

# **Saint Alban and the Cult of Saints in Late Antique Britain**

Michael Moises Garcia

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## Abstract

This thesis presents an interdisciplinary study of cult of saints in Britain during Late Antiquity, utilising both textual and archaeological evidence. The study pursues question regarding when and why the cult of saints was introduced to Britain as well as the impact of the Anglo-Saxon conversion on native British cults. Chapters two and three assess case studies consisting of primary textual sources, including: *De Laude Sanctorum* by Victricius of Rouen; the anonymous *Passio Albani*; the *Vita Germani* by Constantius of Lyon; Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum*; the collected responses of Gregory the Great, known as the *Libellus Responsum*; Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*; the anonymous *Miracula Nynie*; Aelred of Rievaulx's *Vita Niniani*; and the anonymous *Vita Samsonis*. The archaeological evidence examined in chapters four and five consists of early medieval churches sited over Roman graves and in extra-mural cemeteries as well as distinctive burials from the fourth to seventh centuries referred to as 'special graves'. The evidence shows that the development of the cult of saints in Britain followed the same trajectory as on the Continent which reinforces the idea the Christianity continued in Britain after the Roman period.

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### List of Abbreviations

BAR British Archaeological Reports

CBA Council for British Archaeology

*DEB* Gildas, *De Excidio Britonum*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom

*DLS* Victricius of Rouen, *De Laude Sanctorum*

*HE* Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors

*MGH* *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*

*SRM* *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicorum*

## Chapter 1: Britain and the Late Antiquity Paradigm

### 1.1 Overview

This thesis addresses a problem in the study of the cult of saints in Britain. Until the 1970s, the prevalent historical view of the Roman to medieval transition in Britain held that in the fifth and sixth centuries Britain was isolated from the Continent, there was little or no continuity of Roman culture and Latin learning, and Christianity was more or less abandoned until the arrival of Augustine's mission in AD 597.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this view, which will be referred to as the Decline and Fall paradigm, most studies of the cult of saints in Britain begin with the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>2</sup> The cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron, which appear to have developed in the Roman period, are treated as anomalies. Furthermore, when these cults are discussed, their origins are rarely examined in depth. It is taken for granted that they emerged in the Roman period, immediately or soon after the supposed martyrdoms and sometime before the end of persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> Since then, there has been little

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see E. Thurlow Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913); R. G. Collingwood, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, *The Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943); J. N. L. Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> For example David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Wilhelm Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus des Protomartyr Angliae in Texten vor Beda*, *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse* (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1904); John Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban', *Hertfordshire Archaeology*, 1 (1968), 1-8; Martin Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church', in *Cathedral and City: St Albans Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Robert Runcie (London: Martyn Associates, 1977), pp. 23-42; G. R. Stephens, 'A Note on the Martyrdom of St Alban', *Hertfordshire Archaeology*, 9 (1986), 20-21; Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey: Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Monastery', in *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Martin Henig and Philip Lindley (Leeds: Maney, 2001), pp. 45-77; Jeremy Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs: Julius, Aaron and Alban at Caerleon', in *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Martin Henig and Philip Lindley (Leeds: Maney, 2001), pp. 38-44; Richard Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion of St Alban', in *Alban and St*

consideration for the substantial amount of recent scholarship on the development of the cult of saints on the Continent in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>4</sup> The present study addresses this discrepancy, examining the origins and development of the cult of saints in Britain up to the Anglo-Saxon conversion and placing it in the context of Western Europe.

The current understanding of the cult of saints is that, with the significant exception of SS. Peter and Paul in Rome, the cult of martyrs emerged in the late fourth and early fifth century, long after the end of the persecution of Christians and the Peace of the Church.<sup>5</sup> From the fifth century onwards the rise of martyr cults was followed by the development of cults dedicated to non-martyrs referred to as confessors.<sup>6</sup>

The development of the cult of saints described here differs from the general understanding of the cult of saints in Britain. The current understanding of the cult of saints in Britain in the early Middle Ages can be considered by three separate strands: martyr cults that arose in the Roman period before the fifth century, confessor cults that arose in western Britain and Ireland from the

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*Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Martin Henig and Philip Lindley (Leeds: Maney, 2001), pp. 30-37; Richard Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 75-154; Rosalind Niblett and Isobel Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns: An Assessment of St. Albans' Archaeology up to AD 1600* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2005); Richard Coates, 'Verulamium: The Romano-British Name of St Albans', *Studia Celtica* 39 (2005), 169-76.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ian Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France: Local Saints and Churches in Burgundy and the Auvergne 400-1000', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 155-87.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

<sup>6</sup> For the development of the terms *martyr* and *confessor* in antiquity, see Hippolyte Delehaye, *Sanctus: Essai sur le Culte des Saints dans l'Antiquité*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* (Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 1927). chapter 2, pp. 74-121. Although published in 1927, Delehaye's work has not undergone any substantial conceptual revisions.

seventh century, and confessor cults that developed during the Anglo-Saxon period from the seventh century.<sup>7</sup> Textual evidence dating to the fifth and sixth centuries attests the existence of a few martyr cults by the end of the Roman period, namely those of Alban, Julius and Aaron.<sup>8</sup> Archaeological and topographical evidence has been held by some to suggest the possibility of additional martyr cults at sites where early medieval churches overlie Roman mausolea or in extra-mural Roman cemeteries.<sup>9</sup> Textual evidence from the seventh and eighth centuries attests native British confessor cults at the time of the Anglo-Saxon conversion.<sup>10</sup>

The structure and scope of existing scholarship suggests an assumed discontinuity between the martyr cults that developed in the Roman period, the cults that arose in western Britain from the sixth century, and cults that developed in Anglo-Saxon England from the seventh century onwards.<sup>11</sup> The assumption of discontinuity arises from the fact that most studies of the cult of saints in Britain have worked within the Decline and Fall paradigm. To date, no research on the cult of saints in Britain has fully embraced the Late Antiquity paradigm, which has emerged as an alternative to the Decline and Fall view.

A new approach is needed, one that questions the discontinuity and employs an interdisciplinary methodology within the framework of Late Antiquity. Such an approach makes possible the re-assessment of early saints

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<sup>7</sup> For a recent appraisal of research to date, see Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'.

<sup>8</sup> There appears to be a single cult dedicated to both Julius and Aaron together, rather than two separate cults, one for each saint, since they are always mentioned together and were presumably martyred in the same place at the same time. See George C. Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent I: The Romano-British Church', *Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 8 (1992), 11-24; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'.

<sup>9</sup> Some examples include Stone-by-Faversham, Lullingstone, Folkestone. See below, pp. 23-24, and chapter four.

<sup>10</sup> The cults of Samson and Ninian are discussed in chapter three.

<sup>11</sup> See Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 85-86.

cults in Britain through the examination of case studies and evidence that have hitherto fallen outside the intersection of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Thus the aim of the present thesis is to answer important research questions about early saints' cults by re-contextualising important evidence and reveal patterns that have been invisible despite the major paradigm shift regarding the post-Roman world.

This chapter explores the paradigm shift and provides a summary of the context and key terminology of the present study. Research to date has worked within and perpetuated some of the assumptions of the Decline and Fall paradigm, such as the isolation of Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries and the discontinuity between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England. Late Antiquity is presented as a more appropriate framework to investigate the origins and development of the cult of saints in Britain. An interdisciplinary approach for studying the cult of saints in Britain employing both textual and archaeological evidence is outlined and the scope of the thesis is defined.

## 1.2 The "Decline and Fall" Paradigm

The idea of a decline and fall of Roman civilisation occurring with the disintegration of the Western Empire can be traced to the seminal work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, by Edward Gibbon, originally published 1776-88.<sup>12</sup> Gibbon attributed the collapse of the Western Roman Empire to the loss of civic virtue by the Roman citizens. According to

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. ed. by J. B. Bury. 7 vols (New York: Methuen, 1911). Although theologians and scholars of Church History responded to Gibbon's work from its publication, historians did not take much notice of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* until the late nineteenth century. See Arnaldo Momigliano, 'After Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*', in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. by Kurt Weitzmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), pp. 7-16. at pp. 7-9.

Gibbon, the decay of virtue was precipitated in part by Christianity, which encouraged the Romans to be less concerned with worldly matters and more willing to wait for the rewards of heaven.<sup>13</sup> The lack of concern for worldly matters in turn led to the Romans handing the defence of the empire over to barbarian tribes who then overran and destroyed the empire. Gibbon's work has been challenged and revised yet it remains hugely influential on historical scholarship.<sup>14</sup>

The general characteristics of the Decline and Fall paradigm are that the collapse of the political administration of the Western Roman Empire caused a drastic decline of civilisation and culture and there was a decrease in trade, economy, urban habitation, art, learning and knowledge. The circumstances and nature of the end of the Roman Empire in the West have been, and likely will continue to be, an important area of debate.<sup>15</sup> Basic issues are still contested, such as the scale of the barbarian invasions, the extent to which they

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. by J. B. Bury (New York: Heritage Press, 1926), I, 348-381.

<sup>14</sup> Glen W. Bowersock, 'The Vanishing Paradigm of the Fall of Rome', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 49 (1996), 29-43. Many scholars deliberately reference Gibbon by employing the phrase "Decline and Fall" or variations of it in the titles of articles and books. Some recent examples include Ian Wood, 'The Fall of the Western Empire and the End of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 18 (1987), 251-62; Walter A. Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London: Hambledon, 1989); Neil Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001); J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Brian Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). The phrase "Decline and Fall" is also employed to describe the general paradigm in Peter Heather, 'Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. by Michael Bentley (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 69-87. and Peter Brown, 'The World of Late Antiquity Revisited', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 72 (1997), 5 - 30.

