Origins of the Kingdom of the English

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England is arguably the oldest European national kingdom: it has had a continuous institutional history since its creation (in 927).[1] English ethnicity no doubt originated in early mediaeval Britain but it nonetheless acknowledged aspects of identity derived from contributory Germanic ethnicities. The context was settlement by migration from Continental *Germania* in a post-colonial environment after *Brittaniae* (the Roman provinces of Britain) ceased to be an effective diocese of the Roman empire.[2] How was this new society created and organised? How was it affected by its neighbours? Bede wrote of genocide (*exterminium gentis*) of the Britons by the English. What were the institutions of English leadership, power and consent? The kingdom provided one important long-term organising framework. But what were kingdoms and kings? How many were there? Multiple kingship was a given not only among the English but

[1] It is, however, a radical curiosity that King Æthelstan's démarche in 927 has only recently been acknowledged by scholars as the moment of the creation of the kingdom and of Æthelstan himself as its first king. Cf. n. 7, below.

[2] This context has been a subject of endless discussion. Reliance on Gildas's account of Romano-British history has proved disastrous: his ignorance of the period before the mid-fifth century seems profound. In the two concluding paragraphs of E. A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 114–15, we are (quite rightly) presented with a penetratingly bleak picture: 'Fortunately, it has been given to few writers to draw as dark a picture as that which Gildas sketches of the Britain of his day – or of that limited part of Britain about which he had information . . . As far as we can discover, Gildas knew nothing whatever, apart from this handful of facts, about the Roman empire as a whole or about the past history of the entire world. The most frightening feature in the picture drawn by Gildas is not the destruction of city-life in Britain or the break-up of the Imperial system with its guarantee of peaceful life, but rather the destruction of knowledge itself. Knowledge of the outside world and knowledge of the past had been wiped out of men's minds.' Cf. E. A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia* 10 (1979), 203–26 and 11 (1980), 344. There are very various material-culture approaches to the subject – cf. K. Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 10–26 – but archaeologists have also allowed themselves to be mesmerised by the year 410, to no evident profit: F. K. Haarer et al. (eds.), *A.D. 410: The History and Archaeology of Late and Post-Roman Britain* (London, 2014); and S. Moorhead and D. Stuttard, *A.D. 410: The Year that Shook Rome* (London, 2010).

also among their neighbours in Britain. 'International' relations occurred not only within Britain (between Britons, English, Gaels and Picts) but also among kingdoms describable as English.

The received political narrative of early mediaeval English history is of a progressive reduction of the number of English kingdoms to an eventual seven (heptarchy), then to four (tetrarchy) and then (assisted by vikings) to one which, by eventually conquering intrusive Scandinavian polities, created a kingdom and a monarchy of the English. Such historiography is not sustainable. It seems teleological: England's long-term success as a political unit has encouraged a patriotic view that its creation was inevitable – even that the English nation's success in Britain was fore-ordained, as Bede, the father of English historiography, argued in 731. Relieving ourselves of that mediaeval and modern burden, while at the same time paying close attention to the dynamics of the Anglo-Saxon centuries, offers the prospect of a thoroughgoing creative re-conceptualisation of origins of the kingdom of the English.

We can be precise about the date of creation of the kingdom of the English and about the identity of its creator. In 927, Æthelstan, (over)king of the Anglo-Saxons, had conquered the Scandinavian kingdom of the Northumbrians centred on York and, at a meeting on 12 July at Eamontbridge, by Penrith on the Cumberland-Westmorland border (the south-western frontier-point between the kingdoms of Strathclyde and England), had agreed a political relationship with the principal non-English kings ruling in Britain, most notably since 900 *Costantin*, the king of Alba, the other non-English bordering power to the north.[3] Æthelstan had also received the submission of the English king of the northern Northumbrians, whose realm was centred on Bamburgh (Co. Northumberland) and whose dynastic line we henceforth find neither attracting nor bearing royal title.[4] In 927×939, Æthelstan's charters and coins asserted grand styles, *rex Anglorum* ('king of the English'), imperial styles (notably the hellenising *basileus*) and styles claiming Britain-wide rule: REX TOT: BRIT: = *rex totius Britanniae* ('the king of the whole of Britain').[5] The

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[3] For contextualised discussion of the origins of Scotland, see D. Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain, from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2013). Further to Broun's work, see on this subject A. Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba, 789–1070* (Edinburgh, 2007).

[4] On the end of independent English rule in the north-east of England and south-east of Scotland, see D. Whitelock, *History, Law and Literature in 10th–11th Century England* (London, 1981), essay III; cf. W. E. Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North. The Region and Its Transformation, 1000–1135* (Chapel Hill, NC 1979).

[5] On royal styles, see R. Drögereit, *Sachsen, Angelsachsen, Niedersachsen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 3 vols. (Hamburg, 1978), vol. I, pp. 11–125; H. Kleinschmidt, *Untersuchungen über das englische Königtum*

completion of an English project was announced in a letter-poem (imitating one in Charlemagne's name) to the queen-mother and the prince at court, sent from the royal army in the north-west.[6] Whatever previous perceptions there may have been, England (*Englaland*) and the kingdom of the English certainly now existed. Yet it is striking that the first scholarly biography of the kingdom's founder is of recent date.[7]

The Passage of Dominion

The English had inhabited part of Britain for about a half-millennium in 927. To be sure, a great variety of Germanic ethnicities could be met in the founding era of English history, as place-names and Bede's evidence amply attest.[8] Collectively, they could be seen by their native British neighbours as *Saxones* (a Late-Latin name for a major alliance of Germanic-speaking peoples), as *Garmani* (Classical Latin *Germani*)[9] – a larger such ethnic identity (now defined linguistically), but also sometimes (on the evidence of Old-Welsh poetry) as *Eingl* (Latin *Angli*, Old-English *Engle*),[10] another Germanic people, who would eventually provide the name 'English' (*englisc*) for both people and language. It is clear already from seventh-century evidence that the most prominent peoples of early Anglo-Saxon

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im 10. Jahrhundert (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 33–105; and S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready', 978–1016. A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 1–83. On coins, see C. E. Blunt et al., *Coinage in Tenth-Century England, from Edward the Elder to Edgar's Reform* (Oxford, 1989) and C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Athelstan, King of England 924–939', *BNJ* 42 (1974), 35–160 + plates.

[6] This was edited and translated by M. Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Athelstan', *ASE* 9 (1981), 61–98, reprinted in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066* (London, 1993), pp. 49–86. Cf. D. N. Dumville, *The Mediaeval Foundations of England?* (Aberdeen, 2006), pp. 11–15, reprinted in his *Anglo-Saxon Essays, 2001–2007* (Aberdeen, 2007), pp. 266–310, at 274–7.

[7] S. Foot, *Æthelstan, the First King of England* (New Haven, CT, 2011). This book gives Æthelstan a place in historians' purview – which he had not enjoyed since the sixteenth century – but there is much still to be done. On the ways in which Æthelstan was overtaken and marginalised in early modern historical writing, in favour of his grandfather, Alfred 'the Great', see S. Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great', *ASE* 28 (1999), 225–356, which deserves re-issue by Cambridge University Press as a book.

[8] E. Ekwall, 'Some Notes on English Place-Names Containing Tribal Names', *Namn och bygd* 24 (1936), 178–83; and E. Ekwall, 'Tribal Names in English Place-Names', *Namn och bygd* 41 (1953), 129–77. For a larger context, see W. Piroth, *Ortsnamenstudien zur angelsächsischen Wanderung. Ein Vergleich von -ingas, -inga- Namen in England mit ihren Entsprechungen auf dem europäischen Festland* (Wiesbaden, 1979).

[9] On the British pronunciation, see Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [hereafter HE], v.9, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969; rev. imp., 1990), pp. 476–7.

[10] *The Poems of Taliesin*, ed. I. Williams (Dublin, 1968), pp. 3–4 (no. III, line 20, *Eigyl*; commentary on p. 48) and 7–9 (no. VII, line 28, *Eigyl*; summary commentary on p. 87).

England were *Engle* (Angles) and *Seaxas* (Saxons), whose origins Bede in 731 sought to pinpoint in what are now northern Germany and the Jutlandic peninsula of Denmark.[11] From the evidence of material culture, it is apparent that the immigrants came from a yet broader North Sea zone extending from southern Norway to the Netherlands.[12]

The circumstances which brought significant immigration from Continental *Germania* to Britain over a period of perhaps 150 years – I discount immobilist theories of the last generation, which crudely sought to deny such migration – had a shattering effect on the post-colonial polities and culture of the native British. It is, and will remain, a matter of vigorous dispute what happened to the indigenes in the new settler-colonial environment. There are some certainties. There was southward emigration which created new Britains in western Gaul (Brittany, 'Little/Lesser Britain') and in northern Iberia (Britoña in Galicia). (Less certainly, on one interpretation of toponymic evidence, there were widespread individual British settlements in post-Roman Gaul, especially along the North Sea/Atlantic coast; and the British migrations from southern Britain to Brittany may have continued for centuries.)[13] The British language disappeared from large areas of the southern half of Britain,[14] to be replaced by Germanic speech in dialects which eventually came to be known collectively as English. The material and social culture of those areas became that associable with speakers of Germanic languages.

In 731, Bede was in no doubt what had happened to the British. By a conventional Christian interpretation, the Britons' criminal immorality had driven their God to bring them to the brink of extinction, by using the Germanic-speaking heathen invaders as agents of *exterminium gentis*, genocide.[15] For Bede, God's new chosen people in Britain were the English.[16]

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[11] Bede, *HE* i. 15 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 48–53). For a partially self-defeating attempt to shift this focus southwards on toponymic evidence, see J. Udolph, 'The Colonisation of England by Germanic Tribes on the Basis of Place-Names', in *Language Contact and Development around the North Sea*, ed. M. Stenroos et al. (Philadelphia, 2012), pp. 23–51.

[12] S. C. Hawkes and M. Pollard, 'The Gold Bracteates from Sixth-Century Anglo-Saxon Graves in Kent, in the Light of a New Find from Finglesham', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 15 (1981), 316–70; and J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the Pre-Viking Period* (Oxford, 1984).

[13] D. Fahy, 'When Did Britons Become Bretons?', *Welsh History Review* 2 (1964–5), 111–24; Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 78–90; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 21–6, 44–74; and L. Fleuriot, *Les Origines de la Bretagne. L'émigration* (Paris, 1980), esp. pp. 39–109.

[14] K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain. A Chronological Survey of the Brittonic Languages, First to Twelfth Century A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 3–30; and T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society among the Insular Celts, 400–1000', in *The Celtic World*, ed. M. J. Green (London, 1995), pp. 703–36, at 729–36.

[15] Bede, *HE* i. 14, *capitulum* (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 8–9).

[16] *Ibid.*, i. 22 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 66–9).

In justification, Bede referred to the sixth-century British author Gildas, whose massive letter of admonition, *De excidio Britanniae* ('The Ruin of Britain'), was a call for moral re-armament by a people whom he presented as God's 'latter-day Israel' being divinely tested in its faith.[17] While a British elite remained convinced of its civilised superiority to the invaders, its members' only satisfaction can have been that their culture had not been entirely eradicated. Roman Britain, still visible within the emerging English landscape, was already a distant memory in Gildas's world, even though he himself was living testimony to a continuing *romanitas* in British Britain.[18]

It is a long time since literal genocide was a preferred explanation of how a large part of Britain became England. A favoured theory – which could be heard enunciated over and over again during the last generation – was that a few Germanic-speakers who happened to be in late Roman or post-Roman Britain proved to be such superior and therefore powerful role-models that over the course of the immediately succeeding centuries the Britons hurried to shed their inherited culture and to adopt that which by the end of the sixth century we can recognise as English. Although this remarkable hypothesis was advanced with moral self-righteousness, we can see it to have been in all its essentials misleading (to put the matter no more strongly). If we were to set (an imaginary ancient-history committee of) the United Nations to investigate what happened to the native Britons in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries in terms of its Convention on Genocide (1948), it is difficult to imagine that the result would be other than a judgement that genocide took place. Part of that process would have been literal, involving a significant amount of bloodshed. Part might have involved an apartheid system restricting the indigenes' access to resources and status.[19] Part would have been the creation of an environment in which the only hope of personal survival or advancement would have been assimilation to the mores of Germanic-speakers or to flee the Island, never to return. The overall verdict: cultural genocide following resisted invasion and colonisation.[20]

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[17] Gildas, *Epistola de excidio Britanniae*, I. 25–6, in *Gildas*, ed. H. Williams (London, 1899–1901), pp. 56–65; and *Gildas*: *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978), pp. 98–9 and 27–9. Cf. T. O'Loughlin, *Gildas and the Christian Scriptures. Observing the World through a Biblical Lens* (Turnhout, 2012).

[18] D. N. Dumville, 'Post-Colonial Gildas: A First Essay', *Quaestio insularis* 7 (2006), 1–21, reprinted in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, 2 vols. (Aberdeen, 2007), vol. I, pp. 1–15.

[19] Cf. A. Woolf, 'Apartheid and Economics in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 115–29.

[20] For general issues, see *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, ed. G. J. Andreopoulos (Philadelphia, 1994); for text of the 'Convention on Genocide', see pp. 229–33. For larger contexts, see *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, ed. D. Bloxham and A. D. Moses (Oxford, 2010).

Even so, there remain many questions about the British conditions in
which Germanic settlement began and to which the incomers had to adapt.
Here I shall sketch out a dramatic scenario of systemic collapse which
seems to me to provide a helpful interpretative context. The antiquated
junior-school textbook image of the end of Roman Britain defined by
Roman legionary field armies marching out in 409/10 to support their
embattled colleagues in Gaul and Italy has nothing to recommend it, but
scholars' language continues to be defined by such a perception, which, in
our sources, begins with Gildas.[21] There are two certain essential points.
The first is that there were repeated rebellions by Imperial forces in Britain
in 406/7, the last of which led to a usurping emperor, Constantine III
(407–11), taking forces from Britain to campaign in Gaul (and subse-
quently in Iberia).[22] Second, at some point (perhaps around 410) in the
lengthy reign of the legitimate emperor of the West, Honorius (395–423),
the regular flow of coinage to support the army in Britain abruptly ceased.[23]
These two matters may be closely linked. It is likely that the sudden shock
to the Romano-British economy produced dramatic results.

Less closely datable, but certainly within a couple of decades of the latter
events, we see a collapse of mass production of goods in Britain and a loss of
distributive networks. It is not certain which came first, but it is unimagin-
able that these changes are independent. No new money receipts and no new
pottery (with its many functions) would have been severe developments.
How cities and towns now fed themselves may have come into question.
Certainly, archaeology has provided evidence to suggest the ending of some
Roman social norms in urban Britain.[24] We have evidence (as likewise in
later-fifth-century Gaul) for the inability of owners of elite property to have
their central-heating systems maintained adequately or at all. As urban life
slipped from its predictable rhythms, an increasing uncertainty about

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[21] Gildas, *Epistola de excidio Britanniae*, I (ed. Williams, pp. 2–11, 14–39, 44–65; ed. and trans.
Winterbottom, pp. 87–99 and 13–29).
[22] C. E. Stevens, 'Marcus, Gratian, Constantine', *Athenaeum* (Pavia) 45 (n. s. 35) (1957), 316–47; and E.
A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians. The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI 1982), pp.
137–229, 289–307. On the textbook image, see Dumville, 'Post-Colonial Gildas', pp. 5–6, 14–16,
reprinted in *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. I, pp. 4, 10–12. The crucial source is Orosius, *Historiarum
aduersus paganos libri septem* [Seven Books of Histories against the Stupid], in which this alleged
Iberian showed an unusual interest in Insular affairs. The standard edition remains *Pauli Orosii
Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. C. Zangemeister (Wien, 1882). The most recent
discussion is that of P. van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford, 2012). The modern
translators seem not to have understood Orosius's argument.
[23] S. Archer, 'Late Roman Gold and Silver Coin Hoards in Britain: A Gazetteer', in *The End of Roman
Britain*, ed. P. J. Casey (Oxford, 1979), pp. 29–64.
[24] See K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300–800* (London, 1994), pp. 55–64,
68–70, for a discussion.

survival in such contexts may have provoked an urban exodus. In those circumstances, governance is likely to have been exerted from different centres and over more restricted areas.

Barbarian military adventures are attested for this period of British history, both in 410 and in the early 440s.[25] If we accept the testimony of the late-fifth-century hagiography of St Germanus of Auxerre, they were an issue in 429/30 also.[26] A Marxist reading of the socio-religious history of early-fifth-century Britain, as partly seen through the eyes of an unreliable mid-sixth-century Byzantine historian, has produced a hypothesis of a root-and-branch revolt against Imperial authority structures and the ejection of Constantine III's administrators in 409/10.[27] As we leave contemporary evidence, circumstances necessarily become more difficult to evaluate, as this example shows. Nevertheless, we know that *bacaudae* – peasant rebels – were active and effective in western Gaul in precisely this period.[28]

A sudden decline in normality, prosperity and order in early-fifth-century Roman Britain would have created its own social, economic and political momentum. We do not need the very uncertainly attested suspension for Britain of *Lex Iulia de ui publica* (the ban on civilians bearing arms in the Roman commonwealth) by Honorius in 410 as an indicator of crisis. There are other indicators aplenty.

