Early Medieval England and its Neighbours (2025), **51**, e9, 1–26
doi:10.1017/ean.2025.1

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

On Brytene: Late Old English Poetry and Nation

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(Received 07 June 2024; revised 01 November 2024; accepted 09 November 2024)

Abstract

English kings from the late ninth century onwards were sometimes presented as kings of Britain. While this is widely attested, less studied is how the English positioned themselves in relation to Britain – or rather, how English they considered Britain to be. A number of late Old English poems engage deeply with the problem of Britain, but have so far escaped attention in this broader context. In multiple cases, late Old English poems elide non-English peoples and present English dominion as normative and unmarked throughout Britain. This is particularly prominent in the Old English poetic *Menologium*, which is studied here in detail. The treatment of Britain in late Old English poetry also leads to a reinterpretation of one of the most well-known Old English historical poems, *The Battle of Brunanburh.* The battle becomes a defence of a particularly English version of Britain, with the invading enemies being successfully driven out.

Introduction

Britain was a problem in pre-conquest England. While the island remained a multilingual and multicultural zone, including speakers of Brittonic and Goidelic languages and Norse, as well as Old English, late pre-conquest English kings were frequently presented as *rex Britanniae* ('king of Britain'). For much of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the king of the English could be regarded as the most powerful person on the island of Britain. Yet texts adopted a variety of strategies for presenting this domination and the peoples under the king's nominal control. In naming a king as *rex Britanniae*, texts such as charters often leave open the question of the ethnic groups present on the island. Some go further and explicitly present the English king as ruler of a multi-ethnic realm. Thus, in a charter of 955, Eadred is styled 'rex

Angulsæxna et Norþhimbra imperator, paganorum gubernator Brettonumque propugnator' ('King of the Anglo-Saxons, and emperor of the Northumbrians, governor of the pagans and champion of the Britons').[1] The Welsh monk Asser, in a divergent but still imperial vein, presents Alfred the Great as protector of all the Christians of the island of Britain, allowing the Britons as well as the English to fall under his protection.[2] Old English poetry produced in the tenth and eleventh centuries followed a different path, and this article aims to examine this in detail, discussing each reference to Britain in its immediate context, before interpreting their significance within broader frameworks. These texts present Britain as being fundamentally English, rather than simply subject to the overlordship of the king of the English, with implications for our understanding of audience and shared models for remembering the past.

Many of the terms used here are both varied and contested in meaning, not least Britain and English. I use Britain in this article, unless otherwise qualified, in its now standard meaning as referring to the island of Britain. This is also a meaning of *Britannia* in early medieval Latin, but there are other meanings too. *Britannia* could refer to a particular Brittonic area, within Britain (as in Asser's use of *Britannia* for Wales) or without, such as Brittany.[3] *Britannia* could also be used to refer to the area of the former Roman provinces of *Britannia*, thus excluding northern Scotland.[4] This range of meanings is a lens through which to analyse how Old English *Bryten* is used in the poems below.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, before the Norman Conquest of England, English-speakers controlled much of the island of Britain.[5] Already in the eighth century, they had been presented by Bede as the divinely-ordained possessors of the island, with ecclesiastical supremacy over it.[6] Yet they were not Britons. We

[1] S569. Charters are cited by their number in P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), in its revised form available online as the 'Electronic Sawyer' (www.esawyer.org.uk), abbreviated S + number. See further: G. Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?', *TRHS* 21 (2011), 59–91; N. Brooks, 'English Identity from Bede to the Millennium', *Haskins Soc. Jnl* 14 (2003), 33–51, at 50–1.

[2] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), p. 1.

[3] D. N. Dumville, 'Origins of the Kingdom of the English', *Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. Naismith and D. Woodman (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 71–121, at 82; R. Thomas, *History and Identity in Early Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 32; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 1–2.

[4] Dumville, 'Origins', p. 82 and see below p. 16.

[5] On the presentation of Britain on maps in early medieval England, see H. Appleton, 'The Northern World of the Anglo-Saxon mappa mundi', *ASE* 47 (2018), 275–305; cf. H. Appleton, 'Mapping Empire: Two World Maps in Early Medieval England', *Ideas of the World in Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. M. Atherton, K. Karasawa and F. Leneghan, Stud. in OE Lit. 1 (Turnhout, 2022), 309–34.

[6] See, e.g., R. W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (New York, 1966); P. Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the "Church of the English"', *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. G. Rowell (Wantage, 1993), pp. 13–32; N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 49–71; R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 17–20; R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000), p. 50; Dumville, 'Origins'; S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS* 6 (1996), 25–49. See further below p. 24.

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find such a distinction in Bede, who famously highlights the different languages spoken in Britain by different peoples, and sources agree in distinguishing between Brittonic-speakers and English-speakers as one of a number of potential ethnic demarcations in early medieval Britain. Early medieval Britons were Brittonic-speakers, who continued to refer to themselves as such throughout this period, and commonly viewed themselves as the rightful inhabitants of all Britain.[7] I do not seek to create here a distinction between English and Anglophone (or Brittonic and Brittonic-speaking) when referring to group identity, as this is not found in the texts. Indeed, both internal and external sources present strong links between language and identity. English illegitimacy is inscribed in language in *Historia Brittonum* (Gwynedd, 829/30) and the tenth-century Welsh poem *Armes Prydein Vawr* ('The Great Prophecy of Britain'), where the English language itself is deployed to describe English treachery and their flight after their prophesied defeat, respectively.[8] In the Life of St Beuno, composed at Clynnog Fawr in North Wales, hearing an Englishman's language is enough to urge the saint and his disciples to move from one area to another.[9] Similarly, scholars have highlighted the importance of language to identity from an English perspective, both in early and later sources.[10] English-speakers on the island of Britain appear to have had, from at least the eighth century, some sense of collective identity. This was not, of course, to the exclusion of other identities, but is nevertheless plentifully evidenced.[11] A common vernacular endonym for expressing this identity was *englisc*.[12] I describe here how in these poems such an English identity presented itself as being dominant throughout Britain, without the English appropriating the name of Britons for themselves. This article is not in itself a comprehensive reassessment of early English identities, but rather an

[7] H. Pryce, 'British or Welsh? National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales', *EHR* 116 (2001), 775–801; Thomas, *History and Identity*.

[8] *Armes Prydein*, ed. I. Williams, English edition by R. Bromwich (Dublin, 1972), line 66; *Historia Brittonum* (Harleian Recension), §46, *La Légende Arthurienne*, ed. E. Faral, 3 vols (Paris, 1929) III, 34; Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 53–88.

[9] *Buchedd Beuno*, ed. P. Sims-Williams (Dublin, 2018), §8 with discussion on pp. 158–9. The original Latin Life of St Beuno is lost, and its date is uncertain, but it was perhaps produced in the flourishing of Latin hagiography in Wales in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries: cf. *Buchedd Beuno*, ed. Sims-Williams, pp. 17–19. It survives in a Middle Welsh paraphrase found in manuscripts from the fourteenth-century onwards and was used as a source for two twelfth-century lives of Winefride: *Buchedd Beuno*, ed. Sims-Williams, pp. 8–19; *Vita Sancte Wenefrede* (Anonymous; Claudius), ed. D. Callander (Aberystwyth, 2023), saints.wales, accessed 11 October 2024; *Vita Sancte Wenefrede* (Robert of Shrewsbury; Laud), ed. D. Callander (Aberystwyth, 2023), saints.wales, accessed 11 October 2024.

[10] K. Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: a Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation', *Jnl of Med. and Early Mod. Stud.* 28 (1998), 612–37, at 615; L. Brady, 'Constructing Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature: Review of Current Scholarship', *South Atlantic Rev.* 81 (2016), 111–27, at 114; B. Yorke, 'Political and Ethnic Identity: a Case Study of Anglo-Saxon Practice', *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (London, 2000), pp. 69–89, at 71; Foot, 'Making', pp. 29, 38–9.

[11] Foot, 'Making', p. 49; Brooks, 'English Identity'.

[12] D. Wilton, 'What Do We Mean by Anglo-Saxon? Pre-Conquest to the Present', *JEGP* 119 (2020), 425–56, at 439.

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attempt to bring poetic evidence to the table in a debate often dominated by less literary sources.

To turn to the texts in question, the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* shows that *Bryten* 'Britain' occurs around twelve times in Old English poetry, namely *The Battle of Brunanburh* (71b), *The Death of Edgar* (14a), *Guthlac A* (175a), *Guthlac B* (883b), *The Seasons for Fasting* (56b (ambiguous)), *Aldhelm* (5a), *The Metres of Boethius: Metre 20* (99a (ambiguous)), as well as five times in the Old English poetic *Menologium* (14b, 40a, 98b, 104b, 155b).[13] With the exceptions of *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, these instances are all found in what has been termed late southern verse, indicating a particular interest in the topic of Britain in tenth- and early eleventh-century English poetry.[14] *The Menologium* stands out and merits particular attention for its emphatic use of the term *Bryten*. Of all Old English poems, *The Menologium* is the only one which deploys this term more than once, and indeed provides almost half of its instances in the entire verse corpus. We will thus turn our attention to this poem first.

Bryten and *The Menologium*

Also known as the Old English Metrical Calendar, *The Menologium* moves through the entire year from Christmas to Christmas, describing important liturgical events and mixing these with the changing of the seasons.[15] It is a poem which shows how the specific can be natural and universal.[16] As such, it bring together events from Christian history (like the death of Gregory the Great, lines 37b–40a) and the perennial changing of the seasons (including the coming of ice-covered March, lines 29b–37a), with the language it uses highlighting an essential equation between these types of events.[17] This is one of the many artful ways in which medieval Christian writers highlighted how events of Christian history were close and relevant to their audiences, and made new each year in the liturgy.

