

**Reassessing Bede: Power and Identity in fourth- to eighth-century Britain,  
focusing on Northumbria.**

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**Author's declaration**

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Chapter 1- Introduction

### 1.1 Why Bede?

This thesis is probably best described as a study of the historiography of the period beginning in the mid/late fourth century to the mid-seventh century (broadly c. 375-650) in the British Isles, in particular the area between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall. This period has been variously called: Anglo-Saxon, the Dark Ages, sub-Roman, post-Roman, Late Antique, Early Medieval and the Age of Arthur. All of these terms have difficulties associated with their use which will be elucidated in the discussion of terminology later in the introduction. Despite the difficulty naming the period, it is foundational in the modern understanding of the origin of modern insular national identities. The English national curriculum for history sets out as one of its aims:

know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day: how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world.<sup>1</sup>

It suggests that for the period 375-650 students explore: 'the Roman withdrawal from Britain in c. AD 410 and the fall of the western Roman Empire, Scots invasions from Ireland to north Britain (now Scotland), Anglo-Saxon invasions, settlements and kingdoms ... Christian conversion – Canterbury, Iona and Lindisfarne.'<sup>2</sup> Essentially the KS2 curriculum for the period 375-650 is the study of the major themes of the first two Books of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* explored as a 'coherent, chronological narrative.'

The contemporary sources for this period are light on information. Gildas (writing in the early/mid-sixth century) describes the invitation to a group of warriors that he describes as Saxon to settle in modern England in exchange for fighting off incursions from the Picts and Scots, the rebellion of the Saxons against the authority of the British elite and a protracted war, with a period of peace, following the battle of *Mons Badonicus*.<sup>3</sup> At this point Gildas's historical section ceases and his work moves into a criticism of the time in which he lived. Bede builds on the historical description outlined by Gildas and adds further details, continuing the narrative to include the establishment of kingdoms by Gildas's rebellious Saxons and the settlement and kingdom building of other Germanic-speaking

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education (2013), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (2013), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, §§23–26, ed. Giles (1841a). Hereafter *DEB*.

migrants whom he names as Angles and Jutes,<sup>4</sup> up to the beginning of the conversion of these kingdoms by a series of missions from Rome. The first of these missions was by St. Augustine in AD 597. From the national curriculum for history in England it is possible to see how entrenched Bede's work is within modern historical thought. A very recent Book of popular history by Max Adams describes Bede as:

A towering intellect of the Early Medieval world, the Venerable Bede. This erudite and curious monk of Jarrow, on the muddy banks of the River Tyne, who knew almost all that could be known of the world in his own time, set out to chronicle how Anglo-Saxon kings had been chosen by God to bring about a single, universal church and people [...] Bede's story is persuasive – in truth it is the only credible narrative to survive from the crucible of Early Medieval Britain.<sup>5</sup>

This entrenchment is perhaps not as justified as its position at the centre of the curriculum suggests. Recent archaeology is producing challenges of interpretation that cannot be explained by adherence to the narrative outlined above. This thesis is intended to explore how Bede's narratives have permeated the study of the period AD 375-650 and ways in which this is being challenged, and indeed challenging some of the positions held as a result of the reading of this period of history through a Bedan lens. This study is not limited in its application of either literary or archaeological evidence to the study of the period but believes that both should be used alongside each other to paint as detailed a picture as possible. That said, this thesis treats Bede's impact on each discipline separately as Bede's continued predominance differs according to the discipline.

This thesis is not a criticism of Bede's work, which is wide ranging and a mine of information, particularly for students of the seventh century. It is a criticism of the uncritical way in which the information contained in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* has been used as the basis of assumptions which have permeated the study of the period AD 375-650. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight and critique some of these assumptions and demonstrate how dependant modern historiography is on them.<sup>6</sup> It is hoped that identifying these assumptions and their origins will allow historiography to explore other explanations for how some of the earliest phases of the history of

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<sup>4</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, book 1, ch. 15, ed. Plummer (1896). Hereafter *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

<sup>5</sup> Adams (2021), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> See: Reece (1988) for a discussion of the place of myth in the foundation of archaeological study; Harland (2017), p. 25 gives a useful series of examples as to how some Bedan narratives have become axiomatic.

the modern countries of England and Wales came to be shaped. This thesis is part of a wider trend of rethinking the written sources on the basis of the archaeological picture, and in many places represents a synthesis of the hard work of others in breaking down some of the existing narratives and challenging the written sources. This thesis brings together existing work on the archaeology of the fourth to the seventh century and insular Latin and Welsh written sources in a new way and uses them to challenge chronologies and narratives derived from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Part of the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how difficult it is to view the history of Britain and in particular the fourth to the seventh century 'as a coherent, chronological narrative,' as the curriculum aims to do.

## **1.2 Geographical scope**

This thesis is largely concerned with the impact of Bede on the historiography of the fourth to seventh century. Whilst Bede is concerned with all areas in which his English-speaking population represented the dominant elite, an area of specific focus for the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira and their seventh-century successor, the kingdom of Northumbria. As such this thesis maintains a geographical focus on the region north of the River Humber and mostly south of Hadrian's Wall, in part because studies of these centuries tend to focus more often on the South leaving the evidence of the North largely un-synthesised,<sup>7</sup> but also to limit the scope of the study and allow more in-depth study. Evidence from outside my focal region is generally used for comparison and to cast light on a northern context.

## **1.3 Terminology**

The study of the period from the beginning of the fifth century to the mid-seventh century, in what is now known as England, is fraught with terminological difficulty, particularly for those seeking to diverge from the narratives that have come to form part of the national consciousness. Following Bede's narrative there has been seen to be a divide between the peoples of Britain and in particular those who were deemed by the narrative to be the descendants of the native inhabitants of Britain and those who were said to be Germanic-speaking migrants or the descendants of Germanic-speaking migrants. Even whilst writing this thesis, which is critical of Bede's narratives, it is difficult to escape Bede's terminological framework. As such, when discussing those groups or the populations

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<sup>7</sup> See Higham (1984) for an attempt to consider the region as a whole. This work treats our period in a single fifty-page chapter; see also Higham (1993).

of areas which Bede deemed to be native to Britain, discussion is framed in terms of the Britons or the Welsh (this is generally used when referring to the population of the area that is now known as Wales or discussing literature which is believed to be composed in this geographic area or in the Welsh language). Bede's migrant population is generally referred to as Anglo-Saxon in the historiography of the period, Bede describes them as belonging to three Germanic-speaking tribes: the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, Bede introduced notions of an ethnic divide amongst the peoples of Britain. This thesis, in particular chapter 4, conjectures that, amongst archaeologists in particular, ethnicity is frequently used as a proxy for race and the differences that are described as ethnic differences are seen as evidence for genetic difference. The perceived importance of the connection between ethnicity and genetics can be seen in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* which places genetics at the centre of its definition of ethnicity: 'The ascription, or claim, to belong to a particular cultural group on the basis of genetics, language, or other cultural manifestations.'<sup>9</sup> However, this genetic link is by no means universal and others stress that perception of a shared heritage outweighs an actual genetic link in determining ethnicity. Whilst defining ethnic identity and its usage within the field of archaeology in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Diaz-Andreu states:

Ethnicity will be defined here as that aspect of a person's self-conceptualization and his or her conceptualization by other individuals that results from identification with one or more broader groups in opposition to others, on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation or common descent (Jones 1997). Not all archaeologists, however, would agree with this definition. It does not focus on the ethnic group in itself as something objective and describable, as many archaeologists would like. Far from it, the definition provided here stresses perception and, although it does not intend to deny commonalities among the members of the same group, it does not consider them essential for the characterization of an ethnic group.<sup>10</sup>

The most important element of this distinction is that a person living in Britain in the fifth, sixth or seventh century could very easily have had Celtic-speaking ancestors and still identified as Anglian, used material culture which had continental parallels, disposed of their dead in a manner not used in the west of Britain and spoken a Germanic language. Despite this, some discourses around this

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<sup>8</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Darvill (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Diaz-Andreu (2001), pp. 4817–4821.

subject have sought to find a genetic element to explain difference between the practices and languages in the East and West of Britain. Defining issues around the use of Anglo-Saxon in historiography, David Wilton has stated:

The term is an identity label associated with whiteness and is often the self-identification preferred by white supremacists. While few, if any, professional medievalists today would associate themselves with such racist views, the continued use of Anglo-Saxon by those in the field perpetuates and lends legitimacy to those views. Furthermore, by continuing to use it we place the literary and historical study of the period into a silo of national identity that is also defined by origins, race, and ethnicity.<sup>11</sup>

Whilst the above issues are valid reasons to avoid the use of racially loaded terms such as *Anglo-Saxon*, the primary reason for the avoidance of their use in this thesis is due to the belief, outlined here, that their use is incorrect and that notions of migration and ethnically based divisions between groups in the British Isles are exaggerated by Bede's narrative and its continued application to modern historiography. As such this thesis will avoid (where possible) using ethnically charged language; terms such as Anglo-Saxon, Angles, Saxons, and Germanic shall primarily be used in reference to the opinions of others, whether as part of modern historiography or in reference to groups in historical texts, rather than when formulating the author's own position. If a need to discuss the presence of migrants arises, where others would historically have referred to groups in terms such as Anglo-Saxon, this thesis will discuss the difference between areas and groups of people in terms of language and geography. In terms of material culture, the use of ethnic labels for specific types is difficult to escape, especially as labels for material culture types for the fifth to the seventh century are often framed historiographically in ethnic terms. As chapter 4 aims to demonstrate, particularly when discussing the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, ethnic labels are frequently used as a proxy for race. That is to say, where ethnic labels are used, they are frequently employed to demonstrate or at least imply the descent of those labelled rather than the cultural practices employed by the individuals or the group. Particular examples of this include the use of Anglian, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic to describe burial practices and the employment of these practices to imply the genetic make-up, continental origins or the descent of the individuals buried, ignoring that people who had grown up speaking a Celtic language may have adopted a Germanic

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<sup>11</sup> Wilton (2020), pp. 425–454. See also Harris (2003), p. 21. A counter has been made by some in the academic community arguing for the necessity of the use of Anglo-Saxon-based terminology. This position has been rebutted by some: Howard Williams has argued against the removal of the term from academia; see Williams (2020).

language, burial practices and material culture for any number of reasons, not least because these represented the prestige practices and culture of the time in the area that they lived. Where ethnic labels have been applied historiographically to describe types of material culture, these labels will continue to be applied to avoid unnecessary confusion, although elements of the discussion will challenge the use of these as ethnic markers.

A significant difficulty that arises when considering the fourth century to the seventh century is the application of periods to the discussion. Almost all terms used to describe or periodise the middle of the first millennium create difficulties and are loaded with value judgements and, perhaps unforeseen, implications. For example to call the period sub-Roman is to imply that the culture of this time both mimics that of the Roman rule of Britain but also is inferior to it, a viewpoint which risks comparison to post-colonial experiences (an issue shared with the use of post-Roman); to describe the period as early medieval suggests that its value is as a stepping stone to later parts of the medieval period (which has its own troubles) and ignores the lasting impact of Roman rule on the British provinces; Anglo-Saxon also ignores elements of continuity and excludes the other peoples of the British Isles like the Picts, Scots and Britons/Welsh (as do fudges of this term such as early English); the contrary, late antique, ignores the contribution of Continental culture associated with Germanic-speaking peoples on the island whilst Dark Age suggests that nothing of value is known; finally, to describe the period as the Age of Arthur suggests that the only element of value is the existence of a (possibly fictional) character about which very little is known and conflates the period with anachronistic twelfth- and thirteenth-century French notions of chivalry and courtly romance. The notion of a divide between the culture, economy, and society of the fourth century and the following three centuries has created barriers to understanding that has at times led to a truncation of chronology.<sup>12</sup> In order to avoid truncation and value judgements, where possible this thesis will express the periods in terms of time labels, such as the centuries (or groups of centuries) in which events occurred.

#### **1.4 Chapter summary**

This thesis is broadly divided into three parts. The first part of this thesis considers Bede's impact on historical or literary study of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, whilst the second part considers how his narratives have impacted the archaeological study of the same period. The thesis explores the impact on each of these disciplines separately but as part of the same phenomenon, drawing on

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<sup>12</sup> Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Robin Fleming have discussed this difficulty in relation to categorising pottery. See Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Fleming (2016).

the evidence of both, where possible, to create the fullest picture possible. The third part of this thesis explores the potential for new lines of enquiry if the study of this period occurs without the restrictive parameters that adherence to Bede's narrative has created.

Chapter 2 begins what could be described as the historical or literary section of the thesis by asking 'why does the year 410 occupy such a prominent position in the historiography of the ending of Roman rule in Britain?' The year AD 410 marks the end of Roman rule in Britain in the popular understanding of the period. This is not simply a general understanding (a narrative that exists in popular imagination), but the position expounded by several reputable public sources of information. Despite significant support and growing evidence for elements of continuity, or continuity as a whole,<sup>13</sup> the BBC history website,<sup>14</sup> English Heritage website<sup>15</sup> and even the English national curriculum for Key Stage 2 history<sup>16</sup> have AD 410 marking the end of the Roman period in Britain. Whilst it may be deemed that this is representative of public institutions being behind the curve in relation to academic thought, even very recent academic works hold firm to this date. Examples of this include Max Adams, whose February 2021 publication 'The First Kingdom' stated 'after 410 no imperial administration functioned in the province,'<sup>17</sup> demonstrating the hold that the 410 narrative has on not only public but the academic imagination. This chapter is intended to demonstrate that the year 410 is an arbitrary and unhelpful date in the discussion of the fifth-century relationship between Britain and the Roman Empire. Prior to the year AD 410, there are several periods in which the Britons acted separately from the central authority in Rome. For example, between 383 and 388 a usurper emperor (Magnus Maximus), raised to the purple in Britain, governed Britannia and Gaul, whilst Valentinian II ruled the rest of the Western Empire and Theodosius I ruled the Eastern Empire. Between AD 407 and AD 411 Britain raised three more usurpers, Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III, who also governed Britain separately from the legitimate emperor based in Italy. As well as this, beyond AD 410 there are several examples of the British provinces accepting Roman authority figures, e.g. Germanus of Auxerre's visits to Britain in AD 429 and a second visit sometime between AD 430 and his death in AD 448, during which he

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Esmonde-Cleary (2014), pp. 1–12; Collins and Gerrard (2004).

<sup>14</sup> BBC History (2011).

<sup>15</sup> English Heritage [n.d.].

<sup>16</sup> Department for Education (2013), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Adams (2021), p. 91.



engaged with people who were said to have Roman power<sup>18</sup> and led an army of Britons,<sup>19</sup> and applied the AD 418 Edict of Honorius in removing Pelagian bishops from Britain for heresy,<sup>20</sup> or even an appeal for Roman military support recorded by Gildas as the ‘groans of the Britons’<sup>21</sup> in the sixth-century text *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*. This chapter looks for a contemporary literary basis for the consideration of 410 as the end of Roman rule. Through an examination of the contemporary, or near contemporary, sources for the fifth century it is shown that there is little to suggest that the fifth-century inhabitants of Britain or the Western Empire considered the Roman rule of Britain to have ended in 410. The first source from the Western Empire to date the end of Roman Britain to 410 was Bede. This chapter examines how Bede could have come to the conclusion that 410 was a date of importance. This chapter argues that Bede chose the year 410 due to its association with the sacking of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth partly and a desire to separate the Britons from Roman authority prior to his *adventus Saxonum* in order to facilitate the ethnogenesis of his *gens Anglorum*. This chapter also demonstrates how Bede’s linking of these events have incorrectly resulted in some historians drawing a causal link between the two, something which has been exacerbated by the suggestion that the Rescript of Honorius is addressed to the cities of Britain rather than Bruttium in Italy.

Chapter 3 considers the impact of Bede on the modern reading of early Welsh history and also how the medieval Welsh wrote their own history. This chapter initially considers the difficulty of dating early Welsh praise poetry. Following Oliver Padel,<sup>22</sup> this chapter explores the potential implications for a ninth-century context for the composition of the poetry of Taliesin and Aneirin. It argues that if this poetry was composed in the ninth century, then a likely context for its composition was as part of a Venedotian response to Bede’s criticisms of the Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in a milieu characterised by the authorship of the decidedly pro-British *Historia Brittonum*. As such, this chapter examines Bede’s influence on British historiography to the extent that his work was at the heart of

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<sup>18</sup> A figure who had tribunician power; see Constantius of Lyon, *Vita Germani*, ch. 15, ed. Hoare (1954). Hereafter *Vita Germani*.

<sup>19</sup> The alleluia victory: *Vita Germani*, ch. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Markus (1989), p. 214; *Vita Germani*, ch. 27.

<sup>21</sup> *DEB*, §20.

<sup>22</sup> Padel (2013), pp. 115–153.

the understanding of the middle of the first millennium even in Wales, even as early as the ninth century.

Chapter 4 begins the archaeologically focussed section of the thesis. This chapter considers the Anglo-Saxon paradigm and its application to the archaeological study of burials in the third to seventh centuries. At the centre of the chapter is Bede's narrative around the arrival of Germanic-speaking migrants to the east of Britain in the fifth century and a historiographical acceptance of a divide between this population and a 'native-British' population. The chapter considers how archaeologists reading Bede have sought evidence of his narrative in the archaeology of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, and how this has become simplified into seeking an ethnic divide in the material culture and burial practices of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. This chapter explores how attempts to write archaeological narratives with reference to Bede and ethnicity have constrained the interpretation of burial and material culture in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries; it does not intend to create a new narrative but seeks to create a space for new narratives to be studied by clearing existing assumptions. This chapter considers multiple methods of dating features of first-millennium burial archaeology and material culture and their over-reliance on Bedan narratives of ethnicity. It begins by exploring the difficulties of typology as a method of dating, by looking at metalwork. It uses crossbow and cruciform brooches as a casework of the problem of assigning ethnicity to a type of material culture and explores how current research is challenging cruciform brooches as a type of 'Germanic' metalwork and the possibility of its evolution from third- and fourth-century crossbow brooches and their association with positions of status in Roman contexts and the likelihood of this continued association beyond the fifth century. The chapter argues that the use of cruciform brooches in fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century burial cannot be wholly explained in terms of ethnicity: it argues that they denoted status, and as a result of this association to status they may also have become an accidental proxy for ethnicity but to view them as solely as a vehicle of ethnicity would be a mistake. The chapter then considers the difficulties associated with more scientific methodologies. It particularly focusses on modern DNA studies; it argues that, following a Bedan narrative, these studies look for evidence of mass migration. This chapter argues that if DNA evidence is used to look for evidence of migration, we will find it, because populations and genes move/shift. The chapter also argues that this creates a circular argument, in which the notion that the population remains fixed is used as evidence for mass movement, which is exacerbated by a flawed use of Bede as a historical framework. This chapter explores the difficulty of attempting to delineate between a 'Roman' and a 'Post-Roman' burial practice for Britain. Using a

hitherto under-utilised dataset and methodology from Elizabeth O'Brien,<sup>23</sup> it considers British burial types in the third and fourth centuries and how attempts to establish a third- and fourth-century (late Roman or Christian) norm and measure divergence from it are faulty and the data set skewed by a small number of large urban cemeteries in the south of England. After demonstrating the lack of a universal norm in burial alignment and type in the third and fourth century, the chapter then considers the cemetery at West Heslerton on the North Sea coast in North Yorkshire as a way of demonstrating how much difference there can be from what is considered the norm for the fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century burial in areas and at times where the population would be expected to adhere to ethnically defined burial practices (if such practices existed). The combination of this case study and the study of third- and fourth-century burials further demonstrate the difficulty of divining ethnicity, or seeking evidence of ethnic practices from burials prior to, and after the supposed fifth-century watershed.

Chapter 5 considers how far narratives surrounding the ethnogenesis of the English and Bede's narratives around the *Adventus Saxonum* have impacted the archaeological study of the urban situation in Britain in the centuries after the beginning of the fifth century. This chapter uses a series of case studies across the north of Modern England and examines what elements of their fourth and fifth-century development, and use, could allow an insight into any continuity at these sites. Their treatment in the historiographical tradition is also examined in order to demonstrate the influence that Bede's writing has had on modern (and slightly less modern) understandings of British urban spaces after the end of the fourth century. This chapter considers the post- fourth-century literary traditions and archaeological record in relation to York, Carlisle and Catterick. In this chapter, comparisons are made with Baldock and Yeavinger, in a bid to explore the new role played by towns in the political landscape of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. This chapter assumes this new political landscape differs from that of the fourth century due to the absence of the economic impetus of the Roman economic system, the absence of an economic necessity created by a need to supply a large standing military and the absence of mass production of goods for sale. A comparison is made between the treatment of York and Wroxeter by modern historiography as a way of exploring the psycho-geography of the British provinces in the light of Bede's narratives.

Chapter 6<sup>24</sup> diverges from the Bede-centred investigations of the previous chapters and considers mechanisms by which Roman centres of power could have been maintained without the legitimising

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<sup>23</sup> O'Brien (1999).

<sup>24</sup> Chapter six has been published, in part, elsewhere: Gorton (2020).

power of the authority of Rome, and the threat of Rome's military capability to enforce behaviour. In part, this is to demonstrate the opportunities available to develop our understanding without the limiting application of Bede's narratives of collapse and abandonment. This chapter considers a thesis developed by James Gerrard,<sup>25</sup> which suggests how some fourth-century Villa estates in the south of modern England became seats of power in their own right in the fifth century, and applies it to the north of modern England. Gerrard's model suggests that in the economic instability of the fifth century, elite figures brought processing features, like corn driers, that were previously kept at the edge of villa estates into the centre of the estates in order to bring them under their direct supervision and consolidate their position. This chapter asks how far the patterns of consolidation as observed by Gerrard at southern villa sites, such as the movement of food processing structures into the centre of villa estates, are mirrored at Roman fort sites in the North and whether it is possible to identify the same attempts by elite figures to consolidate their position through more direct supervision. This chapter considers signs of food consolidation, whether butchery or storage and processing, and the movement of industry, such as iron mongering, into spaces under the direct oversight of those in charge of the forts. In order to do this, the chapter makes several case studies looking for patterns of consolidation at the Dere Street fort of Binchester in County Durham as well as the Hadrian's Wall forts of Vindolanda and Birdoswald. This chapter also applies Gerrard's model to a northern villa site, at Ingleby Barwick, as a means of testing the suitability of the criteria for a northern context.

The conclusion of the thesis builds on the earlier chapters and takes the further step of speculating, on the basis of the arguments made in the prior chapters, what an alternative narrative of the period c. 350-650, in the area between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall, might look like.

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<sup>25</sup> Gerrard (2013), pp. 225–228.

## Chapter 2- Why does the year 410 occupy such a prominent position in the historiography of the ending of Roman rule in Britain?

### 2.1 Introduction

This primary concern of this chapter is the consideration of the importance of the year AD 410 in the historical understanding of Roman rule. Considered within other chapters of this thesis is a rejection of 410 as an important date archaeologically and a belief that the changes that mark the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries as different from the first to the fourth centuries had their origins in the late Roman state structure, and other than some specifically macro-economic differences<sup>26</sup> there is little to mark the difference between the fourth and fifth century in terms of the wider populace.<sup>27</sup> Whilst Higham states that 'the end of specialisation in economic and social functions had critical consequences for British communities,'<sup>28</sup> it is largely as a marker of the Roman state apparatus, such as coinage and taxation, and the military functions of this that we see this impact occurring.<sup>29</sup> This thesis will reject 410 from an archaeological point of view. As has been noted elsewhere,<sup>30</sup> viewing archaeology and literature as separate and incompatible disciplines in relation to the first millennium creates a great deal of difficulty and limits our understanding. In relation to AD 410 as a paradigm, it may be the case that the two disciplines are not as incompatible as once thought and its importance owes more to historiographical tradition than any real literary evidence. This chapter will consider the literary evidence for the end of Roman rule in the fifth century and attempt to establish why 410 has gained such traction in the historiography of the Roman period. This study explores the likelihood that much of this tradition results from Bede's linking of the loss of the British provinces

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<sup>26</sup> These macro-economic differences include the end of the marketised production of pottery and the state production and distribution of coinage. Such differences, which are clearly important markers of a difference in elite culture, seem unlikely to represent much of a change in the everyday life of the majority of the populace. Aside from the ability to purchase (probably small amounts of) pottery, the rural majority are still likely to have shared their surplus with the local elites in exchange for protection and their material culture is not markedly different in the fourth century and the sixth century.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Gerrard (2013). Gerrard offers a wider discussion of the importance of the agricultural surplus from the third century into the fifth century, and its position as the most important part of the economy.

<sup>28</sup> Higham (1992), p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> For example the repairs to the *praefurnium* in period 9 at Binchester: Ferris (2011). However, it is also worth considering the primacy of Roman military sites amongst excavations as an explanation for this perceived impact.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Higham (1992).

and the sack of Rome in Book 1, chapter 11 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, it further considers Bede's reasoning for this and the importance of this in the establishment of the *gens Anglorum*. As such this chapter is more concerned with the narrative and myth-making involved in the creation of the English than any attempt to set a date for the end of Roman authority in Britain.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2 Historiography

The year AD 410 has had a significant role within the historiography of Roman Britain.<sup>32</sup> For many years, a tradition has existed in which it is seen as the end of Roman rule, either as the point at which the legions (no doubt still dressed in their second-century *lorica segmentata*) upped and left the Britons to fend for themselves or the point at which the government of Honorius recognised that they were unable to bring Britain back under their control following the rebellions of Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III. An example of the traditional use of this date as defining the end of the Roman period in Britain can be seen in Sheppard Frere's *Britannia*, where he states that 'the separation from Rome in 410 came not as a 'withdrawal of the legions' - almost all effective forces had long ago gone to Italy or Gaul- but as a hiatus in the apparatus of central government.'<sup>33</sup> Whilst Salway argues that 410 was important because it marked the British provinces revolting against Constantinian authority,<sup>34</sup> stating that in 409 the British provinces were suffering from barbarian attacks and by 410 Constantine had lost Britain and Spain,<sup>35</sup> he also goes on to state

If we do not take the revolt of Britain from the rule of Constantine III as marking the end of Roman Britain, then we shall have to admit there is insufficient evidence to determine

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<sup>31</sup> I recognise the likelihood that the ability of the Roman government to administer the provinces from Italy was severely hampered during the first decades of the fifth century by the movement of barbarian groups from beyond the Rhine into the western provinces of the Empire. However, as noted by Higham (1992), p. 69, there is little difference between the break with authority that occurred in AD 383 under Magnus Maximus and the break caused by the usurpations of Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III. Indeed, from the usurpation of Magnus Maximus to Constantine's death in 411 the British provinces were only administered directly from Rome (that is using the traditional methods of government), through the Gallic prefecture, for eight years. Similar breaks in rule are also apparent throughout the third and fourth centuries.

<sup>32</sup> Esmonde-Cleary (2014) gives a neat summary of the historiography of the late Roman Britain and the end of imperial power, considering the relative approaches to the end of Roman rule, highlighting the differences between longer term chronology and theories of rupture and collapse. See also Jones (1996).

<sup>33</sup> Frere (1998). Whilst this discussion attempts to break from the view that the situation in sub-Roman Britain was created by the withdrawal of the legions, it is still framed around the year 410.

<sup>34</sup> Salway (2001).

<sup>35</sup> Salway (2001), p. 323–331.

conclusively when the phenomenon we have been studying as “Roman Britain” came to a close.<sup>36</sup>

This demonstrates a perceived need for the year 410 as a threshold for the study of the end of the Roman period in Britain in some parts of the academic community.

Whilst some academics may be moving away from firmly dating the end of the period to 410, more populist writers demonstrate the prominence the date holds in the public’s imagination. Historical broadcaster Michael Wood wrote for the BBC

In 410 came the end of 350 years of Roman colonial rule;<sup>37</sup> a period as long as the Portuguese ruled over Angola, longer than the British supremacy in India...What happened in 410 was a formal severance of responsibility for defence.<sup>38</sup>



Fig 1: An illustration by the artist H.A. Payne (1868-1940) depicting the legions leaving Britain, an example of the place of this traditional narrative within the popular imagination of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Salway (2001), p. 332.

<sup>37</sup> This demonstrates the links that popular culture draws between the Roman and British Empires, something which may have played a part in the consideration of the year 410 to represent the threshold that it seems to have. If comparisons continue to be drawn between the British Raj and the Roman Empire, it may be only natural that the ending of these periods are viewed (too simplistically perhaps) to be the same, with the military power lowering the flag and going home.

<sup>38</sup> Wood (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Image from Payne (1920), p. 57.

Whilst it may occupy a prominent position in the public imagination there are substantial limitations to its continued use. Archaeological evidence from sites such as Wroxeter, Binchester, Birdoswald, Vindolanda and South Shields<sup>40</sup> all suggest that considering 410 to mark the end of the Roman era in Britain limits our understanding of the complex structural sequences that occurred through this threshold and into the period beyond. For example, re-evaluating the archaeological evidence from Elmet, Roberts discovered that considering the Roman influence in Britain to end in the year 410 has resulted in misdating of sites, persons and a failure to understand the long shadow that Rome cast.<sup>41</sup> He highlights the misdating of remains as late Roman when carbon-14 dating has suggested that they may belong to later centuries.<sup>42</sup> This would suggest that regardless of the political situation there were elements of continuity from fourth-century material cultures into fifth-century material cultures- perhaps enough to render the two periods indistinguishable. If this is the case, then the continued use of 410 as a specific end date is truncating our understanding of the archaeology. Such a position has been argued before and has found itself manifested in the application of the Late Antique paradigm to British archaeology.<sup>43</sup>

The use of the term 'Late Antiquity' to describe a period encompassing the later Roman Empire (around AD 250- 600) and the establishment of successor states in the west and the development of the Byzantine Empire from what had been the Eastern Roman empire has been advocated for some time. Peter Brown's 'the World of Late Antiquity'<sup>44</sup> established the importance of the period for the understanding of the situation as it emerged on the continent. There have been serious attempts made to apply the paradigm to the situation in Britain with its supporters arguing that developments which seem to represent what we consider to be the Early Medieval period have their origins in the late Roman period and some areas saw very little change around the year 400, with significant landscape changes (from those established during the Roman period) not occurring until the end of the first millennium.<sup>45</sup> Whilst detractors of the use of Late Antiquity argue that, archaeologically, the

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<sup>40</sup> Wilmott (1997); Wilson and Lyons (2002); Ferris (2011); Bidwell and Speak (1994); Dore and Gillam (1979); Bidwell (1985).

<sup>41</sup> Roberts (2014).

<sup>42</sup> Roberts (2014).

<sup>43</sup> Collins and Gerrard (2004).

<sup>44</sup> Brown (2006).

<sup>45</sup> Turner (2004), pp. 25–33; Fyfe and Rippon (2004), pp. 33–43; Davey (2004), p. 43–55.



situation is markedly different. Faulkner<sup>46</sup> and Ward-Perkins<sup>47</sup> have both suggested that the change from an economy which is capable of mass producing and moving significant numbers of pottery vessels to one of only local impetus marks a complete collapse of the Roman system. They further argue that ‘town life’, something which they consider to represent a marker of Romanised culture in Britain, went into collapse at the start of the fifth century. Gerrard has considered these arguments and has highlighted that the aspects of archaeology that we consider to mark the Roman period (coinage and pottery) were only small parts of a much larger economy. Gerrard argues that a significant part of the economy was dependent on an agricultural surplus, something which continued long after the end of the Roman period, and certainly continued beyond the 410 threshold.<sup>48</sup> Dark has made similar arguments, suggesting that whilst there may have been a reduction in the macro-economy (that is the economy that was responsible for the mass production of pottery), there were many examples of a more localised economy continuing undisturbed from the Roman period.<sup>49</sup>

### **2.3 Bede, 410 and the end of Roman rule**

As has been described above, there is growing evidence, particularly archaeological, which suggests that using 410 is limiting our understanding of the archaeological situation within Britain during this period. Using a seemingly arbitrary date to mark the end of Roman government and forcing all ensuing chronology to fit our understanding of the situation presents difficulties. As such we need to consider where our use of 410 comes from. If the literary sources are stating that the situation was as historians and archaeologists have been suggesting, then there is a definite need for an evaluation of the archaeological evidence in light of it. It would be a mistake to treat the two disciplines in isolation.

The most likely source of this date in British historiography is Bede. Bede places the end of Roman rule in the same year as the sack of Rome by Alaric, i.e. 410.

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<sup>46</sup> Faulkner (2004), pp. 5–13.

<sup>47</sup> Ward-Perkins (2006).

<sup>48</sup> Gerrard (2013).

<sup>49</sup> Dark (1996b).

Now Rome was taken by the Goths in the eleven hundred and sixty-fourth year after its foundation; after this the Roman ceased to rule in Britain, almost 470 years after Gaius Julius Caesar had come to the island.<sup>50</sup>

As well as considering how the year 410 came to exist within the historiographical understanding of Britain's place within Empire, we should also consider how Bede discusses the event and how it sits within his text. Bede appears to use formulaic language throughout his work. It is interesting to note that Bede only uses the formula that he uses for this event 5 times throughout the text (*ex quo tempore*), twice to describe the loss of the British provinces.<sup>51</sup> How he uses this formula may have important implications for understanding how the dating of 410 relates to other events within the text.

In Book 1, Chapter 11 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede describes the loss of the British provinces and the sack of Rome. He states:

Fracta est autem Roma a Gothis anno milesimo CLXIII suae conditionis, ex quo tempore Romani in Brittania regnare cessarunt, post annos ferme CCCCLXX, ex quo Gaius Iulius Caesar eandem insulam adiit.<sup>52</sup>

His description of the events of 410 begin with the sack of Rome by the Goths. Then using the phrase *ex quo tempore* he begins the section where he describes the end of Roman rule in Britain. This phrase clearly links the two events. The link between these events may not simply be in terms of chronology but also in terms of causation.

As can be seen above Colgrave and Mynors translation suggests that *after* the sacking of Rome the Romans ceased to rule in Britain in a manner which may be taken to imply causation. Sherley-Price translates the same passage in the following way:

Rome fell to the Goths in the 1164<sup>th</sup> year after its foundation. At the same time Roman rule came to an end in Britain, almost 470 years after the landing of Gaius Julius Caesar.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 11 in Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 11 and book 5, ch. 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 11, ed. Plummer (1896).

<sup>53</sup> Sherley-Price (1977), p. 50.

It may be that, through the use of *ex quo tempore*, Bede sought to judge the beginning of the chain of events that began the end of Roman rule in Britain, rather than seeking to date the end of the period specifically. Perhaps, rather than translating the phrase, 'at the same time' (as Sherley-Price does), or 'after this' (as Colgrave and Mynors do), we ought to translate it to suggest it functions more as a linked event but not as a result, i.e. 'from that time.'

This formula is again used in Book 3, Chapter 11:

ipsamque aquam, in qua lauerant ossa, in angulo sacrarii fuderunt. Ex quo tempore factum est, ut ipsa terra, quae lauacrum uenerabile suscepit, ad abigendos ex obsessis corporibus daemones gratiae salutaris haberet effectum.<sup>54</sup>

...pouring out the water in which the bones had been washed in a corner of the sanctuary. Ever afterwards the soil which had received the holy water had the power and saving grace of driving devils from the bodies of people possessed.<sup>55</sup>

This is translated by Sherley-Price as:

The water in which the bones had been washed was poured away in a corner of the cemetery, and from that time on the very earth that had received this venerated water had the saving power to expel devils from the bodies of those who were possessed.<sup>56</sup>

This section refers to the miracles that came as a result of the burying of St. Oswald, specifically the water that had been used to wash his bones. Here we see an implication of causation from the use of the formula *ex quo tempore*. As a result of the pouring of the water that been used to wash the bones of the saint, the earth was able to be used in exorcisms. It is clear from the passage that to translate it as 'at the same time' as Sherley-Price does in Book 1, Chapter 11, would result in the loss of the meaning of the passage. As such, given Bede's propensity for writing formulaically, it may be that we are seeing a special meaning for his phraseology. Examination of other uses of the phrase in his text may clarify this.

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<sup>54</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 11, ed. Plummer (1896).

<sup>55</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> Sherley-Price (1977), p. 159.

In Book 4, Chapter 24, we again see the formula used to imply causation, following the death of Ecgrith, *ex quo tempore spes coepit et uirtus regni Anglorum 'fluere ac retro sublapsa referri.'*<sup>57</sup> As Sherley-Price translated it, 'henceforward the hopes and strength of the English realm began 'to waver and slip backward ever lower.'<sup>58</sup> Whilst Colgrave and Mynors translate it as 'from this time the hopes and strengths of the English kingdom began to 'ebb and fall away'.<sup>59</sup> Here again the meaning of the passage would be lost were it to be translated 'at the same time.'

In Book 5, Chapter 24, the phrase is used again. This chapter is a recap of the main events of the text and so repeats in a shortened form the entry from Book 1, Chapter 11. Interestingly this is dated to 409, this may not be due to any fault in Bede's dating. His creation of the *Anno Domini* system of dating may have created a degree of confusion when events usually marked by regnal, Olympic years or years from the foundation of Rome were transferred into the new system, it may even be that this is what Bede is attempting to circumvent by dating the event from Rome's foundation in Book 1, Chapter 11 and using his new system in Book 5, Chapter 24. Here we see the event recorded as: *Anno CCCCVIII, Roma a Gothis fracta, ex quo tempore Romani in Brittania regnare cessarunt.*<sup>60</sup> This is translated by Sherley-Price as: 'In the year 409, Rome was taken by the Goths and thenceforward Roman rule came to an end in Britain,'<sup>61</sup> and by Colgrave and Mynors as 'Rome was stormed by the Goths, after which the Roman rule in Britain was ceased.'<sup>62</sup> Both translations of this section can be seen to reflect a sense of causation.

In the autobiographical notes at the end of Book 5, Chapter 24, Bede writes of himself:

*Ex quo tempore accepti presbyteratus usque ad annum aetatis meae LVIII, haec in scripturam sanctam meae meorumque necessitati ex opusculis uenerabilium patrum breuiter adnotare, siue etiam ad formam sensus et interpretationis eorum superadicere curauit.*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 4, ch. 24, ed. Plummer (1896).

<sup>58</sup> Sherley-Price (1977), p. 258. Here the translation is ascribed to chapter 26 of book 4.

<sup>59</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 429. As with Sherley-Price, the translation is ascribed to chapter 26 of book 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 4, ch. 24, ed. Plummer (1896).

<sup>61</sup> Sherley-Price (1977), p. 333.

<sup>62</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 563.

<sup>63</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 5, ch. 24, ed. Plummer (1896).

Sherley-Price:

From the time of my receiving of the priesthood until my fifty-ninth year, I have worked, both for my own benefit and that of my brethren to compile short extracts from the works of the venerable Fathers on Holy Scripture and to comment on their meaning and interpretation.<sup>64</sup>

Colgrave and Mynors:

From the time I became a priest until the fifty-ninth year of my life I have made it my business, both for my own benefit and that of my brothers to make brief extracts from the works of the venerable Fathers on the holy Scriptures, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation<sup>65</sup>

Here we see a slight difference in his use of the phrase *ex quo tempore*. Bede does not necessarily mark causation with his use of the term. Whilst it is possible to read the passage as stating that becoming a priest caused or allowed the beginning of his writing career if we follow Sherley-Price's translation (given the difficulty of achieving this level of learning outside of an elite or ecclesiastical context,<sup>66</sup> he may not have been able to engage in such activity otherwise), Colgrave and Mynors render it more simply, that after becoming a priest he put himself to this work. The use of this phrase does, at least, mark a changing of direction, or a threshold, in the life of Bede.

In each instance the event that is described is one which marks a threshold. In this way *ex quo tempore*, can be read as from that time forward or henceforward. As can be seen from the above translations some have read Bede's phrasing differently depending on the implication that they wish to infer from Bede. By their reading, rather than marking a particular threshold the use of this formula could mark a recognition that there was not a specific break between Britain and Rome but after the sack of Rome, the Romans were no longer in a position that enabled them to exercise control over the British provinces. The linking of the two events in both of his references have been read as suggesting that the one had a direct impact upon the other, as well as his use of the phrase to mark causation in his other passages, that leads to the implication that he was attempting to

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<sup>64</sup> Sherley-Price (1977), p. 336.

<sup>65</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 567.

<sup>66</sup> Although there is also the possibility that had he found work as a poet he may have been able to achieve a high level of learning in a more secular fashion.

imply a causal link between the two. However, as has also been shown the use of *ex quo tempore* can simply be seen as linking events in time. It appears that Bede's use of *ex quo tempore* may have been understood to imply causation where such an implication may not exist in the text. Indeed, the translations sampled above have shown that multiple translations have been suggested for the same phrase. Viewed in isolation, Bede's usage of *ex quo tempore* may indicate that the Sack of Rome caused the loss of the British provinces. This implication is particularly apparent in both Sherley-Price and Colgrave and Mynors' translations of the 409 entry in Book 5, Chapter 24.<sup>67</sup> But when we consider that in his description of his own life, Bede does not imply causation with his use,<sup>68</sup> the attempts to link the sack of Rome and the end of Roman rule in Britain causally must then be seen as derived from modern perceptions rather than implied by Bede. It might be that Bede is simply linking events in Rome to events in Britain because of his interest in Rome as the source of the mission to convert the English and as the font of orthodoxy in the English Church.

Furthermore, we also see that Bede is not entirely explicit about the period in which the Roman government in Italy lost control of the British provinces, his use of *ex quo tempore* links the loss of Britain and the sack of Rome chronologically and perhaps causally, but even here we see the sack of Rome marking a point where Rome was potentially no longer able to reassert authority in Britain. We do not see this as marking a particular threshold in the day to day government in the provinces.

#### **2.4 Other sources and their discussion of the end of Roman Britain**

Bede's work held a particular importance in the psyche of the English and came to be one of the seminal texts on the origins of the English people.<sup>69</sup> Higham has highlighted the importance of the text, stating that Bede's was the only work of insular extraction that was translated by the court of Alfred, which emphasises 'his unique status as an authoritative Christian figure.'<sup>70</sup> This importance did not end with the reign of Alfred and his particular context of nation building. The twelfth-century monk, William of Malmesbury championed Bede's cause with the papacy; Henry of Huntingdon used

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<sup>67</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 5, ch. 24, ed. Plummer (1896).

<sup>68</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 567.

<sup>69</sup> Higham (2006), p. 24. As early as the tenth century translations of Bede's work were being made into Old English at the court of Wessex amongst works by important authors such as Boethius, Gregory the Great, and Augustine of Hippo, as well as the Psalms.

<sup>70</sup> Higham (2006), p. 25.

his work extensively, as did Geoffrey of Monmouth.<sup>71</sup> Bede's work played a prominent role in the historiography of England that followed, holding a preeminent position in English historiography, despite the difficulties that his decidedly pro-Papal leanings posed during the reformation, through to the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> Given his role as the 'Father of English History,' it is perhaps not surprising that his use of this date has found itself etched deep in the collective memory of Roman rule. However, as has also been argued,<sup>73</sup> Bede is acting as an historian not a chronicler when it comes to the fifth century. His work is the culmination of his reading and his understanding of the situation in the fifth century. It may be that Bede is simply linking events in Rome to events in Britain because of his interest in Rome as the source of the mission to convert the English and as the font of orthodoxy in the English Church, however his attempt to do so has had far reaching consequences for the historiography of the fifth century.

The difficulty arises when considering Bede's use of this date alongside other sources for the period. There is little evidence in British sources to support the claim that Britain specifically separated from the Empire in AD 410. Gildas names no dates in his polemic on the evils of his age, describing two further Roman involvements in the British provinces after the usurpation of Magnus Maximus<sup>74</sup> and the final appeal for aid in the letter to 'thrice-consul Agidius'.<sup>75</sup> As such the period of transition that Gildas describes, if we accept the identification of Agidius as Aetius, represents nearly seventy years. From Gildas's order of events we are unable to see if the year 410 held significance in his reckoning of the end of Roman rule in Britain. Whilst the *Historia Brittonum* does give a measure for the length of Roman rule and describes it as having a definitive end:

Hitherto the Romans had ruled the British for 409 years. But the Britons overthrew the rule of the Romans, and paid them no taxes, and did not accept their kings to reign over them, and the Romans did not dare to come to Britain to rule anymore, for the British had killed their generals<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Higham (2006), pp. 26–28.

<sup>72</sup> Higham (2006), pp. 31–35.

<sup>73</sup> Higham (2006).

<sup>74</sup> An event which can only be dated using continental sources.

<sup>75</sup> This is another event which he does not date and can only be potentially dated to between 446 and 452 with the supposition that the Agidius to whom the appeal refers is the Magister Militum Aetius.

<sup>76</sup> *Historia Brittonum*, §28, ed. Mommsen (1898), trans. Morris (1980) p.25.

there has either been a mistake in the calculation of the end of this rule or it is not seen as ending in 410. Section 21 of the *Historia Brittonum* states that Claudius was the first Roman to conquer Britain,<sup>77</sup> this is in contrast to section 20 which states that Caesar was the first ruler of the Romans to invade Britain and that he was the only Roman to receive tribute from the Britons.<sup>78</sup> Neither of these events are dated in the *Historia Brittonum*. Interestingly, the *Historia Brittonum* distinguishes between receiving tribute and conquest. It describes Caesar's interactions with the Britons as *censum...accepit*, whilst referring to Claudius as *in Brittannia imperavit*.<sup>79</sup> This is interesting in terms of the understanding of the British memory of their relationship with Rome and dating the end (on this basis it would occur in AD 452)<sup>80</sup> but also because of what it tells us about British reckoning of power relationships in the ninth century.<sup>81</sup> The only other British sources available to modern authors for this period are the confession and letters of Patrick; however, these are much narrower in their scope and focus primarily on the events surrounding the life and situation of Patrick and give little information on the wider political situation.<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that, whilst the letter to the soldiers of Coroticus implies that they, and he, would consider themselves to be citizens of Rome, there are no dates offered in the text to provide any concrete assessment as to when the events covered in the letter occurred. Whilst the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine and some later Irish annals suggest that the establishment of an Irish mission occurred in the fifth century, there is little to date the events any closer than this. The absence of any dates within the text means that whilst the implication of shared *Romanitas* is interesting in a broadly late-fourth- to fifth-century context, it is unable to be used as evidence of when Roman rule in Britain was perceived to have ended by the people living through it. As the British sources available to us have been ruled out as the basis of 410 perhaps Continental sources may offer a way of discovering its source.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> AD 43.

<sup>78</sup> 55 and 54 BC.

<sup>79</sup> *Historia Brittonum*, §28, ed. Mommsen (1898).

<sup>80</sup> Potentially 452 could arise from Bede's reckoning of the *Adventus Saxonum*, an event that Bede dates to 449: *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15.

<sup>81</sup> I.e. they perceive a distinct difference between paying tribute to another power and being ruled by another power.

<sup>82</sup> These sources do have much to offer in terms of the study of the culture of late and sub-Roman Britain as well as some insights into the political situation that developed, but their usefulness for the end of Roman rule in a wider political sense is limited.

<sup>83</sup> This may also help to reveal some of the sources Bede was using to write his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.



The Gallic Chronicle of 452 does have a British entry for the year 410. This entry, however, does not state that Roman rule ended in this year. Amongst a series of difficulties suffered by the Romans during this year, including the sack of Rome by the Goths, the chronicle states *Britanniae Saxonum incursione devastatae*<sup>84</sup> Interestingly the entries in this chronicle offer other avenues for consideration. Whilst there is some doubt as to the accuracy of its dating<sup>85</sup> the chronicler may be offering the devastation of the provinces in 410 by the Saxons as a precursor to the eventual loss of the provinces to the Saxons in 441-2, *Britanniae usque ad hoc tempus variis cladibus eventibusque latae in dicionem Saxonum rediguntur*.<sup>86</sup> This would seem to indicate that the British provinces were still considered to belong to Rome in 410 and in 441. Steven Muhlberger has noted that both of these events, as recorded in the Chronicle of 452, fit within a pattern of periods of crisis for the western Empire as a whole and were recorded in such a way by the Chronicler to suggest a period of decline around important events.<sup>87</sup> For the year 410, there is a series of crises such as the devastation of Britain by the Saxons eventually culminating in the sack of Rome by Alaric,<sup>88</sup> whilst the surrendering of Britannia to the Saxons (as described by the entry for 441-2) fits into a period of crisis which resulted in the loss of North Africa to the Vandals.<sup>89</sup> As such, following Muhlberger's argument, it is possible that Britain is being used to make a point; this point is that these are times when the Empire as a whole was suffering rather than the chronicler having a specific interest in the situation in Britain. This potentially tells us something about the way in which those in Southern Gaul were considering the situation in the Empire. If Britain was being used as a tool to tell the story of the difficulties faced by the Western Empire it may be reasonable to assume that the Gallic provincials still considered it to be part of the Empire. Alternatively, it may be because of the seceding of the British provinces from the Empire that they represented a distant 'other,' almost divorced from the Mediterranean world, where bad things could happen to make a point about the

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<sup>84</sup> *Chronicle of 452*, ed. Mommsen (1892), p. 654.

<sup>85</sup> The author of the chronicle was accused of amalgamating events to demonstrate that the years in which Rome was sacked and North Africa was lost were a period of general decline with the Empire suffering significant setbacks, such as the loss of Britannia in 440 as well as North Africa. See Muhlberger (1983).

<sup>86</sup> Mommsen (1892), p. 660 entry 126.

<sup>87</sup> Muhlberger (1983). This may mean that events recorded as occurring at certain times did not occur when stated or in the order stated. Like Bede, the author of the Chronicle of 452 may have been linking events that were perceived as important.

<sup>88</sup> Mommsen (1892), p. 654 entries 62–65.

<sup>89</sup> Mommsen (1892), p. 660 entries 126–129.

wider Roman situation. If we take the Chronicle of 452 at face value, that there was devastation in Britain in 410 and the provinces were surrendered to the Saxons in 441-2, then another reading is possible. Hypothetically, if the year 410 was considered to be the threshold that marks the end of Roman authority in Britain that is portrayed in Bede and, as a result of Bede, in modern historiography, it may be that the events listed in this chronicle could represent the reverse that led to the break away from empire that resulted in the eventual acceptance in 441 that Britain was lost to the Saxons. As such when Bede and the tradition derived from Bede refers to Roman rule ending in 410 it may be as the result of hindsight, seeing the Saxon devastation described here as the final failure and thus the end of Roman rule. However, what is clear is that this chronicle does not state that Roman rule ended in Britain in 410; as such it is unlikely that this is the source from which Bede got this information. Indeed, no known fifth-century source mentions the ending of Roman rule in this year.<sup>90</sup>

Another important fifth-century source is the writer Orosius. His work, written in the first half of the fifth century, offers one of the nearest accounts, chronologically, to the events that occurred in the first quarter of the fifth century. He does not record any of the reverses in the fifth century referred to by the chronicle of 452 for Britain. Indeed, despite his proximity to the events chronologically and to Britain geographically; his perception of Britain seems to be that the British provinces, like others, were a place from which the power of the centre was threatened. That is, during the fifth century, Orosius tells the story of the raising of Constantine and Gratian as usurpers of the Imperial throne,<sup>91</sup> but that is all. Like the other usurpers that he describes it is simply their place of origin that is described and how they fit into the wider story of the Roman Empire. Indeed, it is worth noting that his other mentions of Britain all fit within a general history of Rome and describe events such as the rise of Constantine<sup>92</sup> or Maximus's defeat of the Emperor Gratian,<sup>93</sup> which were important for telling the story of the Empire as a whole, even if it was simply a reminder of the dangers of impiety.<sup>94</sup> This too would seem to fit with his use of geography in general. In Book Seven of his work, he mentions the Spanish provinces some twenty times, Gaul thirty-three times,<sup>95</sup> whilst he mentions Britain on

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<sup>90</sup> Sources checked: Prosper's chronicle, fragments of Olympiodorus, Orosius, Sozomen.

<sup>91</sup> Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, book 7, ch. 40, hereafter Orosius. See Fear (2010).

<sup>92</sup> Orosius, book 7, ch. 25–29.

<sup>93</sup> Orosius, book 7, ch. 34–35.

<sup>94</sup> Orosius, book 7, ch. 7.

twelve occasions, in each of these it is to make a point concerning an event that had implications on the larger Roman scale. Indeed, it would seem from his discussion that Orosius believed that Britain was still under Roman control at the time he wrote. Such a position may be corroborated by Sozomen. Sozomen, who also wrote in the first half of the fifth century (in the early 440's), discusses the usurpation of Constantine III and other rebellions in the first decade of the fifth century. After the capture of Constantine and his son Julian, Sozomen states 'From that period the whole province returned to its allegiance to Honorius and has since been obedient to the rulers of his appointment.'<sup>96</sup> Whilst it is unclear exactly what he means by the use of province, it is probable that he is not simply referring to a single province within Gaul. What is difficult to ascertain is whether his definition of the whole province included Britain,<sup>97</sup> but it is worth noting that he does not explicitly exclude Britain at this point. As such it could be the case that Britain returned to Roman rule at this point or was seen as belonging to the Empire from the perspective of the Eastern Empire.<sup>98</sup>

The only potential fifth-century reference to a Roman withdrawal of authority in 410 can be found in the *Narratio de Imperatoribus Domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae*. This source consists of a series of short biographies of members of the imperial house of Theodosius and Valentinian. This text has been dated to the first half of the fifth century,<sup>99</sup> making it a very nearly contemporaneous source to the period in which Britain left the sphere of Roman authority. It states, in the entry applying to the reign of Honorius, 'Britain was forever removed from the Roman name.'<sup>100</sup> for the period that appears to apply to the year 410. However, the format of the *Narratio* suggests that the author is discussing important events in the reign of Honorius rather than assigning specific dates to them. It is also worth noting that the references contained therein could be organised in terms of the importance of the event in the mind of the author. Indeed, the source states, that 'in his [Honorius's] reign many heavy blows befell the state, but the bitterest was that the city of Rome was captured and overthrown by Alaric, King of the Goths.'<sup>101</sup> This description does not apply a date, nor suggest

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<sup>95</sup> Orosius, book 7.

<sup>96</sup> Sozomen, book 9, ch 15, ed. Hartranft (1890).

<sup>97</sup> Which could be the case if he was using province to refer to the Gallic prefecture.

<sup>98</sup> Sozomen worked in Constantinople.