However, my earlier point about a growing localism – indeed, one could say 'autonomy' – in governance should exercise restraint over any temptation to generalise too eagerly. Considerations of place and time will always point to complexity. We should expect to see in all these circumstances both parallel and consecutive development of different perceptions of present and future and of different patterns of behaviour. Whether Britons saw Britain crashing out of the Roman empire at a particular moment or

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[25] For characterisation of Germanic military activity in Britain in the fifth century, using as a comparandum the *Suebi /Sueui* active in Iberia in the same period, see Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 212–17 (and cf. pp. 239–40, 251–7). Cf. also H. Kleinschmidt, 'Swabians in Early Medieval England', *Alemannisches Jahrbuch* (1994), 9–32.

[26] Constantius, *Vita Sancti Germani*, is the source for any detail: *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi merovingici*, VII, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison (Hannover, 1919–20), pp. 247–83. But the fact of Germanus' visit to Britain beginning in 429 is due to the contemporary chronicler Prosper of Aquitaine, §1301, in *Chronica minora saec. IV.V.VI.VII*, ed. T. Mommsen, 3 vols. (Berlin 1891–8), vol. I, p. 472. Cf. Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 7–14 (and p. 126, *s.v.* 'Saxons').

[27] Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 33–7. See further E. A. Thompson, 'Zosimus 6.10.2, and the Letters of Honorius', *Classical Quarterly* 76 (n. s. 32) (1982), 445–62.

[28] Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 34, 62–3, 104. More generally, see B. Czúth, *Die Quellen der Geschichte der Bagauden* (Szeged, 1965); and L. Montecchio, *I bacaudae. Tensioni sociali tra tardoantico e alto medioevo* (Rome, 2012). For an interesting Bacaudic episode in north-western Iberia in the reign of Rechiarius, king of Sueves (448–56), see Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 211–12.

imagined that they were constitutionally or legally still part of it, even after the middle of the fifth century, or had very various simultaneous views at any moment, must remain a moot point in the absence of specific evidence.

A thought should be spared for an issue which has received all too little attention in the scholarly literature. What was the effect, beyond the frontier, of the collapse – whether sudden or progressive – of the Roman imperial diocese of Britain? It was Roman policy to manage the politics of frontier zones, which required good intelligence and (where possible) reliable local allies. Payment of subsidy, sometimes lavish, was an essential option in the maintenance of alliance. So too was forward military patrolling. When these ceased, the political landscape changed at once.[29] Over the past two generations there has been a growing recognition that there was significant change in the mid-fifth century in the landscape of power in what is now southern and central Scotland. The Britons and (farther north) the Picts of these areas can be seen to have developed new types of fortified centres, often replacing larger hill-forts.[30] New enemies emerged. New opportunities and alliances might be perceived. But in the deep frontier zone which the Roman army had once sought to manage, the money had dried up, just as in the early-fifth-century Roman diocese itself – and for the same reason: the Imperial fiscal tap had been turned off. In different ways, in a different society (or two: northern Britons and southern Picts), the consequences nonetheless must have been severe and the adaptation painful. And when, after the mid-sixth century, the English came calling, the pain was no doubt greater still.[31]

We cannot avoid the question how it was that English, ultimately Germanic, language, social customs (including law and religion) and institutions came to prevail in a large part of Britain. Part of the answer is likely to lie in the circumstances in which Roman rule – or, perhaps even

[29] On Traprain Law, perhaps the central place of the Uotadini, see A. O. Curle, *The Treasure of Traprain. A Scottish Hoard of Roman Silver Plate* (Glasgow, 1923); and Dark, *Britain and the End*, p. 205; and F. Hunter and K. Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver. The Traprain Treasure in Context* (Edinburgh, 2013). The contrast with Burnswark (Dumfriesshire), *caput* of the Damnonii, is striking and instructive.

[30] R. B. K. Stevenson, 'The Nuclear Fort at Dalmahoy, Midlothian, and Other Dark Age Capitals', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 83 (1948–9), 186–98; L. Alcock, 'Early Historic Fortifications in Scotland', in *Hill-Fort Studies. Essays for A. H. A. Hogg*, ed. G. Guilbert (Leicester, 1981), pp. 150–80; and Alcock's detailed reports on excavations of a number of early mediaeval fortified sites in northern Britain, as well as his summation of his Scottish work in *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain, A.D. 550–850* (Edinburgh, 2003).

[31] On this period of (pre-Scottish) history in North Britain, see J. E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland. Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh, 2009). For the English arrival and expansion, the papers by P. Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Northumbria* (London, 1984), still have much to offer. See also P. Clack and J. Ivy (eds.), *The Borders* (Durham, 1983).

more, the Roman imperial economy – ceased in Britain. Our written sources for that period are poor, and what are sometimes taken as certainties are far from such. But we have seen that the evidence of material culture may be held to be decisive. The economy collapsed. Cash flow into the Roman diocese ended; industry and mass production ceased; communications (freedom of movement) and distribution broke down. Management of technology gradually became impossible as manpower and skills were lost; starvation became a problem, particularly in urban communities; civil violence became a significant issue; the cities and towns began to empty as normal life became impossible; population decline, probably severe, became inevitable. New governmental forces made themselves felt, ad hoc; barbarian raiding increasingly gave way to immigration.[32]

If we turn to Gildas, writing in the mid-sixth century in fear of further disasters, we find that cities were now empty; that the barbarian presence, which had provoked a *diuortium* in *Britannia*, was heavily felt; that civil war was endemic in British Britain; that Britons had emigrated. We do not have to accept Gildas's historiography or his religious position: we must merely note what he took for granted in relation to his own time. The Roman era was a dim and distant memory, however prompted by the remains of the built environment of the Empire. Trade no longer flowed along the principal riverine arteries of southern Britain. There had been wars until relatively recently, which had drawn to a close around the time of Gildas's birth, and he at least feared their resumption with newly catastrophic consequences.[33]

As we contemplate systems collapse, the end (in Britain at least) of an Imperial mode whose ways had dominated British life for four centuries (and yet no certainty that 'Rome' would not or could not return), we can suppose that the most heavily Romanised (and therefore the most urbanised and populous) parts of the diocese would have suffered disproportionately. In other words, we do not have to imagine that immigrant (or even indigenous) barbarians pushed Roman Britain over: whatever the merits of such an argument might be in relation to other parts of the western Empire, it is not necessary in Britain. One could even argue that systems collapse would have made *Britannia* a less attractive target for raiding and

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[32] R. Fleming, *Britain after Rome. The Fall and Rise, 400–1070* (London, 2010), has recently produced a lively and colourful history largely from material-culture evidence: the evidence has often been pressed too hard, but the result is nonetheless important and deserves respect.

[33] Dumville, 'Post-Colonial Gildas', pp. 15–21, and Dumville, *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. I, pp. 11–15.

immigration. But we know that from the 360s to the 440s, for which we do have relevant contemporary evidence, Germanic barbarians were attacking Britain.[34]

Yet what is certain is, to take a long view, that the British-speaking Britons were not wholly conquered militarily from England until the thirteenth century and that they were not confined to Dumnonia (understood as Devon and Cornwall), Wales and what is now south-western Scotland until the mid-seventh century. As has long been acknowledged in modern scholarship, if we see English expansionism in Britain as a process, perhaps still on-going or perhaps having just passed its high-water mark in the later seventh century, then the first major stage took some two hundred years to be completed.[35]

In any event, 'the passage of dominion' from Britons to English, as it has been conceptualised since the time of Bede and thoroughly developed since 1100, was a lengthy process. In the eyes of twelfth-century writers it was brought to a close by the reign of Æthelstan as first monarch of England and tidied up by Norman domination of Wales and Scotland from 1093 in what has recently and rather unfortunately been called 'The First English Empire' (presumably because the writer thought that Saxons became English by Normanisation after 1066).[36]

Nomenclature

The terminology of historical peoples and their territories is often, perhaps always, fraught with difficulty, and this is certainly true in relation to ancient and mediaeval Britain. There are scholars for whom the word 'English' remains difficult to use in relation to the six centuries before 1066: for them, 'Anglo-Saxon' is a favoured term of art, while for most students of the first millennium AD it is simply a period designation, 'Anglo-Saxon England' meaning England before the Norman conquest. It is as if there were in some minds a rule 'Anglo-Saxon + French = English'! At the other end of the historical scale, there is a problem of knowing what

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[34] I. N. Wood, 'The Channel from the Fourth to the Seventh Centuries A.D.', in *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail (London, 1990), pp. 93–7.

[35] E. A. Thompson, 'Britain, A.D. 406–410', *Britannia* 8 (1977), 303–18; and Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 137–248, *passim*.

[36] R. William Leckie, Jr., *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981), produced the outstanding account of the literary development of this idea. For the 'English' empire from 1093, see R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire. Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000).

to do about the opposition of meaning of *Engle* ('Angle') and *Seaxe* ('Saxon') when Latin *Angli* and *Saxones* could be used to mean one and the same thing (most easily translated 'English') but when in a document of 736 *Suuthengle* might be taken to mean 'the Southern Angles' (viz. the Mercians) or 'the Southern English'.[37] *Angelcynn* seems likely to have meant 'the English people' and, by extension, 'England' but in principle might also have meant 'Angles'. The changing territory of Anglo-Saxon England can be held to be problematic in terms of nomenclature, and it is striking that modern Scottish historians (and some linguists of like mind) are still unwilling to allow that the English-speakers who were absorbed into 'Scotland' in the tenth and eleventh centuries might be called 'English' rather than 'Angles' or 'Anglians'. This is rendered even more absurd by the circumstance that fifteenth-century native speakers of Scots called their language *Inglis*. But by that stage Scots was no more mainstream English than is twenty-first-century American.

It remains a fact that the land and the people came to be known as 'England' (*Englaland*, 'land of the Angles') and 'English' (Angle-ish). The implied defining role of the Angles in this process has yet to find convincing explanation. Are we to suppose that such ethnogenesis crystallised during the dominance of Southumbrian England by Anglian over-kingdoms from the time of Rædwald of the East Angles (?610s×627) to that of Æthelbald of the Mercians (716–57), perhaps even in one of the brief periods when the whole of England was in the hegemony of Northumbrian kings, Edwin (616×627–33) to Oswiu (651–8)?[38] Yet *Englaland* itself seems to be a relative latecomer to the territorial vocabulary of Old English – and it should be stressed that Latin *Anglia* was not naturally used in England until after the Norman conquest.

In this context, the phrases *rex Anglorum* and *rex Saxonum* (which could mean either 'a king of the English' or 'the king of the English') need careful thought and sensitive interpretation. By extension, *regnum Anglorum*, 'a/the kingdom of the English', requires yet more cautious treatment. It has famously been pointed out that Pope Gregory I (590–604), the father of English Christianity, initiated a papal diplomatic usage of *rex Anglorum*

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[37] P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), p. 94, S 89 (BCS 154). This survives as an original single sheet: see E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial* (Oxford, 1960), p. 21; and *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, vol. III, ed. A. Bruckner and R. Marichal (Olten, 1963), no. 183.

[38] On that period, see E. B. Fryde et al. (eds.), *Handbook of British Chronology,* 3rd edn (London, 1986), pp. 4–6.

for any English king; and that Pope has on this basis been heralded, however improbably, as the father of Englishness itself, the very author of an ethnogenesis.[39]

England, then, at its fullest extent in the mid-ninth century, was bounded on the south by the English Channel, in the west by the Cornish and Welsh borders, in the north-west by the ethnically British kingdoms of what is now south-western Scotland and in particular by the kingdom of Dumbarton (the precise boundaries and all the British players are uncertain), and in the north by the upland massif of *Bannog* (as in Modern Scots Bannockburn, the site of a famous battle in 1314), which provided the southern boundary of the over-kingdom of the Picts.[40] The resemblance of this English territory to the effective dimensions of the Roman province, later diocese, of Britain (*Brittaniae*, 'the Britains', viz, 'the Imperial provinces of Britain', in Classical Latin) is very striking, and it is arguable that in this respect the Roman heritage was of great importance in the Middle Ages in respect of the formation of kingdoms, ethnic identities and imperial aspirations. Latin *Brittania* (Classical)/*Britannia* (mediaeval) was therefore either Great Britain (the island as a whole) or the territory dominated by the Romans: it is worth remembering that up to one third of the British landmass, what is now northern Scotland, was never incorporated into the Roman empire.

It is necessary always to grasp that in the earlier Middle Ages Britain was a place of considerable ethnic complexity and even greater political diversity. That said, we must equally remember that the very idea of Britain was a driver and moulder of political thought and action, a name for a contested world of its own. The Britons held it to be their own sphere (although mediaeval Welsh literature allows that the name Britain may exclude the Pictish north, above the Antonine Wall or above *Bannog*).[41] We find, however, the Britons of the earlier Middle Ages able to refer to any of Britoña, Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, or British-speaking northern Britain (of which the kingdom of Dumbarton would have been the northernmost) as *Britannia* without qualification. For them it was an affirmation

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[39] P. Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the "Church of the English"', in *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. G. Rowell (Wantage, 1992), pp. 13–32; cf. Dumville, *The Mediaeval Foundations*, p. 12.

[40] On Bannog, see *The Gododdin. The Oldest Scottish Poem*, trans. K. H. Jackson (Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 4–6, 78–9.

[41] *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Welsh Triads*, ed. and trans. R. Bromwich, 1st edn (Cardiff, 1961), p. 483, *s.n. Pabo post Prydein*, and, supplementarily, 2nd edn (1978), p. 561. But, since there seems to be no sign of a locution *Ynys Prydyn*, the force of *Ynys Prydein*, 'The Island of Britain', remains uncertain. That last issue hangs awkwardly over Bromwich's book.

of inherited culture, an unwillingness to release that, but also a pointed reminder of what had been lost.[42] At the end of the ninth century, as the inhabitants of what is now north-eastern Scotland started to shake off the unwelcome embrace of the vikings of Dublin, we begin to meet kings of *Alba*, an Old-Gaelic name meaning 'Great Britain/the island of Britain'.[43] Again, we must recognise the note of aspiration – and in its rulers we see the lineal ancestors of the later kings of Scots.[44] All these contested Britain with Germanic speakers, first the English and then Viking-Age Scandinavians. Over the course of early Anglo-Saxon history, English regional over-kings, inspired by stimuli which historians still dispute, enjoyed a developing rhetoric of rule of Britain in their competition for dominance. In a document of the year 736, already mentioned, Æthelbald, (over)king of the Mercians, has the styles *rex Britanniae* ('king of Britain') and *rex . . . omnium prouinciarum quae Sutangli dicuntur* ('the king of all the kingdoms which are called Southern English'), a formula which can be connected directly with what the recently deceased Bede had to say in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* ('Ecclesiastical History of the English People') about seven over-kings who intermittently dominated the Midlands and south of England from Anglo-Saxon proto-history to the time when he wrote.[45] A century and a half later, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (published in 892) gives us in a crudely augmented version of Bede's list the vernacular equivalent of Æthelbald's *rex Britanniae* – *brytenwealda* ('ruler of Britain').[46] In Bede's terms, the West-Saxon kings who received the submission of their East-Anglian and Mercian counterparts, making themselves over-kings of the English Midlands and south, would have joined this list of exceptionally powerful rulers: Ecgberht (829/30), Edward the Elder (899–924), Ælfweard (924) and Æthelstan (924/5–927). In as much as kings from 927 to 1066 continued (albeit with occasional viking-induced disruption) to dominate this Southumbrian area, they might also have rejoiced in such a title. However, it is from 927 that we have explicit evidence of the deployment (in Latin) of royal styles of entitlement to rule Britain.

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[42] A. W. Wade-Evans et al., *The Historical Basis of Welsh Nationalism* (Cardiff, 1950); and Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 519–35, has analysed the tenth-century poem *Armes Prydein Vawr*, where the continuing sense of loss – of rights, territory, and power – is palpable.

[43] C. Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland. The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh, 2007; 2nd edn, 2008), pp. 137–75; and D. N. Dumville, 'Ireland and Britain in *Táin bó Fraích*', *Études celtiques* 32 (1996), 175–87.

[44] Broun, *Scottish Independence*, pp. 71–97.

[45] Bede, *HE* v. 23 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 558–9).

[46] *ASC* MS A, 827, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. A*, ed. J. M. Bately, AS Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, III (Cambridge, 1986), p. 42.