The Menologium survives in one manuscript, London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B. i, produced in Abingdon in the mid-eleventh century.[18] Copied on folios 112r–114v, *The Menologium* is placed between a copy of the Old English Orosius and,

[13] See K. Karasawa, *The Old English Metrical Calendar ('Menologium')* (Cambridge, 2015) (hereafter *OEMC*), p. 89; *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Toronto, 2024), https://doe.artsci.utoronto.ca/ (hereafter *DOEC*), *s.n. Bryten*, *Breten.* The *Menologium* also deploys the ambiguous term *Brytenricu* (230b), discussed further below.

[14] On late southern verse, see E. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2014).

[15] On the poem's editorial title, see *OEMC*, pp. 1–3.

[16] Cf. P. Head, 'Perpetual History in the Old English *Menologium*', *The Medieval Chronicle: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Driebergen/Utrecht 13–16 July 1996*, ed. E. Kooper (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 155–62.

[17] Cf. D. Callander, *Dissonant Neighbours: Narrative Progress in Early Welsh and English Poetry* (Cardiff, 2019), pp. 176–8.

[18] Gneuss-Lapidge 370.2, pp. 294–6; *OEMC*, pp. 5–15. Folios 3–111 appear earlier (first half of eleventh century) than folios 112–64 (mid-eleventh century), the latter beginning with *The Menologium*, and it appears that this second section may have been added to the pre-existing first section: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS C*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 5 (Cambridge, 2001), pp. xx–xxv.

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with the short poem *Maxims II* intervening, the C-text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Karasawa argues that in this manuscript *The Menologium* marks a movement from the older, largely pre-Christian history of Orosius to the more recent (and more domestic) events of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[19] A related prose text, known as the prose *Menologium*, is extant in two eleventh-century manuscripts.[20] Neither the prose nor the verse appears to derive from the other, but Karasawa convincingly shows that both belong to a closely related tradition, and are far closer to each other than they are to the various early medieval Latin and Irish analogues with which *The Menologium* has traditionally been compared.[21] The prose is a much sparer text, containing similar festivals to the poetic *Menologium* but presenting them in a pared-down list without the combination of natural imagery or the concern with *Bryten* found in the verse. As such, the focus here will be entirely on the metrical *Menologium.* Like the prose, the poetic *Menologium* is a late southern text, composed after the *Metrical Psalms* (likely dating from the mid-to-late tenth century) on which it draws, but before Cnut's invasion of 1016.[22]

The poem's first instance of *Bryten* occurs in line 14b. After opening with a mention of Christ's birth in mid-winter, the text moves to state that he was called *Hælend* on the eighth day (3b–4a), and notes that *side herigeas, folc unmæte* 'hosts far and wide, innumerable people' (5b–6a) hold that to be the start of the year, because this is when the calend of the first month comes to us. A great people (*folc mycel*) called this month January long ago (*gerum*).[23] The focus here is thoroughly international, with lines 9b–10a harking back to the Roman past, and associating the Latin name *Ianuarius* (10a) with this in particular. *Us* (8b) is as yet unnarrowed and could easily be equated with the *side herigeas* 'hosts far and wide' and *folc unmæte* 'innumerable people' of lines 5 and 6.

All this changes in the subsequent passage:

And þæs embe fif niht þætte fulwihttiid eces drihtnes to us cymeð, þæne twelfta dæg tireadige, hæleð heaðurofe, hatað on Brytene, in foldan her.	And five nights after that, the baptismal time of the eternal lord comes to us, which blessed ones, warriors brave in battle, call twelfth day in Britain, in the land here.

(11–15a)[24]

Lines 11–14a remain ostensibly broad, commemorating Christ's baptism on the feast of Epiphany, and *to us* could refer to all Christendom or all humanity.[25]

[19] *OEMC*, pp. 12–15.

[20] For details, see *OEMC*, pp. 26–32. The prose *Menologium* is edited in *OEMC*, pp. 132–4

[21] *OEMC*, pp. 18–32; E. G. Stanley, 'The Prose *Menologium* and the Verse *Menologium*', *Text and Language in Medieval English Prose: a Festschrift for Tadao Kubouchi*, ed. A. Oizumi, J. Fisiak and J. Scahill (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), pp. 255–67.

[22] *OEMC*, pp. 70–2.

[23] On the sense of *gerum* here, see the *Dictionary of Old English* (Toronto, 2024), doe.artsci.utoronto.ca/ (hereafter *DOE*), *s.v. gear* B.1.e.

[24] The text of the *Menologium* is here quoted from the edition in *OEMC*. Other quotations of Old English poetry are from ASPR unless otherwise noted. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. On the peculiar problems of the ASPR edition of the *Menologium*, see Stanley, 'Prose *Menologium*', pp. 260–3.

[25] Joseph Shack notes that *us* is metrically stressed in line 12, as also in lines 8, 34, 72, 108 and 183: J. Shack, 'Modeling Recursive and Linear Temporalities in the Old English *Menologium*', *JEGP* 123 (2024), 157–84, at 167.

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Yet lines 14b–15a transform this and bring a far narrower *us* into view, one which remains the concern throughout. The focus is now on us in Britain, equated with *in foldan her* 'in the land here', but by no means does this extend to all inhabitants of the island of Britain. Importantly, the blessed ones in Britain, these warriors brave in battle, speak English. These people call this festival by the English term *twelfta dæg* 'twelfth day', and *hatað* is used to convey this action, the very same verb found in line 10b when referring to the Romans naming the first month of the year *Ianuarius.* Yet, significantly, line 10b uses the past-tense *heton*, as opposed to the present indicative *hatað* here. This is perhaps so simple as an association of English with the present and Latin with the past, but it does emphasize the vitality of the English term. *Twelfta dæg* is still being named as such, whereas the Latin term is fixed by ancient tradition.

The next instance of *Bryten* occurs shortly after the coming of March:

Đænne se halga þæs	Then noble St Gregory eleven nights
emb XI niht æþele scynde	after that departed
Gregorius in Godes wære,	into God's covenant,
breme in Brytene.	famous in Britain.

(37b–40a)

As a church father, Gregory the Great's death was widely celebrated and this exemplifies the poem's concern with universal saints, rather than those culted only in England or regionally. Yet it is interesting that Gregory is described specifically as *breme in Brytene* 'famous in Britain' (40a). Gregory's most famous actions relating to Britain were to establish the Augustinian mission of 597, perceived as the major event in the conversion of the English, and highlighted in this poem (again in a *Bryten* context) at line 98b. This is a specifically English event, being of less importance for the already Christian Britons, but here it is associated with the island of Britain, rather than England alone, which is never mentioned. English history is thus subtly mapped on to all of Britain.

The poem progresses through April, Easter and May, with an explicitly universal focus on Christendom and people far and wide (79b, 92a–3a), although *we* and *us* continue to be used (60b, 63a, 68b, 72b)[26] and the climate described is domestic. It is only at line 98b that we find the next reference to Britain, although it is quickly followed by another (104b):

Þæs emb eahta and nigon	17 in the number of days
dogera rimes þætte drihten nam	after that [it is] that the Lord took
in oðer leoht Agustinus,	Augustine, happy in his heart, into the other light,
bliðne on breostum, þæs þe he on Brytene her	as he here in Britain,
eaðmode him eorlas funde	obtained noblemen obedient to him
to Godes willan, swa him se gleawa bebead	for God's will, as the wise Gregory
Gregorius. Ne hyrde ic guman awyrn	commanded him. I did not hear
ænigne ær æfre bringan	that any man anywhere previously ever brought
ofer sealtne mere selran lare,	better teaching over the salt sea,
bisceop bremran. Nu on Brytene rest	a more illustrious bishop. Now he rests in Britain
on Cantwarum, cynestole neah,	near to the throne by the residents of Kent,
mynstre mærum.	famous minster.

(95b–106a)

[26] *We* occurs seven times and *us* ten times in the poem as a whole.

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Again, these two examples associate Britain (once more presented as being *here*) with specifically English ecclesiastical history. Augustine found obedient noblemen in Britain. The details of these noblemen, that they were English specifically rather than any of the other, already Christian, peoples of Britain, are omitted. Although the gospel had already been brought to Britain, it is emphasized here that the teaching brought by Augustine is better than that ever brought before, suggesting the superiority of the Christianity he brought to that already existing.[27] There is also no more famous bishop than Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, who came to Britain, emphasizing the greater claim to authority of this bishop (and implicitly his successors) over any other on the island. It is important in this regard that both instances of *Bryten* are connected with Canterbury, this being especially clear in 104b, where Augustine's body is said to rest *nu* 'now', in Britain. Canterbury's authority is thus associated with the entirety of Britain.

Lines 106b–153a repeat the mixture of universal liturgical festivals and a Christianity-wide focus with regional weather descriptions, before the text provides its final example of *Bryten* on its own:

Þænne ealling byð	Then always ten nights
ymb tyn niht þæs tiid geweorðad	after that the festival of Bartholomew
Bartholomeus in Brytene her,	is celebrated here in Britain,
wyrd[28] welþungen.	excellent event.
	(153b–6a)

This instance is less clearly loaded than the previous four. Britain is emphasized again as being *here*, but beyond this little is done to link to the English or English dominion in particular, and an apparently broad Christian focus is subsequently maintained.