<sup>15</sup> The popularity of this area of research is attested by a number of recent publications, such as Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*; Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization*; Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Walter A. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

are responsible for the collapse of Roman administration in the West, or whether this was caused by internal tensions and changes.<sup>16</sup> Subordinate to these issues are questions about the creation of the barbarian ethnic identities,<sup>17</sup> as well as the extent to which interpretations of such have been shaped by modern political attitudes.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these broad issues are debates over topics concerning material aspects such as the extent of continued urban habitation,<sup>19</sup> and the scale of commerce and trade.<sup>20</sup> These issues are all debated in relation to the other provinces of the West: Italy,<sup>21</sup> Spain,<sup>22</sup> and Gaul.<sup>23</sup> Concerning Britain, the Decline and Fall paradigm holds

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<sup>16</sup> A recent summary of this debate can be found in Guy Halsall, 'Movers and Shakers: The Barbarians and the Fall of Rome', *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), 131-45.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*; Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, The Transformation of the Roman World (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998); Andrew Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Ian Wood, 'Barbarians, Historians, and the Construction of National Identities', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2008), 61-81.

<sup>19</sup> M. W. Barley, *European Towns: Their Archaeology and Early History* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977); Neil Christie and Simon T. Loseby, *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996); Simon Esmonde Cleary, *Extra-Mural Areas of Romano-British Towns*, BAR British Series, 169. (Oxford: BAR, 1987); Simon Esmonde Cleary, *Rome in the Pyrenees: Lugdunum and the Convenae from the First Century B.C. to the Seventh Century A.D.* (London: Routledge, 2007); Simon Esmonde Cleary, 'Late Roman Towns in Britain and their Fate', in *Pre-Viking Lindsey*, ed. by Alan Vince (Lincoln: City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit, 1993), pp. 1-16; Riccardo Francovich and Richard Hodges, *Villa to Village: The Transformation of the Roman Countryside* (London: Duckworth, 2002); Martin Millett, 'Urban Topography and Social Identity in the Tiber Valley', in *Roman by Integration: Dimensions of Group Identity in Material Culture and Text*, ed. by Roman Roth, Johannes Keller, and Egon Flaig (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2007), pp. 71-82; John Rich, *The City in Late Antiquity*, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Chris Wickham, 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 3-36; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

<sup>21</sup> Neil Christie, *The Lombards: The Ancient Longobards* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Neil Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300-800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332-489* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Peter Heather, *The Goths, The Peoples of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994); Guy Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Henri Galinié, 'Archéologie et topographie historique de Tours - IVème - XIème siècles', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 6 (1978), 33-56; Henri Galinié, 'Reflections on Early Medieval Tours', in *The Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700-1050*, ed. by Brian Hobley and Richard Hodges (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1988), pp. 57-62.

that at the end of the Roman period Britain experienced a more dramatic collapse than other provinces in the Western Roman Empire: political and economic institutions disintegrated by the mid-fifth century or earlier; towns were abandoned; the Anglo-Saxons dominated late fifth-century Britain and conquered it in the sixth century. According to this paradigm, due to the combined effects of the withdrawal of Roman soldiers and administration and the Anglo-Saxon conquest, Britain was isolated from the Continent and Christianity was abandoned.<sup>24</sup>

A number of factors have contributed to the development of the Decline and Fall paradigm and the view that Britain experienced a more dramatic collapse than other western provinces. Foremost among these is the paucity of surviving textual sources from Britain, which can be explained by either poor survival of texts that were produced or few texts being produced. The lack of references to any British sources either from contemporary continental sources or later sources suggests that few texts were produced in Britain in the fifth or sixth century.<sup>25</sup> The only surviving narrative sources produced by British writers

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<sup>24</sup> This view was expressed as far back as Gibbon, *The History of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, III, chapter 38, pp. 501: 'After the destruction of the principal churches, the bishops, who had declined the crown of martyrdom, retired with the holy relics into Wales and Armorica; the remains of their flocks were left destitute of any spiritual food; the practice, and even the remembrance, of Christianity were abolished; and the British clergy might obtain some comfort from the damnation of the idolatrous strangers'; and as recently as Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages.*, pp. 47-48: 'The Romans abandoned the province in c.410, and its archaeology shows a nearly immediate systemic collapse...one result is that post-Roman society was nearly completely de-Romanized in all respects. The relatively small-scale Anglo-Saxon communities who crossed the sea into eastern Britain from c.450 onwards found communities whose social structure was more like that of the Anglo-Saxons themselves than that of their Roman ancestors. Among the communities whom the Anglo-Saxons never conquered, in modern Wales, Latin did not survive except as a specialist ecclesiastical language - Welsh is full of Latin loanwords, but it owes far less to Latin than, say, modern English does to French. Latin was probably lost in the Lowland Zone, too.' For a recent appraisal of the general view of Britain and the end of the Roman Empire, see Ken Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000), pp. 12-15.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Uses of Writing in Early Medieval Wales', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. by Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 15-38; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 88.



in the fifth or sixth century are Patrick's *Confessio* and *Epistola*, and Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum*. Furthermore, there are few contemporary references to Britain in continental sources. There are some references to Britain in fifth-century sources, including Prosper of Aquitaine's *Chronicon*, Constantius of Lyon's *Vita Germani*, and the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris. There are even fewer references to Britain in sixth-century sources. Gregory of Tours mentioned Britain only twice in his *Decem Libri Historiarum*. Both references are brief asides about the daughter of Ingoberg going to Kent for marriage, which is generally accepted as a reference to Bertha marrying Aethelbert.<sup>26</sup> The paucity of native textual sources and references to Britain has led to the long-standing assumption that Latin learning did not continue in Britain and that it was isolated from the continent.<sup>27</sup> For example, O. M. Dalton claimed that the sparsity of references to Britain in Gregory's works 'illustrates the lack of intercourse between Gaul and England in the later days of Saxon heathenism.'<sup>28</sup> More recently, Raymond Van Dam has stated that the lack of references to Britain in the work of Gregory of Tours is not surprising because the Anglo-Saxon invasion had isolated it from the continent.<sup>29</sup>

Another contributing factor to the Decline and Fall paradigm has been the uncritical acceptance and selective interpretation of the narratives presented in the surviving British sources, namely Gildas, and later sources, particularly

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<sup>26</sup> *MGH SRM* I.1, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison. Gregory mentions Ingoberg's daughter getting married and going to Kent in book IV, chapter 26 and book 9, chapter 26, pp. 157 & 445. For an English translation see Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. O. M. Dalton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 135 & 398.

<sup>27</sup> For a recent summary on the evidence for contact between Britain and the continent in the fifth and sixth centuries, see Ian Wood, 'Britain and the Continent in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: The Evidence of Ninian', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. by Jane Murray (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 71-82.

<sup>28</sup> Tours, *The History of the Franks*, pp. 586-87.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Martyrs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), p. 9.

Bede. Gildas and Bede both present narratives that describe a dramatic collapse of society in Britain and do not emphasise continuity.<sup>30</sup>

Until recently, the narratives of Gildas and Bede were accepted as straightforward history, perpetuating the idea of a dramatic collapse.<sup>31</sup> They each had their own reasons for describing a large-scale systemic collapse. Gildas' purpose was to shock the religious and secular leaders of Britain into returning to acceptable standards of behaviour.<sup>32</sup> Bede took advantage of Gildas' negative portrayal of the British to legitimise Anglo-Saxon political and cultural dominance. Procopius and Zosimus also present similar narratives that reinforce the idea of Britain experiencing a cataclysmic disintegration, although their understanding of events differed from contemporary western writers.<sup>33</sup>

The traditional period boundaries used in scholarship have reinforced the Decline and Fall paradigm. The most frequently cited date for the end of Roman Britain is AD 410, a date much earlier than the traditional date for the end of the Western Roman Empire, AD 476.<sup>34</sup> The attribution of this date to the end of Roman Britain derives in part from Bede. He cited it as the end of Roman rule in Britain after the usurper Constantine went to the Continent with all the soldiers

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<sup>30</sup> *DEB*, cc. 13-26; *HE*, book I, cc. 9-22.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Chapman Stacey, 'Text and Society', in *After Rome*, ed. by Thomas Charles-Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 220-57. at p. 242. For some examples of scholars who accepted Gildas and Bede's narratives, see Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology, AD 367-634* (London: Allen Lane, 1971); Collingwood, *Roman Britain*; Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England*; E. A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia*, 10 (1979), 203-26; John H. Ward, 'Vortigern and the End of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 3 (1972), 277-89.

<sup>32</sup> *DEB*, chapter 1, pp. 87-89.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984), pp. 1-26

<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. X. Noble, ed., *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. xxiv.

to secure his claim, leaving Britain defenceless.<sup>35</sup> Bede also linked it to the sack of Rome by Alaric and the Vandals.<sup>36</sup> This is also the date attributed to the letter from Honorius to the citizens of Britain advising them to look to their own defences.<sup>37</sup> Thus many scholars have not considered aspects of Roman Britain beyond this date.<sup>38</sup> Bede is also responsible for emphasising the significance of the date AD 597, the arrival of Augustine to convert Aethelbert of Kent. Bede presents this as a new beginning for Christianity in Britain, the start of the Anglo-Saxon conversion.<sup>39</sup> Just as classicists have been reluctant to seek continuities beyond AD 410, Anglo-Saxonists have been disinclined to seek the origins of Anglo-Saxon Christianity prior to AD 597.<sup>40</sup> The reluctance on behalf of scholars to look for aspects of Roman culture in Britain after AD 410 or Christianity between then and AD 597 partly explains the perceived discontinuity between the martyr cults of Roman Britain and the confessor cults of western Britain and Anglo-Saxon England.

The lack of cross-disciplinary discourse has complicated the investigation and understanding of the Roman to medieval transition in Britain. History and archaeology have a long and complicated relationship which often tends to

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<sup>35</sup> *HE*, I.11-12, pp. 38-44. For continuity on Hadrian's Wall, see Fred Orton, Ian Wood, and Clare Lees, *Fragments of History: Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp 110-15. On Christianity in North Britain, see Michael R. McCarthy, 'Christianity in Northern Britain in the Late-Roman Period', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. by Jane Murray (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 57-70.

<sup>36</sup> *HE*, I.11, pp.38-40. See also Malcolm Godden, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths: Rewriting the Sack of Rome', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 31 (2002), 47-68.

<sup>37</sup> Zosimus, *Zosimus' New History*. trans. Ronald T. Ridley, *Byzantina Australiensia*, 2 (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982). VI.x.2.