An English claimant to be a ruler or king or emperor of Britain must have his outlook examined closely. Given the variety of meanings, in that period, of words translatable as 'Britain' – any one of the British-speaking territories, the Roman imperial diocese at its fullest extent, the island of Britain – a premature, insufficiently contextualised interpretation could be very misleading.[47] Another dimension is provided by parallel usage in Ireland in the earlier Middle Ages: from 642 (an obituary notice) we encounter from time to time persons given the title *rex Hiberniae* /*rí Érenn* ('the king of Ireland'), who show no sign of having dominated an area any larger than (at best) the northern half of that island.[48] We see in Gaelic literature in Latin the transfer of this kind of ideology to Britain when Northumbrian over-kings were dominant in England.[49]

In sum, political theory and practice could cross borders between ethnicities as well as between polities of shared ethnicity. Christian evangelising missions and political exile provided two conduits for such transfer. Even negative views about neighbours did not offer a defence against reception of new ideas. The language of ethnic and religious differences does, however, present a reminder of the points at which lines might be drawn.

Within Britain, the English had three sets of ethnically differentiable neighbours in the early Middle Ages – Picts (Old-English *Pehtas*), Gaels (Old-English *Scottas*) and Britons (*Brettas*), joined by a fourth in the Viking Age, Scandinavians (*Dene*).[50] Attitudes to these neighbours would vary with time, place and political circumstance, and these attitudes might have been variously different between seculars and ecclesiastics. What is clear is that in Anglo-Latin political discourse any one of them might be called *barbari* ('barbarians'). In late Roman terms, any one of them (save

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[47] See, for example, the classic essay by N. Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective: Some Problems', *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Lapidge and Dumville, pp. 85–105.

[48] On King Domnall mac Aedo, who died at the end of January 642, see the brief account of F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), p. 114, whose point about the distribution of chronicle evidence is crucial. Cf. T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. pp. 481–7, on 'Tara and the Kingship of Ireland', relying on a mix of sources of various dates; his very important, indeed unprecedented, study, chap. 13, 'The Powers of Kings', pp. 522–85, is indispensable reading.

[49] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, i. 1, in *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1991), pp. 12–19.

[50] D. N. Dumville, 'Old Dubliners and New Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: A Viking-Age Story', *Medieval Dublin* 6 (2004), 79–94, reprinted in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. I, pp. 103–22; and C. Downham, '"Hiberno-Norwegians" and "Anglo-Danes": Anachronistic Ethnicities and Viking-Age England', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 19 (2009), 139–69, reprinted in her *No Horns on Their Helmets? Essays on the Insular Viking-Age* (Aberdeen, 2013), pp. 41–71.

those Britons counted as Roman provincials, therefore *ciues*, '[Roman] citizens') might be accounted thus, including any one of the Germanic peoples who contributed to the post-Roman population of Britain. It is striking that this language could be adopted and applied to their Insular neighbours by the (newly) Christian English, whose heathen forefathers their Italian evangelists would certainly have regarded as *barbari*. It is no surprise that the Britons called the English barbarians, and it is striking to find Gaelic writers also able to use it of the English.[51] We should perhaps (except in the case of the grim Anglo-British relationship) not read too much meaning into the word, perhaps regarding it simply as a way of affirming the user's sense of his own civility over against his neighbour.

However, one exception to this must be recorded, also in the context of Anglo-British interaction. Much effort has been expended in recent years on lightening the dark picture of mutual racial hatred between the two peoples, and there has been significant gain in the quality of our understanding of the existence of a complex interrelationship.[52] But, if we are to have a generalisation, it remains the case that the default position on either side was characterised by contempt and racial hatred. The word which has become 'Welsh' in Modern English, and therefore both a straightforward ethnic label for the inhabitants of a precisely defined geographical and constitutional space and for the indigenes' original language, had, however, a darker earlier history. Old-English *wealh* (plural *wealas*, adjective *welhisc*) was a word which denoted a foreigner, particularly one of Roman heritage and Romance speech, who was worthy only to be a slave – indeed, it became a standard word for 'slave'. This is part of a much larger Germanic picture and can be seen (for example) on the Germanic-Romance linguistic

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[51] For Bede's usage, see P. F. Jones, *A Concordance to the Historia Ecclesiastica of Bede* (Cambridge, MA, 1929), pp. 53–4 (*s.vv. barbaricus, barbarus*). In the letters of St Patrick, we meet the word once – *Epistola contra Coroticum*, §1: K. Devine, *A Computer-Generated Concordance to the Libri Epistolarum of Saint Patrick* (Dublin, 1989), p. 23. For an Italian view, probably shared in Gaul/Francia, see Bede, *HE* i. 23–5 (ed. Colgrage and Mynors, pp. 68–77). For the long-term history, see J. Gillingham, 'The Foundations of a Disunited Kingdom', in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (London, 1995), pp. 48–64, whose opening pages are of capital importance. On the Celtic side of the relationship, see Gildas, *Epistola de excidio Britanniae*, esp. i. 3–26 (ed. Williams, pp. 14–65; and ed. and trans. Winterbottom, pp. 89–99 and 16–29) and (later and in Ireland) the late seventh-century lives of St Patrick, where *barbarus* was a heathen Gael: *The Patrician Texts in The Book of Armagh*, ed. and trans. L. Bieler and F. Kelly (Dublin, 1979), pp. 74–5 (Muirchú, I.10), 136–9 (Tírechán, §17), 150–1 (§35) and 164–5 (§52) where *barbarae gentes* are foreign peoples.

[52] See especially P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990).

frontier in Belgium.[53] What is striking is that in the conversion of this word into an ethnic label in Britain (as *Wealh, Wealas*, therefore), it became specialised into a description of Britons who inhabited what is now consequently Wales, with the Bretons (*Suðbryttas, Lidwiccas*) and the North Britons (*Cumbras*) receiving different names of a non-negative character and the Cornish (*Westwealas*, but in time *Cornwealas* from which developed Modern-English Cornwall) having their 'Welshness' qualified.[54]

New Societies, New Polities

In sum, the English polity or polities, once established in Britain, must be regarded as intrusive on a previous sub-Roman order, the immigrant presence in the context of system collapse inevitably provoking severe tensions, indeed interethnic hostilities, and leading to a radical political reordering in an ethnogenetic (not to mention ethnonemetic) context. One of the long-standing problems of general interpretation of this process has been whether or not to insist on comparability with the better-documented history of other regions of the western Roman empire which were conquered and settled by Germanic-speaking groups, in Gaul, Iberia, North Africa and Italy. Here I take the view that, while the insights gained by comparison are to be welcomed and developed, there is no merit in insisting that the course of history in Britain and any other sub-Roman region must have been essentially similar.[55] Indeed, it is apparent from the outcome – in terms of language, political and social culture and material culture – that British history has many important differences from that of the other Roman regions in which Germanic-speaking peoples established themselves in the fifth and sixth centuries. There are many reasons for these differences, extending from the circumstances of late-fourth- and earlier-fifth-century Britain to the nature of

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[53] M. L. Faull, 'The Semantic Development of Old English *wealh*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 8 (1975), 20–44. G. Kurth, *La Frontière linguistique en Belgique et dans le nord de la France*, I (Bruxelles, 1896); C. Verlinden, *Les Origines de la frontière linguistique en Belgique et la colonisation franque* (Bruxelles, 1955); and J. Stengers, *La Formation de la frontière linguistique en Belgique ou de la légitimité de l'hypothèse historique* (Bruxelles, 1959).

[54] For Old-English names of peoples, the brief study by F. Mezger, *Angelsächsische Völker- und Ländernamen* (Berlin, 1921), is seminal.

[55] This has proved to be a rather powerful vein of thought over the past generation. For example, it clearly influenced the idea that Gildas's life-span should be given an earlier start: M. Lapidge, in 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain', *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Lapidge and Dumville, pp. 27–50. More generally, see I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås, 1983); and (in the context of 'Late-Antiquity theory') Dark, *Britain and the End*.

the immigrant population which had by the mid-seventh century defined a very new cultural map of Britain.[56]

The ways in which the new polities and societies were established in Britain, and their interactions with and effects on the indigenes, remain very uncertain; interpretation has been, and has continuing potential to be, acutely controversial.

From such a base we begin the history of Anglo-Saxon England. As we gain contemporary evidence of its society – evidence which is very thin for the first seventy to one hundred years from the despatch in 596 of the first evangelising mission from Rome – two features of governance may be observed. We see aggressive regional over-kings locking horns with one another, and in these the historian may be tempted to see the heirs of leaders who commanded significant barbarian forces in fifth-century Britain.[57] But, second, at the same time we see dependent royalty operating at a much more local level, and, as we see more of early Anglo-Saxon England, that evidence increases and diversifies variously. These more local rulers have usually been less interesting (indeed, all too often invisible) to historians, especially in the twentieth century, and it is only in the last twenty-five years that there have been some attempts to write their histories.[58] Nevertheless, historians' focus has remained resolutely on their transience as the English marched their inevitable way to national identity, a monarchy and a nation-state.

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[56] For a discussion of the development of Germanic socio-politics in early mediaeval England, see P. Wormald, 'Germanic Power Structures: The Early English Experience', in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. L. Scales and O. Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 105–24; and S. Foot, 'The Historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "Nation-State"', *ibid.*, pp. 125–42. Three important introductions to the foundational role of the Germanic contribution in the making of Anglo-Saxon culture are M. McC. Gatch, *Loyalties and Traditions. Man and His World in Old English Literature* (New York, 1971); J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971); and M. J. Swanton, *Crisis and Development in Germanic Society, 700–800: Beowulf and the Burden of Kingship* (Göppingen, 1982).

[57] H. M. Chadwick, *The Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), pp. 144–5 and 153–91 (2nd edn, 1924, pp. 135–6, 144–80), seems to have come to the conclusion that royal leadership of Germanic migration into Britain in the *Völkerwanderungszeit* was a given. Confounded by the realities of very local kingship which he himself had described in his ground-breaking book, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905), he declared that 'the [English] Invasion' was followed in the new colony by 'a period of disintegration' (p. 416, *ad* 291, line 9), which he needed in order to avoid any implication that he thought 'that the number of English kingdoms in Britain was originally very large'(!). Cf. *The Origin* (1st edn), pp. 182–3, at greater length.

[58] The way was led by J. Campbell, *Bede's Reges and Principes* (Jarrow, [1980]), and by the contributors to *S. Bassett (ed.), The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1989). For full-length works, see B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990); and D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991; 2nd edn, 2000); while these latter books have been welcome, they have nevertheless done little more than scratch the surface of the historiographical problem.

In 1974, a hypothesis was advanced that parts of early Anglo-Saxon England might not have been ruled thus.[59] This is a useful reminder that Germanic-speaking peoples can be seen in chequered relations with kingship.[60] The Germanic word which gave English 'king' (Old-English *cyning*, later *cyng*) was not one whose etymology conveyed such a notion or had great time depth, unlike Welsh *rhi* (a word now long since abandoned) or Old-Gaelic *rí*, cognate with kingly words in very various Indo-European languages.[61] Furthermore, comparative study suggests that the 'free Germanic peasant', much derided in recent generations, deserves further and positive consideration.[62] How the Germanic-speaking immigrants were led in their migration to Britain – if they were – is not known, and very different hypotheses have been advanced over the last century. Indeed, the effects of migration on political organisation have received too little attention both in general and in particular relation to this period.[63]

Two moments at which this focus might have changed proved illusory. In 1905, Hector Munro Chadwick, Germanic philologist and all-round Anglo-Saxonist (to say nothing of his other remarkable achievements),[64] published a variously groundbreaking book, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions*. It contained the first detailed study of English local kingship. The book was damned by Frank Merry Stenton in an extraordinary and immediate review:[65] historians of Anglo-Saxon England thereafter largely

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[59] W. Davies and H. Vierck, 'The Contexts of Tribal Hidage', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974), 223–93, at 240–1.

[60] This is a theme which runs through the works of E. A. Thompson: *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1965; rev. imp., 1968) (not helped by his adoption of the dismal scheme of chief, chieftainship, clan [kindred] and clan-chieftainship, tribe [*pagus*], to say nothing of Germans and Germany); *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (Oxford, 1966); and *Romans and Barbarians*. The 'anthropological' usage is that canonised by P. Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor* (London, 1905; 2nd edn, 1911); P. Vinogradoff, *Outlines of Historical Jurisprudence*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1920–2), vol. I and Vinogradoff, *Tribal Law*, pp. 163–372.

[61] D. E. Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names. A Study of Some Continental Celtic Formations* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 243–9 (and p. 492, *s.v. reg-*); cf. D. H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 102–40.

[62] The new work has considerable implications in this area. In general, while being grateful for and stimulated by the publications of Rosamond Faith – in particular, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997); and D. Banham and R. Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford, 2014) – I feel a strong need to reconnect with where the great nineteenth-century works on Germanic law and society left the subject and to begin a reconsideration of the evidence at that point.

[63] Chadwick, *The Origin*, provided the inspiration for the remarkable work of B. S. Phillpotts, *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After* (Cambridge, 1913), which was particularly focused on migration.

[64] M. Lapidge (ed.), *H. M. Chadwick and the Study of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in Cambridge* (Aberystwyth, 2015).

[65] Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions*; F. M. Stenton, *Folklore* 16 (1905), 122–6. For my earlier remarks on this subject, see D. N. Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship in Early

avoided it until the 1960s, thus perpetuating the traditions which serious engagement with Chadwick's work would have disrupted.[66] One of the few references (and even fewer positive references) to Chadwick's *Institutions* in the intervening half-century was made in 1937 by J. E. A. Jolliffe (1891–1964), whose historical interests were especially devoted to the study of English local institutions, their origins in what he called 'the era of the folk' and their development in English constitutional history.[67] No English historian was better placed than Jolliffe to appreciate and develop Chadwick's insight. Yet he was unable to find a consistent place for the petty kingdom when seeking to articulate England's 'constitutional history': he faced the constant distraction of feeling the need to raise his eyes to higher levels of rule, and he repeatedly stressed the alleged appointed nature of local kingship.[68] Only in the last generation has a more sympathetic attitude been taken to local, sub-regional and regional kingdoms and their various interactions. Even so, that interest has remained more descriptive than structural, concerned less with their function in the governance of Germanic-speaking Britain than with a few of their individual histories within a predetermined movement of political history towards a known destination.

Our contemporary written sources begin to thicken – that would not be difficult! – from the late seventh century with the advent of royal diplomas, 'The Tribal Hidage', further correspondence, chronicles and (in 731) Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History'. The list does not, of course, end with Bede. In these sources taken as a whole, numerous kingdoms can be seen. But historians have tended not to be curious about this phenomenon and therefore not to see much of what is on the surface, let alone what might lie just beneath it. Comparative approaches have not been exploited. The reason is again that a long-term, overarching structure of interpretation has inhibited free thought and critical enquiry. In short, the idea of the nation—which underpinned the English (and subsequently the British)

Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines (San Marino, 1997), pp. 345–73, esp. 345–6.

[66] The return to Chadwick was perhaps encouraged by the outstanding social and economic history textbook by H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1962), pp. 289–314, 390–1 (cf. 2nd edn, Harlow, 1991, pp. 301, 305), a volume which marked the culmination of Loyn's major scholarly output. Another fine survey produced in that period (but without specific reference to Chadwick) was the work of D. P. Kirby, *The Making of Early England* (London, 1967).

[67] J. E. A. Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England*, 1st edn (London, 1937), pp. 5, n. 1 (with a spectacular confusion of Chadwick with Frederic Seebohm) and 32, n. 2; cf. his article, 'The Era of the Folk in English History', in *Oxford Essays in Medieval History Presented to Herbert Edward Salter* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 1–32.

[68] See Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History*, p. 58, for example.

nation-state – has long rendered irrelevant deeper probing of the origins and early history of English political organisation.

A crucial early witness is provided by a royal diploma of the 670s, preserved in the archives of Chertsey Abbey through the Middle Ages, augmented and at length incorporated in the abbey's cartulary-chronicle in the second half of the thirteenth century.[69] Although both the royal style of the donor and a confirmatory subscription acknowledge the importance of a regional over-king – Wulfhere, over-king of the Mercians (658–75) – this is a charter peopled by local kings (*subreguli*), perhaps themselves of various grades of royalty. This donor was one Frithuwald of the kingdom of the men of *Suthrige* (the Southern District, now [Co.] Surrey), *Fritheuualdus prouincie Surrianorum*: his grant was to enhance the endowment of the minster (*monasterium*) which had first been built under King Ecgberht (presumably Ecgberht I, [over]king of the Cantware, 664–73). Frithuwald's grant was massive – a substantial slice of northern Surrey, constituting much of the *prouincia* ('kingdom') of the Woccingas, as far north-westwards as the boundary of the kingdom of the Sunningas. The size of Surrey at this date is a matter for dispute, but the formation in -*gē* (cf. German *Gau*, 'district') is characteristic of south-eastern England before about 700: Kent, for example, has a number of such units which seem to have been kingdoms.[70] Names in –*ingas* ('followers/dependants/descendants of'), with the leader's name preceding, likewise seem to have been early kingdoms (but the date range of their creation remains controversial). Within Surrey, we meet a number of -*ingas* units: with the aid of this document, we can see the frontier between Surrey and Berkshire (where the territory of the Sunningas began), as well as within Surrey at the *Fullingadic*, the boundary of the Fullingas. It has been well remarked that, from study of local political organisation, 'What emerges most strongly . . . is the stability of the early' units of such sort.[71] It has sometimes been argued

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[69] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, pp. 343–4, S 1165. See M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (Leicester, 1979); and J. Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey* (Guildford, 1991). Most recently, this diploma has been re-edited by S. Kelly, *Charters of Chertsey Abbey*, AS Charters 19 (Oxford, 2015), pp. 89–104 (no. 1): its text and (above all) its contexts have been treated in that book as essentially unproblematic. I have therefore prepared a new text, translation, and study of this document.

