longevity and is incompatible with independent continental evidence, argues that Bede was using poetic licence here, and by *regnum temporale* meant the entirety of Æthelberht's life.

[127] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 19-23.

[128] Sims-Williams, 'The settlement of England', pp. 26-41; Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight', pp. 87-88.

Britons (508 and 527), and suggested that this feature was the result of two versions of one narrative which had been disjointed by an interval of nineteen years. This was the length of both the Dionysiac Easter cycle, within tables of which the earliest annals were recorded, and the lunar cycle which Harrison argued provided the chronological framework for West Saxon oral history.[129] It is unclear whether this duplication was a deliberate attempt to alter the date of Cerdic's *adventus*, or was caused by the technical difficulties of fitting variant versions of oral tradition into an absolute chronology. These extensions of regnal lengths demonstrate on the one hand the readiness of scribes to manipulate an existing chronology in response to present political concerns, and on the other a certain degree of respect for the body of the traditional narrative. The precise length of a king's reign, that is, was apparently more negotiable than his position in the geneaology, or else the annalists could have inserted new kings instead of extending reigns.[130]

The genealogical traditions enshrined in the seventh-century annals of the Chronicle are not straightforward to interpret, especially since the relentless conservatism of alliterative names and the occasional use of nicknames or abbreviations means that it is not always clear which member of the family is being referred to.[131] Yet one can quite easily draw a family tree of Ceawlin's descendents from the information contained in the Chronicle and find it to be internally consistent down to the end of the seventh century, provided that one is prepared to accept, for instance, that Ceawlin had both a brother and a nephew by the name of Ceolwulf, and that he named one of his sons Cutha after his other brother, and that his grandson and great-nephew were called Cynegils. Alliteration among members of one dynasty was not unusual among Anglo-Saxons. If the Gewissae of the seventh century seem to have been strikingly, perhaps suspiciously, fond of the custom, we should note that five of the six known third-generation descendants of Ceawlin and this brothers were named Cenwealh, Centwine, Cenred, Cenfus and Cenberht, and there is no reason do doubt that any of these lived; the first three are historically attested kings, and the remaining two the

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[129] Kenneth Harrison, 'Early West Saxon annals in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *English Historical Review*, 86 (1971), 527-533. See also Joanna Story, 'The Frankish Annals of Lindisfarne and Kent', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 34 (2005), 59-109 (pp. 84-90).

[130] While there are contradictions between the various genealogies, they are relatively minor compared to the chronological manipulations. The only clear contradiction in the genealogies of the seventh-century kings is between the Chronicle's genealogies of Ine under the years 688 and 855; the former lists five generations between Ine and Cerdic, the latter seven, inserting one ancestor named Cutha as Ine's great-grandfather and another named Creoda as Cerdic's son. The five-generation version appears under both 688 and 855 in Æthelweard's Latin translation of the Chronicle: Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, ed. by A. Campbell, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), pp. 20, 33; the seven-generation version (with the name Cuthwulf in place of Cutha) also survives in the Anglian Collection. It is likely that the shorter genealogy, which evidently appeared under both 688 and 855 in the lost version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle used by Æthelweard, and was left unaltered only under 688 in the surviving Old English versions, is the earlier.

[131] For further discussion, see Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, pp. 40-44.

fathers of kings, if not kings themselves.[132] The seventh-century genealogies also survive in a discreet cluster within the Chronicle, distinct from the the obviously mythical elements of the sixth century and the information void of the eighth, and are tied to the ninth century only by a delicate patrilineal thread between Ine's brother Ingild and King Alfred's grandfather Egbert. It is unlikely that the seventh-century genealogies were fabricated in all their complexity in the ninth century, and equally implausible that they were devised by those five eighth-century successors of Ine whose own pedigrees the Chronicle ignores.