<sup>38</sup> Examples include Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Dorothy Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991); Dorothy Watts, *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (London: Routledge, 1998); Raymond Perry, *Anglo-Saxon Herefordshire 410 AD -1086 AD* (Gloucester: Oxengard, 2002); Martyn J. Whittock, *The Origins of England 410-600* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> *HE*, I.23, pp.68-70.

<sup>40</sup> Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*. 3rd edn, *The Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

appear as a competition over which has the better method and/or evidence for investigating the past.<sup>41</sup> Archaeology is often perceived as having a value inversely proportional to the number of extant documentary sources, rather than having its own intrinsic value.<sup>42</sup> Despite frequent calls for more discourse between the disciplines, meaningful dialogue between history and archaeology is difficult and rare.<sup>43</sup> One of the main difficulties in achieving a dialogue is that practitioners of one discipline are not always familiar with the critical methodology of the other. This often leads to the use of off-the-shelf interpretations of one discipline to shape interpretations in the other.<sup>44</sup> A good example of such would be the attempts to trace the invasion and advancement in Britain after the Roman period of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. E. T. Leeds and J. N. L. Myres identified the different tribes as described by Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* with particular material cultures in an effort to corroborate a straightforward reading of that text.<sup>45</sup> Excavations at St Alban's by Martin Biddle are another example of archaeological investigation undertaken to corroborate historical sources without questioning the sources

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 200.

<sup>42</sup> Grahame Clarke, *Archaeology and Society: Reconstructing the Prehistoric Past*. 3rd edn (London: Methuen, 1957), pp. 20-22.

<sup>43</sup> See John Moreland, *Archaeology and Text* (London: Duckworth, 2001), pp. 9-32; Guy Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. by Michael Bentley (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 805-27. esp. pp. 817-821; Catherine Hills, 'History and Archaeology: The State of Play in Early Medieval Europe', *Antiquity*, 81 (2007), 191-200. See also Morn Capper, 'The Practical Implications of Interdisciplinary Approaches: Research in Anglo-Saxon East Anglia', in *Approaching Interdisciplinarity: Archaeology, History and the Study of Early Medieval Britain, c. 400-1100*, ed. by Zoë L. Devlin and Caroline N. J. Holas-Clark (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 10-23; Zoë L. Devlin, 'Approaching Interdisciplinarity', in *Approaching Interdisciplinarity: Archaeology, History and the Study of Early Medieval Britain, c. 400-1100*, ed. by Zoë L. Devlin and Caroline N. J. Holas-Clark (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 72-75; Alex Woolf, 'A Dialogue of the Deaf and the Dumb: Archaeology, History and Philology', in *Approaching Interdisciplinarity: Archaeology, History and the Study of Early Medieval Britain, c. 400-1100*, ed. by Zoë L. Devlin and Caroline N. J. Holas-Clark (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 3-9.

<sup>44</sup> Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography', p. 821.

<sup>45</sup> Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*; Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England*.

themselves.<sup>46</sup> Richard Sharpe's recent discussion of putative martyr cult sites was descriptive and did not include any critical discussion of the archaeological interpretations.<sup>47</sup> The uncritical use of evidence from one discipline to shape interpretation in another has served to reinforce the Decline and Fall paradigm.

Although the Decline and Fall paradigm has been superseded by Late Antiquity, its legacy persists. Many scholars still maintain that Britain experienced a more dramatic collapse than other western provinces, that there was little continuity of Roman culture or Latin learning, that Christianity was largely abandoned, and that Britain was isolated from the continent, despite the mounting evidence to the contrary.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3 The Rise of "Late Antiquity"

The concept of Late Antiquity as a historiographical paradigm emerged in the 1970s with the work of Peter Brown.<sup>49</sup> It challenges the traditional view that at

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<sup>46</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Martin Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archaeology in Honour of Dr. H. M. Taylor*, ed. by Richard Morris and L. A. S. Butler (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1986), pp. 1-31; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

<sup>47</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 126-28.

<sup>48</sup> Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain*; W. H. C. Frend, 'Problems of Late Antiquity', *The Classical Review*, 24 (1974), 283-84; W. H. C. Frend, 'Ecclesia Britannica: Prelude or Dead End?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), 129-44; W. H. C. Frend, 'Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 23 (1992), 121-31; W. H. C. Frend, 'Roman Britain, A Failed Promise', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Richard Sharpe and Alan Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 79-92; Sheppard Frere, 'The End of Towns in Roman Britain', in *The Civitas Capitals of Roman Britain: Papers Given at a Conference Held at the University of Leicester, 13-15 December, 1963*, ed. by John Wacher (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), pp. 87-100; Brian Ward-Perkins, 'Urban Continuity?', in *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Neil Christie and Simon T. Loseby (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 4-17; Brian Ward-Perkins, 'Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 513-33; Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*; Watts, *Religion in Late Roman Britain*.

<sup>49</sup> See especially Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), 80-101; Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971); Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

the end of the Roman Empire civilization experienced a decline and fall.<sup>50</sup> Scholars of Late Antiquity view it as a period of innovation and exciting cultural change rather than stagnation, decay, collapse, and catastrophe.<sup>51</sup> They downplay the significance of the barbarian invasions and the disintegration of Roman administration in the Western Empire.<sup>52</sup> Late Antiquity is also characterised by an emphasis on the religious, cultural, and social history and continuities of Roman culture into the Middle Ages, such as Latin learning and the rise of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> One of the most significant accomplishments of research regarding Late Antiquity has been the integration of Christianity and its classical heritage into the mainstream of historical studies.<sup>54</sup> There is a heavy concentration on spirituality which calls attention to new developments such as monasticism and the cult of saints.<sup>55</sup> Scholarship associated with Late Antiquity is also notable for insights gained from various disciplines, including anthropology and critical theory.<sup>56</sup>

Some aspects of Late Antiquity have been criticised. One criticism is its emphasis on spirituality at the expense of other themes such as economics and

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<sup>50</sup> For recent assessments of the Late Antiquity paradigm, see Brown, 'The World of Late Antiquity Revisited'; Bowersock, 'The Vanishing Paradigm of the Fall of Rome'; Averil Cameron, 'The Perception of Crisis', *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo*, 45 (1998), 9-34; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 45 (2001), 1-11; Peter Heather, 'Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. by Michael Bentley (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 69-87; Edward James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2008), 20-30.

<sup>51</sup> Heather, 'Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West'; James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity'.

<sup>52</sup> Cameron, 'The Perception of Crisis'; Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline'. at pp. 3-4. James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline', p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Heather, 'Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West', p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, 'The World of Late Antiquity Revisited'; Heather, 'Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West'.

politics.<sup>57</sup> Another criticism of Late Antiquity is the insistence on continuity and complete rejection of decline, even when quantifiable data are available.<sup>58</sup> Wolf Liebeschuetz has argued that the rejection of decline is an application of multiculturalism due to the influence of modern political theory within the field of late antique studies.<sup>59</sup> The significance of such observations is that the perception of the period, whether it was a time of decline and decay or innovation and change, depends on what themes are pursued. Liebeschuetz's criticisms are not a problem because they do not invalidate approaches to the period that emphasise spirituality and cultural history.<sup>60</sup>

Another criticism of Late Antiquity is the chronological ambiguity of the period. There is little agreement about when the period begins or ends, and whether or not it actually forms a coherent period that merits its own label.<sup>61</sup> Alongside the chronological ambiguity is a geographical one. Many would characterise Late Antiquity as applying only to the area of the Roman Empire while some include within it the Persian Empire.<sup>62</sup> I do not view chronological and geographical ambiguity as major problems since they are endemic to any discussion of periodisation. An additional criticism is that the emphasis on the

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<sup>57</sup> Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline', p. 6. James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> See especially Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*; Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline'; Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization*, pp. 169-72.

<sup>59</sup> Liebeschuetz, 'Late Antiquity and the Concept of Decline', p. 6. See also Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 3; James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> For a rebuttal of Liebeschuetz's characterisation, see James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', pp. 27-28.

<sup>61</sup> Arnaldo Marcone, 'A Long Late Antiquity? Considerations on a Controversial Periodization', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2008), 4-19; James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 24.

Eastern Mediterranean has led to a neglect of the western provinces.<sup>63</sup>

However, the work of scholars such as Ian Wood and Raymond Van Dam has gone some way to address the initial neglect of western provinces, especially Gaul, within the Late Antiquity paradigm.<sup>64</sup>

Despite recent efforts to include the western provinces of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, Britain is rarely considered to be part of the new paradigm.<sup>65</sup> Debate continues regarding the inclusion of Britain within Late Antiquity due to the persisting assumptions about Britain after the end of Roman administration.<sup>66</sup> The Decline and Fall view of Britain, that it fell faster and more completely than other provinces, that it was de-Romanised more completely, that Christianity was largely abandoned and that Britain was isolated from the Continent remains the predominant view.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, some scholars have

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<sup>63</sup> James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 25. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization*, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup> Ian Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country', in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp. 61-76; Ian Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås: Viktoria, 1983); Ian Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984), pp. 1-25; Wood, 'The Fall of the Western Empire'; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*; Ian Wood, 'The Barbarian Invasions and the First Settlements', in *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, ed. by Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 516-37; Ian Wood, 'Augustine and Gaul', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 68-82; Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001); Ian Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Mayke de Jong, Francis Theuws, and Carine van Rhijn (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 137-54; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'; Ian Wood, 'Continuity or Calamity: The Constraints of Literary Models', in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. by J. F. Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), pp. 9-18; Wood, 'Barbarians, Historians, and the Construction of National Identities'; Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*.

<sup>65</sup> Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> See Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, pp. 12-15; Simon Esmonde Cleary, 'The Roman to Medieval Transition', in *Britons and Romans: Advancing an Archaeological Agenda* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 2001), pp. 90-97; Rob Collins and James Gerrard, eds., *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700, BAR 365* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004); James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity', p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, p. 12.; See especially Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain*.



pursued particular aspects of Britain in the context of Late Antiquity. Recent surveys have emphasised cultural continuities from Roman Britain.<sup>68</sup> Some scholars have examined the development of ethnicities in Britain and the emergence of English identity.<sup>69</sup> Other scholars have argued for the continuity of Christianity from the end of Roman Britain to the mission of Augustine.<sup>70</sup> The works of Gildas have been reconsidered and placed in the context of Late Antiquity. His writings are now seen as attesting the continuity of Christianity and Latin learning in Britain.<sup>71</sup> Such research has begun to abrogate the Decline and Fall characterisation of Britain.