[70] A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1956), vol. I, pp. 196–7 (under **gē*): 'found chiefly in the SE in p.ns. of great antiquity'. For comment, see W. H. Stevenson, *EHR* 4 (1889), 359–63, reviewing J. Earle, *A Hand-Book to the Land-Charters, and Other Saxonic Documents* (Oxford, 1888). Such units are later found as hundreds: O. S. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names*, 3 vols. (Lund 1934–9), vol. III, p. 196.

[71] Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey*, p. 102.

that Frithuwald was a representative of a type of early Mercian regional deputy of royal status – in other words, probably not a native of Surrey, which had only recently come under Mercian hegemony.[72] King Wulfhere would on this argument have represented the next grade on an ascending scale of Anglo-Saxon royalty. One of the various striking features of this diploma is found in the witness-list, of which a section is explicitly devoted to *subreguli*: there are four, of whom Frithuwald is the first, followed by Osric, Wigheard and Æthilwald. It would be possible to argue that these royals were equivalents of Frithuwald in other districts of Wulfhere's over-kingdom, were other local kings in 'the kingdom of the men of *Suthrige*' and/or were other local rulers of neighbouring minor kingdoms (such as the *Sunningas*). This diploma reveals a world of lesser kings and of petty kingdoms: the word which the author of this diploma used for such a kingdom was *prouincia*.[73] For Bede, that word was characteristically (but by no means exclusively) restricted to the (over) kingdom of a regional over-king – of the Bernicians, the Deirans, the East Angles, the East Saxons, the Mercians and suchlike: he usually employed *regio* to describe a more local kingly unit.[74] Here, as in other charters, *prouincia* is used of a broader range of kingdom types. But the crucial point is that these words describe kingdoms and that the minor kingdoms were the building blocks of larger regional over-kingdoms, themselves of very varying degrees of size and importance.

We can recognise such units across the length and breadth of early Anglo-Saxon England, although our sources are unevenly distributed across time and space.[75] Toponymic evidence is of particular importance,

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[72] P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald et al. (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129, at 112.

[73] It is necessary to restrain any instinct to deduce from this word that a division of a larger polity is intended: the usage comes from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae seu origines*, written in the first third of the seventh century, where it is explicitly associated with kingship. For texts and commentaries, see *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911); and A.-I. Magallón García, *Concordantia in Isidori Hispaliensis Etymologias* (Hildesheim, 1995). A multi-volume edition and translation, by many hands, is in course of publication in the series 'Auteurs Latins du Moyen Âge': *Isidore de Séville, Étymologies*, 20 vols. (Paris and Besançon, 1983–). For an English translation, see *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S. A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, 2006).

[74] For specific references to Bede's use of these words, see Jones, *A Concordance*, pp. 429–31 (*s. vv. prouincia* and *prouincialis*) and 448 (*s.v. regio*).

[75] The pioneering attempt to draw up a list of such units was that of J. M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England. A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols. (London, 1849), vol. I, pp. 449–86 (2nd edn, rev. W. de G. Birch (London, 1876)). For his pains, Kemble attracted a dismissive and misleading footnote from F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), p. 314, n. 1 (3rd edn [1971], p. 318, n. 1).

as have been local studies of patterns of rights and dues, of relationships within and between estates.[76] It is clear that England in the early Middle Ages had a culture of plural, multiple kingdoms. By extrapolating from the size of local territories described in early Anglo-Saxon texts as *regio* and/or *prouincia* and/or having names in -*gē* or -*ingas*, we could start to draw a map of the local polities of England before the Viking Age and provide a very different, fresh analysis of the culture of the early English polity as a whole: we might find that even a partial map would show kingdoms numbered in three figures. Such an exercise would help us to enhance our appreciation of a middle-ranking tier of over-kingdoms which are at present poorly understood.[77] Comparison with neighbouring or related societies would help us to grasp something of the factors tending to stability and instability in such polities. A model has been offered, generated from the history of the Mediterranean (and particularly the Hellenic) world in Antiquity, of 'peer-polity interaction' which could be very usefully tested, with some of its manifest inadequacies probed, against the evidence of the Insular (and Scandinavian) societies of the earlier Middle Ages.[78]

An obvious point of comparison, crossing an evident linguistic and cultural divide but into a neighbouring society with which the early

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[76] The almost innumerable studies by G. R. J. Jones should be mentioned here: see P. S. Barnwell and B. K. Roberts (eds.), *Britons, Saxons, and Scandinavians. The Historical Geographer Glanville R. J. Jones* (Turnhout, 2011). For some searching questions about Jones's methods, see N. Gregson, 'The Multiple Estate Model: An Adequate Framework for the Analysis of Early Territorial Organisation?', in *The Borders*, ed. Clack and Ivy, pp. 49–81; for further iteration and debate, cf. N. Gregson, 'The Multiple Estate Model: Some Critical Questions', *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (1985), 339–51, with reply by Jones, 'Multiple Estates Perceived', *ibid.* 11 (1985), 352–63. Worthy of mention here too is the work of a scholar whose contribution (still very worthy of scrutiny) ended exactly a century earlier, in 1911 – Frederic Seebohm, whose remarkable (and profoundly controversial) trilogy of books deserves continuing attention: *The English Village Community Examined in its Relations to the Manorial and Tribal Systems and to the Common or Open Field System of Husbandry. An Essay in Economic History* (London, 1883, and subsequent editions); *The Tribal System in Wales, Being Part of an Inquiry into the Structure and Methods of Tribal Society* (1st edn, London, 1895; 2nd edn, 1904); and *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law, Being an Essay Supplemental to (1) 'The English Village Community', (2) 'The Tribal System in Wales'* (London, 1911).

[77] I have begun the process by writing a series of short papers, indicating the methods needed and providing a detailed example: (1) 'The Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of Hierarchy and Scale'; (2) 'Bede, Place-Names, and the Constitutional History of Early Anglo-Saxon England'; (3) 'The Kingdom of Oundle'; (4) 'Bede's Use of *antiquitus* in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*'; and (5) 'Criteria for the Establishment of Bishoprics in Early Anglo-Saxon England'.

[78] C. Renfrew and J. F. Cherry (eds.), *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge, 1986). See also C. Renfrew and S. Sherman (eds.), *Ranking, Resource and Exchange. Aspects of the Archaeology of Early European Society* (Cambridge, 1982).

English interacted, is provided by Gaeldom – Ireland and Gaelic (north-western) Britain – in the early and central Middle Ages.[79] A recent analysis of the evidence of one major class of written evidence has revealed that throughout that period Ireland (by far the greater part of Gaeldom in the early Middle Ages) had a minimum of 600 to 650 kingdoms.[80] It has been well observed that '[e]arly medieval kingship was naturally small-scale' and, if somewhat less happily for England at least, that 'In Ireland . . . dynasties expanded only to segment, whereas the rulers of expanding English king-doms were careful to deny the royal aspirations of their fellow kinsmen', that 'Irish royal dynasties could expand as much as any Anglo-Saxon counterpart, but that their need to maintain the [royal] status of as many as possible of their branches ensured that the primary kingdoms remained small.'[81]

A recurrent joint difficulty in analysis of such developments is the question of what is primary and where to start the story. For these purposes, the advantage of study of the English polity is that it did not exist before the fifth century. What happened in the fifth and sixth centuries will have been of literally fundamental importance. At the time of the appearance of written evidence, in the generation from the mid-590s to the mid-620s, we can see a regional over-kingdom based in East Kent and a glimpse of a subordinate (and ethnically different – Saxon) kingdom (over-kingdom?) in West Kent, which was judged worthy of its own bishopric at Rochester.[82] If Bede's testimony about this generation, written

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[79] The classic studies are those of D. A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958), 113–38; and D. A. Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order', in *Proceedings of the [First] International Congress of Celtic Studies, Held in Dublin, 6–10 July, 1959*, ed. B. Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1962), pp. 119–32, as well as his edition of a law-tract on status, *Críth Gablach* (Dublin, 1941). Also seminal was the work of Binchy's predecessor in this subject: E. MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin, 1921; rev. imp. by D. Ó Corráin, 1981); and E. MacNeill, *Early Irish Laws and Institutions* (Dublin, [1935]). The most important recent account of early mediaeval Ireland is that of Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (cf. n. 48, above), with much which is useful and illuminating about local polities, but it is at the same time an attempt to argue the supposed merits of big government in that unlikely quarter. See also the shorter account (but more exclusively focused on kingship) by B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000).

[80] K. M. McGowan, 'Political Geography and Political Structures in Earlier Mediaeval Ireland: A Chronicle-Based Approach' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2002), and accompanying database. On rulership in early mediaeval Gaeldom in Britain, see D. N. Dumville, 'Political Organisation in Dál Riata', in *TOME. Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, ed. F. Edmonds and P. Russell (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 41–52.

[81] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Medieval Kingships in the British Isles', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Bassett, pp. 28–39 and 245–8, at 37 and (two quotations at) 36.

[82] Bede, *HE* ii. 8 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 158–61), quoting a letter from Pope Boniface V to Iustus, bishop of Canterbury; cf. P. Hunter Blair, 'The Letters of Pope Boniface V and the Mission of Paulinus to Northumbria', in *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 5–13, at 7–8, referring to papal correspondence in the early seventh century.

more than a century later, has aught to commend it, then the East Kentish over-king also dominated the East Saxons and East Angles and indeed as far as the River Humber, as well as having diplomatic influence of an unspecified character which reached as far west as the southern boundary of the Hwicce in the south-western Midlands (presumably Gloucestershire).[83] Soon afterwards, papal correspondence tells us of the major kingship of Edwin, king of the Deire, and similarly of Eadbald (*Audubaldus*) of Kent *gentibusque ei subpositis*, 'with the peoples subject to him', still an over-king though not in his father's league.[84] In other words, on the earliest available evidence, major over-kingships had come into existence not later (but perhaps also not earlier) than the late sixth century.

Whether such over-kingships had existed from English origins in Britain or had grown as the English polity had developed is a question that has divided scholars. This issue returns us to uncertainties about the effects of migration and of the impact of whatever British polities were encountered by the settlers. One could imagine small communities of free peasants making a crossing to Britain or groups characterised by having a clear leader or both in parallel.[85] Whichever of these three options one chooses, the fact remains that in our earliest written sources we can see structural gradations of kingly power. If the toponymists' current arguments in historical interpretation of *-ingas* place-names have merit, they (and therefore the local kingdoms bearing such names) were not created in the primary phase(s) of Germanic migration into Britain.[86] But that does not of itself dispose of the possibility that comparable units were already in existence, characterised for example by place-names in *-gē*.

When English regional (over)kingdoms come into view, some have an origin reported as an act of creation by a more powerful over-king. The over-kingdom of the Middle Angles is a case in point, constituted

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[83] For the eastern kingdoms, see Bede, *HE* ii. 3, ii. 5, i. 25, and ii. 5 (the Humber); for the Hwicce, see ii. 2 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 142–5, 148–55, 72–7, and 134–43).

[84] *Ibid.*, ii. 10, pp. 166–71. [85] On royal leaders, held by Chadwick to be a given, see n. 57, above.

[86] J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Significance of the Distribution of the English Place-Names in *-ingas*, *-inga-* in South-East England', *Medieval Archaeology* 10 (1966), 1–29, reprinted in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements*, ed. K. Cameron (Nottingham, 1975), pp. 27–54. It is very doubtful that all his conclusions and (above all) those of the scholars who extended them (and heralded them as the beginning of a toponymic revolution) can still be sustained. In many ways, the 'gold standard' remains the first edition of E. Ekwall, *English Place-Names in -ing* (Lund, 1923); his second edition (1962) seems to represent a mistaken turn.

(according to Bede) by Penda, king of the Mercians (*ob.* 655), for his son Peada.[87] This has led to rather adventurous suggestions that all such units in the Greater Mercian over-kingdom created by Penda derived from over-kingly acts of will. On that argument, King Frithuwald's subkingdom in Surrey would be another such, if smaller and less complex than the subkingdom of the Middle Angles, which was itself a substantial over-kingdom. The kingdom, perhaps over-kingdom, of the *Magonsætan* (in what is now Herefordshire) within the Mercian over-kingdom is another case in point, but its rulers and their mode of rule are not well documented; it did, however, acquire a bishopric (at Hereford) in 676, with a pontiff translated from Rochester.[88] Much better reported is the neighbouring kingdom (probably over-kingdom) to the east, that of the Hwicce, which came in 680 to have a bishopric at Worcester. In its charters, the kingdom of the Hwicce is classically represented as having up to three kings at any one time. It is not known whether each had responsibility for a particular area or constituency within the kingdom or whether the kings ruled as a committee concerned with the whole. The origins of this kingdom are quite unknown but may have occurred in a context of dispute between (West) Saxons and Angles with different ethnic components belonging to this unit. Within it, -*ingas* units are visible.[89]

A superficially similar case is the kingdom of the East Saxons, for long a core part of the Mercian hegemony, but with an older and a more complex

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[87] Bede, *HE* iii. 21, 24, and v. 24 (annals 653, 655) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 278–81, 288–95, 564–5). Cf. D. N. Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1993), essay IX, pp. 15–16.

[88] K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', *The Origins*, ed. Bassett, pp. 171–83, 277–9, provided a thoughtful survey; however, M. Gelling, 'The Early History of Western Mercia', *ibid.*, pp. 184–201, 279–80, is full of improbable assertions offered without justification. See further *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, 4 vols. (London, 1885–99), vol. III, pp. 242–4 (no. 1040), on a royal diploma issued in 958; H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, 2nd edn (Leicester, 1972), pp. 197–224, 136–46, and H. P. R. Finberg, *Lucerna. Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England* (London, 1964), pp. 66–82. Apart from the terminology *in pago Magesætna* in the mid-tenth-century diploma, we read of a royal dynasty belonging to the seventh century. For more substantial (if contextual) eighth-century evidence, see M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 357–79, 510–12; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 328–59; and P. Sims-Williams, *Britain and Early Christian Europe* (Aldershot, 1995), essays IX and X.

[89] The Hwicce have received much (and increasing) attention in the last half-century: linguistically, from A. H. Smith, 'The Hwicce', in *[Franciplegius.] Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr*, ed. J. B. Bessinger Jr and R. P. Creed (New York and London, 1965), pp. 56–65; and R. Coates, 'The Name of the Hwicce: A Discussion', *ASE* 42 (2013), 51–61; variously, S. Bassett, and others, in *The Origins*, ed. Bassett, p. 294 (some twenty references); and by D. Hooke in numerous publications, especially *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape. The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985) and *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-bounds* (Woodbridge, 1990).

organisation. It lost the territory dependent on London, whose people came to be known as 'the Middle Saxons', annexed to the Greater Mercian over-kingdom in the early eighth century;[90] Surrey may have been the East Saxon kingdom's 'Southern District' if it existed with that name before a Mercian takeover in the third quarter of the seventh century.[91] West Kent, which was an object of interest to East Saxon dynasts in the later seventh and eighth centuries, may have been an earlier example of the same. -*ingas* units are visible across the kingdom of the East Saxons and have been an element in the assignment of a chronology of the type. Its three rulers as seen in the early seventh century may have exercised authority as a committee but may equally have been responsible for three parts: the core, Middlesex and Surrey, and West Kent. It cannot by that date have been the creation of a Mercian over-king.[92]

Here our focus is on different sizes and types of kingdom (or over-kingdom). What they all have in common is domination by a powerful regional over-kingship, but their origins have been differently explained. Their internal constitution suggests the existence of subkingdoms as a routine part of their structure. Although some subkingdoms had relative longevity, it may be the case that 'the early *regiones* [were] organic entities combined and recombined like building bricks to form more transient territories'.[93]

If we look to a yet larger level of political organisation, we meet those over-kingdoms – of the Northumbrians, the Mercians and (eventually) the West Saxons – which intermittently (but seemingly in turn) dominated first the English as a whole (from the 620s) and then (from the late 650s) the Southumbrian political scene.