Mythical origins: Britons and Saxons in the reign of King Ine, 688-726

While we should remain wary of a source which bears so many fingerprints of later scribes, it does seem that the genealogies of the Chronicle largely preserve late seventh-century traditions of Gewissan descent from King Ceawlin. Beyond Ceawlin, however, the story is very different: the rot begins with his alleged father Cynric, and sets in deeply with the mythical Cerdic. It also seems likely that the tradition of Cerdic's *adventus* and the subsequent expansion of Wessex through conquest was well-established in Ine's day, not least since, according to the Anglian Collection, Ine appears to have promoted himself as a direct descendant of Cerdic.[133] This tradition may have included the relative chronology as it survives, but by no means the absolute dates of the Chronicle, which are broadly reliable only back to Cynegil's reign.[134] One consequence of pushing the West Saxon *adventus* from 538 to 495 was to associate Cerdic and his kinsmen more closely with the Kentish and South Saxon founders, who, according to the Chronicle's narrative, had arrived in 455 and 477 respectively. The West Saxon *adventus* tradition, however, is more textually complicated than either of these, consisting as it does of not one, but three arrivals.

We noted above that two features of the surviving West Saxon dynastic propaganda stand out: the importance of Cerdic as the font of regal legitimacy, and the role of the Britons as the perpetual victims of West Saxon aggression. We can relate both of these features to the political situation in which the Gewissae found themselves in the late seventh century, and thereby better

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[132] Cenwealh is well attested in both the Chronicle and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, III. 7, pp. 232-237; Centwine was king from 676 to 685 and was referred to in a poem by his contemporary Aldhelm (Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 14, l. 3); Cenred, aside from his identification in the Chronicle (s. a. 688) as the father of King Ine (688-726), is also named in the preamble to Ine's Law Codes (Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze*, I, pp. 88-89) and appears as *rex Westsaxonum* when confirming a 692 charter of King Nunna of Sussex (Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 45); Cenfus is named by the Chronicle (s. a. 674) as the father of King Æscwine (674-76); and Cenberht (s. a. 685) as the father of King Cædwalla (685-88).

[133] Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon origin legends', p. 17.

[134] This is not to say that there are no discrepancies with independent sources, for example the death of Bishop Hæddi of Winchester, which the Chronicle places in 703 and Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, V. 18, pp. 514-515, in 705.

understand the way in which elite identity was formulated according to contemporary needs and concerns. The first feature reflects a desire to push the origins of the West Saxon kingdom two generations further back than Ceawlin, to an ancient landfall on the Hampshire coast. As already discussed, the narrative actually records three separate landfalls, beginning with the arrival of Cerdic and Cynric in 495, which was followed by a second *adventus* at Portsmouth of one Port with his two sons in 501, and finally the arrival of Stuf and Wihtgar in 514. Barbara Yorke has emphasised the clearly mythical elements in each arrival: the recurrence of two brothers, the set-piece battle upon landing which quickly routs the local Britons, and the obvious later derivation of personal names from geographical locations. 'Port' appears to derive from from Latin *portus*, probably referring to Portchester, 'Wihtgar' from *Uectis*, now the Isle of Wight, and the British ruler 'Natanleod' from *Natanleaga*, probably Netley Marsh.[135] The Chronicle's account of the mythical Cerdic's arrival also links his activities to three local places: *Cerdicesora*, *Cerdicesford* and *Cerdiceslea* (only the second of which survives as modern Charford on the river Avon south of Old Sarum). Like the Chronicle's other suspicious etymologies, this probably represents the shaping of myth around existing place-names. Because of the threefold occurrence of the extremely rare personal name element *Cerdic-* in such a small area, Stenton plausibly suggested that the place-names did indeed derive from a single historical individual, though probably a post-Roman British ruler rather than a Saxon invader.[136]

Even if we accept that Cerdic may have been a genuine figure, how and when he became a Saxon invader and grandfather of Ceawlin is impossible to ascertain, except that he was known as such by the end of the seventh century. The origins of Port, Stuf and Wihtgar are equally obscure, but Yorke suggests that the odd triple *adventus* of the West Saxons may conceal further Jutish legends which the West Saxons appropriated and incorporated into their own dynastic myth.[137] There are good reasons to support this view. Having three similar mythical arrivals, one after the other, seems unnecessarily complicated, especially considering that the very purpose of *adventus* legends is to provide a particular ruling dynasty with a clear moment of origin.[138] The three arrivals