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<sup>68</sup> See Ken Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300-800* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994); Ken Dark, ed., *External Contacts and the Economy of Late Roman and Post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996); Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*; Esmonde Cleary, 'The Roman to Medieval Transition'; Anthea Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West: The Archaeology of Cultural Identity AD 400-800* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Nick Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Nick Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London: Seaby, 1992); Nick Higham, *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, v. 7 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007); John Hines, 'The Becoming of the English: Identity, Material Culture and Language in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1994), pp. 49-59; Nicholas Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity', in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. by Julia M.H. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 221-46; Nicholas Brooks, *Bede and the English*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St. Paul's Rectory, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London: Batsford, 1981); David Petts, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003); Clare Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of St Augustine', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 107-51; Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent'; Mark A. Handley, 'The Origins of Christian Commemoration in Late Antique Britain', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 177-99; Jeremy Knight, 'The Early Christian Latin Inscriptions of Britain and Gaul: Chronology and Context', in *The Early Church in Wales and the West: Recent Work in Early Christian Archaeology, History and Place-names*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford: Oxbow, 1992), pp. 45-50; Jeremy Knight, *The End of Antiquity: Archaeology, Society, and Religion, AD 235-700* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999); Jeremy Knight, 'Basilicas and Barrows: Christian Origins in Wales and Western Britain', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 119-26; McCarthy, 'Christianity in Northern Britain'.

<sup>71</sup> See Thomas O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); Michael Lapidge and David N. Dumville, eds., *Gildas: New Approaches*, Studies in Celtic History (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984); Karen George, *Gildas' De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

#### 1.4 The Cult of Saints

The paradigm shift from Decline and Fall to Late Antiquity is central to the study of the cult of saints. In the following I shall establish the terminology employed in my discussion and set the context of the present study against the backdrop of the Late Antiquity paradigm.

The cult of saints was one of the key developments of Christianity in Late Antiquity. A saint's cult is the institution that developed around the veneration of a holy person. Defining a holy person is a complicated task. Peter Brown has argued that there were no strict qualifications for holy men and saints in early Christianity, that the definition for saint or holy man should be viewed as fluid.<sup>72</sup> However, James Howard-Johnston has suggested working definitions for 'holy man' and 'saint'. He described a holy person as someone 'of noted piety and discernment, whose prayers were reckoned to be particularly efficacious, and who gained the respect of those who encountered him or her'; and he defined saints as 'either a martyr who died for his or her faith, or a holy man or woman singled out for posthumous commemoration and veneration, or someone with more dubious credentials.'<sup>73</sup> Howard-Johnston also described the conditions needed to be satisfied for a holy person to be recognised as a saint. This included the following: the existence and qualities of the holy person were known to more than a handful of contemporaries; the holy person stood out from their peers regarding exercise of religious authority, accomplishing feats, and/or working miracles. These criteria do not necessarily represent all the

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<sup>72</sup> Brown, 'The Rise and Function'; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber, 1982).

<sup>73</sup> For the definitions and what follows, see James Howard-Johnston, 'Introduction', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), pp. 1-24; at pp. 5-6.

circumstances under which someone could become a saint. For instance, certain powerful figures, usually clergy, but sometimes political leaders, could be recognised as saints by their partisans. In the east, many cults developed around living holy men, who acted as arbiters in disputes, while in the west, the cult of saints was a phenomenon that developed predominantly around dead holy men.

For the purposes of the present study, I offer a definition that draws on some of the characteristics described by Howard-Johnston with a significant modification. Here a saint is defined as a person depicted in a primary source as someone who either died for their faith and/or accomplished feats and worked miracles. The emphasis on primary sources is significant for several reasons. It opens up the possibility of considering saints who never existed yet were invented and promoted as real historical figures. It also highlights the importance of texts for the commemoration and veneration of saints and the promotion of their cults. A saint's cult can be defined as the community that promoted the veneration of a saint as well as the artefacts used to promote a saint, including physical objects such as relics and structures as well as texts.

The cult of saints arose in the late fourth century, when it was promoted by figures such as Ambrose of Milan, Paulinus of Nola, and Damasus of Rome.<sup>74</sup> Cults were promoted through the production and distribution of texts, normally *passiones* and *vitae*. The cult of saints was initially focused on the relics of martyrs who died in the persecutions before the Peace of the Church, begun by the Edict of Milan in 313. Cults often began at the sites of martyrs' graves, normally in extra-mural cemeteries or in the catacombs of Rome. The

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<sup>74</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

graves were the sites where the martyrs were commemorated with feasts celebrated on the anniversary of their martyrdom, the *dies natalis*. The grave did not necessarily remain the primary site of a cult. The relics could have been, and often were, translated to new sites and housed in structures purpose-built to hold them, such as shrines, chapels and churches. One of the most famous examples of a translation occurred in 386, when Ambrose of Milan translated the relics of Protasius and Gervasius to the new basilica he had just constructed.<sup>75</sup> Ambrose placed the relics under the high altar, setting a precedent that became established in the liturgy in Western Europe.<sup>76</sup>

If relics were left in the grave, the grave itself often experienced architectural elaboration, with shrines, chapels and churches built over the site of the original burial. There are several terms used to refer to the structures erected over the graves of martyrs: *cellae memoriae* and *martyria*. *Cellae memoriae* are a type of mausoleum, small buildings which provided shelter at the graveside. The textual evidence indicates these were first built in Gaul and Italy in the late fourth and early fifth century.<sup>77</sup> The most complete and best documented surviving example of a *cella memoriae* erected over a martyr's grave is San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro in Milan.<sup>78</sup> Due to the widespread belief that burial near the saints, *ad sanctos*, would improve one's chances of salvation, *cellae memoriae* became the focus of burial for other Christians who wanted to be in proximity to the holy dead. Sometimes the *cellae memoriae*, or simply *memoriae*, were enlarged to accommodate additional burials. *Martyria* were

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<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones*, IX.7; idem. *De Civitate Dei*, XXII.8; idem. *Sermonin 286 natal Mm. Ss. Gerv. et Prot.*

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 37.

<sup>77</sup> Gillian Vallance Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 226.

<sup>78</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 226.

defined by Grabar as monuments built for the purpose of marking the location of the tombs of martyrs and organising the space around their grave for the use of the cult and sheltering the faithful.<sup>79</sup> Krautheimer defined *martyria* as structures over the sites that bore witness to the Christian faith, either by referring to events in Christ's life or passion, or sheltering the grave of a martyr.<sup>80</sup> Gillian Mackie has advocated a distinction between the two whereby *memoriae* consist of sites of primary burial and *martyria* comprise secondary shrines, sites built to house relics but otherwise unconnected to the life of the saint whose relics they housed.<sup>81</sup> The present study does not employ this distinction because in most of the academic literature the terms are used more or less interchangeably. The preferred terms from each source, whether primary or secondary, will be used here, and if a distinction is significant, it will be noted.

Modern scholarship on the cult of saints was pioneered by Hippolyte Delehaye.<sup>82</sup> In *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs*, published in 1912, Delehaye examined the primary textual sources relating to the origins and development of the cult of saints and surveyed the evidence across the Roman Empire province by province.<sup>83</sup> Britain was mentioned only briefly, at the end of the section on Gaul, in which Alban is the only martyr named.<sup>84</sup> Delehaye cited his martyrdom at Verulamium (the name of the Roman settlement adjacent to modern St Albans), the connection between Alban's cult, Auxerre and Germanus by

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<sup>79</sup> André Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le Culte des Reliques et l'Art Chrétien Antique*. 2 vols (Paris: Collège de France, 1946). I, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 361.

<sup>81</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 213.

<sup>82</sup> Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1912); Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1921).

<sup>83</sup> Delehaye, *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs*; Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires*.

<sup>84</sup> Delehaye, *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs*, p. 412.

Alban's feast day, as well as references to the saint in the writings of Gildas, Fortunatus and Bede. André Grabar examined the architectural development of the cult of saints in *Martyrium*, originally published in 1946.<sup>85</sup> Grabar's work has been expanded on by scholars such as Richard Krautheimer, John Crook, and Gillian Mackie.<sup>86</sup> Regarding the current state of studies on the cult of saints in Late Antiquity, the work of Peter Brown has arguably had the greatest impact.<sup>87</sup> Brown incorporated ideas from disciplines such as anthropology into his research, considering saints and their cults in the wider context of society. Brown's work has been followed by other scholars such as Ian Wood, Raymond Van Dam, Averil Cameron, Gillian Clarke, and Alan Thacker.<sup>88</sup>

There are no identifiable trends in scholarship concerning the cult of saints in late antique Britain, mainly due to the fact that it has not been widely recognised as a distinct topic *per se*. Scholars have focused on the cults for which textual evidence survives, namely the cults of Julius and Aaron and

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<sup>85</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium*.

<sup>86</sup> Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*; John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c.300-1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*.