Yet this changes with the arrival of October:

And þæs embe twa niht þæt se teoða monð	And it is two nights after that that the tenth month
on folc fereð, frode geþeahte,	travels to the people, according to wise determination,
October on tun us to genihte,	October to our habitation as an abundance for us,
Winterfylleð, swa hine wide cigð	Winterfylleð, as island-dwellers, Angles and Saxons,
igbuende Engle and Seaxe,	widely call it,
weras mid wifum.	men along with women.
	(181–6a)

The vitality and importance of the English term for the month is again emphasized. The present indicative *cigð* 'calls' highlights how *Winterfylleð* is a continually used term, and the breadth of its usage is highlighted by the adverb *wide* 'widely' and by the apposition of *Engle and Seaxe* 'Angles and Saxons' with *weras mid wifum* 'men along with women', indicating that this term is used throughout English society. Here the name *Bryten* is not deployed, but the island nevertheless remains present in the compound *igbuende*. This is a present participle meaning 'island-dwelling' which can also be taken substantively as 'island-dwellers'. Karasawa interprets this adjectivally and

[27] Cf., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 134–42; F. Leneghan, 'End of Empire? Reading the Death of Edward in MS Cotton Tiberius B I', *Ideas of the World*, ed. Atherton, Karasawa, and Leneghan, pp. 403–34, at 410–12.

[28] wyrd] wyrð

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translates 'the island-dwelling Angles and Saxons'.[29] Jones translates as 'dwellers on this island, Angles and Saxons'.[30] If *igbuende* is taken adjectivally, it links the Angles and Saxons strongly to the entire island. If taken substantively, as its use in the a-line with *Engle and Seaxe* in the b-line might suggest, the effect is even more powerful. The artful slippage of apposition allows for the equation of quite distinct items: those dwelling on the island, and the Angles and Saxons. Again, a claim is made on the island of Britain on the part of Angles and Saxons who speak English. Angles and Saxons in this context would appear to refer to the linguistic group of all the English in Britain, rather than the Mercians and West-Saxons only. An island-focused identity was of fundamental importance to the Britons and, in claiming this, the poem highlights the transfer of dominion over the island from the Britons to the English.[31]

The final reference to *Bryten*, in the ambiguous compound *Brytenricu*, does not occur until the very end of the poem, after the entire year has been covered and Christmas again mentioned:

Nu ge findan magon	Now you can ascertain
haligra tiid[a] þe man healdan sceal,	the saints' festivals which one must hold,
swa bebugeð gebod geond Brytenricu	as far as the command of the king of the Saxons
Sexna kyninges on þas sylfan tiid.	at this very time extends throughout the kingdoms of Britain.
	(228b–231)

The term *Brytenricu* is grammatically accusative plural.[32] The *Dictionary of Old English* notes it as occurring only here and in *Azarias* (107b), where *brytenrices weard* 'the guardian of *brytenrice*' refers to God. It provides the following cautious definition:

1. spacious kingdom; 'destructive power' has also been proposed, if *bryten* is related to *brȳtan* 'to destroy'
2. ? spacious kingdom ? kingdom of Britain

The first definition applies to its use in *Azarias*, the second to its use in *The Menologium.*[33] Karasawa highlights the variant *Breotenrice* which occurs in *Durham* 1b and the Old English Bede (ch. 5), not included in the *DOE* entry. This is perhaps because it was viewed as a proper noun, and Karasawa indeed argues that it means 'the kingdom of Britain' in both instances.[34] Yet the usage of the term in *Azarias* suggests that it can be detached from Britain specifically, and most probably means 'spacious kingdom' there.[35] Such a meaning is possible for the usage in *Durham* 1b (*Is ðis burch breome geond Breotenrice* 'This town is famous

[29] *OEMC*, p. 83.
[30] *Old English Shorter Poems, 1: Religious and Didactic*, ed. C. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 2012) p. 187.
[31] On the importance of an island-based identity to the Britons, see Thomas, *History and Identity.*
[32] R. M. Hogg and R. D. Fulk, *A Grammar of Old English*, 2 vols (Malden, MA, 1992–2011) II, 18–19.
[33] *DOE s.v. bryten-rīce.*
[34] *OEMC*, p. 129.
[35] Cf. *DOE s.v. bryten.*

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throughout a spacious kingdom') and indeed for *The Menologium.* Thomas O'Donnell translates 'Breotenrice' as 'kingdom of Britain' in his discussion of *Durham*, a poem which he argues dates to between 1050 and 1083.[36] He compares the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*, a worked produced at Durham in the tenth or eleventh century, with the relevant section deriving from the eleventh century.[37] In this text, Cuthbert appears to Alfred in a vision, stating 'tibi et filiis tuis data est tota Albion' ('all Britain has been given to you and your sons'), and describing him as 'rex totius Brittanniae'.[38] That a text produced in a similar milieu to *Durham* has such a focus strengthens the conclusion that *Breotenrice* does indeed mean 'kingdom of Britain' in that poem. O'Donnell cites an extraordinary use of 'Breotanrices' in a varied eleventh-century document from Bury St Edmunds:

> Ures drihtnes hælendes Cristes freo náma á on ecnyssa sy gewurþod þe ængla wuldorheap him sylfum to wyrðscipe gegearawode . 7 eac manna wynsumlic wlita . æfter his agenan anlicnessan gehywlæhte . syllende heom genihtsumlice geofa heofonas 7 eorþan . swa he nu dagum Breotanrices fægran islandes . Eadwearde cyncge sealde 7 geuþe . ealswa he æror geara his magum dyde . ðæra wæs sum æþel 7 wurðful Sc̄te Eadmund gehaten . 7 se mid Criste sylfum nu eardað on heofonum.
>
> May the noble name of our Lord the Saviour Christ be honoured for ever to all eternity. He formed the glorious company of angels for his own honour, and likewise fashioned the winsome countenance of men after his own image, bestowing abundantly upon them the gifts of heaven and earth. In these days he has given and granted to King Edward the fair island of Britain, as he did of yore to his kinsmen, one of whom was by name the noble and honourable St Edmund, who now dwells in heaven with Christ himself.[39]

Here, the island of Britain does appear to be presented as one kingdom, under the control of King Edward and previously that of his kin. Kathryn Lowe suggests that this text is a translation of a Latin original and it is possible that *Breotanrices* here translates *regni Britannie.*[40] While *Brytenrice* is rare in Old English, references to pre-conquest English kings being rulers of *regnum Britannie* are found in a number

[36] T. O'Donnell, 'The Old English *Durham*, the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*, and the Unreformed in Late Anglo-Saxon Literature', *JEGP* 113 (2014), 131–55. On the poem's date, cf. R. N. Bailey and E. Cambridge, 'Dating the Old English Poem "Durham"', *MÆ* 85 (2016), 1–14.

[37] *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, ed. T. Johnson South (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 25–36; O'Donnell, 'Old English *Durham*', p. 134.

[38] *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, ed. Johnson South, pp. 54–6.

[39] Text and translation from *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1956), no. CIV, pp. 194–5. Robertson titles the document 'Notes with regard to food-rents, charitable gifts, etc. from Bury St Edmunds': pp. 192–3. On the text's date, see Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 440.

[40] K. A. Lowe, 'Post-Conquest Bilingual Composition in Memoranda from Bury St Edmunds', *RES* 59 (2007), 52–66, at 60.

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of Latin charters associated with the tenth century (S434 (Æthelstan), S435 (Æthelstan), S436 (Æthelstan), S777 (Edgar), S1795 (Edgar)).

O'Donnell proceeds to argue that '[w]hatever the history of the term in eighth- and ninth-century contexts, by the eleventh century, *Breotenric* [*sic*] had come to be associated with the multiethnic realm governed by Alfred's descendants.'[41] This is possible, although the term's currency in Old English is uncertain and its only unambiguous use in this sense is in the Bury St Edmunds document, where the kingdom is associated with a particular kin-group. O'Donnell translates *Brytenricu* in *The Menologium* as singular, but the plurality of its form is significant and different, and is discussed further below. An earlier instance of *Breotenrice* is found in the Old English Bede, translated in the late ninth or early tenth century.[42] It occurs in Book 1, Chapter 5: *Basianus his sunu feng to Breotenrice* 'His son Basianus succeeded to *Breotenrice*'.[43] This translates Bede's *Bassanius Antonini cognomine adsumto regno potitus est* 'Bassanius, having acquired the additional name Antoninus, gained the kingdom'.[44] In its context of Bede's description of early British history, it seems most likely that *Breotenrice* does refer to the kingdom or realm of Britain here, although it is noteworthy that this refers to the Roman past rather than the English present.

It appears, primarily through the parallel with Latin charters, that *Brytenrice* could be used in the tenth century to refer to a 'kingdom of Britain' under the control of an English king. What, then, is to be made of the plural *Brytenricu* in *The Menologium*? Karasawa translates it as 'the spacious kingdoms of Britain', drawing on both potential meanings of *bryten* here. However, Karasawa then moves from Britain to England in discussing the term: 'It is used in the plural, perhaps because of the awareness that kingdoms once existed in England, which later came to be ruled by a single (West Saxon) king'.[45] I agree with Karasawa that the phrase evokes Britain in its context, but would take issue with the slippage from Britain to England. The poem never mentions England and the very compound used here is a claim to Britain, not England.[46] The island of Britain of course still contained multiple kingdoms. Yet the poem's subtle equation of Britain with the English encourages such conflation of England and Britain. Karasawa's second suggestion that the plural form could simply be

[41] O'Donnell, 'Old English *Durham*', p. 154.

[42] S. M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 36–56.

[43] *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. T. Miller, 4 vols, EETS os 95, 96, 110, 111 (London, 1890–98) I, 32.

[44] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 26.

[45] *OEMC*, p. 129.