<sup>99</sup> *Narratio de imperatoribus domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae*, ed. Mommsen (1892b), henceforth *Narratio*. See also Muhlberger (1990).

<sup>100</sup> Mommsen (1892a), p. 630. My own translation.

<sup>101</sup> Mommsen (1892a), p. 630. My own translation.

that the events that followed were in anyway chronologically corresponding to the event first listed. What we can ascertain from this is that in the view of the *Narratio's* author the loss of Britannia occurred during the reign of Honorius. We should also consider that despite Muhlberger's claim that the chronicle of 452 may be derived in part from the *Narratio*,<sup>102</sup> the *Narratio's* reference to Britain did not make it into the Chronicle of 452. As such rather than being 'another independent source to the list of sources that report the unequivocal loss of Britain in 410,'<sup>103</sup> as it has been described by one commentator (further highlighting the legacy of this idea in popular consciousness), it would seem to represent a corroboration of the idea that Roman authority was severely diminished in the British Isles at some point in the last quarter of the fourth century or the first quarter of the fifth century. Whilst 410 remains a possible date for this event, it is certainly not a conclusion that is reachable through the use of this source.

In the sixth century, two Byzantine writers also made connections with the events at the end of the first decade of the fifth century and the end of Roman rule. In his *Bellum Vandalicum*, Procopius states that 'Constantinus, defeated in battle, died with his sons. However, the Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain, but it remained from that time on under tyrants.'<sup>104</sup> This excerpt does not, however, place the end of Roman rule in Britain in 410. It instead states that following the return of the Honorian government to control over the Gallic provinces they failed to regain possession of Britain. In theory, this would then place the end of Roman rule at the point where the connection with the western Emperor was broken, with the barbarians crossing the Rhine when it froze, in 406.<sup>105</sup> What is clear is that the assessment of this point is made with the benefit of over a century of hindsight and a view of the wider loss of Rome and the west. Similarly, Zosimus's *Historia Nova* points to the barbarian invasions as causing the initial British break from the Empire:

The barbarians above the Rhine, assaulting everything at their pleasure, reduced both the inhabitants of Britain and others of the Celtic peoples to defecting from Roman rule and living their own lives disassociated from the Roman law. Accordingly, the Britons took up arms and, with no consideration of the danger to themselves, freed their own cities from

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<sup>102</sup> Muhlberger (1990).

<sup>103</sup> Vermaat [n.d.].

<sup>104</sup> Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum*, book 3, ch. 2, line 38, ed. Dewing (1916). Hereafter Procopius.

<sup>105</sup> Heather (2005), pp. 194–195. Thompson (1956), p. 164 argued that this is more likely to have occurred on 31 December 405.

barbarian threat; likewise all of Armorica and other Gallic provinces followed the Britons' lead: they freed themselves, ejected the Roman magistrates, and set up home rule at their own discretion.<sup>106</sup>

However, Zosimus also introduces what is perhaps the most significant event in this discussion. Later in this description Zosimus states: 'Honorius wrote letters to the cities in Britain, bidding them to take precautions on their own behalf.'<sup>107</sup> These letters, which are mentioned in no other source, seem to be the basis of the suggestion that Roman rule ended in 410. Numerous theories have been built around the events that led to these letters. In 1956, E.A Thompson argued that this may have represented an uprising by the rural peasantry against the Romanised elite and the provincial administration, a phenomenon experienced on the continent where the rebels were referred to as *baucadae*.<sup>108</sup> A popular reinterpretation of the Rescript of Honorius suggests that it was directed at Bruttium in southern Italy which was potentially under threat from an advancing Alaric and represented an area through which support for Honorius's army could come from Count Heraclian, who was holding Africa, and thus was pivotal in Honorius strategy to relieve the threat posed to Italy.<sup>109</sup> As such, it has been argued that this reference is actually a mistake made during transmission which is further supported by the positioning of the rescript in Zosimus's text. Five paragraphs after he has finished describing the rebellions in Britain and the Gallic provinces, Zosimus adds the section on the rescript in the midst of a description of events relating to the activities of Alaric in Italy.<sup>110</sup>

Whilst there does seem to an acceptance that, with hindsight, the Romans were unable to regain the British provinces after a break of some sort in the early years of the fifth century, according to these literary sources, this break seems to be linked to the crossing of the Rhine by barbarian groups in c.406, rather than with the sack of Rome in 410. Whilst these sources draw a link between the events of the first decade of the fifth century and the end of Roman rule in Britain, with Zosimus also

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<sup>106</sup> Zosimus, *Historia Nova* (1814), book 6, section 5; this section may have been derived from Olympiodorus of Thebes, who was writing in around 418, prior to the restoration of Roman authority in northern Gaul. As such this may represent incomplete information.

<sup>107</sup> Zosimus, *Historia Nova* (1814), book VI.10.2.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson (1956).

<sup>109</sup> Bartholemew (1982), pp. 261–263; see also Millet (1990), p. 216; Halsall (2013).

<sup>110</sup> Zosimus, *Historia Nova* (1814): Britain discussed until VI.5; the rescript is in VI.10.2.

seeming to provide a significant piece of evidence to support the use of 410 as a threshold in the history of Roman Britain, they are unlikely to have been used by Bede.<sup>111</sup> With all of these sources the importance of 410 emerges as a result of hindsight. Both Procopius and Zosimus were writing in sixth century Constantinople at times when the loss of the Western Empire were likely to be part of the zeitgeist. Procopius, in particular, writes at a time when consideration of the loss of the west was likely to be at the forefront of people's imagination given Justinian's campaigns to reclaim portions of the former western Empire.<sup>112</sup> Procopius does not actually state that 410 is an important year, seemingly dating the end of Roman rule in Britain to the crossing of the Rhine in c.406, something also highlighted as important by Zosimus. It is clear from the wording of Procopius: 'the Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain'<sup>113</sup> that he is arriving at this conclusion by virtue of his chronological distance from the events he describes. Perhaps the most important piece of evidence in support of the 410 date, the rescript of Honorius, may not even apply to Britain. Without this, it appears more likely that the impression of continental sources was that the crossing of the Rhine in c.406 was the most important event in the ending of Roman rule in Britain, not the sack of Rome.

## 2.5 Bede's motivations

It would seem from consideration of both the archaeological and literary evidence pertaining to fifth century Britain that there is little evidence to support the importance that AD 410 has gained in the historiography of the end of Roman power in Britain, especially if we accept the argument that the rescript of Honorius applied to events in Italy. The main sources that discuss the years around 410 do so from the Eastern Empire, with the benefit of a century of hindsight and at times when the loss of the Western Empire are likely to have been part of the public consciousness.<sup>114</sup> As Bede does not seem to have used these sources in his work<sup>115</sup> it seems likely that he arrived at the use of 410 through his own calculations. As discussed earlier, it seems likely that Bede arrived at 410 as a result

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<sup>111</sup> Higham (2006). Bede does not seem to have used these as sources for his work. For a discussion of the sources available to Bede see Meyvaert (1996), p. 827–883; Farmer (1978); Lapidge (2014), p. 62.

<sup>112</sup> Procopius served as secretary to the Byzantine general Belisarius and was intimately involved in both the North African and Italian campaigns.

<sup>113</sup> Procopius 3.2.38, ed. Dewing (1916).

<sup>114</sup> Procopius wrote after the Justinianic attempts to reclaim portions of the Western Empire in mid-sixth century and Zosimus wrote in the decades after the loss of Rome to the Ostrogoths and was writing about the decline of the Roman Empire. See Sorek (2012), p. 211.

<sup>115</sup> Higham (2006).

of linking the end of Roman rule to the Sack of Rome. Why then did Bede pick this event as important?

A potential reason for the Bede's selection of this event could be found amongst the purposes of Bede's work. Bede's work is far more than a simple history of the English. Contained within his work are various themes which demonstrate his understanding of the priorities of his time. A major theme in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the importance of religious orthodoxy. Throughout his work Bede, rails against the Britons for their failure to recognise the supremacy of Rome in ecumenical matters as opposed to their own traditions.<sup>116</sup>

At this time the most noble of English Kings, Oswiu of Northumbria and Egbert of Kent, conferred together as to what ought to be done about the state of the English Church; for Oswiu, although educated by the Irish, was fully aware that the Roman Church was both catholic and apostolic.<sup>117</sup>

As well as writing about the history of the church and the work done to unify the differing traditions amongst the English, Bede's work also contains much that could be seen to attempt to unify the peoples of England. As well as attempting to create a form of unification for the differing Germanic-speaking groups within Britain, through the creation of a shared origin myth to explain their presence in the former British provinces, he also recognised their individuality:

They came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. The people of Kent and the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin and also those opposite the Isle of Wight, that part of the kingdom of Wessex which is today called the nation of the Jutes. From the Saxon country, that is the district now known as Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons. Besides this, from the country of the Angles, that is the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes and the Saxons, which is called *Angulus*, came the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians and all the Northumbrian race (that is the people who dwell north of the river Humber) and the other Anglian tribes.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> E.g. events leading to the synod of Whitby.

<sup>117</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3 ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 319.

<sup>118</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 15; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 51.

Bede's work includes the idea of the Saxon revolt and rise to authority as initially representing a punishment on the Britons from God, further supporting the idea of the importance of religious orthodoxy.

They consulted as to what they should do and where they should seek help to prevent or repel the fierce and very frequent attacks of the northern nations; all, including their king Vortigern, agreed that they should call the Saxons to their aid from across the seas. As events plainly showed, this was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon those miscreants.<sup>119</sup>

To put it briefly, the fire kindled by the hands of the heathens executed the just vengeance of God on the nation for its crimes. It was not unlike that fire once kindled by the Chaldeans which consumed the walls and all the buildings of Jerusalem.<sup>120</sup>

However, following Gildas, Bede also stresses the importance of the coming of the Saxons in ending the threat posed to the Britons by their northern and western neighbours.

For instance, they were too rapidly reduced to a state of terror and misery by two extremely fierce races from over the waters, the Irish from the west and the Picts from the north; and this lasted many years. We call them races from over the waters, not because they dwelt outside Britain but because they were separated from the Britons by two wide and long arms of the sea, one which enters the land from the east, the other from the west, although they do not meet.<sup>121</sup>

Here we see that the Britons were deemed to be different from the Picts and the Scots, with Bede highlighting the separation of these different peoples. This may simply be down to the affiliation of the Britons with the Romans but it could also represent a desire to isolate the Picts and the Scots from those that could belong to the *gens Anglorum*. It is this association with the Romans that we return to with the linking of the end of Roman rule in Britain and the sack of Rome. In the linking of the two events in Book 1, Chapter 11, prior to the *adventus Saxonum*, we see a deliberate break from the British traditions associated with Rome. After the writing of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,

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<sup>119</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 49.

<sup>120</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 15; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 53.

<sup>121</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 12; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 41.



those Britons who wished to assert their independence against the authority of the English-speaking kings stressed their difference by, amongst other means, harking back to their Roman heritage and the authority this imbued.<sup>122</sup> Bede is highlighting that not only had Roman authority in Britain come to an end before the protection of the Saxons was sought, but also that Roman imperial power had been shattered and any claims to Roman political power no longer had any meaning. We see this further manifested in Bede's discussion of *imperium* in Britain:

The fifth was Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, the nation inhabiting the district north of the Humber. Edwin had still greater power and ruled over all the inhabitants of Britain, English and Britons alike, except for Kent only. He also brought under English rule the British Mevanian Isles (Anglesey and Man) which lie between England and Ireland and belong to the Britons.<sup>123</sup>

Potentially Bede is here attempting to claim, for some Anglo-Saxon kings, a power over all of Britain similar to that which had been held by the Romans. This too distances those Britons who refused to integrate with English authority from Rome. By claiming imperial authority in Britain for these seven rulers Bede is able to deny any British claims to Roman authority and further reinforce the idea that Britain had separated from Rome prior to the *adventus Saxonum*. For those that were willing to accept this, such a separation allowed a mental space from which they could identify with the *gens Anglorum*.

Key then to understanding Bede's work is the idea that he is working to create a unifying history for all the people who had come under, for want of a better term, Anglo-Saxon rule. As such what we can see in his work is myth making, the creation of a narrative which places the English at the heart of authority in Britain. Benedict Anderson has noted that a nation or a people 'is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'<sup>124</sup> He goes on to state

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...Gellner...rules that 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.' The drawback to this

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<sup>122</sup> Guy (2018).

<sup>123</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* Book 2 Ch.5; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 149.

<sup>124</sup> Anderson (2006), pp. 5–6.

formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'. In this way he implies that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.<sup>125</sup>

A significant part of Bede's work involves the creation of communion for groups which were not only in competition for political supremacy<sup>126</sup> but whose own traditions<sup>127</sup> had them depicted as mortal enemies.<sup>128</sup> This required the creation of a tradition which allowed the Britons a break with their own traditions and a way of linking the Britons to the *gens Anglorum*. As Hobsbawm and Ranger note

There is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the invention of tradition...however, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the old social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated.<sup>129</sup>

Through the use of the origin myth involving Hengist and Horsa<sup>130</sup> Bede created a shared link to the authority that brought the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and other assorted *foederati* to Britain. As such every 'barbarian' group that was present in Britain was linked by this myth. The Britons on the other hand, were not one of these groups and as such posed the problem of how they would be fit into the English society that Bede envisioned. Through the development of the 410 paradigm Bede was able to create an ideological break with the Roman Empire, further supported by the repetition of

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<sup>125</sup> Anderson (2006), p. 6.

<sup>126</sup> Such as Northumbria and Mercia.

<sup>127</sup> E.g. Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*.

<sup>128</sup> It is worth noting at this point that although the Britons and Anglo-Saxons were depicted as mortal enemies there is substantial evidence of Britons finding service in areas that would generally be considered to be occupied by Anglo-Saxon groups, e.g. Powlesland (2000).

<sup>129</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger (2010), p. 4–5.

<sup>130</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15–22.

Gildas's 'groans of the Britons.'<sup>131</sup> This myth-making was able to create an ideological space in which the Anglo-Saxons and Britons could co-exist and come together to form England at the expense of groups such as the Picts and the Irish. As Edward W. Said states origin myths are 'designated in order to indicate, clarify, or define a later time.'<sup>132</sup>

## 2.6 Bede and Gothicism – a comparison of ethnogenesis

Whilst Bede's *gens Anglorum* may have only existed in the mind of Bede and some of those who sought to assert control over the former British provinces in the early eighth century, by the late ninth century Bede's work had gained a new importance and was used again in a fresh bout of nation building by Alfred of Wessex and his successors.<sup>133</sup> The ninth- and tenth-century use of Bede is not the same as the creation of the *gens Anglorum*. This use of Bede found itself manifested in other ways. For example: the creation of the *gens Anglorum* did not include the invention of a shared ancestry as can be seen in the manifestation of the *Angelcynn*. However, the motives and outcomes are analogous with those found in the creation of Gothicism and usefully demonstrate the ways in which Bede's messages of shared identity could be used in the building of traditions and national identity.

There has been some consideration in Anglo-Saxon historiography of the importance of a pan-Germanic identity in the development of nation states such as England and the Carolingian Empire. As Taranu states:

the interest in things Gothic and Scandinavian as well as the new supraethnic identity emerging in the Carolingian Empire correlate with similar interests and shifts in conceptualizing identity in ninth- and tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>134</sup>

This conceptualisation invokes a shared identity based upon a shared Gothic heritage. Roberta Frank refers to this as Gothicism. Frank states:

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<sup>131</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 13.

<sup>132</sup> Frantzen (1990), p. 23.

<sup>133</sup> Harris (2003), pp. 83–103; Davis (2006), pp. 111–29; Niles (2007), pp. 39–91.

<sup>134</sup> Taranu (2016), p. 169.

Germanic legend matters to us: because it was somehow important to the Anglo-Saxons, who tried harder and harder with each passing century to establish a Germanic identity;<sup>135</sup>

As Foot has shown,<sup>136</sup> a need for a wider identity for the English peoples came about as a result of the Scandinavian incursions into Britain during the ninth and tenth centuries. This need led to the creation of the *Angelcynn*, a new grouping which included all Christian Anglo-Saxons and Danes. This group would come to form a significant part of the new nation of England through the inspiration and leadership of the West Saxon royal house. Linking these two groups ideologically required more than political power and an appeal to a shared heritage may have been seen as offering a way of cementing this new identity. Taranu has questioned whether Gothicism was purely a 'Carolingian fad that was adopted by Anglo-Saxon royalty for political purposes.'<sup>137</sup> This new feature was something which not only had impacts upon notions of ethnicity and national identity but also found its way into the lineages of the royal houses of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, thus becoming intrinsically linked to how those in power wished to portray themselves.<sup>138</sup> As Taranu persuasively argues:

'Had no one believed that all Anglo-Saxons (formerly separated in strongly local polities) and Danes loyal to the West Saxon kings were indeed the descendants of Geatas~Goths, Alfred would have preached in vain about the new Angelcynn.'<sup>139</sup>

Key to this was the reconfiguration of works such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* to allow the creation of a new social order which included those Scandinavians who had converted to Christianity. Taranu's most compelling example is the introduction of the Geats into the lineage of the *gens Anglorum*.<sup>140</sup> This was not simply as an addition, the translator of Bede replaced the Jutes with the Geats, as such 'in terms of the new Bedan ethnogenesis, the three incoming tribes were the Angles, the Saxons, and the Geats – meaning the Angles, the Saxons, and the Goths.'<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Frank (2013), p. 82.

<sup>136</sup> Foot (1996), pp. 25–49.

<sup>137</sup> Taranu (2016), p. 171.

<sup>138</sup> Taranu (2016), pp. 173–174.

<sup>139</sup> Taranu (2016), p. 182.

<sup>140</sup> Taranu (2016), p. 171.

<sup>141</sup> Davis (2006), p. 123.

The interest in the Goths continues beyond Bede and is also found in the old English translation of Orosius, where Steven Harris has demonstrated a whitewashing of the sack of Rome to present the Goths as almost heroes.<sup>142</sup> As Taranu highlights, ‘the Gothicism in the translator of Orosius should be seen in the context of the negotiation of a common national identity that would include both English and Danes after Alfred’s peace with the latter.’<sup>143</sup> As a result of the work involved in the creation of this new ethnos, the Goths became the ancestors of both the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes. Furthermore, as Taranu also argues, as a result of their being the first Christianised Germanic peoples, they would be able to serve as exemplary ancestors for this new Christian people. As well as serving as a symbolic representation of ‘a trans-ethnic order of identity as it came to be perceived in Carolingian Frankia’<sup>144</sup> made them an even more useful bridge between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes.

The way that Bede and Orosius were used by the ninth and tenth century Anglo-Saxons shows highly-placed intellectuals thinking deeply about new ways to understand ethnicity in the context of nation or empire building, and about how these could be fit into Classical ethnographical models.<sup>145</sup> However, Taranu has also shown how Anglo-Saxon notions of their ancestral links to the Goths appear to have gone further than Carolingian attempts and also found it manifested in different ways, such as in genealogies and heroic poetry. Heroic poetry such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith* present a reconstructed history for the Geats.<sup>146</sup> As well as constructing the history of the Geats, the poet of *Widsith* also created links between the semi-legendary Gothic figure of Ermanaric and the Anglo-Saxons through a marriage to an Anglian princess called Ealhild. Interestingly, as Niles points out, this marriage also serves to highlight a difference in the perceived statuses of the Anglo-Saxons and the Goths. Niles states, the ‘poem is intended to raise the status of the Angles by marrying them into the Goths, whose stature they thereby approximate.’<sup>147</sup>

Further, given the difficulty dating these texts it is possible that the developments that led to the growth of Gothicism may pre-date the ninth and tenth century requirement for a wider ethnic pool.

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<sup>142</sup> Harris (2003), pp. 83–103; Taranu (2016), p. 172.

<sup>143</sup> Taranu (2006), p. 172; Harris (2003), pp. 83–103.

<sup>144</sup> Taranu (2006), p. 173.

<sup>145</sup> Taranu (2006), p. 173.

<sup>146</sup> Taranu (2006), pp. 169–85.

<sup>147</sup> Niles (2007), p. 92.

As Taranu states, ‘there are grounds for seeing a trans-ethnic conceptualization of both Continental and Insular Saxons as Germani among eighth-century Anglo-Saxon intellectuals.’<sup>148</sup> James Palmer argues that even as early as Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ‘the missions to the Continental Saxons read almost like an extension of the conversion of the Angli in Britain: [Bede’s] account of the missions seems to imply some sense of meta-Germanic identity.’<sup>149</sup> Bede states:

At that time the venerable servant of Christ, and priest, Egbert, who is to be named with all honour, and who, as was said before, lived as a stranger and pilgrim in Ireland to obtain hereafter a country in heaven, purposed in his mind to profit many, taking upon him the work of an apostle, and, by preaching the Gospel, to bring the Word of God to some of those nations that had not yet heard it; many of which tribes he knew to be in Germany, from whom the Angles or Saxons, who now inhabit Britain, are known to have derived their race and origin; for which reason they are still corruptly called ‘Garmani’ by the neighbouring nation of the Britons. Such are the Frisians, the Rugini, the Danes, the Huns, the Old Saxons, and the Boructuari.<sup>150</sup>

Frank has questioned any suggestion that Gothicism could have played any part in a pre-Alfredian context, highlighting that there was little desire on the continent to establish links with the Goths or build the kind of identity that the Carolingian or Alfredian monarchs needed. She states:

An Englishman in the age of Bede was unlikely to have heard of Ermanaric, let alone to have regarded him as kin. Goths were not seen as chic or German during the long period stretching from the death of Theodoric to the coronation of Charlemagne. Isidore, writing in seventh-century Spain, could see no family relationship between Goths and Franks; he believed that the former were descended from the Scythians. Fredegar, a Frank writing around 660, portrayed Theodoric the Ostrogoth as a Macedonian, reared in Constantinople; he, like the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum* (c.727), honoured the Franks with Trojan, not Germanic, ancestry.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Taranu (2006), p. 183.

<sup>149</sup> Palmer (2009), pp. 46–47.

<sup>150</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 5, ch. 9. cit. Taranu (2016), p. 183.

<sup>151</sup> Frank (2013), p. 87.

There are certain limitations with Frank's assessment. As Taranu has shown, Gothicism manifested itself differently in Britain to the way it occurred in Carolingian Frankia as well as in some cases belonging to an earlier context than the political situation of tenth century Wessex.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the examples she gives of an absence of Gothic interest are all limited to a continental context, her position comes under scrutiny if we do not consider the works developed in late ninth and tenth century Wessex to represent the earliest forays into Gothicism. However, the difficulty with the dating of works such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith* means that we are unable to say conclusively whether they belong to an eighth century context or later. Clearly, an earlier date for either of these texts than Frank's assumed post-Alfredian date could create a different set of conclusions. For the sake of this argument, however, we will accept that Frank may be correct and we lack the information to contradict her position. As such, whilst interesting it is probable that Bede's use of 410 as a threshold in British history was not linked to a desire to create an ethnic identity that included the Goths, although Bede's work was later used for this purpose.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is little archaeological or contemporary literary evidence to support the idea that the year 410 marked anything like the political threshold in Roman rule that has been ascribed to it by modern historiography. Later Byzantine works such as those by Zosimus and Procopius consider the events associated with the uprising of Constantine III as marking the end of Roman political authority in Britain. Bede, writing even later than these Byzantine sources, links the event chronologically with the sack of Rome, although some translations of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* imply a causal link. Bede's linking of these two events chronologically 410 comes as a result of Bede's attempts at ethnogenesis, as seen in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. It is argued that a purpose of Bede's 'Ecclesiastical history of the English people' was to create a shared identity for the seemingly disparate groups of Germanic-speaking and British peoples fighting for supremacy over the former Roman provinces of Britannia. This was manifested through a shared origin story that included the separation of the Britons from Roman authority which in turn offered a break from British ideas of their own heritage and Roman inheritance. The linking of the sack of Rome and the ending of Roman rule also helped to support Anglo-Saxon claims of succession to the Romans in Britain and to wider Germanic succession to the Romans on the continent, such ideas would play a significant role in the historiography of the fall of the Western Roman Empire through until the

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<sup>152</sup> Taranu (2016), p. 173.

twentieth century. For the audience that Bede spoke to, such a position allowed for claims of Anglo-Saxon *imperium* and also the recognition that Rome's role in the world had changed from one of military and political supremacy (where Germanic peoples had taken over) to one of religious primacy. The uses to which Bede's work was put during Alfredian attempts at ethnogenesis in the ninth and tenth centuries serve as a useful analogy for what Bede was attempting to achieve in the eighth century. An intellectual space had to be created into which the melting pot of early medieval identities could be put to forge a larger shared community or national identity, inclusive of those whose ancestors came from Jutland, Saxony, Denmark or Yorkshire. Bede achieved this by creating breaks between Roman rule and the *Adventus Saxonum* to avoid the suggestion of usurpation and the creation of a shared tradition and the scholars of the ninth and tenth century achieved it through the creation of a shared Gothic heritage. Bede's creation of the English would seem to have been successful in, what became, England as in the creation of this Angelcynn, Alfred's scholars did not include a link to British ancestry amongst their Gothic genealogies.



## Chapter 3- Bede and Welsh Literature

This chapter is intended to demonstrate that the impact of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* was more widespread than simply its foundational role in English history. Alex Woolf has discussed how the period after the end of Roman rule saw the creation of a Welsh identity.<sup>153</sup> This chapter will explore how Bede's narratives have impacted how Welsh history of the first millennium has been read by modern scholars, as well as how the Welsh wrote their own history. Building on the previous chapter, which explored how Bede had acted as a historian in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* linking events to create narratives around the end of Roman rule as part of his ethnogenesis of the English, this chapter will look at the possibility of parts of the corpus of early Welsh praise poetry belonging to a ninth-century context alongside the *Historia Brittonum*, as Welsh propaganda pieces offering a contrary viewpoint of salvation to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

### 3.1 The Sources

For the purposes of discussing how the British/Welsh wrote or presented their own history, the insular sources for British/ Welsh history in the first millennium AD can be largely divided into four types: Latin historical texts, Welsh-language poetry, genealogical tracts, and charters. However, whilst charters are useful in a number of ways, such as for understanding land tenure and individual relationships, they will not be considered here as they have little to say on historiography *per se*.

#### 3.1.1 Latin Historical Texts

The main texts of this type considered will be Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and the *Historia Brittonum*. Whilst this section is called 'Latin Historical texts', it is not strictly true to state that all of the texts used here were written with the express purpose of communicating history. Gildas' *De Excidio* is believed to have been written somewhere in the very late fifth to mid sixth centuries,<sup>154</sup> somewhere in the South-West or Wales.<sup>155</sup> Gildas's *De Excidio* appears to largely be a sermon designed to highlight the wrongs of the Britons in the time that he lived in order to bring them back into God's grace;<sup>156</sup> as such, to make his argument,

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<sup>153</sup> Woolf (2003), pp. 355–373; see also Woolf (2020).

<sup>154</sup> Dumville (1984); Woods (2010), pp. 226–34; O'Sullivan (1978).

<sup>155</sup> Breeze (2010); Breeze (2008); Wright (1984), pp. 27–50; Dumville (1977).

<sup>156</sup> George (2009). On Gildas see also Dumville (1977); Breeze (2010); Wright (1984), pp. 27–50; Lapidge (1984), pp. 85–105; Sharpe (1984); O'Sullivan (1978); Wood (1984); Dumville (1984); Woods (2010), pp. 226–34; Breeze (2008); Sims-Williams (1984).

he wrote a short history highlighting how he believed the Britons had found themselves in the situation that they were in. This was more complex than a chronicling of events, something many historians wish it was, instead it used the Old Testament as a mirror for the situation of the Britons and showed how the Britons fit into a pattern whereby God punished sinfulness and, in this way, Gildas also offered the solution to their problems.<sup>157</sup> As such, Gildas may have been aware of and had access to significantly more information than was included in the *De Excidio*, the point of his work was to demonstrate the cause of British suffering (themselves) and offer a roadmap back to God's good graces.

The next Latin source is Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. This was written in the north-east of modern-day England at the monastery at Jarrow near the River Tyne. It was completed in around AD 731. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* treats the Britons and Welsh as a foreign population to his own English-speaking people<sup>158</sup> and builds on Gildas's criticism of the Britons. Bede's work draws significantly from the historical section of Gildas, sometimes word for word, and also adds to the information contained therein.<sup>159</sup> In writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede is acting as a historian and is not a primary source for the fifth or sixth century.<sup>160</sup> Bede draws together information from several sources, and parses it, to form his narrative. As such, Gildas represents one of several sources used, albeit heavily, to inform Bede's work. As Dumville states in respect of Bede:

Because his work is a fine piece of scholarship, a mine of information, and written in a clear Latin style, it does not follow that we should necessarily accept his view of centuries for which he is at best a secondary authority as more reliable than that of any modern scholar. The argument that Bede lived much closer to the fifth and sixth centuries than we do should not be allowed to cut any ice.<sup>161</sup>

The final Latin source for the history of the Britons/Welsh is the *Historia Brittonum*. This text likely had its origin in North Wales in the ninth century, during the reign of Merfyn Frych of Gwynedd (825-844).<sup>162</sup> Several issues arise with the use of the *Historia Brittonum* as a source for the history of

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<sup>157</sup> O'Loughlin (2012), pp. 94–97.

<sup>158</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15; for further discussion of Bede and the context in which he wrote see also chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>159</sup> See Miller (1975), pp. 241–261.

<sup>160</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 191.

<sup>161</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 192.

Britain in the period c.400-700. David Dumville has summarised them, beginning with the Nennian preface's claim to heap together all of the information that the author could gather, stating: 'if that be accepted as a statement of the author's principles, we are compelled to regard him as an incompetent oaf'.<sup>163</sup> According to Dumville, taking the preface as a true statement of the author's aims has 'brought with it the belief that his very inability to produce an intelligent piece of historical writing has allowed him to reproduce almost unaltered earlier sources of some value for the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-century history of Britain.'<sup>164</sup> Rejecting this approach, Dumville has suggested that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* attempted to create 'a synchronizing history of the type we meet regularly in mediaeval Ireland'.<sup>165</sup> As such, Dumville considers the author to be attempting to create a narrative for the period of the fifth and sixth centuries by synchronizing the material at his disposal. He argues that the author was limited by the sources available to him at the time:

unlike the Irish, he was not suffering from a surfeit of contradictory material and of wilful powers of inventiveness; he struggled rather with inadequate source-material, especially for the fifth century [...] These are interwoven by our author to provide a discontinuous and not entirely coherent attempt at an interpretation of fifth-century British history.<sup>166</sup>

Dumville suggests that the *Historia Brittonum* is 'a rather competent attempt at an appallingly difficult task, especially with the very unsatisfactory sources at his disposal.'<sup>167</sup> The transmission history of the *Historia Brittonum* adds further difficulty, it is believed that there is not a full text of the original document still in existence.<sup>168</sup> Whilst the Harleian recension is believed to represent the most complete version of the text, it dates to around 1100 and is likely to be a copy of a text from the tenth century, which may have been a copy of the original, but is not the original itself.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, perhaps as a result of the belief that the *Historia Brittonum* is not a carefully crafted

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<sup>162</sup> The dating and context of this text will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>163</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 176.

<sup>164</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 177.

<sup>165</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 177.

<sup>166</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 177.

<sup>167</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 177.

<sup>168</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews [n.d.].

<sup>169</sup> Higham (2002), p. 119. See also Fitzpatrick-Matthews [n.d.].

work of historical research but an unedited heap of sources, additional information from later recensions has been added to editions of the *Historia Brittonum* by modern editors, these later additions are only 'distinguishable therein with some difficulty.'<sup>170</sup>

Nick Higham has taken Dumville's more positive view of the text further and has argued that the *Historia Brittonum* could actually represent a sophisticated propaganda piece, offering a contrary view of salvation than that of the ninth-century 'English elite arguing their case to be the chosen people domiciled within the old British provinces, hence as natural and legitimate heirs to the imperial Romans as rulers of Britain,'<sup>171</sup> and represented a 'major British response to Bede and the ideological substrate of English colonialism.'<sup>172</sup> A view seconded by David Dumville, who has argued that the *Historia Brittonum* sets out to contest the past with Bede as much as Gildas, both of whose historical works the author clearly knew well.<sup>173</sup>

Central to this viewpoint is the belief that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* both had access to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and made use of it. Unlike the link between Bede and Gildas, where elements of Bede's text have clearly been copied directly from Gildas,<sup>174</sup> the author of the *Historia Brittonum* has not used Bede in the same way as Bede used Gildas. This makes the argument that the *Historia Brittonum* is a response to Bede harder to make. As Higham describes it, 'it is not, however, a simple amalgam of other existing pieces. It is a highly original piece of writing. Indeed, it must be stressed that the originality has to date been underestimated.'<sup>175</sup> However, Dumville and Higham have noted elements of the *Historia Brittonum* which appear to have been derived from Bede or answering an element of criticism of the Britons derived from Bede.

Dumville argues that the character of Vortigern, as he appears in the *Historia Brittonum*, is drawn largely from English sources whilst the Welsh engaged in a *damnatio memoriae* and highlights Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a location where Vortigern's story appears in full, implying a link between the Bede and the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>176</sup> However, Dumville does not list Bede's *Historia*

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<sup>170</sup> Higham (2002), p. 119.

<sup>171</sup> Higham (2002), p. 116.

<sup>172</sup> Higham (2002), p. 116.

<sup>173</sup> Higham (2002), p. 123; Dumville (1994).

<sup>174</sup> Cf. *DEB*, §24 and *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15.

<sup>175</sup> Higham (2002), p. 121.

<sup>176</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 176.

*Ecclesiastica* as source for the fifth century and suggests that there may be an English legend of Hengist and Horsa from which information about Vortigern was derived.<sup>177</sup> Higham disagrees with this arguing that whilst there is a general acceptance of a small passage of this story derived from Bede, the majority of this story has been interpreted as derived from an anonymous Kentish source. Higham continues and states 'he seems to have used Gildas and Bede more extensively within it than have hitherto been recognised.'<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, Higham suggests elements of the *Historia Brittonum's* discussion of the interaction of Germanus of Auxerre and Vortigern were derived from Bede, in particular Higham states the return of Germanus '*ad patriam suam* (by which the author, following Bede, apparently meant Gaul).'<sup>179</sup> As well as suggesting that the linking of the Saxons to the island of Thanet resulted from Bede's statement that Augustine landed there.<sup>180</sup> Higham also highlights the addition of an interpreter called Cheritic (Ceredig) as being derived from one of Bede's few uses of a British name *Cerdice* in Book IV, chapter 23 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>181</sup>

The northern British section of the *Historia Brittonum* also indicates a use of Bede. Kenneth Jackson and David Dumville agree that a likely source for the Northern British section of the *Historia Brittonum* is the first four Books of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Jackson believes that this came to the author of the *Historia Brittonum* as a single *Northern History* text which he believed was compiled at Glasgow.<sup>182</sup> Dumville disagrees with this assessment and argues that the most likely author of this section was the author of the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>183</sup> One of the most compelling elements of the argument which suggests that the *Historia Brittonum* made use of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is where both texts end. The last historical event that Bede describes is the end of the Northumbrian

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<sup>177</sup> Dumville (1977), p. 177.

<sup>178</sup> Higham (2002), p. 131.

<sup>179</sup> Higham (2002), p. 128.

<sup>180</sup> Higham (2002), p. 133.

<sup>181</sup> Higham (2002), p. 128.

<sup>182</sup> Jackson (1963); Dumville (1976–77), pp. 346–347.

<sup>183</sup> Dumville (1976–77), pp. 345–354.

expansion with defeat by the Picts,<sup>184</sup> which is also the last event described in the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>185</sup> Higham argues

The ultimately Bede-derived reference to Ecgrith's death in battle with the Picts, after which the Northumbrian expansion was halted and efforts to levy tribute from their northern neighbours abandoned... This was clearly included to mark the failure of Anglian imperialism in the north and the humbling of both king and army in the act of invading a Celtic neighbour... Our author seized upon Bede's unusual admission of weakness to his own advantage.<sup>186</sup>

The coincidence of both histories ending their descriptions of events with this event does imply a significant crossover between the two texts. As discussed above, the inclusion of the Northern British section may derive from another source, if we follow Jackson. However, as Dumville argues, it is more likely that North British Section results from the creative analysis of the author of the *Historia Brittonum* drawing together a Northumbrian regnal list and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* into the novel form we find it in the *Historia Brittonum*. If we accept that Bede has been used here, it follows that Bede could have influenced the rest of the *Historia Brittonum* and Higham's argument that it is written to counteract Bede's narrative around the Britons is applicable.<sup>187</sup> A marginally softer viewpoint would be that the author of the *Historia Brittonum*, aware of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, sought to offer a contrary view of the salvation narrative advanced by Bede, in part contradicting Bede's depiction of events and demonstrating that the advance of the English was not unstoppable.

### 3.1.2 Welsh Poetry

This chapter will largely consider the two bodies of Welsh poetry generally considered to contain the earliest elements of Welsh-language literature.<sup>188</sup> The first of these is a collection of poetry referred to as the early 'Taliesin' poems from a fourteenth-century codex called the Book of *Taliesin* (Welsh *Llyfr Taliesin*), also known as Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 2. The other collection is from a thirteenth-century document, attributed to Aneirin, called the Book of *Aneirin*

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<sup>184</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 4, ch. 27.

<sup>185</sup> *Historia Brittonum*, §65.

<sup>186</sup> Higham (2002), p. 158.

<sup>187</sup> Higham (2002), pp. 98–166.

<sup>188</sup> Koch (1997); see also Koch (1988), pp. 17–43.

and known as MS Cardiff 2.81. Significant portions of both of these collections of poetry are believed to date to the tenth century and earlier and some even believe portions of these texts were composed in the sixth or seventh century.<sup>189</sup>

### 3.1.3 Welsh Genealogies

An interesting source type is the genealogies of the rulers and nobility of Wales.<sup>190</sup> These can tell us a great deal about how Welsh dynasties wanted their lineage to be understood. Genealogies for Brittonic dynasties are preserved in several manuscripts, covering not only prominent Welsh dynasties of the period in which they were recorded (the tenth to thirteenth century) but also dynasties from much earlier in time, including Urien Rheged and other British princes of the *Hen Ogledd* from the fourth to the seventh centuries, who are not claimed as ancestors of the later Welsh princes. The earliest surviving group of these is preserved in a single manuscript from London, British Library, Harley MS 3859. Whilst the manuscript has been dated to the twelfth century,<sup>191</sup> the latest entry in this collection is for the maternal and paternal lineages of Owain ap Hywel Da (c.910-988), suggesting they were compiled in his reign.<sup>192</sup> Alongside the Harleian genealogies preserved in Harley MS 3859, collections drawing on some of the same material are also found in Jesus College MS20, however these are believed to date to the thirteenth century<sup>193</sup> and focus on southern Welsh dynasties. An earlier genealogy is preserved in the form of the Pillar of Eliseg (a carved pillar in Denbighshire, Wales), this genealogy contains 31 lines of text describing the ancestry of Elisedd ap Gwylog, an eighth century King of Powys, through Vortigern and Magnus Maximus. The inscription on the pillar states that the stone was erected by Elisedd's great-grandson Cyngen (rendered Concenn on the pillar) ap Cadell (rendered Cattell), a ninth century King of Powys.<sup>194</sup>

### 3.2 Problems associated with early Welsh praise poetry

There are issues associated with the use of any source; however, some sources pertaining to the second half of the first millennium AD are particularly problematic. Before making use of these

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<sup>189</sup> Arguments around the dating of elements of these texts will be considered later in this chapter.

<sup>190</sup> Bartrum (1966).

<sup>191</sup> Siddons (2006), pp. 800–802; see also Bartrum (1966).

<sup>192</sup> Siddons (2006), pp. 800–802.

<sup>193</sup> Siddons (2006), pp. 800–802.

<sup>194</sup> Higham (2002), pp. 166–169.

sources there is therefore a need to unpick the issues involved and consider them whilst making an analysis. The poetry attributed to Taliesin and Aneirin are two such difficult sources, with particular difficulty surrounding the dating of portions of the texts and identifying the transmission that has occurred for us to receive it in its current state. Whilst this poetry is largely concerned with events which are usually considered to have occurred during the sixth century, several prominent scholars have questioned the traditional dating of the composition and the recording of these poems at the time of the events described.<sup>195</sup>

In 1968, Ifor Williams identified twelve poems, written in middle-Welsh, from the fourteenth-century *Llyfr Taliesin* manuscript<sup>196</sup> which he dated to the sixth century and argued were likely to have been written by the historical Taliesin mentioned in the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>197</sup> This position has since been challenged, along with Koch's assertion that there is an archaic block within the poetry of the *Llyfr Aneirin*, also written in middle-Welsh, which could be considered contemporary with a historical Aneirin,<sup>198</sup> by several prominent scholars including O.J. Padel, David Dumville and G.R. Isaac. Padel states that the poems attributed to the sixth century present a dilemma as, if they were written in the form that survives today, they cannot have been as early as the sixth century. Padel argues that sixth-century British was significantly more archaic than the form found in any of the surviving manuscripts. Furthermore, Padel argues that the earliest examples of middle-Welsh found, which display the archaic forms highlighted as demonstrating the sixth- or seventh-century age of elements of the *Llyfr Taliesin* and the *Llyfr Aneirin*, do not predate the ninth century.<sup>199</sup>

There are two main approaches to the use of medieval Welsh poetry as evidence for the early medieval period. Some regard it as valuable evidence for the period, arising from a rich oral tradition, and are content to use certain poems as a way to further construct and flesh out the meagre historical and archaeological evidence for the period. Some, such as John Koch, have gone so far as to argue for an early version of *The Gododdin* dating to the period, a so called 'ur-text' from which the written versions are derived, which survives as an archaic core of the text found in the

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<sup>195</sup> Padel (2013), pp. 115–153. See also Dumville (1988), p. 8.

<sup>196</sup> Huws (1993), p. 20.

<sup>197</sup> Williams (1968), p. xxviii.

<sup>198</sup> Koch (1997).

<sup>199</sup> Padel (2013), pp. 115–153; a contrary opinion has been offered by Sims-Williams (2016).



thirteenth-century *Canu Aneirin*.<sup>200</sup> Koch has made considerable inroads into the hypothetical reconstruction of Neo-Brittonic, moving forward from continental Gallic and insular Celtic and backwards from Middle Welsh and Old Breton in order to reconstruct a phonetically plausible form of the language. He has argued that the archaisms found in the poetry of Aneirin, whilst was still sometimes used in later Welsh texts, show signs of having been composed by a Brittonic language in flux. He further argues that these archaisms show signs of modernisation in places where the meter and internal rhyme of the *awdl* would not be affected, demonstrating that the transmission of this poetry allowed it to be modernised into the form in which it could be preserved in Welsh.<sup>201</sup> Others, like Ifor Williams, have identified the earliest poems by Taliesin and assigned them to the sixth or seventh century.<sup>202</sup> This approach, employed, for example, by Philip Dunshea, allows the reconstruction of a historical narrative on the basis of this evidence.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, if we accept a sixth- or seventh-century authoring of the *ur*-form of *The Gododdin* it also potentially provides evidence of the existence and prominence of a historical Arthur in a sixth-century context or a the existence of a legendary Arthur as early as the composition of the poetry.

Others are more sceptical of the validity of the argument that medieval Welsh poetry offers an early window onto the post-Roman Celtic-speaking world. David Dumville has stated until we are able to reliably date the poetry to the sixth century we are not able to use it as evidence of sixth-century history.<sup>204</sup> This scepticism concerning a sixth- or seventh-century *floruit* for the composers of the ‘Taliesin’ and ‘Aneirin’ poetry has been taken a step further by scholars such as Oliver Padel who, further than simply suggesting that we lack the evidence to support early authorship of these works, have argued through linguistic analysis that these works cannot predate the development of Welsh from Brittonic and as such cannot have been written earlier than the ninth century meaning that the archaisms that Koch uses to argue for a seventh-century *ur*-text are not evidence of the poetry’s age.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, as the poems are clearly written in Welsh, this suggests a composition in a

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<sup>200</sup> The key work is Koch (1997).

<sup>201</sup> Koch (1988), pp. 17–43.

<sup>202</sup> Williams (1968); see further Sims-Williams (2016), pp. 163–234.

<sup>203</sup> Dunshea (2013), pp. 81–115.

<sup>204</sup> Dumville (1988), p. 8.

<sup>205</sup> Padel (2013); see also Sims-Williams (2016).

location closer to the boundaries of modern day Wales rather than in the *Hen Ogledd* where the events they describe occur.<sup>206</sup>

Padel highlights that Kenneth Jackson's primary reasoning for an early date for the Aneirin text boils down to the likelihood that there would be no historical interest in a small number of minor warriors who lost a battle outside the Welsh borders. He has argued that as the earliest date from which Welsh language texts certainly survive, the Welsh language can only be dated as far back as the ninth century. This, he argues, prevents us from being able to reconstruct a language in which the poetry traditionally attributed to this period could have been composed. As such, features which may be used to suggest that the poetry dates from an older period than that within which we can reliably reconstruct it, so called archaisms, are inconclusive when it comes to evidencing the age of this poetry, particularly given the frequency with which they are still used at much later dates.<sup>207</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss the validity of either strand of argument or the linguistic evidence upon which these arguments are based, something which is significantly beyond the skill of the author. Instead, this paper asks, if Padel is correct and the poetry of *The Gododdin* and the material sometimes attributed to an early medieval Taliesin belong to the ninth century or later but predate their eventual recording in the *Llyfr Taliesin* or the *Llyfr Aneirin* (contemplating, for example, a ninth- or tenth-century archetype for the textual tradition and subsequent transmission to the context from which we know them), then what does this mean for our understanding of them? At the same time this chapter also asks if we take secondary, softer, viewpoint and say if Koch, Williams and Jackson are correct in dating the earliest portions of the poetry of the *Gododdin* and Taliesin to the sixth or seventh century, how would a ninth-century transmission of these bodies of poetry interact with the *Historia Brittonum*, if as Jackson argued, there would be no historical interest in a small number of minor warriors who lost a battle outside the Welsh borders. Could the milieu that created the *Historia Brittonum* have generated an interest in the *Hen Ogledd* and the activity of warriors in that region.

### **3.3 Reading Taliesin and Aneirin through the *Historia Brittonum* and as part of a retort to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica***

Assuming that these texts do not predate the ninth century, our narrative sources from the Brittonic-speaking world begin with Gildas – probably writing in the first half of the sixth century –

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<sup>206</sup> Padel (2013).

<sup>207</sup> Padel (2013), pp. 115–29.

who offers a potted history in the context of a polemic on the disasters of his age and how they came about.<sup>208</sup> This polemic supplies us with a few names and a general description of a back-and-forth war between two groups which may have been writ large over the entirety of what we now know as England, fought in a small area in the south-east, or indeed in another, perhaps hitherto unsuspected, area of the British Isles. This was then followed up by Bede in the mid-eighth century. Bede relies heavily on Gildas and adds additional details to Gildas's narrative.<sup>209</sup> These details serve to strengthen the notion of an ethnic divide between the two groups outlined by Gildas. Bede further suggests that the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (the incoming group) had pushed the Britons (the native group) back to the fringes of the British Isles.<sup>210</sup> In Bede's writing the British are seen as the inferior of the two groups, and subject to God's judgement for failure to convert the pagans and for failure to acknowledge the authority of St. Augustine and thus the Church in Rome, as well as their failings in relation to the Easter Controversy.<sup>211</sup>

In advancing a history based upon the opposition of two groups – the English and the Britons – Bede highlights the distinctions between them. The Britons are shown to be subjugated and rebellious, punished by God with the attack of the pagan Angles, Saxons and Jutes and destined to be conquered; worse still, they have previously been adherents of the Pelagian heresy and furthermore their unorthodox Christianity persisted beyond the Germanus of Auxerre's correction of the Pelagian heresy as the impact of their unorthodoxy had resulted in the Easter Controversy in the seventh century, in which British practices were, again, in need of correction. The English begin as pagans, the instrument of God's judgement on the Britons, never conquered by the Romans but successors to their *Imperium* and, once shown the way, exponents of the true version of Christianity. As Higham argues,

It was at this point that Bede introduced Augustine, the Roman apostle of his own English people, so further reinforcing the Roman/Anglo-Saxon moral axis on which his vision of history depends... the refusal of the British clergy *en masse* to acknowledge Augustine's authority at Augustine's Oak (*HE* ii,2) could then be interpreted by Bede as the last damning act of disobedience towards God's representatives on earth, hence to God Himself.

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<sup>208</sup> *DEB*, §§3–26.

<sup>209</sup> Higham (2006); Meyvaert (1996), pp. 827–883; Farmer (1978); Lapidge (2014), p. 62.

<sup>210</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15; see Chapter 4 of this thesis for further exploration of this theme.

<sup>211</sup> Higham (2006).

As such, by the eighth century the impression of the Britons created by insular authors was less than complimentary. This impression was not just limited to Britain: by the eighth century the English influence on the Continent was growing, with English clerics such as Alcuin coming to hold significant positions in the church there. Alcuin himself held a senior position in the court of Charlemagne, and eventually became Abbot of Tours, associating himself with some of the most important figures in western Christianity such as Martin and Gregory.<sup>212</sup>

Into this historiographical context we must insert the *Historia Brittonum*. In all probability, written in the second quarter of the ninth century in Gwynedd, this work was composed following a period in which the Kingdom of Gwynedd had suffered internal power struggles<sup>213</sup> and the death of its king Caradog ap Meirion at the hands of the Mercians in 798.<sup>214</sup> But also at a time when the primary threat to Wales, of the last century, Mercia was also undergoing a period of instability.<sup>215</sup>

Nick Higham has argued for the *Historia Brittonum* being created in the court of Merfyn Frych, in the 830s.<sup>216</sup> Higham argues that the primary purpose of the *Historia Brittonum* was to promote a united British resistance against the English with Merfyn's new dynasty in Gwynedd as the focal point. In order to achieve this, he had to present Gwynedd as a power worth backing and discredit other dynasties within Wales such as Powys. As well as this Merfyn had to present the British cause as one worth fighting for. In part, this meant undoing some of the damage done by Bede and Gildas's damning indictment of the British. As such, in this context, it is possible to see the *Historia Brittonum* as a direct retort to some of the accusations initially made by Gildas and embellished by Bede. It is possible to read Gildas's narrative as a call to arms to regain God's favour and reclaim the lost lands of God's people.<sup>217</sup> As Coumert notes, significant historiographical difficulty was caused by the incompatibility of competing claims within the British Isles to be God's chosen people, resulting in

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<sup>212</sup> Bullough (2004).

<sup>213</sup> Most notably the struggle between Cynan Dindaethwy and Hywel ap Rhodri Molwynog/Caradog. (Several secondary sources name Hywel as the brother of Cynan. However, Oxford, Jesus College, MS. 20 names him as Caradog ap Meirion's son, a claim supported in Harleian Genealogies.) See Bartrum (1966).

<sup>214</sup> Higham (2002), p. 115.

<sup>215</sup> Higham (2002), p. 116.

<sup>216</sup> Higham (2002), p. 119. Keith Fitzpatrick Matthews disputes this context but does agree that the majority of recensions are based on an original that can be dated to the reign of King Merfyn of Gwynedd. See Fitzpatrick-Matthews [n.d.]: he specifically dates this original to the fourth regnal year of his reign 828–9.

<sup>217</sup> Coumert (2019), pp. 19–34.

the coexistence of contradictory versions of the past illustrating the rival claims of the Britons, Scots and English.<sup>218</sup> These contradictory claims, however, may be specific to a British context as the advancement of one *gens* in the narratives of the second half of the first millennium came at the expense of another. For Gildas, the rebellion of the Saxons and the violence that followed represented the initial setback of the Britons that marked the low point from which recovery (i.e. the return to God's favour) could begin, whilst for Bede the same events represent the transfer of God's favour from the Britons to the English. Indeed, Bede outlines his perspective on this:

To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian records in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them. Nevertheless God in His goodness did not reject the people who He foreknew, but He had appointed worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith.<sup>219</sup>

As Nick Higham highlights, the *Historia Brittonum* seems to be a work deliberately constructed to demonstrate several points, or indeed to contradict points made by Bede. A clear, albeit implicit, example of this can be seen in the retort to Bede's claim that the Britons had failed to evangelise the English:

Edwin, son of Aelle, reigned 17 years. He occupied Elmet and expelled Ceretic, king of that country. His daughter, Eanfled, received baptism, on the twelfth day after Whitsun, and all his people, men and women, with her. Edwin was baptised at the Easter following, and twelve thousand men were baptised with him. If anyone wishes to know who baptised them, and this is what bishop Renchidus and Elvodug, the holiest of bishops, told me, it was Rhun son of Urien, that is Paulinus, archbishop of York, baptised them, and for forty days on end he went on baptising the whole nation of Thugs, and through his teaching many of them believed in Christ.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Coumert (2019), pp. 19–34.

<sup>219</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* book 1 ch.22; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 69.

<sup>220</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §63; Morris (1980) p.38.

By stating that Rhun son of Urien (Urien Rheged<sup>221</sup>) was responsible for the baptism of Edwin, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* not only contradicts Bede's claim but also claims for the Britons the responsibility for Northumbrian (and by extension Bede's own) Christianity.

Furthermore, the Britons are presented in the *Historia Brittonum* as one of the earliest of Christian peoples:

Lucius, the British king, received baptism, with all the underkings of the Brittihs nation, 167 years after the coming of Christ, after a legation had been sent by the Roman emperors and by Eucharistus, the Roman Pope.<sup>222</sup>

As Koch has noted, this notion of the Britons as followers of the true version of Christianity even prior to the mission of Augustine to the English makes it into medieval Welsh poetry. Koch highlights how a link is developed in both the traditions of the Welsh and the Bretons between Taliesin and Gildas, in opposition to Maelgwn, who Gildas criticises in the *De Excidio Britanniae*. In the sixteenth-century *Ystoria Taliesin*, Taliesin is said to have defeated the court poets of Maelgwn in competition, but this idea is much older, first suggested in the *Kerd Veib am Llyr* that begins with the words *Golychaf-i gulwyd* found in the fourteenth-century Llyfr Taliesin: 'I have come to Degannwy for (poetic) contention, with Maelgwn who's pleading is the greatest'.<sup>223</sup> While Maelgwn may not appear earlier, in the Taliesin poetry thought most likely to be archaic, Taliesin and Urien are likewise shown to be orthodox Christians:

Urien he, renowned chieftain  
 Constrains rulers and cuts them down  
 Eager for war, true leader of Christendom<sup>224</sup>

Meanwhile, *The Gododdin* situates its action in terms of liturgical time at Catraeth:

On Easter, I saw the great light and the abundant fruits,  
 I saw the leaves that shone brightly, sprouting forth  
 I saw the branches, all together in flower

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<sup>221</sup> Breeze, A. (2013) pp.170–179. Furthermore, Urien is named as the lord of Catraeth in the Taliesin poetry. *Gweith Gwen Ystrat*: Book of Taliesin 56 in Koch and Carey (2009) p. 338.