<sup>87</sup> See for example James Howard-Johnston, 'Introduction', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-24. For Brown's work, see especially Brown, 'The Rise and Function'; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

<sup>88</sup> Wood, 'Topographies of Power'; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*; Averil Cameron, 'On Defining the Holy Man', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 27-44; Gillian Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7 (1999), 365-99; Gillian Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 161-76; Alan Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-44; Alan Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 45-74; Alan Thacker, 'Martyr Cults Within the Walls: Saints and Relics in the Roman *Tituli* of the Fourth to Seventh Centuries', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Jane Annette Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 31-70.

especially Alban. In 1904, Wilhelm Meyer published an edition of the *Passio Albani* that included two of the three surviving versions of the text.<sup>89</sup> The third version of the text has yet to be published in a proper edition,<sup>90</sup> although its significance in the textual tradition was emphasised by Richard Sharpe in 2001.<sup>91</sup> In 1941, Wilhelm Levison published an article that had a large impact on the study of the cult of saints in Britain.<sup>92</sup> In this article, Levison reviewed the textual evidence for the cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron and compared these cults to contemporary continental cults. Levison also questioned the authenticity of these cults as Roman martyr cults. Levison did not reach any solid conclusions and speculated that one day archaeological evidence might shed further light on the matter. Levison's work will be discussed in depth in chapter two. Martin Biddle followed Levison's conjecture and conducted several series of archaeological excavations at St Albans from the 1970s to the 1990s, yet Levison's speculation remains unsubstantiated.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Jeremy Knight has reviewed the evidence for the cult of Julius and Aaron at Caerleon, where the evidence is also inconclusive.<sup>94</sup> Some additional sites have been suggested as possible locations of martyr cults based on archaeological and topographical evidence, including the sites of Stone-by-Faversham,<sup>95</sup> Lullingstone,<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*.

<sup>90</sup> The text of one of the manuscripts containing the third version of the text has been published in Ian Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', *Bulletin du Centre d'Études Médiévales d'Auxerre*, 13 (2009), 123-29. A transcription of the earliest manuscript of the E text can be found in Ian Wood, 'Levison and St Alban', (forthcoming).

<sup>91</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'.

<sup>92</sup> Wilhelm Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', *Antiquity*, 15 (1941), 337-59.

<sup>93</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

<sup>94</sup> Knight, 'Basilicas and Barrows'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'.

<sup>95</sup> W. Whiting, William Hawley, and Thomas May, *Report on the Excavation of the Roman Cemetery at Ospringe, Kent*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London (Oxford: Society of Antiquaries, 1931). J. T. Irvine, 'On the Remains of Saxon or Early Norman Work in the Church of Stone Juxta Faversham', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 31 (1875), 249-58. Harold McCarter Taylor and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). II, p. 577. Eric

Folkestone;<sup>97</sup> St Martin's, Canterbury;<sup>98</sup> Icklingham;<sup>99</sup> Wells;<sup>100</sup> St Helen's and St Alban's, Worcester; St Michael's, Lichfield; and St Andrew's, Wroxeter;<sup>101</sup> and St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester.<sup>102</sup> The archaeological evidence at all these sites will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

Aside from Levison's article of 1941, the most significant published work regarding the cult of saints in late antique Britain is Richard Sharpe's 'Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain', published in 2002.<sup>103</sup> Sharpe attempted to integrate the disparate evidence, including archaeological, textual,

Fletcher and G. Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham', *Antiquaries' Journal*, 49 (1969), 273-94; Eric Fletcher and G. Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham Second Report', *Antiquaries' Journal*, 57 (1977), 67-72. H. M. Taylor and D. D. Yonge, 'The Ruined Church at Stone-by-Faversham: a Re-Assessment', *Archaeological Journal*, 138 (1981), 118-45.

<sup>96</sup> G. W. Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent. Vol. 1, The Site* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1979).

<sup>97</sup> R. C. Jenkins, 'Archaeological Progress in Kent', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of London*, 5 (1873), 478-81; R. C. Jenkins, 'On a Roman Hypocaust Discovered at Folkestone AD 1875', *Archaeologica Cantiana*, 10 (1876), 173-77. Samuel Edward Winbolt, *Roman Folkestone: A Record of Excavation of Roman Villas at East Wear Bay, With Speculations and Historical Sketches on Related Subjects* (London: Methuen, 1925). Tyler Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, BAR British Series, 390 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), p. 169.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Jenkins, 'St Martin's Church at Canterbury: A Survey of the Earliest Structural Features', *Medieval Archaeology*, 9 (1965), 11-15; Harold McCarter Taylor and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 143-45. T. Tatton-Brown, 'St Martin's Church in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries', in *The Parish of St Martin and St Paul, Canterbury: Historical Essays in Honour of James Hobbs*, ed. by M. Sparks (Canterbury: Friends of St Martins, 1980), pp. 11-18; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 170-74.

<sup>99</sup> Stanley West and Judith Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham', *East Anglian Archaeology*, 3 (1976), 63-125.

<sup>100</sup> Warwick Rodwell, 'From Mausoleum to Minster: The Early Development of Wells Cathedral', in *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland: Studies Presented to C.A. Raleigh Radford*, ed. by Susan M. Pearce (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1982), pp. 49-59; Warwick Rodwell, 'The Origins of Wells Cathedral', *Antiquity*, 56 (1982), 215-18; Warwick Rodwell, 'Above and Below Ground: Archaeology at Wells Cathedral', in *The Archaeology of Cathedrals*, ed. by T. W. T. Tatton-Brown and Julian Munly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 115-34; Warwick Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93* (London: English Heritage, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> For the churches at Worcester, Lichfield and Wroxeter, see Steven Bassett, 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands: The Transition from British to Anglo-Saxon Control', in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. by John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 13-40.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Bryant and Carolyn Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church, Gloucester, 1978-9', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 121 (2003), 97-178.

<sup>103</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'.



and philological. Sharpe's article was the first published work to consider the general phenomenon of the cult of saints in late antique Britain rather than focus on individual cults.

The rise of the Late Antiquity paradigm and the lingering assumptions from the Decline and Fall paradigm have created some inconsistencies. With the exception of the aforementioned article by Richard Sharpe, the evidence has seldom been integrated into a comprehensive synthesis of all the British material, even though such surveys have been produced for later periods.<sup>104</sup> Scholarship has tended to focus on the few cults for which textual evidence survives, the cults of Alban and Julius and Aaron. Investigation of these cults has tended to pursue questions about the date of the supposed martyrdoms, and the locations of their shrines.<sup>105</sup> Research on these cults has not integrated them into the wider context of the cult of saints across Europe in Late Antiquity. The introduction and development of the cult of saints in Britain during Late Antiquity has not been considered. It is taken for granted that the origins of the cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron occurred in the Roman period, soon after their putative martyrdoms, because they could not have happened later, in the fifth or sixth century, when Britain was supposedly isolated and Christianity largely abandoned. These martyr cults are seen as unique examples of uninterrupted continuity from the Roman period into the Middle Ages, despite the fact that

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<sup>104</sup> E.g. Rollason, *Saints and Relics*.

<sup>105</sup> Arthur Wade-Evans, 'The Site of St Alban's Martyrdom', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5 (1905), 256-59; C. E. Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', *The English Historical Review*, 56 (1941), 353-73; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'; Walter Bader and Herbert van Bebber, *Sechzehnhundert Jahre Xantener Dom* (Cologne: DuMont, 1964); Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'; Stephen Matthews, 'St John's Church and the Early History of Chester', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 76 (2002), 63-80.

there are no cults with evidence for uninterrupted continuity of veneration from the period of persecutions into the middle ages in the West except in Rome.

The Late Antiquity paradigm has not been applied appropriately to the study of the cult of saints in Britain. Sharpe employed the terminology of Late Antiquity and viewed the cult of saints as a thread of continuity running from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>106</sup> However, he perpetuated some of the assumptions of the Decline and Fall paradigm. He took for granted that Alban, Julius and Aaron were authentic martyrs whose cults began shortly after their martyrdoms and neglected the research which shows the cult of saints emerged in the late fourth and early fifth century, long after the end of Christian persecutions.<sup>107</sup> In the present study, the evidence shows that the cult of saints developed in Britain along the same trajectory as on the continent, that is, it emerged in the early fifth century rather than the early fourth. Thus, it will be said that the history of Christianity in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries roughly followed that of mainland Western Europe, at least with respect to the cult of saints. The evidence considered here suggests that Britain was not isolated from the continent, that there were more aspects of continuity than previously assumed, and Britain can be included in Late Antiquity.

### **1.5 Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Cult of Saints**

The evidence for the cult of saints transgresses modern disciplinary boundaries. However, most research has tended to focus on either the textual evidence or the material manifestation of cults. The study of the texts used to promote cults

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<sup>106</sup> Sharpe's work will be discussed in depth in chapter two of the present study.

<sup>107</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints'; Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint'; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*.

via *passiones* and *vitae* normally occurs under the discipline of history. The study of the material manifestation of cults typically falls under art history, architectural history and archaeology.

The characteristics that separate historical research from archaeology can be generally summarised in the following way. Textual sources tend to be discrete. They were written by individual authors, for many of whom some biographical information survives. Textual sources can also normally be placed within an absolute chronology. The composition of texts as well as the events they describe can usually be given accurate, if not always precise, calendar dates. Examples of historical approaches include the work of Hippolyte Delehaye, Wilhelm Levison, and Peter Brown.<sup>108</sup> Archaeological interpretation typically presents a diachronic perspective, describing continuity and change over time. Examples of these studies include André Grabar, Richard Krautheimer, John Crook, Gillian Mackie, and Martin Biddle.<sup>109</sup>

Scholars who work primarily in one discipline often reference evidence studied in other disciplines. Most such instances cannot be considered interdisciplinary because when evidence from another discipline is cited, scholars often only use simplistic interpretations without employing critical methodology.<sup>110</sup> An interdisciplinary approach does not simply consist of creating a checklist of the points in which historical and archaeological evidence

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<sup>108</sup> Delehaye, *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs*; Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires*; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

<sup>109</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium*; Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*; Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c. 300-1200*; Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

<sup>110</sup> Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography'. at p. 819. Hills, 'History and Archaeology: The State of Play in Early Medieval Europe'.

agree or disagree. Interdisciplinarity entails the investigation of questions that can be answered by recourse to evidence from more than one discipline while employing the critical methodology of each discipline involved. Truly interdisciplinary studies are rare.<sup>111</sup>

The paucity of interdisciplinary studies is due in part to the difficulty in establishing a meaningful dialogue between textual and archaeological evidence. The relationship between the disciplines of archaeology and history is long and complicated.<sup>112</sup> As Halsall has pointed out, the most frequent uses of archaeological material by historians, and historical archaeologists, can be divided into three categories: illustrative, in which archaeological evidence is used to illustrate the daily lives of people during the period under discussion; justificatory, in which crude and simple interpretations of archaeological data are used to prove facts described in historical texts; and 'filling in the gaps', in which archaeology is used to investigate areas where textual sources present little or no information.<sup>113</sup> Regarding the cult of saints, most uses fall into Halsall's 'justificatory' category. Textual sources attest to the existence of the cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron. Levison focused on texts, cited recent excavations at Bonn and Xanten, and speculated that evidence would be found at St Albans. Biddle excavated St Albans but did not employ source criticism of

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<sup>111</sup> Examples include Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz*; Guy Halsall, 'Female Status and Power in Early Merovingian Central Austrasia: The Burial Evidence', *Early Medieval Europe*, 5 (1996), 1-24.