[46] Note that this same movement from Britain to England is found in Nicole Guenther Discenza's treatment of the *Menologium* and *Seasons for Fasting* (discussed below): '*Seasons for Fasting* weaves together Rome, Israel, and England, moving from the historical "ealddagum Israheala folc" (... 1) and "Romwara" (... 50) to the contemporary "Brytena leodum" ("people of Britain," 56) who must now observe proper fasts. *The Menologium* outdoes *Seasons*, alternating references to events from the life of Christ, the apostles, and certain saints with their application to England. The poem opens with Christ's birth and baptism, then brings the reader or hearer back "on Brytene" ("in Britain," 14 ...)': *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto, 2017), p. 116.

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formulaic appears unlikely as *Brytenrice* only occurs in the singular elsewhere in the corpus.[47] *Brytenricu* should be taken as plural, referring either to 'spacious kingdoms' or, more probably, 'kingdoms of Britain'. There is an intriguing parallel to this in S629, a charter of Eadwig. Here Eadwig, in addition to being styled *rex totius Britannie* ('king of all Britain') is described as 'rex Anglorum et totius Britannie prouinciarum' ('king of the English and of the provinces of all Britain'). The exact referent of *prouinciae* is ambiguous: the term could refer to a kingdom or an administrative division within a kingdom, and could also recall the Roman provinces of Britain.[48] Nevertheless, this presentation of Eadwig as ruling over a plurality of units parallels *The Menologium*'s plural use of 'the kingdoms of Britain'. Thus the plural *–ricu*, rather than being problematic, might in fact be easier to justify than the singular. English kings from Alfred onwards claimed overlordship over kings in Wales and other parts of Britain, and this appears to be the context here: there are multiple kingdoms of Britain, but the Saxon king holds sway over them, or at least some of them.[49] Yet this stands in an intriguing contrast with the rest of the poem, which readily elides all other kingdoms and peoples in Britain. The poem states that now one knows which festivals should be held as far as the command of the king of the Saxons extends at this very time around Britain.

The poem's use of *Sexna* 'of the Saxons' is unusual. Nowhere else in Old English is it deployed on its own to refer to the English in general in late pre-conquest England. The standard Latin use was *rex Anglorum (et Saxonum)* or *rex Angul/Angol/Anglo Saxonum* for tenth-century English kings. If *Saxonum* was used in other contexts it would be accompanied by a specifying adjective like *occidentalium.* However, a charter of Eadwig (S654) describes him as *rex Saxonum*, providing a parallel to the usage in *The Menologium.* This less usual way of referring to the English may also have been encouraged in its context in the poem by the alliteration in /s/. Also difficult is the use of *swa*, translated by Karasawa as 'as far as'.[50] In his discussion of *swa (swa)* in clauses of place, Bruce Mitchell offers a number of examples similar to that in *The Menologium*, suggesting meanings of 'wherever', 'as far as', or 'as widely as' for *swa.*[51] This is seen clearly in the following instances:

Smeolt wæs se sigewang, symble wæs dryge folde fram flode, swa his fot gestop.	The victory-plain was peaceful, the land was continuously dry from the flood, wherever his foot stepped. (*Andreas* 1581–2)
Sægde se þe cuþe frumsceaft fira feorran reccan, cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh[te], wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð ...	He who was able to recount the origin of people from far back spoke, said that the Almighty created the earth, a plain of splendid beauty, as widely as water encompasses it ... (*Beowulf* 90b–3)

[47] *OEMC*, p. 129.

[48] *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R. K. Ashdowne, D. R. Howlett and R. E. Latham (Oxford, 2018), *s.v. provincia.*

[49] Cf. S. Keynes, 'Welsh Kings at Anglo-Saxon Royal Assemblies (928–55)', *Haskins Soc. Jnl* 26 (2014), 69–122.

[50] See discussion *OEMC*, pp. 128–9.

[51] B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1985) II, pp. 269–72.

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This phrase *swa wæter bebugeð* also occurs in *Andreas* 333, with the same meaning, and it is noteworthy that the very same verb *bebugeð* is used in this context in *The Menologium.*[52] The evidence for *swa* as a causal conjunction is less clear, and does not provide such obvious parallels as those above.[53] As such, it is much more likely that the phrase in *The Menologium* is a clause of place. Karasawa's translation of 'as far as' is effective in highlighting how this phrase emphasizes the breadth of the area under control of the Saxon king, but that this area is not unlimited. The text is more ambitious and less declaratory here than elsewhere. There is a suggestion that the authority of the Saxon king extends widely around the kingdoms of Britain and that this is a beneficial authority, under which one celebrates festivals at their proper dates, in accordance with the reckoning of wise ancient scholars. Yet the use of *swa* indicates that this authority has limits and is not absolute. In its ambition and pride in the Saxon king, the text also subtly admits the boundaries of his power.

The Menologium repeatedly emphasizes the English domination of Britain. This emphasis is achieved in a number of ways. Those dwelling on the island of Britain are presented as English-speaking Angles and Saxons (11–15a, 181–6a), and English ecclesiastical history is foregrounded and presented as being of primary importance throughout Britain (95b–106a, 228b–31). This allows for the elision of non-English peoples in Britain, and any idea of a smaller territorial England itself, which is never mentioned. *Bryten* appears to refer to the island of Britain here, as the use of *igbuende* suggests. It certainly does not refer to a specific Brittonic area, as Latin *Britannia* could. The poem's geography does not allow us to conclude whether its conception of the island of Britain included northern Scotland or not, but it is in any case a claim to a significantly larger unit than that settled by the English. *The Menologium* is highly successful in presenting such English domination of Britain as normal, natural, and unmarked. It is a thoroughly believable rhetoric, and one in which other late Old English poems partook, as I discuss below.

British Ambiguities: *Guthlac*, *The Metres of Boethius*, *The Seasons for Fasting*

As noted, the seven instances of *Bryten* in Old English poetry outside *The Menologium* are as follows: *Aldhelm* (5a), *The Battle of Brunanburh* (71b), *The Death of Edgar* (14a), *Guthlac A* (175a), *Guthlac B* (883b), *The Metres of Boethius: Metre 20* (99a), *The Seasons for Fasting* (56b). With the exception of the *Guthlac* poems, these can all be characterized as products of southern England from the tenth or eleventh centuries.

The contexts of the composition of *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* appear rather different from that of *The Menologium*, and so is their use of the term *Bryten*, although they have interesting parallels with one another.[54]

[52] Cf. *Panther* 6b; *Beowulf* 1223b.

[53] Mitchell, *Old English Syntax* II, 573–4.

[54] *Guthlac B* is generally attributed to Cynewulf by modern scholars, although the ending which would have contained his signature is missing. Dates for Cynewulf's *floruit* vary enormously (*The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. R. E. Bjork (Cambridge, MA, 2013), p. x) but he is often thought to have

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God wæs Guðlac! He in gæste bær
heofoncundne hyht, hæle geræhte
ecan lifes. Him wæs engel neah,
fæle freoðuweard, þam þe feara sum
mearclond gesæt. Þær he mongum wearð
bysen on Brytene, siþþan biorg gestah
eadig oretta, ondwiges heard.

Guthlac was good! He bore in his spirit a heavenly
hope, gained the salvation
of eternal life. An angel was near to him,
a faithful guardian of peace, for the one who as
one of the few occupied the borderland. There he
became an example to many in Britain, after the
blessed champion, fierce in resistance, ascended the
hill.

(*Guthlac A* 170–6)

Us secgað bec
hu Guðlac wearð þurh godes willan
eadig on Engle. He him ece geceas
meaht ond mundbyrd. Mære wurdon
his wundra geweorc wide ond side,
breme æfter burgum geond Bryten innan,
hu he monge oft þurh meaht godes
gehælde hygegeomre hefigra wita,
þe hine unsofte, adle gebundne,
sarge gesohtun of siðwegum,
freorigmode.

Books tell us
how Guthlac through God's desire became
blessed among the English. He chose eternal
power and protection for himself. His working of
miracles became famous far and wide, renowned
among the towns throughout Britain, how he often
through God's power healed many wretched ones of
heavy torments, who sought him roughly with care,
bound by illness,
from the travelling roads,
sad in mind.

(*Guthlac B* 878b–88a)

Both poems highlight Guthlac's fame throughout Britain, rather than a particular region thereof, although *Guthlac B* does also highlight his blessedness among the English, forming an implicit connection between *on Engle* 'among the English' (880a) and *geond Bryten innan* 'throughout Britain' (883b). The poems emphasize the breadth and importance of Guthlac's renown, but the references to Britain could also be linked to Guthlac's engagement with the Britons. As Lindy Brady has discussed, Felix's *Life of Guthlac*, the major source for *Guthlac B* and a potential, but uncertain, source for *Guthlac A*, mentions Guthlac's interactions with the Britons on multiple occasions.[55] While the poems do not explicitly name the Britons as the prose does, Guthlac's known connections with the Britons, as well as the English, may well be a motivating factor for emphasizing the importance of his cult throughout Britain. Felix's Life also refers to a fen *in meditullaneis Brittanniae* ('in the midland district of Britain'), translated in the Old English prose Life of Guthlac as *on Bretonelande*, highlighting how the Latin text could also have had an influence here.[56]

One of the most ambiguous instances of *Bryten* in Old English poetry occurs in the *Metres of Boethius* (*Metre 20*), where it may well not refer to Britain at all. The Old English Boethius was produced at some point between 890 and 950, and its prose translations of the Latin metres were later turned into Old English poetry.[57] *Metre 20* describes God's creation in great detail and variety, focusing

composed in Mercia between *c.* 750 and *c.* 850: cf. R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992), p. 368. *Guthlac A* appears linguistically earlier than *Guthlac B*: Fulk, *History*, pp. 399–402.