<sup>222</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §22; Morris (1980) p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> Koch (2013).

<sup>224</sup> Clancy (1998), p. 79.

And I have seen the ruler whose decrees are most generous  
I saw Catraeth's leader from across the plains.<sup>225</sup>

The Taliesin poetry, concerning Urien and his family, positions Catraeth as being within the sphere of influence of the Brittonic-speaking culture portrayed by the poems. Assuming the usual identification of Catraeth with Catterick is correct,<sup>226</sup> the poetry was laying claim to an area of the North which was closely associated in Bedan historiography with the conversion of the Northumbrians to Christianity. If we read these Taliesin and Aneirin poems in a ninth-century Brittonic-speaking context, they resonate with the *Historia Brittonum's* claiming of the conversion of Edwin by the son of Urien.<sup>227</sup>

This is particularly demonstrated in the Northern portion of the *Historia Brittonum*, where it is made clear that Urien has substantial successes against the House of Ida in Bernicia, pushing them back and trapping them on Medcaut (Lindisfarne), until the success is ended by the assassination of Urien by another British ruler, who had previously been part of his alliance, due to jealousy over his success in war:

Hussa reigned seven years. Four kings fought against him, Urien, and Rydderch Hen, and Gwallawg and Morcant. Theodoric fought vigorously against Urien and his sons. During that time, sometimes the enemy, sometimes the Cymry were victorious, and Urien blockaded them for three days and three nights in the island of Lindisfarne. But during this campaign, Urien was assassinated on the instigation of Morcant, from jealousy, because his military skill and generalship surpassed that of all the other kings.<sup>228</sup>

The potential of the Britons to resist the English is further demonstrated through the persons of Arthur and Vortimer.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Koch (2013).

<sup>226</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14. See Chapter 5 of this thesis for further discussion of the importance of Catterick to Bede's Northumbria.

<sup>227</sup> *Historia Brittonum*, §63.

<sup>228</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §63; Morris (1980) pp.37-38.

<sup>229</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §43 and §45.

Then Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle. The first battle was at the mouth of the river Glein. ... The eighth was in Guinnon fort, and in it Arthur carried the image of the Holy Mary, the everlasting Virgin, on his [shield?], and the heathen were put to flight that day, and there was great slaughter among them, through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and power of the holy Virgin Mary, his mother.<sup>230</sup>

This passage highlights the ability of a united British force to defeat allcomers, as well as demonstrating the Britons' position as beloved by God. Similarly, there is a suggestion that up to this point the successes of the English have been gained by treachery:

But Hengest told all his followers to hide their daggers under their feet in their shoes, saying 'when I call out to you and say "*English, draw your knives*", take your daggers from your shoes and fall upon them and stand firm against them. But do not kill the king; keep him alive, for my daughter's sake, whom I wedded to him, for it is better for us that he be ransomed from us.' So the conference assembled, and the English, friendly in their words, but wolfish in heart and deed, sat down, like allies, man beside man. Hengest cried out as he had said, and all the three hundred Senior of king Vortigern were murdered, and the king alone was taken and held prisoner. To save his life, he ceded several districts, namely Essex and Sussex, together with Middlesex and other districts that they chose and designated.<sup>231</sup>

From the very beginning of the *Historia Brittonum*, the Britons are established as the superiors of the English (referred to as Saxons) as the population of Europe in the *Historia Brittonum* suggests:

The first man that came to Europe was Alanus, of the race of Japheth, with his three sons, whose names are Hessitio, Armenon, and Negue. Hessitio had four sons, Francus, Romanus, Britto and Alamanus; Armenon had five sons, Gothus, Walagothus, Gepidus, Burgundus, and Langobardus; Neugio had three sons, Vandalus, Saxo, and Bavarus. From Hessitio derive four peoples—the Franks, the Latins, the Albans, and the British; from Armenon five, the Goths, the Walagoths, the Gepids, the Burgundians, and the Langobards; from Negue four, the the Bavarians, the Vandals, the Saxons, and the Thuringians. These peoples are subdivided throughout Europe.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §56; Morris (1980) p. 35.

<sup>231</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §46; Morris (1980) p. 32.

<sup>232</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §17; Morris (1980) p. 22.



Brutus, the progenitor of the Britons, is described here the youngest son of Hessitio, the eldest of Alanus's sons: a sibling and therefore an equal of both the Franks and the Romans. The progenitor of the Saxons, however, was a junior cousin, the middle child of the youngest of Alanus' sons. The emphasis on the importance of Brutus's lineage is continued with reference to the Trojan narrative, which was popular across Europe during the early medieval period as an origin myth for the successors to Roman authority:

The first inhabitants of Britain were the British, from Brutus: Brutus was the son of Hessitio, Hessitio of Alanus, Alanus was the son of Rhea Silvia, daughter of Numa Pompilius, son of Ascanius. Ascanius was the son of Aeneas, son of Anchises, son of Tros, son of Dardanus, son of Elishah, son of Javan, son of Japheth.<sup>233</sup>

In this way, the Britons are established as both descendants of the Classical and Biblical worlds. As such we can see an explanation for British resistance to Roman authority. From their first contact with Rome, the Britons were, in the account of the *Historia Brittonum*, above acknowledging Roman authority

When the Romans acquired the mastery of the world they sent legates to the British, to demand hostages and taxes from them, such as they had received from all other countries and islands. But the British were arrogant and turbulent and spurned the Roman legates.<sup>234</sup>

If we follow Padel in accepting a ninth-century or perhaps later Welsh context for the creation or the transmission of the *Gododdin* and the earliest Taliesin poetry, we can see how it could be used as part of the milieu created by Merfyn Frych's court in Gwynedd and the drive to reignite the British/Welsh response to English incursions into Welsh territory. A significant part of this endeavour lay in contradicting the harmful narratives around the Britons/Welsh popularised by Bede. The *Historia Brittonum* can be seen as the first step in this process whilst the poetry of Taliesin and Anierin can be seen as the second, supporting the claims of the *Historia Brittonum* and reinforcing an ethnic consciousness of the Britons. In this context, the poetry would serve to highlight the potential of the Britons when united behind one leader and not succumbing to infighting and treachery. Furthermore, the success of the Northern British, under the leadership of Urien, over one of the most successful English Kingdoms (Bede names three seventh century kings of Northumbria –

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<sup>233</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §18; Morris (1980) p. 22.

<sup>234</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §19; Morris (1980) p. 22.

Edwin, Oswald and Oswy – as the three most recent kings holding *imperium* over large parts of the island of Britain)<sup>235</sup> demonstrates the combined military supremacy over the English and further undermines Bede’s claims for English supremacy. This is supported by repeated emphasis on the Britons being the chosen people of God, responding to Gildas’s depiction of the Britons as the latter-day Israelites, and demonstrating that the supremacy in relation to the Church envisioned by Bede for the English is misplaced and that the Christianity of Northumbria is derived from the orthodoxy espoused by Urien and his descendants at the important Northumbrian royal vill of Catraeth.

If we view the poetry of Taliesin and Aneirin through this ninth-century lens, we can view this poetry as perhaps being inspired by the *Historia Brittonum*, or the milieu that created the *Historia Brittonum*. In the poetry then, we can perhaps see stories to supplement and enhance the history contained in the *Historia Brittonum*. This is not simply the poetry of Taliesin, but also the *Gododdin* poetry emphasising the heroic ideal of dying in combat and being remembered in verse. A similar context has been envisioned for the composition of the *Canu Heledd*, a lament by Heledd for loss of her brothers (who were kings of Powys) and the loss of their home to the English, set in the seventh century. It has been pointed out by several scholars that a more likely context for composition of the poetry were the ninth-century invasions of Powys by the Mercians rather than its seventh-century setting.<sup>236</sup> As such, like the Taliesin and Aneirin poetry, the *Canu Heledd* could be deemed a ninth-century imagining of an earlier time reflecting the concerns of the ninth century. This reading of the poetry as part of a milieu answering the charges laid against the Britons by Bede is also applicable to an earlier composition. If we accept a sixth- or seventh-century composition for the collections of poetry in either the south of modern Scotland or in the north of modern England, then the difficulties arising as a result of Padel’s analysis remain. For these texts to have reached modern readers in the form they are now in they cannot have been written in Brittonic. As such in the ninth century, or later, these poems must have been transmitted into Welsh. As has already been pointed out these collections of poetry (particularly the *Goddodin*) are about a small number of minor warriors who lost a battle outside the Welsh borders, and the events of a long-lost royal line outside Wales, from which no contemporary Welsh line claimed descent. A potential context for their transmission into Welsh could be the same milieu that is proposed for a ninth-century composition, in which case the heroic tales of resistance to English expansion across the North of England would also fit with the aims of the Merfyn Frych and his court. This context becomes all the more

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<sup>235</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 5.

<sup>236</sup> Rowland (1990), pp. 120–41; Charles-Edwards (2013), p. 674; Johnson (2017).

important when you consider that the antagonists of the *Gododdin* and Taliesin poetry are the kingdoms celebrated by Bede.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter asks if it is possible to read a number of Welsh texts as part of a pro-British propaganda campaign by a ninth-century king of Gwynedd and, as part of this, as a retort to Bede's character assassination of the Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

The composition of the earliest pieces of Welsh language praise poetry is difficult to date. Whilst the current form that we have of two of the main bodies of text (the *Canu Aneirin* and the *Llyfr Taliesin*) come from the thirteenth and fourteenth century, few would disagree that these do not represent the earliest form of the poetry. Much work has been done in order to find the earliest forms of the work, with some going back as far as the sixth century for the original composition of parts of the poetry. Other have argued that linguistically they cannot date to any earlier than the ninth century. This chapter considered how, if a ninth-century date was correct, this poetry about an area of land no longer in the hands of those culturally and linguistically aligned to the Welsh this poetry could have come to be written. Using Nick Higham's analysis of the ninth-century Latin text *Historia Brittonum* as a piece of pro-British, pro-Gwynedd propaganda setting out the case for united British response to English incursions into Wales under the leadership of the Venedotian King Merfyn Frych, this analysis argues that much of the *Historia Brittonum* was written to counteract the views of the British outlined by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. In this milieu, the composition of several collections of poetry about successful resistance to Northumbrian expansion into territory controlled by British lords (Taliesin) and failed, but glorious, attempts to reclaim that territory once lost (Aneirin) makes sense. This context also makes sense as an explanation for the transmission and recording of the poetry from an earlier composition in the context of the *Hen Ogledd*, should a sixth- or seventh-century composition of the poetry be correct. As such, in both contexts, at the centre of the medieval Welsh understanding of their own history is the Bedan narrative of the failings of the British and their abandonment by God in favour of Bede's *Angli*.

This chapter has provided a case study of how central Bede is to the historiography of the first millennium. His work is so deeply embedded in the historiography of the period to extent that, even in Wales as early as the ninth century, it was felt that in order to advance the position of the Welsh, it was necessary to counter the damage done by Bede.

## Chapter 4- Handling Remains: The impact of the Bedan narrative on Burial Archaeology between AD 400 and AD 650.

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter marks a move away from the literary emphasis of the previous two chapters to an investigation of the impact of the Bedan narrative on the study of the archaeology of the End of Roman rule in Britain and the beginnings of what is known in some spheres as the Anglo-Saxon period. This chapter begins by stating the existence of a narrative (as given by Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*) which describes the end of Roman rule in Britain. It considers how this narrative describes the coming of a migrant population to British shores in the decades that followed to become the dominant culture in the eastern areas<sup>237</sup> of what is currently England. It examines how the application of this narrative has led to an understanding in archaeology that differences in burial practices and material culture can be discussed almost completely in ethnic terms.<sup>238</sup> The next chapter will consider how Bede's description of the *adventus Saxonum* has fed into a series of narratives culminating in the 'decline and collapse' narrative for Roman urban spaces. It will also examine ways in which the use of urban spaces changed in the fifth century (and later) and how these changes could have allowed the continuity of these spaces as centres of local or regional power.

This chapter is intended as a summary of various areas of existing criticism of the Anglo-Saxon paradigm and its application to archaeological study. It draws together existing criticism of the study of the material culture and burial practices of the geographic area of modern England for the period AD 400 to AD 650 with the intention of demonstrating that the existence of Bede's narrative has created a historiographical framework where discussions of changes from burial practices in the third and fourth century (usually seen to be associated with Roman influence on the British populace) to those of the fifth, sixth and seventh century represent the arrival of a migrant population in the second half of the fifth and the sixth century and the replacement of Roman practices with the practices of this migrant population. This narrative has become a significant part of modern English identity as demonstrated by a story from the *Daily Mail*, dated 28 July 2016, based on data from the Ancestry DNA website, which states that 'Yorkshire is most Anglo-Saxon part

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<sup>237</sup> Alex Woolf has defined this eastern area as falling largely to the southeast of the Roman Fosse Way route. See Woolf (2020), p. 24.

<sup>238</sup> For an alternative consideration of many of these issues see Oosthuizen (2019).

of UK,' where the inhabitants have on average 41% 'Anglo-Saxon' genetic material as opposed to the national average of 37%,<sup>239</sup> highlighting how the reading of research can become a tool to reinforce pre-existing notions rather than informing debate.

The first section of this chapter will look briefly at the narrative outlined above, its origins, and the way it manifests itself in the study of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, in essence how research into this period tends to begin from an assumption of the correctness of the above narrative and seek to prove or explain elements of it. The second section will look at how an acceptance of the aforementioned narrative has determined how elements of fifth, sixth and seventh century material culture have been looked at, in particular the role of typology and serialisation in determining date and how beliefs about ethnicity derived from the Bedan narrative can impact how things are dated, and how these assumptions are now being challenged. The third section will consider how modern scientific methods are not above reproach and are also being inhibited by the continued application of Bedan narratives. The fourth section will consider British burial types in the third and fourth centuries and how attempts to establish a third and fourth century (late Roman or Christian) norm and measure divergence from it are faulty and the data set skewed by a small number of large urban cemeteries in the south of England. After demonstrating the lack of a universal norm in burial alignment and type in the third and fourth century, the fifth section will look at a case study from West Heslerton on the North Sea coast in North Yorkshire as a way of demonstrating how much difference there can be from what is considered the norm for the fifth, sixth and seventh century burial in areas and at times where the population would be expected to adhere to ethnically defined burial practices (if such practices existed).

## 4.2 Historiography

Key to any attempt to understand the treatment of patterns and behaviours of the fifth, sixth and seventh century by modern scholars is the narrative in which this treatment is set. As with many elements of British archaeology for the first millennium there is a desire to fit what is found in the archaeology to what is 'known' from the history. For the first half of the first millennium this can be anything from attempts to find evidence of the Barbarian conspiracy of AD 367 or identifying elements of Hadrian's Wall forts.<sup>240</sup> What can be seen from these studies are attempts to situate the study of archaeology within narrative events. A similar phenomenon occurs within the fifth, sixth

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<sup>239</sup> White (2016).

<sup>240</sup> For a coincidence of these two phenomena see Tomlin (1974), pp. 303–309. See also Casey (1979), pp. 66–79; Casey (1983), pp. 121–124; Frere (1987); David Alvarez Jimenez (2013), pp. 73–84.

and seventh centuries: here again archaeology becomes subordinate to the over-arching historiographical narrative. Archaeological study is used to demonstrate how the narrative worked, and how and where elements of the narrative occurred.

The primary narrative in British history for the fifth, sixth and seventh century is the arrival of Germanic-speaking migrants on the East coast and their efforts to establish supremacy over the Celtic- or Latin-speaking population, either by driving them westwards or conquering and subjugating them. The earliest insular contributor to this narrative was Gildas, who (at some point in the first half of the sixth century) wrote:

Then a pack of cubs burst forth from the lair of the barbarian lioness, coming in three *keels*, as the call warships in their language. The winds were favourable; favourable too the omens and auguries, which prophesied, according to a sure portent among them, that they would live for three hundred years in the land towards which their prows were directed, and that for half the time, a hundred and fifty years, they would repeatedly lay it waste. On the orders of the ill-fated tyrant, they first fixed their dreadful claws on the east side of the island, ostensibly to fight for our country, in fact to fight against it. The mother lioness learnt that her first contingent had prospered, and she sent a second larger troop of satellite dogs. It arrived by ship, and joined up with the false units. Hence the sprig of iniquity, the root of bitterness, the virulent plant that our merits deserved, sprouted in our soil with savage shots and tendrils.<sup>241</sup>

And:

So a number of the wretched survivors were caught in the mountains and butchered wholesale. Others, their spirit broken by hunger, went to surrender to the enemy; they were fated to be slaves forever, if indeed they were not killed straight away, the highest boon. Others made for lands beyond the sea,<sup>242</sup>

Bede added several elements to this narrative:

They consulted as to what they should do and where they should seek help to prevent or repel the fierce and very frequent attacks of the northern nations; all, including their king Vortigern, agreed that they should call the Saxons to their aid from across the seas. As

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<sup>241</sup> *DEB* §23. Winterbottom (1978) p.26.

<sup>242</sup> *DEB* §25. Winterbottom (1978) p.27.

events plainly showed, this was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon those miscreants.<sup>243</sup>

And then:

At that time the race of the angles or Saxons, invited by Vortigern, came to Britain in three warships and by his command were granted a place of settlement in the eastern part of the island [...] They came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. The people of Kent and the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin and also those opposite the Isle of Wight, that part of the kingdom of Wessex which is today called the nation of the Jutes. From the Saxon country, that is the district now known as Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons. Besides this, from the country of the Angles, that is the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes and the Saxons, which is called *Angulus*, came the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians and all the Northumbrian race (that is the people who dwell north of the river Humber) and the other Anglian tribes. It was not long before hordes of these peoples eagerly crowded into the island and the number of foreigners began to increase to such an extent that they became a source of terror to the natives who had called them in [...] Some of the miserable remnant were captured in the mountains and butchered indiscriminately; others, exhausted by hunger, came forward and submitted themselves to the enemy, ready to accept perpetual slavery for the sake of food, provided only they escaped being killed on the spot: some fled sorrowfully to lands beyond the sea, while others remained in their own land and led a wretched existence, always in fear and dread, among the mountains and woods and precipitous rocks.<sup>244</sup>

He further reinforces the replacement of Briton with Anglo-Saxon (AD 603):

At this time, Aethelfrith, a very brave king and most eager for glory, was ruling over the kingdom of Northumbria. He ravaged the Britons more extensively than any other English ruler. He might indeed be compared with Saul who was once king of Israel, but with this exception, that Aethelfrith was ignorant of the divine religion. For no ruler or king had

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<sup>243</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 49.

<sup>244</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1 ch. 15; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 49-53.

subjected more land to the English race or settled it, having first either exterminated or conquered the natives.<sup>245</sup>

This narrative has become key to English identity and has had lasting impacts on the study of the period. Stephen Laker has highlighted how the narrative's impact on the historiography of language change has not developed much since 1830 when Robert Forby wrote:

The Saxons brought their language into this country exactly in the middle of the fifth century...throwing off the insidious character of allies, under which they came, had not only occupied the greater part of the country, but had driven out its ancient inhabitants, and replaced them by successive hordes of barbarous invaders from the north-western coasts of Germany. The whole story of mankind does not afford a stronger, perhaps not so strong, an instance, of the entire conquest and extermination of a whole people by an invading army.<sup>246</sup>

In 1994, Ans van Kemenade wrote:

Old English or Anglo-Saxon is the group of dialects imported by immigrants from the continent in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, who drove back the native Romano-Celtic population to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland.<sup>247</sup>

Whilst in 2003, David Crystal wrote:

There is surprisingly, very little Celtic influence – or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the savage way in which the Celtic communities were destroyed or pushed back into the areas we now know as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria and the Scottish Borders.<sup>248</sup>

All of which contribute to 'the unanimous conclusion that there was very little Brittonic or British Latin influence on English,'<sup>249</sup> the explanation for which is almost wholly derived from Bede's narrative.

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<sup>245</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* book 1 ch. 34; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 117.

<sup>246</sup> Forby (1830), pp. 20–21 in Laker (2008), p. 1.

<sup>247</sup> Van Kemenade (1994). P. 110 in Laker (2008), p. 1.

<sup>248</sup> Crystal (2003), p. 8 in Laker (2008), p. 2.

<sup>249</sup> Laker (2008), p. 2.



A similar trend is visible in archaeological study, although it is not expressed in the same way. The archaeological model has become more nuanced and is now framed in terms of ethnic identity. Heinrich Härke argues that ethnic identity is a 'situational construct: it is considered to be not 'in the blood,' but 'in the head', and therefore flexible and changeable'<sup>250</sup> and has attempted to draw distinctions between the search for ethnic identity and the search for race. Härke has stated, 'you cannot infer race from archaeological evidence because it is a biological concept, and as such it cannot be inferred from cultural remains'<sup>251</sup> and has argued that ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon and as such it should

be possible to infer it from cultural evidence, including archaeological remains. In early medieval archaeology, such inferences have routinely been using grave goods, in particular female dress items, to identify 'tribes' (usually meaning ethnic groups) named in the written sources of the period, to follow their migrations, and to identify the 'tribal' affiliations of individuals.<sup>252</sup>

However, what can be seen from Härke's suggestion that cultural evidence can be used to track the movement of 'tribes' is that even when stated that ethnic identity is a societal construction, flexible and changeable, and thus should be transferrable without the movement of people, the implicit assumption is that migration as described by Bede not only occurred, but did so in such a way that material culture can be used to track it. Furthermore, a 2006 paper by Mark G Thomas, Michael Stumpf and Heinrich Härke which attempts to apply DNA markers to what Härke has elsewhere deemed to be a 'societal construct,' alongside the application of a societal apartheid preventing the genetic mixing of migrant and native populations, to explain the high level of association between the y-chromosomal levels of two geographic areas<sup>253</sup> suggests a firm adherence to the belief in migration as described by Bede and that the search for ethnic identity may simply be the search for race by a different name.

In 2007, Heinrich Härke wrote:

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<sup>250</sup> Härke (2007a), p. 13.

<sup>251</sup> Härke (2007a), p. 12.

<sup>252</sup> Härke (2007a), p. 13.

<sup>253</sup> Thomas, Stumpf and Härke (2006), pp. 2651–2657; the impact of Bede's narrative on the search for DNA evidence of migration will be discussed later in the chapter.

The archaeological sequence of the first half of the first millennium AD in England is, in itself, reasonably clear and unambiguous: (1) Roman material culture up to the beginning of the fifth century; then (2) a black hole ('post crash gap') in the first half of the fifth century, first punctuated, and then followed by, (3) Anglo-Saxon material from the second half of the fifth century.<sup>254</sup>

What the above demonstrates is the predominance given to ethnicity as a way of understanding the fifth century onwards. Härke's premise is that there were Britons in the east of what we now know as England but that they were archaeologically invisible: either that they made use of perishable materials (as Leslie Alcock notes, 'wood, flax, wool, horn and leather were all freely utilised in Arthur's day [the fifth and sixth century], and we may infer that gut and sinew were equally important; but none of these survive')<sup>255</sup> or that their presence is unrecognised.<sup>256</sup> Two assumptions are clear from Härke. The first is that there were at least two ethnic groups in what we now know as England from the fifth century onwards, with the fifth century marking the arrival of the additional ethnicity, and the second is that these ethnicities had different material cultures and as such should appear differently in the archaeological record. These assumptions are also apparent when Sam Lucy notes that there is a strong link between burial practices and ethnicity in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>257</sup> What is clear from these is the legacy of Bede and Gildas's writings: they inform modern writers of the existence of ethnic difference and thus ethnic difference is sought, even to the point where Härke argues that archaeological invisibility is a feature of one ethnic group.

Where archaeological understanding has moved on from Bede's narrative is in the growth of the 'elite emulation model.'<sup>258</sup> The elite emulation model assumes that rather than the wholesale genocide of all those who failed to flee westwards in the face of Germanic-speaking invaders, the victorious Germanic-speaking invaders occupied the highest strata of society and the subservient Britons adopted their customs, language and material culture. However, even this model assumes much of Bede's narrative is correct, if slightly exaggerated in places, and centres population

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<sup>254</sup> Härke (2007b), p. 58.

<sup>255</sup> Alcock (1971), p. 144.

<sup>256</sup> Härke (2007b), pp. 58–60. Härke is not the only seeker of archaeologically-invisible Britons: see Higham (2007) for an entire volume devoted to the perceived phenomenon.

<sup>257</sup> Lucy (2000b), pp. 11–17.

<sup>258</sup> Higham (1992); for a slightly different model see also Woolf (2007), pp. 115–129.

movement and ethnicity in fifth to seventh century burial change, albeit slightly less directly than through genocide.

An assumed link between ethnicity and burial behaviour has resulted in certain burials being seen as representing a type that belongs to Anglo-Saxon cultures and others that represent continuity of Romano-British culture. Whilst ethnicity may offer a degree of explanation for some of the changes apparent in burial archaeology, I would suggest that the simplicity of ethnicity as a complete explanation has led, historically, to a certain amount of complacency in the study of this field. This form of identity is given a perhaps undeserved predominance in the study of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, to the point where ideas of ethnicity are used to frame any study of the period, for example (despite her challenge to the acceptance of ethnicity being derived from material culture) Sam Lucy's *The Anglo-Saxon way of Death*<sup>259</sup> and Nick Stoodley's study of 'Anglo-Saxon' gender presentation, *The Spindle and the Spear*<sup>260</sup> both of which make their arguments from an ethnic start point. As such, it makes consideration of any other form of identity difficult and any attempt to frame a discussion of the fifth, sixth and seventh century becomes expressed in terms of ethnicity.

#### **4.3 Problems of dating Typology and Serialisation**

One of the main difficulties when addressing burials from the fifth, sixth and seventh century is dating when the burial occurred. A method frequently used to provide a period in which the burial occurred is through the use of typology. Guy Halsall defines typology as the following:

Typology assumes that artefacts change in form and design over time. Brooches, for example, can be divided into general types (disc brooches, saucer brooches, &c.). These are then classified, according to design and decoration (often using recognized artistic 'styles'), into sub-types [...] The researcher posits a progression from one sub-type to another and sub-types are then argued to be early or late within the series.<sup>261</sup>

Such a methodology cannot give an absolute date for any item and chronology is therefore determined by relationship to other items dated using other means. As Halsall goes on to argue, there are further difficulties such as determining whether a type progresses or degenerates over

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<sup>259</sup> Lucy (2000a).

<sup>260</sup> Stoodley (1999).

<sup>261</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 27.

time (moving from simple to complex types or *vice versa*, or even fluctuating between the two) and how to measure the time elapsed between types.<sup>262</sup> And perhaps the most damning flaw is that, 'When used, as it usually is, as a chronological rather than an analytical tool, typology is flawed by the assumption that artefact variability is exclusively to be explained by difference in date.'<sup>263</sup>

Typology has been refined by the use of 'seriation' which is where the contexts in which sub-types are generally found are compared and dated, placed in a series and assigned to different periods, for example 'Artefact-type 'a' is here found with sub-types 'b', 'c', 'd' and 'e', but never with 'f' to 'j'. Sub-type 'h', on the other hand, is found with 'e', 'f', 'g', 'i' and 'j' but never with 'a' to 'd'.<sup>264</sup> The application of this method creates assemblages which when associated with either stratigraphy or specifically dated items give an indication of chronology. However, some of the failings of typology continue to apply here: 'If we continue to assume that artefacts differ only according to time, we may mask, and thus prevent the useful study of, an important aspect of early medieval burial variability.'<sup>265</sup> However, despite his criticism of the methodology Halsall still states 'Nonetheless, artefact seriation, refined and pinned down by numismatic and scientific dating methods, remains the best way of dating grave-goods, graves and structural types of grave.'<sup>266</sup>

A clear example of the difficulties associated with dating based on assemblage is demonstrated by the late First Millennium execution cemetery at Walkington Wold (East Yorkshire). Initial assessment based on an assemblage which included 700 coins (the earliest examples of which included a coin of Claudius Gothicus c. AD 268) and thousands of pieces of late-fourth-century pottery, as well as this the excavators Bartlett and Mackey (1973) identified a small group of bronze objects of post-Roman 'Germanic manufacture'.<sup>267</sup> This led to a suggestion of a fifth-century date, compounded by the excavator's belief that the barrow with which these burials were associated was the remains of a fourth-century signal station. This has subsequently been dismissed as a misidentification of site,<sup>268</sup> with various reinterpretations being offered including a late Roman temple site or an execution

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<sup>262</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 27.

<sup>263</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 27.

<sup>264</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 27.

<sup>265</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 28.

<sup>266</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 28.

<sup>267</sup> Bartlett and Mackey (1973); Buckberry and Hadley (2007), p. 310.

<sup>268</sup> Bailey (1985), pp. 11–12; Buckberry and Hadley (2007), p. 310.

cemetery dating to the 'later Anglo-Saxon' period.<sup>269</sup> Ultimately, despite the acceptance of a late Roman or fifth-century date in associated literature,<sup>270</sup> carbon dating has shown this cemetery to be of a much later date than Bartlett and Mackey's initial assessment, suggesting a range of seventh-to eleventh-century burials, with burial times more than 100 years apart between skeletons in the same grave.<sup>271</sup> This time lapse suggests a lack of care when the burials were carried out, supporting the suggestion that this was, at least at times, a cemetery for people of low social status or perhaps outcasts.

Interestingly, the burials of barrow 1 at Walkington Wold do not tend to conform to the traditional narrative associated with alignment. Of the 11 burials from Walkington Wold, one is buried with the head to the east, four with head to the west, and six with their heads to the south.<sup>272</sup> Of these only two had retained their heads: the rest were decapitated. As well as this there were numerous disassociated skulls in the areas around the inhumations.<sup>273</sup> Given the traditional narrative that following the Augustinian Mission at the end of the sixth century there was an enhancement of the Christian tradition of burying with head to the west it would be expected that this would be the dominant tradition. The failure of the application of this to this group is illuminating. That this is an apparently specific sort of burial that only applied to an apparently discrete group within society suggests that either burial alignment was not universal because it mattered less than we give it credit for or perhaps the divergence from this expected alignment at Walkington Wold is a further indication of the status of the individuals being buried. In which case, at what status within society could a person be able to expect an East-West burial, and is this something specifically associated with those of the highest status?

An area where the ethnic interpretation of typology and serialisation is receiving criticism is in relation to brooch wear in fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century burial being seen as a marker of ethnicity. The use of brooches to denote the status of their wearer could represent a remnant of Roman tradition. The Stilicho Diptych depicts the early fifth-century *Magister Militum* Stilicho wearing a style of brooch known as a crossbow brooch. This brooch type is associated with official

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<sup>269</sup> Bailey (1985) (Roman Temple), Reynolds (1997) (Anglo-Saxon execution cemetery) discussed in Buckberry and Hadley (2007), p. 310.

<sup>270</sup> Allison (1976); Philpott (1991).

<sup>271</sup> Buckberry and Hadley (2007), pp. 312–315.

<sup>272</sup> Buckberry and Hadley (2007), p. 311.

<sup>273</sup> Buckberry and Hadley (2007), p. 311.

office in the Roman Empire and is also known in British contexts. The crossbow brooch can be seen as indicator of military rank or perhaps as an element of elite status. The latter would appear to offer some explanation for the discovery of some crossbow brooches in the burials of women and children,<sup>274</sup> while the absence of these finds from every fourth-century military burial would appear to indicate that there was a link between those who wore crossbow brooches and a status that not everyone possessed.

Vince Van Thienen has demonstrated that the artistic depiction of crossbow brooches shows a shifting use from the beginnings of their popularity in the third century, where they replaced saucer brooches as a popular style amongst those individuals with a military and wealthy background, i.e. military officers.<sup>275</sup> Crossbow brooches also have a possible Germanic link: Van Thienen argued that ‘foederati – foreigners fighting in the name of Rome – were furnished with weapons by the Roman *fabricae* and ... their warband leaders also wore crossbow brooches.’<sup>276</sup> Indeed, ‘The first scholars to study the crossbow brooch believed it to symbolise the growing ‘Germanic’ presence or influence in the Late Roman army and empire.’<sup>277</sup> Some of these brooches, such as the Childeric brooch (c. AD 464-482) and the Apahida brooch (c. AD 454-473), have been found beyond the recognised borders of the empire and could have belonged to local leaders with strong imperial ties.<sup>278</sup>

However, from late-fourth century, ‘although some individuals, including Stilicho for instance, had a clear military history, it appears that the primary focus was their official position as consuls’.<sup>279</sup> Van Thienen goes on to argue that the general depiction of those wearing crossbow brooches in a fourth- and fifth-century context in iconographic material of the time implies that they were worn in wealthy and politically influential circles that were linked to the military establishment.<sup>280</sup> The creation of gilded and highly decorated forms of the brooch, beyond the initial, and more widely circulated, copper alloy variants of the crossbow brooch, such as the gilded crossbow brooch which was inscribed with *Utor Felix* (good luck to the user) and *Vene Vivas* (live well) buried with an

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<sup>274</sup> Collins (2010), p. 66.

<sup>275</sup> Van Thienen (2016), p. 120.

<sup>276</sup> Van Theinen (2016), p. 120.

<sup>277</sup> Van Thienen (2016), p. 102.

<sup>278</sup> Van Thienen (2016), p. 122.

<sup>279</sup> Van Thienen (2016), p. 121.

<sup>280</sup> Van Theinen (2016), p. 122.

individual at Lankhills cemetery at Winchester, along with silver belt fittings,<sup>281</sup> would appear to indicate the high status of the bearer. As Van Thienen argues, in the fourth and fifth century, it seems likely that at this time the owners of crossbow brooches were consuls and members of the senatorial class itself.<sup>282</sup>

Several crossbow brooches have been discovered in fourth-century contexts at various locations in Britain, and the presence of these at sites other than those clearly associated with the military would appear to confirm Van Thienen's argument. The Lankhills cemetery in Winchester has more crossbow brooches than any other cemetery in Britain. This may be to do with a proliferation of non-military officials in the South-West, the creation of a second naval command in the region<sup>283</sup> or the creation of an official native militia,<sup>284</sup> something that has been argued occurred in northern Spain.<sup>285</sup> Cool highlights that there are more gilded or gold examples in the South-West than anywhere else in Britain but there are more crossbow brooches in the eastern portion of the country.<sup>286</sup> Rob Collins (2010) has suggested that the presence of gold crossbow brooches at the villas at Ingleby Barwick and at Corbridge, but not on Hadrian's Wall, may indicate the movement of high status officials away from the frontier, arguing that the proliferation of these gold brooches in southern Gaul and Italy, where the Imperial court was to be found, could indicate they were reserved for those of the highest ranks.<sup>287</sup>

What the above demonstrates is the association of crossbow brooches and Roman officials (military or administrative) and their appearance in British archaeology in fourth-century contexts. Despite the association of brooches and Roman authority, there have been significant attempts to associate the use of brooches with the manufacture of a 'Germanic' or Anglian identity in the fifth and sixth century. Toby Martin writes:

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<sup>281</sup> Cool (2010), p. 7.

<sup>282</sup> Van Thienen (2016), p. 122.

<sup>283</sup> Roger White referenced in Cool (2010), p. 8.

<sup>284</sup> Laycock (2008), p. 131.

<sup>285</sup> Russell and Laycock (2010), p. 164.

<sup>286</sup> Cool (2010), pp. 7–8, perhaps due to the establishment of significant military commands such as the *Dux Britanniarum* and the *Comes Litoris Saxonis* in the late third and fourth century.

<sup>287</sup> Collins (2010), pp. 65–68.

the idea of Anglian identity must have existed before its objectification in cruciform brooches. Yet, the cruciform brooch also seems to have existed in England before the ethnogenesis of the Anglian identity... This account therefore suggests that the cruciform brooch, as a pre-existing material form with Germanic connotations that connected it at least approximately with the perceived homelands, was appropriated in an act of opportunism by an emerging ethnic group seeking a suitably authentic symbol with which to demonstrate their descent.<sup>288</sup>

Whilst the distribution of these brooches is (or has been thought to be) coterminous with the extent of the Anglian dialects of Old English, the location of their use does not necessarily mean that they were a badge of Anglian identity. The matching distributions of brooches and dialect might be caused by some other factor, an idea which is generally discounted due to the consistent application of Bede's ethnic explanation. Additionally, it has also been noted that the earliest forms of cruciform brooch have late Roman decorative elements,<sup>289</sup> highlighting the links between Late Roman military tradition and fifth- and sixth-century burial. Whilst the earliest forms of cruciform brooch in Britain have Continental parallels,<sup>290</sup> the use of the cruciform brooch seems to have developed in isolation from the Continent: types C, D and Z have no Continental parallels.<sup>291</sup> As Martin highlights there are examples of cruciform brooch in Britain from the early fifth century onwards:

The presence of the very early cruciform brooch Dorchester G2 in what seems to be a sub-Roman context should also warn us not to discount the possibility of Germanic peoples in Roman Britain long before the proposed *adventus Saxonum*. It is a possibility, albeit a slim one, that those early cruciform brooches were just as much a Germanic influenced sub-Roman product as one that originated from strictly outside the bounds of the Empire.<sup>292</sup>

These cruciform brooches may have fourth-century antecedents from Germany.<sup>293</sup> Harland has countered the belief in a solely Germanic inheritance for the earliest cruciform brooches by highlighting that

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<sup>288</sup> Martin (2011), pp. 181–182; see Harland (2017) for rebuttal of this position.

<sup>289</sup> Harland (2017), p. 165.

<sup>290</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 25.

<sup>291</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 25.

<sup>292</sup> Martin (2011), p. 172.

<sup>293</sup> Martin (2011), p. 150 and Harland (2017), p. 163.



The earliest precursors to cruciform brooches (Nydam brooches, Armbrust brooches, etc.) were often found in cemeteries whose contexts suggest a desire on the part of the burying community to demonstrate their affiliation with Roman authority—associated with crossbow brooches, distinct military belt buckles, and the like—often when the genuine products of Roman *fabricae* were not available.<sup>294</sup>



*Fig 2: Images above: A crossbow brooch dated to the late fourth or fifth century (left) and a cruciform brooch dated to AD 475–550 (right).*

It is perhaps unsurprising that a method of denoting high office in a Roman context in the fourth century could have evolved to denote a high status in an insular context in the period that followed. Yet the desire to attach ethnic labels to post- fourth-century material culture, developed from the desire to place archaeology within the narrative structure defined by Bede and Gildas, has led to the similarity of such types being largely ignored. As Harland asks in respect of the similarity of the dress depicted on the early-fifth-century Stilicho diptych to the assemblage of a grave from Mucking in Essex, seen to be typical of sixth-century east coast burial, would ‘Lowland British contemporaries have been so attentive to the putative ethnic signals given by the slight variations in the metalwork composing the overall ensemble?’<sup>297</sup> Whilst, rigorous academic study has produced a series of minor typological differences that are seen to represent the display of ethnicity, it is always worth asking how aware the desired audience of these statements would be of small differences in their display.

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<sup>294</sup> Harland (2017), p. 253.

<sup>295</sup> An image of a crossbow brooch dated to the early fifth century, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2000–2021).

<sup>296</sup> A cruciform brooch from Barrington, Cambridge dated AD 475–550; see British Museum (2015).

<sup>297</sup> Harland (2017), pp. 339–40.

Similarly, the already difficult process of using material culture types to act as the basis for dating is exacerbated by the difficulties created by attempting to place burials within Bede's chronology. The continued use of this narrative framework ignores the possibility, that people can continue using material culture long after their time of manufacture, and even firmly dated material culture such as coinage are only able to provide a time after which deposition occurred. As the existence of seventh- to eleventh-century burials bearing third-century coinage and fourth-century pottery shows, using these firmly dated material culture types as a close indicator of the time in which an event occurred could be a mistake, and the time that a material is in use or has value is not always easy to determine. Furthermore, material culture from which a person is chronologically divorced (such as coinage) may retain a meaning for later populations that have not been identified and whilst Bede takes great care to divorce the population of eighth-century Britain from their Roman past by creating a rupture in the fifth century, this message may not have made it all the way through society.<sup>298</sup>

#### **4.4 Moving towards a more scientific study of remains and material culture (DNA/Carbon Dating and Strontium Isotope analysis) and the difficulties using these including their basis within /biases towards a Bedan narrative.**

As has been outlined above the application of scientific methods has been used to provide a firmer basis for the dating of artefacts and burials. The primary method of achieving this is through carbon dating. The use of carbon dating – measuring the degradation of the carbon-16 isotope in living matter after they died – has been useful in providing date-ranges in which items were deposited; strontium and oxygen isotope analysis has been used to determine the geological make-up of the area in which a person lived prior to around their sixth year of life; and DNA analysis has been used to measure the similarity of DNA for persons in certain areas to those in others in a bid to determine whether population movement occurred between different areas.

Strontium and oxygen isotope analysis and DNA analysis could be key to understanding if and, by extension, how much population movement occurred in the third quarter of the First Millennium AD. In short, they could in theory be used to confirm or deny the existence of the narrative as described by Bede- if there are people who can be shown to have migrated from Germany and buried in England in the fifth, sixth and seventh century (as shown by strontium and oxygen isotope analysis)– presumably Bede was correct.<sup>299</sup> What's more if there is a strong genetic link between the

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<sup>298</sup> See chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>299</sup> See Budd et al. (2004).

populations of the east of England and that of northern Germany then presumably there was a large number of this population that moved as the narrative suggests, or there was a strong link between the populations that manifested itself in a significant body of shared DNA. However, whilst a strong genetic link between the modern populations of the east of England and northern Germany may prove movement between these two areas, this movement may not have occurred all at once (a large-scale migration) or in the fifth or sixth century. Whilst it is accepted that the application of these scientific methods could, potentially, offer a wealth of information that could help to answer questions about the period we study, there are also difficulties that arise from their use that should not be ignored – in particular if we seek to use this information to confirm Bede's narrative.

Additionally, it should also be remembered that the majority of dating does not use a scientific basis: it is done by assemblage. This is largely due to the expense of scientific analysis like carbon dating, strontium and oxygen isotope analysis, and DNA sampling being more expensive than the traditional methods of dating,<sup>300</sup> and frequently the use of these methods would exceed the funds available to digs. If carbon dating is used it is as a product of additional funding explicitly sought in exceptional circumstances, where the evidence or stratigraphy differs from the normal understanding of a site. As such, even with the availability of carbon dating as a method of more accurately ascertaining the age of deposits, funding and budgetary limitations mean that older, less accurate, methods still predominate in the assembly of our archaeological record.

The use of strontium isotope analysis is currently under question. Research into the soils in Denmark has demonstrated that agricultural lime can affect the isotopic make-up of the soil and as a result changes the baseline level measure. This can produce adverse results: for example Thomsen and Andreasen have challenged the previous interpretation that the 'Bronze Age' Egtved girl had been born in southern Germany and migrated to Denmark, suggesting she was actually born locally to the area in which she was buried and that the use of lime in the non-calciferous soils of Jutland have affected the levels of Strontium 87 and 86 in the area that she was buried.<sup>301</sup> As such similar effects could occur in other areas, resulting in a differing geological picture being presented for a person's origins than actually occurred.

Genetic research (the use of DNA evidence) has evolved significantly in recent decades, and has the potential to inform our understanding of population change in the fifth, sixth and seventh century,

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<sup>300</sup> By typology, stratification, and association with other more accurately datable materials such as coinage.

<sup>301</sup> Thomsen and Andreasen (2019), p. 8.

whether this represented cultural change amongst a largely genetically homogenous population, with very little impact from either Celtic-speaking (in prehistoric contexts) or Germanic-speaking (in the mid-first millennium AD) migrants as has been argued by Stephen Oppenheimer,<sup>302</sup> or an almost total population replacement in the east of modern day England by a Germanic-speaking population in the middle of the first millennium as was argued by Michael Weale et al.<sup>303</sup> As the previous two examples, which are the results of research published within 4 years of each other drawing opposite conclusions, show, the use of DNA to inform archaeological understanding is fraught with difficulty.

The vastly different conclusions from Weale et al. and Oppenheimer are in part derived from differing methodologies. At present the scientific community are engaged in tracking Y-Chromosomal DNA (passed solely down the male line of a family),<sup>304</sup> Mitochondrial DNA (passed by a mother to her offspring),<sup>305</sup> as well as the tracking of specific allele groups across populations (rare allele testing).<sup>306</sup> Specific Y Chromosomal research is further divided into 2 groups – principal components analysis (tracking average patterns across a whole sample) and the phylogeographic method, which tracks individual genes and places them within a theoretical framework to track their origins and development.<sup>307</sup> The vastly different approaches resulting in vastly different results make using genetic evidence for population migration very difficult and, at present, untrustworthy.

Furthermore, whilst research seeks to link a migrant population with events in the fifth and sixth century as described by Bede, it reaches difficulty when deciding where the migrant population is from. Although Bede informs readers that the migrants are from Saxony, Jutland and Angeln,<sup>308</sup> and archaeological research has been carried out linking the material cultures and burial practices with those of what is currently North Germany and Southern Denmark,<sup>309</sup> many genetics studies conclude

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<sup>302</sup> Oppenheimer (2006b); Oppenheimer(2006a). Oppenheimer argues for a Germanic-speaking Belgic pre-Roman population in Britain.

<sup>303</sup> Weale et al. (2002), pp. 1008–1021.

<sup>304</sup> Weale et al. (2002), pp. 1008–1021; see also Thomas, Stumpf and Harke (2006), pp. 2651–2657.

<sup>305</sup> Forster et al. (2004), pp. 99–111.

<sup>306</sup> Schiffels et al. (2016), pp. 1–9; Schiffels and Sayer (2017), pp. 255–266.

<sup>307</sup> Oppenheimer (2006b), p. 6.

<sup>308</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 14.

<sup>309</sup> For a useful discussion of recent attempts to link the ethnicities of North Germany, Southern Denmark and the South East of what is currently England and examples of archaeological links between the areas see Harland (2017), pp. 20–32, see also Baker (2006).

a genetic similarity between the populations of the east coast of what is currently England and the North of what is currently the Netherlands and not to a north German or Southern Scandinavian population.<sup>310</sup> Oppenheimer states that 'English females almost completely lack the characteristic Saxon mtDNA marker type still found in the homeland of the Angles and Saxons.'<sup>311</sup> Indeed, Weale et al.'s 2002 study sought to compare samples from Norway, Friesland and samples taken in a transect across the centre of England and North Wales,<sup>312</sup> ignoring the 'Anglo-Saxon' heartlands as described by Bede. Despite this, such evidence is still used as confirmation of Bede's correctness in describing a male Anglo-Saxon migration<sup>313</sup> with Weale et al. even highlighting how

Stories of migration are included in the writings of Gildas (ca. A.D. 540) and Bede (A.D. 731) and hinted at in Anglo-Saxon sagas, such as *Beowulf*. Archaeological evidence confirmed a rapid rise of continental culture in England and suggested a contemporaneous desertion of continental Germanic settlements.<sup>314</sup>

The validity of this conclusion should be challenged when we consider that Weale et al.'s research is based on samples originating from continental areas not mentioned by Bede. Furthermore, accepting the conclusions derived from this evidence becomes even more difficult when the claims of literary support for the conclusions are incorrect. Whilst this chapter argues that Gildas and Bede are the basis of claims for migration, *Beowulf* makes no mention of Britain or even hints at migration to Britain, and thus this claim by Weale et al. can be discounted.

When assessing the validity of DNA evidence, we should ask on what basis its conclusions are drawn. DNA analysis of modern populations works by comparing various aspects of the DNA sequence from one area with populations from other areas. In the case of finds in England genetic links have been drawn between the populations of Northern Germany, Scandinavia and the Low Countries and the East Coast of Britain. The study of modern DNA assumes that populations have moved very little in the last two millennia so that we can say the population of Northern Germany today is

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<sup>310</sup> Forster et al. (2004), pp. 101–108; Stephan Schiffels et al. (2016), pp. 1–9.

<sup>311</sup> Oppenheimer (2006b), pp. 4–5.

<sup>312</sup> Weale et al. (2002), pp. 1008–1021.

<sup>313</sup> Thomas, Stumpf and Harke (2006), p.. 2651.

<sup>314</sup> Weale et al. (2002), pp. 1008–1009.

representative of the population of the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>315</sup> This is despite the textual evidence from the period suggesting that the area of Angeln being largely abandoned during the lifetime of Bede.<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, advancing the notion that populations remain largely fixed as evidence for population movement appears counter intuitive. If we accept that these populations did move, how can we then say that the populations we are drawing comparisons with, did not also move? According to Schiffels et al.:

even large-scale analyses of present-day data provide only weak evidence of the Anglo-Saxon migration impact, mainly for two reasons. First, estimating the impact of historical migrations from present-day genetic data alone is challenging, because both the state of the indigenous population before the migration as well as the genetic make up of the immigrants are unknown and have to be estimated simultaneously from present day data. Second, if the source population is genetically close to the indigenous population, migrations are hard to quantify due to the challenge in detecting small genetic differences. This is particularly true for the case of the Anglo-Saxon migrations in Britain, given the close genetic relationships across Europe.<sup>317</sup>

Furthermore, it also perhaps underrates the possibility of change driven by non-migratory factors, e.g. the greater reproductive success of people with one set of genes over another (maybe due to natural selection, but also due to social factors such as sexual selection or discrimination against an ethnic group) although it should be noted that in a bid to make sense of the results of Weale et al. one of the authors, Mark Thomas, teamed up with Heinrich Härke and Michael Stumpf to propose that the near total replacement of an Iron-age Celtic-speaking population within the British genome could have been achieved through an apartheid like social structure.<sup>318</sup> Against the notion of apartheid being based in the genetics of the population should be set the following from Schiffels et

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<sup>315</sup> However, it is also possible to compare DNA samples from burials dated to the period in question in both a German and British context. However, even here shared genetic information is probable on the basis of moving populations throughout history. As stated above, shared genetic information may be evidence of the movement of populations, but it is not evidence of movement in the fifth or sixth century.

<sup>316</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15; Sherley-Price (1977), p. 56.

<sup>317</sup> Schiffels et al. (2016), p. 2. Despite their criticism of the practice, Schiffels et al. still attempted what they criticised.

<sup>318</sup> Thomas, Stumpf and Harke (2006), p. 2651–2657; see also Woolf (2007), pp. 115–129 for further consideration of such a process.

al. discussing the DNA sampled from a fifth- to sixth-century cemetery at Oakington in Cambridgeshire:

The genomes of two sequenced individuals (O1 and O2) are consistent with them being of recent immigrant origin, from a source population close to modern Dutch, one was genetically similar to native Iron Age samples (O4), and the fourth was consistent with being an admixed individual (O3), indicating interbreeding. Despite this, their graves were conspicuously similar, with all four individuals buried in flexed position, and with similar grave furnishing. Interestingly the wealthiest grave, with a large cruciform brooch, belonged to the individual of native British ancestry (O4), and the individual without grave goods was one of the two genetically 'foreign' ones (O2), an observation consistent with isotope analysis at West Heslerton which suggests that new immigrants were frequently poorer.<sup>319</sup>

As such the connection of migrant populations with specific types of material culture may also be faulty. If, then, we accept that populations move then we cannot draw conclusions about the origins of ancient populations on the basis of the location of current populations.

Added to this confusion is the impact of popular genetics research like 23 and me and ancestryDNA, which link a persons to genetic information from a database shared with people in other geographic areas.<sup>320</sup> The combined effect is a conversation in which genetics can be used to support any conclusion or claim one wishes to make.<sup>321</sup> At a public level, this can create problems of understanding. L. J. Richardson and T. Booth, who did research in to public perceptions of genetic studies, noted that 'two "intuitive tenets" related to these issues are pervasive in the public consciousness: that ancestry and heritage are fundamentally linked, and that British biology and nationhood were simultaneously forged in the Early Medieval period,<sup>322</sup> and 'many members of the public in Britain believe that these tests can link them to specific Early Medieval cultural groups.<sup>323</sup> In short, the narrative outlined by Bede is deeply ingrained into the national narrative and in the use

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<sup>319</sup> Stephan Schiffels et al. (2016), p. 6.

<sup>320</sup> Richardson and Booth (2017), pp. 1–5.

<sup>321</sup> Richardson and Booth (2017), p. 3.

<sup>322</sup> Richardson and Booth (2017), p. 3.

<sup>323</sup> Richardson and Booth (2017), p. 3.

of DNA studies ‘the complicated association between present ethnic identity and ancient DNA is misunderstood, oversimplified, and frequently used to fit into nationalist narratives.’<sup>324</sup>

In summation, whilst there is a great deal of potential for genetic research to provide insight into population movement in the first millennium, at present it is still too early to use it as the basis of an argument or even to simply support Bede’s narrative. Scientists have yet to agree the best method of measuring change in populations and still have to answer how a belief that populations do not move can be a basis for measuring population movement. For example, if the population of eastern England share genetic material with the population of Friesland this should not be construed as evidence of the population of eastern England is ancestrally from Friesland or vice versa, but it may be evidence that both populations share ancestry that originated in the same place, wherever that may be. Furthermore, scientists and archaeologists have a responsibility to inform the general public about the limitations of current methods and resist the temptation to use an incomplete understanding of the genetic record to reinforce pre-existing narratives.

The intention of this chapter is not to wholly dismiss the use of DNA evidence in the study of this period, merely to suggest caution in the application of the evidence provided from this medium. Even widely accepted methods of dating such as carbon dating are not beyond question. An example of this can be seen at Binchester, where the mathematical modelling demonstrated that even scientific methods can fall foul of the subjectivity of those interpreting the outcomes. At Binchester Roman fort, carbon dating for a sequence of the Phase 8 house were undertaken on charcoal fragments and bone fragments. Initial results suggested a deposition between AD 380 and AD 480, with a high probability of AD 420-AD 450, and stratigraphy inclining the excavators towards the latter end of the period c. 450. However, when the report was returned the deposition was judged to have occurred between AD 380 and AD 410, despite the mathematical modelling suggesting a later date.<sup>325</sup> Additionally, as David Petts notes:

the 5th century AD is a period when the calibration of radiocarbon dates is liable to give particularly large margins of error. In the period under discussion there is a plateau on the calibration curve between AD 450 and AD 530 meaning that is not possible to place many

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<sup>324</sup> Richardson and Booth (2017), p. 2.