<sup>112</sup> Some recent surveys on the relationship between archaeology and text include Anders Andrén, *Between Artifacts and Texts: Historical Archaeology in Global Perspective*, Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology (New York: Plenum, 1997); Moreland, *Archaeology and Text*; John Moreland, 'Archaeology and Texts: Subservience or Enlightenment', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35 (2006), 135-51; Martin Carver, 'Marriages of True Minds: Archaeology with Texts', in *Archaeology: The Widening Debate*, ed. by Barry Cunliffe, Wendy Davies, and Colin Renfrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 465-94; Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography'.

<sup>113</sup> Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography'. at p. 819.

texts. Sharpe referenced archaeological evidence but did not apply the Late Antiquity paradigm.

Halsall also described a three stage process that often occurs with attempts to use archaeology and history together.<sup>114</sup> First, an assumption based on textual sources is used to organise or collect archaeological evidence. Second, in depth examination of the archaeological evidence and textual sources demonstrates that neat correlations between the two are often flawed. As a result, in the third stage the idea that archaeological evidence and textual sources can be used together is rejected. The present study experienced a similar situation. One of the original aims of the present study was to determine the range and scale of the cult of saints in late antique Britain by compiling a list of sites that fit the model of a church in an extra-mural Roman cemetery. In the later stages of research it was determined that the archaeological model was flawed in part because of a misreading of the textual sources. Previous attempts at investigating the cult of saints via archaeology assumed that cults experienced uninterrupted continuity from the period of persecutions into the medieval period.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, archaeological investigations attempted to find evidence for the existence of cults in the third century, during the persecutions, rather than evidence from the time when the cult of saints emerged, from the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Thus, in chapter four, the traditional model of churches in extra-mural cemeteries as indicators of cults is challenged and reappraised.

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<sup>114</sup> Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography', p. 819.

<sup>115</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

The present study explores the origins and development of the cult of saints in late antique Britain through an interdisciplinary approach. Integrating history and archaeology allows a more nuanced analysis and the possibility of posing questions that cannot be pursued by a single discipline. The present study investigates the following questions: When and why was the cult of saints introduced to Britain? What factors determined whether a saint's cult survived or was abandoned or suppressed? What impact, if any, did the Augustinian mission and Anglo-Saxon conversion have on the British cults that existed at the time of Augustine's mission? These questions call upon both textual sources and archaeological evidence. The present study follows the suggestions for using texts and archaeological evidence together proposed by Halsall. His stages of enquiry consist of framing the questions, collecting the data, evaluating the data, examining the context of the data, establishing patterning within the data and finally producing detailed conclusions based on the body of data.<sup>116</sup> As Halsall stated, this process is not necessarily linear, as establishing patterns in the data must sometimes precede examination of the context of the data. The process is also recursive, as new ideas often emerge during the later stages of investigation that require reconsideration of the data or collection of more data.<sup>117</sup> The different categories of evidence are initially considered separately, but brought together in the later stages of analysis.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis, two types of primary evidence, textual and archaeological, will be discussed. The relevant textual sources are analysed in chapters two and three. These sources were selected

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<sup>116</sup> This method follows Guy Halsall's suggestions in Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography', p. 822.

<sup>117</sup> Halsall, 'Archaeology and Historiography', p. 822.

because they are the only known sources that reference cults of British saints in Late Antiquity. The texts comprise a handful of primary sources composed in Britain and on the Continent from the fourth to the twelfth centuries. These sources include *De Laude Sanctorum*, *Passio Albani*, *Vita Sancti Germani*, *De Excidio Britonum*, *Libellus Responsumum*, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, *Vita Samsonis*, *Vita Niniani*, and *Miracula Episcopi Niniani*. Additional texts relating to the cult of saints on the Continent in Late Antiquity will be discussed for comparison and context. These include the works of Gregory of Tours, Augustine of Hippo, Sulpicius Severus, and Ambrose of Milan. The analysis of the texts pursues the research questions listed above and considers both the context in which the texts were produced as well as specific content regarding the development and function of saints' cults. The cults of Patrick and David are not considered in the present study. Although these figures probably lived in the period under consideration here, the evidence for their cults dates much later and their cults appear to have developed after Late Antiquity. The extant works by Patrick, the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*, reveal nothing about the cult of saints.

The methodology entails a series of discrete case studies of the above mentioned sources. The texts are examined in terms of dating and manuscript transmission where relevant to establish their place in the development of the cult of saints. The reassessment of the chronology will reinforce the conclusions of the subsequent textual analysis, which in turn presents substantial evidence for the role of invention, appropriation and suppression in the development of saints' cults. The analysis of these texts presents a chronology for the origins, development, and function of saints' cults in late antique Britain.

Archaeological evidence is examined in chapters four and five. The interpretation of the cult of saints based on the texts from chapters two and three is used to establish a preliminary context against which to compare the archaeological evidence. It is necessary to start with the textual sources because of the difficulty in identifying and investigating cults using archaeological evidence alone. The archaeological evidence is examined not only on whether or not it agrees with or rebuts interpretation of the textual sources, but also what interpretations it presents beyond the textual sources. The traditional model for the archaeological investigation of saints' cults is reappraised by examining the sites which seemingly fit the model of churches over Roman mausolea or in extra-mural cemeteries. This includes sites mentioned in the primary sources, namely St Albans and Caerleon. Similarly to the textual sources, the sites are discussed in case studies organised into two chapters, with chapter four examining churches overlying mausolea or in Roman cemeteries, and chapter five discussing cemeteries. The discussion of churches focuses on varied indications of Christian reuse of Roman mortuary structures. Where available, textual evidence is also referenced. The following chapter reassesses major themes in burial archaeology in relation to the cult of saints and examines how specific features (such as orientation, paths, arrangement, and special graves) indicate the presence of cults. The archaeological evidence indicates that cult sites often reused features, such as graves, monuments or other structures, and that uninterrupted use of sites cannot be assumed. This suggests that the creation of saints' cults involved the appropriation of the past to create the perception of continuity. Therefore, cult sites in Britain should not be investigated simply in terms of identifying churches



over extra-mural Roman cemeteries. Chapters five and six consider additional sites, such as cemeteries, burials, and sites of pre-Christian ritual significance.

## 1.6 Monument reuse

Over the past two decades the study of the reuse of ancient monuments has been a developing topic in archaeology.<sup>118</sup> The development of this topic has its origins in an article published in 1987 by Richard Bradley, entitled 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity'.<sup>119</sup> In this article Bradley examined the reuse and emulation of prehistoric monuments at the Anglo-Saxon royal site of Yeavering.<sup>120</sup> Bradley's paper subsequently influenced other scholars to examine the interpretation of monument reuse across a wide range of sites and time periods. Since the publication of Bradley's article many other scholars have endeavoured to build on Bradley's insights, with most studies focusing on reuse of monuments in the context of Anglo-Saxon burial practices.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Some examples include Richard Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 140 (1987), 1-17; Richard Bradley, *Altering the Earth: The Origins of Monuments in Britain and Continental Europe* (Edinburgh: Society for the Antiquaries of Scotland, 1993); Bonnie Effros, 'Monuments and Memory: Repossessing Ancient Remains in Early Medieval Gaul', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 93-118; Bonnie Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul: Burial and the Afterlife in the Merovingian World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Sarah Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 109-26; Sarah Semple, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Past: A Landscape Perspective' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford, 2002); Howard Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Re-use of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites', *Medieval Archaeology*, 41 (1997), 1-32; Howard Williams, 'Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 90-108; Howard Williams, 'The Ancient Monument in Romano-British Ritual Practices', in *TRAC 97 Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, ed. by C. Forcey, J. Hawthorne, and R. Witcher (Oxford: Oxbow, 1998), pp. 71-87; Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>119</sup> Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity'.

<sup>120</sup> Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity'; Bradley, *Altering the Earth: The Origins of Monuments in Britain and Continental Europe*; Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London: H.M.S.O., 1977).

<sup>121</sup> Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Martin Carver, 'Reflections on the Meaning of Anglo-Saxon Barrows', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2002), pp. 132-43; Stephen T. Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in

The study of monument reuse has produced many significant findings. Survey and excavation have revealed that monument reuse was a widespread phenomenon in the early medieval period and was not restricted to particular regions.<sup>122</sup> There is a general consensus that most cases of the reuse of prehistoric and Roman monuments in the early medieval period were deliberate.<sup>123</sup> The reuse was not fortuitous, accidental, or simply practical, but the deliberate appropriation of visible and ancient structures and monuments.<sup>124</sup> Another important discovery of ancient monuments in the past is that reuse does not necessarily indicate uninterrupted continuity of ritual significance. Bradley argued that the reuse of monuments represents a strategy of inventing traditions where the living and the dead were connecting themselves to a timeless, mythical past rather than showing direct continuity of ritual significance.<sup>125</sup>

Although practical and functional concerns are possible motivations, the reuse of monuments was predominantly symbolic in nature. The reuse of monuments was a symbolic act to link the past and the present. Howard Williams has argued that ancient monuments were important fields for social

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Early Medieval Scotland', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 142-58; Heinrich Härke, 'A Context for the Saxon Barrow [on Lowbury Hill]', *Archaeological Journal*, 151 (1994), 158-211; Jeremy Knight, 'Basilicas and Barrows: Christian Origins in Wales and Western Britain', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp. 119-26; David Stocker and Paul Everson, 'The Straight and Narrow Way: Fenland Causeways and the Conversion of the Landscape in the Witham Valley, Lincolnshire', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), pp. 271-88; Christopher Tilley, 'Rocks as Resources: Landscapes and Power', *Cornish Archaeology*, 34 (1995), 5-57.