[55] L. Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 53–9; *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 108–110; *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 2nd ed., ed. B. J. Muir, 2 vols. (Exeter, 2000) II, 435.

[56] Text and translation from *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, p. 86; *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. P. Gonser (Heidelberg, 1909), p. 113.

[57] *The Old English Boethius: an Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009) I, 145–51.

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on the earth before moving to describe humanity. The term *Bretene* occurs in line 99a, amid a discussion of the four elements:

Hwæt, ðu þæm wættere wætum and cealdum	Lo, you established the earth firmly as a
foldan to flore fæste gesettest,	floor for the wet and cold water, because it
forðæm hit unstille æghwider wolde	restlessly would widely disperse everywhere
wide toscriðan wac and hnesce.	yielding and soft. It might not ever stand
Ne meahte hit on him selfum, soð ic geare wat,	firm on itself, I well know the truth,
æfre gestandan, ac hit sio eorðe hylt	but the earth holds it
and swelgeð eac be sumum dæle,	and swallows it as well in some part, so that
þæt hio siðþan mæg for ðæm sype weorðan	it may afterwards because of the absorption
geleht lyftum. Forðæm leaf and gærs	be moistened by airs. For that reason leaf
bræd geond Bretene, bloweð and groweð	and grass spread around Britain/broad lands,
eldum to are. Eorðe sio cealde	bloom and grow as a consolation for people.
brengð wæstma fela wundorlicra,	The cold earth brings many wondrous crops,
forðæm hio mid þæm wætere weorðað geþawened.	because it is washed with the water.
	(*Metre 20* 90–102)

In the ASPR text given here, *Bretene* is capitalized and taken as the proper noun. In Godden and Irvine's edition there is no such capitalization, and they translate *bretene* as 'spacious regions', the same interpretation as suggested in the *DOE*.[58] This latter interpretation certainly seems possible, as indicated by examples like *brytenrices weard* in *Azarias* (107b) and *brytengrundas* and *brytenwongas* in *Christ A* (357a, 380b).[59] The context here is very general, referring to the whole earth and its elements, and thus 'spacious regions' appears to fit better than the specificity of 'Britain'. It is also closer in sense to the equivalent section in the Old English prose translation which the poet versified.[60] If we were nevertheless to follow the less likely interpretation, and suppose that *bretene* does indeed mean 'Britain' here, then it lacks the obvious political charge of *The Menologium*, simply describing the greenery growing in Britain.

The Seasons for Fasting is a poem in some ways more similar to *The Menologium*, with which it is often brought into comparison, and, like *The Menologium*, *Seasons* has a powerful political focus. Now surviving only in Laurence Nowell's transcript of 1562, and missing its ending, *Seasons* was once found in the damaged manuscript British Library, Cotton Otho B. xi, with the relevant section of this codex having been produced at Winchester in the first half of the eleventh century.[61] It is similar in date to *The Menologium* (*c.* early eleventh century), being another example of late southern verse, and the similarities do not end there.[62] Mary Richards states that *Seasons for Fasting* and *The Menologium*

[58] *Old English Boethius*, ed. Godden and Irvine, I, 466; II, 150; *DOE s.v. bryten* (a).

[59] Cf. also the use of *brytencyninges beorn* in *The Fortunes of Men* (75a), apparently referring simply to a powerful king.

[60] The corresponding section of the prose reads: 'Ac seo eorðe hit helt [and] be sumum dæle swilgð and for þam sype heo bið geleht þæt hio grewð and blewð and westmas bringð'; 'But the earth holds it and swallows it in some part and because of the absorption it is moistened so that it flourishes and blooms and brings forth crops.' *The Old English Boethius*, ed. Godden and Irvine, I, 316.

[61] Gneuss-Lapidge 357, p. 280; *The Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting: a Critical Edition*, ed. M. P. Richards with C. B. Hilton (Morgantown, 2014), pp. 2–17.

[62] *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, ed. Richards with Hilton, p. 35.

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'share a focus on certain holy days of the liturgical calendar and a nationalistic emphasis on the observances and figures, especially Gregory the Great, important to England.'[63] *Seasons* also contains references to Britain or Brittonic peoples, but the way in which these are deployed suggests a rather different political focus to that found in *The Menologium.* Both references occur in the section of the poem concerning the Ember Dates controversy (lines 1–102). In England, the Ember Fasts, as Richards notes, 'were celebrated on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of designated weeks in late February or March, June, September, and December'.[64] The Ember Fasts were scheduled somewhat differently on the continent, and this became a significant issue following the Benedictine Revival, when continental usage appears to have started impacting on English usage.[65] In response, a number of documents were drawn up to prescribe the English dates, 'swa swa Sanctus Gregorius Angelcynne sylf hit gedihte'.[66]

The dates of the Ember Fasts were thus a source of considerable controversy in late pre-conquest England and are key to the British references in the poem. The first is as follows:[67]

Ofer þa Eastertid oþer fæsten	After Easter another festival is to be
ys to bremenne Brytena leodum	proclaimed to the people of the Britains (?)
mid gelicum lofe, þe **gelefen** hafað[68]	with similar praise, ...
on þære wucan þe æfter cumeð	on the week which comes after
þam sunnandæge þe geond sidne wang	the Sunday which priests around
Pentecostenes dæg preostas nemnað,	a wide land name the day of Pentecost,
on þam monþe, þæs þe me þinceð,	on the month, as it seems to me,
þe man Iunius gearum nemde.	which was called Junius a long time ago.
	(55–62)

Line 56b has traditionally been interpreted as meaning 'people(s) of Britain', but requires further attention. *Bryten* appears to refer to locations only, rather than Britons ('Wealas' or 'Bryttas'), as there are no clear examples of it referring to a people rather than a place.[69] The form ending in *-a* is found only here and in a manuscript of the Old English translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*,

[63] *Ibid.* p. 58.
[64] *Ibid.* p. 36.
[65] *Ibid.* p. 37.
[66] *Æþelred VI.* 23, quoted in *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, p. 38.
[67] The text is quoted from *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, ed. Richards with Hilton.
[68] The reading of Nowell's transcription ('þe gelesen hafað') appears to be corrupt. Richards emends to 'gelefen', translating 'those who have belief': *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, ed. Richards with Hilton, p. 105. Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems 1*, p. 403 emends to 'gelesu' and translates 'as it includes the readings'.
[69] Contra Leslie, who translates *Brytena leodum* as 'by the nations of the Britons': R. F. Leslie, 'Textual Notes on "The Seasons for Fasting"', *JEGP* 52 (1953), 555–8, at 556. *Brytene* in *The Battle of Brunanburh* has on occasion been translated as 'Britons' (having been similarly translated to *Britones* in the Latin rendering of the poem by William of Malmesbury), but there does not appear to be any justification for this: M. Livingston (ed.), *The Battle of Brunanburh: a Casebook* (Exeter, 2011), p. 64. Cf. I. Milfull and K. Thier, 'Anglo-Saxon Peceptions of Celtic Peoples', *England, Ireland, and the Insular World: Textual and Material Connections in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. Clayton, A. Jorgensen and J. Mullins (Tempe, AZ, 2017), pp. 199–223.

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where it is an error for *beterena.*[70] *Bryten* is a strong feminine ō-stem noun, and otherwise appears to occur in nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative singular forms, the last three all being *Brytene.*[71] There are three obvious possibilities to explain the form *Brytena* in *Seasons for Fasting*: it could be an error for *Brytene*, probably introduced by Nowell; it could be an otherwise unattested form of the genitive singular; it could be genitive plural. The first option is highly possible, given the large number of errors Nowell made elsewhere in his copy, particularly in inflexional endings, but cannot be proven.[72] The second is favoured by most scholars, without discussion.[73] Philologists have noted that while *-a* would be predicted in the genitive singular of ō-stem nouns, *-e* is the regular form (except for nouns with the suffix *-ung/-ing*).[74] Ō-stem nouns not ending in *-ung/-ing* with *-a* in the genitive singular are exceptionally rare.[75] Thus the use of a genuine genitive singular form *Brytena* here seems unlikely.

The final option 'of the Britains' may appear the oddest, but can be justified formally. This is the regular ending for the genitive plural in feminine ō-nouns. As noted above, early medieval writers knew of many Britains: *Britannia* could refer to Britain (including or excluding northern Scotland), to Brittany, or to other Brittonic regions.[76] The Old English Martyrology, possibly produced in Mercia in the ninth century, repeatedly refers to Britain as *ðas Brytene/ðisse Brytene* ('this Britain'), perhaps indicating an awareness of others.[77] As regards the phrase *Brytena leodum* here, it is easier and more common to take the dative plural *leodum* as 'to the people(s)', rather than 'by the people(s)'. Indeed, in context it appears that the former interpretation is encouraged. As noted, this text is concerned that continental influence on the Ember Dates be resisted, and that the correct English system be upheld. As such, it is particularly effective here to state that this date should be proclaimed to the Britons (especially the continential Bretons): perhaps these are the people of the Britains. This coheres with the arguments the poet makes

[70] *DOEC*, *s.v. brytena*; *Bischofs Waerferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. H. Hecht (Leipzig, 1900), p. 262.

[71] *DOEC*, *s.v. bryten*, *brytene*. A variant *breotone* and less common late spelling *britene* also occur. On ō-stem nouns, see A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 234–7; Hogg and Fulk, *Grammar of Old English* II, 28–32,

[72] In comparing the Old English Bede copied by Nowell from the same manuscript and still partially extant there, Raymond Grant notes twenty instances of Nowell changing <e> to <a>: R. Grant, 'Laurence Nowell's transcript of BM Cotton Otho B. xi', *ASE* 3 (1974), 111–24, at 118.