<sup>325</sup> Rick Jones *pers comm*.



dates more accurately within this broad 90-year bracket, thus calculated date ranges can often be too wide to provide much fine-grained insight into the process of transition.<sup>326</sup>

For a period of transition as important as the second half of the fifth century the consideration of such a large and obscure window creates a before and after without the ability to understand the process by which the end was reached.<sup>327</sup>

What needs to be understood from this is that even scientifically established data based upon mathematical modelling may be limited by the understanding of those interpreting the information at hand. As such, for someone who expects the DNA evidence to demonstrate an incoming population, interpretation of the DNA evidence may be skewed towards seeing this demonstrated, perhaps subconsciously.

#### **4.5 Dating by burial alignment- the third- and fourth-century angle**

##### **4.5.1 Historiographical understanding of the difference between third and fourth century burials and fifth, sixth and seventh century burials**

Discussions of fifth-century burial tend to begin with the assumption that there is a dramatic difference between the burial practices associated with the third and fourth centuries and those associated with the fifth-, sixth- and seventh-centuries.<sup>328</sup> This section of the chapter will consider how some of the apparent norms of the third and fourth century which are used as the baseline against which change is measured in the fifth, sixth and seventh century do not stand up to scrutiny.

This thesis largely focusses on the developments associated with the north of the former Diocese of Britannia in the fifth and sixth centuries. It could be assumed that there would be the same, striking differences in the north that can be seen in parts of the more southerly areas. However, the northern parts of what is currently England and the southern parts of what is currently Scotland had a different history of mortuary practice, particularly prior to the turn of the fifth century, to the eastern and southern areas that more generally form the basis of argument on this subject. As noted by Alex Woolf in the first millennium there was a divisional line across what is now modern day England roughly corresponding to the Fosse Way, to the South East of which are areas which were

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<sup>326</sup> Petts (2016), p. 5.

<sup>327</sup> Petts (2016), p. 5.

<sup>328</sup> See for example Guy Halsall's *Handbook on Early Medieval Cemeteries* where he begins his section on lowland Britain discussing fourth-century inhumation as the major rite before moving on to discuss fifth-century and later diversion from this norm. Halsall (1995), p. 5.

more likely to be urbanised in the second to fourth century, have widespread villa type settlements, correspond to distribution maps of pre-Roman British coinage and can also be associated with burial types which would generally be described as 'Anglo-Saxon' type, especially cremation.<sup>329</sup> As Elizabeth O'Brien notes, by the seventh century there is little variation in burial practices across what is currently England,<sup>330</sup> which makes the level of regional variation observed prior to the seventh century all the more striking. Whilst the south and east offer examples of burial sites with clear fourth- to sixth-century continuity, there are few such cases in the north, with the exception of the territory generally associated with the *Parisi* in East Yorkshire, which is included as part of the 'Southeast lowland zone'. It may be that there was a common burial practice in the north, but if so, this left few, if any, remains and certainly not enough from which to identify general trends in behaviour. It is possible to read this difference as reflecting a simple difference between northern and southern populations. However, as discussed in the next chapter, there is marked difference in the quantity of urbanised areas to the north of the Fosse Way line when compared with the south of this line. As outlined below, the majority of the burials that form our evidence for this period come from large cemeteries in close proximity to large urban areas in the south, it is possible that there was a widespread mortuary practice amongst rural Britons conspicuous by the absence of remains in the north but perhaps also reflected in the paucity of southern rural remains. The remains that we do find could then reflect a choice to be buried in a way that reflected their position within a Roman urban setting and as such represent outliers rather than the norm. However, the absence of either a record of this practice or actual remains to study means that we are hypothesising from silence. Either way a direct comparison between northern cemeteries with burials associated with the fourth century and earlier and those with burial practices associated with the fifth century and later is not possible.

Traditional discussions of the burial methods of the first millennium AD tend to begin from the assumption that in the late third and fourth centuries there was a widespread, unfurnished burial type which included the East-West alignment of the corpse, as demonstrated by Sam Lucy, who asserts that 'Late Roman Christian cemeteries...are characterised by largely unfurnished burial, with the bodies laid out in the grave so that heads were consistently placed at the west end.'<sup>331</sup> This was then seen to change in the fifth century to a more North-South alignment, sometimes with

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<sup>329</sup> Woolf (2020), p. 24.

<sup>330</sup> O'Brien (1999), p. 30.

<sup>331</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 1. See also Halsall (1995), p. 5.

associated grave goods and sometimes cremations,<sup>332</sup> a rite which was predominant in northern Germany in the third and fourth centuries.<sup>333</sup> However, Halsall notes that these north German inhumations did not contain many grave goods, and suggests that the use of grave goods was a sign of social instability in the Scandinavian world,<sup>334</sup> and cremation formed the majority rite.<sup>335</sup>

Differing mortuary practices have been observed in some western and upland regions of the British Isles in the period after the beginning of the fifth century, with a tendency towards unfurnished cist burials aligned East-West with the head at the west end.

There was then a further shift towards East-West alignment and the raising of barrows over graves, as well as new kinds of grave goods, in the late sixth and early seventh century. These changes are generally assumed to be associated with the Augustinian mission to Kent in AD 597 and the spread of Christianity into the kingdoms of the southern lowlands of Britain, those sometimes referred to as Anglo-Saxon.<sup>336</sup> This change in burial rite is seen to represent a shift from paganism to Christianity in these areas, whilst the use of East- West burials in the intervening period in the West and upland parts of Britain has generally been seen as belonging to the influence of an insular form of Christianity. The differences between these two forms of Christianity were the subject of talks at the synod of Whitby in 664 AD. It may be that some of the differences between the western and eastern burial rites were the result of differences between these two Christian traditions.

#### **4.5.2 Elizabeth O'Brien and the statistical approach to burial alignment**

A 1996 PhD thesis by Elizabeth O'Brien applying techniques developed in Irish burial archaeology offers an interesting rebuttal to this belief. As well as suggesting that the general shift from earlier insular methods of burial to the predominance of unfurnished extended inhumation associated with the late third and fourth century seem to pre-date the adoption of Christianity, rather than being

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<sup>332</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 1.

<sup>333</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 4; see also Halsall (1995), p. 11. The predominance of this rite in Northern Germany prior to the beginning of the fifth century could be seen to offer support for the arguments made in favour of large-scale immigration from northern Germany to Britain, especially given Bede's assertion that the lands that the English had originally come from remained unoccupied down to his day (early eighth century). *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15; Sherley-Price (1977), p. 56.

<sup>334</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 12.

<sup>335</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 11.

<sup>336</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 4.

associated with it,<sup>337</sup> O'Brien challenges the view that the burial practices of the Southeast are as outlined by Lucy above. Using a breakdown of 2975 extended burials from the third and fourth centuries she demonstrated that there is a general prevalence of East-West alignment: 77.4% had heads lying West, 2.3% East, 11.3% North and 9.0% South.<sup>338</sup> However, she notes that the large, organised cemeteries at Poundbury<sup>339</sup>, Cannington<sup>340</sup> and Lankhills<sup>341</sup> make up the vast majority of those with the East-West alignment and as such may be skewing results. If these large cemeteries are removed from the sample, a general preference for North-South alignment emerges. Of the remaining 917 burials, not from these three cemeteries, 32.4% had heads aligned to the North, 23.8% South, 39.3% West and 4.5% East.<sup>342</sup>

As O'Brien notes, there emerges a prevalence of North-South or South-North aligned burials in these cemeteries, representing 56.2% of the total, even in the vicinity of urbanised administrative centres such as London, Cirencester and Ilchester; indeed, the third- and fourth-century burials at Bath Gate cemetery at Cirencester are aligned entirely North-South.<sup>343</sup> This flies in the face of the traditional narrative around third- and fourth-century burials, demonstrating that there were more than simply Christian burial traditions at play in Britain during this period. As such it could be concluded that

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<sup>337</sup> O'Brien (1999), p. 5.

<sup>338</sup> O'Brien (1999), pp. 5–6.

<sup>339</sup> A large cemetery consisting of over 1400 burials, mostly dated to the third and fourth century, overlooking Dorchester in Dorset. See Farwell and Molleson (1993).

<sup>340</sup> A large third- to seventh-century cemetery projected to consist of 1500–5500 burials, although only 542 have so far been excavated and many have been destroyed by later activity, at Cannington Park Quarry near Bridgewater, Somerset. See Rahtz, Hirst and Wright (2000).

<sup>341</sup> A large fourth-century cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester. Early excavations at Lankhills (carried out by Giles Clarke in 1967–1972) uncovered 444 inhumation burials and 7 cremation burials, which contribute to O'Brien's total. Additional excavations (carried out by Oxford Archaeology in 2000–2005) have added a further 307 inhumations and 25 cremations. The majority of these inhumations were aligned East-West. It has been noted that the organisation of these burials may have been in part determined by the boundaries of the cemetery. As burials in the western part of the cemetery appear to have an alignment determined by the east-west Winchester-Cirencester Road, whilst eastern burials appear perpendicular to a north-south boundary. See Booth et al. (2010).

<sup>342</sup> All data from O'Brien (1999), pp. 5–6.

<sup>343</sup> Andrew Breeze (2010) has proposed that the Iren mentioned in the eleventh-century life of St. Gildas as the place where the saint received his education, at some point in the fifth century, was in Cirencester rather than Ireland as has traditionally been thought. Richard Coates has strengthened this argument in his 2013 article on Corinium by demonstrating the likelihood that Cirencester was not known as Corinium whilst under Roman rule but Cironium, making Breeze's identification more plausible, despite Coates' own doubt on the connection with Gildas. Such a case suggests a longevity of Christian activity at Cirencester. Coates (2013), pp. 81–91.

rather than representing an orientation that is typical of the British Isles at this time, the use of and East-West burial orientation may be a reflection of a more local rite or a product of the need for larger scale organisation at these cemeteries to facilitate the burial of larger numbers. However, before such a conclusion is accepted, it should also be noted that a burial rite involving placing the head at the western end of the grave shaft was the most common single burial orientation in the third and fourth century, representing 39.3% of the sample even with the larger cemeteries removed from consideration. This choice of orientation which corresponds to behaviours on the continent<sup>344</sup> may reflect British adoption of a form of *Romanitas* which is further demonstrated in the development of insular forms of Mediterranean type products (such as coarse ware pottery) or be a simple reflection of the fourth-century Christianisation of the Western Empire. Whilst the dataset shows a preference for western aligned burials as an individual rite and north-south over all, a possible interpretation of these results may also be a simple aversion to burying with the head at the east of the grave cut, perhaps for the deceased to avoid rising on judgement day with their back to Jerusalem, which would make sense in a Late Roman Christian context. In this case it may be possible to interpret burial with the head to the East as a form of punishment.

#### **4.5.3 A small burial site at Scorton, North Yorkshire**

A case study of a small cemetery from Scorton in North Yorkshire, excavated after the publication of O'Brien's work,<sup>345</sup> further demonstrates the flexibility of alignment in late Roman burial, chosen to demonstrate the small-scale cemeteries from north of the Fosse Way and flexibility of alignment away from the large, organised cemeteries. Of the 15 burials, aged between 17 and 35, at the cemetery in Scorton, 5 were aligned with their heads to the north, 3 with their heads to the west and 2 with their heads to the south, and 2 to the east (the alignment of the remaining 3 could not be determined).<sup>346</sup> The material associated with the burials, including coins that indicate a *terminus post quem* of AD 353, would suggest burial in the latter decades of the fourth century.

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<sup>344</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 7.

<sup>345</sup> O'Brien's work is based on her 1996 PhD thesis; Scorton was excavated 1998–2000 and published 2015.

<sup>346</sup> Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015), p. 196.

Grave <sup>347</sup> Number	Sex (M/F)	Grave goods	Orientation (Head)	Preservation
1	M	Crossbow brooch (right shoulder), belt fittings	West	Good
2	M	No	North	Good
3	N/K	Pottery vessels including a Nene valley beaker	Not Known	Poor
4	N/K		Not Known	Poor
5	M	Crossbow brooch and coins at foot of the skeleton, belt fittings, Pottery vessels including a Nene valley beaker	Placement of Grave goods indicates North	Poor
6	M	belt fittings	North	Good
7	M	Crossbow brooch (right shoulder), belt fittings, Pottery vessels including a Nene valley beaker, animal jaw bone and a glass flask (style not found outside Britain).	North	Good
8	N/K		Grave cut aligned N/S	No remains just grave cut
9	M		South	Good
10	M	No	West	Medium
11	F	Copper alloy and bone bracelets	East	Good
12	M	belt fittings, copper alloy bracelet, coin purse and coins.	West	Good
13	M	No	North	Good
14	M	Crossbow brooch (left chest), belt fittings, Pottery vessels including a Nene valley beaker	South	Good
15	M	Pottery vessels including a Nene valley beaker	East	Poor/Medium

Fig 3: a table of burials from Scorton

<sup>347</sup> All results from this dataset compiled from information in Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015).

Strontium isotope analysis carried on the skeletal remains at Scorton suggested a local origin for those buried at Scorton: the landscape in which they were raised bore geological similarity to the local area of North Yorkshire. However, the oxygen isotope analysis suggested that 6 of those tested<sup>348</sup> at Scorton were raised in a cooler climate than that of the British Provinces. This oxygen isotopic difference appears to be consistent with a Central or Northern Continental European origin for 6 of the bodies.<sup>349</sup>

What is, perhaps, most significant about the 15 burials at Scorton is that the people buried in them exhibit signs of belonging to the elite of the Empire: 4 were buried with crossbow brooches (widely believed to indicate high administrative position)<sup>350</sup> and 6 were buried with belt fittings (something not widely found in Britain, but generally seen to be an indicator of status).<sup>351</sup> The apparent elite Roman status of those being buried at Scorton in the late fourth century could lead to the expectation that burials would correspond more closely to the Roman norm, if there was one. The fact that these apparently high-status individuals were buried with no consistent pattern of alignment would appear to indicate that burial alignment is of less importance in the cultural milieu of the later Western Empire than the preferences observed at Lankhills, Cannington and Poundbury would suggest.

#### **4.5.4 Other third-and-fourth-century burial practices**

Similarly, there are also other burial rites that are traditionally associated with the fifth, sixth and seventh century which show continuity from the Iron Age through the first half of the first millennium. Crouched burials were a commonly used type amongst Iron Age burials in Britain;<sup>352</sup> it is a type that remained in use throughout the whole of the first half of the first millennium. However, it is as a minority rite, becoming even more of a minority as extended inhumation became more popular in the third and fourth century and as the use of east-west orientation grew. At Bath Gate cemetery near Cirencester it represents 8% of the burials (36 out of 450).<sup>353</sup> Whilst as a proportion of

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<sup>348</sup> There were 9 sets of remains analysed for strontium and oxygen. With two-thirds of the sample taken indicating a foreign origin for the bodies as many as 10 of the 15 burials contained the remains of people who had their origins on the Continent. Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015), pp. 191–223.

<sup>349</sup> Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015), pp. 191–223.

<sup>350</sup> Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015), p. 197.

<sup>351</sup> Eckardt, Müldner, and Speed (2015), p. 203.

<sup>352</sup> O'Brien (1999), p. 5.

the total buried at Bath Gate crouched burial represents a minority rite, the high number of those buried in this way – 36 in a single cemetery – suggests that it still represented an important (albeit minority) rite and the use of this rite was not an aberration.<sup>354</sup> Differing interpretations of this rite have emerged in a bid to explain its continuing use: O’Brien suggests that later use of the burial type, into the fourth century, may represent a conservative or reactionary response to a growing Romanisation of the population of lowland Britain.<sup>355</sup> This reading is characteristic of interpretations of archaeology which foreground ethnicity. However, the prevalence of this form of burial amongst the youth of those buried at Trentholme Drive in York<sup>356</sup> could suggest that its continuation was a reflection of other kinds of identity, such as age or social status, perhaps that extended inhumation (if it represented an acceptance of Mediterranean influence) belonged to a status not afforded to those who had not yet reached adulthood. As such similar usage of the burial type in contexts not associated with adolescents or children may reflect a subordinate status in society, perhaps that of a slave. That said, the absence of such a ratio at other third and fourth century burial sites would suggest that this was a more localised response rather than a societal trend, or reflective of an anti-Roman agenda within society. Indeed, whilst there appears to be a preference for children to be buried using this rite at Trentholme Drive, it is not repeated elsewhere. Crouched burials appear to also be a minority practice at other sites, representing one tenth of those at two sites in Ilchester (Little Spittle and Townsend Close), six out of sixty, and even fewer at Queensford Farm, Dorchester on Thames, only 3 out of 164. The widespread use of this rite even in low numbers suggests that it had an importance of some variety, although it would appear that the use of crouched burial lacks the consistent application that could be expected to reflect an option chosen as a universal form of protest or even application to a single group (like children) or ethnicity. The absence of a consistent approach suggests that local priorities and customs were more important and whilst some have chosen to read it as indicative of ethnicity, other non-ethnic forms of identity (not immediately apparent from the remains) may have played a part in determining the application of this rite.

What these two types of burial do suggest is that there were more factors at work in the third and fourth centuries than a simple trend of extended burial with an East-West alignment. As O’Brien

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<sup>353</sup> Given that the total number of burials at Bath Gate, Cirencester is 450, and I can think of no other reason for the final figure being 45, I will assume that O’Brien intended for this number to be 450 and this is simply an error.

<sup>354</sup> O’Brien (1999), p. 5.

<sup>355</sup> O’Brien (1999), p. 5.

<sup>356</sup> O’Brien (1999), p. 1.



correctly notes, there is an undercurrent of burial traditions that continue from the Iron Age, the first millennium BCE, beyond the introduction of Roman Mediterranean influences in the first and second century through to the third and fourth century despite the prevalence of the Mediterranean inspired East-West extended inhumation. As such it may be that what follows in the fifth and sixth century is not as new, or as much of a cultural shift, as general commentaries on 'Anglo-Saxon' inhumation burial would suggest. However, the significant growth in cremation burials observed at some sites such as Spong Hill (Norfolk),<sup>357</sup> which had 2259 cremation burials in a fifth and sixth century context and 57 inhumation burials dated to the sixth century, and Sancton (East Yorkshire),<sup>358</sup> where 240 cremations and 1 inhumation were excavated from a fifth to seventh century cemetery between 1954-8 and then a further 90-95 cremation burials and 1 additional inhumation burials between 1976-80 in an area overlapping the original site, demonstrates that in some areas there were significant changes from the patterns observed in the third and fourth century inhumations that we do have.

The use of cremation burials in the third and fourth century after the gradual second-century replacement of cremation by inhumation burial runs counter to the traditional interpretation that the fifth and sixth century use of the custom solely represents an importation from northern Germany. There are examples of cremation burials at several sites within the British provinces, persisting in the Northern frontier region into the fourth century and in the South, the Midlands and East Anglia into the late fourth century.<sup>359</sup> Some 29 cremations dated between the second and fourth century have been discovered at King Harry Lane cemetery in Hertfordshire, while 5 of 7 fourth-century cremations at Lankhills were dated to after AD 350.<sup>360</sup> This not only suggests that this burial custom represented a fairly common type but that it was still in reasonably active use at the turn of the fifth century, something which may suggest that far from representing an importation, the use of this burial type in the late fifth and sixth century may represent a continuity or resurgence of a hitherto, at least in a third- and fourth-century context, minority rite. Of interest too are the use of urns in two out of three third and fourth century cremation burials at Bath Gate, Cirencester which perhaps indicate that the use of cremation pots was not a foreign introduction in the fifth century. That said, the numbers of cremations observed at Bath Gate and King Harry Lane

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<sup>357</sup> McKinley (1994).

<sup>358</sup> Timby et al. (1993).

<sup>359</sup> O'Brien (1999), p. 9.

<sup>360</sup> O'Brien (1999), p. 9.

cemeteries pale in comparison to that of Spong Hill or even Sancton, suggesting that whilst there is evidence of cremation and urn burial prior to the fifth century there was a significant cultural change that led to the emergence of cremation as a majority rite at some sites in the fifth and sixth century. What the presence of these rites in a minority context in the third and fourth century should do is make us question the extent to which this cultural change should be read on ethnic lines.

Something that should also be noted when discussing burial trends in the first millennium CE is the small sample from which data is being drawn. For O'Brien's sample of late Roman burials to demonstrate the trends relating to alignment, from the third and fourth century, there were fewer than three thousand examples of extended burials. This, which is generally seen to represent the majority rite in Roman Britain (so would presumably be the type of burial that the majority of people in Britain experienced in the third and fourth century), reflects less than 0.1% of the estimated living population of Britain at the end of the fourth century.<sup>361</sup> If this is the case, where are the rest of the burials: are the discovery and survival rates for burials so poor in the third and fourth century that only this small number remain? Or were there other forms of burial rite that were more common but do not produce the same levels of preservation? The near absence of northern burial sites from our samples could be a reflection of this: if the northern frontier was home to somewhere between 10,000 and 40,000 soldiers in the third and fourth centuries the paucity of remains from this area could be a reflection of another form of unrecognised rite. The cemeteries at Scorton (in close proximity to Catterick) and Trentholme Drive (York) suggest that inhumation cemeteries in the North were possible, although as noted above perhaps what the existence of these cemeteries could indicate is the preference for inhumation amongst urban populations. A counter to this view could be that rescue archaeology largely takes place because of a desire to develop land. This is more likely to take place either within or in close proximity to modern urban centres (which largely correspond to Roman centres) so in a sense, archaeologists are more likely to find the cemeteries of the Roman urban population purely because of where archaeological excavations are taking place. Better preservation may also be explained by differences in soil pH: if the land north of the Fosse Way is more acidic than that of the land south of the Fosse Way preservation would be better in the south. However, this view fails to account for the higher levels of post- fifth-century preservation and the high numbers of fifth-seventh century cemeteries (when compared to the third and fourth century) along the North Sea coast to the north of the Fosse Way line.

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<sup>361</sup> Presumed to be around 4 million.

What the above demonstrates is that the traditions relating to burial in the third and fourth century were far from set in stone. Whilst overall (from the sample currently available) there is a preference for extended inhumation which is aligned with the head to the West, with this rite representing approximately three-quarters of total known burials in this period, as O'Brien has shown, this sample could be skewed by the three large cemeteries at Lankhills, Cannington and Poundbury. Otherwise, with these sites excluded from the sample, there seems to be a preference for other alignments that do not fit the traditional description of 'Late Roman burials.' Furthermore, whilst extended inhumation seems to be the majority choice, other burial traditions still had strong and persistent representation throughout the fourth century including crouched inhumation and cremations. As such, it seems unlikely that the use of these 'other' burial types in the period after the end of the fourth century on their own could be seen as evidence for a change of ethnicity amongst those dealing with their dead in Britain in the fifth, sixth and seventh century.

#### **4.6 A case study of West Heselton and how a large site in 'Anglian' territory shrugs off expectations for fifth/sixth and seventh century burial.**

##### **4.6.1 The context of West Heselton**

West Heselton is situated in North Yorkshire but is a part of the historic East Riding of Yorkshire. Haughton et al. note the major fracture from Roman tenurial systems appears to occur in the 'middle Saxon' period (from c. AD 650 onwards), where, at many 'Roman and Early Anglian' sites, continuity and development from the fourth century onwards is abandoned in favour of new foundations.<sup>362</sup> An example of this continuity can be seen at West Heselton: the late Roman cult site retained an importance beyond the fourth century and was retained as a 'well defined' space and formed a focus around which the fifth- and sixth-century elements of the site developed.<sup>363</sup>

The coastal area between the River Humber and the River Tweed has long been considered to represent the heartland of Anglo-Saxon culture in the north.<sup>364</sup> On this basis, we might be forgiven for expecting burials from this period to fit closely with the traditions that are generally suggested to belong to an invading 'Germanic culture'. However, the excavators of the site at West Heselton have highlighted that there are several ways that this site differed from what could be considered the norm.

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<sup>362</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 9.

<sup>363</sup> Powlesland (1998).

<sup>364</sup> Rollason (2003), pp. 20–24.

West Heslerton has 104 graves which the excavators felt confident that they could date. Of these, 57 dated from the late fifth century to end of the sixth century and a further 37 dated from the early sixth to early seventh century. The excavators dated the cemetery to approximately AD. 475-650.<sup>365</sup> This dating of graves was based on typologies and assemblages; the earliest item was an E1 spearhead from grave g87 which the excavators believed was in use no later than the end of the fifth century.<sup>366</sup> However, as mentioned earlier, the practice of dating by assemblage, and in this case spearhead typology, is potentially self-fulfilling and ultimately as limited as dating by grave alignment. Such methodology only allows for general trends to emerge and works on the law of averages. Unfortunately, with as limited a sample size as we have on the east coast of Yorkshire the difficulty of catching outliers prevents confidence in the outcome. As such, as easily as it could represent a late fifth century model of spearhead, it could also be an early example and predate the usual period of use. Similarly, there is nothing to rule out the burial of someone with an antique (or a family heirloom), as the Walkington Wolds burials, above, demonstrate the artefacts within a grave only provide a *terminus post quem*.

#### **4.6.2 Grave alignment at West Heslerton and fifth-seventh century burial norms.**

The burials at West Heslerton do not follow the traditional understanding of burial alignments in the fifth and sixth centuries, as burials here do not generally favour a North-South alignment as Lucy stated was the norm for fifth- and sixth-century burials.<sup>367</sup> As the cemetery at West Heslerton is in a traditionally 'Anglo-Saxon' region and is in use from the early sixth century it could be expected that the burials would conform quite closely to the accepted norm for 'Anglian' burials. However, this trend is not universally accepted. Guy Halsall has stated that, in lowland Britain, early medieval burials are 'usually oriented west-east (i.e. with the head to the west) though there are many variations and North-South graves are not uncommon in early phases.'<sup>368</sup> It is possible that Halsall's position represents an average of the second half of the first millennium and the 'early phases' he references are the fifth, sixth and early seventh centuries, which form the basis of Lucy and O'Brien's claims for a North-South alignment norm. Halsall's position is supported by David Wilson, who has stated that the usual orientation for 'pagan inhumations' was a West-East alignment with the feet

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<sup>365</sup> Houghton and Powlesland (1999), p. 81.

<sup>366</sup> Houghton and Powlesland (1999), p. 80.

<sup>367</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 1.

<sup>368</sup> Halsall (1995), p. 5.

facing East.<sup>369</sup> What is apparent from the differences between the interpretations as offered by Halsall, Wilson, Lucy and O'Brien is that there does not appear to be a universality associated with burial alignment. As such differences in alignment are probably not of enough importance and not reflective enough of difference to base understanding of population makeup on.

At West Heslerton, a west-east alignment is favoured throughout the period of the fifth to the seventh century. Despite the emphasis placed on alignment by commentators such as Lucy and O'Brien, Haughton et al. argue that as far as West Heslerton is concerned this emphasis is over-egged. They highlight that, for West Heslerton, there is no absolute correlation between the alignment of graves and other major factors, such as type of burial (extended, crouched, prone etc.) or specific grave goods. For example, weapon burials suggest that 'the alignment was of less importance to the Anglian population than we tend to believe.'<sup>370</sup> The absence of a correlation between the alignment of the burial and the type of burial, whether by grave goods or burial type, would prevent the inference of social status, ethnicity or even period based on alignment alone.

At West Heslerton the angle of burial alignment is not uniform and differs from one inhumation to another, although there is a general preference for the head to the West. This represents 50% of the total burials although the remaining 50% are spread equally around the compass, suggesting an absence of preference for any other type of burial beyond west-east aligned.<sup>371</sup> Haughton et al. suggest a possible explanation for this is burial at sunset and alignment with the sun as it sets. An interesting feature of this alignment is that it could indicate a trend for more female fatalities during the winter months: approximately 58% of those burials aligned along 250 and 270 degrees, were women (50/85 burials- 20% could not be assigned a sex).<sup>372</sup> This may, admittedly, be an issue of calculating sex based on grave goods.<sup>373</sup> Haughton et al. state

there is nothing to indicate that there is either an ethnic or social bias in the burial alignment overall: taking one obviously distinct group, the weapons burials, the alignment of the graves shows the same distribution as the sample as a whole.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Wilson (1992).

<sup>370</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 88.

<sup>371</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 87.

<sup>372</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 87.

<sup>373</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 87.

If there was a tendency for more women to die and be buried in winter at West Heslerton, it might be expected that this could be a reflection of ethnicity, with more value being placed on male Anglian lives as opposed to native female ones. However, it would appear that there was a strong correlation in terms of female grave goods with the material culture of the north of Continental Europe:

The distinctive Anglian (as opposed to Saxon or Jutish) nature of female dress accessories (cruciform, square-headed, and small-long brooches, bucket pendants, braids, and wrist-clasps) found in the graves strongly suggest links with both Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany and Scandinavia, specifically western Norway and southern Sweden.<sup>375</sup>

If the traditional narrative of invasion by a northern European population is to be maintained, this would appear to indicate that, unless the goods being used to sex graves are not as representative of fifth and sixth century gender as is believed, the situation in West Heslerton reflects a material cultural in which females were as associated with continental Europe as males. This would suggest that either there was a complete population introduction, male and female, in the fifth and sixth century; or that at least half of the population adopted a material culture that was alien to them.<sup>376</sup> If this is the case questions arise about how the (presumably) female element of the West Heslerton population came to use material culture associated with female burial in Northern Germany. As Montgomery states:

using burial with jewellery of a style previously common in the Germanic homelands is neither proof that the deceased owned it or was born in Angeln, nor by the same token that “she” was biologically female.<sup>377</sup>

Whilst it is possible that the people gendered as female by archaeologists with reference to their grave goods may or may not have actually been female by sex, there is an association that occurred between some people being buried in the north east of England in the fifth and sixth century and female dress from the Continent. There is a temptation to suggest that the adoption of the material culture reflecting influences from across the North Sea occurred in more neutral terms: that the people who inhabited the area north of the Humber in the fourth century changed their dress habits

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<sup>374</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 87.

<sup>375</sup> Montgomery, Evans, Powlesland, and Roberts (2005), p. 2.

<sup>376</sup> Making this an opportunity to apply strontium and oxygen isotope analysis.

<sup>377</sup> Montgomery, Evans, Powlesland, and Roberts (2005), p. 2.

in the fifth and sixth century and reflected the influence of a cultural zone that included Northern Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. A possible alternative way of explaining the association of certain goods with female graves is that the use of these goods reflects a social status rather than gender.

#### 4.6.3 Extended Burial at West Heslerton

As well as distinguishing burials from each other by the direction in which the bodies were aligned, or by the grave goods associated with burial, it is also possible to distinguish between burial by how the body as placed in the grave. There are several types of burial: extended probably represents the most distinctive and most deliberately placed of burials in use in Britain in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>378</sup> Extended burial is described by Haughton et al. as with the body 'laid out in an extended position with the torso supine and the legs extended.'<sup>379</sup> This requires a significant amount of effort on the part of those carrying out the burial, with a need for a larger hole in which to place the burial and the effort to lay the body in such a deliberate position. By comparison crouched burials are sometimes described as representing the need to fit a body in a small hole.<sup>380</sup> The effort to which those carrying out the burial went with a body to be buried is likely to be reflected in the grave goods associated with the burial. As a package, the combination of the grave goods and effort involved in the burial is likely to reflect a higher status for those being buried. Haughton et al. also note that

The distribution of cruciform brooches shows a bias towards inclusion with extended burials; of 11 graves containing cruciform brooches 5 were extended and 1 was [...] perhaps a loosely laid out extended burial; there were 3 accompanied bodies whose position was unclear. As a relative distribution within the cemetery as a whole this association must be significant.<sup>381</sup>

At West Heslerton, although the assemblages accompanying the accompanying extended burials do not show any unique attributes, the two best furnished male and female burials are both extended.<sup>382</sup> Perhaps this is a reflection of this higher level of social status amongst those being

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<sup>378</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

<sup>379</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

<sup>380</sup> Spurrell (1889), pp. 314–315.

<sup>381</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

<sup>382</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

buried in the extended way and the use of cruciform brooch types is a further extension of this status.

#### **4.6.4 Fifth- to seventh-century crouched and prone burial at West Heselton**

Whilst extended burial and an association with Romanised material culture, or material culture with Romanised antecedents, appears to be indicative of a higher status with the society of West Heselton, it has been argued that crouched or prone burial is more likely to indicate a lower status within society. Margaret Faull has suggested that a northerly alignment of crouched burials may represent a native tradition rather than an Anglian one and thus serve as an identifier for these groups.<sup>383</sup> West Heselton does not fit this interpretation as there is no distinctive association of burial type and alignment, although the cemetery at Norton<sup>384</sup> may offer firmer support for such an interpretation.<sup>385</sup> What may be concluded from this is the absence of a universal approach to burial type and alignment in eastern Yorkshire. Lucy has further suggested that Faull's assessment is flawed on the basis of a trend towards a seventh- or eighth-century date for this type of burial and an expectation that differences of ethnicity inside Anglian kingdoms would have been resolved by this time.<sup>386</sup> The dating of the majority these burials to the fifth and sixth centuries at West Heselton,<sup>387</sup> however, makes this argument difficult to sustain. Despite this, evidence suggests that an ethnic interpretation of this burial type and alignment is problematic. Haughton et al. go on to suggest that attempts to assign ethnic relevance to what appear to be distinctive characteristics of certain groupings in isolation from a wider network is also problematic, they highlight that Pader observed the absence of wrist clasps from extended burials in her analysis of the cemetery at Holywell Row, Mildenhall in Suffolk, a trend which is reversed at West Heselton.<sup>388</sup>

The apparent absence of an explanation for the use of prone and crouched burials has led to the suggestion that in most cases 'the position of the body appears to have been determined by no

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<sup>383</sup> Faull (1974) cited in Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90. Such an interpretation has been supported by Eagles and Higham: see Lucy (2000b), pp. 11–17.

<sup>384</sup> Norton on Tees, North Yorkshire.

<sup>385</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

<sup>386</sup> Lucy (2000a); Lucy (2000b).

<sup>387</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 81.

<sup>388</sup> Pader (1982); cf. Haughton and Powlesland (1999), pp. 90–91.



other factor than the shape and size of the grave.<sup>389</sup> Lucy has commented, in response to suggestions that there were specific reasons for prone burial types, that some may simply have been caused by the clumsy handling of a coffin or accidental misplacement due to an absence of care.<sup>390</sup>

However, whilst there is an absence of a universal reason for crouched and prone burials there is also evidence which suggests that effort was put into the burials, including an example of a prone burial at West Heslerton where the deceased appeared to have been bound into an unnatural position prior to burial, and perhaps prior to death, suggesting that prone burial could be used as a punishment.<sup>391</sup> This has been argued by Hirst (1985) and later Sherlock and Welch (1992) suggesting it as a standard form of punishment or, given the relatively low numbers of cases,<sup>392</sup> as a punishment for a specific crime such as adultery or witchcraft, or perhaps a specific calibre of crime.<sup>393</sup> Such an argument is difficult to prove without written records to support them; however, we find that some of those buried in a prone position were alive and bound at the time of burial,<sup>394</sup> suggesting that there was more at work here than simply careless burial. Whilst we are unable to prove the association of these burials with specific reasons, this social line of investigation as an explanation for the burial choices of the people of Northumbria seems more promising than attempts to align burial types along ethnic lines.

A major feature of burials on the east coast of England in the late fifth to mid sixth century is a significant number of cremation burials. This burial type has been widely linked to an invading population and is seen as an indicator of a different ethnicity to the local populace. Given West Heslerton's close proximity to the coast and the apparent readiness of the local population of East Yorkshire to accept new continental practices, one might expect a high proportion of cremations to have occurred at West Heslerton. The low percentage of these at West Heslerton<sup>395</sup> could potentially cast doubt on claims of a shared invading ethnicity along the East Coast in the fifth century: if the form of burial being undertaken is an expression of ethnicity, then presumably all (or at least the

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<sup>389</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 90.

<sup>390</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 80.

<sup>391</sup> Lucy (2000a), p. 78.

<sup>392</sup> 3 at Sewerby, 7 at Norton (7% of total) and 12 (5% of total) at West Heslerton.

<sup>393</sup> Hirst (1985) and Sherlock, Welch, and Birkett (1992) cited in Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 91.

<sup>394</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 92.

<sup>395</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 4.

majority) of those of that ethnicity would express it in the same way and this expression should be distinct from the expressions of other ethnicities. For there to be a very low percentage at West Heslerton would indicate that those burying were not of the same ethnicity, running counter to traditional narratives of invasion in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and counter to the impression offered by the existing material culture. The possible explanation offered by the excavators that the lower percentage of cremations may be due to plough damage<sup>396</sup> highlights a further weakness of attempting to reconstruct society in fifth- and sixth-century Britain along ethnic lines: the evidence we have is easily destroyed or damaged. Furthermore, to claim that the absence of something is likely due to destruction rather than simply an absence is an argument from silence and cannot readily be accepted.

#### 4.6.5 West Heslerton conclusions

What emerges from this brief survey is that whilst burial may be viewed as an expression of ethnicity, the visible patterns lack the uniformity necessary to draw firm conclusions from and where conclusions regarding ethnic choices have been made based on faulty assumptions. What does seem apparent is that the higher the quality of grave goods associated with a burial, the more likely explicit care will be taken when burials were carried out. However, the reverse also seems to be true of punishment burials such as decapitation and bound crouched or prone. These seem to demonstrate a care not afforded to those middle-status burials that made up a large proportion of the population. At West Heslerton, this specific care appears to be expressed in the form of extended burials, whilst elsewhere it may have been crouched or prone (or indeed another form of burial not discussed above). A further telling feature of the burials at West Heslerton that suggests that ethnicity is less of a factor than social position is the low number of infant burials in the cemetery, the discovery of infant bones in *Grubenhäuser* rubbish deposits suggest other less formal methods of burial were acceptable amongst the population<sup>397</sup> and that social status was the primary motivator when determining how people in the fifth, sixth and seventh century at West Heslerton were treated in death. It is also worth noting, however, that arguments have been made that suggest that the highest stratum of society in this period was filled by people of a different ethnicity to the native population and as such (in an almost self-fulfilling way) to be buried with care was an expression of a different ethnicity to the local population.

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<sup>396</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 4.

<sup>397</sup> Haughton and Powlesland (1999), p. 4.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that attempts to write archaeological narratives with reference to ethnicity and to Bede's narratives of the ethnogenesis of the English have constrained the interpretation of burial archaeology. This chapter has not tried to tell a new story, as this is not the focus of the thesis, but it has brought together existing criticism of the application of Bede's ethnic narrative in a novel way and applied it to multiple areas. What this chapter aims to do is highlight assumptions based on ethnic narratives derived from Bede in the field of fifth- to seventh-century burial archaeology and, by casting light on and critiquing them, open the way for other possibilities to be considered.

This chapter has considered how the use of certain types of material culture has been seen as deliberately denoting ethnicity. This chapter has used crossbow and cruciform brooches as a casework and argued that the development and use of cruciform brooches cannot be wholly (or necessarily at all) explained in terms of ethnicity. Highlighting the similarity to fourth-century crossbow brooches and arguing that the continuity of decorative elements from late Roman brooch types into cruciform brooches, this chapter suggests that they are likely to have denoted status, and due to a pre-existing belief that those who occupied the highest levels of fifth- to seventh-century society were Germanic-speaking migrants they may have become a poor, accidental proxy for ethnicity. In relation to burial assemblages, this chapter has highlighted how, whilst we often lack better tools for dating than typology, we should question the lens through which we interpret them.

This critique of typology also extends to inhumation styles. The use of Elizabeth O'Brien's study has demonstrated how ideas of change in fifth- to seventh-century burials are based on an assumed norm in third- and fourth-century burial practice which is skewed by large datasets from three urban cemeteries in the south of modern England. This chapter argues that in reality much of what is known about third- and fourth-century burial in Britain comes from a very small set of evidence. The chapter argues, as Elizabeth O'Brien demonstrates, if we remove the three large urban cemeteries of Poundbury, Lankhills and Cannington from the dataset, the east-west burial alignment preference (head at the western end of the grave cut) used as one of the markers of late Roman burial is not nearly so pronounced. With the removal of these cemeteries, it can be seen that rather than a preference for east-west a general preference for graves aligned north-south or south-north can be seen, although it could also be the case that this is more simply a general aversion to placement of the head at the east. The implication of this is that the supposed move to north-south aligned burial that is generally seen as a marker of ethnic change in the fifth century is not nearly as important or as emphatic as has been suggested. Additionally, this chapter has highlighted the continued use of

burial types other than the extended inhumation believed to be a marker of fourth-century Roman burial in order to demonstrate that rather than representing novel introductions in the fifth century they represented minority rites throughout the first millennium. At the heart of this analysis is the difficulty associated with the size of the dataset, not enough is made in studies of fourth-century burial or in studies inferring change between fourth- and fifth-century burials about the astonishing dearth of evidence for burial in fourth-century Britain, the ignorance of this important fact allows narratives of change to be written from what is essentially silence, when we consider that we have little or no evidence for the burial of approximately 98% of the fourth-century population.<sup>398</sup>

This chapter has also used West Heslerton as a case study of fifth- to seventh-century burial in what would usually be considered to be an area occupied by Germanic-speaking migrants. West Heslerton is used to demonstrate the fallibility of the application of believed norms to fifth to seventh century burial types and suggests that in the absence of the uniform use of these believed norms across areas described as under the control of specific ethnic groups by Bede (the Angles, Saxons and Jutes) we cannot infer ethnic behaviours. This conclusion challenges the belief that the change in the ethnic make-up of the fifth- to seventh-century population of the east of England described in Bede can be used to explain changes in burial practices in the fifth century.

This chapter has also been critical of the current use of DNA studies in fifth- to seventh-century archaeology highlighting the logical inconsistency at the centre of using the locations of modern populations as evidence of the movement of populations in the fifth to seventh century. Put simply, it is not logically plausible to state that the current location of a population can be seen as a statement of where it or other populations came from, we cannot state that populations are geographically fixed and at the same time that they move. Shared DNA markers between two population groups could indicate that one of these populations came from the same location as the other, that they shared a common origin somewhere other than the locations in which both are currently based, or that there was intermingling of the population through generations of interbreeding or even parallel evolution of genes (less likely but possible). Essentially, if the sources for the first millennium tell us anything it is that there was population movement occurring, as such if we look for evidence of migration, we will find it, because populations and genes shift over time. But this becomes a circular argument if we attempt to use it to pin down the origins of a population and the flawed use of Bede as a historical framework for this movement is creating difficulty with

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<sup>398</sup> Very conservative estimates of the population of the Roman provinces of Britannia at between 500,000–1.5 million: Wheeler (1930), pp. 91–95. ‘Salway in 1993 postulated 4–6 million, probably too high, while Fulford in 1984 lowered it to 2.8 million. Millett in 1990 made a serious attempt to calculate a reasonable figure, suggesting 3.6 million at the beginning of the fourth century’: Alcock (2011), p. 260.

archaeological interpretation. Archaeogenetics will eventually be useful, but it is not there yet... perhaps a method that may bear fruit would be the comparison of fifth-seventh century DNA with fifth-seventh century DNA, rather than with modern populations.

This chapter has demonstrated that the continuing application of Bede's migration narrative for the genesis of the English-speaking population of first-millennium Britain, is leading to difficulties with the interpretation of the burial archaeology and material culture of fifth-to seventh-century Britain. Seeing this narrative as a simplistic way of Bede distancing his English-speaking people from the Celtic-speaking areas of Britain in a bid to claim religious superiority may offer other avenues for explaining some of the changes that occurred in the former provinces of Britannia which may provide more satisfying outcomes. Moving away from ethnicity as the most likely explanation for change in the fifth to the seventh centuries may offer opportunities to explore other forms of identity as well as other ways in which the material culture, language and burial practices, that are seen to be markers of these ethnicities, could have come to dominate the lowlands of Britain in the second half of the first millennium. As Alex Woolf has stated 'one of the problems with the debate concerning the fate of the Britons is the presumption that a single model might apply across the whole country.'<sup>399</sup> As such, approaching the Bede's migration model with a degree of scepticism may allow for a more nuanced and varied approach. The next chapter will consider how Bede's migration model has been applied to the end of the Roman urban experience and how this too is limiting our understanding of how Roman urban spaces evolved beyond the end of the fourth century.

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<sup>399</sup> Woolf (2007), p. 116.

## Chapter 5- The Shadow of Bede: psycho-geographies and the urban narrative of late Roman towns in the fifth and sixth centuries.

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will ask how far narratives surrounding the ethnogenesis of the English and Bede's narratives around the *Adventus Saxonum* have impacted the archaeological study of the urban situation in Britain in the period after the beginning of the fifth century.

This chapter is not intended to represent a synthesis of the archaeological picture in relation to urban spaces between the beginning of the fifth century and Bede's lifetime (in the late seventh and eighth centuries), although elements of archaeological discussion will undoubtedly feature, but more of a discussion of what (if any) features of a Roman town remained in use and were developed after the traditional (historiographical) end of the Roman urban story at the end of the fourth century and what these can tell us about how the gap was bridged between Roman urban centres and the political entities that followed. Key to this chapter is the belief that alongside the Roman town's economic role is its function as a centre of power within the local (and in some cases regional, provincial or diocesan) landscape. This chapter will focus on a series of case studies across the north of modern England and examine what elements of their fourth- and fifth-century development and use, could allow an insight into any continuity at these sites. Their treatment in the historiographical tradition will also be examined in order to demonstrate the influence that Bede's writing has had on modern (and slightly less modern) understandings of British urban spaces after the end of the fourth century.

In order to consider these factors, this chapter will make a case study of the treatment of York by Bede and modern authors. York is featured prominently in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* as the bishopric of Paulinus and the location of Edwin's baptism. York has the advantage of large, published, recent excavations as well as representing a significant Roman centre in the fourth century and was, later, a significant centre of the Northumbrian kingdom. York benefitted from planned urban amenities which resulted from its foundation as a legionary fortress in the first century and increased as York's importance grew. This chapter will compare the treatment of specific features in the archaeological discussion of York with that of another significant first millennium town, Wroxeter, which does not have the weight of a historiographical association with a potential early Germanic-speaking occupation. It will also explore features which may have represented continuity and explore factors which may have allowed that continuity to have occurred.

This chapter will also consider the literary tradition around fifth- to seventh-century Carlisle, which although eventually becoming a *civitas* capital, did so after the first- and second-century culture of making large-scale public monuments had ceased and so lacked the amenities associated with large, planned towns and was laid out in a more organic pattern than the traditional Roman grid pattern.<sup>400</sup> It could be argued that Carlisle appears in the archaeological record in the third and fourth century in a manner which is similar to that of an unplanned small town in the more southern regions of the British provinces.<sup>401</sup> In order to consider the comparison with a small town more fully, the fourth- and fifth-century experience of the small town is also considered through a case study of Catterick. Again, this is a town which has benefitted from multiple modern excavations which are well published. Like York, Catterick is a location of some importance in the world outlined by Bede and additionally, has ascribed to it a significant role in Welsh literature about the early medieval period. Prior to this, for the purposes of considering the small town in the fifth-century paradigm in more detail, the fifth-century experience of Baldock in Hertfordshire is also considered.

Throughout this chapter the question of how Roman towns featured in the political landscape of the ‘post-Roman’ North will be considered in a bid to more fully consider the role played by towns in the absence of the economic conditions of the second to fourth century.

## **5.2 The northern urban experience between the second and the fifth century.**

Much of what has been written on the urban environs of Roman Britain has been from the perspective of the south-east of those provinces. For the most part this dominance of the urban landscape in the southern parts of the British provinces results from the significantly higher concentration of urban centres, particularly planned urban centres, to the south of the River Humber. It is telling that in his piece considering the ‘Urban transformation from late Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England’, Gavin Speed considers the urban situation in the Southeast, Midlands and Southwest but leaves the North out of his consideration (this is despite the narrative suggesting that the Southwest fell under Germanic-speaking control much later than a significant portion of the North).<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Jones (1991), pp. 53–63.

<sup>401</sup> Jones (1991), p. 53.

<sup>402</sup> Speed (2014).

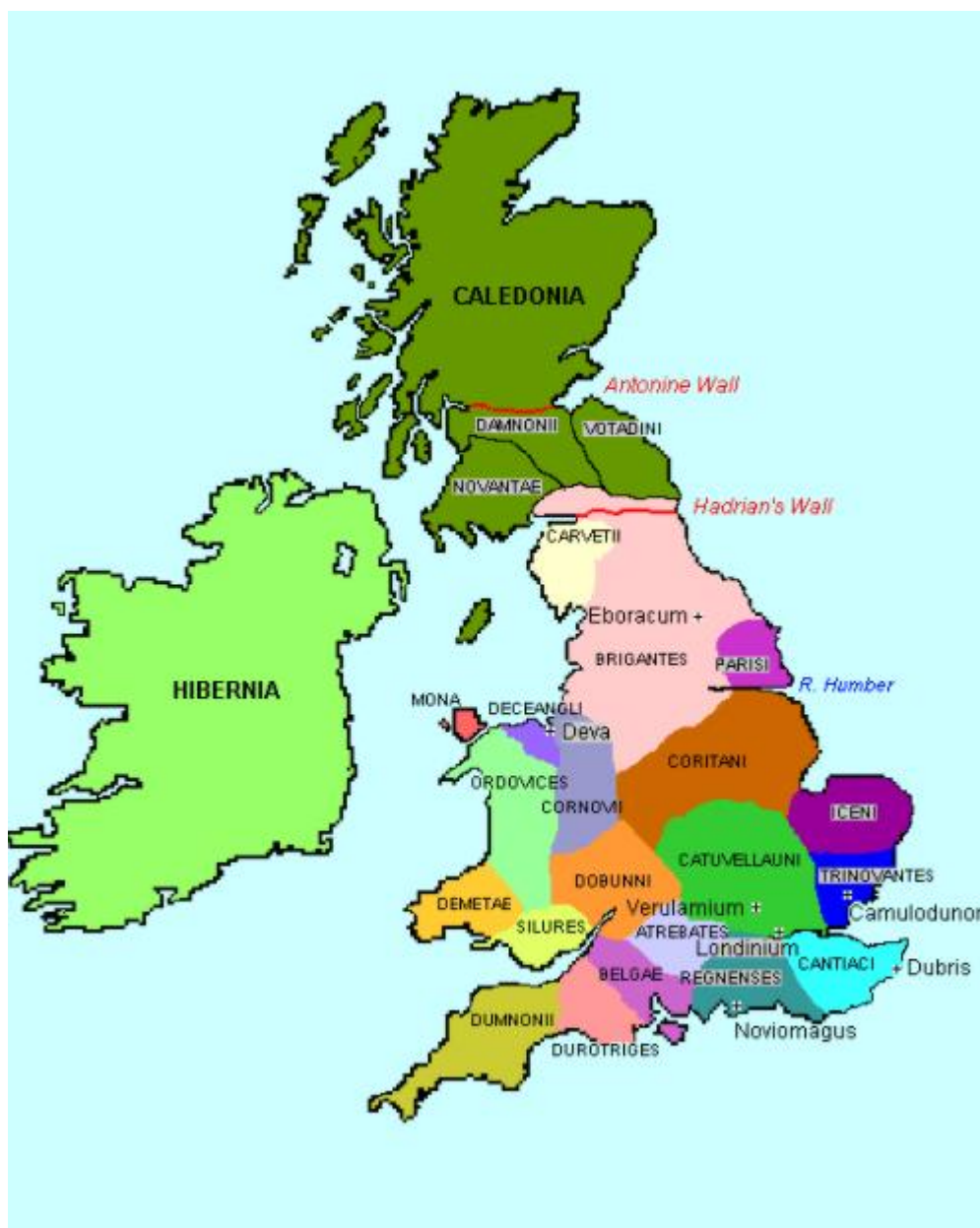


Fig 4: A very simple breakdown of civitates in Britain in the third century<sup>403</sup>

As well as containing the locations of several early *colonia* (planned towns to house retired veterans of the legions featuring large-scale public amenities, including amphitheatres, public baths, forums and basilicas, as well as being laid out in grid patterns) such as Colchester, Gloucester and Lincoln, each tribal grouping (*Civitas*) was given its own capital, which was also planned and featured many of the amenities given to *colonia*. South of the Humber there were at least 17 *Civitas* capitals, in

<sup>403</sup> Image has been taken from Rollinson [n.d]. Note: an additional *civitas* mirroring that of the *Carvetii* but on the East coast has been hypothesised: see Jones (1991), p. 62. This *civitas*, which is expected to have had its capital at Corbridge, has not been investigated to the same extent that the *Carvetii* and Carlisle have been, nor has it been named. There have been no modern excavations at Corbridge which would have allowed the investigation of this hypothesis: Hodgson (2009), pp. 97–107.



addition to the aforementioned *colonia* and a provincial capital at London, whilst north of the Humber there were two *civitas* capitals with foundations earlier than the mid-second century (when formal planning still took place) and perhaps as many as four by the third century, although as mentioned above two of these lack (the capital of the *Carvetii* and its eastern counterpart) the trappings associated with the *civitas* capitals of the south, as well as the legionary fortress at York.