<sup>122</sup> A survey conducted by Howard Williams makes clear that monuments from throughout prehistory and the Roman period were reused as burial sites in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Evidence for monument reuse is commonplace where cemeteries are excavated by modern archaeological excavation techniques. Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 4; Sam Lucy, 'The Significance of Mortuary Ritual in the Political Manipulation of the Landscape', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, 11 (1992), 93-105; Audrey L. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).

<sup>123</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 182.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity'.

action and ritual discourse because they were regarded as liminal and timeless places that existed both in the past and present, the world of the living and the world of the supernatural.<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Smith argued that holy sites on ruins did not operate independently of memories of the past, but contemporary or subsequent narratives could have revised such memories.<sup>127</sup> According to Smith, ancient places were considered sacred because they effectively focused rituals.<sup>128</sup> The case of St. Guthlac featured a prehistoric burial mound as a focus for life, death and enshrinement.<sup>129</sup> Williams also suggested that ancient burial monuments were reused because the dead could have been mediators between the living and the ancestral or supernatural beings.<sup>130</sup> Williams' argument here regarding the reuse of prehistoric burial monuments is very similar to the description of saints as mediators and could be describing the sites of saints' graves as well as pagan Anglo-Saxon burials. This indicates that saints' graves and other ancient burials were viewed with similar attitudes.

The appropriation of the past by reusing ancient monuments imparted legitimacy and authenticity. Bradley argued that ancient monuments were political resources.<sup>131</sup> Although much of the discussion has focused on Anglo-Saxon society, Bonnie Effros suggested elite Christian views towards ancient monuments promoting orthodoxy in Merovingian Gaul.<sup>132</sup> The mythological

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<sup>126</sup> Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 25.

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 83-88.

<sup>128</sup> Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>129</sup> David Harvey, 'Constructed Landscapes and Social Memory: Tales of St Samson in Early Medieval Cornwall', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2 (2002), pp. 231-48; Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 207.

<sup>130</sup> Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 25.

<sup>131</sup> Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity', p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> Effros, 'Monuments and Memory'.

attributes of monuments were attractive sources of supernatural legitimacy.<sup>133</sup> The appropriation of the past was a creative act, similar to the fabrication of pseudo-historical accounts that explained the origins of a people or dynasty.<sup>134</sup> Bradley focused on how ritual manipulated the perception of time and the past and how it legitimized status in early medieval society.<sup>135</sup> The antiquity and monumentality of ancient structures invested them with ancestral and supernatural qualities that could not be achieved by building new mortuary structures.<sup>136</sup> Anglo-Saxon communities placed their dead in association with ancient monuments to construct and reproduce their idealized visions of past and present, their mythical origins and their social identities.<sup>137</sup> Control of ancient monuments and their interpretation defined identity and legitimized status.<sup>138</sup> Williams argued that the reuse of prehistoric and Roman monuments was important for the construction and negotiation of origin myths, identities and social structures.<sup>139</sup> Driscoll argued that the ancient and mythic past was politically valuable and occupied a significant place in the ideological strategy of the nobility.<sup>140</sup> Williams suggested that reuse was not just creating a link to the past but forging claims for the present and future, with the past as a means of appropriating the landscape ideologically as well as physically through burial practices.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in Early Medieval Scotland', p. 147.

<sup>134</sup> Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in Early Medieval Scotland', p. 155.

<sup>135</sup> Maurice Bloch, 'The Past and the Present in the Present', *Man*, 12 (1977), 278-92; Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity'.

<sup>136</sup> Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 25.

<sup>138</sup> Williams, 'Monuments and the Past', p. 104.

<sup>139</sup> Williams, 'Monuments and the Past'.

<sup>140</sup> Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in Early Medieval Scotland', p. 145.

<sup>141</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 183.

Another important discovery is that attitudes towards monument reuse were not consistent in the medieval period.<sup>142</sup> Bonnie Effros has shown that perceptions of the past and the reuse of monuments evolved continuously in early medieval Gaul.<sup>143</sup> Regarding early Anglo-Saxon England, John Blair and Howard Williams have argued that the seventh century was a significant period for the appropriation of monuments due to the dramatic transformation of society in regards to politics, economy and religion.<sup>144</sup> Semple has argued that from the seventh century ancient monuments were no longer used as burials sites and subsequently acquired negative connotations.<sup>145</sup>

The variety and quantity of studies have demonstrated that such approaches are applicable to other periods and sites. Bradley and others have looked at the reuse of monuments during prehistory.<sup>146</sup> As mentioned above, the majority of these studies have focused on burial practices in early Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>147</sup> Richard Morris, David Stocker, and Paul Everson have looked at early Christian religious foundations in England associated with

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<sup>142</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 183.

<sup>143</sup> Effros, 'Monuments and Memory', p. 118.

<sup>144</sup> John Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994); Howard Williams, 'Placing the Dead: Investigating the Location of Wealthy Barrow Burials in Seventh Century England', in *Grave Matters: Eight Studies of the First Millennium AD Burials in Crimea, England and Southern Scandinavia*, ed. by Martin Rundqvist (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1999), pp. 57-86.

<sup>145</sup> Semple, 'A Fear of the Past'.

<sup>146</sup> Bradley, *Altering the Earth: The Origins of Monuments in Britain and Continental Europe*; Tilley, 'Rocks as Resources: Landscapes and Power'; Chris Gosden and Gary Lock, 'Prehistoric Histories', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 2-12.

<sup>147</sup> Christopher Scull and A. F. Harding, 'Two Early Medieval Cemeteries at Millfield, Northumberland', *Durham Archaeologica Journal*, 6 (1990), 1-29; Lucy, 'The Significance of Mortuary Ritual'; Härke, 'A Context for the Saxon Barrow'; John Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and Their Prototypes', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 8 (1995), 1-28; Semple, 'A Fear of the Past'; Semple, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Past: A Landscape Perspective'; Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead'; Williams, 'Monuments and the Past'; Williams, 'The Ancient Monument in Romano-British Ritual Practices'; Williams, 'Placing the Dead'; Howard Williams, 'Identities and Cemeteries in Roman and Early Medieval Archaeology', in *TRAC 98 Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, ed. by P. Baker, et al. (Oxford: Oxbow, 1999), pp. 96-108; Howard Williams, 'Death, Memory and Time: A Consideration of Mortuary Practices at Sutton Hoo', in *Time in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christopher Humphrey and William Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), pp. 35-71; Howard Williams, 'Rethinking Early Medieval Mortuary Archaeology', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), 195-217; Williams, *Death and Memory*.

prehistoric ritual monuments.<sup>148</sup> Stephen Driscoll examined Pictish royal sites associated with prehistoric monuments.<sup>149</sup> David Petts examined the claim that early medieval inscribed memorial stones are reused prehistoric standing stones.<sup>150</sup> Some scholars have conducted surveys on a regional level,<sup>151</sup> while others have pursued surveys on a national level.<sup>152</sup> Some scholars have drawn comparisons with monument reuse on the Continent and in Scandinavia.<sup>153</sup> There have also been examinations of the selectivity of monument reuse,<sup>154</sup> as well as discussion about how to distinguish deliberate monument reuse from coincidental or practical associations.<sup>155</sup>

Relatively little reference has been made to the theme of monument reuse in relation to saints' cults in Britain. As demonstrated by the quantity and

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London: Dent, 1989); David Stocker, 'The Early Church in Lincolnshire: A Study of the Sites and Their Significance', in *Pre-Viking Lindsey*, ed. by Alan Vince (Lincoln: City of Lincoln Archaeological Unit, 1993), pp. 101-22; Stocker and Everson, 'The Straight and Narrow Way'.

<sup>149</sup> Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in Early Medieval Scotland'.

<sup>150</sup> David Petts, 'The Reuse of Prehistoric Standing Stones in Western Britain? A Critical Consideration of an Aspect of Early Medieval Monument Reuse', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 21 (2002), 195-209.

<sup>151</sup> Driscoll, 'Picts and Prehistory: Cultural Resource Management in Early Medieval Scotland'; Lucy, 'The Significance of Mortuary Ritual'; Sam Lucy, *The Early Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of East Yorkshire: An Analysis and Reinterpretation*, BAR British Series, 272 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1998); Petts, 'The Reuse of Prehistoric Standing Stones in Western Britain? A Critical Consideration of an Aspect of Early Medieval Monument Reuse'; Semple, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Past: A Landscape Perspective'; Sarah Semple, 'Burials and Political Boundaries in the Avebury Region, North Wiltshire', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), 72-91.

<sup>152</sup> Sam Lucy, 'Burial Practice in Early Medieval Eastern England: Constructing Local Identities, Deconstructing Ethnicity', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2002), pp. 72-87; Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead'.

<sup>153</sup> Effros, 'Monuments and Memory'; N. Roymans, 'The Cultural Biography of Urnfields and the Long-Term History of Mythical Landscapes', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 2 (1995), 2-25; Eva Thäte, 'Alte Denkmäler und frühgeschichtliche Bestattungen: Ein sächsisch-angelsächsischer Totenbrauch und seine Kontinuität', *Archäologische Informationen*, 19 (1996), 105-16.

<sup>154</sup> Sam Lucy, 'Early Medieval Burials in East Yorkshire: Reconsidering the Evidence', in *Early Deira: Archaeological Studies of the East Riding in the Fourth to Ninth Centuries AD*, ed. by Helen Geake and J. Kenny (Oxford: Oxbow, 2000), pp. 11-18; Semple, 'A Fear of the Past'; Williams, 'Placing the Dead'; Andrew Reynolds, 'Burials, Boundaries and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: A Reassessment', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2002), pp. 171-94.