[73] *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, ed. Richards with Hilton, pp. 105 and 141; *Old English Shorter Poems 1*, ed. Jones, p. 161; Greeson, 'Two Old English Observance Poems', pp. 183 and 292; C. B. Hilton, Jr., 'An Edition and Study of the Old English "Seasons for Fasting"' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1983), p. 63.

[74] Hogg and Fulk, *Grammar of Old English* II, 30–1; cf. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, pp. 234–7.

[75] Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, pp. 234–7; Hogg and Fulk, *Grammar of Old English* II, 30–1.

[76] Plural *Brittaniae* is also used in Classical Latin to refer to Rome's provinces in Britain, a form we frequently find in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Dumville, 'Origins', p. 82.

[77] *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 64, 68, 190, 196; on dating, see pp. 1–10.

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thirty lines later that the instructions of the Bretons or the Franks should be ignored. Also noteworthy here is the focus on English (in the term *Pentecostenes dæg*) being widely spoken by priests, although this is not explicitly equated with a particular territory. Due to the inaccuracy of Nowell's transcription, it is difficult to be certain about the interpretation of *Brytena.* If *Brytena* is retained, there could be a particular focus on correcting the insular and continental Britons here. If it is an error for *Brytene*, the term could refer to various peoples living on the island of Britain. If **Brytene leodum* were translated as 'by the people of Britain' and taken to refer to the English specifically, paralleling the reference to English-speaking priests in lines 59b–60, then we could see an equivalence of those living in Britain with the English, as in *The Menologium.*

The second possible reference to Brittonic peoples also occurs in the section of the text concerned with the Ember Dates Controversy (1–102) at 88a:

Gif þe þonne secgen suþan cymene	If the Bretons or Franks,[78] come from the south,
[Brytta oþþe Franca,] þæt þu gebann sceole	then say to you, that you should hold any ordinance
her on eorþan ænig healdan,	in the land here,
þæs þe Moyses iu mælde to leodum,	according to what Moses said to people long ago,
na þu þæs andfeng æfre gewyrþe,	do not ever place value on accepting that,
ac þu þæt sylfe heald þæt þe suþan com	but yourself keep to that which came to you
from Romana rices hyrde,	from the south, from the guardian of the kingdom
Gregoriæ, gumena papa.	of the Romans, Gregory, pope of men.
	(87–94)

Here, then, we have a focus on upholding the English dates against contemporary continental influence. As part of this, the poem emphasizes the validity and authority of English Christianity. Unlike *The Menologium*, we do not have a geographic expansion of English Christianity and cultural normalcy here. Indeed, in *Seasons,* England exists and is referred to (98a; cf. 44b), without any clear reference to Britain. Both poems focus on *us*, here in this wide land, but the imagined land is not necessarily identical between them. The apparent focus on Bretons in *Seasons* is different from *The Menologium*, where continental peoples do not feature. Also unlike *The Menologium*, although English-speaking priests are presented as covering a wide area, there is no specific mapping of English Christianity and cultural normlacy onto Britain. Nevertheless, the validity and importance of these are emphasized. *Seasons* shares with *The Menologium* a focus on legitimising English ecclesiastical history and practice, and in both cases (but more explicitly in *Seasons*) emphasizes the superiority of this to the religious traditions of Brittonic peoples, and in *Seasons* continental peoples more widely. Due to the unreliability of the transcription, the presentation of the English in Britain in *The Seasons for*

[78] Line 88a is apparently corrupt, reading *brytt Franca* in Nowell's transcription. ASPR emends to *bryttan Franca* ('leaders of the Franks'); cf. Greeson, 'Two Old English Observance Poems', p. 185. I favour the emendation made by other editors to *Brytta oþþe Franca*, which is closer to the version of these lines printed by Wheelock: *Old English Poem Seasons for Fasting*, ed. Richards with Hilton, p. 120; *Old English Shorter Poems 1*, ed. Jones, p. 404; cf. K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), p. 55.

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Fasting is ultimately too ambiguous to decide whether it equates the English with the people in Britain or refers specifically to the Brittonic peoples, in Britain as well as the continent.

Bishops in Britain: *Aldhelm* and *The Death of Edgar*

Three of the five instances of *Bryten* in *The Menologium* have episcopal associations with Gregory, Augustine, and Canterbury, and it is revealing that such a connection between bishops and Britain is also found in *Aldhelm* and *The Death of Edgar*. *Biscop* and *Bryten* of course alliterate, but the connection between them appears to go further than this. Let us first take *The Death of Edgar*, a text surviving in manuscripts A, B and C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the last of which also contains the only copy of *The Menologium.* This poem was most likely composed shortly after the death of the king in 975.[79] The section which mentions Britain describes the death of Cyneweard, bishop of Wells:

And him tirfæst hæleð tyn nihtum ær of Brytene gewat, bisceop se goda, þurh gecyndne cræft, ðam wæs Cyneweard nama.	And ten nights previously the glorious man departed from Britain, the good bishop, through innate skill, whose name was Cyneweard.

(13–15)

This linking of bishops and Britain in an English context is found from Bede onwards, and we have already seen it in *The Menologium.*[80] George Molyneaux notes further the claims of the Archbishop of Canterbury to authority over all Britain in a range of seventh and eighth-century sources.[81] Although it became less prominent in the texts, this remained a concern in later periods, as indicated by S546, a grant by King Eadred to Canterbury Cathedral. This is of doubtful authenticity, but survives in a mid-tenth-century copy among other witnesses, and thus can in any case be examined with a mid-tenth-century context in mind.[82] Here, Odo, archbishop of Canterbury, is described as 'regni celestis super arua Brittannica claues preportans' ('carrying the keys of the heavenly kingdom above the British earth') and as *pater tocius Britannie* ('father of all Britain'). Thus the connection between bishops and Britain here, in *Aldhelm*, and most prominently in *The Menologium*, is part of this wider pattern of emphasizing Canterbury's claim to all Britain. Edgar is explicitly described as *Engla cyning* ('king of the English' 2a), with the poet playfully describing God as *Brego Engla* ('lord of angels' 36a).[83] Notably, this reference to *Brego Engla* is quickly followed by 'geaf eft blisse gehwæm / egbuendra' ('he [God] gave bliss to each of the island-dwellers'). As in *The Menologium*, but less obviously here,

[79] Cf. J. Carroll, '*Engla Waldend, Rex Admirabilis*: Poetic Representations of King Edgar', *RES* 58 (2007), 113–32, at 114.

[80] See below, p. 24 and above pp. 6–7.

[81] G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), p. 210; cf. Davies, *First English Empire*, pp. 37–8; see below p. 24.

[82] See https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/charter/546.html.

[83] Carroll, '*Engla Waldend*', pp. 124–5.

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there is an equation of the English and the island-dwellers, as well as a connection between Britain and an English bishop.[84]

Such an equation is more prominent in *Aldhelm*, a short bilingual poem in English and Latin (with some Greek vocabulary), surviving uniquely in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 326. This manuscript was produced at Canterbury in the late tenth or early eleventh century.[85] The circumstances of this poem's preservation as an insert between the contents list and beginning of Aldhelm's *Prosa de uirginitate* suggest it may have been composed by its scribe.[86] *Bretene* occurs in line 5a:

Þus me gesette *sanctus et iustus*	Thus composed for me the holy and just
beorn boca gleaw, *bonus auctor*,	man wise in books, good author,
Ealdelm, æþele sceop, *etiam fuit*	Aldhelm, noble poet, also was
ipselos on æðel[e] Angolsexna,	high in the homeland of the Anglo-Saxons
byscop on Bretene.	a bishop in Britain.
	(1–5a)

Here the word Britain is associated with Aldhelm's episcopal status as bishop of Sherborne. As noted above, the association between Britain and bishops may be due to Canterbury's claim to primacy over Britain. Yet even more striking than this here is the use of apposition in lines 4–5. The slip of variation allows Britain to be subtly equated with the homeland of the Anglo-Saxons, in a manner reminiscent of *The Menologium* equating the Angles and Saxons with those dwelling on the island (185). The poet emphasizes the idea that Britain is the homeland of the Anglo-Saxons, and again there is no mention of other peoples.[87] As with *The Menologium*, *Breten* in *Aldhelm* and *The Death of Edgar* appears to map on to the sense of *Britannia* as the island of Britain, including or excluding northern Scotland.

Britain and *The Battle of Brunanburh*

The remaining example of *Bryten* in the poetry, and that which perhaps resonates most strongly with *The Menologium*, is in *The Battle of Brunanburh*. *Brunanburh* occurs in manuscripts A, B, C (also containing *The Menologium*) and D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This poem celebrates the battle of 937 where Æthelstan and Edmund of Wessex overcame a combined force of multiple peoples. On the text's dating, there are two main schools of scholarship: it can be seen as a praise-poem composed shortly after the battle, or a somewhat later poem composed with its

[84] See above pp. 6–7.

[85] Gneuss-Lapidge 93, pp. 105–6.

[86] Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, p. 68; cf. F. C. Robinson, '"The Rewards of Piety": Two Old English Poems in their Manuscript Context', *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, ed. P. J. Gallacher and H. Damico (New York, 1989), pp. 193–200, at 196–8.

[87] Wilton, 'What Do We Mean' notes this as the only Old English poetic use of the compound 'Angolsexna', stating that this 'may ... refer to Mercia-Wessex, or, given the later date of the poem, it may be a reference to all of England' (438). The apposition of ' on æðel[e] Angolsexna' and 'on Bretene' is not discussed.