The Northumbrian over-kingdom we can see under construction, from the kingdoms (probably over-kingdoms) of the Bernicians and Deirans, from the late sixth century to 679; these players are given extra life by being

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[90] Bede, *HE* iv. 6 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 354–7), referred to Surrey as a kingdom (*regio Sudergeona*) in the 670s.

[91] For some vigorous discussion of this point, see Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons,* pp. 348, 370–1.

[92] On all this, see D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar. Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, 1992), chap. I (esp. pp. 3–4); Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 13, 25–57, 109, 113; and Dodgson, 'The Significance'. It ought to be a question whether Bede's evidence on early East Saxon history is consistent or contradictory. The over-kingdom of the Hwicce seems to have had similar arrangements, with three kings exercising authority. According to Bede, *HE* ii. 3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 142–3), London was, when he wrote, in the kingdom of the East Saxons (*quorum metropolis Lundonia ciuitas est*). Unless this was a slip, or resulted from ignorance of change in southern English politics, it runs against our other evidence.

[93] Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey*, p. 102.

at the core of Bede's historical narrative.[94] That construction was not solely northern or English but involved continuing conquests of Britons and ferocious struggle with the growing over-kingdom of the Mercians. In the process, a 'Transhumbrian' political formation was probably destroyed. There has been relatively little discussion of the building blocks from which the Deiran and Bernician over-kingdoms were previously constructed, and indeed the frontiers of both peoples remain in part uncertain.[95]

A Mercian over-kingdom has seemed to be the work almost of one man, King Penda (*ob*. 655), who emerges from Midland proto-history in league with Britons as an implacable opponent of Bernician and Deiran expansionism and a voracious conqueror of England between the Thames-Severn line and the Northumbrian frontier. 'Greater Mercia', as his construction has come to be known, continued to grow after his death, reaching deep into south-eastern England. The fate of the political elites of the peoples, large and small, drawn into this hegemony is a subject which deserves a great deal more scrutiny, not least in its possible implications for Mercian governance in the ninth century.[96] As we have already seen, some of the middle-size kingdoms within 'Greater Mercia' have been held, if controversially, to be creations of the uppermost level of Mercian over-kingship: that is almost certainly true of the over-kingdom of the Middle Angles, which had longevity in defining a bishopric with its seat at Leicester from 737, but is largely invisible to us as a political entity within a few years of its creation by Penda in the mid-650s.[97] It is here that the remarkable but enigmatic document, untitled but known to twentieth-century scholarship by the desperately unhappy

94 M. Miller, 'The Dates of Deira', *ASE* 8 (1979), 35–61; Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay III (reprinted from *The Origins*, ed. Bassett, pp. 213–22, 284–6); and H. Geake and J. Kenny (eds.), *Early Deira. Archaeological Studies of the East Riding in the Fourth to Ninth Centuries A.D.* (Oxford, 2000). The major recent regional study is that of D. Rollason, *Northumbria, 500–1100. Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), but he has ploughed very traditional furrows. There is much of relevance in D. Petts and S. Turner (eds.), *Early Medieval Northumbria. Kingdoms and Communities, A.D. 450–1100* (Turnhout, 2011).

95 Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Northumbria*, essays III–V and VIII, were the 'gold standard' but now require thorough reconsideration; J. N. L. Myres, 'The Teutonic Settlement of Northern England', *History*, n.s. 20 (1935–6), 250–62; and Dumville, 'The Origins of Northumbria', in his *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay III. Cf. T. Green, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons. Lincolnshire, A.D. 400–650* (Lincoln, 2012); and N. Higham, *The Northern Counties to A.D. 1000* (London, 1986).

96 Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay IX; and S. Keynes, 'Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth Century', in *Mercia. An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (London, 2001), pp. 310–28.

97 Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay IX; Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (2nd edn), pp. 6–12, 74–82 (and 190, n. 42); and Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 62–6 and 106–13. For the bishops, see Fryde et al. (eds.), *Handbook* (3rd edn), p. 218 (by S. Keynes); and M. Lapidge et al. (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Chichester, 2014), pp. 539–66.

name of 'The Tribal Hidage', is a capital witness.[98] It begins by stating an original Mercian territory (presumptively in Staffordshire)[99] but is in its essentials an assessment list of the Middle-Anglian peoples, up to twenty-three often tiny political units stretching in an arc from southern Lincolnshire to eastern Oxfordshire, whose allegiance must have been contested in the east with the East Angles and in the south with the West Saxons in the seventh century.[100] When Wulfhere, over-king of the Mercians 658–75, led an army with thirty *duces regii* into the North, most of those 'royal ealdormen' (or 'kingly war-leaders') may have come from 'the Middle Angles'.[101]

The West-Saxon over-kingdom seems to pose some rather different problems. There are two of great importance. In 731, Bede wrote of the Christianisation of the West Saxons as occurring in synchrony with that of the Northumbrians through the efforts of the over-king of the latter, Oswald (634–42), whose hegemony extended over the West Saxons:[102] introducing the West Saxons for the first time in an extended narrative, Bede wrote *gens Occidentalium Saxonum qui antiquitus Geuissae uocabantur* ('the West Saxon *gens*, who were of old/originally called Geuissae') – Bede elsewhere always employed a Latin masculine form *Geuissi*: one is bound to wonder if this is a vernacular formation doubly analogous to *Lindissi, Lindissae* (Lindsey). Where Bede used the name suggests that he considered it current from the 610s to the 680s.[103] If this is correct, the renaming occurred in

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[98] D. N. Dumville, 'The Tribal Hidage: An Introduction to Its Texts and Their History', in *The Origins*, ed. Bassett, pp. 225–30, 286–7. For the text's name, see F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond. Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1897), pp. 455–520. Cf. D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex. The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 18–23 and 253; for a remarkable and innovative recent study focusing on the Viking Age, see J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage. Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013).

[99] On this, see E. P. Hamp, '*Lloegr*: The Welsh Name for England', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982), 83–5.

[100] Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay IX.

[101] Bede, *HE* iii. 24 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 288–95, at 290–1). For the same locution in relation to Sussex, see *ibid.*, iv. 15 (pp. 380–1). Cf. F. M. Stenton, *Preparatory to 'Anglo-Saxon England'* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 48–66, at 49–50, reprinting a paper first published in 1918.

[102] Bede, *HE* iii. 7 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 232–7, at 232–3).

[103] *Ibid.* ii. 5, iii. 7, iv. 15, iv. 16 (14), v. 19 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 152–5, 232–7 [three mentions], 380/1 [three mentions], 382–5 [three mentions], 516–31 at 522–3). On *Lindissae /Lindissi*, see M. Gelling, 'The Name Lindsey', *ASE* 18 (1989), 31–2. H. Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae, the West Saxons, the Angles and the English: The Widening Horizon of Bede's Gentile Terminology', *North-Western European Language Evolution* 30 (1997), 51–91; and H. Kleinschmidt, 'The Geuissae and Bede: On the Innovativeness of Bede's Concept of the *gens*', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint*, ed. J. M. Hill and M. Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 77–102, are of outstanding interest on this subject. More generally, we owe to Professor Kleinschmidt both an outpouring of individual papers about the Anglo-Saxons over the past quarter-century and an extraordinary range of books of the very highest interest and remarkable intellectual range.

Bede's lifetime and is an interesting historical example of ethnogenesis, perhaps attributable to the long reign of King Ini (688/9–725/6).[104]

There may be a connexion with the second problem needing consideration here, for which once more Bede's 'History' provides the starting point. Ini's predecessor, Ceadwalla (685–8/9), is represented as a bloodthirsty warlord who was responsible in his brief reign for some major political upheavals across the deep south of England. According to Bede, 'When [King] Cenwealh [642–72] had died … *subreguli* took the government (*regnum*) of the *gens* ('people'/'nation'); having divided it among themselves, they held it for about ten years'.[105] There have been two rival interpretations of these events: either the kingdom, normally 'united', 'fragmented'; or we have here an explicit glimpse of normality, a body of local rulers, usually acknowledging an over-king, dispensing with that practice for a decade or so.[106] There is much other evidence for petty kingship among the West Saxons in the seventh century. This period ended when Ceadwalla stormed to power. Bede continued the story: 'the *subreguli* having been defeated (*deuictis*) and removed (*amotis*), Ceadwalla received the over-kingdom (*imperium*)'. While sub-kings are certainly known from eighth-century Wessex, Ceadwalla's reign may have marked a moment of transition in their constitutional status.

When, in 825–8, Ecgberht, king of the West Saxons, relieved the Mercian over-kings of their south-eastern subkingdoms – Surrey, South Saxons, Kent, East Saxons – and ended such local royal rule, intrusive Mercian in Kent but native kingship of the East Saxons, he seems to have terminated the tradition of English (or, at any rate, southern) petty kingship.[107] There would be some appointed sub-kings until the end of the century, and there would be dominance of one king(dom) by another; on the face of it, however, petty kings were now creatures of the past.

It is certain that the idea of empire (*imperium*) played significant and varied roles in Anglo-Saxon political life. If an emperor was a king of kings, there was empire aplenty in that period. Charles Plummer usefully expounded Bede's understanding of the contrasting pair of kingship

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[104] Or to the short, sharp shock represented by the reign of King Ceadwalla.

[105] Bede, *HE* iv. 12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 368–71, at 368–9).

[106] Charles-Edwards, 'Early Medieval Kingships', p. 37; and Campbell, *Bede's Reges*, re-issued in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 85–98, on the absence of West Saxon over-kingship, 672–*c.* 682. See further Dumville, 'The Terminology'; and Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions*, p. 366.

[107] Dumville, *Wessex and England*, chap. I.

(*regnum*) and empire/over-kingship (*imperium*).[108] Bede's employment of
imperium (the power exercised by one king[dom] over another or others)
bears particular examination, for he could use it of the internal constitution
of kingdoms (as here, concerning Ceadwalla) as well as the relationship of
one (over)kingdom with another or others.[109]

An ad hoc relationship of one over-king with another (and so on) may be
conveniently and clearly illustrated by Bede's treatment (for reasons of
Church history) of the affairs of the South Saxon kingdom in the 670s. The
over-king of the South Saxons, Æthelwealh, was subject to Wulfhere, over-
king of the Mercians (658–75) and *brytenw(e)alda*, at whose instance
Æthelwealh was converted to Christianity. His Christian wife, Eafe, was
of the royal line of the (over)kingdom of the Hwicce. In token of
Æthelwealh's baptism, Wulfhere gave him (*donauit illi*) two kingdoms
(*prouincias*), namely, those of the Wihtware and Meonware, according to
Bede Jutish kingdoms in which the Gewissi/West Saxons had an interest.
Eventually, Æthelwealh was killed by Ceadwalla in 680×685, but the latter
was driven out by two of Æthelwealh's subordinate kings (*duces regii*),
Berhthun and Andhun, who then took power. Eventually, Ceadwalla
returned as king of the Gewissi (685–8/9) and reduced the South Saxons
to tribute, a relationship which remained stable under Ceadwalla's succes-
sor, Ini (688/9–725/6), thus providing a forty-year 'interruption' of
Mercian dominance of the South Saxons and an end to Mercian/South
Saxon dominance of the *Iutae* of Hampshire.[110]

On the evidence of their diplomas, some kings' administrations were
more prone to use imperial language than others. But it is clear that the
contextual strands of thought were various. The place of the English in a
larger Christian polity, with its Roman roots, was one such. An idea of
Britain (and its islands) as another world, a potential empire of its own, was
another.[111] The relationship of English kingdoms to non-English peoples of
Britain (and, later, Ireland), and in particular to an imagined polity
of *Britannia*, was a third. But the simplest underpinning of the idea of

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[108] *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896), vol. II, pp. 43 and 86.
Cf. Jones, *A Concordance*, pp. 449–51 (*regnum*) and 252 (*imperium*).

[109] Jones, *A Concordance*, p. 252.

[110] Bede, *HE* iv. 13–15 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 370–81). For exposition, see Campbell, *Bede's Reges*
(*Essays*, pp. 85–98). On Wulfhere's status, see F. M. Stenton, 'The Supremacy of the Mercian Kings',
EHR 33 (1918), 433–52, reprinted in his *Preparatory to 'Anglo-Saxon England'*, pp. 48–66, at 49–50. On
Bede's account of the Jutes in *HE* i. 15 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 48–53, at 50–1), see H.
Kleinschmidt, 'Bede and the Jutes', *North-western European Language Evolution* 24 (1994), 21–46.

[111] C. Erdmann, *Forschungen zur politischen Ideenwelt des Frühmittelalters* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 1–51; and
E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 11–13.

imperium was provided by Bede or his source(s) of inspiration: kings who wielded power over other kings held *imperium*; that might be the power of one major supra-regional over-king over another, or it might be of kings who stood at the head of complex polities which encompassed numerous petty kingdoms (and perhaps also intermediate over-kingdoms) in a relatively stable constitutional framework. It might indeed (if Bede had written more about petty kings) have been used for the dominance of one petty king over two others.

'International' relations therefore operated at a variety of levels within the Anglo-Saxon polity as well as between English, Britons, Gaels, Picts and (in the Viking Age) Scandinavians. This was made absolutely explicit in a classic paper by Molly Miller.[112] A long-used and very crude English translation of Bede's political terminology of power, office, status and territory – only very slowly (and often reluctantly) given up since the 1950s – has left a language of provinces and ealdormen (or indeed dukes), for example, providing the conceptual framework for historians' reading of the early Anglo-Saxon polity. The failure to engage with H. M. Chadwick's work in the half-century after 1905 left the writing of the *Verfassungsgeschichte* of England in 'big government' mode. Where kingship and government might have been recognised as having their roots at local level, a top-down reading of the polity has almost universally prevailed. F. M. Stenton's classic and contemptuous treatment in 1943 of the kings of the Hwicce sums up that approach;[113] yet he was merely the most distinguished inheritor and purveyor of this long-standing outlook.

Twelfth-century historians provided an interpretative framework for early Anglo-Saxon political history in the concept of The Heptarchy.[114] Duly tweaked and republished in early modern England, this concept prevailed until challenged in the 1970s and 1980s.[115] Even those who have

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[112] M. Miller, 'Eanfrith's Pictish Son', *NH* 14 (1978), 47–66. Cf. Dumville, *Anglo-Saxon Essays, 2001–2007*, pp. 47–54.

[113] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 45–6 (3rd edn, 1971, p. 46); cf. Dumville, 'The Terminology', esp. pp. 345–6.

[114] Various writers of the first half of the twelfth century, whether anonymous or named, whether from Durham, Huntingdon or Worcester, have been credited with creating this organisational myth. For the first clear signs of its rejection in modern scholarship, see the commentary by Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 2nd edn, pp. 1–9.

[115] C. R. Hart, 'The Tribal Hidage', *TRHS*, 5th series, 21 (1971), 133–57; cf. Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, chap. IX. It should be noted, however, that it was denounced in 1831 by the estimable F. Palgrave in his *History of England*, I, *Anglo-Saxon Period* (London, 1831) – reprinted as *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1837), with identical pagination – , p. 46: 'In this manner were formed the states of the so-called *Heptarchy*, an erroneous term, but one which has become so familiar by usage, that there is some difficulty in discarding it from history. It must, however, be rejected, because an idea is conveyed thereby, which is substantially wrong. At no period of our history were

since then given precise and detailed treatment of polities more local than those of the Northumbrians, Mercians and West Saxons have barely looked beneath the 'Heptarchic' surface. Scholars have also treated the major (over)kingdoms as territorially defined (East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, Wessex) despite the language of peoples being the universal Anglo-Saxon discourse. It has mostly been in very local studies, with landscapes and their functions at the centre of enquiry, that a more grounded, realistic assessment has begun hesitantly to emerge,[116] though again with an inadequate conceptual vocabulary, as (for example) the reappearance of the woeful discourse of 'tribe' and 'tribal' has indicated.[117] The tetrarchy in which the Anglo-Saxon polity was organised in the middle quarters of the ninth century and in which condition it was destroyed in the years 865–78 may have been four unitary kingdoms or monarchies (although it has recently become clear that our appreciation of Mercian governmental forms has long been inadequate).[118] However, behind those four kingdoms which comprised mid-ninth-century England lay a political history of significant complexity whose dynamic has, we can now say, never been well understood. Furthermore, as one marked trend in the subject is to argue for ever bigger, more intrusive, government at ever earlier dates,[119] it is arguable that understanding continues to be postponed. That there was a dynamic to the political system of England in the early Middle Ages, capable of delivering executive authority to kings and phases of reduction of kingly status and therefore of competition for royal power, seems clear, but that we yet understand structures and processes seems much more doubtful.

Received Narrative and Teleology

The received narrative of early Anglo-Saxon political history, of a *gens Anglorum* or English people developing in a pattern of successive dominant

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there ever *seven* kingdoms independent of each other. And if we include those kingdoms which were subservient to larger states, the number must be increased.' However, the inertia of convention prevailed.