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[135] Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight'; idem, 'Anglo-Saxon origin legends', pp. 17-19; see also Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400-1066* (London, 2000), pp. 88-89; Gordon John Copley, *The Conquest of Wessex in the Sixth Century* (London, 1954), pp. 165-168. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 20, n. 2, argued that Port was a genuine historical figure, notwithstanding the toponymical coincidence of Portsmouth, and Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare*, pp. 225-226, is inclined to support him on this point. With regard to Hengist and Horsa, some historians have considered their role as archetypal 'divine twins', mythical figures woven into a historical fabric. See Barbara Yorke, 'Fact or fiction? The written evidence for the fifth and sixth centuries AD', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 6 (1993), 45-50.

[136] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 24-25.

[137] Yorke, 'The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight', pp. 95-96.

[138] Cf. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 61, who writes that 'the migration was cherished as a source of political order'.

also reflect the three political groupings of the Solent: Cerdic and Cynric for the West Saxons; Port, arriving at Portsmouth, for the Jutish province of the Meon valley; and Stuf and Wihtgar for the Jutes of the Isle of Wight, which the Chronicle (s. a. 534) claims was later granted to Wihtgar by Cerdic. According to the sequence of events, Cerdic, and by implication his lineage, was quite clearly senior to the later arrivals. This would have had obvious benefits for the Gewissae, for it legitimised the seventh-century Saxon conquest - or reconquest, according to the Chronicle's narrative - of vulnerable Jutish territory which gave them valuable access to continental trade links and a breathing space from Mercian pressure on the Thames.[139] It also directed the socially embedded martial inclinations of all English-speaking noblemen, Saxon and Jute alike, towards the more natural, ancient and immediate enemy: the Britons.

The actual relationship between the British and early Saxon populations of the south between the fifth and seventh centuries is a fraught question, particularly the degree to which the Britons - who are, problematically, virtually invisible in the archaeological record - underwent either replacement or acculturation. Since the 1980s there have been influential arguments for a model of elite emulation and acculturation by which small but powerful Saxon warbands gradually established cultural dominance over the majority British underclass.[140] The British influence on aspects of Saxon material culture is also more widely acknowledged than it was forty years ago.[141] Now Higham, one of the architects of the acculturation model, expresses the fear in his recent edited volume on this topic that 'an elite dominance interpretation of cultural change is becoming the new orthodoxy'.[142] Opposing voices have maintained that the Germanic immigration was larger in scale than a few isolated warbands,[143] that the immigrants 'moved into a landscape from which a major withdrawal had taken place',[144] and that 'the significance of ethnic barriers [between Britons and Saxons] has been underplayed in the early medieval historiography of Britain'.[145] The most

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[139] Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 58-59.

[140] See in particular Richard Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (London, 1989); Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*; Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*; Kenneth R. Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud, 2000); Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?' *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 513-533; the trend culminated in John Moreland's assertions that that 'the "English" are not biologically descended from the Germanic stock of Bede's account', and that up until Bede's time the terms 'Angles' and 'Saxons' only ever referred to a restricted warrior elite. Moreland, 'Ethnicity', p. 25, 46-49. For recent summaries and discussions of the debate, see Catherine Hills, *Origins of the English* (London, 2002); Higham, 'Britons in Anglo-Saxon England'.

[141] John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p. 22, dismissed the possibility of British influence on the Anglo-Saxons in half a paragraph; since then a considerable amount of archaeological work has been done on detecting British technical and artistic influence on Anglo-Saxon metalwork in particular. For a full review and discussion, see Lloyd Laing, 'Romano-British metalworking and the Anglo-Saxons', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 42-56

[142] Higham, 'Britons in Anglo-Saxon England', p 12.

[143] Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 48.

[144] Coates, 'Invisible Britons', p. 185.