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Chronicle context in mind.[88] Sarah Foot, whose scholarship is fundamental to understanding this work, revises an earlier position in noting that 'this is a poem not only about the English people but about the realm of Britain.'[89] I certainly agree that *Brunanburh* concerns Britain, but my reading of the text here, and of its engagement with Britain, follows a somewhat different path.

Here Britain occurs at the very end of the text:

Ne wearð wæl mare	A greater slaughter of people slain
on þis eiglande æfre gieta	on this island had never yet occurred
folces gefylled beforan þissum	by the edges of swords before this,
sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,	according to what books tell us,
ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider	ancient authorities, since from the east
Engle and Seaxe up becoman,	Angles and Saxons came ashore here,
ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,	made for Britain over the broad sea,
wlance wigsmiþas, Wealas ofercoman,	proud war-smiths, overcame the Britons,
eorlas arhwate eard begeatan.	earls eager for glory acquired a land.
	(65b–73)

Britain occurs thrice here, in *on þis eiglande*, explicitly as *Brytene*, and finally implicitly as *eard.* No idea of England is mentioned in the poem, but there is a clear connection between *Engle and Seaxe*[90] ('Angles and Saxons'), who are praised as *wlance wigsmiþas* ('proud war-smiths') and Britain. Britain here cannot be separated from the English defeat of the Britons. In the first instance, it is linked to the slaughter at Brunanburh, presented as an heroic deed unparalleled in the history of the island since the principal act of obtaining dominion (also by the Angles and Saxons) centuries before.[91] Britain features only in the English claiming of it: the preterite phrases *Brytene sohtan*,[92] *Wealas ofercoman*, and *eard begeatan* are all in apposition with one another, this highlighting in particular that the *eard* ('land') the English acquired was Britain.[93] This celebrates the

[88] For a recent overview of the dating arguments, see A. Jorgensen, 'Reading Emotion in *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Neophilologus* 100 (2016), 663–76, at 669–71.

[89] S. Foot, 'Where English Becomes British: Rethinking Contexts for *Brunanburh*', *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. J. Barrow and A. Wareham (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 127–44, at 144; cf. S. Walker, 'A Context for "Brunanburh"?', *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. T. Reuter (London, 1992), pp. 21–39.

[90] It is noteworthy that only in *Brunanburh* 70a and *Menologium* 185b do we find the combination 'Engle and Seaxe' in the corpus of Old English, providing a further parallel between these texts. Note how the double reference here parallels the references to West-Saxons (20b) and Mercians (24b) earlier in the poem.

[91] Cf. Howe, *Migration*, pp. 30–1.

[92] This phrase notably also occurs in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, describing the coming of Hengest and Horsa (year 449, *gesohton Bretene*), the coming of Claudius (year 46, *Bretene lond gesohte*), and the coming of Julius Caesar (year 60 BC, *Bretenlond gesohte*). Note that two of the three instances are associated with a transfer of dominion: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS A*, ed. J. M. Bately, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 3 (Cambridge, 1986), 2, 4, 17. For variants on these passages, see D. Whitelock with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1961), pp. 5–10. Cf. the entries in versions D and E of the Chronicle for the year 979: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 6 (Cambridge, 1996), 47; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS E*, ed. S. Irvine, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7 (Cambridge, 2004), 60.

[93] Cf. P. Cavill, 'Kings, Peoples and Lands: the Rhetoric of *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Ideas of the World*, ed. Atherton, Karasawa and Leneghan (Turnhout, 2022), pp. 385–402, at 396.

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confirmation of English dominance at Brunanburh, but also back-dates it, suggesting that English possession of Britain goes all the way back to their first victories over the Britons.

With this reading of *Bryten* in mind, let us turn our attention to the rest of the poem. Æthelstan and Edmund do not fight Britons in this text, despite the likely presence of Britons at the historical battle.[94] The poem presents Æthelstan and Edmund as fighting against Scots, that is, Gaelic-speakers under Constantine of Alba (11a, 19b, 32a) and Norsemen from Dublin under Olaf Guthrithson (18b, 33b, 53a). These other peoples are presented as invading Britain and fleeing from it. The text is not tied to our understanding of the historical reality and there is no reference here to these other peoples submitting to Æthelstan and becoming part of his empire: rather they flee from his nation. This is obvious in the case of the Norsemen who explicitly flee back to Dublin over the sea, leaving the island (53–6). The case of Constantine of Alba is a little more complex: he flees *on his cyþþe norð* (38). Although this may seem like an example of another king in Britain remaining in Britain, as noted above, a number of texts from early medieval Britain (including some composed in the context of Brunanburh) view Scotland north of the Firth of Forth as separate from Britain.[95] This may well ultimately connect with Roman conceptions of Britain, with the Antonine Wall marking the northernmost frontier.[96] Utilizing this concept of Britain allows the imagined history of *The Battle of Brunanburh* to fall into place. The English have held Britain from an early stage, when dominion was transferred to them from the Britons through military conquest. Invaders arrive from outside Britain (over sea or from the north). The English defeat these invaders at Brunanburh and they flee away from Britain, with no transfer of dominion at this stage. This is why Æthelstan and Edmund are explicitly presented as defending their land: *land ealgodon.* The contemporary Britons naturally do not occur in this text as, in the poem's view, they already lost Britain centuries before.[97]

[94] On the inclusion of the Britons of Strathclyde in other sources, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 527.

[95] Thomas, *History*, pp. 28–31; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1988), p. 16.

[96] Thomas, *History*, p. 28; cf. the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 189: 'Seuerus ... Bretenlond mid dice begyrdde from sę oþ sę', *ASC* MS A, p. 9. For variants on this passage, see Whitelock with Douglas and Tucker, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 8.

[97] Cf. E. Tyler, 'England Between Empire and Nation in "The Battle of Brunanburh"', *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*, ed. A. Albin, M. C. Erler, T. O'Donnell, N. L. Paul and N. Rowe (New York, 2019), pp. 166–80, at 175. It has been suggested that the Britons are omitted to create symmetry between the West Saxons and Mercians and their two enemies, the Scots and Norsemen: T. Lawlor, 'Brunanburh: Craft and Art', *Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Francis A. Drumm*, ed. J. H. Dorenkamp (Worcester, MA, 1973), pp. 52–67; Jorgensen, 'Reading Emotion', pp. 670–1; P Cavill, 'Kings', pp. 393–4. Jorgensen suggests that the omission of the Britons could indicate a later composition date, more distant from the battle, whereas Cavill also highlights the relevance of English unity here: Jorgensen, 'Reading Emotion', pp. 670–1; Cavill, 'Kings', pp. 393–4. Bredehoft suggests rather that the presence of the Britons is hinted at by the poem's final reference to *Wealas* (72b): T. A. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, 2001), p. 101.

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The Battle of Brunanburh notably differs from the more imperial focus of the Latin *Carta dirige gressus* and Æthelweard's late tenth-century Latin *Chronicle*, which present Constantine as paying homage to Æthelstan.[98] Whereas certain scholars have emphasized imperium in *Brunanburh*, this appears rather more relevant to these Latin texts than to the vernacular.[99] Nobody pays homage to Æthelstan in *Brunanburh.* The Scottish and Norse attackers cease to exist in Britain by the end of the poem, and the Britons have long since ceased to exist. There is no place for other peoples in *Brunanburh*'s conception of Britain. The differences between *Brunanburh* and *The Menologium* and their spare prose equivalents also speak to expectations of what late Old English poets did when treating the issue of Britain in their verse.[100] There appears to be a common idea of history presented here, of longstanding and hegemonic English domination of Britain, with the elision of other ethnic groups having already taken place. This is a literary construct, and need not equate whatsoever with what we believe to be historical truth or the evidence of other types of texts, such as charters. In the case of *Brunanburh*, the modern historical discourse surrounding the battle is so strong that it has been difficult to read the poem on its own terms in the context of other late southern poems, which can help us understand the imagined history and community it presents.

Whereas the earlier use of *Bryten* in *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* may be linked to that saint's specific connection with the Britons, some clear patterns emerge from the tenth- and eleventh-century poems. *The Menologium*, *Aldhelm* and *The Death of Edgar* all connect Britain with bishops. Such a British focus in episcopal contexts appears to be connected (especially in the case of *The Menologium*) with Canterbury's claim to Britain as its archiepiscopal province, which, as scholars such as Molyneaux have highlighted, was not always clearly separate from the imperial ambitions of English kings.[101] Britain is used in conjunction with bishops as that island, the poets indicate, is the territory of the most important English bishop. *The Seasons for Fasting* alone does not appear to use the term *Bryten* to refer to the island (with or without northern Scotland), and appears focused at least as much on England as on any larger territory. *Seasons* is also the only Old English poem which may use *Bryten* to refer to specifically Brittonic areas, if plural *Brytena* is a genuine form. If this interpretation is correct, *Seasons* refers to plural Britains in order to emphasize the need for the Britons in particular to change their ways. Such use of *Bryten* to refer to Brittonic territories is avoided in the other poems,

[98] See *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962), p. 53; M. Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Athelstan', *ASE* 9 (1981), 61–98, at 90, although note the poem's reference to *ista/perfecta Saxonia* (3.1–2) and its ambiguous relationship with *Britanium/Bryttanium* (4.4, 5.2) in the text as emended by Lapidge. On the possible significance of the term *Saxonia*, see Foot, 'Where English Becomes British', p. 133, n. 23.

[99] Cf. Foot, 'Where English Becomes British', p. 144; Walker, 'Context'.

[100] The short prose accounts in versions E and F of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle do not mention Britain (year 937): *ASE MS E*, p. 55; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS F*, ed. P. S. Baker, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 8 (Cambridge, 2000), 79–80.