[116] J. Blair, 'Frithuwold's Kingdom and the Origins of Surrey', in *The Origins*, ed. Bassett, pp. 97–107, 261–5; Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey*; and J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994).

[117] See, for example, the index of Bassett (ed.), *The Origins*, p. 298, *s.v.* 'tribe *see* extended family', for at least a decent show of embarrassment: under that phrase, at p. 293, are a good many more 'tribes'.

[118] Keynes, 'Mercia', n. 96, above.

[119] A. Reynolds, *The Emergence of Anglo-Saxon Judicial Practice: The Message of the Gallows* (Aberdeen, 2009), and A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009), carry a vigorous big-government message in an anthropological discourse.

over-kingdoms, is essentially Bede's, as augmented for the ninth century in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. A division of north and south was also in this way part of Bede's political heritage.[120] Whether Bede expected or desired that a monarchy of the English should be the eventual outcome of successive supra-regional over-kingships is far from certain, but he might nonetheless reasonably be described as an English nationalist in his political outlook.

A common feature in the writing of European national histories has been the power of a modern identity to determine the nature of historiography[121] – which continues apace in the cause of 'the European project' – and this has been manifest in the writing of English history. Everywhere in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English historiography is a sense of the inevitability, and indeed the desirability, of union of all the English. Given that the monarchy was achieved in 927 (although there has been a marked reluctance from the later sixteenth century until recently to acknowledge King Æthelstan's place in that history),[122] it is inevitable that all the effort in this direction should have been concentrated in Anglo-Saxon history. One of the games which historians have played in that cause has been to identify crucial antecedents to union, including major conceptual steps forward.

To this cause has been recruited the unlikely figure of Offa, over-king of Mercians in 757/8–96.[123] Various forged diplomas in his name have given him an uncompromising title of *rex Anglorum*.[124] When the facts of forgery had eventually been digested by scholarship, a legend of Offa had already grown deep and resilient roots. The textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s, still current in the 1960s, reflected this legend: for Jolliffe, 'Offa was clearly driving towards a lasting kingdom of the English . . . The death of Offa stopped that normal development of a general English crown and title in which enlightened contemporaries had placed their faith.'[125] '"England" as a political fact was now emerging under the direction of a king whose

[120] Bede, *HE* ii. 5 and v. 23 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 148–55 at 148–51, and 556–61).

[121] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Tendencies in the Historiography on the Medieval Nordic States (to 1350)', in *Public Power in Europe. Studies in Historical Transformations*, ed. J. S. Amelang and S. Beer (Pisa, 2006), pp. 1–15. See also D. N. Dumville, 'Did Ireland exist in the Twelfth Century?', in *Clerics, Kings and Vikings. Essays on Medieval Ireland in Honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin*, ed. E. Purcell et al. (Dublin, 2015), pp. 115–26.

[122] But cf. Dumville, *Wessex and England*, chap. 4. See also above, pp. 72–3.

[123] On the date 757/8, see Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, p. 134, who has adopted 758 as the year of Offa's accession.

[124] Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*', pp. 109–11.

[125] Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History* (4th edn, 1961), pp. 48, 49; it is well worth hesitating over his word 'normal'.

political vision far transcended provincial limits and local interests and revealed a remarkable conception of the duties and potentialities of kingship', wrote G. O. Sayles; and with more than a nod in what would be the direction of the next generation's increasing identification of interaction with Continental powers as indices of virtue and importance, 'It was his drive towards the south-east of England, towards that part of the English Channel [coast] which came closest to the Continent, that reveals his vision and proves his ability to achieve his ambitions.'[126] Another generation later, this general approach to Offa, in its thoroughgoing improbability, has not changed in any essential. There is not space here for the necessary reappraisal, but one may advertise instead a view that almost every recorded action of Offa is testimony to his failure to hold or usefully develop what Æthelbald, his long-term predecessor, had built and points the way to the ultimately terminal decline of the Mercian hegemony.[127]

The most important over-kings of early Anglo-Saxon England can in the eighth century be seen expressing their power in terms of a relationship with *Britannia, Brytene*. It might be said that to be (or to think oneself) the most important king in Britain did not logically require him to hold every constituent part of England or to separate any number of sub-kings from their royal status. The absence of straightforward evidence for routinely continuing kingship of the East Angles from the mid-eighth to the mid-ninth century might be held to indicate a radical move in that direction; however, Offa's murder of Æthelberht, king (perhaps over-king) of the East Angles, in 794 provides a strong negative indication.[128]

A more direct, and variedly attested, pointer to major change in approach is provided by the politics of 829/30. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (829), 'And that year King Ecgberht conquered [both] the kingdom of the Mercians and everything south of the Humber, and he was the eighth king who was *brytenwealda*', and (830), 'In this year Wiglaf again obtained the kingdom of the Mercians.'[129] A temptation to read the East Angles too into the geographical statement of conquest should probably be resisted. If Wiglaf was driven out and his kingdom annexed to that of the West Saxons, that must indeed have been a remarkable development. The *Chronicle* is not merely a propagandist organ here, for we have a Mercian regnal list and a charter of Wiglaf himself – issued 'in the second year of my

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[126] G. O. Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England* (London, 1948), pp. 69 and 68.

[127] Æthelbald, a remarkably powerful over-king with a 41-year reign, has not had his due of attention from historians. In D. Hill and M. Worthington (eds.), *Æthelbald and Offa, Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia* (Oxford, 2005), however, there is some redress.

[128] Fryde (ed.), *Handbook*, p. 9.   [129] *EHD*, ed. Whitelock (2nd ed.), p. 186.

second reign', 831 – which carry the same message.[130] (What occurred in 829 recurred ninety years later, in 918/19, but with a very different outcome.[131]) The only alternative interpretation would be that Wiglaf was replaced as king in 829 by a deputy who could not stay the course – but of such a royal there is now no trace. The conquest of the Mercians, followed by pre-emptive submission of the Northumbrians and (830) successful aggression against the Welsh (whatever one makes of this last), has been quite sufficient to gain Ecgberht an elevated place in histories of England[132] – although it must be said that it was his role as progenitor of a remarkable dynasty which is his principal legacy.

The end of petty kingship in England is often cited as a major constitutional achievement of Offa. In fact, it was not in his power to achieve that among the West Saxons and Northumbrians, if local kingship still survived in these two kingdoms. The kingship (once an over-kingship) of the East Saxons, the Mercians' most loyal long-term allies, outlived Offa by some thirty years. But once it was gone (following West Saxon conquest), we have (as yet, at least) no evidence for sub-kingship in the tetrarchic kingdoms of the mid-ninth century, save as a training ground and an apanage for the heir to the West Saxon throne.[133] Over the course of early Anglo-Saxon history, there were clearly periods in which succession or access to royal title came to be restricted in one over-kingdom or another. Only the last of those (in Offa's reign) has received any sustained analysis, but premature conclusions have been drawn.[134]

An English monarchy was achieved in the tenth century. The knowledge, and the millennium-long celebration, of that constitutional fact has had an all-pervasive impact on the writing of Anglo-Saxon history. Since the mid-sixteenth century, modern scholars on the whole have had neither taste nor time for local or lesser grades of royalty in English history; indeed, most historians have probably not even noticed that they were there. Where they have, the meaningless but pejorative adjective 'tribal' makes

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[130] D. N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50, at 29–31 n. 3, for the regnal-list (preserved in a Worcester cathedral cartulary); the article is reprinted in his *Histories and Pseudo-Histories of the Insular Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1990), essay V; S 188 (*CantCC* 60).

[131] *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 186–217; and F. T. Wainwright, *Scandinavian England* (Chichester, 1975), pp. 63–161 and 305–44.

[132] When I was invited in the 1980s at the instance of J. M. Wallace-Hadrill to take on the early mediaeval volume of *The New Oxford History of England* under the editorship of Vice-Chancellor John M. Roberts, the closing date was to be 802, which I refused – arguing instead for 927.

[133] The process began already in Ecgberht's reign, it seems.

[134] For some remarks on that context, see Dumville, 'The Terminology'.

a rapid appearance.[135] Yet it was the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which gave us our conceptual tools for dealing with them, derived not least from colonial experience in Ireland and the New World: that the scholar today can speak of 'petty king(s)' and 'petty kingship' (*Kleinkönig[e], Kleinkönigtum* in the German historiographical tradition) and of 'mesne (over)kings' and 'superior (over)kings' is due to encountering in a colonial context a phenomenon analogous to that seen in early mediaeval Europe.[136] As we have noted, when H. M. Chadwick attempted to initiate a twentieth-century discussion of grades of early English kingship, his work was belittled and frozen out of mainstream historiography. After all, the direction and destination of England were well known: why worry over distracting constitutional complications? Had not John Milton spoken truly of 'battles of kites and crows' which signified nothing?[137] Even though the study of Anglo-Saxon history is a business very different from fifty years ago, there are few students of history or archaeology who are interested in asking penetrating questions about early governance. The inevitability of English union (and then of British union) as a historiographical concept is a derivative of much later political desires or necessities; it has derailed

[135] Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History*, 1st edn, pp. 41–55; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 13 *et passim*; and see above, n. 117. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1st edn, p. 37, insisted at the outset that 'Unlike Gaul, Spain, and Italy, Britain was invaded, not by tribes under tribal kings, but by bodies of adventurers.' In this, Stenton was determinedly criticising H. M. Chadwick: see above, n. 57.

[136] In modern historical writing, this usage was in English employed most in relation to Ireland, notably by D. A. Binchy. The early modern context has been explored by N. Canny, *Kingdom and Colony. Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560–1800* (Baltimore, 1988), and in a number of subsequent works: 'mainstream' European cultures interacted with 'exotic' discovered cultures and had to develop terminology for describing their mores and institutions. See further N. Canny and A. Low (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, I, *The Origins of Empire* (Oxford, 1998).

[137] J. Milton, 'The History of Britain', in *The Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. F. A. Patterson (18 vols. in 20, New York, 1931–8), vol. X (1932), ed. G. P. Krapp, p. 191 (lines 20–2). What is striking is that the quotation usually associated with Milton is not that derivable from his *History of Britain*, Book IV, where we read (p. 191, lines 20–2), 'such bickering to recount, met oft'n in these our Writers, what more worth is it than to Chronicle the Wars of Kites, or Crows, flocking and fighting in the Air?'. For commentary, see C. Nicholas, *Introduction and Notes to Milton's History of Britain* (Urbana, IL 1957), p. 113, who cross-referred to Milton's verbal assault on the monastic sources for the period, at X. 179, lines 14–22. W. Stubbs, *Lectures on Early English History* (London, 1906), p. 4, remarked that 'I have heard it observed that history has been written on the assumption that all Anglo-Saxons were alive at the same time: . . . all clubbed together as kites and crows; for as such John Milton, a great poet but an execrable historian, is pleased to designate the heroes of the Heptarchy. We will guard ourselves at the outset from this silly blunder.' We should also note Milton's use of 'petty King', explicitly referring to Bede's account of West Saxon kingship in the years in which the word *subreguli* occurs uniquely in his *Historia* (see above, n. 105): 'After whom several petty Kings, as *Beda* calls them, for ten years space divided the West-Saxons; others name two, *Escwin* the Nephew of *Kinigils*, and *Kentwin* the Son, not petty by their deeds' (*The Works of John Milton*, X. 170, lines 16–19).

scholarly interaction with the evidence for pre-union, pre-monarchical political organisation among the English.

Two more modern tendencies may be observed. From the 1980s, British archaeologists began to speak, in imitation of neo-evolutionist American anthropologists of the 1960s and 1970s, of a succession of stages of increasingly complex human political organisation. There are internal variations, such that one group might speak (unfortunately) of a 'tribal' phase, while another rejects that category.[138] One might think that it could be helpful to have Anglo-Saxon archaeologists writing of chiefdoms in this context; but, in common with their peers in Scandinavia, they seem to have succumbed to a desire to find precocious 'states' at every turn, both an unhappy use of language and almost certainly an over-egging of the evolutionary pudding.[139] And it seems that, in this

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[138] It will be useful to begin with C. Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* (London, 1986), p. 281, *s.v.* 'tribe': 'This term has been widely used in anthropology, but there is no general consensus as to its precise definition or appropriate application.' Some of this is conveniently on display in two volumes: (1) J. Helm (ed.), *Essays on the Problem of Tribe. Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of The American Ethnological Society* (Seattle, WA, 1968), opening with a paper by M. H. Fried; and (2) M. H. Fried, *The Notion of Tribe* (Menlo Park, CA, 1975), which begins with a statement that Fried 'assaults the generally held concept of "tribe" by attacking the notion of highly discrete political units in pre-state society'. See also E. R. Service, *Primitive Social Organisation. An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York, 1962; 2nd edn 1971); A. Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes The Problem of Power in Social Evolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1984); M. H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York, 1967); and M. Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford, 1965). A neo-evolutionist anthropologist at the centre of the last half-century's discussions of these issues is the redoubtable M. D. Sahlins, whose early essay, 'The Segmentary Lineage: An Organisation of Predatory Expansion', *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961), 322–45, has had a major effect on the writing of early mediaeval history (*inter alia permulta*); for his incisive treatment of the troubled concept, see *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968). It was the varieties of often warring 'neo-evolutionists' who profoundly influenced the development of British archaeological theory in the 1980s; all too often such theorising (in one form or another) was taken as gospel and/or misunderstood but was recognised as trendy. It needs to be met with vigorous informed criticism by any historian(s) thinking of joining the resulting party.

[139] The problem can be carried back to Marx and Engels. Cf. M. Bloch (ed.), *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology* (London, 1975). Ancient Greek history played a large role: H. E. Seebohm, *On the Structure of Greek Tribal Society. An Essay* (London, 1895), sought to follow the work of his father (see n. 76, above: a scholar well known to students of Insular history) 'into the structure and methods of the Tribal System'. This is a subject which greatly concerned those who sought to understand the early development of English society. Some further complications may be observed in, for example, J. Middleton and D. Tait (eds.), *Tribes without Rulers. Studies in African Segmentary Systems* (London, 1958). Another popular topos has been the concept of the 'chief' (an epistemological cop-out) and the attendant 'chiefdom': see T. Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power The Political Economy in Prehistory* (Stanford, CA, 1997), which has attracted much attention. A notable, but unhappy, result in adjoining territory is B. Arnold and D. B. Gibson (eds.), *Celtic Chiefdom, Celtic State The Evolution of Complex Social Systems in Prehistoric Europe* (Cambridge, 1995). Cf. E. R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization. The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York, 1975). But most historians are likely to recoil from such anthropologists' use of the word 'state'. For an interesting book resulting from bringing together anthropologists and historians, see I. M. Lewis (ed.), *History*

context, kingship is being frozen out of anthropological discourse, a grave error.[140]

Second, one may observe such desire for universals in a discourse of comparative history, particularly of European societies, which has increasingly come to be associated with the European project. The result is that the lesser grades of kingship are in such schemes rapidly assimilated to aristocratic status. This has led to a writing-out of the royal dimension of sub-national government, a dimension which has its own particular importance as a cultural, religious, social and political phenomenon.[141]

Writing England: Bede, Alfred, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Peter

It has long been recognised that Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People' (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*), published in 731, was written in national mode and had a profound impact in the development of an English Church, which, in turn, probably affected political development. It is not easy to produce a wholly satisfying answer to a question about what inspired Bede thus. It was probably study of the encyclopaedia of Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae seu origines* ('Origins'), which enabled Bede to find a consistent descriptive language to adapt to the politics and social organisation of Germanic Britain.[142] While an interest in

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    and Social Anthropology (London, 1968). For the statist tendency among Scandinavian and English archaeologists, see, for example, M. Axboe, 'Danish Kings and Dendrochronology: Archaeological Insights into the Early History of the Danish State', in *After Empire. Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, ed. G. Ausenda (San Marino, 1995), pp. 217–51; A. Reynolds (n. 119, above); and S. Brookes and A. Reynolds, 'The Origins of Political Order and the Anglo-Saxon State', *Archaeology International* 13–14 (2009–11), 84–93.

[140] What has happened since the heady early years of anthropology – as captured by J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1st edn, 2 vols. (London, 1890; 2nd edn, 3 vols., 1900; 3rd edn, 12 vols, 1906–15; a supplement was issued in 1937) – is the discipline's detachment from or rejection of the concepts of 'king' and 'kingship'. For some works worth considering in that context, see G. Widengren et al. (eds.), *La Regalità Sacra. The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden, 1959); *Succession to High Office*, ed. J. Goody (Cambridge, 1966); and F. Oakley, *Kingship. The Politics of Enchantment* (Malden, MA, 2006).

[141] Cf. J. Crick, 'Nobility', in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages. Britain and Ireland, c. 500–c. 1100*, ed. P. Stafford (Chichester, 2009), pp. 414–31, which opens the reader's eyes to some of this.