As hinted above, there is a distinct association between military foundations throughout Britain, but in particular the North, and smaller scale urban centres. Many forts had an associated civilian settlement (*vicus*), which in some cases was of comparable size to some small towns. The settlement at Bimchester was approximately 8 hectares, which made it approximately a quarter of the area of the Brigantian *civitas* capital at Aldborough (*Isurium Brigantium*).<sup>404</sup> Many of the economic functions carried out by small towns in the south were carried out in the *vici* in the north. As such, by the fourth century, it is possible that distinctions between town and fort at places such as Bimchester are so small as to have no meaning particularly with the growth of military occupation within town walls in the fourth century, and like the towns in the south these fort settlements represented the central places in their localities.<sup>405</sup>

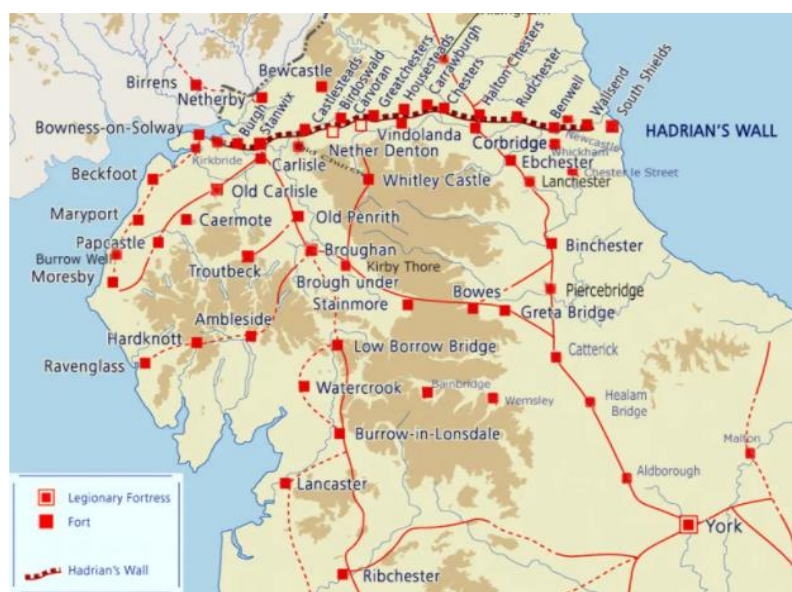


Fig 5: Map of the Northern frontier region<sup>406</sup>

<sup>404</sup> Jones (1991), pp. 61–62.

<sup>405</sup> Jones (1991), p. 62.

<sup>406</sup> Map of the northern frontier region in Britain: Tynedale U3A Hadrian's Wall Group [n.d.] .

In a northern context, the aforementioned lack of distinction (in economic terms) between a town and a fort in the third and fourth centuries may have been further enhanced by military presence at almost every urban site. Many urban sites in the North were based around or were in close proximity to an occupied fort, although some were abandoned and reoccupied at various times during the second, third and fourth centuries. As demonstrated on the map above these forts, and their associated urban sites occupied every major line of communication (such as passes between areas of highland) through the northern region of the province as well as the crossings of every major river. In a purely topographic sense this may have made them the de facto central places in the region as in order to move themselves or their goods anywhere easily the civilian population would have to move along these lines of communication. As such post- fourth-century continuity at these sites may need to be thought of in such terms<sup>407</sup> that (unless these sites were destroyed) they still occupied spaces which were central in the landscape, for the most part had physical defences and were positioned in locations that necessitated their use should communication over larger distances be required. For these reasons alone, such places could have become or remained centres of power for either Romanised or non-Romanised figures in absence of the authority of the centre of the Empire. The existence of such places in the landscape makes it likely that at some point they would be used as places of defence or from which to project power, however the next chapter explores the possible means by which those that occupied these sites at the start of the fifth century could have retained them in the absence of a Roman infrastructure.<sup>408</sup>

### 5.3 The historiographical narrative of the end of the Roman urban experience

The Bedan narrative has had a pervasive effect on the historiographical tradition. Thomas Wright, describing the mid-nineteenth-century excavations at Wroxeter in the 1863 *Transactions of the Royal Ethnological Society* clearly envisaged the end of urban life in Wroxeter coming abruptly and in exactly the same way as described by Gildas and Bede:

Many of the terrified inhabitants, pursued by the barbarians, who were masters of the city, had evidently sought refuge in these buildings, which were full of hypocausts, and other

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<sup>407</sup> For a consideration of the process by which these forts may have moved from the control of central Roman authority to represent local authorities in their own right see chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>408</sup> Mechanisms by which these locations of importance in the first to fourth centuries could become centres of power in a post-fourth-century context will be explored further in the next chapter.

places difficult of access, and not very likely to be explored, even by victorious savages, almost as eager of blood, as of plunder.<sup>409</sup>

His vision of a victorious Germanic army storming a captured city is used to explain the discovery of a crouched burial and two extended burials in the hypocaust beneath the Roman Baths<sup>410</sup>:

an old man and two women, who had entered by the small passage from the inner court which admitted the slaves who attended to the hypocausts, had crept between the rows of pillars of the hypocausts to the further side, and there the man had crouched into the corner, while the women appear to have laid themselves down between the pillars and the wall. The massacrers were not likely to follow them, but their hiding place was nevertheless an unsafe one much the same thing as taking refuge in the chimney when your house is on fire, and when the plunderers set fire to the building these three individuals were no doubt smothered.<sup>411</sup>

Wright's adherence to the view of the end of Roman town life as a violent, bloody and sudden affair appears to have represented the norm. This perception of a sudden, brutal end continued beyond the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1912, Haverfield stated

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<sup>409</sup> Wright (1863), p. 365.

<sup>410</sup> A comparison of Wright's depiction of the fall of Wroxeter to 'Barbarian' forces with the transfer of cities through staged battles perhaps offers an insight into the understanding of warfare at the different times of writing. In the ninth century, the time of the composition large portions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, not only were kings mostly expected to fight alongside their warriors (although *Y Gododdin* offers an interesting exception to this trend) but the battles tended to involve a larger proportion of the fighting class of a kingdom; as such defeat was likely to result in larger tracts of territory changing hands simply because of the absence of a warrior class to defend it. This could perhaps explain the *Chronicle's* description of towns simply changing ownership following a battle. By comparison, Wright's article was written at a time when nation states had massive numbers fighting on behalf of a country (for example 685,000 fighting on behalf of Napoleonic France when it invaded Russia in 1812). Such massive numbers are unwieldy and need to have multiple commanders; as such it is unreasonable to expect a king to fight with their army, because they cannot lead all of them at the same time. As a result, if one army is defeated another can replace it. It was only at events such as Waterloo, when the head of state was the commander on the battlefield, that regime-changing battles took place. With this situation, the progression of a conquest had to be made on a town-by-town basis unless there was a surrender of the general regime.

<sup>411</sup> Wright (1863), p. 366.

‘as the Romano-Britons retired from the south and east, as Silchester was evacuated and Bath and Wroxeter were stormed and left desolate, the very centres of Romanised life were extinguished. Not a single one remained an inhabited town.’<sup>412</sup>

As time passed this discussion evolved beyond a simple statement of the destructive end of Roman Britain to highlight the perceived break between the Roman archaeological levels and the next periods of occupation. The existence of this break in occupation was argued by Wheeler and Wheeler using evidence from St. Albans in 1936.<sup>413</sup> The expectation of a break in occupation was restated in Collingwood and Richmond’s ‘The archaeology of Roman Britain’<sup>414</sup> and again by Richard Reece in the 1980’s and 90’s.<sup>415</sup> From this it can be seen that at the centre of narratives around the end of Roman town life developed a belief that there must be a break in Roman occupation before other occupation was able to begin.

This narrative, which originated with Gildas’s *De Excidio* and Bede’s *Adventus Saxonum*, eventually became the end of Roman Britain narrative. It worked on the basis that there must be an end to Roman levels prior to the development of Anglo-Saxon town life. What’s more, as this narrative developed there began to be seen to be an inevitability about the end of Roman rule in Britain which was marked by a decline in town life as the Romano-British population rejected those things which supporters of this narrative believed made them Roman eventually resulting in a collapse of the Roman system.<sup>416</sup>

This rejection narrative has resulted in different suggestions as far as the date of this decline occurs. For example, whilst Wheeler and Wheeler saw evidence in St Albans for a period of growth at the beginning of the fourth century followed by a mid-century decline and Collingwood and Richmond also argued for a mid-fourth century decline, Richard Reece argued that the decline began as early as the second quarter of the third century.<sup>417</sup> He argued that the early classical town had little

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<sup>412</sup> Haverfield (1912).

<sup>413</sup> Wheeler and Wheeler (1936).

<sup>414</sup> Collingwood and Richmond (1969).

<sup>415</sup> Reece (1980), pp. 77–92; Reece (1992), pp. 136–145.

<sup>416</sup> Again, this is probably reflective of the period in which this narrative was written and reflects a belief that the rejection of Imperial rule (insert British Empire for Roman Empire here) must result in the decline of the population that is rejecting it.

<sup>417</sup> Reece (1980), p. 77; Reece (1992), p. 143. For a useful summary of the end of the Roman town decline and collapse narrative see Speed (2014), pp. 11–17.

enduring value beyond the second century, subscribing to notions of *Romanitas* representing a thin veneer on the top of iron age British civilisation:

the Roman Empire had been a passing fancy in the real development of Britain, and the towns were the sorts of beads that the natives first considered and then rejected.<sup>418</sup>

Reece then argued that any further occupation within urban environs no longer represented ‘town life’. Reece argues instead that after the third-century decline towns became administrative villages. Whilst Speed is critical of any dismissal of a vibrant town life in the fourth century, the thin veneer argument has other adherents.<sup>419</sup> As well as Mattingley and Millett’s works on the problem, Jones has also argued that the end of Roman rule [in Britain] came about not just as a result of the external problems in the empire, but rather ‘the problem was the inherent disinterest of the British to accept and become “Romanised”’.<sup>420</sup>

Whether as a by-product of the failure of Romanisation or as a collapse of the economic impetus which had previously ensured their existence, few would disagree that Roman towns in the late fourth and fifth century were no longer the hives of activity that they had represented in the second and third centuries. However, this need not mean that Roman towns came to an end at approximately the end of direct Roman authority over the diocese.<sup>421</sup> It is apparent from a consideration of the discussion of the sieges and the capture of Celtic-speaking urban centres in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,<sup>422</sup> as well as Gildas and Bede’s discussions of the violent capture of towns,<sup>423</sup> that there was a belief in the sixth, eighth and ninth century that Britain, after Roman rule, remained a place where urban centres represented places of power and were still occupied in some way. This chapter is not intended to consider the arguments in favour of continuity and discontinuity but will look instead at the effect that the various narratives which began with Bede and Gildas have impacted modern considerations of the British urban situation in the fifth and sixth century. It will

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<sup>418</sup> Reece (1992), p. 143. For further consideration of the thin veneer argument see Millett (1990) and Mattingley (2007).

<sup>419</sup> Speed (2014).

<sup>420</sup> Jones (1998), p. 255.

<sup>421</sup> Speed (2014) provides a very useful examination of the urban narrative and how various towns show signs of continuity and discontinuity, which also considers the changing roles of these towns.

<sup>422</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s.aa. 571, 577, 491. When using the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, I will refer to the Winchester manuscript (MS A), as this represents the earliest copy of the original, with the first entries compiled in the same hand up to 891, suggesting compilation in that year. Swanton (1996), pp. 14–18.

<sup>423</sup> DEB, §24; *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 15.

do this by considering the development of former Roman urban centres such as York and Carlisle beyond the end of the fourth century. It will compare the way in which the narrative around the development these Roman centres differs from each other and other similar former Roman urban centres in different geographic locations.

#### 5.4 The end of Roman York?

Between the second and fifth centuries York represented a site of particular importance within both the military and civil administrations of the Roman authorities in Britain. As the capital of first *Britannia Inferior* and then *Britannia Secunda*<sup>424</sup> (after the further division of the provinces into four to create the diocese of the Britons in the administrative reforms of the tetrarchy<sup>425</sup>) the city represented one of the primary administrative centres of the British provinces. Furthermore, it was also home to a significant military office, first as the base of the IX,<sup>426</sup> then the VI<sup>427</sup> legions, before becoming the probable base of the *Dux Britanniarum*,<sup>428</sup> the commander of the *limitanei* forces on the northern frontier.<sup>429</sup> During the Anglian period,<sup>430</sup> York became a royal centre, a bishopric then an archbishopric, playing a significant role in the reign of Edwin<sup>431</sup> and becoming a significant centre

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<sup>424</sup> Ottaway (1999), p. 147.

<sup>425</sup> Between c. AD 284–305.

<sup>426</sup> C. AD 71.

<sup>427</sup> C. AD 120.

<sup>428</sup> In the fourth century, as listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.

<sup>429</sup> Ottaway (1999), p. 147.

<sup>430</sup> The term Anglian period is used by regularly by archaeological theorists to describe the period between the end of Roman rule (in the fifth century) and the Scandinavian invasions of the ninth century. Since September 2019, a debate about the use of Anglo-Saxon has been raging, several medieval scholars, particularly scholars of Old English literature, have highlighted the racist misuse of these term and as such have argued for its replacement. This is discussed in the introduction to the thesis.

<sup>431</sup> Bede states that Edwin died on 12<sup>th</sup> October 633 AD having ruled for 17 years: *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 20; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 203. There is some ambiguity around the date of the battle of Hatfield Chase (where Edwin died) as Bede also states that the decision had been made to remove the year of the reigns of Osric of Deira and Eanfrith of Bernicia (Edwin's successors) from the regnal lists as a result of their apostasy and the destruction wreaked on Northumbria by Cadwalla. That year was therefore assigned to the reign of Oswald: *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3, ch. 2; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), pp. 212–214. D. P. Kirby has suggested that Hatfield Chase may have occurred in 634. Frank Stenton dates it to 632, following Anscombe and Poole in considering Bede to begin the New Year on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, whilst Levison has argued that Bede began the year on 25<sup>th</sup> December. See D. P. Kirby (2000), p. 56; Stenton (1971), p. 81; Wynn (1956), pp. 71–78. For the importance of York during Edwin's reign see *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14; Rollason (1999) p. 122.

in the kingdom of Northumbria. It thus follows, given its importance in both the Roman administration and then that of the later Kingdom of Northumbria, that there ought to be a level of continuity at York. Such a conclusion is further supported by the continuity of the name of York from its name during the Roman period, Eboracum, to Eborwic ('board-place') and later Eoforwic in Old English and then its Old Norse form of Jorvik ('horse-bay'), a name we see preserved today in its modern form-York.<sup>432</sup>

This section of the chapter will explore how, despite the continuity of the name along with the city's religious and political importance in multiple contexts throughout the first millennium, there has been a historiographical trend that considers the Roman levels of York to be abandoned at the beginning of the fifth century and a shift towards a new population inhabiting the city in the seventh century and beyond. This section considers how this historiographical trend can be seen to be derived from Bede's descriptions of the city at the time of Edwin's baptism and the foundation of the new church of St. Peter by Edwin and Paulinus.<sup>433</sup> It then explores how, despite the historiographical trend discounting continuity at York, excavations around York have shown signs of low-level use of key sites within the city, characterised by elite feasting and control of logistically important routes. This section then compares how the historiographical trend of considering post-fourth-century activity at York to be a marker of a new population inhabiting the city has similar characteristics to post-fourth-century activity at Wroxeter. Despite the similarities of these characteristics, the absence of a Bede-inspired narrative, which suggests a replacement population within the city after the beginning of the fifth century, has allowed excavators to consider the changes evident in the archaeological record as evidence of continuity and adaptation in the fifth century and later.

#### **5.4.1 Bede's references to York and the impression generated from them:**

Bede makes several references to York in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

Bede's earliest reference to York helps to highlight its importance during the Roman period, highlighting it as the death place of Septimius Severus.<sup>434</sup> This reference occurs as part of a chapter which also highlights the treachery of the Britons. It states: 'he was compelled to come to Britain by the desertion of nearly all of the tribes allied to Rome,'<sup>435</sup> which supports Bede's narrative of the

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<sup>432</sup> Alaric Hall *pers comm.*; see also Wachter (1976), pp. 104–177.

<sup>433</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p.187.

<sup>434</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 5; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp.25-27.

Britons as unfaithful and therefore unworthy of God's favour. Interestingly, this entry also suggests that Septimius Severus also ordered the building of a dividing turf rampart from coast to coast between the Roman occupied territories and the tribes to the North.<sup>436</sup> Bede is clear that this is not a wall, so this building work is not Hadrian's Wall, so may represent a misdating of the Antonine Wall or a reference to the creation of the Vallum.

Bede then refers to York as imagined as an equal See to London in a letter sent from Pope Gregory to Augustine in AD 601; this letter instructed Augustine to establish a Bishop of York from amongst his companions who was then to appoint 12 subordinate bishops in the area around York.<sup>437</sup> The letter stated that after the period of Augustine's role as Bishop of London (although despite the instruction to establish his metropolitan See in London Augustine chose to make his See Canterbury, which has retained this archbishopric since), the bishopric of York was to be wholly independent of the southern Sees and have an equal stature to the Bishop of Canterbury with seniority established by date of consecration.<sup>438</sup> This entry suggests that there is doubt in Rome as to the Christianity of the people of York, stating in respect of the establishment of a See 'if this city together with the neighbouring localities should receive the Word of the Lord'<sup>439</sup> What is clear is that there was an expectation that there was a power at York and a population in the area. Whilst Gregory's assumption may be entirely derived from the third- and fourth-century administrative picture, it serves to reinforce the importance of York as a third- and fourth-century Romanised centre and suggests a seventh-century expectation outside of Britain that some form of authority continued within the city. This assumption predates Edwin establishing Paulinus within the city and so could represent an expectation of the continuity of a British or even a Romanised British authority.

Building on Gildas's critique of the British clergy, Bede states

Not only were laymen guilty of these offences but even the Lord's own flock and their pastors. They threw off Christ's easy yoke and thrust their necks under the burden of drunkenness, hatred, quarrelling, strife, and envy and other similar crimes.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 5; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp.25-27.

<sup>436</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 5; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp.25-27.

<sup>437</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 105-107.

<sup>438</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 105-107.

<sup>439</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 105-107.

<sup>440</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 47-49.



However, Bede makes continued reference to a Christian presence in Britain, with this instance followed by the restoration of the faith by Germanus and Severus after flirtations with Pelagian heresy.<sup>441</sup>

The next entry that references York occurs 26 years after the letter from Pope Gregory to Augustine. This entry concerns the conversion and baptism of Edwin and his aristocracy and discusses mass baptisms at York, Yeavinger and at Catterick, followed by the building of a church in stone in York around the small timber church erected to baptise Edwin.<sup>442</sup> A slightly later entry states that Paulinus received the pallium from Pope Honorius in AD 634,<sup>443</sup> which suggests that the initial instructions from Pope Gregory in AD 601 were unable to be completed,<sup>444</sup> the conjunction of these entries with an entry, which states that Edwin's pagan chief priest (Coifi) advised that Edwin's people turn their back on their gods, convert to Christianity and then personally destroyed the altars of the old gods (at Goodmanham),<sup>445</sup> creates the impression of a wholly pagan landscape in the area around York.

Bede makes many more references to York after the conversion of Edwin in 627 and the construction of the church of St. Peter. Initially, this is in terms of references to Paulinus as the former Bishop of York. After the death of Edwin (at the Battle of Hatfield in c. 633), Bede states that Edwin's successors Osric (Edwin's nephew) and Eanfrid apostatised and 'reverted to the filth of their former idolatry.'<sup>446</sup> In the period after the death of Edwin, Paulinus and several members of Edwin's close family went into exile in Kent and Paulinus was made Bishop of Rochester. His transfer to Kent left Deacon James in charge of the Church in York.<sup>447</sup> This episode is briefly covered by Bede who concluded his section on the judgement of God on these apostates, with their deaths at the hand of Cadwalla,<sup>448</sup> by saying:

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<sup>441</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 17–21; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 55-67.

<sup>442</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 187-189.

<sup>443</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 17; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 195-197.

<sup>444</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 105-107.

<sup>445</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 13; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 183-187.

<sup>446</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3, ch. 1; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 213.

<sup>447</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 20; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 207.

<sup>448</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3, ch. 1; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 213. In this instance, Cadwalla is characterised in the same way as Gildas's use of Saxons in that they are both godless and instruments of God against those in need of punishment (in this case the people of Northumbria rather than Gildas's Britons)

So all those who compute the dates of kings have decided to abolish the memory of those perfidious kings and to assign this year to their successor Oswald, a man beloved of God.<sup>449</sup>

Interestingly, Alcuin of York (c. AD 735- 804), writing in the later eighth century was not entirely supportive of Bede's narrative around the refoundation of York, although the primary source for his work was Bede. He writes 'meanwhile Edwin, the descendant of ancient kings, a native of York and the future lord of all the land was driven into exile as a boy and fled the realms of his foes'<sup>450</sup> and 'then the young man returned once more to his ancestral cities, popular and acclaimed by the people and nobles alike.'<sup>451</sup> His description of Edwin's relationship with York implies not only that York was a centre of Edwin's territory, but that it had long represented a centre of some importance in the context of Edwin's kingdom, although Alcuin states that Edwin did not make York 'the chief city of his realm'<sup>452</sup> until after his conversion and baptism. Alcuin also notes that the position of York in Edwin's kingdom had been ordained by Pope Gregory.<sup>453</sup> Furthermore, his description of the baptism occurring beneath York's high city walls<sup>454</sup> implies a significant level of structural continuity from the Roman city to Edwin's time. Alcuin does however agree with Bede that prior to the arrival of Paulinus, Edwin (and presumably) his nobility, was pagan and that in order to baptise Edwin a new church was built.<sup>455</sup> A possible inference from this is that, as far as Alcuin was concerned, Edwin represented a continuation of an existing and long held pagan authority that included the territory of York as one of its major political centres. Indeed, Alcuin's description of the early history of York does not imply an occupational break between the fourth and seventh century. This offers two considerations, did Alcuin consider Edwin a descendant of the Roman nobility of York or did he believe that Edwin's ancestors had captured the city from these? Alcuin's description of the early history of York does not offer any clues as to his position on this, but his description does suggest

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before returning to Christianity with the even more godly King Oswald. Perhaps this use is a reflection of the desire to present their chosen people as the latter-day Israelites, as discussed by Coumert (2019).

<sup>449</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3, ch. 1; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 215..

<sup>450</sup> Alcuin, *Versus de patribus, regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, ed. Godman (1982), p. 13. Hereafter, Alcuin.

<sup>451</sup> Alcuin; Godman (1982), p. 13.

<sup>452</sup> Alcuin; Godman (1982), p. 21.

<sup>453</sup> Alcuin; Godman (1982), p. 21.

<sup>454</sup> Alcuin; Godman (1982), p. 21.

<sup>455</sup> Alcuin; Godman (1982), pp. 13–21.

that in the late-eighth century Alcuin did not believe that the city had been deserted after the end of the fourth century.

Many of the references to York in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* indicate the importance of York prior to the fifth century, a belief which appears to be echoed by Gregory's desire to establish a second See at York, independent of those in the south and equal to the most senior in See in Britain. Alcuin, who derives much of his information from Bede,<sup>456</sup> suggests activity in York prior to the reign of Edwin and refers to Edwin as a native of the city. Bede does not actually state that York is empty, this inference appears to be a creation of modern historiography. However, the earlier portions of Bede discussing the abandonment of towns may bear some responsibility for this interpretation. The next section will consider how modern historiography handles the occupation in the fifth, sixth and seventh century.

#### **5.4.2 The Bede-influenced historiographical discussion of fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century evidence relating to occupation in York.**

Despite the logic of continuity at York, (on the basis that the city was an important centre under Roman authority until the beginning of the fifth century and an important centre within the kingdom of Northumbria from the seventh century onwards) there is a tendency amongst archaeologists to dismiss York as a fifth-century centre. David Rollason has suggested that there is very little evidence to support the retention of a high enough level of occupation to justify the later political importance that the later 'Anglian' site represented, implying a refoundation by a later 'Anglian' population.<sup>457</sup> This has been supported by Edward James, who Cecily Spall and Nicola Toop quote as saying,

'If there is no certain archaeological evidence for a continued Romano-British or British presence in York in the 5th and 6th centuries, there is also no evidence for a takeover by the Anglo-Saxon newcomers'.<sup>458</sup>

As such, from these two, there is an implication that there is a disconnect between Eboracum, as governed by the Romans, and Eoforwic, the eighth-century centre within the Northumbrian Kingdom. Indeed, whilst Spall and Toop go on to argue that there was an early medieval settlement in the region of Heslington, they maintain that there was a shift from rural to urban settlement in

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<sup>456</sup> Alex Woolf (*pers. comm*).

<sup>457</sup> Rollason (1999) p. 122.

<sup>458</sup> Edward James in Philips and Heywood (1995), p. 9; Spall and Toop (2008), p. 3.

the seventh and eighth centuries marked by the settlements at Fishergate and increased activity in the centre of the fortress on Clifford Street and in the Minster itself. This increased activity comprises of evidence of life in the form of hanging bowls and burials, furthermore the deposition of small coinage (sceattas) hints at a new form of economic activity taking place.<sup>459</sup> However, what is important for Spall and Toop is the disconnect between this settlement development during York's 'Anglian' period and the Roman city that had existed before, concluding that the new intensification of activity at York were features of a seventh- and eighth-century change of mindset, including a 'changing attitude to *Romanitas*,'<sup>460</sup> which 'attracted the rural population back to the old city.'<sup>461</sup>

That there appears to be a disconnect between Eboracum and Eoforwic raises significant questions around how the Anglian settlement came to be located there. Was the refoundation of the town simply the whim of Pope Gregory, based on access to earlier Christian texts, harking back to its importance in the origin story of a Christianised Roman Empire? <sup>462</sup> Was there a local awareness that the ruin at the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Foss had previously been Roman York and due to the will of the Northumbrian Kings and their desire to please the Papacy in Rome economic stimulus was injected? Or had York remained an important point on the regional map, perhaps a traditionalist counterbalance to developing Anglian trends, whilst the Anglian kingdom developed in the area to the east of it? As has been highlighted by Rollason:

the early history of Deira had no connection with York, that the Anglian kingdom had grown up without reference to, and perhaps in a manner hostile towards, the former Roman capital, and that Edwin's presence in the former city was relatively speaking a novelty<sup>463</sup>

Rollason's analysis would appear to suggest that the relationship of the new power brokers in the Kingdom of Deira and subsequently Northumbria with York was new in the seventh century. Of particular interest is the notion of hostility towards the Roman city. When we consider this statement alongside the tradition of abandonment at the end of the fourth century, a hiatus of occupation and a new foundation in the seventh century (also espoused above by Rollason), who or

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<sup>459</sup> Spall and Toop (2008), p. 19.

<sup>460</sup> Presumably born of the Roman connection seen in the new Christian vigour brought about by the Augustinian Mission of the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

<sup>461</sup> Spall and Toop (2008), p. 21.

<sup>462</sup> Spall and Toop (2008), p. 2.

<sup>463</sup> Rollason (1999), p. 123.

what was at York was there to be hostile to? Was it just the abandoned structures or was there an alternative focus of regional power within York itself? What Rollason's analysis demonstrates is the silence around the use of York between the fourth century and the reign of Edwin, along with a reduction in easily datable artefacts after the end of the fourth century have allowed the creation of narratives from relative silence. There is no evidence of conflict between a power at York and the earliest elements of the Deiran kingdom, save the absence of material culture usually associated to a Germanic-speaking population within the city. Whilst Bede implies that an apparent focus of power within this kingdom was at Goodmanham.<sup>464</sup> Indeed, it may even be that Goodmanham and York were two of several focuses of power within the kingdom. Edwin's relationship with York outlined by Alcuin (discussed above)<sup>465</sup> which states that Edwin was a native of York at the time of his exile in the late sixth century potentially supports this viewpoint.

Tweddle suggests that the archaeological evidence for later Anglian occupation (after the beginning of the seventh century) at York is superior and more plentiful than at many other towns in England. For the middle Saxon period it surpasses all but London, Ipswich and Southampton, where far greater excavations of Anglian deposits have been carried out.<sup>466</sup> However, he also notes that the quantity of evidence available is small and at times may even be described as 'insubstantial' for the period prior to this.<sup>467</sup> Tweddle suggests a level of population reduction during the fifth century as the economic impetus that had kept the city in use during the second to the late fourth centuries began to decline. The size and scale of the late Roman defences made the settlement a place of significant strength and may have offered a point of refuge to those in the surrounding area, something that Tweddle suggests may have prevented a complete desertion of York.<sup>468</sup> Accordingly, Tweddle considers occupation in the fifth century to have been limited to a timber building at Wellington Row which is constructed on deposits sealing very late Roman coins. Whilst Carver has argued that there was further activity in the area around the *Principia* of the legionary fortress,<sup>469</sup> Tweddle argues that this interpretation goes beyond the limits of the evidence available.<sup>470</sup> For

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<sup>464</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 13. Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 183-187.

<sup>465</sup> Although Alcuin was not contemporary with Edwin and was writing over a century later when York had become an important religious centre.

<sup>466</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 207.

<sup>467</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 207.

<sup>468</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 208.

<sup>469</sup> Carver (1995), pp. 177-201.

Tweddle, the presence of sub-Roman pottery at some sites around the city does support the conclusion that there was more activity in York than simply the structural evidence from Wellington Row.<sup>471</sup>

Although there is a limited degree, with elements of disagreement as to the extent of it, of continued sub-Roman occupation,<sup>472</sup> there is some evidence of the establishment of cemeteries outside of the Roman walls<sup>473</sup> in the mid to late fifth century. Despite the evidence of some small finds within the Roman walls, Tweddle concludes that it is unlikely that the earliest 'Anglian' occupation in the region of York was within the limits of the old city, although he does support the continued use of the Roman road links during the fifth to seventh centuries.<sup>474</sup> Tweddle et al. have stated that there are some 85 sites within York and its vicinity that have produced evidence for the Anglian occupation of York, although many of these have probable dates that fall outside the remit of this work. It is apparent that the Roman defences of York retained a good deal of importance beyond the fifth century. With the reinforcement of the Roman bank and, potentially, the development of the 'Anglian tower'<sup>475</sup> it is possible to see that the defences of the Roman period were enhanced to fit the needs of later centuries.<sup>476</sup> What this discussion seems to present is the belief that whilst the Roman remains represented a strategic and perhaps 'symbolic' structure for the local population and the Deiran elite after the 'refoundation' of York in the reign of Edwin, for those who subscribe to the decline and collapse argument in respect of Roman York fifth- (and, perhaps sixth-) century occupation of York was non-existent.

A degree of difficulty presents itself when examining the evidence for the period of transition between the fifth and seventh centuries. Whilst it is reasonable to conclude that there is a disparity in both the quality and extent of occupation between the levels of the second century and that of the fifth century and later, it may be too hasty to presume that any new types of occupation after

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<sup>470</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 208.

<sup>471</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 208.

<sup>472</sup> That is occupation that could be considered to represent a form of continuity from the occupation of the late fourth century, as opposed to Anglian settlement which many assume to represent a new foundation.

<sup>473</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 208.

<sup>474</sup> Tweddle (1999a), p. 208.

<sup>475</sup> If a date within the period of the fifth to the ninth centuries can be sustained.

<sup>476</sup> Tweddle (1999a), pp. 297–98.

the beginning of the fifth century represents a move to a new population. This difficulty is further exacerbated by the tendency to assume that the new population must represent a new ethnic group. Although there is a tendency to associate material cultures to language families the main difference between a British and Anglian population is almost entirely language based. In the absence of epigraphic evidence, the change between a Celtic/Latin-speaking population and a Germanic-speaking population is not measurable through material culture as there is no way to tell what language the person depositing the material culture spoke. It is also difficult to determine what the material culture of continuing occupation of York would look like in the absence of new supplies of Roman small coinage after approximately AD 390 (<sup>477</sup>) and the decline of large-scale pottery production after the end of the centrally funded Roman military market. In the absence of these primary markers of Roman material culture what remains, that which would have made up the majority of materials used by the population, is largely lost and therefore the population appears invisible. As Leslie Alcock stated in 1971, there is literary evidence to suggest that ‘wood, flax, wool, horn and leather were all freely utilised in Arthur’s day [the fifth and sixth century], and we may infer that gut and sinew were equally important; but none of these survive.’<sup>478</sup> And whilst attempts have been made to construct a probable fifth century assemblage<sup>479</sup> they have by no means gathered common assent and, if we are entirely honest, there is very little to distinguish this assemblage from that of earlier centuries, which inevitably leads to these assemblages being misdated to earlier centuries.

If we consider the descriptions given by Rollason for the potential transitional power arrangements,<sup>480</sup> we reach a difficulty as far as the intricacies that were involved in such a transition are concerned. Rollason assumes that because the architecture and material culture of seventh-century York differs from that of fourth-century York there is another population in charge of the city by the seventh century. As a result, there must have been a transition of power and population in the period between the fifth and the seventh century. Presumably Rollason assumes this because the people in charge in the seventh century had different names (names which were not Latin,

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<sup>477</sup> It is worth noting that at many sites in the North the latest large supplies of small coinage date from much earlier in the century: c. 330–360. This no doubt helped to reinforce the belief in the fourth-century decline and collapse argument. See Brickstock (2000); Moorhead and Walton (2014); Casey (1988), pp. 39–54.

<sup>478</sup> Alcock (1971), p. 144.

<sup>479</sup> Cool (2000), pp. 47–65.

<sup>480</sup> Rollason (1999), pp. 120–22.

Brythonic or Welsh) and presumably spoke a different language to those that had been in charge at the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>481</sup> However, Rollason fails to consider the possibility of an existing population adopting new burial practices and, if Gelling's assessment of place name change during the first millennium is correct, changing languages and naming practices over the space of several generations despite such an occurrence happening during the Roman period. Whilst these changes are clearly a form of ethnic change, there is no requirement for a new population (Germanic-speaking immigrant or otherwise) to have replaced the descendants of population that had inhabited the city at the turn of the fifth century for these changes to have occurred.

Modern historiography tends to assume that in the fifth century the descendants of the population who had occupied York in the fourth century left the city. New activity, even that beginning in the fifth century, is therefore seen as a marker of a new population. The activity of this population is seen to represent the first stages of a Germanic-speaking population entering an abandoned city and re-founding it. Changes in the material culture and burial practices of the fifth to seventh century are seen to be indicators of this new population. Whilst it is possible that this is the case, rather than representing a refoundation by a new population, the changes seen to mark this population could represent changes amongst an existing population who had left a reduced archaeological footprint in the city after the end of widespread use of the major markers of Roman occupation- coinage and pottery. Many of the arguments around this period are made on the basis of an absence, which is essentially arguing from silence.

#### **5.4.3 The archaeology evidence relating to fifth-century use of York (low level use)**

As highlighted above, there is a tendency to assume a discontinuity between Roman and Anglian York. This section will consider what evidence is available for the use of York in the fifth and sixth centuries. Richard Reece has stated generally about Roman towns that there was a marked decline in the level of activity at urban sites throughout the fourth century with the major functions of the town becoming limited to the administrative functions necessary for the functioning of a large empire. This implies a late- third- to mid-fourth-century erosion of the economic systems that had characterised Roman towns in the second and third centuries. However, when tracing the occupation of York from Roman Eboracum to Anglian Eoforwic it is not absolutely necessary for the economic role that the city had enjoyed during its Roman centuries be maintained. What is necessary for there to be a continuity of occupation is for York to still represent a place of enough

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<sup>481</sup> Probably a form of Old English (although this may be a hasty assumption) see Gelling (1993), pp. 51–56, for a suggestion that old Welsh or Brythonic remained the spoken language of the majority in England until the seventh or eighth century.



importance in the minds of those in the local area, and perhaps nationally, for activity to become refocused at York when a new economic system emerged, as suggested by Spall and Toop in the later part of the first millennium. Whilst this could potentially have been as a half-remembered hearkening back to Roman grandeur by Pope Gregory and the Deiran elite of Edwin and his successors, it may equally be that there was a low level of occupation by an elite claiming legitimacy for their power on the basis of their control of York. If this were the case, a comparatively low level of occupation could be used to explain the apparent continuity that is represented by the linguistic shift from Eboracum to Eoforwic. So how might this latter scenario appear in the archaeological record?

#### 5.4.4 Major Excavations of York (fourth- to seventh-century material)

One of the key pieces of evidence for a form of continuity at York is the discovery of maintenance of the roof over the *principia* prior to its ninth-century collapse excavators of York Minster found that

in the seventh century . . . the great military headquarters and adjacent buildings, possibly of Severan date, still stood and were to remain standing and in good repair for a further two centuries.<sup>482</sup>

This good repair is not simply the retention of upstanding walls. Structural continuity was marked by the maintenance of the roof over the *principia* throughout the fourth to the ninth centuries, to the extent that the ninth century debris used to date the roof collapse had the original roof timbers over the top.<sup>483</sup> It has, however, been noted that the latest date for the collapse of this roof is provided by the sealing of only five sherds of ninth century pottery in the uppermost of the pre-collapse deposits, which may have been intrusive,<sup>484</sup> but if correct the longevity of these timbers highlights the continued maintenance of the *principia* roof long beyond 'Roman' use for the site and well into the city's 'Anglian' period.

The maintenance of the building structure on its own do not necessarily suggest continuity. There are many reasons why a building and (potentially) its roof could be maintained that does not necessitate an elite presence within York's walls and would not on its own suggest that those who had maintained it were figures of local or regional authority in the second half of the first millennium

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<sup>482</sup> Brooks (1986), p. 85.

<sup>483</sup> Brooks (1986), pp. 85–86.

<sup>484</sup> Gerrard (2007), pp. 303–307.

particularly when 'very few artefacts were found, however, and none at all of the sixth and seventh centuries.'<sup>485</sup>

Alongside the potential maintenance of the roof and building structure of the *principia* there is also evidence for the use of the central precincts of the legionary fortress into the fifth century. In a similar pattern of development to what has been commented on elsewhere in this thesis for the northern frontier region,<sup>486</sup> York shows evidence of restructuring of the central military space in the late fourth century, alongside a series of structural modifications that begin in the later fourth century, which brought a more utilitarian way of life to what had previously been elite spaces.<sup>487</sup> This was marked by evidence of smithing in the area of the basilica<sup>488</sup> and extensive midden deposits above the latest modification levels of the fourth century sequence.<sup>489</sup> Carver has also noted an apparent high status residence in the Centurion's quarters of Barrack 2.<sup>490</sup>

Similar to Binchester, there is also evidence of high-status consumption of meat. The so called 'small pig horizon,' which carbon dates on a cattle bone in the same layers calibrated earlier between AD 343 and 416,<sup>491</sup> has been used both as evidence of poor farmers eking out an existence in the remains of the former fortress:

These activities [within the basilica] can be held to imply a reactive self-sufficiency within a run-down ruralised town, where citizens, relieved of hierarchy and taxation, have contrived some centralised amenities. (Carver 1995, 195)<sup>492</sup>

And also, by the same author, as evidence of a localised fifth century elite actively demonstrating their *Romanitas*:

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<sup>485</sup> Brooks (1986), p. 86.

<sup>486</sup> See chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>487</sup> For example, the *Praetorium* at Binchester. See section 6.3.3 in chapter 6 below for a fuller discussion of the late fourth-century development of the elite spaces at Binchester.

<sup>488</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 302; Carver (1995), p. 195.

<sup>489</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 302; Carver (1995), p. 195.

<sup>490</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 302; Carver (1995), p. 195.

<sup>491</sup> Gerrard (2007), p. 304. Gerrard suggests a fifth-century context for deposition of the majority of the remains.

<sup>492</sup> Carver (1995), p. 195 quoted in Gerrard (2007), p. 304.

Equally they can be seen as a rustic attempt to claim status, exact tribute and exercise authority in a traditional seat of military power. (Carver 1995, 195).<sup>493</sup>

The 'small pig horizon' is characterised by approximately 960 animal bones of which approximately one third are porcine in nature. Added to this, of that third, a large proportion of the pigs within the small pig horizon were either juvenile or neo-natal, aged less than a year old<sup>494</sup> and 20 per cent of the assemblage was considered to be 'very young, a few bones suggesting animals of only a few weeks of age.'<sup>495</sup> Furthermore, the deposition of these juvenile and neo-natal remains suggests that this event occurred on several occasions in various locations around the basilica.<sup>496</sup> On the basis of this we can say that in what was, apparently, a subsistence economy someone, or a group of people, were, on more than one occasion, making the choice to consume a pig when it was a long way from fully mature. The repeated nature of this act suggests that it was not brought about by necessity and as such it seems reasonable to conclude a display of elite status is the most likely context for these depositions. As Gerrard argues, the most likely context for this consumption is a series of feasts in which an elite group demonstrated their control of a local surplus by demonstrating their ability to waste it.<sup>497</sup> The use of pigs for such a context is further supported by the deposits from the Centurion's quarters in Barrack 2. Here, in another high-status context, the faunal remains are largely bovine and had been slaughtered after reaching maturity but prior to reaching five years old, at an optimum time for both hide and beef production.<sup>498</sup> This demonstrates the economic efficiency in play in other areas in the vicinity of the basilica throwing into sharp contrast the wastefulness of the pig consumption taking place and supports a suggestion of elite consumption. Given this evidence and the contrast with far less conspicuous consumption occurring nearby, James Gerrard sums up the situation as follows:

The small pig horizon appears to represent the conspicuous consumption of animals that had yet to reach their economic optimum in terms of meat yield. This suggests that they were being consumed by a group of individuals capable of controlling and perhaps abusing

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<sup>493</sup> Carver (1995), p. 195 quoted in Gerrard (2007), p. 305.

<sup>494</sup> Gerrard (2007), p. 305.

<sup>495</sup> Rackham (1995), p. 540 quoted in Gerrard (2007), p. 305.

<sup>496</sup> Carver (1995) fig. 82.

<sup>497</sup> Gerrard (2007), p. 305.

<sup>498</sup> Collins (2012), p. 98.

the use of surpluses generated in York and its hinterland. Furthermore, if the small pig horizon is viewed against a backcloth of Romano-British consumption of suckling and juvenile pigs, then what we may be seeing in the basilica in the fifth century is the residue of some imperfectly remembered 'Roman' dietary preference. Occasional feasting on suckling pig in the echoing headquarters building of a largely abandoned legionary fortress may have been a way of reconnecting with the Roman past and reaffirming an imperfectly understood and recalled way of life.<sup>499</sup>

As Gerrard argues, the implication of the small pig horizon is that, in the fifth century, in a period when the site was no longer being used in the same way that it had been during the previous century, there was an individual (or group), who was in control of a surplus from the local area, who was making use of the centre of the former fortress as a sight for the conspicuous consumption of suckling pig, in a manner that is reminiscent of late Roman elite feasting. A likely explanation for such behaviour is that it was a display of a claim to authority, presumably on a Roman basis, within the vicinity of York. When we consider this alongside the evidence which suggests maintenance of the roof of the *principia* from the fourth to the ninth century, it would appear that, even if there are no datable artefacts from the sixth and seventh century which would suggest the continued occupation of the military site at York, the centre of the former fortress represented (and continued to represent) a place of importance to the local elite, which was used on a number of occasions as a place to demonstrate their elite status in a Roman way.

David Rollason highlights a possible literary reference to the high-status use of York by Edwin in the seventh century. An early eighth-century life of Gregory the Great, written by an anonymous monk or nun from Whitby, describes actions by Edwin and Bishop Paulinus, which may or may not have taken place at York in which following religious instruction in the hall (*aula*), they (the congregation), the king, and the bishop moved to the church (*ecclesia*). Whilst in a public square between the two buildings a crow croaked and Paulinus ordered that it be shot.<sup>500</sup> If this incident did take place at York, and Rollason's location of Paulinus's church of St. Peter in the courtyard of the *Principia* (underneath the current Minster) is correct, then it is possible that the hall referred to is the *principia*,<sup>501</sup> should

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<sup>499</sup> Gerrard (2007), p. 306.

<sup>500</sup> Rollason (1999) p. 122.

<sup>501</sup> Rollason (1999), pp. 122–23.

this be the case, this may represent literary evidence of the continued use which the archaeology hints at.

A significant feature of the fifth-century, and later, use of the fortress at York is that it appears to have been confined to the centre. The 1997 Minster library excavations suggested abandonment of the barrack units in the *retentura* of the fortress. Excavations uncovered evidence for a period of decline in the use of the structures that had made up the stone barracks of the second and third centuries.<sup>502</sup> Structure 8, 9 and 10 had represented the main areas of occupation at the Minster Library in period 2 (c. AD 120- 375). Structure 8 supplied no evidence of use or maintenance in the fourth century and structure 10, similarly, shows signs of dark earth deposition prior to collapse of the structures.<sup>503</sup> Structure 9 does show some signs of occupation. This is limited to use of a hearth and a new clay floor.<sup>504</sup> Interestingly, despite archaeomagnetic dating of samples from the hearth and the stratigraphy of the structure suggesting a fourth-century date for these changes, the floor sealed second-century pottery sherds.<sup>505</sup> This would suggest a high degree of residuality for material culture within the fort. The combined evidence from period 3 suggests a gradual decline in the numbers of those occupying the fort in the fourth century rather than, for example, the withdrawal of military forces from the fort.

Justin Garner-Lahire has argued that the sub-Roman evidence from the Minster Library excavations suggest that there was not continuous occupation of the legionary fortress from the fifth century onwards.<sup>506</sup> The Period 4 excavations did not uncover any major structural remains: although there were two possible pits, or one pit and a post hole dug into the 0.55m deep dark earth deposits and a robber trench, the deposition of late Roman type material in these has been interpreted as disturbed Roman material accumulating in the robber trench.<sup>507</sup> Alan Vince has, however, noted the presence of a single sherd of pottery that may fall into late-Roman, sub-Roman and Anglian typologies.<sup>508</sup> This serves to highlight the problematic nature of dating material from this era based

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<sup>502</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), pp. 22–26.

<sup>503</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), p. 28.

<sup>504</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), p. 26.

<sup>505</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), pp. 26–27.

<sup>506</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), pp. 94–96.

<sup>507</sup> Garner-Lahire (2016), p. 94.

<sup>508</sup> Vince (2016), p. 96.

purely on typology. There is also a single sherd of a more clearly Anglian typology, although the absence of decoration makes it more difficult to date than of the fifth to the ninth century.<sup>509</sup> Whilst not enough to suggest occupation of the Minster Library these sherds do suggest the existence of a population in the vicinity of the Minster Library, perhaps using the *principia* of the fort, which occasionally deposited some material in the Minster Library area.

Whilst it may not be the case that there was a group living in the fort consistently throughout the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, it would appear that there was a recognition that the centre of the fort held an ideological force upon which power could be based. It is interesting to note that the roof was probably maintained for two centuries after the Deiran King Edwin took control of York and built a church there.<sup>510</sup> It may even be that this church was within the *principia*, as noted by Brooks: this is what was being sought when the Minster excavations began.<sup>511</sup> Although, having said this, the fortress walls remained standing and were enhanced by the building of the multi-angular wall in the latter part of the first millennium. From this it can be assumed that they represented substantial defences and could be employed in a military capacity if the need arose. It may be that in terms of life, the role of the central precincts of the fort became limited to use rather than consistent occupation. But what is important in considering how the evolution from fourth-century Eboracum to ninth-century Eoforwic came about is that it appears that the centre of the former legionary fortress acted as a focus of power, a place where a portion of the elite of the area could and did demonstrate their status, perhaps with reference to a Roman context or heritage. In short, it seems likely that, the primary use of the military fortifications at York in the fifth century and later was elite demonstration.

Away from the military context at York, there has also emerged evidence of at least fifth-century continuity at Wellington Row. Mark Whyman has made an analysis of the latest Roman deposits and structural evidence from the Wellington Row excavations and uncovered a probable fifth-century structural sequence which may have stretched beyond even that. Phase 2 of this sequence was sealed with a coin of the House of Theodosius providing a *terminus post quem* of AD 388 and several late coins of the house of Valentinian. The combination of these two forms of coinage would support

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<sup>509</sup> Vince (2016), p. 96.

<sup>510</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14. Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp.187-189.

<sup>511</sup> Brooks (1986), p. 85.

a late fourth-century date for the levelling portion of phase 1 of development of the structure.<sup>512</sup> Later phases of the development of the structure at Wellington Row suggest continuity beyond an earliest date of AD 388, and later phases are also sealed with a further three Theodosian coins suggesting a continued use for this coinage into the fifth century.<sup>513</sup> Phase 4 of this structure involved a substantial redevelopment of the site from which evidence of occupation has emerged.<sup>514</sup> He has also highlighted how coarse gritted ware continued to be made into the fifth century in the East Yorkshire potteries and the standards associated with the apparent height of this industry in the fourth century was maintained beyond the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>515</sup> This use of the East Yorkshire gritted ware can be seen to continue in to the fifth century at Wellington Row where comparison with the phased structural evidence has been used to suggest an emergence of two specifically fifth-century types. Whyman argues 'fabric groups INCL 02 and FC 03 may be identified as continuing, and INCL 05 and FC 04 as having begun, to be manufactured, brought to and used in York well into the fifth century.'<sup>516</sup> The use of these, he argues, should be

interpreted as production by communities which retained, outside villa estates and the direct individual exploitation such estates imposed, fundamental elements of their traditional organisation, but were subject to tribute exaction by a late Roman ruling class, imposing tribute and disposing of it as both state officials and landowners.<sup>517</sup>

Such an interpretation could be argued to be supported by the evidence of high-status feasting in the military centre of York. It would appear that, York retained elements of activity beyond the end of the fourth century, how far this continued remains unclear.

David Petts' excavations at the Queen's Head hotel in York add a further element to our understanding of fifth century York. Here there is no evidence of occupation into the late fourth

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<sup>512</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 420.

<sup>513</sup> Whyman (2001).

<sup>514</sup> Whyman (2001), pp. 420–435.

<sup>515</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 348–349.

<sup>516</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 344.

<sup>517</sup> Whyman (2001), p. 344.

century and beyond until later interest in the site in the last quarter of the first millennium.

Following carbon dating at Queen's Hotel, Petts states that

a clear Late Roman - Anglian divide emerges for the carbon dating of the Queen's hotel site, with a hiatus of approximately two centuries apparent in activity on the site.<sup>518</sup>

However, Petts also suggests

whilst there may well be sub-Roman activity taking place in the former *colonia* south of the Ouse, it is relatively localised. It is noticeable that the Wellington Row site is located on the line of the main Roman road close to the bridge head, whereas Queen's Hotel is further away from the main communication route. There may be a contraction of activity to core areas leaving more peripheral areas of the town to fall out of use in the 5th century.<sup>519</sup>

The evidence of Queen's Head Hotel supports the conclusion that there was a general reduction in the occupation of peripheral areas of the former *colonia* and *canabae* of Eboracum. As Petts argues, there appears to be a general contraction of use to areas necessary to new power structures such as the central precinct of the former fortress and a major communication route across a bridge over the Ouse. Similarly, the apparent fourth century end to occupation at Tanner Row was followed by a period of abandonment which continued into the eleventh century.<sup>520</sup> Similar evidence for abandonment was also noted at Bishophill, where a timber lined well was infilled with rubbish, and dark earth accumulations were found at Trinity Lane, 5 Rougier Street and the site of the Old Station.<sup>521</sup> Post- fourth-century and pre- Anglo-Scandinavian (seventh- to ninth-century) dark earth deposits have been noted at Wellington Row, Tanner Row, Skeldergate and North Street.<sup>522</sup> This is generally seen as being indicative of abandonment. However, it is worth noting that although there is dark earth at Wellington Row there are also indications of fifth-century continuity in the structural and pottery record. As such, whilst dark earth deposits may be indicative of a reduction in the scale of use of a site- after all a major indicator of sustained occupation is cleanliness- it is not necessarily an indication of abandonment. It is possible that, if there is dark earth accumulating yet there are

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<sup>518</sup> Petts (2016), p. 10.

<sup>519</sup> Petts (2016), p. 11.

<sup>520</sup> McComish (2015), p. 24.

<sup>521</sup> McComish (2015), p. 7.

<sup>522</sup> McComish (2015), p. 8.



other signs that the site is being used, the site's use has been changed. In the case of Wellington Row, it is possible that there was no longer anyone living at the site but that it was being used for the purposes of control of the area around the bridge over the Ouse.

The apparent hiatus in occupation seen at the majority of Roman sites in York between the fifth century and the Anglo-Scandinavian occupation of the city is mirrored in the literary record.<sup>523</sup> However, there is evidence of another form of use of York in the period between the fifth and seventh centuries. Alongside the apparent control of the communication point over the River Ouse, at Wellington Row and the use of the central portions of the fortress, beneath the current Minster, there was also burial occurring in the area around the Mount during the fifth century.

Excavations carried out at the Mount discovered 10 urns with the ashes from cremations,<sup>524</sup> this type of burial is usually associated with the earliest Anglo-Saxon forms of burial and seen as an indicator of a Germanic population making use of the area. Two of these urns contained Anglo-Frisian pottery, of a type usually associated with a late Roman, Germanic military tradition.<sup>525</sup> That this cemetery is suspected of going out of use in the fifth century would suggest that these inhumations are incredibly early and may belong to a fourth-century context or the early fifth century. In which case, it is unlikely that they are representative of a later Anglo-Saxon occupation of York and are perhaps an indicator of the late Roman use of Germanic-speaking soldiers in Britain, or even a very early expression of the British elites using late Roman military practices to meet fifth century threats. Such evidence blurs further discussions of changes of population in relation to material culture, particularly in places such as York, especially when, in the absence of coinage, firm dating of fifth-century and later material culture is difficult and certainly not reliable. Evidence such as this, is just one reason why the Bedan narrative and its archaeological application is flawed. If pottery which is usually associated with a population that is deemed incoming and for the presence of which the Bedan narrative demands an end to prior types of occupation, how then can (at the very least) an overlap between these two types of material culture occur?

The general impression created by a consideration of excavations carried out in York is one of a severe reduction in activity between the fourth and seventh century. Considering the evidence that does remain, it is possible to reach the conclusion outlined in the historiography above. However, it

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<sup>523</sup> McComish (2015), p. 7.

<sup>524</sup> Brooks (1986), p. 96.

<sup>525</sup> Brooks (1986), p. 96.

is also reckoned to be a feature of the populace of the fifth-seventh century that they leave few remains, relying on largely perishable material.<sup>526</sup> What is clear from the above is that there is very little which, on its own, is firm evidence of continuity. In order to hypothesise what might represent continuity in York a significant gap in the archaeological remains which needs to be bridged. At present this is not possible. But, if we consider the latest fifth century activity in York, that at the *principia* and on Wellington Row, it is possible to see a contraction of activity to key ideological and economic areas. If we were to attempt to bridge the gap in the record, it may be that if occupation of York continued from the fifth to the seventh century, any authority in the area occurred through control of these sites. The small-pig horizon suggests that at least in the early fifth century there was some attempt to assert a Romanised form of authority in York, however what is unclear is how long this assertion continued and, if it did, whether the descendants of those who had asserted their authority in the early fifth century changed their method of display as the fifth century progressed into the sixth and seventh century.