[101] Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 210.

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perhaps because it would highlight the special nominal connection between the Britons and the island. Yet *Seasons* does powerfully parallel *The Menologium* in its emphasis on the validity and rectitude of the traditions of English Christianity as opposed to those of other peoples. Like *The Menologium*, *Aldhelm* and *Brunanburh* do not simply indicate episcopal supremacy but rather English domination and normalcy throughout Britain. Britain is the homeland of the English (*Aldhelm* 4–5a), who are the island-dwellers (*Menologium* 185), and they have been dominant, the *Brunanburh* poet affirms, since they first made for Britain and overcame the Britons, with the victory at Brunanburh providing spectacular confirmation of this. Late Old English poetry thus articulated a confidence in the validity and supremacy of the English presence in Britain. *The Menologium* is unusual in its five-times repeated reference to Britain, and perhaps locating its composition at Canterbury, a place which the poet is keen to emphasize and which had a particular episcopal concern with Britain, might explain this. Yet *The Menologium* also stands out in the element of doubt and plurality introduced in the final lines of the text. Although the ways of the English are valid and widespread, the poem, unlike any other here discussed, appears to admit of multiple kingdoms in Britain and that the rule of the king of the Saxons, though vast, does not necessarily cover all of them.

Conclusion: on English Britain

In a rightly celebrated article, George Molyneaux discusses an array of sources, showing how certain tenth-century English kings are presented as kings of Britain and explaining possible reasons for this.[102] As indicated above, a number of documents notably highlight the English king's overlordship of a multi-ethnic island. This is even true of the poetic *Death of Edward* (1065), which, while it does not mention Britain explicitly, does present Edward as having ruled over multiple peoples, these being invoked to celebrate the breadth of his power.[103] The Old English poems discussed here, other than those of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, have received little attention from historians of early medieval England, and are not mentioned in Molyneaux's article, nor in Rees Davies' highly influential *First English Empire.* Yet it is worth considering how they contribute to and complicate presentations of Britain in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The poems stand out in presenting Britain as English, rather than simply subject to the overlordship of the king of the English. Why is this the case? The audience for these poems is unlikely to be identical with that of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, who may well have had one eye on a Welsh readership and who, as mentioned above, presents the king as protector of all Christians in Britain, including the Britons. Unlike with

[102] Molyneaux, 'Why'.

[103] See Leneghan, 'End', p. 423; Trilling, *Aesthetics*, p. 210. Note the poem's reference to *deore rice/ Engla landes* 'the dear kingdom of England' in lines 19b–20a.

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charters, nothing needs to be agreed in these poems and they do not have explicit parties and witnesses. They have the freedom to include and exclude whatever best suits their purpose.

But can we trace a pre-existing tradition upon which these poets may have been building? As discussed above, the framework of an English-dominated Britain is already provided by Bede, with the English as God's chosen people in Britain. As well as providing a list of kings who ruled all or almost all of the peoples of Britain (called *Bretwaldas* in later vernacular texts), Bede and others also advocate English ecclesiastical supremacy, presenting the Archbishop of Canterbury as Archbishop of Britain.[104] Bede's history remained one of the most well-known works in pre-conquest England and was translated into Old English in the late ninth or early tenth century.[105] Bede was also not alone in highlighting the overwhelming importance of a *gens Anglorum* in Britain: Alcuin's letters emphasize further still the connection of the English with Britain in its entirety.[106] These sources generally do not go as far as some of the poems discussed here in presenting an English Britain occupied by the English alone, but might be seen as planting the seeds for such a model.

Outside poetry, we also find stronger evidence for this model from the late ninth-century onwards, when English hegemony over the island was often substantial.[107] Thus a will from the reign of Alfred the Great states 'Ond sio ðis lond gewriten 7 unbefliten efter Eadredes dege in Aelfredes rehtmeodrencynn ða hwile þe fulwihte sio on Angelcynnes ealonde' ('And let this estate be ascribed and without dispute after Eadred's day to Ælfred's direct maternal kin, as long as there be baptism on the English people's island.').[108] Æthelweard's late tenth-century adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle claims

[104] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Colgrave and Mynors), bk. II, chs. 3–4; bk. II, ch. 5; bk. IV, ch. 17. See P. Wormald, 'Bede, the bretwaldas and the *Gens Anglorum*', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald, D. A. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129; E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 1–63; C. Erdmann, *Forschungen zur politischen Ideenwelt des Frühmittelalters* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 5–7; N. Brooks, *Bede and the English*, Jarrow Lecture 1999 ([Jarrow, 2000]), 33; Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 35–41; Foot, 'Where English Becomes British', pp. 139–40; Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 210. Molyneaux notes that '[l]inked to such royal and archiepiscopal titles may well have been a belief in some circles that the English had a right to the entire landmass', citing S1508 and Æthelweard's *Chronicle.* As noted by Molyneaux (p. 210), Bede does refer to Britain as 'our island', although he does not do so frequently: Bede, *De locis sanctis* (CPL 2333, ch. 19), 'nostram, id est britaniorum, insulam'; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Colgrave and Mynors), bk. V, ch. 24), 'Historiam ecclesiasticam nostrae insulae ac gentis'.

[105] *Old English Version*, ed. Miller. For an overview of the Old English translation's treatment of the Britons and the English, in comparison with Bede's original, see: A. Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum *in its Historical and Cultural Context* (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 308–82. Bede's focus on the supremacy of the English Church over Britain is retained: Lemke, *Old English Translation*, p. 339.

[106] Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 42–3. Brooks detects the influence of Alcuin's letters on the focus on the English and the island of Britain in a common ninth-century charter formula: Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 45–6. For further relevant sources, see Brooks, 'English Identity', p. 44.

[107] Cf. Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 47–51; Foot, 'Making'.

[108] S1508, text and translation from https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/charter/1508.html.

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that Britain is now called *Anglia*, following the name of the victors.[109] Ælfric is even more striking in depicting Diocletian's persecution as coming to *engla lande* in his life of St Alban, before the *adventus Saxonum*.[110] These texts, which appear to equate Britain with the land of the English, are by no means representative of all pre-conquest English representations of Britain in Old English prose and Latin. As Molyneaux has shown, there are many references to a multi-ethnic realm under the overlordship of the English king, and the model presented in this article was one of a number of perhaps competing ways in which the English envisaged their relationship with Britain, which of course varies over time. Nevertheless, the references here highlight that the representation of Britain in Old English poetic tradition was not wholly isolated, and also formed a vein in late pre-conquest vernacular prose and Latin works. It is beyond the scope of this article to ascertain how prominent such an ideology was. Text-type appears to be significant and vernacular poetry was perhaps particularly well-placed to enable this model, more so than legal texts. However, the fact that this tradition of an English Britain appears in a variety of texts, in different contexts from at least the ninth century onwards, suggests it was a worldview more widespread than that of a few closely networked authors. An English king terming himself *Rex Britanniae* could therefore be presenting himself as overlord of a multi-ethnic dominion but might equally be projecting himself as an English king over an English land called Britain: the other terms associated with the king in a given text need to be closely examined to determine which is more likely.

A final comparison may further highlight the achievement of late Old English poetry in its construction of an unmarked English Britain. Perhaps the most bloodthirsty text surviving from tenth-century Britain is the Welsh *Armes Prydein Vawr* ('Great Prophecy of Britain').[111] This poem shocks modern readers with its brutal presentation of the Welsh and their allies massacring the English and exiling them from the island of Britain. Yet *Armes Prydein* never pretends that the Britons actually control all Britain or are the only people currently dwelling there. As such, the claims of a poem like *The Menologium* are in fact bolder, and more provocative. It takes a huge rhetorical effort to conceal this. Perhaps the emphatically multi-ethnic *Armes Prydein* was reacting against just such rhetoric.[112] If so, texts assuming (and creating) a monocultural English *us* as an audience, like some of these poems, may nevertheless have reached unanticipated readers.

The late Old English poetic presentation of Britain's history can, in part, be summarized thus: Britain is English, being occupied entirely by the English, and has been so since the English first arrived and overcame the Britons.

[109] *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, p. 9; cf. Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 49–50. Note, as discussed above, that Æthelweard presents the victory at Brunanburh rather differently from the Old English poem.

[110] *Old English Lives of Saints II: Ælfric*, ed. M. Clayton and J. Mullins (Cambridge, MA, 2019), p. 174.

[111] *Armes Prydein*, ed. Williams.

[112] On *Armes Prydein* responding to models of rulership of Britain, see R. Thomas and D. Callander, 'Reading Asser in Early Medieval Wales: the Evidence of *Armes Prydein Vawr*', *ASE* 46 (2017), 115–145.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ean.2025.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

English too, indeed especially so, is the Church in Britain, ever since the arrival of the Augustinian mission to establish the head of Christianity in Britain at Canterbury. English settlement of the island was much less complete than such a framework allowed. This can create tension in the texts, as we see in the final *Brytenricu* of *The Menologium.* Nevertheless, the framework would have helped enable audiences to feel comfortable and legitimate where they lived. As such, this model can be productively compared with other examples of migrations with transfer of dominion, where literature has acted to legitimise.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to many scholars for their support with this article over the long period of its composition, including Rebecca Thomas, Richard Dance, Harriet Soper and the editors and peer-reviewers of EMEN, as well as the audience of the 21st Biennial Conference of the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England, where I presented an earlier version of this work. None of these other scholars necessarily shares the views set out here and all errors remain my own.

Cite this article: Callander, David. 2025. '*On Brytene*: Late Old English Poetry and Nation.' *Early Medieval England and its Neighbours* **51**, e9, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/ean.2025.1