[142] The authoritative and inspirational quality of Isidore's encyclopaedia provided numerous and repeated stimuli throughout the early Middle Ages. See also n. 73, above. There are important studies by J. Y. duQ. Adams, 'The Political Grammar of Isidore of Seville', in *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge. Actes du quatrième congrès international de philosophie médiévale* (Montréal, 1969), pp. 763–75; and J. Y. duQ. Adams, 'The Political Grammar of Julian of Toledo', in *Minorities and Barbarians in Medieval Life and Thought*, ed. S. J. Ridyard and R. G. Benson (Sewanee, TN, 1996), pp. 179–95. In 1996, I presented to the San Marino conference (n. 65, above) a supplementary paper (not then intended for publication) discussing the history and rationale of this English application of Isidorian terminology. A remnant of the discussion of it may be found in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Hines, p. 369 (P. Lendinara).

Britannia as a politico-geographical concept manifested itself intermittently in Anglo-Saxon history, occasionally with greater force and point, a concept of the English and subsequently of England was what at length proved more continuously compelling.[143]

We do not know when the dynasty founded by Ecgberht, king of the West Saxons (802–39), began to think of the creation of a kingdom of England; but we seem to find its most audible representative, King Alfred (871–99), sponsoring an adaptation of Bede's 'History' in Old English, and the king himself was content to write of England as a whole, using the phrase *geond Angelcynn* ('throughout England') quite naturally and of *Englisc* as his language.[144] It has even been argued that he declared himself king of all the English, whether those not in subjection to Scandinavian conquerors or to all ethnic English regardless of their political situation.[145] And it is to Alfred that we owe a political and/or ethnic formulation of the nature of his (over)kingdom from the mid-880s, when he began to style himself king of the *Angolsaxones* or *Angulsaxones* (we also find *rex Anglorum et Saxonum* and *Anglorum Saxonum rex*), presumably in general 'king of the Angles and Saxons', although finer shades of interpretation are possible.[146] The term 'Anglo-Saxons' is first found in Frankish Latin about a century earlier to distinguish the Saxons of England from those of Saxony, but that was hardly its purpose in Alfredian usage.[147]

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[143] However, it is worth noting the Gregorian plan for, and the eventual (eighth-century) institutionalisation of, two archiepiscopal provinces within the English Church. Whether that would have happened in the 730s but for the Gregorian blueprint should be a moot point. Did everyone in the polity acknowledge that (as also in Ireland) the north and south were two very different worlds? On the two halves of Ireland, see Byrne, *Irish Kings*, chap. 10. G. Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?', *TRHS*, 6th series, 21 (2011) 59–91, has offered an interesting but conflicted analysis: for, if the matter had depended on the ability or potential to project power across all England (as in the seventh century), the result would have been very different.

[144] For the Alfredian Anglian adaptation of Bede's History, see *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. T. Miller, 2 vols. (London, 1890–8); and, for discussion, see most recently G. Waite, 'The Preface to the Old English Bede: Author, Transmission, and Connection with the *West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List*', *ASE* 44 (2016), 31–93; and G. Molyneaux, 'The *Old English Bede*: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', *EHR* 124 (2009), 1289–323. On *Angelcynn*, see S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 25–49. On Alfred's political thought, see the outstandingly penetrating study by D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007). For the best general introduction to Alfred through the literature associated with him, see A. J. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, 1986).

[145] Cf. *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904; rev. imp. by D. Whitelock, 1959), pp. 148–9.

[146] It is worth noting that the *Angol-* /*Angul-* spellings might be held to refer back to Angeln.

[147] W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 92–3, although his views on the Angles seem to be misperceptions; *Alfred the Great*, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 227–8; cf. *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 148–52.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is in its earliest recoverable form a text written and published in the West Saxon over-kingdom in 892, therefore in Alfred's reign.[148] At various times it has been regarded as Alfred's own work or sponsored as his political mouthpiece or as a product of his court; but another view, never successfully refuted, is that it was written elsewhere in his kingdom, albeit with knowledge of and from the royal court.[149] In the *Chronicle* of 892, neither *Englaland* nor *Englisc /englisc* is to be found (*Engle* are in annal 473), but *Angelcynn* and *Angelcynneslond* were both used to convey the sense of 'England'.[150] However, overall it might be said that the *Chronicle* is focused most thoroughly on what has been called 'Greater Wessex' (the Saxon polity achieved in 825×828: southernmost England, including Essex) – not surprisingly, given the context of frequent and existential conflict with vikings in that region.

The national territory comes very sharply into focus almost on the day of the national kingdom's creation. King Æthelstan, at Eamontbridge on the frontier between the Northumbrians and the British (but Scandinavian-dominated) kingdom of Strathclyde for a council of northern kings on 12 July, 927, had in his entourage (like his great-grandfather Æthelwulf) a

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[148] *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–9; rev. imp. by D. Whitelock, 1952), vol. II, p. cxvii (§III), and cf. pp. cxiv–cxvii (§IIO); P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London, 1962), pp. 13–21; Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 55–140; and C. Downham, 'Annals, Armies, and Artistry: "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle", 865–96', reprinted in her book *No Horns*, pp. 9–37.

[149] C. Plummer, *The Life and Times of Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1902), pp. II and 146, saw Alfred as the mind and force behind the creation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* but not as its author. For various views on Alfred's possible involvement, see first the studies by A. Scharer, 'König Alfreds Hof und die Geschichtsschreibung. Einige Überlegungen zur Angelsachsenchronik und zu Assers *De rebus gestis Aelfredi*', in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (Wien, 1994), pp. 443–58; A. Scharer, 'Zu drei Themen in der Geschichtsschreibung der Zeit König Alfreds (871–899)', in *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung*, ed. K. Brunner and B. Merta (Wien, 1994), pp. 200–8; A. Scharer, 'The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court', *EME* 5 (1996), 177–206; and A. Scharer, *Herrschaft und Repräsentation. Studien zur Hofkultur König Alfreds des Grossen* (Wien, 2000). See further T. A. Shippey, 'A Missing Army: Some Doubts about the Alfredian Chronicle', *Anglo-Saxon* I (2007), 319–38; F. M. Stenton, 'The South-Western Element in the Old English Chronicle', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, ed. A. G. Little and F. M. Powicke (Manchester, 1925), pp. 15–24, reprinted in his book *Preparatory*, pp. 106–15; and N. P. Brooks, 'Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?', *ASE* 39 (2011), 43–70.

[150] *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. Plummer, vol. II, pp. 375–7, 333. Cf. H. Sweet, 'Some of the Sources of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Englische Studien* 2 (1879), 310–12, on annal 473. It should be noted that in King Alfred's will we read of two estates which King Alfred owned *on Wealcynne*, whether in the territory of a neighbouring British polity or in British-speaking enclaves in Wessex: *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. and trans. F. E. Harmer (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 15–19, 49–53 and 91–103, at lines 28–34; and *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 173–8, at 175 (especially nn. 18 and 56), and pp. 313–26, at 317, n. 18, and 321, n. 56.

Continental secretary, one Peter.[151] We have a short letter-poem written by him in Æthelstan's name, directed to the Queen Mother and the prince (Latin *cliton*, representing Old English *æðeling*) at the royal court in the south. It is unambiguous in its announcement of Æthelstan's creation of England, *Saxonia*, 'now made whole' (*iam . . . perfecta*), with himself as monarch.[152]

The Viking Age

Vikings' activities in England, which might have seemed a mere irritant or an urgent God-sent warning in the 790s, finally blew away the early Anglo-Saxon polity, now a tetrarchy, in the years from 865 to 878.[153] There was a brief period, in the first half of 878, when all England lay in Scandinavian hands, the royal family of Dublin being the most identifiable and perhaps most prominent of the conquerors.[154] In spite of the iconically English story of King Alfred and the cakes – set in a period when the defeated Alfred, his kingdom taken from him, planned and waged a guerrilla war from the marshes of Somerset to recover his inheritance and perhaps turn the tide – modern English historians have never acknowledged what the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in its annal for that year says bluntly:[155]

> In this year in midwinter after Twelfth Night [6 January] the enemy-army (*here*) came stealthily to Chippenham [Wiltshire] and conquered (*geridon*) the land of the West Saxons and settled there (*gesæton*) and drove a great part of the people (*folc*) overseas and conquered (*geridon*) most of the others; and the people, except King Alfred, subjected themselves to them.

[151] On Felix, Æthelwulf's secretary, see *Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 203 n. 1, 225–6, 306; and S. Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and His Sons', *EHR* 109 (1994), 1109–49. Peter's origin was deduced by Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems', pp. 83–93 and 98 (and *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066*, pp. 71–81 and 86) from his name (this particular type of biblical usage was not English at the time) and from his use of *Saxonia* (although that, taken by itself, could have pointed to a Celtic origin).

[152] Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems', pp. 87 and 89: stanza 3 (*Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066*, pp. 75, 77). Cf. Dumville, *The Mediaeval Foundations*, pp. 13–14, reprinted in his *Anglo-Saxon Essays, 2001–2007*, pp. 266–310, at 275–7.

[153] Cf. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, pp. 210–20. For an approach from the other end of the equation, see S. McLeod, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England. The Viking 'Great Army' and Early Settlers, c. 865–900* (Turnhout, 2014).

[154] Dumville, 'Old Dubliners'; and Downham, *Viking Kings*, pp. 141–5 (North Britain) and 63–71 (England).

[155] *EHD*, trans. Whitelock, pp. 195–6.

Bishop Asser, translating the text soon after and adding to it (as long as we do not think of him as a forger of *c*. 1000),[156] softened this very slightly but added to it some further elaboration of the reality of guerrilla warfare:[157]

> [T]he heathen army left Exeter and went to Chippenham, a royal estate in northern Wiltshire . . . and spent the winter there. By strength of arms they forced many men of that people to sail overseas, through both poverty and fear, and very nearly all the inhabitants of that kingdom submitted to their authority. At the same time King Alfred, with his small band . . . was leading a restless life in great distress amid the woody and marshy places of Somerset. He had nothing to live on except what he could forage by frequent raids, either secretly or openly, from the heathens as well as from the christians who had submitted to the heathens' authority.

The West Saxons had at last been conquered. Historians have excused Alfred's earlier payment of tribute as buying time to build an effective defence. If there was such a policy, it failed. The brutal statement by the Chronicler has been refused acknowledgement by English historians who have preferred to accentuate the king's guerrilla warfare as a token of continuity. But January 878 was indeed a moment of fracture. After 878, the West Saxon kingdom could never be the same again. Conquest and settlement by heathen vikings, and exile at their hands, had formerly been the fate meted out to the Northumbrians, East Angles and Mercians. The West Saxons were not to be exempt. This was part of a process of radical political and social change – including movement of population – which was occurring across Britain. Ireland had received viking settlement earlier than Britain, and its Scandinavian invaders – while not devoid of great ambition – could adapt easily from their own background to the local culture of petty kingdoms in the host country.[158] The one viking entity which would acquire greatest prominence in Insular politics, sinking its teeth deeply into Britain, was the kingdom of Dublin.[159] The coalitions of raiding armies which bit into Pictland, Strathclyde and England were, while potentially fissiparous, capable of great achievements. And the kings of Dublin maintained a contest for England into the era of Danish

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[156] *The Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great*, trans. A. P. Smyth (Basingstoke, 2002), whose arguments deserve very close continuing consideration.

[157] Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, chaps. 52–3 (ed. Stevenson, pp. 40–1; and trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 83 (modified here)).

[158] P. H. Sawyer, 'The Vikings and Ireland', in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe. Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. D. Whitelock et al. (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 345–61.

[159] Downham, *Viking Kings*.

conquest under Swegen (Sveinn) and Cnut (Knútr) at the beginning of the eleventh century.[160]

There was, however, another side to the story: small-scale, local settlement, powerful enough to dominate an area but not having the strength in numbers and depth successfully to defy the approach of a determined leader of a substantial territorial kingdom. Whether in relation to the Hebrides or to eastern England, we can deduce the ninth-century establishment of small political units. Those in the Hebrides (and, later, Mann) – *Suðreyjar*, 'The Southern Isles', in Old Scandinavian – were knitted together into a fractious, unstable (over)kingdom called in Middle Gaelic *Inse Gall*, 'The Islands of the Foreigners'. In the 'Danelaw' of eastern England, we find two substantial kingdoms (then still known to Anglo-Saxon observers as the East Angles and the Northumbrians), a possible league of small polities ('The Five Boroughs'),[161] and a variety of minor polities (usually described as an army [*here*, *folc*]) focused on a fortified central place (*burg*/*burh*; the inhabitants were *burgware*). The process of settlement and land-taking can only occasionally be seen, however.

Much obloquy has attached to Lucien Musset's bracketing together of the late Antique Migration Age (*Völkerwanderungszeit*) and the Viking Age.[162] An implication of the subtitle of his second volume, *Le second assaut contre l'Europe chrétienne*, was of a religiously inspired age of Germanic heathen warfare against Christendom, which is perhaps farfetched but deserves calm analysis. There is a serious point of a different order, however. The migration of Germanic speakers into sub-Roman Britain derived from what are now Denmark and southern Norway, as well as from areas farther south.[163] In the Viking Age, just the same Scandinavian regions were the source of settlers in Britain. It is striking that Viking Age migration, unlike its late Antique counterpart, has not been denied, although there have been attempts to downplay its scale. What seems to have been delivered into England, after it had lost its complex native polity of layered kingships, was some Scandinavian petty kingdoms in Middle Anglian territory. Furthermore, if the received analysis of the social structure of the Scandinavian settlements is correct, the relationship of kings or earls and their farmer-soldiery was more akin to that of the English *ceorl* with his

[160] *Ibid.*, pp. 232–3.
[161] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn, pp. 385, 388–9, 502–25; K. Cameron, *Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs* (Nottingham, [1965]); P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1998), pp. 4, 122, 128–9, 151; and C. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), p. 685.
[162] L. Musset, *Les invasions*, 2 vols. (Paris 1965; 2nd edn, 1969–71).
[163] Hines, *The Scandinavian Character*.

royal lord as we first meet him in the seventh century.[164] On this basis, it is not difficult to see why the Scandinavians of Bedford, Hertford, Luton, Northampton, Leicester, Huntingdon, Cambridge, Stamford and Nottingham,[165] though occasionally combining in pairs, lacked the ability effectively to resist the determined efforts of King Edward the Elder to reduce them to his authority. It had proved impossible in this context for the more powerful viking armies of the period 865–78 (or occasional major campaigns thereafter) to be re-created to help to defend the settlements and minor polities of the northern Home Counties and the East Midlands.

The Scandinavian kingdom of East Anglia and the minor polities of the rest of the southern 'Danelaw' were overthrown in campaigns lasting for nine consecutive years (912–20). Something of the same sort had to be done again, though in face of the Dubliners and Northumbrians, in the reign of King Edmund I, 939–46: in 942, all the historical territory of the Mercians was seized for the English crown, including 'five boroughs' (*burga fífe*) – Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford and Derby, of which Lincoln and Derby had not been specifically mentioned in reporting the campaigns of the 910s.[166]

Although the matter has proved controversial, the first major English responses to viking activity seem to have been initiated by Æthelwulf, king of the West Saxons (839–58). The religious response involved visits to Rome and royal decimation-offerings to God.[167] The political reply was to write a royal will which commanded a narrowing of eligibility to succeed to the kingship of the West Saxons, leaving Æthelwulf's last-standing son to control transmission of the throne to the next generation.[168] That son was Alfred, well groomed for the role by his parents but perhaps not expected to be the one who would be left standing. Unification

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[164] F. M. Stenton, 'The Thriving of the Anglo-Saxon Ceorl', in his *Preparatory*, pp. 383–93; R. H. C. Davis, 'East Anglia and the Danelaw', *TRHS*, 5th series, 5 (1955), 23–37 (a justly famous article), reprinted with additions in his *From Alfred the Great to Stephen* (London, 1991), pp. 15–32; and D. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw, Its Social Structure, c. 800–1100* (London, 2000).

[165] The *ASC*, annals 912–20, provides the narrative basics for the events of these years, including these nine settlement-names.

[166] *ASC* MSS ABCD, 942, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities*, ed. and trans. B. Thorpe, 2 vols. (London, 1861), vol. I, pp. 208–9; C. Downham, 'The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York', *NH* 40 (2003), 25–51; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*; and R. A. Hall, 'The Five Boroughs of the Danelaw: A Review of Current Knowledge', *ASE* 18 (1989), 149–206.

[167] S. Kelly, 'King Æthelwulf's Decimations', *Anglo-Saxon* 1 (2007), 285–317.