[145] Alfred P. Smyth, 'The emergence of English identity, 700-1000', in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity*

persistent challenge to theories of acculturation has been presented by the English language itself, which shows remarkably little influence from Celtic, although there is also disagreement among linguists on this issue.[146]

Faced with such complexities, it is perhaps best to agree with Ian Wood's multifaceted conclusion that 'some places saw rapid takeover with minimum disruption, others saw instances of carnage, and yet others saw a slow, destructive infiltration'.[147] The original arrival of the Gewissae in the upper Thames, according to the archaeological evidence, likely preceded or immediately followed the first war between Saxons and Britons in the 430s; this may have been one instance of 'carnage', although direct and unambiguous evidence of such episodes is notoriously difficult to detect in the archaeological record. The expansion of Gewissan control up the Thames valley and beyond likely involved a complex combination of violence and relatively peaceful capitulation, depending on time and place. The same could be said of the Gewissan annexation of the British west in the seventh century. It was heralded by the battles of Bradford-on-Avon in 652 and Penselwood in 658, in the wake of which the Britons were driven 'as far as the Parret', a river in central Somerset.[148] This saw the end of British rule in the region, but there is no reason to believe that there was a mass expulsion of the native population. Padel has invoked the dominance of English place-names in western Wessex in order to support the model of a 'major replacement of population, language and place-names [occurring] over a large area in a comparatively short space of time'.[149] The assumption that early medieval place-names are necessarily representative of the ethnicity of the inhabitants, however, is invalidated by C. P. Lewis's study of Mersete hundred on the eleventh-century Welsh Marches. The hundred contained nineteen manors, all with English names (the majority being *-tun* place-names, as in Padel's study of Devon), yet the vast majority of its population was Welsh: fifty-eight households compared to thirty-two English households, with most of the latter concentrated in a single royal manor.[150] Had we a Domesday Book for seventh-century Wessex, we might equally find a surprising number of Britons populating an overwhelmingly 'English' toponymic landscape for several generations before English became the

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[146] *and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Alfred P. Smyth (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 24-52 (p. 31).

[146] Coates, 'Invisible Britons', regards the lack of Celtic loan-words in English as proof of mass population replacement; Hildegard Tristram, 'Why don't the English speak Welsh?', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 192-214, argues that there is evidence for Celtic influence on English at the level of phonology and morphosyntax rather than vocabulary.

[147] Wood, 'Before and after the migration', p. 46.

[148] *Her Cenwalh gefeaht æt Peonnum wiþ Walas, 7 hie gefliemde oþ Pedridan*. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 658.

[149] O. J. Padel, 'Place-names and the Saxon conquest of Devon and Cornwall', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 215-230 (p. 228).

[150] C. P. Lewis, 'Welsh territories and Welsh identities in late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 130-143 (pp. 134-136).

dominant language.

The evidence of Ine's Law Code (written 688x93) also describes Britons of several classes living under Saxon rule, and this aspect of the text should properly be related to the newly acquired British lands to the west, not necessarily to Wessex as a whole.[151] Following the conquest, large numbers of Britons suddenly found themselves at the mercy of a Saxon elite, newly arrived from the east, who had taken over tracts of land as the spoils of victory. Among these Saxon incomers were the parents of St Boniface, born *c*. 675 near Exeter. The much lower *wergeld* of a Briton compared to a Saxon of equivalent rank, as promulgated at several points in the Law Code, clearly demonstrates the legally and socially inferior status of the British population under West Saxon rule.[152] While the Law Code does not define the criteria for distinguishing between Britons (*wealas*) and Saxons (*englisc*), the fact that such a distinction could be externally imposed through legal structures demonstrates that it was seen, at least by Ine and his advisors, as a meaningful and important one.[153]

Ine inherited the legacy of the previous generation of Gewissae who had conquered these expansive British territories by the sword. The most popular songs and stories of military glory in his court may well have been about this successful war in the west, less often about the ignominious Gewissan retreat from the upper Thames. By tracing his own lineage directly back to Cerdic, who was overthrowing British rulers almost from the moment his feet landed on the shores of the Solent, Ine promoted a dynastic identity whose legitimacy was self-evident. The defeat and oppression of the Britons was a present reality, codified in law and forming the very basis of West Saxon power; it provided a mirror in which Ine could see himself as the sole king of a unified, victorious Saxon people, just like Cerdic before him. It is of course ironic that the name 'Cerdic' appears not to be Anglo-Saxon at all, but is probably derived from British 'Ceretic'. There are echoes of this down the seventh-century genealogies, for the first historical king of the Gewissae, Ceawlin, also seems to have borne a British name, as did Cenwalh and Ine's own predecessor Cædwalla.[154] In Ine's time, however, it is unlikely that the British origin of these names was acknowledged, or, if it was, that it