#### 5.4.5 The Wroxeter Comparison

Given the problems that this paper considers it is probably necessary to make a comparison of the developments that occurred in York between the late fourth and the seventh century, some of which may be attributable to an incoming Anglian population, with the developments that took place at a different prominent Roman urban centre in the same time frame, without the excavators' perception that there was an introduction of a non-native population before the end of the period discussed. For this case study we will use Wroxeter, which at its height was the fourth largest urban centre in Britain, surpassing even that of York<sup>527</sup> and has also had the added advantage of not being developed into a modern urban centre and so has had the opportunity for substantial modern research excavations to uncover a great deal of evidence. Furthermore, Wroxeter is generally seen as being in a zone not usually thought to have been occupied by Germanic speakers until the later seventh century. Whilst the premise of this thesis rests on the assumption that these narratives are faulty or simplistic, the traditions which they come from have led others to the assumption that there would have been no immigrant population in Wroxeter prior to the seventh century whilst the contrary expectation can be seen at York.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Alcock (1971), p. 144.

<sup>527</sup> White and Barker (1998).

<sup>528</sup> E.g. White and Barker (1998); such an assumption played a role in their understanding of Wroxeter, allowing any activity to be evidence of continuity.

Like York, Wroxeter underwent a relatively significant period of decline from the late fourth century onwards, typified by the development of 'dark earth' deposits in many sites including the baths basilica.<sup>529</sup> Such development highlights the reduction in population and the use of amenities. Although it is interesting to note that the last flooring level in the basilica overlaid the 'dark earth' deposits. Dark earth deposits are seen as something that (in an urban centre which was believed to have changed population like York) marked a hiatus between populations, whereas in other centres they can be seen simply as a break in use.<sup>530</sup> The change in burial patterns associated with the remains found in the hypocaust system of the *frigidarium* of the baths basilica at Wroxeter were initially interpreted as the corpses of people who had failed to escape an Anglo-Saxon attack on the city.<sup>531</sup> This interpretation has since been supplanted by White and Barker's interpretation that these represent normal burials, occurring after the breakdown of Roman civic law, in the area of the church or chapel in which they worshipped.<sup>532</sup> Again it is interesting that we see that it is assumed that these people are the descendants of the late Roman inhabitants of the city and that what we see is the breakdown of Roman civic law rather than a change of occupancy, despite unfurnished deposition in a hypocaust also representing a break from Roman traditions and a movement from a traditional Roman cemetery. Whilst the general explanation for changes in burial practices in the east of Britain is that a new immigrant population replaced the existing population, Wroxeter's *frigidarium* burials offers an example of a change in practices by the same population, not least because, as discussed in an earlier chapter,<sup>533</sup> the features generally taken to be associated with Roman (first- to fourth-century) burial were by no means universal.

White and Barker have suggested that there was a Romanised authority in power in Wroxeter during the fifth and sixth centuries. They cite, as evidence, the dimensions of the building complex constructed in the latest phase.<sup>534</sup> These correspond to a Roman system of measurement: buildings 27 and 28 (amongst others) are constructed on a series of platforms which measure exactly 27, 28

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<sup>529</sup> White and Barker (1998), pp. 118–119.

<sup>530</sup> For comparison consider the fifth- and sixth-century structural developments to the Roman defences at York, reckoned to be Anglian in nature as a result of being of a later date than Roman levels: Tweddle (1999b), pp. 297–298.

<sup>531</sup> Thomas Wright in White and Barker (1998), p. 124.

<sup>532</sup> White and Barker (1998), p. 125.

<sup>533</sup> See chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>534</sup> White and Barker (1998), p. 124.

and 29 Roman feet.<sup>535</sup> They argue that mostly likely holder of that authority was a bishop.<sup>536</sup> Whilst it is interesting and, indeed, possible that the figure of authority in Wroxeter was in fact a bishop, it also poses a question about whether there was a religious authority in residence at York prior to the baptism of Edwin in 633. Rollason has argued that since the foundation of the church of St. Peter the Apostle was not in a reused Roman building, it is unlikely that there was existing Christian authority in York prior to the arrival of Paulinus.<sup>537</sup> As highlighted by White and Barker, only the Emperor had the authority to bring to an end an episcopal see<sup>538</sup> so (without the interference of external Roman authority) they could, in theory, become self-perpetuating if they passed on their authority to a successor. Whilst we know with relative certainty that during the fourth century there was a British bishop from York present at several important church councils, we must assume on the basis of Bede's account of the baptism of Edwin<sup>539</sup> that this position had not become self-perpetuating and continued to the seventh century in York, perhaps due to the visible population decline discussed above. However, we are also aware of differing traditions of the baptism of Edwin, including that of the *Historia Brittonum*, where it is stated that a British cleric, Rhun son of Urien, was also involved in the baptism of the Deiran king.<sup>540</sup> It is therefore possible that Bede's presentation of York as being without spiritual succour may not fully reflect the situation as Edwin found it. An alternative possibility could be that Bede is referring to the absence of a bishop in the city that belonged to the tradition being projected from Canterbury during the seventh century, that is a tradition that saw

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<sup>535</sup>White and Barker (1998), p. 124.

<sup>536</sup>White and Barker (1998), pp. 125–26.

<sup>537</sup>Rollason (1999), p. 123.

<sup>538</sup>White and Barker (1998), p. 125.

<sup>539</sup>*Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14. Colgrave and Mynors (1969) pp. 183–187.

<sup>540</sup>*Historia Brittonum*, §63. It is possible that Rhun is a British bishop from the insular Christian tradition and so rejected from the narrative by Bede. Given the claimed descent of Urien from Coel Hen (a figure who John Morris considered to represent one of the last *Duces Britanniarum*) it is possible that Rhun represents a candidate for an alternative bishop of York from the insular tradition. It is pertinent to note, however, that the claims made here may just represent a rebuttal to Bede's claim that the Britons refused baptism to the English. As the entry also states that 'and for forty days on end he went on baptising the whole nation of Thugs'. *Historia Brittonum*, §63; Morris (1980), p. 38. See also Chadwick (1963), pp. 138–166; Breeze (2013), pp. 170–179.

Rome as the centre of the Church and not the Church that had grown in Britain in the intervening centuries and refused to recognise Augustine's authority.<sup>541</sup>

The archaeological interpretation of the situation in York would support the traditional narrative that the end of the Roman period in Britain was marked by a decline in the level of occupation in towns.<sup>542</sup> Such a conclusion is also supported by the dark earth deposits found in the late or sub-Roman levels at Wroxeter. Whilst it seems likely that there was a decline in the type of town life that occurred in the late Roman period and beyond, it is likely that this trend began much earlier and was a consequence of changing attitudes to civic life during the Roman period rather than a mark of the end of Roman authority. If we look at the urban elements of settlements in the north of the former diocese we can see similar trends of decline beginning in the third century. This is in marked contrast to the military sites within the same region where it is possible to see significant investment in the facilities.<sup>543</sup>

As we can see from a comparison of the narratives around York and Wroxeter there are problems as far as the assumption that dark earth deposits and new burial practices mark a change in population at York but not at Wroxeter.

The issues related to the overreliance on the decline and collapse narrative, and the Bedan narrative from which it can be traced, is not limited to York. The geographical issues relating to the application of this narrative to York as opposed to Wroxeter demonstrate that there is a need to consider the experience of other Roman urban sites in the fifth and sixth centuries.

## 5.5 Small Towns

### 5.5.1 A small-town experience (Baldock (Herts.))

Although modern research has a tendency to focus on the experience of the large Roman urban centres like Wroxeter, London, York and St. Albans (those that were recognised with an official Roman designation<sup>544</sup>) and the forts and their attached civilian settlements, as Fitzpatrick-Matthews highlights the small town represents the likely urban experience of the majority of Romano-British

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<sup>541</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 2.

<sup>542</sup> See for example Faulkner (2004).

<sup>543</sup> See developments at North-eastern military sites such as Binchester and South Shields in Ferris (2011); Ferris and Jones (2000); Bidwell, Speak, and Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (United Kingdom) (1994); Dore and Gillam (1979).

<sup>544</sup> Such as *Colonia*, *Municipum* or *Civitas Capital*.

provincials.<sup>545</sup> He proposes that contrary to the usual view of the end of the Roman town, some of these small centres may have enjoyed a vitality in the fifth century that has previously gone unrecognised. He states that 'late and sub-Roman stratigraphy in 'small towns' is difficult to recognise, which leads to the interpretation that occupation ceased in the decades around AD 400, if not earlier.'<sup>546</sup> He also highlights that those examples of sub-Roman occupation of small urban centres such as Bath, Carlisle and Shepton Mallet are all seen as exceptions to the general rule of decline in urban environments and are also seen to represent western outliers and are not associated with the majority of early 'Anglo-Saxon' material.<sup>547</sup> Such a position suggests that there was a re-founding of urban centres throughout the eastern part of England as a result of 'Anglo-Saxon' impetus rather than any continuity by their earlier occupants, fitting with the general perception that has been discussed above.

Summarising other scholars' views, Fitzpatrick-Matthews' suggests that the general perception of small towns seems to be that economic collapse removed the need for urban centres:

with the failure of a market economy driven in part through coin use, predicated on a military supply economy funded through direct taxation, their economic basis was removed at a stroke.<sup>548</sup>

This new economic situation appears to have been supported by the absence of evidence for sustained levels of production after AD 400 and as such he suggests that any population within towns must have reverted to subsistence farming within or near their urban environment in order to survive.<sup>549</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews suggests that there are numerous flaws with this general perception of the end of urban environments. For Fitzpatrick-Matthews, the main problem is accounting for the end of this urban population. He suggests that there is no increase in burials to mark the decline of fertility or a rising death rate, that the rural population was also in decline thus nullifying any argument for outward migration from urban centres into the countryside and that the logistical issues surrounding a massive emigration to the continent along with the absence of literary evidence

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<sup>545</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 43; see also Burnham and Wachter (1990).

<sup>546</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014) p. 45.

<sup>547</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 45.

<sup>548</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), pp. 45–46.

<sup>549</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), pp. 45–46.

for such an event suggests that no such event occurred.<sup>550</sup> Whilst this thesis is in general agreement with the thrust of Fitzpatrick-Matthews' argument, that the acceptance of an end to occupation of Roman urban centres at the beginning of the fifth century is premature, there are some flaws with his reasoning. Fitzpatrick-Matthews' belief that there was an absence of burials to support an end of occupation fails to account for the increased soil acidity and thus poor preservation of remains noted by Stallibrass and Huntley in the later years of the Roman period.<sup>551</sup> Additionally, the burial behaviours in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries were in a state of flux. In respect of Wroxeter, burials apparently began to occur within city limits and within the hypocausts of the old buildings, the South West and Wales saw changes in interment practices, with the growth in the use of the *hic iacit* formula on gravestones (mirrored in Gaul in the late fourth and early fifth century), whilst new burial types have been widely evidenced in the east of England. Furthermore, Fitzpatrick-Matthews' suggestion that there is no literary evidence to support the occurrence of a large migration of Britons to the continent fails to account for Gildas's lament that Britain was denuded of its youth to make war on the continent<sup>552</sup> at either the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth century. As well as being literary evidence to support the movement of relatively substantial numbers of people to the continent, it also suggests that any logistical difficulties were surmountable.

Fitzpatrick-Matthews uses the case study of Baldock in Hertfordshire to demonstrate the difficulty with the traditional decline and abandonment narrative around small towns in the fourth and fifth century. Baldock had suffered from the traditional application of the 'end of Roman rule' narrative. Stead's excavations between 1968 and 1972 reached the conclusion of a 'near terminal fourth-century decline followed by abandonment'<sup>553</sup> in Baldock. Such a position was, however, was challenged by the excavations of Burleigh on Clothall Common, where sub-Roman sequences were uncovered. Like the excavations at Binchester and Birdoswald,<sup>554</sup> evidence of sub-Roman occupation was uncovered by stratigraphic sequences upon, or cutting through, firmly dated late fourth-century

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<sup>550</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 46.

<sup>551</sup> Stallibrass and Huntley (2010), p. 95.

<sup>552</sup> *DEB*, §14; Giles (1841a), p. 26. There is also the potential for the movement of a significant number of Britons onto the Continent to fight for Riothamus against Euric in c. AD 470; see Jordanes, *Getica*, §§237–238; Mierow (1908).

<sup>553</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 46.

<sup>554</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000); Wilmott (2000).

layers.<sup>555</sup> Interestingly, these ‘sub-Roman’ layers also produced a new pottery type (one that had not been seen in pre- fifth-century layers of occupation) which allowed for the ‘sub-Roman’ dating of other features, where stratigraphy had not produced such clear results. Fitzpatrick-Matthews argues

in light of the very late date of these fabrics, the initial assessment of ‘residuality’ for late Roman material may need to be revised, particularly with fabrics known to be among those represented in final ‘Roman assemblages’ elsewhere.<sup>556</sup>

In addition to the issues raised with the dating of some of this ‘residual’ pottery is the apparent long-lived use of fabrics which are dated earlier. Amongst the latest grave cuts at Baldock, pottery emerged that was identical to a vegetable-tempered ware dated to the seventh century in Bedford<sup>557</sup> but which is likely to be much earlier at Baldock.<sup>558</sup> Such evidence suggests that arguments of residual and short-lived use of late Roman pottery at other sites may also be problematic. Pottery of a late Roman type may indeed belong to a later period or have remained in use for much longer than had previously been supposed. Fitzpatrick-Matthews highlights that there may have been a localised trade of such pottery with evidence use of pottery types first noted at Baldock at other sites in the area. Fabric 54 (a sandy greyware of fifth century date) has been found at Pirton,<sup>559</sup> a settlement of around 12km from Baldock. Furthermore, Fitzpatrick-Matthews highlights that there may have been ‘Anglo-Saxon’ use of some of these pottery types. He discusses the discovery of two sherds of a globular jar manufactured using fabric 54 but decorated using ‘pagan Saxon’ motifs of a late fifth or sixth century date.<sup>560</sup> There is also potential architectural evidence to support the presence of new post-Roman cultural developments at Baldock. Fitzpatrick-Matthews highlights the construction of several *Grubenhäuser* type sunken-featured buildings which resemble the ‘Saxon’ type in everything except date. These features seem to have a fourth-century context,<sup>561</sup> suggesting either early ‘Anglo-Saxon’ settlement in the region or ‘evidence for a Romano-British building tradition parallel to that of the continental Germans.’<sup>562</sup> If these sunken-featured

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<sup>555</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 46.

<sup>556</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 47.

<sup>557</sup> 152 Fabric A1 Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 47; see also Baker and Hassall (1979).

<sup>558</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 47.

<sup>559</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 50.

<sup>560</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 50.

<sup>561</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 53.



buildings are indeed Romano-British, i.e. predating the beginning of the fifth century, it is possible that misidentification of decoration types as 'Pagan Saxon' could be occurring and these types simply represent a pagan type rather than a culturally 'Saxon' type.

An interesting feature of the fifth century development of Baldock seems to be the attempts made to defend the site. Fitzpatrick-Matthews has noted attempts to control access to the town including the construction of a timber gateway on the road leaving the town to the south-east.<sup>563</sup> This suggests that despite the apparent absence of town walls there were attempts to defend and limit access to the town. This is further supported by the digging of shallow pits to limit access along other roads.<sup>564</sup> From this we are able to surmise that as well as there being evidence of, at least, fifth-century occupation in Baldock, there was a population of enough size to warrant and facilitate the production of defences. The creation of methods to limit traffic along the roadways into Baldock would be pointless without a large enough population to police them. Whilst Fitzpatrick-Matthews recognises that the settlement underwent a contraction in the fourth century<sup>565</sup> we are able to see that in the fifth century there was enough of a functioning economy to support the production of pottery,<sup>566</sup> suggesting the existence of craftsmen, and support a group of people who manned defences.

Baldock potentially offers a window to understanding the later development of some civilian settlements outside of the political structure that had existed with the support of the Roman Empire. In Baldock, we see evidence for the existence of a functioning and specialised local economy, which may have been supplying people in other settlements as far as 12km away. We can also see evidence that may suggest a transition between pottery types that were historically labelled Romano-British or Anglo-Saxon. If this is the case, they may represent points on an economic timeline rather than competing cultural practices.<sup>567</sup> Such an interpretation is also possible within the architecture of Baldock, where *Grubenhäuser* exist in a pre- fifth-century context; although as

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<sup>562</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 53.

<sup>563</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), pp. 47–48

<sup>564</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), pp. 47–48

<sup>565</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), p. 52

<sup>566</sup> Albeit not of the same standard as had been produced for the previous three centuries.

<sup>567</sup> Myres has previously suggested the hybridisation of Roman and Saxon pottery types: he saw them as a feature of the early settlement of Saxon military units in the fourth century; see Myres (1969).

Fitzpatrick-Matthews notes the fourth-century material used to date these structures only provides a *terminus post quem*.<sup>568</sup> If we are to insist on a mid-fifth- to sixth-century context for this *Grubenhäus* in keeping with the date of AD 448 singled out by Bede as the beginning of the *Adventus Saxonum* then we must also accept that the residual use of erstwhile fourth-century material was much longer than is traditionally accepted. If this is the case, the *terminus post quem* of this fourth-century material is as much as a century earlier than the structure it is associated with. Such a long period of use should then have an impact on how long we consider fourth-century material to have been in use at other sites, thus impacting on when we consider the end of these periods of occupation to be. The post-AD400 sequences at Baldock offer a divergent view to that seen at York and Carlisle. The late sequences at Baldock suggest that suggestions of abandonment at these sites may be premature and that the assignment of post-fourth century activity to the Anglo-Saxons may be underestimating the British presence and level of activity at these sites. The evidence from Baldock also suggests that the assignment of certain architectural practices and pottery decorations specifically to an Anglo-Saxon culture may be problematic as their origins may be uncertain.

## 5.6 Carlisle

Carlisle potentially represents a site of some importance in the north of Britannia. Whilst nowhere near as important administratively as York, it was undoubtedly a major regional centre in the third and fourth centuries. The Roman city of Luguvalium was probably a *Civitas* capital,<sup>569</sup> and potentially a provincial capital, if the fourth-century province of Valentia was situated in the northwest of the Diocese.<sup>570</sup> It also represented a military command of some significance, situated as it was at the western end of Hadrian's Wall. In contrast to York, the traditional narrative does not place it in Anglian control until the start of the seventh century and as such there is no suggestion of an incoming population re-founding the city in the post-Roman period in any of the studies of it.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014).

<sup>569</sup> From the mid-second century onwards; see Wachter (1976), pp. 405–410.

<sup>570</sup> According to Ammianus Marcellinus, after the Barbarian conspiracy of 367 the Count Theodosius created a new province. McCarthy has suggested that the *Civitas* of the *Carvetii* represented a feasible location for this. McCarthy (2002).

<sup>571</sup> McCarthy (2002); McCarthy (1984); McCarthy and Archibald (1990); Higham and Jones (1985).

Indeed, St Cuthbert's visit to the city is seen as evidence of its continued functionality and occupation in the seventh century.<sup>572</sup>

Carlisle differs from York in a number of ways. Perhaps the primary difference is that there is no suggestion of an Anglian population occupying the city in the period after its Roman foundation. This has led to a different approach and narrative being sought to describe its history from the fifth century onwards. As discussed above, an additional difficulty in understanding the fifth-century use of the city is the absence of a planned town at the early phases of its Roman development, having grown *ad hoc* from the settlement around the Hadrian's Wall fort. This means that discussion of its later phases take place without a second-century urban peak to refer to.

Like York, Carlisle also shows signs of relatively significant population shrinkage by the beginning of the fifth century, something which McCarthy dates to a much earlier period going so far as to suggest that by the time the city became a provincial capital it had already begun to function as a purely military centre.<sup>573</sup> There is some evidence for late occupation at Blackfriars Street consisting of 'a strip-house-type structure' in use in the late fourth century and in a similar development to that of Birdoswald there are phases cutting through this late Roman development.<sup>574</sup> Later phases, dated to the seventh to ninth centuries, employ similar building techniques to those seen at Yeavering. Further sub-Roman occupation is also hypothesised at Scotch Street and Carlisle Cathedral, although what evidence there is suggests that this occupation was not that of a Roman town.<sup>575</sup> McCarthy instead suggests that the town evolved into an estate centre during the sub-Roman period and became a bi-focal estate centre with a secular elite centred on the fort and a religious centre at an unknown site. It has been suggested that Carlisle may have represented one of the principal sites of the peripatetic kingship of the Kingdom of Rheged, a rival or perhaps a counterpart to the site at Dunragit, 'the fort of Rheged'<sup>576</sup> which it has recently been proposed was the political centre of the Kingdom of Rheged.<sup>577</sup> However, the proposition that a single site can represent the centre of a

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<sup>572</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 4, ch. 29; Colgrave and Mynors (1969) p. 439-443. See also Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, chapter 27, ed. Giles (1910): the Roman walls and fountain that the citizens of Carlisle were attempting to show Cuthbert could demonstrate their continued maintenance and good condition. However, it could also be that their tumbledown remains were a local curiosity.

<sup>573</sup> McCarthy (1984), p. 72.

<sup>574</sup> McCarthy (2002), p. 138.

<sup>575</sup> McCarthy (2002), pp. 138-139.

<sup>576</sup> McCarthy (2002), p. 144.

<sup>577</sup> Toolis and Bowles (2016).

kingdom at this time presents problems of infrastructure that are difficult to resolve in the fifth to seventh centuries. It seems much more likely that it was one of a number of high-status estate centres in the political sphere of the northwest from which the entire region was governed. Furthermore, the identification of a political entity in the northwest of modern-day England with Rheged could be a figment of modern authors' imaginations.

Evidence of population shrinkage has been observed at the Millennium project excavations where activity in period 6B (dated using Constantinian coinage from AD 330-5)<sup>578</sup> includes the destruction of a granary (building 1196) adjacent to the west wall of the fort.<sup>579</sup> However, the introduction of hypocaust heating systems in the central buildings of the fort are in keeping with activity associated with the fourth-century military sites of the North East of the provinces e.g. Piercebridge, South Shields and Binchester, suggesting that (here too) the commanders of the fort sought to mark their position as members of an Empire-wide elite using some of the trappings of *Romanitas*. John Zant notes the presence of medical supplies in these central spaces, which may suggest a diversification of use of some of the space and that these hypocausts could represent a degree of comfort for convalescing soldiers.<sup>580</sup> How then did the transformation from Roman urban (or military) centre to a post-Roman elite centre manifest itself in the archaeology of the period?

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<sup>578</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 305–324

<sup>579</sup> Zant (2009), p. 324

<sup>580</sup> Zant (2009), p. 325

### 5.6.1 Major Excavations of Carlisle (fourth- to seventh-century material)

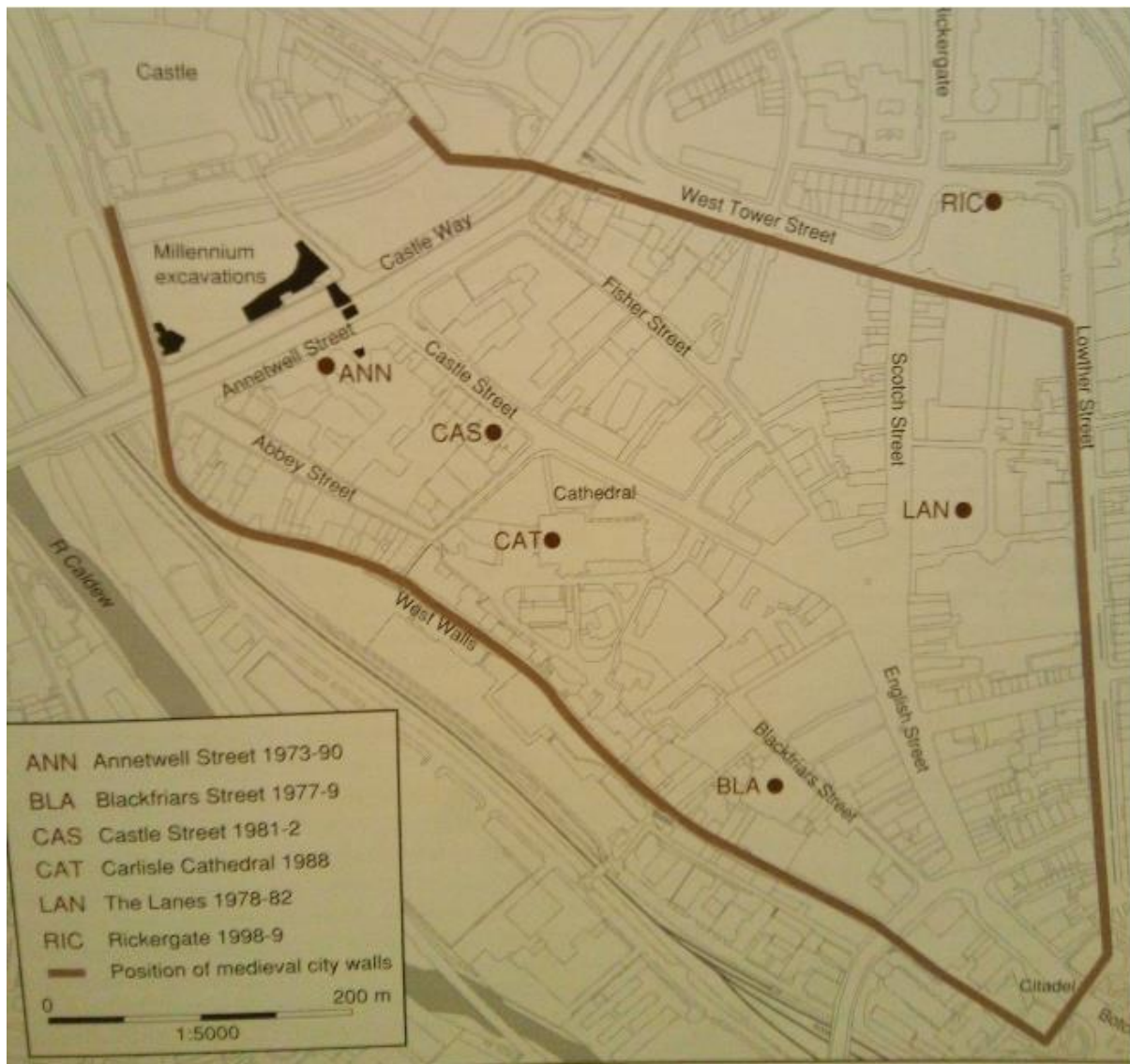


Fig 6: Important late Roman excavations in the centre of Carlisle:<sup>581</sup>

In order to address these changes, we will focus on the remains from Blackfriars Street, Carlisle Cathedral and the Millennium Project excavations. Whilst as mentioned above there are other areas of potential continuity from the fourth century into the fifth and beyond, these remain the best studied areas of Carlisle and offer a good insight into the subject at hand.

<sup>581</sup> Zant (2009), p. 10.

## Blackfriars Street

At Building one, Blackfriars Street, Period 9 saw an almost complete reconstruction after the mid-second century with phases that potentially cross into the fifth century offering an insight into the late- and post-Roman transition. Following the apparent destruction of the Period 5 building in the early to mid-second century and a mid-second century hiatus on the site, during Period 9 a new strip building was constructed on the same alignment as the Period 5 building.<sup>582</sup> The earliest phases of Period 9 are marked by Antonine pottery, suggesting a late second-century beginning for this period and end with coins from the 370's-380's, which would allow for period 9 to run into the early fifth century.<sup>583</sup> Phases o-p of Period 9 appear to correspond to a fire within Building One, characterised by large deposits of carbon and grey silt, which Mick McCarthy suggests may simply have been bonfires lit as part of the process of clearing the site prior to a new phase of building.<sup>584</sup> But it is worth noting that the new building, constructed in phase r, was constructed in the same position as the old. The final phase of period 9 saw the potential robbing from a civic building. As McCarthy describes it 'three massive rectangular carefully-tooled sandstone blocks ... of a high quality and... reminiscent of a public building'<sup>585</sup> were used to seal a gap between the South and East walls of the building. The property dimensions remained as they had been during the pre-fire phases, with the property line remaining static and marked by a line of posts and a slot. This changed at the end of the sequence (post-AD370), when a new road was laid between Building 1 and the new building 2.<sup>586</sup> Period 10 of building 1 was marked by the placement of 3 or 4 uprights, that according to McCarthy do not correspond to a sill beam for a timber building.<sup>587</sup>

The latter phases of period 9 for buildings 2, 3 and 4 were marked by abandonment with the area of these buildings becoming used as open land, following either deliberate dismantling or collapse due to neglect. However, whilst there was evidence of abandonment of buildings 2, 3 and 4, the area itself apparently remained in use as part appears to have been demarcated with a wall and an entrance.<sup>588</sup> Additionally, the area was also used for some minor industrial activity, with small ovens

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<sup>582</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 43.

<sup>583</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 43.

<sup>584</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), pp. 50–53.

<sup>585</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 53.

<sup>586</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 53.

<sup>587</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 53.

and charcoal, ash and coal deposits demonstrating at least sporadic use of the site.<sup>589</sup> Period 10 saw the construction of a new building and the laying of a new road.<sup>590</sup> The period 10 building did not survive into period 11, where at least the northwest corner of the building was overlaid with an oven or kiln. The kiln shows few signs of use with little sign of burning on the walls or the floor, suggesting a short period of use. Period 12 appears to have included a reconstruction of a building on the site along the same layout as Period 10 building.<sup>591</sup> Period 13 begins in the seventh to ninth century according to dendrochronological evidence, suggesting that the end of period 12 marks the end of the late Roman transition in Blackfriars Street.<sup>592</sup>

From Blackfriars Street it is possible to see periods of hiatus and development, destruction and abandonment throughout the third to the fifth centuries, followed by an apparent lengthy period before a new period of development before Period 13 and a new type of development defined as Anglian by the excavator.<sup>593</sup> In some ways this situation reflects the fourth and fifth century in York. There is undoubtedly a downward trend in the levels of occupation in both York and at Blackfriars Street in the fourth and fifth century. However, as at York there are still elements that appear to suggest that, for some (although in all likelihood not many), life continued within the walls of these former Roman cities.

### **Carlisle Cathedral**

In 1988, excavations immediately to the west of the Carlisle Cathedral uncovered further evidence of continuing life within the confines of the former Roman city of Lugavallium.<sup>594</sup> Of interest at the Cathedral site is the complete absence of later- fourth-century coins. Despite a clear late- and post-Roman sequence, as David Shotter notes, excavations have not produced a coin dated later than

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<sup>588</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 63.

<sup>589</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 63.

<sup>590</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 65.

<sup>591</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 67.

<sup>592</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 70.

<sup>593</sup> McCarthy and Archibald (1990), p. 70.

<sup>594</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 185–257.

AD375 contrasting markedly with the fourth-century towers built along the Yorkshire coastline, where the coin sequence continues as late as the first decade of the fifth century.<sup>595</sup> Shotter states

We thus have to admit that, in the matter of sub-Roman activity at the Cathedral site, the coin-evidence by itself is inconclusive, unless, of course, the absence of late Roman coins itself points to an activity at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries that was not coin-using.<sup>596</sup>

The notion of a local economy in Carlisle working without the use of coinage is intriguing and would appear to predict the situation that followed the fifth-century transition from centralised Roman rule. However, as Shotter also notes, there were areas making use of Roman coinage into the latest parts of the fourth century within Carlisle, indeed within sight of the Cathedral.<sup>597</sup> As is noted in the later discussion of the Cathedral site, Blackfriars Street, located less than a quarter of a mile to the southeast there are examples of coins of Honorius from the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>598</sup> As such, notions of a coinless economy in Carlisle in the late fourth century appear to be premature. once again this brings us to questions about how the late Roman economy continued to function in Britain. If two areas of the same city were employing different economic patterns it is possible that the assumed economic model for the Roman period<sup>599</sup> focussed largely on the sale of manufactured wares using coinage was by no means universal. If, in the fourth century, a non-coin-based economy functioned in close proximity to (or perhaps even alongside) a monetary economy perhaps the systems in place were more complicated.<sup>600</sup> If this was the case then the absence of new coinage in the fifth century may have caused the loss of luxury items (like wheel-thrown pottery) but allowed the continued exchange of many essential goods.

The structural sequence at the Cathedral begins with late Roman structures. The earliest phases of phase one probably date from the mid-second century and remained in use into at least the late-fourth century and probably further into the fifth century.<sup>601</sup> This was followed by a post hole

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<sup>595</sup> Shotter (2014), p. 203.

<sup>596</sup> Shotter (2014), p. 204.

<sup>597</sup> Shotter (2014), p. 204.

<sup>598</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 240.

<sup>599</sup> E.g. Finley (1973); Ward-Perkins (2006).

<sup>600</sup> For a consideration of a potential barter economy see Moorhead (2006), pp. 99–109; Collins (2013), pp. 123–37.



structure. in phase 2, which does not appear to have been closely aligned to the Roman road which appears to have rotted in situ. This suggests a long life span for the building.<sup>602</sup> This would imply that there was a long period of occupation after the beginning of the fifth century in the region of the Cathedral. However, as has also been noted by the excavators, there is a large deposit of dark earth making up phase 3 as part of the infill on the postholes of phase 2.<sup>603</sup> As such, the length of occupation at the phase 2 development is difficult to measure.

Whilst there are significant dark earth deposits at the Cathedral, these appear to be made up two types, an initial phase, probably brought about by a period of decay:

The thin, lower part of the deposit, with its Roman artefactual component, probably represents the mineralized residue following the chemical and biological breakdown of phase 1 and phase 2 structures. The parent materials for this deposit would have included much organic matter derived from the timber buildings, including the posts in phase 2 which rotted in situ, daub from wall infill, eroded sandstone, mortar and charcoal.<sup>604</sup>

This was overlaid by a much thicker layer which was textured and coloured differently.<sup>605</sup> This thicker layer appears to represent a single deposit, unnaturally made and therefore representing a non-structural form of activity at the site.<sup>606</sup> It is possible that this represents a rubbish deposit from other areas of the city, however it is also possible that 'the purpose of these dumps was to create plots or closes for horticultural purposes.'<sup>607</sup> Such a pattern has been suggested elsewhere, with the latter phases of fourth and fifth century urban occupation consolidating into a small core with urban farms occupying the remaining walled areas.<sup>608</sup> This appears to be the pattern at Carlisle. Large dark earth deposits are observed overlaying Roman structures in certain places, e.g. St Mary's Gate (120 meters east of the cathedral) was recorded as having deposits approximately 1 meter thick<sup>609</sup> and

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<sup>601</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 239.

<sup>602</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 240.

<sup>603</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242.

<sup>604</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242.

<sup>605</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242.

<sup>606</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242.

<sup>607</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242.

<sup>608</sup> Loseby (2000).

McCarthy reports the existence of 'significant deposits...in the central range and on the western side of the fort where they infilled and overlay buildings,'<sup>610</sup> whereas the absence of dark earth is noted at Blackfriars and the Lanes. This suggests that these sites were amongst those which represented the continued occupation within Carlisle.<sup>611</sup>

### Millennium Project excavations

Like many other fort sites in the British frontier region, activity dated to the late fourth century by coinage deposits indicates an intensification in subsistence type behaviours. Period 6C (late-fourth century) deposits appear to contain large quantities of animal bone indicating a likelihood that butchery as well as consumption was now occurring within the fort. Furthermore, it is apparent that the full processing of the carcass was now taking place within the fort environs.<sup>612</sup> The deposition of a coin from AD 388-92 in a newly laid road surface within the fort, suggests that there was building activity occurring as late into the fourth century as is possible and perhaps into the fifth century (carbon dating of a bovine metacarpal bone from the same deposit offered a range from AD 210-440),<sup>613</sup> whilst a human skull found in the same context may also indicate a similar breakdown of burial practices as observed above at Wroxeter.<sup>614</sup> Zant contradicts the traditional narrative around reducing fourth-century fort occupation, instead suggesting that the recovery of 3 post-AD370 coins from the fort can be seen as an indication of the relatively intensive activity in the fort when considered against the rarity of such coins in the north-west region of the frontier.<sup>615</sup>

Zant notes the construction of two buildings in close proximity to the *principia* consisting of a short lived timber lean-to, from which the 19kg of animal bone<sup>616</sup> may indicate the use of this for meat processing, or simply the use of bone as a base for the building, and a probable extension to an existing building.<sup>617</sup> The combination of a Theodosian coin in the base of the structure and a carbon-

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<sup>609</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 242.

<sup>610</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 242 reporting Zant (2009).

<sup>611</sup> McCarthy et al. (2014), p. 241.

<sup>612</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 331–341.

<sup>613</sup> Zant (2009), p. 341.

<sup>614</sup> Zant (2009), p. 343.

<sup>615</sup> Zant 2009).

<sup>616</sup> Zant (2009), p. 350.

dated bovine-metacarpal bone suggest a maximum window of approximately 50 years (AD 388-440) for the development around the *principia*.<sup>618</sup> Like York, areas of the fort apparently ceased to be in use in the latter decades of the fourth century. Excavations from Annetwell Street suggest that occupation in the south of the fort ceased by around AD 375, although Zant has hypothesised that the evidence of the very latest Roman occupation was removed by subsequent use of the site, as Post-Roman deposits include 27 coins from AD364-78 and one post-AD388 coin.<sup>619</sup> Such a conclusion would be supported by the large single depositions observed at St Mary's Gate.

Period 6D perhaps represents the most interesting period of use for the site. A large-scale levelling of areas of the fort appears to have taken place in phase 6D.<sup>620</sup> Given the coinage and bone material in phase 6C in proximity to the *principia* discussed above and their likely dating, a context for this destructive phase appears likely to postdate the mid-fifth century. Whilst it is possible that this was as a part of piecemeal robbing of the fort for building materials in the absence of military authority, the care taken for the removal of specific features (such as the *principia*) may indicate a more organised use of the area. Dark earth deposits overlaying much of the remains, but not containing rubble, suggests that few buildings collapsed through neglect.<sup>621</sup> It appears likely therefore that this was a conscious effort to remove materials from within the walls of the fort. Period 6E includes pits dug through period 6D remains suggesting continued use of the area but an absence of occupation,<sup>622</sup> although Zant notes that at least one period 6E pit included tenth- to twelfth-century bones (carbon dated) yet the dark soil infill was indistinguishable from that of earlier periods.

Like many other sites therefore the fort at Carlisle offers little in the way of firm dating beyond the usual *terminus post quem* provided by individual coins and a *terminus ante quem* of the late eleventh century by new activity from Period 8A.<sup>623</sup> Period 7 dark earth deposits feature large quantities of Roman material, including sherds from a Palestinian amphora, of fourth- or fifth-century date.<sup>624</sup> Later material has also been found in period 7 deposits including a ninth-century

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<sup>617</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 349–350.

<sup>618</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 349–350.

<sup>619</sup> Zant (2009), p. 352.

<sup>620</sup> Zant (2009), p. 352.

<sup>621</sup> Zant (2009), p. 352.

<sup>622</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 358–359.

<sup>623</sup> Zant (2009), p. 365.

coin, a seventh- to ninth-century hairpin and a number of probable pre-Norman artefacts.<sup>625</sup> The scarcity of material from after the fourth century would usually be taken to indicate that the Carlisle was unoccupied and perhaps refounded in the later first millennium, however as discussed above the literary evidence suggests a continuing use of Carlisle.

It is likely that the population level within late Roman Carlisle was reducing in the fourth century. Whilst some buildings continued to be used in the late fourth century, new structures were also being built, existing structures were also modified, and life continued in the city into the fifth century and beyond.<sup>626</sup> Where this life was not occupying Roman buildings, it appears to have made new use of unwanted Roman structures, no doubt to facilitate the continuity of what remained. An interesting feature of this new use of Roman structures includes the concerted effort made to remove those structures for which the occupants at the time had no use for, observed at Blackfriars Street and in the Millennium Project excavations. What appears to be absent from the fifth-century occupation of Roman Carlisle, that is apparent elsewhere, is the occupation and use of ideological centres associated with *Romanitas*. Although further excavation with Carlisle may produce evidence of this.

### 5.6.2 Yeavinger as a model of how Carlisle could have been used

Hope-Taylor suggests that the site of *Ad Gefrin*, as Bede calls it, was initially a 'Celtic' meeting place, perhaps a market or *oppidum*, which evolved into a royal centre to facilitate the government of a tributary state following the capture of Bamburgh by Ida.<sup>627</sup> He describes the situation at Yeavinger thus:

*Ad Gefrin* was the instrument of Anglo-Saxon political *rapprochement* with a vigorously surviving native population which, though stubbornly rooted in its traditional ways of life, was at least not overtly hostile.<sup>628</sup>

Hope-Taylor argued for a long chronology for the site at Yeavinger, which he considered to be situated at a natural meeting point in the landscape arguing for a degree of continuity of local governance, from the Roman Iron Age through to the Edwinian period in the seventh century until,

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<sup>624</sup> Zant (2009), pp. 365–367.

<sup>625</sup> Zant (2009), p. 366.

<sup>626</sup> Mike McCarthy et al. (2014), pp. 241–242

<sup>627</sup> According to the Bamburgh castle website this is in approximately AD 547: Bamburgh Castle [n.d.].

<sup>628</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 281.

as Bede states, the administration of the area was moved to nearby *Maelmin* (usually considered to be Millfield).<sup>629</sup> Hope-Taylor argued that the chronology from phase III AB onwards fits perfectly the narrative that Bede writes about the experiences of the kingdom of Northumbria: that phase III AB, including the great hall of building A2, the assembly structure and the refurbished temple all must have been standing during the reign of Aethelfrith,<sup>630</sup> whilst phase IIIC belongs to the reign of Edwin.<sup>631</sup> Prior to this he argued that Phase II must belong to at least 50 years before this, despite the traditional interpretation that the dynasty of Ida was trapped in a beachhead at Bamburgh and Lindisfarne until c.AD 600, or the chronology of the site risks being dangerously truncated.<sup>632</sup>

Hope-Taylor argued that the building of rectangular structures at the site, which could be interpreted as evidence of Anglo-Saxon influence, represent a memory of Roman influence. This memory is further accentuated by the construction of building E, which seems to be based upon Roman tradition.<sup>633</sup> Hope-Taylor argued that building E was built for the purposes of administration, a place in which councils could be held and those in attendance could witness decisions being made by a select few.<sup>634</sup> Otherwise, the site would have been the home of a reeve or *praefectus* leaving the highest status buildings unoccupied. He argues that these councils were a key feature of the royal presence at the site, either the king's attendance brought about a council or the need for a council made the king visit.<sup>635</sup>

There have been some criticisms of Hope-Taylor's interpretation and chronology for the site with Scull and Miket placing the earliest date of the first phase much later than Hope-Taylor's original interpretation. They argue for the development of an Anglo-Saxon farmstead into an important political centre rather than an important local centre co-opted for political use by an incoming elite, highlighting the similarity of the architecture to other 'Anglo-Saxon' types.<sup>636</sup> However, as noted

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<sup>629</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), pp. 310–318.

<sup>630</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 276.

<sup>631</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 277.

<sup>632</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 276.

<sup>633</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 279.

<sup>634</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 279.

<sup>635</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 279.

<sup>636</sup> Scull (1991), 51–63; Miket (1980), pp. 289–305.

above (section 5.5), elements of apparently ‘Anglo-Saxon’ type architecture, such as sunken-floored buildings have been known in pre-fifth-century contexts and (at Yeavinger) were argued by Hope-Taylor to represent a memory of Roman types. Furthermore, Hope-Taylor makes a compelling argument that the potential truncation of chronology at the site if phase II and phase III are too close to one another.<sup>637</sup> Additionally, it appears to follow more logically that an important political centre such as Yeavinger would evolve from an earlier form of political site than a farmstead.

Hope-Taylor also argued that Yeavinger was inhabited by pagan Britons, who whilst initially accepting conversion by Paulinus reverted back to their pagan behaviours quickly in the mid-seventh century. He stated that ‘Paulinus found at *Ad Gefrin* a centre of vigorous, native paganism.’<sup>638</sup> He further argues that given the attention that was paid to the alignment of the pagan burials in the building of the phase IV church, paganism had not long been ‘dead’.<sup>639</sup> Bradley, however, argued that it was more likely that Anglo-Saxon pagans appropriated much earlier traditions (Bronze Age burials) as part of an effort to establish themselves in the landscape.<sup>640</sup> The difficulties in ascertaining who populated the site at Yeavinger and how long they occupied the site are pertinent to the discussion here. Despite the criticisms raised of his conclusions Hope-Taylor made the important point that there is no evidence of any Anglo-Saxon metalwork in the area north of the Tyne in the period prior to Edwin’s reign and little evidence of any Anglo-Saxon pottery in this earlier period, whilst there seems to be a predominance of native types.<sup>641</sup> As such, whilst the architecture may share similarities with other Anglo-Saxon sites and the burials may reflect attempts to situate newcomers in the landscape the people of Yeavinger appear to have been doing so without Anglo-Saxon material culture. Evidence for the presence of Anglo-Saxon population in the area may be demonstrated by the use of Anglo-Saxon burial practices typified by the existence of inhumation graves. However, these are numerically limited in the region, with only three known from Yeavinger. Here, two belong to the period before Phase III AB and the third seems to owe itself to some ritual involving the great hall of phase IIIC. Hope-Taylor noted that whilst these graves are furnished, they are much less so than examples from further south which may be indicative of any number of things, including an adoption of new burial practices by a local elite instead of the local unfurnished

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<sup>637</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 276

<sup>638</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 278.

<sup>639</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), pp. 278–279.

<sup>640</sup> Bradley (1987), pp. 1–17.

<sup>641</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 281.

tradition or a comparable economic paucity to furnished burials further south, or the absence of a higher-status elite being buried at Yeavinger with these burials representing those of the local reeve or *praefectus*.<sup>642</sup>

A comparison of Carlisle with a known elite centre in the north-east of England (Yeavinger) demonstrates how this elite centre may have functioned. Whilst Yeavinger is generally considered to be an exemplar of Anglo-Saxon elite culture, it demonstrates the interplay of a mobile elite with their more stationary subjects. Yeavinger is also interesting in its own right, as the interpretation of the site by Hope-Taylor offers a model for the interaction of an 'Anglo-Saxon' elite with a local population. Whilst Hope-Taylor interprets the local population to be a native one, it is probable that the mode of interaction and (presumably) government employed by the elite of Bernicia at Yeavinger would be broadly similar to the one that was employed with any of their non-elite populations and as such potentially offers a broader insight into the nature of 'Anglo-Saxon' government in general.

If Carlisle functioned as an estate centre for a small kingdom in the fifth to seventh centuries, comparison with Yeavinger demonstrates how a relationship with the local population may have worked. The elite who were in charge of the region may or may not have been present at the site for the vast majority of the year, favouring instead other centres of authority. However, the architecture at Yeavinger makes it clear that there was an expectation that the elite would visit and administer the site periodically and that these visits would occasion some variety of visible act of government. Whether this visible act of government represents some form of council or just sitting in judgement is unclear. When Carlisle was not occupied by this high-status elite, it too was presumably controlled by a steward, acting on behalf of the elite. The apparent absence of structures which could represent links to *Romanitas* suggest that if Carlisle did represent an elite-centre it was not one in which the elites felt the need to draw legitimacy from this structural heritage, although the control of a substantial set of fortifications may have represented legitimacy enough. The literary descriptions of the visit of Cuthbert to the town indicate that (perhaps) later generations saw merit in alluding to a Roman heritage. The late fourth/ early fifth century destruction of the granary and construction of a 'feasting' hall in its place at nearby Birdoswald<sup>643</sup> suggests that Roman structures may not have fulfilled the necessary social functions that were desired in this area. As such, perhaps

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<sup>642</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977), p. 279

<sup>643</sup> See section 6.3.5 (below) for a discussion of how the feasting hall at Birdoswald may have been used.

in the context of the western frontier Roman structures may not have represented the political centre of the community.

The assumption that Carlisle necessarily became an elite centre may be premature, however, consideration of the fifth century development of Baldock in Hertfordshire may offer an alternative path for the development after the fourth century. This path may not be divergent from that of the one described by McCarthy but represent an in between point between Roman town and elite site.

## 5.7 Catterick - The small-town experience in the North

### 5.7.1 Catterick's literary tradition

Catterick is a particularly interesting example of a small-town experience. It presents a strong literary tradition associating it with British lordship in the sixth century and then is firmly associated with the authority of the Northumbrian kings from the early seventh century onwards.

There is a significant tradition marking Catterick as a site of importance during the second half of the first millennium, either strategically or ideologically. Bede first mentions Catterick as being in proximity to the site where Paulinus in the late 620's

baptized in the River Swale which flows beside the town of Catterick. For they were not yet able to build chapels or baptistries there in the earliest days of the church.<sup>644</sup>

Bede then makes several further references to Catterick as a Northumbrian and Deiran royal vill later in the seventh century, a point of reference within the landscape of Northumbria<sup>645</sup> and as the location of the residence of the Deacon James, the spiritual successor to Paulinus.<sup>646</sup>

There is also a significant tradition associating Catterick with British power. Two poems in the collection of 11 poems which Ifor Williams identified as the oldest part of the *Canu Taliesin*, a fourteenth-century collection of Middle Welsh poems, which was reputedly initially composed in the sixth or seventh century and largely concerns sixth-century historical figures, refer to an Urien as having control of Catraeth.<sup>647</sup> The Battle of *Gwen Ystrad* opens with 'Catraeth's men set out at

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<sup>644</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 189.

<sup>645</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 3, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 257. In this entry Bede mentions the disbanding of Oswiu's army, ten miles from Catterick.

<sup>646</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 20; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 207.

<sup>647</sup> I discuss the dating of this poetry elsewhere in this thesis, so will refrain from doing so here. See Bede and Welsh Literature (Section 3.2).



daybreak; Round a battle winning lord, cattle-raider; Urien he, renowned Chieftain.’<sup>648</sup> Additionally, *The Spoils of Taliesin*, which is a praise poem to Urien, refers to Urien as the ‘Ruler of Catraeth.’<sup>649</sup> The identification of Catraeth with Catterick and the claims of Taliesin in respect of Urien’s rule of Catterick would seem to indicate that, the poet (and by extension the Welsh audience he wrote for) believed that Catterick was ruled by British lords at the time Urien was alive.<sup>650</sup>

A further collection of Middle Welsh poetry, the *Llyfr Anierin*, associates Catraeth with British activity. The collection of 130 *awdlau* (verses) were recorded in the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>651</sup> A significant number of these *awdlau* mention Catraeth as a location where a force of 300 Gododdin men suffered a significant defeat resulting in all but one of the 300 dying. As Philip Dunshea states, there has been a recognition since 1860 that the *Llyfr Anierin* was written by two scribes, resulting in a division of the text into A and B.<sup>652</sup> The A text mentions Catraeth 19 times in 18 different *awdlau*. Examples of this include several entries that begin ‘Men went to Catraeth,’<sup>653</sup> ‘Men went to Catraeth at dawn’<sup>654</sup> and ‘a man went to Catraeth at daybreak’<sup>655</sup> as well as details of the battle of Catraeth<sup>656</sup> and general statements about the lives of the heroes celebrated in the poetry prior to Catraeth.<sup>657</sup> The B text, which, it has been argued, is older because it contains more archaic elements<sup>658</sup> (although it has been argued that archaic elements were in use as late as the thirteenth century),<sup>659</sup> does not mention Catraeth anywhere near as frequently as it appears in the A

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<sup>648</sup> Taliesin ‘The Battle of Gwen Ystrad’, trans. Clancy (1998), p. 79.

<sup>649</sup> Taliesin ‘The Spoils of Taliesin’, trans. Clancy (1998), p. 87.

<sup>650</sup> Urien’s rule is usually dated to the second half of the sixth century: Dunshea (2013).

<sup>651</sup> Dunshea (2013), p. 81

<sup>652</sup> Dunshea (2013), p. 81

<sup>653</sup> Aneirin, ‘Y Gododdin’, trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 46–67, *awdlau* 8, 9, 21, 33

<sup>654</sup> Aneirin, ‘Y Gododdin’, trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 46–67, *awdlau* 10, 11

<sup>655</sup> Aneirin, ‘Y Gododdin’, trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 46–67, *awdlau* 12, 13 14

<sup>656</sup> Aneirin, ‘Y Gododdin’, trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 46–67, *awdlau* 15, 25, 32 57, 58, 60, 72, 76

<sup>657</sup> Aneirin, ‘Y Gododdin’, trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 46–67, *awdl* 62

<sup>658</sup> Jackson (1969), pp. 41–46 cit. Dunshea (2013), p. 82.

<sup>659</sup> Russell (1995), pp. 129–176 cit. Dunshea (2013), p. 82

text, some 5 times, although it is mentioned in much the same way.<sup>660</sup> As has been argued by Dunshea, the use of Catraeth has become central to our understanding of the *Llyfr Anierin* and has been used to paint a picture of the sixth century in the North. Catterick has been viewed as a strategic flashpoint where the kings of the Hen *Ogled*d battled for supremacy against the Saxon invaders, eventually culminating in the loss of Catraeth (and the abortive attempt to reclaim it lamented in the *Gododdin*), followed by the loss of Elmet and the withdrawal of the Britons behind the Pennines.<sup>661</sup> However, despite the prevalence of this narrative the decreased number of references in the, apparently, older B text has led to the suggestion that rather than representing a lament for those lost at a single battle (at Catraeth) the *Gododdin* text is about the defence of the *Gododdin* territory and a series of battles fought at the borders against Pictish, Scottish and English Kingdoms.<sup>662</sup> This suggestion challenges the view that there was even a battle at Catraeth, suggesting instead that it be read ~Cad ~traeth- or battle rampart / shoreline- a poetic rendering of the line of battle where the two sides met or any frontier or battlefield.<sup>663</sup>

As with York, the existence of a literary narrative surrounding use of a specific location, or the absence of use (as in the case of York) has resulted in archaeologists struggling to reconcile the literary Catraeth with the reality of Catterick.

Pete Wilson states,

the association of Catterick and the Battle of Catraeth recorded in the *Y Gododdin*, and generally considered to have happened in AD 590- 600, may be seen to have reinforced the claims for very late and Post Roman occupation.<sup>664</sup>

Those investigating the archaeological remains at Catterick have frequently sought a sixth-century transition between Roman-type material culture associated with a Celtic-speaking population and material culture associated with a Germanic-speaking population, which (if such a transition could be found) would provide a neat case study for a putative Romano-British assemblage for the fifth and sixth century. Indeed, such is the confidence in the literary Catraeth that Wilson commented at

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<sup>660</sup> Awdlau 18, 20, 24, 37, 38 of the B text *Aneirin*, 'Y *Gododdin*', trans. Clancy (1998), pp. 68–77.