[168] Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, chap. 16 (ed. Stevenson, pp. 14–16); J. B. Gillingham, *The Kingdom of Germany in the High Middle Ages (900–1200)* (London, 1971), p. 18; D. N. Dumville, 'The Ætheling: A Study in Anglo-Saxon Constitutional History', *ASE* 8 (1979), 1–33, at 21–4; P. Wormald, 'The Ninth Century', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, apud J. Campbell et al. (Oxford, 1982), pp. 132–57, at 140; and *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 72–3 (§16 and pp. 236–7, nn. 33–7).

of the English was an essential aspect of policy, leading to Alfred's promotion of his '(over)kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'. Alfred's military reforms created a network of fortresses, a standing field-army and a primitive navy. A series of other governmental reforms was designed to create a much enhanced kingship and royal administration. Finally, the crucial response, in the reign of Edward the Elder (899–924), was to secure the future by invasion and conquest of Scandinavian England.[169]

Three dimensions of the historiography of the First Viking Age in particular deserve exploration.[170] There has been some reluctance in principle among historians to accept the case for a long-term developing strategy on the part of the West Saxon royal dynasty from the mid-ninth century.[171] The focus on Alfred has been inevitable and entirely justified, even where it seems overly pious. But his father, in particular, is not to be overlooked.

The other two historiographical responses fall into the familiar categories of error. The invasion and conquest of the 'Danelaw', led by Edward the Elder, was for a long time described as 'the reconquest of Scandinavian England'.[172] A mild observation of the absurdity of this formulation, made a generation ago,[173] quickly and quietly led to its abandonment by most historians. The underlying thinking had been hopelessly anachronistic, based on the modern nation, supposing that the West Saxons could present themselves as if they were the natural heirs to the previous rulers of the conquered territories. In fact, West Saxon armies now embarked on the conquest, *de nouo*, of formerly Mercian regions, drawing them into 'the (over)kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' which Alfred had created thirty years earlier.

In an identically nationalist vein has been the treatment of the incoming Scandinavians. There has been a century-long obsession with divining whether particular viking groups were Danish or Norwegian (the Swedes

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[169] See N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder, 899–924* (London, 2001), for a very varied discussion.

[170] For the terminology, see P. H. Sawyer et al., 'The Two Viking Ages of Britain. A Discussion', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 2 (1969), 163–207; see further D. N. Dumville, *Vikings in Britain and Ireland: A Question of Sources*, 3rd edn (Aberdeen, 2014).

[171] For a discussion of one aspect of the case, see Dumville, *Wessex and England*, chap. VI.

[172] Wainwright, *Scandinavian England*, for example, p. 324, 'Edward's conquest of the Danish midlands [of England!]', and p. 328, 'the recovery of those areas which the Danish armies had occupied in the reign of Alfred the Great'. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1st edn, p. 51, offered a classic specimen of his thinking: 'English kings did not so much reconquer Scandinavianized England as absorb it.'

[173] In academic oral tradition, this is held to have been said in the context of the preparation of Campbell et al., *The Anglo-Saxons*.

never being allowed a significant role). It has been known since the seventeenth century that Latin *Dani* and *Nordmanni* were interchangeable in ninth- and tenth-century discourse. Likewise, the Old-Scandinavian words *Danr* and *dönsk*, applied whether to persons or to language, meant 'Scandinavian' rather than 'Dane'/'Danish'.[174] This was also reflected in Classical Latin usage. However, the pressure for nationalistic interpretation has produced a skewed treatment of a potentially important question by requiring a reductionist approach. We can see that outlook developing particularly as Norwegian nationality became an issue in the run-up to independence in 1905.[175]

927: The Kingdom of the English and the Struggle to Hold It

The kingdom of the English was created by King Æthelstan in the summer of 927 through direct military action against the one remaining Scandinavian polity in England, the kingdom of the Northumbrians. It is part of the unsatisfactory oddity of the apparently original record in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for Æthelstan's reign that it has no primary account of that year's events. It is only in two much later texts, Versions D and E, each with a Northern dimension, that such appears, but in two apparently contradictory narratives. King Sihtric, Æthelstan's brother-in-law since January 926, died, to be succeeded by King Guthfrith (Guðrøðr) II, who was then expelled by King Æthelstan. Version D is interesting in implying that Æthelstan's control of the Northumbrian kingdom was endorsed by a treaty with Northern kings, among whom is numbered Aldred Eadwulfing of Bamburgh, the ruler of English 'Bernicia', whose line now probably had to renounce its royal status.[176]

We can see a conscious foreign policy developing in Æthelstan's reign: the cultivation of relationships with Continental royal courts by successive

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[174] Downham, *No Horns*, pp. 41–71, and references given therein, especially F. Amory, 'The dönsk tunga in Early Medieval Normandy: A Note', in *American Indian and Indoeuropean Studies: Papers in Honor of Madison S. Beeler*, ed. K. Klar et al. (Den Haag, 1980), pp. 279–89. Cf. Dumville, 'Old Dubliners', reprinted in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. I, pp. 103–22. See also M. Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der altgermanischen Personen- und Völkernamen nach der Überlieferung des klassischen Altertums bearbeitet* (Heidelberg, 1911), pp. 70–1, *s.n.* 'Dani'. For the easy interchange between 'Danish' and 'Norse' for one language, see J. L. Campbell, 'The Norse Language in Orkney in 1725', *Scottish Historical Review* 33 (1954), 175.

[175] Downham, '"Hiberno-Norwegians" and "Anglo-Danes"', pp. 152–7 (cf. her *No Horns*, pp. 54–9).

[176] The most attractive introduction to Æthelstan remains that of J. A. Robinson, *The Times of Saint Dunstan* (Oxford, 1923), pp. 25–80; cf. Dumville, *Wessex and England*, chap. IV. For Versions D and E, see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, gen. ed. Dumville and Keynes, vols. 6 and 7 (Cambridge, 1996, 2004); cf. *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 218–20.

marriages of his sisters; implacable opposition to the claims of kings of (Scandinavian) Dublin to rule at York, and military intervention in Scotland and France, thereby establishing – within a decade of the making of England – a practice which would last for 800 and 1,000 years respectively.[177]

The interested parties, against whom the new kingdom had to be held, were the Dubliners and the Northern powers: the kingdom of Strathclyde had since 871 been a satellite of the viking kingdom of Dublin; the kingdom of Alba (formerly of the Southern Picts) had a history of bitter hostility to the vikings of Dublin but was now in the hands of a ruler, Cosstantín/Constantine, who had become unfriendly to the approaching kingdom of the English and entered an alliance with the Dubliners;[178] and the more remote polities (as seen from England) of the Hebrides and Mann (known in Middle Gaelic as *Insi Gall*, 'The Islands of the Foreigners'), Muréb (Moray), formerly of the Northern Picts, and the Scandinavian earldom of Orkney and Shetland (including, on the mainland, Caithness and part of Sutherland). Mutual invasion, punctuated by treaty arrangements, seems to have become the norm of international relationships in northern Britain.[179]

Dublin remained a significant factor in this relationship until at least about 980. There were reverses when England was invaded by a coalition led from Dublin at the end of 939, immediately after the death of Æthelstan: 'Northumbria' and the Mercian/Midland 'Danelaw' were lost to the Dubliners for two to three years, in circumstances of which the campaigns of 1745/6 seem eerily reminiscent, and the Northumbrian kingdom proved difficult to hold for the next fifteen years.[180]

The historiography of that struggle to keep England intact by holding 'Northumbria' has produced some interesting twists and turns of interpretation. The role of Dublin has declined from a high point and then risen in importance again.[181] There have been some (but only some) significant

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[177] Dumville, *Wessex and England*, chap. IV.   [178] *Ibid.*, pp. 146–9.

[179] Downham, *Viking Kings*, chap. 5. There is a new account of Scottish history of this period: Woolf, *From Pictland*, chaps. 3 and 4.

[180] On 1745/6, see, for example, J. Black, *Culloden and the '45* (Stroud, 2000). Cf. the off-the-cuff remark of Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, p. 7: 'The German[ic] kindreds could no more have overthrown the Roman empire of Augustus or Marcus Aurelius or Constantine the Great than the Scottish clansmen of 1745 could have overwhelmed the England of King George II.' However true all that may be, it is nonetheless worth remembering that in 1746 the Scottish insurgents seized Derby, with the result that London began to empty as the capital panicked.

[181] A magnificent account of Viking Age Dublin was provided by C. Haliday, *The Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin* (Dublin, 1881; 2nd edn, 1884; rev. imp. 1969); and (earlier) in the superb editorial introduction and notes to *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, *The War of the Gael and the Gaill*, ed. and trans. J. H. Todd (London, 1867). See further Downham, *No Horns*, chap. 8; M. Murphy et al., *The*

developments in understanding the history of the kingdom of Strathclyde,[182] which had – invisibly in surviving written record – pushed southwards to the middle of what is now Cumbria between 871 and 927. The relations of Alba and Strathclyde (and England) were and are difficult to follow, and remain so until the last recorded appearance of a king of Strathclyde, at the battle of Carham-on-Tweed in ?1014.[183]

The English foreign policy was on the whole successful, but a militarily more sensible definition of 'Northumbria' in early Anglo-Norman England led to the first establishment of something like the present Anglo-Scottish border in the 1090s, with northward advance in the west and a willingness to hold an eastern border on the River Tweed.[184] The struggle over the body of the much larger pre-Viking-Age territory of the kingdom of the Northumbrians and the difficulties which King William I faced in Yorkshire have encouraged observers of a 'north-south divide' in England to argue that the West Saxon and then Danish/Anglo-Danish kings who held the kingdom of the English from 927 to 1042 never succeeded in depriving the English north of its separate identity and incorporating it fully into their England.[185]

This arguable proposition can usefully be yoked to another. Some English historians have, over the past three-quarters of a century, found reason to downplay the success of the 'English project' of the dynasty of Ecgberht of Wessex. One very remarkable and high-profile manifestation of this was in F. M. Stenton's treatment of the later tenth century in his classic *Anglo-Saxon England*, first published in 1943. He announced Edgar's reign (959–75), seen by contemporaries and by twelfth-century historians as a high point of English governance and military power, as the beginning

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Dublin Region in the Middle Ages. Settlement, Land-Use and Economy (Dublin, 2010); J. Bradley et al. (eds.), *Dublin in the Medieval World. Studies in Honour of Howard B. Clarke* (Dublin, 2009); and the splendid array of scholarship on view in the annual journal *Medieval Dublin*.

[182] Downham, *Viking Kings*, chap. 5 and p. 337, *s.n.* Strathclyde; Woolf, *From Pictland*, has devoted the whole of a very interesting book to the transformation of North Britain in the Viking Age; cf. Dumville, *The Mediaeval Foundations* (reprinted in his *Anglo-Saxon Essays, 2001–2007*, pp. 266–310), for comment on various aspects of the period.

[183] The scholarship on the contexts of this battle is very unsatisfactory. I have prepared an article offering a new analysis of the sources: 'The Date and Context of the Battle of Carham-on-Tweed'.

[184] G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots. Government, Church and Society from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1973), pp. 139–61 (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 112–29. This essay has been repeatedly updated and augmented since its first appearance in 1966 as an Inaugural Lecture and an article, 'The Anglo-Scottish Border', *NH*, 1 (1966), 21–42.

[185] H. M. Jewell, *The North-South Divide. The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester, 1994); N. J. Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria, 350–1100* (Stroud, 1993); and Rollason, *Northumbria*.

of a period of decline.[186] More generally, one is bound to wonder whether modern historians most committed to the existence and promotion of an idea of an English nation from at least the time of Bede and those who had come to regard King Alfred as its father found the role of Æthelstan and his successors a tiresome distraction from and complication of a subject held to be already closed by 900. Indeed, even relatively moderate opinion has been doubtful about admitting the kingdom's existence until it was uncontested.[187] This rather bizarre approach must mean that the kingdom did not exist until William I secured it – but that was certainly not King William's opinion!

Uí Ímair ('The Descendants of Ívarr'), the rulers of Dublin, were formidable and tenacious opponents of the first seven kings of England. But what struck most foreign observers of the kingdom of the English before 1066 was its power and wealth.[188] Historians may debate whether or not pre-Conquest England was a state (archaeologists, on a quite different trajectory, seem to be thinking of the state as a useful description of eighth-century English over-kingdoms) or a pre-state society. It had a governmental apparatus which functioned predictably; but royal government had noticeable limitations in the face of entrenched local power, whether in Kent or in Durham. Nevertheless, its kings had the military might (and the supporting wealth) to deliver a substantial military punch when and where they wished to land it. It is hard to imagine that in those circumstances the Dubliners – however seriously they might be taken in England (whether by tenth-century kings claiming the right to rule Dublin or indeed Ireland or by an eleventh-century queen who was fluent in Irish)[189] – could so disrupt the English polity (as they had in the later ninth century) as to call its new kingdom into question.

The origins of the kingdom of the English were of course various and reflected the travails of a long-developing body politic. Founded by settler-colonists on the wreckage of Roman Britain, Germanic Britain had at least 150 years' development before it began to leave records which speak to us with relative clarity. I see nothing in the history of early Anglo-Saxon

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[186] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1st edn, pp. 359–67.

[187] It is rather curious that this seems not to have been a major issue debated by modern historians of the Norman conquest of England. If one searches their indexes, one does not find entries for 'England', 'kingdom of England', or the like.

[188] P. H. Sawyer, 'The Wealth of England in the Eleventh Century', *TRHS*, 4th series, 15 (1965), 145–64, and his Ford Lectures, *The Wealth of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013).

[189] The encomium of Queen Edith, in *Vita Ædwardi regis* i. 2, *in The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster, Attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin*, ed. and trans. F. Barlow, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992), pp. 22–5; cf. C. Downham, 'England and the Irish Sea Zone in the Eleventh Century', *ANS* 26 (2003), 55–73, esp. 65.

England which implies a nation in active search of a national kingdom or indicates an inevitable progression towards such an outcome. It was the long experience of a kingdom of the English, indeed of England, that in early modern times allowed the growth of such teleological thought. Perversely, perhaps, the effective creation of a British kingdom as the Tudors' contribution to the island's history convinced English historians of their nation's God-given inheritance. In a climate of increasing nationalism, modern historians saw no reason to rethink this fundamental proposition. Only now, perhaps, in the aftermath of Empire (and indeed of 'the European Project'), can the lengthy processes of the creation of both the kingdom of the English and the land of the English, England, be subjected to thorough analysis.[190]

Summation

I close by offering seven summary propositions.

1. England began in the fifth century amid the wreckage of what had been Roman Britain; control of increasing amounts of territory was wrested from the British indigenes in a process which (in the language of the 'Convention on Genocide' of the United Nations Organisation) may be called 'cultural genocide'.

2. The ethnic and linguistic variety of Britain in the earlier Middle Ages was great (and included racial hatred between English and Britons) but was as nothing in comparison with the political complexity: Britain (a lively concept associated with imperial pretension) was a theatre of inter-kingdom as well as international politics.

3. Early English kingship needs to be wholly problematised: at base, it was an intensely local institution (probably with hundreds of petty kings across England), but with rising layers of sub-regional, regional and quasi-national over-kingship; such a polity probably provided considerable local stability while allowing a significant dynamic at higher levels.

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[190] I must acknowledge two great debts. A first version of this chapter was written in response to a very welcome invitation from Professor David S. Bachrach to contribute a 5,000-word article on the subject to *History Compass*, one of the liveliest academic journals in the discipline. The original result was much too long. To Dr Clare Downham, as at that time the willing friend at hand, I owe great thanks for her efforts and ingenuity in service of attempts to cut the article down. That it was in the end still much too big for the original purpose allowed me to offer it (with further revision and updating) when I was invited to contribute to this volume in honour of Simon Keynes, my friend and colleague of very many years, who is of course no stranger to discussion of fundamental questions about Anglo-Saxon England.

4. The central but unacknowledged problem of interpretation has been that the received narrative of Anglo-Saxon political development has depended on a teleology, that the creation of an English monarchy (after however many centuries of polyarchy) was both desirable and inevitable, given the existence of the *gens /natio Anglorum* already recognised and defined by Bede in 731.

5. Where between 802 and 927 the West-Saxon royal dynasty began to think of its members as potential kings of all the English we do not yet know. But we do have a letter-poem of 12 July, 927 (built on one from Charlemagne's reign), formally and royally proclaiming the creation of the kingdom of the English.

6. The years 865–78 marked a major turning point in the history of the English polity: Scandinavian conquest of all England (as of North Britain too) was in 878 briefly a reality, and the new Scandinavian-dominated polity incorporated some very old elements of socio-political organisation – notably the petty kingdom. It was the West Saxons' recovery from conquest which eventually allowed their own conquest of England.

7. When King Æthelstan created the kingdom of the English, this constituted a challenge to the kingdom of Dublin, whose power and influence in northern Britain were at once called fundamentally into question; the resulting contest was pursued vigorously through the tenth century but never succeeded in creating an existential crisis for the kingdom of the English, which proved resilient. The limits of England were defined by the relative strength and resolve not only of its own ruling elite but also by those of its neighbours, particularly in 'the kingdom of Alba [Britain]' (founded at much the same time as Alfred's 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons') on which Scotland was built.