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[151] Martin Grimmer, 'Britons in early Wessex: The evidence of Ine's Law Code', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 102-114 (pp. 108-111). Far less should Ine's Law Code be used as evidence for an apartheid-like social structure which was applied across Anglo-Saxon England in general. See, for example, Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', p. 149; Thomas, Stumpf and Härke, 'Evidence for an apartheid-like social structure', p. 4; Alex Woolf, 'Apartheid and economics in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Higham, pp. 115-129 (pp. 127-129). For the standard edition of the text, see Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I, pp. 88-123.

[152] L. M. Alexander, 'The legal status of the native Britons in late seventh-century Wessex as reflected by the Law Code of Ine', *Haskins Society Journal*, 7 (1995), 31-38.

[153] Grimmer, 'Britons in early Wessex', p. 113.

[154] David Parsons, 'British *Caraticos, Old English Cerdic', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 33 (1997), 1-8; Coates, 'On some controversy surrounding *Gewissae/Gewissei*, *Cerdic* and *Ceawlin*'.

was held to be of much importance. The primary concern of the earliest West Saxon annalists was to narrate the steady expulsion and subjugation of the native Britons, and they left no room for accounts of the intermarriage or alliance which likely had occurred.

Conclusion

We can see that the West Saxon origin myth of Cerdic, perhaps inspired in content by a similar Kentish myth,[155] fulfilled two important political needs. First, it planted the origins of the Gewissan dynasty firmly in southern Hampshire, passing over the fact that the region had formerly been ruled by a Jutish dynasty, and that the Gewissae had been shouldered out of the upper Thames by Mercia. Second, it justified Saxon rule over the Britons of Dorset, Somerset and Devon, a sizeable area which had been conquered with relative swiftness between 652 and 661. The triumphant *adventus* myth of Cerdic helped buttress this social reality by portraying the Saxon advance as inevitable, and the battles of Cenwalh and Ine in the west as a natural continuation of the deeds of their ancestors. In a sense, although the tradition had become disjointed from the past, it was not entirely innaccurate. The earliest Saxon groups, presumably including those settled at Dorchester-on-Thames, had managed to conquer the south-east with relative swiftness in the middle of the fifth century, as evidenced by Gildas and the Gallic Chronicle of 452. Two centuries later it was the Gewissae, also based in the upper Thames, who conquered most of the remaining British territory in the south-west. Tradition and myth, far from being purely ideological fabrications, were adapted to fit and account for historical forces which had long outlasted living memory, but whose momentum was still felt.[156] The Cerdic myth was a fitting and plausible explanation as to how, when and why the ancestors of the Gewissae had come to Britain: not as mercenaries, as far as can be discerned from the Chronicle annals, but as conquerers from the outset.

   We should regard the Chronicle's story of West Saxon origins as an extremely valuable source, not for fifth-century history, but for the dynastic myth-making of later centuries. The ninth-century compilers of the Chronicle, luckily for us, were not overly conscientious when it came to reconciling the tangle of annals, traditions and genealogies they had inherited. In this article we have teased apart these threads and peered between the confusions and contradictions in order to win a glimpse of an earlier stage of dynastic propaganda, to which the Alfredian chroniclers looked back and sought to connect their own rulers. They found that this earlier story, tailored to the

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[155] Yorke suggests that the inspiration was ultimately Gothic in origin, and arrived in Kent via the person of King Æthelbert's father Irmenric, who had a Gothic name. Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon origin legends', pp. 25-28.

[156] See the contribution of Francesco Borri in this volume for a similar observation concerning the origin myth of early medieval Venice.

political needs of the late seventh century, still fitted well in the ninth. It bore the colours of antiquity, continuity and victory. Alfred took it up just as he took up the Law Code of Ine and appended it to his own laws; in both cases he was claiming the authority of the past in much the same way as his seventh-century forebears had attempted to do when they first planted their unsteady feet in the Jutish south and the British west.

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