<sup>661</sup> Dunshea (2013), pp. 81–114.

<sup>662</sup> Dunshea (2013), pp. 81–114.

<sup>663</sup> Dunshea (2013), pp. 101–102.

<sup>664</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 25.

the end of his excavation report that there was no reason why the descendants of those living at Catterick at the end of the fourth century could not have been present for the events of the Gododdin poetry.<sup>665</sup> However, what has been found must also be weighed against the decline and collapse urban centre narrative.

### 5.7.2 Major excavations at Catterick (fourth- to seventh-century material)

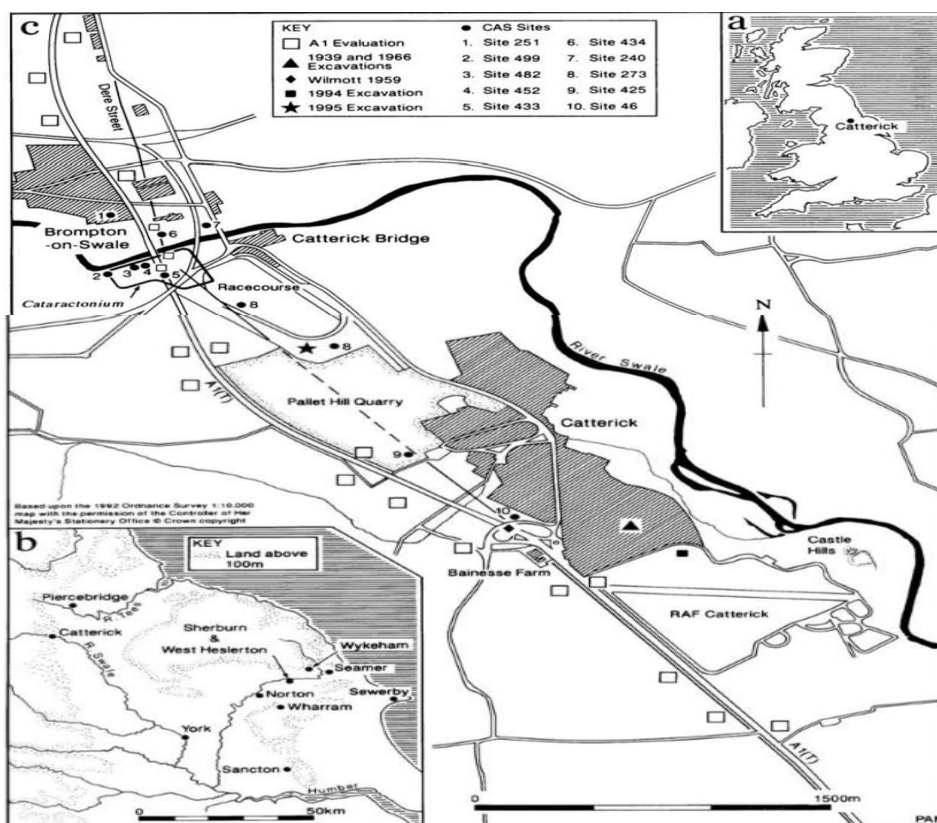


Fig. 7: A map of the main excavations carried out at Catterick<sup>666</sup>

Wilson has collated the evidence of the multiple excavations that have taken place at Catterick in the last sixty years. These have primarily been as a result of the development of the A1 or as a result of the need for rescue of sites due to river erosion, construction and development work, or the expansions of quarrying activity in the area.<sup>667</sup> The earliest remains at Catterick consisted of a first-

<sup>665</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002b).

<sup>666</sup> This map has been borrowed from Wilson et al. (1996), p. 3.

<sup>667</sup> See Wilson et al. (1996).

century fort. No Iron-Age remains predate the site.<sup>668</sup> This was presumably built to facilitate the expansion of Roman military control into *Brigantian* territory, a mid-first century high-status Iron age fortification 10 miles away at Stanwick and the necessity of controlling a crossing on the River Swale may have chosen the location. Its position at the northern exit of the Vale of Mowbray, an area of relatively flat lowland between the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors make it the optimum communication route northwards, whilst its location also situated it along the East-West Stanegate line.<sup>669</sup> A second century *Mansio* was built, incorporating the fort's bathhouse. The incorporation of the bathhouse and the existence of an inscription to the IX cohort, suggest that the *Mansio* was a military endeavour.<sup>670</sup> This was abandoned in the late-second to mid-third century,<sup>671</sup> whilst a recutting of a ditch suggests the fort remained occupied into the third century.<sup>672</sup> Stone defences around the civilian settlement were added in the mid-third to early-fourth century.<sup>673</sup>

Despite extensive excavation 'very little of significance' has been added to the corpus of evidence for very late Roman occupation of the area.<sup>674</sup> Although, as noted by Wilson there is difference between the choices for areas of excavation that research led decisions may have highlighted as opposed to the necessity of the rescue excavations that have taken place at Catterick since the decision to build the A1 through the remains of the former Roman town.<sup>675</sup> Wilson argues that the large body of probable late fourth century East Yorkshire ware has been reduced by Hird's analysis of pottery at Birdoswald<sup>676</sup> and significantly reduces the body believed to be in circulation after AD370. The area of the town of Cataractonium appears to be the centre of any continued occupation after the turn of the fifth century. The discovery of two late fourth-century belt buckles

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<sup>668</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a), p. 46. As noted by Wilson and Lyons, the absence of pre-Roman occupation at Catterick may offer an explanation as to how an area could have been given a Greek-derived name, receiving its name from the Roman soldiers who first occupied it, for whom Greek would likely have been a familiar language.

<sup>669</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a), p. 82.

<sup>670</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a) P.74.

<sup>671</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a), p. 82.

<sup>672</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a), p. 82.

<sup>673</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a), p. 94.

<sup>674</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 25.

<sup>675</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002a).

<sup>676</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 25.

from the floor of building III.1<sup>677</sup> date from the period AD 375-425 as well as a buckle plate of the same period.<sup>678</sup> Additionally, a further three brooches from the mid-fifth to the mid-sixth century from the building suggest continued occupation. This is further supported by other elements of the assemblage including a Fowler type E Brooch and two jet rings.<sup>679</sup> A spear head of unknown date has also been considered evidence of continuity.

Despite Hilary Cool's discussion of the shape of a possible Romano-British assemblage from the fifth century<sup>680</sup> it remains very difficult to date an assemblage to the fifth century. In part, this is due to conservatism of many Roman archaeologists and their tendency to date assemblages by the latest coin, rather than considering this to be the earliest time that the assemblage could date to, the *terminus post quem*. As with many other Roman sites which potentially have fifth to sixth century continuity, it is left to the structural evidence to offer any real sense of continued occupation. As Pete Wilson notes:

That occupation continued into the 5<sup>th</sup> century is not in doubt. However, exactly what changes occurred in the 5<sup>th</sup> century rather than the late-4<sup>th</sup> century appear less certain. The dating of the occupation and alterations to buildings to the 5<sup>th</sup> century is almost entirely based on the apparently-secure later-4<sup>th</sup>-century date of occupation in the southern part of the site (Phases 6a and 6b). Clearly changes recorded, for example, in Building VII.5b cannot be shown to reflect a particular lapse of time, but the extent of alterations and changes would seem to accord with a reasonable length of occupation which must extend into the 5th century.<sup>681</sup>

Building VI.8c, from site 433 excavated by J.S. Wachter in 1959, was argued to have housed a very late army unit.<sup>682</sup> After the end of this occupation and a period of time in which the building lines appear to have been lost, new structures were built on the site which completely differed from the

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<sup>677</sup> Building III.1 was excavated in 1952 by Hildyard and lies within site 452.

<sup>678</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 25.

<sup>679</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 25. For a discussion of how assemblage types changed from the fourth into the fifth century, see Cool (2000), pp. 47–66.

<sup>680</sup> Cool (2000), pp. 47–66.

<sup>681</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002), p. 114.

<sup>682</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

orientation of its predecessors. Further structural evidence from Insula III, including building III.1 a bath house from Insula III and evidence from Insulae VI and VII also offer potential elements of fifth-century occupation.<sup>683</sup>

A late third century bath house structure (Building III.5c from insula III ) appears to have remained incomplete for some time after its initial construction, with elements such as suspended floors and wall jacketing not added to the initial structure. This incomplete structure appears to have functioned as a midden or rubbish dump for some time before a layer of mixed clay and mortar was laid over some mid- to late- fourth-century material over which was laid a stone floor.<sup>684</sup> The combination of these layers and the fourth-century material sealed by the clay and mortar floor offers the possibility that this building could represent a location in which fifth-century activity on the site could have taken place.<sup>685</sup> Hildyard's building III.1, from insula III also offers a possible location for continuity in terms of the aforementioned assemblage. This assemblage was located in a multiphase building which underwent considerable development after AD 370.<sup>686</sup> A further building in close proximity to building III.1 appears to have been constructed between AD 350 and 380.<sup>687</sup>

Three late-fourth-century strip buildings in Insula VI show signs of modification post-AD380. The replacement of one of these strip buildings (building VI.8) with a building on an entirely new alignment which included the addition of an apse<sup>688</sup> could be indicative of Christianity at Catterick. If this was the case, it offers a potential challenge to Bede's claim of there being no chapels or baptistries in the region.<sup>689</sup>

A late series of developments in Insula VII including the unification of several buildings into two walled courtyard complexes (buildings VII.3b/10b and VII.5b/6b) could be seen to indicate the same pretensions displayed by the military elite at Binchester in the fourth-century construction of the bath house complex and *praetorium*<sup>690</sup> (a distance of approximately 25 miles) and Piercebridge (13

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<sup>683</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>684</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>685</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>686</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>687</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>688</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

<sup>689</sup> See above and *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, ch. 14; Colgrave and Mynors (1969), p. 189.

<sup>690</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 26.

miles), and perhaps should be seen in the same context. The insula VII buildings appear to represent a single or multiple late-Roman authority figures engaging in architectural elite display using Roman-style courtyard buildings as their medium. What is unclear is how late this activity occurred, exemplars from elsewhere in the region would appear to place this in the fourth century, whilst the comparatively simple nature of the structures, aside from the arches, could date the activity to later in the fourth century, where phase 8E at Binchester indicates a decline in work quality which includes the building of new features in un-mortared stone.<sup>691</sup> An alternative interpretation could be that the use of the site represents fifth-century urban farming taking place at Catterick.<sup>692</sup> Wilson points to the lack of Theodosian coinage at Catterick indicating a decline in the economic functioning of the town, or a growth in the fourth century of non-monetary economic exchanges.<sup>693</sup> A further similarity between late-fourth- or early- fifth-century Binchester and Catterick is also observable, in phase 6 or early in phase 7, an increase in activity in insula III within the walled area. For comparison, in the late-fourth century (phase 8C and 8D) there was a marked decline in the occupation outside the walls of Binchester (the vicus) and a diversification of the use of the bath house in the *praetorium* which could be indicative of a growth of civilian use of the fort.<sup>694</sup> This intensification of use within the fort is apparently mirrored by a reduction in use of the area north of the river after AD370.<sup>695</sup>

Activity appears to have continued on multiple sites in the vicinity of Catterick from the end of the fourth century, as Wilson notes,

the duration of this 5<sup>th</sup>-century, 'late Roman', occupation of Cataractonium is difficult to determine in the absence of 'Roman' material that can be assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> century with certainty.<sup>696</sup>

Phase 6 at Catterick Bridge, site 240, dated after AD 370 appears to show a move towards post-framed structures. Whilst the presence of hearth or ovens at the site is indicative of some sort of

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<sup>691</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000), pp. 1–11.

<sup>692</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 27.

<sup>693</sup> Wilson (2000), p. 27.

<sup>694</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000), pp. 1–11.

<sup>695</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002), p. 138.

<sup>696</sup> Wilson et al. (1996), p. 52.

craft, the absence of slag suggests this was not metalworking.<sup>697</sup> Activity at this location appears to have continued into the fifth century (phase 7) marked by hearth use and some small structural changes such as the blocking of flues.<sup>698</sup> Site 240 and 434 both appear to have been largely abandoned by the fifth century, although some burial may have taken place on the site. New activity seems to have occurred in the sixth century after a period of low level usage and apparent abandonment, particularly at site 434.<sup>699</sup> In some areas, such as at site 46 near Bainesse farm to the south of the principal Roman settlements of the fort and vicus, it is possible to see evidence of burial activity aligned on the axis of fourth-century buildings, suggesting that at least some of the structures remained upright.<sup>700</sup> It is worth noting that the pottery assemblage from Catterick sites includes material that is from further afield, suggesting the population was not wholly self-sufficient and a degree of local trade continued after the end of the fourth century.<sup>701</sup>

The discovery of *Grubenhäuser* at sites 425, 434 and RAF Catterick<sup>702</sup> hint at an adoption of building practices used in Germanic-speaking areas of the continent, their probable sixth-century date could be an indicator of Germanic-speaking influence in the area, however (as highlighted above) an apparent British tradition of sunken-floored buildings has also been seen at Baldock and this may be further evidence of the same. It is interesting to note that the type of sunken floored building at site 434 differs from the others suggesting multiple styles in use in a small area. If we are to accept the identification of Catterick and Catraeth and a late- sixth-century date for the battle, these could also be seen as evidence of Jackson's theory of Catterick as a point of peaceful coexistence of Britons and Anglians.<sup>703</sup> However, this is only necessary if we are constrained by a narrative constructed around the Taliesin and *Gododdin* poetry, or believe that use of material culture associated with a Germanic-speaking populace is in itself an indicator that those using the material culture were

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<sup>697</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002), p. 196.

<sup>698</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002), p. 199. The blocking of flues is also replicated at Binchester in phase 9 and could represent a conscious change of use rather than the hitherto suspected lack of care and attention; see Ferris and Jones (2000).

<sup>699</sup> Wilson and Lyons (2002), p. 203.

<sup>700</sup> Wilson et al. (1996), p. 32.

<sup>701</sup> Fabric 14 is suggested to have a source in the Tees Valley, whilst fabric 1 is also found at Piercebridge (fabric 4); see Wilson et al. (1996), pp. 7–8.

<sup>702</sup> Wilson et al (1996).

<sup>703</sup> Wilson et al (1996), p. 51.



Germanic-speaking and ethnically different from the previous Celtic- or Latin-speaking inhabitants of the area.<sup>704</sup> It is telling that Bede makes no mention of the battle, although the choice of location for the baptisms carried out by Paulinus suggests it was a location of importance, perhaps due to a continuing settlement with Roman architectural features and its geographical importance on a line of communication between the two parts of Edwin's kingdom.

Away from the narrative, the late fourth/early fifth century structural developments in Insula VII could either be indicative of a move to subsistence farming within the former 'urban' area or a statement of authority as hypothesised at York, Binchester and Birdoswald made through a Romanised medium, or indeed a reflection of elements of both. This may be someone expressing a degree of *Romanitas* by using Roman architectural styles against the backdrop of a Roman fort and town, maintaining control of an important crossing on an important line of communication, yet displaying a degree of self-sufficiency rather than being wholly reliant on exploiting the local populace. What is clear, the contradiction of two separate narratives, the *Hen Ogledd* and Bede, suggesting that Catterick is either an important British centre, lost to the Deiran Kingdom resulting in a highly unsuccessful attempt to recover it, or a site that doesn't really become important until after Paulinus carried out baptisms there are not really supported by the archaeological record. It is possible that a battle was fought at Catterick and a British king had overlordship of the area from as far away as Carlisle, but without the literary evidence to suggest it the archaeology would not lead to this conclusion. Whilst the absence of a real record within Bede prior to AD 627 belies the importance of Catterick strategically, his statement that Catterick in the seventh century was a village which was important enough to mention when things happened near it may be close to the mark.

Like York, Baldock, Wroxeter, and Carlisle the new economic conditions of the fifth century are reflected in the archaeological record at Catterick by a significant decline in both pottery and coin deposits. It is probable that these towns remained important points in their local landscape and remained in use after the traditional narrative would expect near total abandonment.

Archaeologically at Catterick, activity is evidenced in the vicinity of the Roman town and its hinterlands at the very end of the fourth century and probably well into the fifth century, as Wilson states:

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<sup>704</sup> See Oosthuizen (2019), pp. 62–65 for a refutation of this viewpoint demonstrated using Ikea.

it appears probable that a number of stone buildings within the defences of Roman Cataractonium were occupied and modified after A.D. 400, and the existence of timber buildings occupied in the 5th century was recognized at the time of excavation.

Furthermore, the possibility of a 5th-century date for one or more of the burials from Site 46 Area 10 cannot be excluded.<sup>705</sup>

New types of activity, both structural and funerary (in location if not type - the use of cist burial types reflects a local Iron Age type)<sup>706</sup> emerge in the sixth century but the absence of dateable fifth-century material assigning activity to the fifth century makes bridging the gap between the two difficult. Without the literary tradition associating Catterick and Catraeth it seems unlikely that it would be attempted.

## 5.8 Conclusions

This chapter has considered the representation of various urban centres in the north of the British provinces in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and other parts of the literary record and how this representation has impacted the later historiographical tradition around the end of Roman rule and ideas of abandonment, conquest and continuity. What can be seen in the above is often similar features are treated differently by archaeologists based on how they are treated by literary tradition. This chapter explored the archaeological situation in York in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. This chapter argues that due to Bede's references to York, between the death of Septimius Severus<sup>707</sup> and the baptism of Edwin,<sup>708</sup> the historiographical tradition around York suggests that the city is considered to have undergone decline and abandonment by the beginning of the fifth century and remained largely ignored until Paulinus and Edwin (probably fulfilling the ambition of Pope Gregory) established a church there. The archaeological picture does suggest a decline in the levels of occupation in the former Roman provincial capital but also suggests that the Roman structures retained a degree of importance that continued until the ninth century. Whilst not an economic centre of the second-century type, York appears to have retained a political and perhaps ideological importance that is reflected in the conspicuous consumption of young pigs and the maintenance of Roman structures in the Minster. As well as this, York remained a point of power

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<sup>705</sup> Wilson et al. (1996), p. 51.

<sup>706</sup> Wilson et al. (1996).

<sup>707</sup> AD 211.

<sup>708</sup> AD 627.

in terms of logistics and communication. The archaeology of Wellington Row highlights the continued control of lines of communication and river crossings beyond the fourth century.

By contrast Carlisle, where Bede's narrative has no need of an end to occupation, is treated differently. Like York there are signs that significant areas of the city were no longer in use at some point between the end of the fourth century and clear datable use of the site in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (although at York this clear and datable phase begins much earlier). Like York there are some small signs that activity continued although in a way that is not datable. Where there is a gap between archaeological remains, there is a literary record that indicates continued use of Carlisle and few would argue that the people met by St Cuthbert represent anything other than the descendants of those that had occupied Carlisle in the fourth century, despite nearly seven centuries of undatable use of the site. Elements of the archaeology hint at a move towards subsistence and self-reliance and it may be that the significant dark earth deposits represent deliberate attempts to create small-scale gardens amongst the Roman remains or that the movement of materials for the purposes of this have resulted in the destruction of the upper layers of stratigraphy. Unlike York the elite that governed this area seem to have done so disassociated from elite elements of the Roman military infrastructure like the *principia*. Such a disassociation is perhaps mirrored at Birdoswald, and perhaps future excavations will uncover evidence of longhouse or hall construction within the Carlisle fortifications which may mark the focus of power in the area after the beginning of the fifth century.

Its literary treatment makes it likely that occupation continued at Carlisle. It may be that this occupation represented a move towards what was experienced at Yeavinger, with Carlisle representing a meeting point for the local population, and perhaps its Roman heritage added a degree of importance to the site. A contrary view could be suggested. Carlisle may have come to function like the centre of a Villa estate, with the Roman fortifications offering a military advantage and a political legitimacy to their occupier. Such an outcome is hypothesised for many sites across the North, particularly Roman forts and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6 (food and Power). Either way it seems likely that the use of Carlisle ceased to be the same as it had been in the fourth century.

The remains at Catterick, and its treatment historiographically, are very similar to that of Carlisle. Catterick's geographical location makes it a key position in the landscape and for this reason alone continued control of the town is likely to have been necessary for any kingdom builder in the fifth century and later. A literary tradition which associates Catterick with a failed campaign by a seventh-century British king and with the extensive lordships of a possible sixth-century king all suggest that

Catterick remained a place of importance even without a Roman infrastructure. Furthermore, Bede's continuing references to Catterick as both a Northumbrian Royal Vill and as an important point in the landscape highlight that it remained important into the eighth century. Despite this, as at York and Carlisle the archaeological evidence is scanty and perhaps without the literary tradition the continued occupation of the town is unlikely to have been expected. Unlike Carlisle, it seems that there may be some structural evidence which suggests a focus of power may have developed in newly converted courtyard buildings in Insula VII, which was displayed in a style that would be recognisable to a late Roman elite.

What this chapter has shown is that based on the small amount of archaeological evidence for urban occupation and use in the fifth century to seventh century (especially when compared to the evidence of the previous four centuries) many sites appear, at first glance, to be empty. Rather than this representing the actual condition of fifth-century Roman urban occupation, it seems likely that literary narratives (in particular Bede) are determining how far the evidence that can be found is taken to determine later occupation. In some cases, like Catterick and Carlisle, the existence of a literary tradition which marks them as population centres beyond the fourth century is evidence enough that these sites remained in use, the example of Wroxeter further demonstrates a willingness to accept the continued occupation of an urban centre by the same population through the fifth century and later at other sites where their geographical location does not make them candidates for abandonment in the face of Bede's barbarian invasion. York, which has neither of these, is accepted as empty based on the writing of Bede. Where use of the site is encountered many commentators have sought to see this as evidence of a new population, rather than the continuing use of the area by the old.

If, instead of only accepting continued occupation and use where either literary tradition or geographic location makes it unlikely that the site was abandoned, we assume continued use of the majority of these sites we could then search for the evolution of the site into the new conditions that are found in the latter half of the first millennium. Searching for signs of evolution of use rather than signs of abandonment could enhance our understanding of the mechanisms by which the kingdoms attested in sources such as Bede came into being. This chapter has shown that one of these mechanisms may have been the contraction of occupied space within urban centres, and the diversification of use of unoccupied areas, to allow the subsistence of those resident, but also the maintenance of control over lines of communication and places of ideological power. These features may have been key to the fifth-century future of the Roman urban population.

The next chapter explores food supply and industrial method consolidation as mechanisms for continued use of some Roman sites into the fifth century and how the different approaches apparent in the archaeological record that these sites took as they evolved may have contributed to the different outcomes seen from the sixth century onwards.

## Chapter 6- Food supply and the consolidation of power in the northern frontier zone.

### 6.1 Introduction

Current theories regarding political change in Britain between AD 400 and 650 fail to fully explain the situation as it developed beyond the beginning of the fifth century. Numerous attempts have been made to develop a catch-all model that covers the decline of some Roman sites and the development of early medieval elite sites. Some have argued for a complete collapse of Roman authority, resulting in a bottom-up approach to societal rebuilding,<sup>709</sup> others have argued that new power-groups occupied and appropriated Roman military defences and sites for their own legitimation and security. The latter model has seen several different iterations regarding northern Britain, including the re-defence of Hadrian's Wall in the sub-Roman period under the command of a still functioning *Dux Britanniarum*,<sup>710</sup> and the development of political units around small Roman policing units that were stationed beyond a retreating frontier and interacted with existing British political units such as Strathclyde and Gododdin.<sup>711</sup>

This chapter focuses on the development of the political situation in the frontier zone of Hadrian's Wall, where there seems to be a difficulty understanding how the occupational and political situations evolved from the fourth century to the sixth and seventh. I would argue that there is no catch-all explanation and that what occurred were local developments aimed at resolving local issues with little resemblance to a grand political narrative. These local responses, it would seem, may have come from a playbook with which some broader models of political change are consistent, but none of these models explain the whole situation. This chapter proposes another model based on the consolidation of food supply to be considered alongside those others to explain some local development.

Colm O'Brien has identified several attempts to explain why some Hadrian's Wall forts remained in use beyond AD 400, whilst others seemed to decline and fail.<sup>712</sup> Wilmott suggested that Birdoswald survived because the fort's garrison continued to extract their customary taxes and developed into a

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<sup>709</sup> Faulkner (2001).

<sup>710</sup> Dark (1992).

<sup>711</sup> Halsall (2013).

<sup>712</sup> O'Brien (2010), pp. 110–20.

self-sustaining unit by allying with local civilian groups under the command of a hereditary commander.<sup>713</sup> Rob Collins has suggested that a reduction in the number of crossing points left fort commanders in a position where they were able to control movement through Hadrian's Wall, putting them in a position of power which developed into regional authority.<sup>714</sup> Both of these models include fort garrisons' eventual development into an elite warband which eventually became the nodes around which the early medieval kingdoms of the North formed. Furthermore, Collins has suggested that the shared experience of life as *limitanei* on the British frontier created a community amongst the frontier soldiers.<sup>715</sup> This principle, called Occupational Community Theory, is echoed by Ian Wood's suggestions for the origins of Bernicia. In 2007 he asked 'were the *Bernicii*, in some manner, heirs to the Wall and the zone to the north and south of it?'<sup>716</sup> This theory has been expanded to include a notion of a Germanic language as the spoken language of the frontier<sup>717</sup> and a consideration of whether the descendants of the frontier troops on Hadrian's Wall came to see themselves as a *gens Berniciorum* and subsequently 'as part of the Anglian people of Northumbria.'<sup>718</sup> This poses interesting questions about how this development came about and how much of the frontier came to belong to this *gens Berniciorum*.

## 6.2 James Gerrard's villa model

James Gerrard has proposed a model based on the control of the food surplus to explain continuity at villa sites in the lowland zone of Britannia. He argues that at several Romano-British villa sites during the fifth century there was a move to centralise elements of crop storage and manufacturing from their usual position at the periphery of the estates into the centre, under the direct supervision of the landlord, often making them part of the central complex.<sup>719</sup> This, he argues was a by-product of the unstable position that the Romano-British elite found themselves after the diminishing of Roman authority in Britannia. He states that the relocation of these features could indicate 'a weakening of the obligations that assured the smooth rendering of the agricultural surplus to the

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<sup>713</sup> Wilmott (1997), p. 228.

<sup>714</sup> Collins (2004); O'Brien (2010), p. 113.

<sup>715</sup> Collins (2004); O'Brien (2010), p. 111.

<sup>716</sup> I.N. Wood (2007), p. 111.

<sup>717</sup> Salway (1965); Roberts (2010), p. 120.

<sup>718</sup> Wood (2007) in Roberts (2010), p. 120.

<sup>719</sup> Gerrard (2013), pp. 225–228.

elite<sup>720</sup> and thus a need to bring them under direct elite control. This model maps the change from fourth-century villa sites such as Roundstone Lane, Angmering (Sussex), Popley near Basingstoke (Hampshire) and Fordington Bottom (Dorset), where corn driers are sited on the periphery of villa estates, to fifth-century sites such as Chedworth, Butleigh (Somerset), Brading and Rock (Isle of Wight) and North Wraxall (Wiltshire) where these driers were moved to areas that had previously been associated with elite functions.<sup>721</sup> Further to this is the association of these areas with important industrial activities such as iron-making, as it was 'necessary to equip and maintain not only the retinue but also the equipment needed for everyday use.'<sup>722</sup> Through this movement the elites were able to consolidate their power and create stable nodes from which they could govern their locality. Gerrard comments that 'from these locations<sup>723</sup> the remnants of the Romano-British elite exercised control from what was a traditional seat of power.'<sup>724</sup> This association of previously lower-status activity with areas of elite function has the potential to be applied in the northern frontier zone, where changes in the use of buildings have been observed in a period beginning in around AD 350 and continuing in development after AD 400. This in turn may suggest that some of the former forts of the frontier zone could have become the seats of power for an elite which continued to identify with Roman culture, from which the fort commanders could have become regional powers in a similar way to those elites of the South.

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<sup>720</sup> Gerrard (2013), p. 257.

<sup>721</sup> Gerrard (2013), p. 257.

<sup>722</sup> Gerrard (2013), p. 255.

<sup>723</sup> Presumably stabilised by the securing of their industrial production and their agricultural surplus.

<sup>724</sup> Gerrard (2013), p. 258.



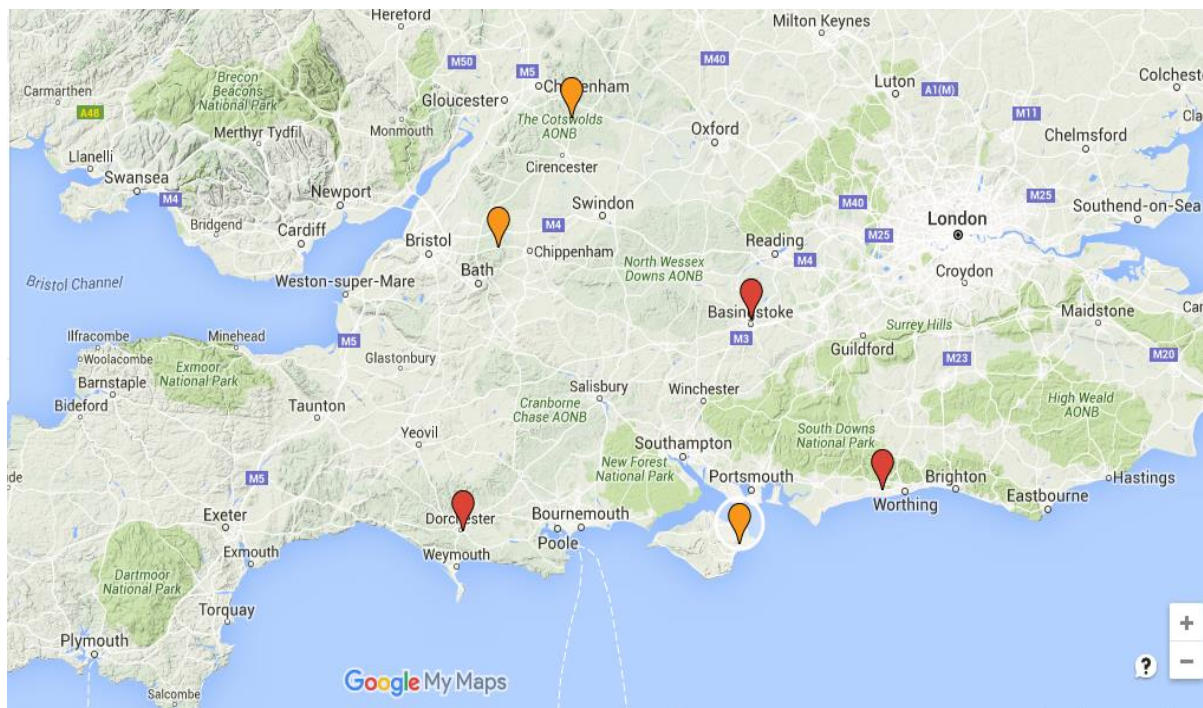


Fig 8: The location of Gerrard's Villa's:

- 4<sup>th</sup> C. villas inc. Roundstone Lane, Popley, Fordington Bottom
- 5<sup>th</sup> C. villas inc. Chedworth, Brading and Rock, North Wraxall

This chapter considers how far the situation on the northern frontier can be seen to fit the model described by Gerrard. It will consider the development and occupation at several sites across the frontier zone, including the wall forts of Birdoswald and Vindolanda, a frontier fort at Binchester, and perhaps the most northerly villa complex in Britannia at Ingleby Barwick. I consider the potential of Gerrard's southern villa model at each of these sites, making specific efforts to consider the placement of industrially and agriculturally important apparatus at each site.

### 6.3 Case Studies

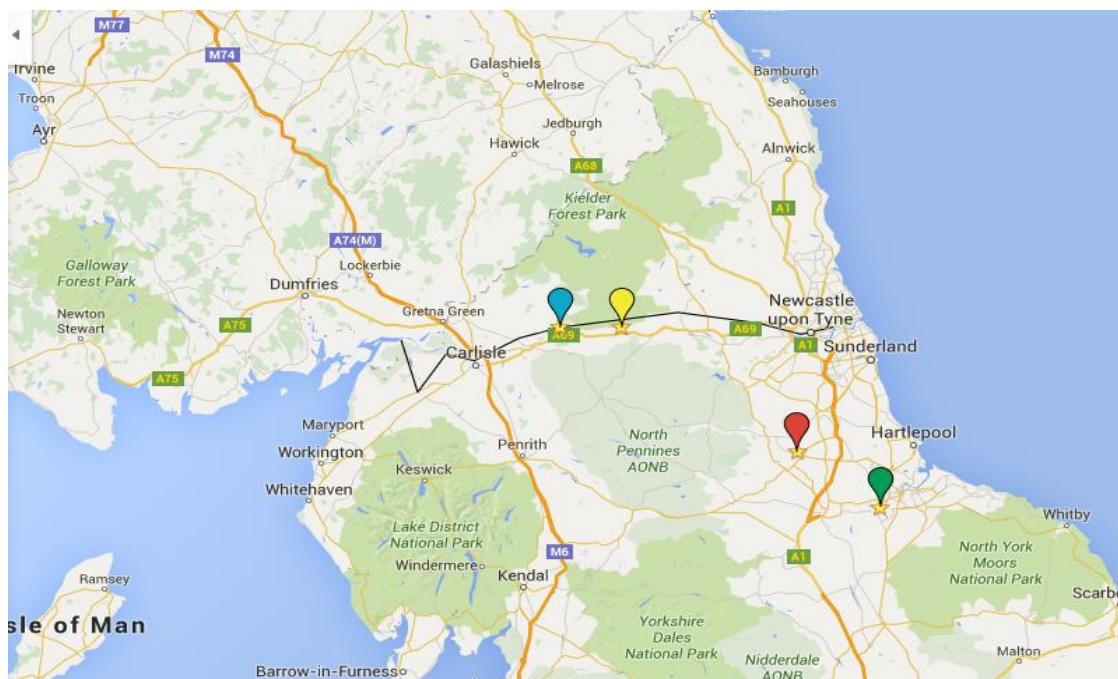


Fig 9: Case Study locations

#### Key

- Ingleby Barwick
- Vindolanda
- Binchester
- Birdoswald

■ Frontier line

#### 6.3.1 Supplying the frontier under Roman rule

Key to this paper is developing an understanding of how each of these sites were supplied in the period leading up to and following the end of the fourth century. It is important to note that supply to the frontier area during the Roman period should not be considered monolithic. It is likely that it went through phases of development as the garrisons became more embedded in the landscape. A three-phase model could be described as the ideal, and perhaps represents the most likely path that was followed.<sup>725</sup> In the first phase, upon the initial Roman military occupation of an area and the foundation of a fort, we can expect supplies to be moved in from outside of the region, probably from other regions in the Empire. In this phase, we would probably expect to see evidence of large storage facilities in use as shipping smaller quantities more frequently would be more expensive.

<sup>725</sup> Rick Jones (*pers. comm*); see Cool (2006) for a general discussion of the types of food available in the first to the fourth centuries.

Examples of this kind of high-frequency supply can be seen at South Shields, which shows developments to support the third-century Severan campaign in Scotland. J. P. Gillam and John Dore noted that in the early third century the northern half of the fort at Arbeia was transformed into granaries to facilitate the storage of large quantities of grain.<sup>726</sup> This type of supply cannot have been sustained for a particularly long period of time, especially given expensive commitments to campaigns on other frontiers and the financial problems associated with the third-century crisis.<sup>727</sup> For a more settled frontier, it seems likely that phase 2 would have followed quickly, probably within a generation. In phase 2, we can suppose that a supply relationship with the local landscape developed. Milestones from Spain suggest that around each fort there was a *territorium* that it could exploit.<sup>728</sup> In the frontier zone of northern Britain, the close proximity of the forts to each other, and the landscape of the northern Pennines, may have made this phase more difficult to sustain. The rugged character of this landscape may go some way to explaining the continued use of large supply deposits at certain sites, such as Building XV (a fourth-century double granary building) at Housesteads,<sup>729</sup> which we can assume was used to supply those forts of the central regions of the frontier that were not self-sufficient. It seems likely that if the supply relationship noted for phase 1 is unlikely to have been sustained, and phase 2 was unsuitable for some forts, there must have been a third phase, which saw the creation of supply depots for those forts that could not live off their immediate hinterland. In phase 3, there was presumably supply from further afield through purchasing mechanisms. In this market economy, forts would be expected to purchase their supplies (probably using pay from more central administration) either as individual units or as a bloc. This is a likely explanation for the widespread distribution of East Yorkshire pottery throughout the frontier region in the fourth century,<sup>730</sup> and could be used to help explain the distribution of coinage into the countryside.

If the forts of the frontier moved into phase 3 of this supply model, such a relationship would be expected to break down at the end of the fourth century, when coinage ceased to arrive from the

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<sup>726</sup> Dore and Gillam (1979).

<sup>727</sup> De Blois (2002), pp. 204–17; Southern (2015), pp. 1–50; Drinkwater (1987); Drinkwater (2005); Kulikowski (2007).

<sup>728</sup> Rick Jones (*pers. comm.*).

<sup>729</sup> Collins (2015).

<sup>730</sup> Wilson (1989); Bidwell and Croom (2010).

Continent.<sup>731</sup> In this instance, the forts can probably be expected to have reverted back to phase 2, with those unable to establish a relationship with the local populace unable to sustain their position. This would chime with Tony Wilmott's position about the garrison of Birdoswald fort being able to levy taxes from the local landscape in the form of grain and supplies to continue to support the garrison after AD 400.<sup>732</sup> However, it is likely that such taxes would need to be collected in large quantities for a fort to be able to sustain itself over the period of a year, suggesting a need for mass storage facilities. It may also be the case that after AD 400 certain goods were collected through a mechanism like that suggested for phase 3 but other goods were supplied through local tax regimes as in phase 2. If this is the case, then perhaps food supplies (at certain forts) would be one of those goods that continued to be supplied through direct taxation. This could be a predictor of later survival.

Jacqui Huntley argued that a typical fourth-century Wall garrison of c. 1000 men would require the produce of approximately 200 hectares of land per year in order to meet demand for the 1.4 kg of grain ration per day that was each soldier's allotment.<sup>733</sup> Further territory is also likely to have been needed to supply grazing land for cavalry units, as well as additional products to the grain ration. If we assume that the garrisons of the Wall-forts were not the soldier-farmers that have been proposed as a solution to the problem of maintaining garrisons without central organisation,<sup>734</sup> and thus not able to grow this grain themselves, then this supply must have come from the surplus created by the local population within the *territorium* of each fort in addition to their own subsistence levels, creating a need for each fort to have a larger territory under their control. This highlights the difficulty that low yield, subsistence areas faced. In such circumstances, supply of the fort is likely to have come from further afield, resulting in a larger *territorium*, and presumably would have been harder to maintain without state mechanisms. Forts in isolation, such as Binchester, may have been able to call on a larger area to supply their needs, however along the wall frontier such territories are likely to have been limited by the existence of the territories of other forts in close proximity. This proximity may even have created competition between the forts in the absence of a centralised command, and without the regular supply of taxation allowing the purchase of supplies.

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<sup>731</sup> At many sites the latest coin deposited predates the beginning of the fifth century. Brickstock (2000); Brickstock (2010).

<sup>732</sup> Wilmott (1997), p. 228.

<sup>733</sup> Huntley (2000), pp. 67–72.

<sup>734</sup> Luttwak (1984).

Such difficulties must have been exacerbated by the general reduction in cultivation west of the Pennines noted by Stallibrass and Huntley<sup>735</sup> after its fourth-century zenith. This change in cultivation levels did not mark a change in diet<sup>736</sup> and can therefore be assumed to mark a decline in land exploitation, perhaps resulting from lower, or more local tax regimes after the end of the fourth century.

Changes in the storage food stuffs have been considered previously. In 2015, Rob Collins did a study of the structural changes in the granaries at 5 sites in the Wall zone. These were: South Shields, Newcastle, Housesteads, Birdoswald and Vindolanda.<sup>737</sup>

### **6.3.2 Ingleby Barwick (a villa estate on the River Tees in North Yorkshire)**

Given that Gerrard's model was initially applied to villa sites, we will consider the evidence at the only non-military site in our sample. The villa at Ingleby Barwick shows some signs of development typical of Gerrard's pattern. During phase 4 of development, which ran to the mid-fourth century, the caldarium was modified to become a corn drier bringing agricultural control closer to the central spaces of the site. If we apply Gerrard's model here, this would seem to indicate that the site's owners were attempting to consolidate control of the agricultural surplus, perhaps during a time of uncertainty. This corn drier was abandoned during the late-fourth-century phase 5 developments but another was built in phase 5C in area F, beyond the villa enclosure ditch.<sup>738</sup> If we are to apply Gerrard's model here we would consider this to represent a period of a degree of confidence. A position of relative strength could further be inferred from the high levels of late Roman pottery on the site from beyond the East Yorkshire potteries, which were prominent in the North during this period,<sup>739</sup> as well as the Swift type 6 gilded cross brooch found on the site.<sup>740</sup> It would seem that late in the fourth century, there was a figure of some significance active at the site who seemed relatively confident of their position within the Roman world. On the other hand, it is also possible to argue that the development of a grain drier in area F, whilst indicating a greater confidence than can

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<sup>735</sup> Stallibrass and Huntley (2010), pp. 92–95.

<sup>736</sup> Stallibrass and Huntley (2010).

<sup>737</sup> Collins (2015), pp. 18–31.

<sup>738</sup> Willis and Carne (2013).

<sup>739</sup> Petts (2013), p. 197.

<sup>740</sup> Petts (2013), p. 196.

be seen during phase 4, could not be considered peripheral to the site as it is only 50 metres from the villa, and so still represent a form of continued consolidation. However, we see from the later phases of the site (phases 5-6), taking the site from the late fourth to the seventh century, that there are no further moves towards the consolidation at this site that is seen at sites further south, which the model would predict. Further excavation at Ingleby Barwick, including the central areas of the estate in which the aisled building was placed, may change our understanding of this.<sup>741</sup>

### 6.3.3 Binchester (a frontier zone fort in County Durham)

Binchester seems to fit the model described by Gerrard of a traditional seat of power from which a member of the Romano-British elite exercised control.<sup>742</sup> Phase 8 of development at Binchester was marked by significant redevelopment of the *praetorium* building. This development led to the creation of a courtyard building along the lines of those that were found at South Shields and Piercebridge. This development included a significant bath complex, which was expanded several times during phase 8. The similarity of the developments at Binchester to those at other fort sites in the north-east of the frontier region, along with forts on other frontier systems, has led the excavators to suggest that the military elites of this part of the frontier system were displaying their status in a language that would be recognised in all parts of the Roman world and would mark them out as members of an Empire-wide elite.<sup>743</sup> Similar to phase 5 at Ingleby Barwick, the developments during Phase 8 at Binchester would seem to indicate an elite with significant confidence in their position, both in the locality and in the wider Roman world. Whether the developments of this phase represent state economic input or the input of a wealthy hereditary commander is unknown, but it would seem in either case that there was a change, or a growing significance, for the elite occupants of this fort during this period. This change would seem to reflect a move towards the site being indicative of the social status of its occupant,<sup>744</sup> perhaps in the same way a villa might be for a civilian.

The high-status building of Phase 8A was expanded in phase 8B by the development of a bath complex, dated between AD 350 and 360. At this time, it would seem that the *praetorium* was home to a person of high status who was functioning and displaying wealth within the context of a culture

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<sup>741</sup> Willis and Carne (2013), pp. 29–57.

<sup>742</sup> Gerrard (2013), p. 258.

<sup>743</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).

<sup>744</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).

and style belonging to that of a fourth-century Roman elite. Phase 8C, which seems to have occurred at a similar time to 8B (or perhaps a short time later), includes the insertion of walls into the larger rooms to sub-divide them into smaller spaces.<sup>745</sup> Overall this seems to suggest the need for a change in the useable space within this lavish building, perhaps suggesting the development of a family unit, which could be indicative of the development of a hereditary command at the site or a change in the administrative functioning of such a building, perhaps the need to share the trappings of higher status with a larger group; in this it may be possible to begin to see the embryo of what may have become the elite war bands of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. The same possible causes of change that were suggested for 8C could also be applied to the changes in 8D. The addition of two cold rooms and a new exercise hall could be seen as indicators of either a new more lavish status, as Ferris and Jones suggest,<sup>746</sup> or could be seen as further examples of a reorganisation born of a need to allow access to more of the trappings of elite life.

Phase 9 of occupation on this site shows signs of compromise in the standard of living enjoyed at the site and has been described as squatter occupation in comparison to the lifestyle that had been enjoyed before.<sup>747</sup> The bath suite remained in use for a time during phase 9 but eventually the economic resources or skill needed to keep it in good repair were lost. The repairs to the furnace flue and the boiler platform using rubble bonded with clay rather than the cut sandstone and mortar that had originally been used stand as testament to this loss.<sup>748</sup> Whilst the excavators of the bath house complex at Binchester have argued for a date beginning after the end of the fourth century for phase 9, some have argued that it followed phase 8 very quickly, perhaps occurring as early as the 360's and certainly by AD 400.<sup>749</sup> This interpretation creates difficulty; if we follow Ferris and Jones's dating of phase 9, we can see the loss of the grandeur associated with Phase 8 as a feature of the new economic model created by the absence of external Roman input into the frontier. As such the behaviours associated with phase 9 can be seen through the prism of the end of Roman rule in Britain. This interpretation allows for a cause for this sudden change in policy, something which is necessary given the level of expenditure associated with phase 8. This is not the case with Petts and

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<sup>745</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).

<sup>746</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).

<sup>747</sup> Ferris (2011), p. 554.

<sup>748</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000), p. 2.

<sup>749</sup> Hodgson (2013), pp. 409–410.

Hodgson's interpretation. Whilst the latest evidence associated with these developments does suggest a TPQ of around AD 370, there is an absence of datable evidence associated with Phase 9 so the only acceptable conclusion to be drawn is that events of Phase 9 occurred between the datable evidence of Phase 8 and the next datable event. The next datable event was the burial of two people in a style associated with Anglo-Saxon culture, usually dated to around AD 650, some 3 centuries later. Petts and Hodgson's desire to truncate the chronology creates its own difficulties and those who subscribe to such a view need to answer what happened in the period after the completion of Phase 8D to cause the abandonment of the culture and aspirations associated with the bath house complex of Phase 8. Petts described the change as occurring as a result of a change for Binchester to a supply depot during the second half of the fourth century. Whilst there is a possibility of such a change of use occurring, it seems unlikely that such a change would result in the abandonment of the *Praetorium* by its occupants. Such a change in culture would require an absence of a desire to belong to a wider Romanised elite and portray wealth in a Romanised way and the absence of wider Roman economy to necessitate the movement to less sophisticated modes of building and maintenance (associated with the clay repairs to the smaller flue). The break with Rome and the wider economic changes associated with the early to mid-fifth century provide the impetus for such a change, the events of the middle of the fourth century or a change to a supply depot do not.

The change of usage for the house of phase 8 during phase 9 suggests a more utilitarian approach to life. The change of high-status rooms in the main courtyard building into a slaughterhouse and a smithy highlight a need for these on the site in this period and the loss of pretensions to grandeur that living in such a house had meant during the fourth century.<sup>750</sup> This suggests that the fort was becoming more of a self-sufficient community during this time. The movement of these important processes into elite spaces would potentially allow for the application of Gerrard's model. The centralisation of features of food supply such as the slaughterhouse would certainly imply the consolidation that Gerrard refers to. But without the evidence of a centralisation of control of the grain supply the application of Gerrard's model remains incomplete. However, excavation of the fort is itself incomplete, so Gerrard's model is not necessarily compromised by this absence of evidence.

#### **6.3.4 Vindolanda (a Hadrian's Wall fort in Northumberland)**

Vindolanda probably represents the site that most clearly fits Gerrard's villa model in our sample. It can be shown to represent the seat of someone with pretensions to elite status, if not actually

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<sup>750</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000), p. 2.



belonging to the highest levels of the elite. The site also shows signs of attempts to diversify and consolidate the food supply to the fort, allowing it to continue to be occupied beyond the end of the fourth century.

The fort at Vindolanda does not seem to have undergone the same level of regeneration that had occurred at Binchester. Like Binchester phase 8, there seems to have been developments of the internal structures of the fort at Vindolanda during the fourth century. Whilst this seems to have been for the benefit of the fort *praepositus*, as it involved the development of the *principia*, which was upgraded to include a hypocaust heating system by AD 369, it did not follow the same pattern of development as sites such as Piercebridge, South Shields and Binchester, where renovations of the dwelling of the *praepositus* occurred at the *praetorium*.<sup>751</sup> The *praetorium* at Vindolanda, conversely, seems to have undergone a long-term, piecemeal demolition during the fourth century,<sup>752</sup> something which may have facilitated the movement of the *praepositus* to the *principia*. These developments included the addition of a bath house in the north part of the building, whilst the development of a potential church in the east wing<sup>753</sup> could indicate the importance of Christianity in the late Roman period and its association with authority, as well as situating this elite in a wider context. The adoption of Christianity may also go some way to explain the change of use in the chapel of the standards, which became a fire pit.<sup>754</sup> We should not however, jump immediately to abandonment of the old religion(s) as an explanation for changes in religious spaces. These could also be explained by a comparison with Phase 9 at Binchester,<sup>755</sup> which suggest that new practicalities overrode previous religious compunctions. Andrew Birley suggests that the adjacent strong room may have been used as a larder and the cross hall used as a feasting chamber—a use he claims for the period 6A building at Birdoswald.<sup>756</sup> Both these changes suggest a desire for more efficient use of space. Further elements to consider in relation to these changes include what they may mean for the social organisation of the fort and its inhabitants. The decision to demolish much of the *praetorium* and build a church building in the east wing may suggest a slight

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<sup>751</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).

<sup>752</sup> Birley (2014), pp. 195–205.

<sup>753</sup> Birley (2014).

<sup>754</sup> Birley (2014).

<sup>755</sup> Birley (2014).

<sup>756</sup> Birley (2014), p. 201.

difference in authority to Binchester. This could perhaps represent a need to interact more closely with the 'rank and file' as they morphed into a warband. This, however, would seem to be countered by the enhancements made to the *principia*, and the suggestion that this became the residence of the *praepositus*. As such we could perhaps infer that there was simply a decline of the *praetorium* without the means or desire to restore it. This in turn could suggest a change in the command structure at the fort, with a move away from traditional Roman military mechanisms.

Structural changes in the fourth century demonstrate the changing face of occupation at this site and point to a more informal mode of control developing. Paul T. Bidwell has highlighted that structural issues became a concern in the latter years of the fort's occupation. He notes that material was deliberately deposited to prevent the collapsing of the west wall of the fort.<sup>757</sup> Whilst it has previously been suggested that the deposition of the debris was caused by the collapse of the upper wall, he argues that a simple collapse would not have provided enough material to support the remaining wall and that it is more likely that this was an effort to prevent the collapse of the entire wall once the necessary skills to maintain the wall had been lost. He states that there is a 'possibility that the defences of Vindolanda were refurbished in a manner reminiscent of the refortification of some Iron Age hill forts in the fifth or sixth century.'<sup>758</sup> Such a conclusion would seem to imply that it may have been a local population carrying out the repairs or a population that had been distanced from the Roman economy for long enough to have lost the diverse range of skills that such an economy facilitated and was necessary for the maintenance of this site.<sup>759</sup> Whilst this site does not seem to have shared the extremely high status enjoyed by Binchester and Ingleby Barwick, it is still likely to have occupied a position of prominence within its locality, and thus represent the seat of traditional power as described by Gerrard.

Although there is little evidence to firmly date the latest phases of occupation at Vindolanda, Bidwell suggested that period 7 offers the latest evidence of occupation. In this phase the barracks were demolished and replaced by a new building. He states that 'it is reasonable to assume that the demolition of the period 6 buildings did not take place until the very end of the fourth century at the

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<sup>757</sup> Bidwell (1985), p. 46.

<sup>758</sup> Bidwell (1985), p. 46.

<sup>759</sup> Such as the ability to prepare mortar. Such a conclusion highlights a general trend for the loss of skills with the end of a more diversified, and thus specialised, economy. See above at Binchester and Ferris and Jones (2000), p. 2.

earliest. Indeed, the demolition may have taken place at a much later date.<sup>760</sup> Whilst this may be the case, he also points out that there is no dating evidence to place the period 7 works any later than 370, the earliest date for period 6. In a pattern that seems to be found at the majority of potential fifth-century sites, Vindolanda seems to have a structural sequence of indeterminate length beginning sometime in the late fourth century and perhaps representing continued occupation into the fifth century and perhaps beyond. The changing of the barracks into a new building could represent a changing of the social structure within the fort. This change may represent a move from a self-perception as Roman military to that of a local warband. That the site continued to represent a place of local importance is evidenced by the later finds on the site. Bidwell's excavations uncovered a tombstone from the late fifth or early sixth century and a penannular brooch from around a century later.

Andrew Birley has highlighted further developments in the structural sequence. By the middle of the fifth century<sup>761</sup> a new series of developments occurred at the site of the fort. 'Buildings in the central range of the fort – the *principia*, the *horrea* and the *praetorium* – were extensively altered, and new structures were built over the existing third- and fourth-century road network and ramparts in the north-western quadrant. The fort wall defences were strengthened with a new tower on the south wall and several ruinous sections of fort wall were strengthened.<sup>762</sup> Birley has suggested that the continued occupation of the site is largely due to its position in the landscape securing lines of movement north-south and east-west as well as sitting on the confluence of two river basins – the Allen and the Tyne.<sup>763</sup> He highlights the pre-Roman agricultural cultivation of the site by a local civilian population,<sup>764</sup> demonstrating the potential of the site to sustain a population in the post-Roman period,<sup>765</sup> as well as evidence of post-Roman mining in the vicinity for lead, iron, coal,

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<sup>760</sup> Bidwell (1985), p. 75.

<sup>761</sup> Birley is unsure whether there was a break in occupation in the first half of the fifth century. The absence of certainty presents certain issues about whether developments that followed represented Roman military continuity or a more local phenomenon.

<sup>762</sup> Birley (2014), p. 196.

<sup>763</sup> Birley (2014).

<sup>764</sup> Although he notes the apparent absence of a settlement.

<sup>765</sup> Birley (2003), pp. 1–5; Birley (2014), p. 197.

sandstone and limestone.<sup>766</sup> All these factors suggest the importance of Vindolanda to a local, or perhaps slightly wider, population in the Iron Age, the Roman period and after AD. 400.

These analyses suggest that either a local population reoccupied and enhanced the fortifications at Vindolanda in the fifth century, no doubt due to its important position on local communication lines, or the military occupiers of the site in the late fourth century were able to organise, or perhaps continue the agricultural management of the local area in order to continue the supply of the fort. The viability of this arrangement would seem to be partially the result of lower levels of occupation: Birley argues that the remodelling of the interior portions of the fort seem to indicate a further fall in the number of inhabitants in the post-Roman period.<sup>767</sup> Birley does argue that by the end of the third or the early fourth century local agricultural surplus supported the site rather than shipments from Arbeia.<sup>768</sup> However, the reduction in fifth-century population would seem to indicate that levels of occupation remained too high at the end of the fourth century to be sustained from the local environment, despite the evidence for a rise in hunted food supplementing the diets of the occupants.<sup>769</sup> This evidence suggests that Vindolanda underwent a reduction in scale but retained a local importance whilst being sustained by exploiting local resources. All of this would seem to indicate Vindolanda's position as a seat of local power overseeing the local area, fitting Gerrard's model. How far does it then fit the rest of his model?

The developments of the granaries at Vindolanda from the fourth century onwards suggest an attempt to consolidate food supply, rendering the fort suitable for later occupation. The eastern granary ceased to be used for its original purpose in the mid-fourth century, suggesting an early change in either the mode or quantity of supply at an early stage. The granary building remained in use in the fourth century, with extensive coin deposits suggesting that market activity occurred on the site, something that perhaps demonstrates a change into a commercial building.<sup>770</sup> We should perhaps ask, if commercial activity did take place in the building of the former granary, what kind of commercial activity took place and what this means for our understanding of Vindolanda's role in the local economy. We could suggest, based on the high levels of coin deposition and the end of

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<sup>766</sup> R. Birley (2009), p. 32; McGuire in Birley (2014), p. 197.

<sup>767</sup> Birley (2014), p. 197.

<sup>768</sup> Birley (2014), p. 197.

<sup>769</sup> Collins (2012); Birley (2014), p. 197.

<sup>770</sup> Birley (2014), p. 202.

occupation in the *vicus*, that the commercial activity of the building was a continuation of that which had taken place in the *vicus* in the second and third century. This is something that could be taken to suggest a breakdown in the more formal distinction between soldier and civilian occurring in the fourth century, with civilian activities occurring with a military environment. Taken to a greater degree we could perhaps see the fort beginning to function as a local market place on this basis. This is likely to have solidified its position as an important local centre.

We could also ask if the use of the granary site for financial transactions could be symptomatic of a different shift. If the period in which the fort was directly supplied from Arbeia<sup>771</sup> had come to an end by the time of this change of use, perhaps the high levels of coin deposition in the eastern granary is a sign of local purchasing taking place, of a new relationship with the local populace. If this were the case, however, we could expect occupation of the site to have been severely hampered at the beginning of the fifth century, when the end of an imperial coin supply to the fort could have been expected to result in a need for a further change in methods of supply. As such, if we accept a commercial use for the building, we can probably infer that this change in use did not facilitate the continued occupation of the site in a post-fourth century context, except perhaps as a stepping stone from imperial to local supply.

The platform of the eastern granary appears to have been reused as a domestic dwelling:<sup>772</sup> grain finds from the hearth in the north-east portion of the building indicate the continued supply of foodstuffs throughout the period.<sup>773</sup> This suggests that there was no break in continuity of supply, which presumably came from a local population. As such, this suggests that surplus extraction from the local area continued into the fifth century.

Both granaries at Vindolanda show extensive use above the fourth-century levels, including the building of new stone structures over the existing granary floors. The southern half of the western granary had a new raised hypocaust type floor put in, although there are no signs of it being fired. Above this hypocaust flooring there are signs of storage of agricultural surplus.<sup>774</sup> As Birley notes, this showed a high level of sophistication and highlighted the need to keep grain and foodstuffs

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<sup>771</sup> As suggested by Birley, see above.

<sup>772</sup> Birley (2014), p. 203.

<sup>773</sup> Birley (2014), p. 203.

<sup>774</sup> Birley (2014), p. 203.

dry.<sup>775</sup> The sophistication of this method of storage suggests a greater priority was being placed on the preservation of foodstuffs, and we can probably assume that they therefore held a greater value, as this level of care was certainly not evident in earlier phases of use of the granaries. This fits with Gerrard's model of surplus consolidation in the fifth century, with more importance being placed on the preservation of foodstuffs which were perhaps no longer as readily available, as has previously been seen.<sup>776</sup> We can also see that there was a degree of low-level industrial activity occurring within the vicinity of the western granary, suggested by the discovery of iron slag in front of building.<sup>777</sup> Such developments fit with Gerrard's suggestion of consolidation, with important processes taking place in a small, easily protected environment, a single building. This may be due to a smaller population within the fort: it could be that the use and maintenance of a single building for both storage and industry was more cost-effective than maintaining multiple facilities.

Although the fourth-century occupation was not at the same social level as can be seen at Ingleby Barwick and Binchester, Vindolanda seems to have had pretensions towards a higher status with its fourth-century developments. The enhancements to the *principia* can be seen in the context of a claim to belonging to the same military elite that the developments to the *praetoria* at South Shields, Binchester and Piercebridge indicate. The continued use of western granary suggests less of a need for storage, but the fort was still in control of the local surplus. This would suggest that the fort represented a position of fifth-century and later strength and authority. As such, this site could be considered to represent the best candidate for the application of Gerrard's model.

### 6.3.5 Birdoswald (A Hadrian's Wall fort in Cumbria)

Birdoswald follows Vindolanda and Binchester in possessing structural evidence for a potentially long period of continuity after the end of the fourth century. The traditional dating methods provide a *terminus post quem* of the later fourth century for the latest phases of Roman occupation. In two phases during period 6, the stone buildings within the fort were first adapted by the addition of timber structures and then ignored when the occupants erected entirely new timber buildings.<sup>778</sup> Wilmott argues that, whilst there was no datable evidence after 400, the timber building work must have occurred after this date as the timber phase post-dates the latest deposition of Roman material

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<sup>775</sup> Birley (2014), p. 203.

<sup>776</sup> E.g. by the pre- fourth-century use of at least two granaries.

<sup>777</sup> Birley (2014), p. 203.

<sup>778</sup> Wilmott (1997), pp. 226.

on the site. Using the average life of timbers, the phases of development and the earliest date for the last deposition of Roman coins, Wilmott dates the possible end of the occupation of the fort at Birdoswald as occurring between 446 and c. 520. He argues that due to the worn nature of the coin with the latest date, it was probably not deposited until after 420 and that as the timber was based on stone it was less likely to rot within the most conservative 25-year estimate. Therefore, it is not likely that the earliest date for the end of occupation is the correct one, Wilmott favouring instead a date of around 500 for the end of the occupation period.<sup>779</sup> Similar to the change noted at Vindolanda, in the mid fourth century the south granary at Birdoswald underwent a change in usage. Following the infilling of the ventilated sub-floor, which can be dated to the period after AD 348 using coinage, a new floor of heavy stone slabs was placed over the top. The floor appears to have been kept clean and remained in use until at least AD 388. From the hearth-like stone arrangements at the western end of the building, what looks like a later Roman assemblage was uncovered. This assemblage included a glass finger ring, a gold and glass earring and a worn Theodosian coin.<sup>780</sup> This change in use would suggest that the granary was no longer used to store grain sometime after AD 348.

The changes of period 6 suggest a change in the structure of the supply to Birdoswald as the change of the granary buildings from granaries to new uses hint at either a smaller group within the fort, therefore needing to be fed less, or a more direct method of gathering food and therefore the removal of the need to stockpile it. The developments highlighted by Birley at Vindolanda suggest that at least at some sites along the frontier there was still a need to store food; indeed, the care taken to ensure that the food supply was protected<sup>781</sup> suggests that there was a greater priority being placed on food at Vindolanda. The absence of such features at Birdoswald suggest a different set of priorities and perhaps a different social structure there. One possible interpretation of the absence of food storage is that there were external groups involving themselves at Birdoswald. I consider this possibility below.

An important feature of the latest developments at Birdoswald is a general movement of activity from the central parts of the fort to more peripheral buildings. This contrasts with the trend seen at most forts, including the two others in our sample, where efforts in the fourth century seem to have gone into establishing a higher-status lifestyle for those occupying the central reaches at the forts,

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<sup>779</sup> Wilmott (2001), pp. 123.

<sup>780</sup> Wilmott (1997).

<sup>781</sup> The building of a hypocaust system to ensure that there was less food spoilage.

be it in developing the *principia* (as at Vindolanda) or the *praetorium* (as at Binchester, Piercebridge and South Shields). Whilst phase 9 at Binchester shows a more functional approach, with portions of the *praetorium* being used for more industrial and lower-status activities, the work of phase 8 highlights the status enjoyed by the fort commander, and perhaps his family. At Birdoswald, period 6 seems to indicate that there was less of a distinction being made between the commander and his troops. Indeed, it is possible that there was no distinction or that the person who oversaw the people within the fort did not live there. Unlike at Vindolanda, where we see evidence of bulk storage (to a lesser extent than in previous centuries) there is little evidence to support a conclusion that the inhabitants of Birdoswald could take control of a local surplus to the same degree. As such, we must ask what arrangements they had in place for the supply of the fort.

Given the absence of architectural evidence for distinctions between commander and commanded, it may be the case that the real authority over the fort came from outside. The hall building of period 6A is reminiscent of the feasting hall found at Yeavinger by Hope-Taylor. This remained out of use for much of the year—presumably unless a member of the elite was in residence. Rather than seeing a mingling of a warlord and his retinue in the use of the hall,<sup>782</sup> an alternative possibility is that this became a place of assembly used when an authority figure was in residence. Even if the feasting hall is not an example of the kind of political structure envisioned by Hope-Taylor at Yeavinger, the question of how Birdoswald was supplied still looms large. In Britain, grain is harvested at one time of year, meaning that, somewhere in the landscape, bulk storage of the harvest must have been happening. With the absence of evidence for bulk storage, it seems likely that there was not the same kind of supply system in place at Birdoswald that is seen at Vindolanda. This suggests that the people of Birdoswald were not in control of their supply. A likely inference from this is that someone outside of Birdoswald was controlling the food supply to the fort and thus probably had control of the fort.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

In summary, James Gerrard established that there were attempts by Villa owners in the south of the British provinces to consolidate control over industrial activities and the storage and processing of grain at their estates during the fifth century. This, he argued, helped to sustain these estates as local centres of authority and enabled the elites that owned such sites to exercise their authority in the new political situation that was developing during the fifth century. This paper has applied this

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<sup>782</sup> Wilmott (1997); Wilmott (2001).



model to various sites in the northern frontier region of Britain to test how far we can see evidence of consolidation and the possible creation of local centres of authority for the fifth century. The villa at Ingleby Barwick, shows signs of making efforts to consolidate grain processing during the mid-fourth century (c.360) and the movement of grain driers further away from the centre of the estate at beginning of the fifth century shows signs of slightly greater confidence, although not enough to suggest a return to the pre-350 levels of confidence. It is important to note, however, that the grain driers remained firmly under the authority of the villa owner even after this movement away from the central buildings of the villa, such movement being limited to less than 100 metres and does not represent anything like the distance that Gerrard associates with peripheral constructions in his southern examples<sup>783</sup>. The discovery of a gold crossbow brooch at the site suggests that its owner held great significance in the late Roman administration, in around AD 400, and we can predict that this site is likely to have represented a seat of at least some local authority, in the period after AD 400.

At the frontier forts of Vindolanda and Binchester, we see evidence to suggest that important industrial activities and consolidation of resources occurred, enough to suggest at least a partial success in the application of Gerrard's model. Both sites exhibit behaviours that could be seen to mark control over their hinterland and a degree of self-sufficiency, as well as evidence to mark their commanders out as important members of the local, late Roman elite. Such conditions being met, I would propose that these sites became local power centres during the fourth century and early fifth century, and this enabled their survival when there was no longer a military pay structure in place. Birdoswald shows no such signs of this kind of development in the fifth century. Rather than making efforts to consolidate control of supply and developing the architecture used to demonstrate the position of the commander of the fort as an important elite figure (as seen at Binchester and Vindolanda), the period after c. AD 400 shows a move in an entirely different direction. Phase six at Birdoswald is marked by an abandonment of existing Roman structures, with the demolition of the only known storage buildings and an abandonment of the central administrative buildings of the *praetorium* and the *principia*. As such, we can say conclusively that Gerrard's model does not apply at Birdoswald. We are forced to ask then, why is Birdoswald so different from our other sites, and given the absence of storage how could a population be sustained here in the period after AD 400? Rather than continuing the Roman military practice of a commander occupying an elite residence in the centre of the fort, whoever was in charge at Birdoswald seems to have adopted leadership

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<sup>783</sup> James Gerrard (*pers. comm*)

practices more akin to those in evidence at Yeavinger.<sup>784</sup> Potentially this suggestion offers other avenues for consideration; if the fort at Birdoswald does represent an estate centre along the lines of that at Yeavinger, we could perhaps ask how that fort fitted into a wider network and what other parts made up that network. The absence of obvious features for stockpiling goods would suggest that a more local supply line continued to exist or had been recreated in the late fourth or early fifth century as centralised supply ceased. As Wilmott has noted, there no doubt continued to be a degree of local supply to the fort.<sup>785</sup> But how far this could have sustained the fort with its deficiencies regarding storage is a difficult to say. The continued centralised supply of some forts, from place such as Housesteads,<sup>786</sup> in the fourth century and the absence of ability to store large quantities of supplies suggest that the commander of the fort at Birdoswald was not entirely in control of the supply situation at his fort<sup>787</sup>, that he was beholden to either another individual or group of individuals to sustain the garrison. If supplies to the fort were extracted by force or threat of force, we might expect to find larger storage facilities to minimise opportunity for resistance. The absence of these could be taken as evidence that the supply was willingly given, perhaps as part of a symbiotic relationship, as suggested by Wilmott.<sup>788</sup> However, the absence of storage facilities could also suggest that supply was used as a method of control. In this sense, either a local population (or perhaps elite) supplied the fort on a regular basis to ensure protection, or perhaps the fort was part of a wider network and was supplied by the elite in charge of that network to ensure loyalty.

Michael R. McCarthy has suggested that when Carlisle ceased to function as a Roman military command it became an elite centre for the kingdom of Rheged.<sup>789</sup> Dunragit<sup>790</sup> has also been suggested as a potential centre for this kingdom, as well as Rochdale.<sup>791</sup> Whilst Rheged may never have existed, and if it did its location is unknown, the possibility of multiple elite sites around the Northwest of the former province of Britannia representing a network and perhaps the foundations

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<sup>784</sup> Hope-Taylor (1977).

<sup>785</sup> Wilmott (1997), pp. 226–29; Wilmott (2001), pp. 124–26.

<sup>786</sup> Collins (2015)

<sup>787</sup> And that he may not ever have been

<sup>788</sup> Wilmott (1997).

<sup>789</sup> McCarthy (2002).

<sup>790</sup> Toolis and Bowles (2016).

<sup>791</sup> McCarthy (2002).

of a kingdom is an interesting possibility. Yeavinger and examples in the south-west<sup>792</sup> (Wales and Cornwall) suggest that none of these elite sites would have been continuously occupied by the elite of the kingdom, but rather that the elite of the fifth, sixth and seventh century was peripatetic. As such, it is likely that the changes witnessed at Birdoswald, particularly the creation of a hall, were part of a shift from the Roman military system to that of a peripatetic regional elite based in the north-west of modern England. If we assume that the centre, from which the authority grew, of that regional power was the western part of the frontier system, in particular Carlisle (which had the dual distinction of representing a Roman administrative centre as well as a military one so had greater ability to communicate over long distances), we could perhaps argue for a retention of a western frontier command. This is something that may be supported by the genealogies of the Harleian genealogies,<sup>793</sup> which seems to suggest that many of the local kings, of the North and West, of the period after AD 400 derived their authority from a single figure, who it has been proposed was the *Dux Britanniarum*,<sup>794</sup> and as such Birdoswald may owe its continuity to strategic concerns. If we assume that this intact command was not able to sustain occupation at all forts it may be that only key sites were left garrisoned. We may also, if we consider centres such as Birdoswald and Carlisle to belong to the same network as centres such as Dunragit, suggest the shifting of control of the region to another elite form, perhaps based on non-Roman practices, and see the continued occupation or garrisoning of Carlisle and Birdoswald for strategic reasons. In both situations, it is proposed that the post-AD400 developments at Birdoswald mark a move to interaction with this new form of elite.

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<sup>792</sup> Alcock (1963); Alcock, Stevenson and Musson (1995); C.D. Morris (1999) pp. 206–15.

<sup>793</sup> Bartrum (1966).

<sup>794</sup> J. Morris (2001) p. 54.

## 7- Conclusion

### 7.1 A summary of the chapters and main arguments in this thesis

This thesis has demonstrated the continuing central position that Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* has in the historiography of the period AD 375-650 in Britain. It has highlighted how modern scholarship on the fifth to seventh century is built, sometimes unwittingly, on narratives derived from the uncritical use of Bede as a source. Modern scholarship is aware of how problematic a source Bede is. In recent decades, efforts have been made to champion a more critical reading of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*,<sup>795</sup> which have contributed to challenges to some of the central themes in the study of fourth- to seventh-century Britain.<sup>796</sup> Despite these challenges and these more critical readings of Bede, frameworks for archaeological interpretation which were constructed from Bede's narratives are often still in place. Additionally, as shown in Chapter 4, related fields such as linguistics and archaeo-genetics still base their interpretations within these narratives.

Chapter 2 argued that Bede is the primary literary basis for the historiographical narrative that places the year AD 410 as the end date of Roman rule in Britain. It highlighted Bede's linking of the end of Roman rule to the sacking of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths (an event which undermined seven centuries of the invincibility of Rome) and suggested that this could have been used to distance the Britons from their Roman past. Through a comparison with the use of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to create an intellectual space for the Danes in the ninth- and tenth-century *Angelcynn*, it is possible to see how Bede worked to create a shared past for the Britons and his *gens Anglorum*. This shared past denied the British elite access to Roman legitimacy, by using the coincidence of the end of Roman rule and the sacking of Rome to show how, in 410, Roman authority was destroyed, and presented the *gens Anglorum* as both the replacements for Roman authority in Britain and the saviours of the Britons from their true enemies (who even the Romans were not able to protect the Britons from) - the Picts and Scots.

Considering the origin and potential purpose of the placement of 410 in the narrative of the end of Roman Britain, this thesis allows the consideration of different interpretations of the end of Roman rule. As a result of the demonstration that the use of 410 may owe more to Bede's eighth-century agendas than to fifth-century realities, the consideration of British involvement with the declining

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<sup>795</sup> For example: Higham (2002); Higham (2006); Laker (2008)

<sup>796</sup> For example: Cool (2014); Harland (2017); Collins and Gerrard (2004)

Western Roman Empire in the fifth century can be viewed in more nuanced and gradual terms. This nuance is of particular use in the archaeological sphere where chronologies of Roman sites are sometimes brought to an end prior to 410 for the purposes of meeting this deadline, or where use of the site beyond for 410 is seen as British desire to maintain Roman lifestyles in the absence of Roman authority. In the region between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall the removal of 410 as a hard end date for Roman interest in Britain (or worse still a withdrawal of Roman military representation in 410) has particular applications in frontier studies and the military installations of the frontier region. Rather than considering the end of the Roman context for these sites in the fifth century, either as a policy position on the part of Honorius's government or as an accident resulting from the crossing of the Rhine, the gradual evolution of the use of sites from the mid-fourth century through the fifth century and beyond, in the light of a failing monetised economy and a centrally instituted tax regime, can be considered. Whilst some archaeologists point to the end of this monetised economy at the beginning of the fifth century as corresponding to Bede's narrative, H.E.M Cool has highlighted that the experience of the end of small coinage distribution was shared across the whole of the Western Empire from AD 402 onwards, potentially removing it as a distinctive marker of the disruption of British involvement with central Roman authority.<sup>797</sup>

Chapter 3 continued the literary analysis of chapter 2 but did so from a new angle. Rather than considering Bede's use in English history-writing, chapter 3 considered Bede's impact on other populations. It explored how Bede has impacted modern readings of early Welsh history and also how the medieval Welsh wrote their own history. This chapter considered the difficulty of dating early Welsh praise poetry. On the basis of arguments made by Oliver Padel,<sup>798</sup> this considered how, if we accept a ninth-century context for the composition of the poetry of Taliesin and Aneirin, it could have been composed in the court of Merfyn Frych, as part of Venedotian response to Bede's criticisms of the Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It pointed to the *Historia Brittonum* as an example of literature composed in a similar context,<sup>799</sup> but also argued that in the absence of firm ninth-century dating for the composition, potentially the recording and transmission of oral history of a pre-existing body of poetry by Taliesin and Aneirin could also belong to the same context. As such this chapter provided a case study of the extent of Bede's influence on the historiography of

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<sup>797</sup> Cool (2014). pp 13-14. However, the end of small coinage in the Western Empire has also been disputed see Moorhead (2012) pp. 601-632; Walton and Moorhead (2016).

<sup>798</sup> Padel (2010) pp.115-153.

<sup>799</sup> See Higham (2002) pp 98-169

Britain even in Wales, even as early as the ninth century. It also considered a context for considering medieval Welsh interest in the *Hen Ogledd*, which is a region that includes the area of focus for this thesis.

A similar theme to chapter 2 was present in chapters 4 and 5, which explored the primacy of Bede's mass migration narrative in the historiography of fifth- to seventh-century burial archaeology and material culture and the decline and collapse narrative of second- to fifth-century urban spaces.

Chapter 4 considered how the desire to find ethnic identity (which in some cases is used as a proxy for nineteenth-century notions of race) in burial archaeology constrains the interpretation of fifth- to seventh-century burials and their associated material culture. Chapter 4 highlights how items that are deemed representative of ethnic identity could also denote status and indeed, how their styles have been shown to have been descended from Roman status markers. Chapter 4 used an important and under-utilised dataset of late Roman burials to challenge the idea of normal fourth-century burial alignment and cast light on how little information is available from the region between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall. As a result of this, the chapter questioned how far deviation from this supposed fourth-century burial norm in fifth- to seventh-century burials could really be seen to mark ethnic presentation. The idea that deviation from fourth-century burial norms in the fifth- to seventh-century marked a change of population was further challenged using the cemetery at West Heslerton as a case study of fifth- to seventh-century east coast burial from the region between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall. At West Heslerton, ideas of norms in burials believed to represent markers of new ethnic populations are shown consistently to lack the uniform application necessary to render them norms. The use of modern DNA to find the location of ancient populations is also considered and dismissed, especially in relation to the search for Bede's ethnic groups, where evidence is claimed from different areas to those which Bede states his ethnic groups come from. Ultimately the chapter concluded that the continued attempts at ethnic identification within the Anglo-Saxon paradigm limited the study of burial archaeology and the period. As a result of the over reliance on Bede's ethnic migrations as an explanation for change in the fifth to the seventh centuries, archaeologists have consistently missed opportunities to explore other forms of identity or indeed other ways in which the material culture, language and burial practices could have come to dominate the lowlands of Britain in the second half of the first millennium.

Chapter 5 also explored the application of Bedan narratives to the archaeological depiction of change in the fifth century. This chapter considered how narratives of the abandonment and collapse of Roman urban spaces in the east of Britain can be traced back to Bede's descriptions of the *adventus Saxonum* and its depiction as ending the occupation of Roman towns. This chapter

considered the treatment of towns in the north of the former province, between the River Humber and Hadrian's Wall. It examined how, in the absence of a contrary literary narrative, towns were largely assumed by modern archaeologists to be abandoned by the beginning of the fifth century (or earlier depending on which version of the decline and collapse narrative is studied). Further expression of how far Bede has shaped the study of the period can be seen in how the continued use of Roman urban spaces in the west of the province was more readily accepted than at towns situated in the east, where further use of the urban space was described in terms of new populations with different ethnicities. The application of new ethnicities as an explanation for later use was particularly prevalent in the study of York, which was situated in close proximity to some of the earliest known centres of the Deiran kingdom, which appears to have been ruled by a Germanic-speaking elite. In contrast, Bede's passing references to activity at Carlisle and the absence of an expectation of Germanic-speaking migrants in the city prior to the eighth century was enough to expect continued British occupation despite Carlisle having similarly low evidence of use as York between the fifth and seventh century. Without the limitation created by adherence to these narratives, this chapter has highlighted similarities in the way that some urban spaces were used in the period after the archaeological record ceased to be able to easily date features (end of the fourth century) and before new close dating methods begin to apply (usually sometime after the eleventh century). This chapter suggests that the search for the evolution of urban spaces in the fifth century rather than their collapse in the fifth century may allow the space in which the growth of the kingdoms of the sixth and seventh century can be found. Escaping the framework created by Bede's narrative may help this search.

These chapters have highlighted how the continued application of Bedan narratives are limiting the understanding of the fifth and sixth century. Rather than telling new stories about how the world that Bede lived in came to be, these chapters have sought to highlight the weaknesses of assuming that Bede's understanding, or perhaps his presentation, of the period between the end of Roman rule and his lifetime is entirely correct. How far this is due to the limitations of his own knowledge and how far this is due to his motivations in writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is unclear, although this thesis has attempted to highlight how some of the narratives derived from Bede may have interacted with the suspected motivations of his writing.

Despite this, it is also unwise to wholly dismiss Bede: elements of what he is depicting may be true but they do not present the whole picture and should not be treated as doing so. Bede describes the passage of time from the sacking of Rome and his date for the end of Roman authority in Britain (in AD 410) to the sending of the Augustinian mission to Kent in AD 596, a period of 186 years, in which

dramatic economic and social changes occurred in Britain, in just eleven chapters. Five of these eleven chapters relate to Germanus of Auxerre's visits to Britain in AD 429 and a second short visit he dates as occurring in the period AD 434-444, so six of them provide the majority of the information. As such, the fifth- and sixth-century portion of his work does not contain a great deal of detail for this period and whilst his description of the seventh century has far greater detail, he is unable to offer much more than what Gildas describes for occurrences in the fifth and sixth century. Indeed, much of his narrative for the period is based on Gildas' with embellishments based on his understanding of how the situation of his time came to be. If we treat Bede's description of the fifth and sixth century as what it is, an extremely potted history of events which is very light on actual information, we can create space in which new possibilities are considered. Instead of fitting archaeology to a framework created by Bede perhaps we should create a framework, or multiple smaller more localised frameworks, based on the archaeology of the fourth to the seventh century and assess which elements of what Bede describes can be applied to it.

Chapter 6 represents an attempt to do just that. In this chapter, the narrative framework as described by Bede is removed and the potential of the archaeology to offer an explanation for the evolution of sites and, by extension, the region is explored. In this chapter, a model of consolidation of food supply and industrial activity (developed by James Gerrard and applied to southern villa estates) is applied to a northern context and used to explore how different military sites in the frontier zone responded to new economic circumstances in the fifth century. A potentially interesting difference between the east and west of the frontier region emerged. Whilst the forts at Binchester (County Durham) and Vindolanda (Hadrian's Wall) in the east of the frontier region show signs of the consolidation of industrial activity and perhaps food supply, Birdoswald (Hadrian's Wall) in the west does not. Instead at Birdoswald, the food storage in the fort appears to have been largely dismantled and a potential feasting hall appears to have replaced one of the warehouses.

## **7.2 Some speculation about avenues for potentially non-Bedan inspired models in the fifth and sixth centuries**

This thesis has largely challenged current archaeological interpretations derived from Bedan narratives relating to the *Adventus Saxonum* and the search for ethnic markers in fifth- to seventh-century burial archaeology and material culture, the decline and collapse narrative of the end of Roman urban occupation and the use of year 410 to mark the end of Roman Britain. As has been stated at various points throughout the thesis, one of aims of this thesis is to challenge existing assumptions about the way that the fifth, sixth and seventh century progressed and create space to consider alternative ideas based on a combination of archaeology and literature rather than using



archaeology to supplement literary narratives. This thesis is part of a wider trend of rethinking the written sources on the basis of the archaeological picture.

In this section I will engage in a degree of speculation around how fifth-century change in some areas may have occurred. This speculation is by no means universal. At the centre of my understanding is a belief in localised responses to events, pressures and changes and the power of these localised responses to shape the kingdoms attested to in the literature of the later first millennium. Once again, I refer back to Alex Woolf and state one of the greatest failings of the narrative models as they currently apply is 'the presumption that a single model might apply across the whole country,'<sup>800</sup> and that by considering local or regional responses to the problems generated by the progression of the fifth century, rather than attempting to write a single grand narrative, we may be able to enhance the picture.

Hypothetically, we might consider the following as a way of describing how the end of the Roman rule could have affected some areas of the British provinces. The crossing of the Rhine by the Franks and other Germanic-speaking groups in the early fifth century seems to have had the effect of cutting the British provinces off, at least in the short term, from the authority of the Western Empire. As was noted earlier in the thesis, the disconnect of the British provinces from the authority of the Empire was nothing new and was the experience of British provincials for significant periods of the third and fourth centuries, and presumably the authority of the centre was expected to be returned at some point.

The raising of three emperors (Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III) in 406 and 407 highlights how divided elite society in Britain was in light of the separation from Rome. It is possible that these divisions became more entrenched with the failed rules of each of the usurpers raised, until no group had enough power to enforce their vision over the others, preventing the selection of new usurper emperors. At this point, I suspect that the British provinces maintained their belief in a return to Roman authority, or rather the legitimatisation of their rulers through the support of the Roman administration. The acceptance of the actions of Germanus of Auxerre in 429 and during his second visit, in particular the claimed application of the 418 Edict of Honorius against the Pelagian bishops, implies the continuity of Roman law, at least in some parts of the provinces. The comments of Jordanes relating to the military intervention of several thousand Britons led by Riothamus

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<sup>800</sup> Woolf (2007) p. 116

against Euric on the continent in AD 469/70,<sup>801</sup> implies that at least a portion of British society considered themselves to be affiliated to the Western Empire as far removed as 60 years from the usurpations of the first decade of the fifth century. However, whilst the events alluded to here may indicate an acceptance of, or even an interest in, affiliation with the power of the Western Empire in the fifth century, the material trappings of this affiliation appear to have been in reducing supply, at least if considered in comparison to third- and fourth-century material culture. As noted by many archaeologists, 402 saw the last distribution of small coinage to Britain from the western mints<sup>802</sup> and in the absence of a monetary stimulus to the economy there appears to have been a reduction in the production of luxury goods such as pottery.<sup>803</sup>

With the absence of a uniting vision of how rule should be and with no faction able to enforce their own view of how it should be, the factions themselves are likely to have divided as they too sought to determine direction.<sup>804</sup> As these factions split further, power is likely to have become based in the hands of those who could enforce their own will in their own right. As such the power that existed was in the hands of those that either had the wealth, or controlled enough resources, to buy the support of those in their vicinity or already the support of those in their area.

As discussed above, it is also unwise to wholly dismiss Bede: elements of what he is depicting may be true, but they do not present the whole picture and should not be treated as doing so. As such, effort should be made to situate Bede in this speculative narrative, not as the central framework but space should be allowed for the events he describes within a wider understanding of the period. These events should be evaluated critically against the evidence available from other sources and against his motivations for including them. As such Bede (and Gildas's) discussions of the invitation to Saxon mercenaries may have occurred. However, placing it into a wider context, it may only represent the actions of a small area of Britain. As Woolf suggests, were the Germanic-speaking mercenaries brought in to defend parts of the south and east of the Roman provinces against the more 'barbarian' British kings in the West and North- misidentified as the Picts and Scots by Gildas writing 100 years after the events he describes (perhaps as a result of insulting references by their

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<sup>801</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* §237-8; Mierow (1908)

<sup>802</sup> Cool (2010); Brickstock (2000) Brickstock (2010)

<sup>803</sup> Dark (1996); Evans (2000); Fulford (1979); Bidwell and Croom (2010)

<sup>804</sup> One need only consider the shape of politics in Britain as Brexit is being discussed to see how such a situation may have developed.

more urbane compatriots in Gildas's source material)?<sup>805</sup> Such an interpretation would fit with the locations of material culture associated with Germanic-speaking populations, which was not present in large numbers at Hadrian's Wall, as one might expect to find a mercenary force enlisted to fight the Picts. As Guy Halsall has highlighted, there is material culture that has been historically associated to Germanic-speaking population far inland in the early fifth century, perhaps even predating their supposed establishment of a beachhead in coastal regions.<sup>806</sup> This evidence has been used by Stuart Laycock to argue for early use of Germanic foederati at the borders between British tribal territories.<sup>807</sup>

Considering the above as a way of describing the development of local power in the fifth century several questions emerge. If, as the previous paragraph suggests, we assume an initial deployment of Germanic-speaking mercenaries in opposition to British kingdoms and independent British elites in the West and North, and the different burial behaviours and material cultures are the product of an incoming population, why are they not at their strongest in these earlier locations (inland rather than on the coast)? Could the changes in behaviours in coastal locations and near coastal regions be the product of the location of populations near the coast? Here they would be at the contact point with other cultures over the North Sea, and as such open to influence from these cultures, or even simply the first place where cultural expression using material culture from beyond the North Sea could happen. Considering a hypothetical fifth- and sixth-century map of the disposition of the different groups on the continent, it is clear that after the turn of the fifth century the people occupying continental positions of power in closest proximity to the Southeast and East of Britain spoke a Germanic language and claimed to have taken authority from the Western Empire - in most cases largely by force. The use of Germanic-speaking mercenaries, Gildas's revolt and the whole of the *Adventus Saxonum* narrative may have been incidental to the adoption of culture in order to share it with the nearest trading partners or if not trade then their closest, most powerful neighbours. Whilst a difficulty emerges if we consider that the British provinces were in a state of economic turmoil in the fifth century, exemplified by the reduction in small coinage and the apparent collapse of the pottery industry, it is possible that trade was still occurring. Although this thesis has questioned the *Adventus Saxonum* and Bede's interpretation of the fifth century, all sources for the period suggest that this was a period in which warfare was endemic. Warfare

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<sup>805</sup> Woolf (2020)

<sup>806</sup> Halsall (2013)

<sup>807</sup> Laycock (2008); Laycock (2009)

produces prisoners which, in the context of the fifth to the seventh century, were commodifiable as slaves. Indeed, St. Patrick's *Confessio* and letter to Coroticus indicate the dangers that slavery posed to the population of Britain and Ireland in the fifth century.<sup>808</sup> Furthermore, the tone taken by the letter to Coroticus suggests that slavery itself was not frowned upon, merely the enslavement of Christians.<sup>809</sup> Additionally, trade existed between Britain and the continent prior to the Roman conquest in the first century, including the trade of items which have not left a material record, such as hunting dogs,<sup>810</sup> which may have continued throughout the first millennium. Furthermore, whilst exploitation of natural resources such as silver, iron and lead had been a feature of Roman rule in Britain and this declined in the fifth century, it remains probable that this decline did not mean the end of some level of extraction occurring, which would have been available for trade. In the absence of trade, gift giving remained an important feature of power relationships between Britain and the continent and has parallels in first-century BC relationships between the elite of the East and Southeast and the Roman Empire.<sup>811</sup> The transmission of Merovingian gold coins into Britain has been evidenced by finds from Sutton Hoo.<sup>812</sup>

The adoption of customs and language which affiliated them to continental powers may have allowed the population of the East and South coast to engage more easily with their new neighbours, encouraging trade and gift giving whilst allowing those elites who did so to distinguish themselves from those who did not. Whilst multilingualism is, for the most part, assumed for those engaging in trade, the removal of language barriers and barriers created by differing customs may have allowed those who 'played the part' greater access to continental powers. In such a way, the fifth and sixth century population of Southeast (lowland) Britain may have found Germanic languages to be more highly prized than their Celtic or Latin counterparts.<sup>813</sup> Such behaviour would not be alien to the population of lowland Britain, as Chris Loveluck and Patrick Ottaway describe: the

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<sup>808</sup> St Patrick *Confessio* 35 and Letter to Coroticus in Skinner (1998)

<sup>809</sup> St. Patrick letter to Coroticus 19; Skinner (1998)

<sup>810</sup> Strabo *Geography* Book IV Ch. 5 in Jones (1923); Strabo also lists grain, cattle, gold, silver, iron, hides and slaves as well as dogs as British exports to the continent; see also Tacitus *Agricola* 12 in Hutton and Peterson (1914). See also Fleming (2020) pp. 370-388; Hamerow, Hollevoet & Vince (1994). Fleming (2012) argues against Iron extraction occurring in the fifth and sixth century.

<sup>811</sup> Ireland (2008)

<sup>812</sup> Green (1988) pp 73-97

<sup>813</sup> See also Woolf (2007)

Southeast and East Yorkshire had a history of adopting elements of continental culture long before the arrival of the Romans in the first century AD.<sup>814</sup>

Similarly, elements of the material culture of Kent can be seen to be influenced by links across the channel to Merovingian Gaul. Indeed, as Sam Lucy notes, the close relationship envisioned for the East coast and northern Germany and Scandinavia, in terms of material culture and burial practices, was not the only close relationship that was impacting the behaviours in Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries. There is evidence of closer trading links between Kent and Merovingian Gaul that result in some differing material cultures to other areas of Southeast Britain.<sup>815</sup> An example of this can be seen in Kentish wheel-thrown pottery belonging to the sixth and seventh centuries (although this may be slightly earlier) which only has parallels in France's Pas-de-Calais.<sup>816</sup> Rather than being an example of the differences between Jutish and Saxon material culture as the Bedan narrative would lead us to, this could simply represent the differing spheres of trade that were operating in the third quarter of the first millennium AD. Or, as Woolf suggests, the absence of this Merovingian/Kentish material culture in other areas may reflect a resistance to Merovingian hegemony in the South<sup>817</sup> expressed through deliberate affiliation to Scandinavian material culture.<sup>818</sup>

Indeed, the use of imported material culture to support an elite status can also be seen in Southwestern Britain and Wales. Here the importation of D and E ware from the Mediterranean is seen as a defining behaviour of local elites.<sup>819</sup> As can be seen in the seventh-century miracle story of St. John the Almsgiver, Britain was known as a source of tin even as far afield as Byzantium.<sup>820</sup> The combination of this association and the importation of D and E ware suggests an association in the Southwest that bypassed the closest territories controlled by Germanic-speaking groups and brought those of the South and West into contact with those who had engaged more readily with the Roman administration. Furthermore, the external influence of continental behaviours is

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<sup>814</sup> Loveluck and Ottaway (2003) pp. 151-170

<sup>815</sup> Lucy (2000a) pp. 16-64

<sup>816</sup> Lucy (2000a). p. 54

<sup>817</sup> For discussion of this hegemony see Wood (1983).

<sup>818</sup> Woolf (2017)

<sup>819</sup> Campbell (2007); Cunliffe (2001); C.D. Morris (1999)

<sup>820</sup> Alcock (1995) pp 141-42

reflected in the adoption of the *Hic iacit* formula on burial monuments in the mid-fifth century. This and the subsequent *hic requiescat in pace* formula were developed in Gaul in the fifth century and found on western-British burials shortly after.<sup>821</sup> As such it might be the case that we are simply seeing the interpretation of the different trading networks or regions of influence that developed in the period after the Roman dominance of European trade reflected in the differences that we ascribe to the cultural behaviours of the Britons and Anglo-Saxons.

That is not to suggest a complete absence of Germanic-speaking immigrants from British shores in the fifth and sixth centuries. In addition to the general movement of elements of Germanic-speaking populations across the North Sea that the expected trade facilitated and required, the literary sources do tell us about the presence of some migratory groups of Saxon warriors involving themselves in the politics of fifth-century Britain and establishing kingdoms therein. However, it is believed that narratives of the fifth and sixth century, born from the primary sources, significantly over-emphasise their impact on the genetic make-up of the population of Britain. Some former Romano-British elite groups may have found themselves in opposition to, and possibly replaced by, Germanic-speaking warriors. However, this was highly unlikely to have been repeated across the whole of lowland Britain. Furthermore, the combatants on both sides in the wars fought in the sixth and seventh century between Celtic-speaking and Germanic-speaking populations are expected to have been largely composed of people whose ancestors had been in Britain under Roman rule. It is believed that many more of the elite of fifth- and sixth-century lowland Britain adopted the material culture, customs, and language of their Germanic-speaking neighbours on the Continent and amongst other members of the elite of lowland Britain, for the advantages they offered, than were replaced or displaced by them. Similarly, as had occurred throughout the first to the fourth century, where new material cultures, languages and customs were adopted by elites, and had the prestige associated with elite use, lower echelons of society inevitably follow suit where they could.

The post-fourth-century experience of the region north of the Humber appears to be equally as divided as the region to the south of it. By the end of the sixth century, it appears that east of the region was primarily composed of Germanic-speakers engaging with a material culture and customs that shared elements with the near continent and with the Southeast of modern England. The west of the region appears to have had more in common linguistically and in terms of material culture and customs with areas such as Wales and the Southwest. This outcome could not be predicted from

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<sup>821</sup> Knight (1996); Knight (2003)

the fourth-century situation in the region as Carlisle, in the west, and York, in the east, represented the two *foci* of power in the frontier system.

As shown in Chapter 6, beyond the end of the fourth century, there is not a uniform approach in the region north of the Humber in terms of how the frontier forts related to one another, with a difference emerging between how eastern and western forts dealt with the new circumstances. If the suppositions of chapter 6 are correct in suggesting a western frontier network emerged in the late-fourth and fifth centuries, whilst eastern elite figures opted to act independently, then it would not be unreasonable to assume that cultural differences between the east and west of the region apparent in the seventh century could be due to decisions made in the fifth century. Divisions, or perhaps power relationships, resulting from these decisions could have impacted how and from where the peoples of the area north of the Humber drew their social cues.

Based on the material culture and burial patterns of the later fifth to seventh centuries, it appears likely that those in the east of the region looked, like their neighbours in the south, across the sea to the continent. Such patterns are reflected in the material culture of areas around the River Tyne, the River Tees and the River Humber. Whilst these patterns are at their strongest in the areas closest to the continent, they are not necessarily indicative of mass migration. Like the populations south of the River Humber, this new culture may reflect a decision to opt into the culture of those in power on the near Continent. However, as was suggested for the South some of this population may have had their origin on the Continent. This does not constitute mass migration or even the transfer of an elite but may represent the movement of small groups of people from the Continent into Britain, and perhaps *vice-versa*, as has occurred throughout history. Like in the South, it seems far more likely that the elite of the Northeast chose to adopt customs and language found both south of the River Humber and on the Continent. As noted by Ferris and Jones, this would not be out of character for the military elite of the Northeast, who (in the late third and fourth century) chose to display their elite status in a manner that would present them as belonging to a continental elite at forts such as Binchester and Piercebridge (as well as others) by adopting architecture in keeping with a late Roman elite sites which changed the layout of their forts.<sup>822</sup> This decision to opt in to the culture of their continental neighbours, supplemented by the continued low level movement of people across the North Sea (which Oppenheimer suggests has been occurring since before the first century

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<sup>822</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000)

AD)<sup>823</sup> could have contributed to the shared DNA markers and material culture that are commented on in Chapter 4.

Sections of the military elite may also have found their ability to maintain their status reduced in the absence of the ability to pay their underlings. This will have particularly impacted areas like the region between Hadrian's Wall and the River Humber, which had a large military presence and infrastructure. As such shifts to redistributive structures (similar to that of later kings or chieftains) may have emerged, examples of the infrastructure used to support this may be evidenced by the construction of a probable feasting hall in place of the southern granary at Birdoswald. For those who had the support of being in possession of a military tradition and a military force, they were able to reinforce their position and perhaps build a wider network of power. In this way the fort at Carlisle may have become a centre of power in the area and attracted other fort commanders into a group that eventually evolved into a kingdom.<sup>824</sup> The possession of a Roman military tradition may have also offered a form of legitimacy in this kingdom building. In places where the local elites took over the control of supply to forts, the networks created could have been the building blocks of the later kingdoms that emerged. As suggested in Chapter 6, where there is evidence for consolidation of food supply and industry, this may indicate attempts by fort commanders to act independently of other elites in the area and may have contributed to delayed kingdom building in these areas and failure to maintain the administrative infrastructure of the Empire.

What can be seen at various sites in the northeast of the frontier region could be described as a singling out of the fort commander to a more elite status during the fourth century,<sup>825</sup> more distinct from their commands than at other times during the previous three centuries. Whilst the phase 9 developments at Binchester could suggest that this pretension was no longer realistic during the fifth century, the application of Gerrard's model to this site suggests a change in the type of elite behaviour, but not necessarily an end of that claim to elite status. If the behaviours noted at Binchester, Piercebridge and South Shields<sup>826</sup>, as well as the development of the *principia* at Vindolanda, during the fourth century are indeed an attempt by these commanders to establish their respective forts as their own private estates, what could be suggested for the eastern half of

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<sup>823</sup> Oppenheimer (2006)

<sup>824</sup> For an examination of the role of food supply see chapter 6.

<sup>825</sup> The *praetoria* at Binchester, South Shields and Piercebridge.

<sup>826</sup> Ferris and Jones (2000).



the frontier region is a fragmentation of the military command into smaller localised estate sites. In such an instance the survival of these sites must be predicated on an ability to establish enough of a control over their hinterland to ensure adequate supply. Potentially, the later development of the granaries and apparent diversification of diet observed at Vindolanda in Chapter 6 are evidence of how a successful move to self-sufficiency could have occurred. Self-sufficiency may also be suggested by the high amounts of butchery occurring in phase 9 at Binchester. If we consider these alongside York, it may be that at certain places, control of the hinterland around former Roman centres allowed elite display within the Roman setting.

The evidence from Birdoswald would not support the same kind of conclusions about the self-sufficiency of this fort in the fifth century or later. Whilst it remains a possibility that storage facilities for supplies for the fort may be found in other unexcavated parts of the fort and its hinterland, the evidence of the destruction of the granaries and the building of the great hall-like feature on their remains would seem to suggest a different sort of situation emerging from that experienced in the east. Furthermore, the development of storage buildings in other parts of the fort would suggest that there were new constructions when such buildings already existed, a remarkably inefficient choice for building, whilst the building of these storage facilities outside of the fort would suggest a different security experience to those seen throughout the British provinces and a complete absence of the expected consolidation of the fifth century, indeed an opposite response.

If food supply did offer an avenue for the consideration of power in the fifth century and later, it may be that the move towards self-sufficiency in the eastern part of the frontier region created more localised interests than the larger network that these forts had previously belonged to. As such, independent action and identities may have developed as a result. These identities and the power which developed from this independent action may have been much more mutable than that of the western half of the frontier, allowing the people of these sites to become part of the local populace and adopt the political practices of those they lived amongst, be they Germanic-speaking or Celtic-speaking. The intact authority of the western half of the frontier may have ensured a continuing larger sense of identity and an ability to act in concert, something which lent itself to kingdom building, either creating one or joining an existing one. Indeed, as Woolf has highlighted, there is a similarity between the lack of political unity in the east of England in the fifth and sixth century and the early Frankish territories in northern Gaul<sup>827</sup> created by the presence of multiple smaller independent territories, which created difficulty in using the imperial administration

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<sup>827</sup> Modern day Belgium and the Netherlands.

system.<sup>828</sup> Interestingly, here too Germanic languages<sup>829</sup> rather than Romance languages replaced Latin. It is possible that in the east of the frontier zone (or even on a wider scale - the east of England) the lack of unity created by multiple independent elites in competition created a situation that hampered kingdom building until such a time as military advantage was achieved.

For those outside of this military tradition, occupying a former Roman urban space may have offered a similar legitimacy to occupying a fort. In the fifth and sixth century, urban spaces may have come to occupy a similar position in the settlement hierarchy to forts. James Gerrard has made a similar case for villa sites in the South.<sup>830</sup> As such, despite low levels of occupation, centres such as York may have still represented areas of significance. The faunal remains described by Gerrard as evidence of elite occupation of the Basilica may be key to understanding the ongoing use of York. If this interpretation of the remains is correct, at least one group chose to use a former centre of Roman political power as a place to demonstrate their own elite status in the fifth, and perhaps the sixth, century. Like Carlisle, York could have continued to be an important source of political power for those who sought to rule in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. However, it is worth noting that, like Carlisle, York could have continued to have economic importance as well as political. Its positioning at the confluence of the Foss and the Ouse offered good links to the North Sea. This, combined with its political heritage, may have been key to its continued importance. While they were not able to claim the same levels of significance as sites like Carlisle and York, former Roman small towns could still have offered the same legitimacy but on a smaller scale, whilst geographical positioning and control of communication could afford those in control of centres such as Catterick a local significance. Or maybe, if we suspend disbelief and accept the locating of Catraeth in North Yorkshire, the significance of their geographical position could make places like Catterick a point in the strategic landscape worth making war over. What has been observed at several of these urban sites is a contraction in occupation beyond the fourth century. It may be that this contraction represented a reduction in the areas which an elite figure needed to control in order to have power over the space. For York, it seems that those areas central to the maintenance of power were the ideological centre of the military headquarters and the logistical points such as bridge access as well

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<sup>828</sup> Woolf (2007) pp. 117-118

<sup>829</sup> Flemish and Dutch

<sup>830</sup> Gerrard (2013)

as the military advantages conferred by controlling the defences of York. Control of these may have conferred ideological legitimacy and economic power.

In short, military, villa and urban sites (military and urban in particular) may have conferred on those able to exercise control over them a legitimacy, in part derived from the Roman heritage linked to them but also economic and military advantages resulting from the infrastructure around them. As Gerrard stated, when discussing fifth century occupation of villas: 'from these locations,<sup>831</sup> the remnants of the Romano-British elite exercised control from what was a traditional seat of power.'<sup>832</sup>

At the centre of this speculation is the notion of the existence of networks, operating separately from each other in both the east and the west of the region north of the Humber. In part, this may be due to existing infrastructure. With the placement of the Pennines, running north-south up the middle of the region, it has always been easier to communicate north-south than east-west in the region between the Humber and the Wall. Catterick is at the eastern entrance to one of only a few easy passes through the range. Other potential centres of power (and candidates for continuity) in the north-east of Britannia, such as York and Binchester, are ideally situated for control of elements of the Roman infrastructure as they are sited on river crossings on the primary north-south route (Dere Street). That these centres experienced a reduction in occupation and have shown few signs of early examples of the material culture associated with Germanic-speaking populations may have resulted from the independence and self-sufficient behaviours suggested for the East in Chapter 6. It is, perhaps, telling that river mouths such as the Tyne, Humber, and Tees are the locations where the earliest examples of material culture and burial customs associated with the Germanic-speaking elements of the continent have been found. Rather than representing the entry points for a Germanic-speaking invasion, where communication by road was more difficult, perhaps the elites close to the sea opted for this as the primary communication route. It is worth noting that, in the seventh century, Edwin's place of exile (East Anglia) was far more accessible by sea than by land if travelling from Yorkshire. As such, the populations of the North may have found themselves on the periphery of spheres of influence, being moderated through the communication of their more southerly neighbours' interactions with continental powers. If their southern neighbours were engaging with continental material culture, social practices and language, this too could have been

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<sup>831</sup> Presumably stabilised by the securing of their industrial production and their agricultural surplus.

<sup>832</sup> Gerrard (2013) p. 258.

transmitted into the North. The power relationships, trade and gift giving suggested for the relationship between the Merovingian Gaul and southern Britain could also have been mirrored by the relationships between groups within Britain. By engaging with the culture of their southern neighbours, the North-Sea-coast elite situated north of the Humber may have developed greater access to elements of that culture than their rivals further inland. Alternatively, direct trade and communication across the sea with the modern Netherlands, northern Germany, and Scandinavia may have been equally as achievable as communication and trade down the east coast of Britain, and may account for some differences in material culture. Through their easier engagement with both continental elites and elites along the coast of Britain, those elites in proximity to the North Sea may have become more powerful than their inland neighbours and through their control of access to these networks they may have gained the ability to exert control over larger areas. In this way, the kingdoms of Deira in the south of the eastern frontier region and Bernicia in the north may have emerged.

By contrast, those in the west of the region may have been able to engage more readily in the culture and social structures available in Wales and the Southwest and may have profited from doing so. If we are to imagine that Carlisle and Birdoswald formed part of the same network controlled by a peripatetic elite, then it seems likely that this elite would have engaged more readily with its neighbours around the Irish Sea than along Hadrian's Wall or through the Pennine passes. In part this may have been due to forts to the east of Birdoswald acting independently and, perhaps, viewing this north-western network as competitors. Whilst the presence of fourth-century Palestinian amphora at Carlisle<sup>833</sup> indicates that the Northwest was part of trade networks that stretched as far as the eastern Mediterranean under Roman rule, the absence of D and E ware from Carlisle and Birdoswald may indicate that they were not able to engage as fully with this network beyond the fifth century. The proliferation of these pottery types at Tintagel<sup>834</sup> may indicate that by the late fifth century<sup>835</sup> power within the Irish Sea was controlled by those close to its southern entrances rather than those at former Roman power centres. The presence of sixth-century E ware at sites in southwestern Scotland, which showed signs of wealth derived from precious metals,<sup>836</sup> could indicate a need for a greater degree of wealth than has been evidenced at Carlisle or

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<sup>833</sup> See section 5.6.1.

<sup>834</sup> Morris et al. (1999).

<sup>835</sup> Campbell (2007) p. 138.

<sup>836</sup> Campbell (2007) p. 138.

Birdoswald to access these elements of the network. From this we may be able to infer that a Roman military heritage may only have conferred a localised legitimacy whilst controlling access to trade networks could have represented a greater power. However, whilst those at Carlisle and Birdoswald may have lacked the wealth to attract the highest-status goods, they may have engaged with the Irish-Sea network in other ways. Or indeed, by the sixth century, the territory of the elites that had used Carlisle and Birdoswald may have grown enough to control other sites and rule some of those in southern Scotland where D and E ware has been found, or they may have come under the control of other groups. By the time that St Cuthbert visited, Carlisle may have slipped down the hierarchy of elite centres in the Northwest.

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