<sup>155</sup> Elisabeth Zadora-Rio, 'The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories in the Early-Medieval Landscape of France and England in the 7th- 12th Centuries: A Reconsideration', *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003), 1-19.

scope of the studies listed above as well as the case studies enumerated in the following chapters, the approach to monument reuse created by Bradley can be applied to the cult of saints in late antique Britain. Both the texts and archaeological evidence demonstrate that the creation and promotion of saints' cults included the appropriation of the past. The discussion of the chronology of the development of the cult of saints establishes that cults did not experience uninterrupted continuity between the lifetime of a saint and the development of their cult. Rather, the creation and promotion of cults employed an artificial or created continuity. Appropriating the past presented the impression of continuity and authority.

As textual analysis informs archaeological interpretation, in turn archaeological analysis informs textual interpretation. Thus, the implications of the analyses of the evidence in chapters two to five are further explored in chapter six. Here, common themes presented by both textual sources and archaeological evidence are drawn together. Both types of evidence demonstrate the appropriation of the past to create an artificial continuity in the creation or promotion of saints' cults. Referencing the past and the perception of continuity lends authenticity and legitimacy to the creation or promotion of cults. The texts accomplished this by reference to martyrdoms during the persecutions or to figures from the distant past. The material manifestation of cults reused ancient graves, structures and monuments.

The geographical range and chronological scope of the present study conforms to the Late Antiquity paradigm. The extant sources, both archaeological and textual, range all over the Roman province of Britain. Textual sources and archaeological evidence from the Continent are drawn

upon for comparison. The chronological scope ranges from roughly AD 300 to 800. These dates allow the present study to proceed from the earliest evidence of Christianity in Britain, including references to British bishops at early Church councils in the fourth century, to the culmination of the Anglo-Saxon conversion and its consequences for the saints' cults that existed in Britain at the time of Augustine's arrival in Canterbury.



## Chapter 2: The textual evidence part 1: martyr cults

### 2.1 Overview

This chapter addresses a significant lacuna in scholarship regarding the cult of saints in Britain. Investigation of the earliest cults, associated with the martyrs Alban, Julius and Aaron, has tended to pursue questions about the date of their supposed martyrdoms, and the locations of their shrines.<sup>1</sup> The origins of these martyr cults have rarely been questioned.<sup>2</sup> It has been assumed that they emerged in the Roman period, soon after the supposed martyrdoms and before the end of persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup>

The assumptions about the origins of these cults do not fit the present understanding of the development of the cult of saints in other provinces of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> The current understanding of the cult of saints is that, with the significant exception of SS. Peter and Paul in Rome, the cult of martyrs emerged in the late fourth and early fifth century, long after the end of the persecution of Christians and the Peace of the Church begun by the Edict of Milan in 313.<sup>5</sup> Initially, the cult of saints was often used by figures such as Ambrose of Milan to promote orthodoxy in the context of conflicts with various

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<sup>1</sup> Wade-Evans, 'The Site of St Alban's Martyrdom'; Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens'; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'; Bader and Bebbler, *Sechzehnhundert Jahre Xantener Dom*; Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'; Matthews, 'St John's Church and the Early History of Chester'.

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Stephens, 'A Note on the Martyrdom of St Alban'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'; Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'; Niblett and Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns*; Coates, 'Verulamium: The Romano-British Name of St Albans'.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*; Howard-Johnston and Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

heresies.<sup>6</sup> The British martyr cults have been seen as unique examples of uninterrupted continuity from the Roman period into the Middle Ages. In reality, with the exception of Rome, there is no evidence for uninterrupted continuity of veneration for any known cult that existed between the period of persecutions into the Middle Ages in the West.<sup>7</sup>

The present chapter examines the textual evidence for the cult of martyrs in late antique Britain. The relevant sources consist of: Victricius of Rouen's *De Laude Sanctorum*,<sup>8</sup> the anonymous *Passio Albani*,<sup>9</sup> Constantius' *Vita Germani*,<sup>10</sup> Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum*,<sup>11</sup> the *Libellus Responsionum*,<sup>12</sup> and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>13</sup> Analysis of these texts reveals when, why and how the cult of saints was introduced to Britain as well as its subsequent development. As the detailed survey of textual sources in this chapter demonstrates, there is sufficient evidence that the cult of saints developed in Britain along the same trajectory as on the Continent. It was introduced to

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

<sup>7</sup> Sharpe employed the terminology of Late Antiquity, and viewed the cult of saints as a thread of continuity running from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England. However, he perpetuated some of the assumptions of the Decline and Fall paradigm. He took for granted that Alban, Julius and Aaron were authentic martyrs whose cults began shortly after their martyrdoms and neglected the research which shows the cult of saints emerged in the late fourth and early fifth century, long after the end of Christian persecutions. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints'; Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint'; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*.

<sup>8</sup> Eligius Dekkers and Emil Gaar, *Clavis patrum latinorum: qua in Corpus christianorum edendum optimas quasque scriptorum recensiones a Tertulliano ad Bedam*. 4 edn, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Steenbrugis: in Abbatia Sancti Petri, 1995); Victricius of Rouen, 'De Laude Sanctorum', in Foebadius. Victricius. Leporius. Vincentius Lerinensis. Evagrius. Rubricius, ed. by Roland Demeulenaere (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985).; English translation in Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints'.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*.

<sup>10</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani', in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicorum*, 7, ed. by Wilhelm Levison (Hanover, 1920), pp. 225–83. English translation in Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1995). See also René Borius, *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre*, Sources Chrétiennes, 112. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*. trans. Michael Winterbottom. 2nd edn, *History from the Sources* (London: Phillimore, 2002). Hereafter *DEB*.

<sup>12</sup> *MGH, Epistolae*, 2, pp. 331–343.

<sup>13</sup> Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Hereafter *HE*.

Britain in the late fourth/early fifth century, long after the end of persecutions, and was used to promote orthodoxy over heresies such as Arianism and Pelagianism. By the sixth century it was no longer associated with conflicts between orthodoxy and heresy. Native martyr cults were affected by the mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons, initiated by Gregory the Great and Augustine of Canterbury at the end of the sixth century. Some cults were suppressed while others were appropriated by the Anglo-Saxons.

## 2.2 The earliest evidence

Victricius of Rouen's *De Laude Sanctorum* contains the earliest reference to the cult of saints in Britain. It implies that there were no saints' cults in Britain before the end of the fourth century. It also suggests that the cult of saints was introduced to Britain to promote orthodoxy against the threat of heresies such as Arianism.

The sermon was composed c. 396, and is the only extant material by Victricius.<sup>14</sup> He wrote *De Laude Sanctorum* in the style of an imperial panegyric for an *adventus*, an official ceremony usually performed for the arrival of a visiting emperor or his deputy, but on this occasion it was relics of martyrs sent to Rouen from Ambrose of Milan.<sup>15</sup> The cult of relics is the central topic of the sermon. However, there is much more to the sermon than just the welcoming of relics to Rouen.

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<sup>14</sup> Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate'; Clarke believes its survival is likely due to it being falsely attributed to Ambrose. It is conventionally dated to 396 because it mentions the relics of Nazarius, which were discovered in 395, and describes Ambrose, who died in 397, as still living.

<sup>15</sup> On *adventus*, see Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 17-61.

Gillian Clarke interpreted the sermon as a cultural translation by Victricius, an attempt to convince the audience of the legitimacy of the translation of saints' relics, since a contemporary audience would not have been comfortable with the idea of venerating bones, blood and dust.<sup>16</sup> The Roman attitude of keeping the dead at a comfortable distance is indicated by the strict laws forbidding the disturbance of corpses and proscribing burial of the dead to extra-mural areas.<sup>17</sup> Victricius spent part of the sermon arguing that although what one may see looks like relics, this is illusion and what is actually there is the saint himself:

Before our eyes are blood and clay. We impress on them the name of "relics" because we cannot do otherwise, with (so to speak) the seal of living language.

We see small relics and a little blood. But truth perceives that these tiny things are brighter than the sun, for the Lord says in the gospel "My saints shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father." And then the sun shall shine fuller and brighter than now.<sup>18</sup>

The cult of relics was controversial for reasons other than cultural taboos regarding proximity to the dead. Meritxell Pérez-Martínez has recently argued that the sermon was part of theological debate about Arianism, the rise of

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<sup>16</sup> Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate', p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> For the Roman law proscribing burial outside the city, see Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmundian Constitutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 239-40, book 9, title 17, on the violation of tombs.

<sup>18</sup> *DLS* c. 10. 'Subicitur oculis cruor et limus. Id nos reliquiarum nomine, quia aliter non possumus, uelut uiuidi sermonis inpressione signamus.'; 'Cernimus paruas reliquias, nonnihil sanguinis. Sed has minutias clariores esse quam sol est, ueritas intuetur, Domino in euangelio dicente: *Sancti mei fulgebunt sicut sol in gegno Patris*. Et tunc sol amplius quam nunc clariusque lucebit.' Translation taken from Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', p. 391.

asceticism and the cult of relics.<sup>19</sup> *De Laude Sanctorum*, she claimed, echoes the official church attitude at the end of the fourth century, which urged moderation in the controversy among bishops surrounding the reconciliation of former Arian clerics. At the end of the fourth century, figures such as Damasus of Rome, Paulinus of Nola, and Ambrose of Milan were promoting cults for a variety of reasons. For Ambrose this included upholding orthodoxy over heresy.<sup>20</sup> Victricius' sermon shared this purpose.

Heresies such as Manichaeism, Priscillianism and Arianism caused much discord with the episcopate at the end of the fourth century.<sup>21</sup> Overcoming the controversies and restoring a sense of normalcy after the crisis of Arianism was a long and costly process, involving the reconciliation of repentant schismatics, the definition of an Orthodox asceticism, and the promotion of the cult of martyrs and relics.<sup>22</sup> The development of the cult of martyrs and relics arose partly in reaction to Arian propaganda and was a predominant factor in overcoming the Arian problem throughout the West.<sup>23</sup>

Victricius' *De Laude Sanctorum* is to be read in light of this controversy. At the beginning of his sermon, Victricius mentioned that he has just returned from Britain, having travelled there to settle a dispute among bishops concerning martyrs:

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<sup>19</sup> I am very grateful to Dr. Pérez-Martínez for allowing me access to her forthcoming paper on Arianism in Britain, to which much of the discussion in this section is indebted.

<sup>20</sup> Meritxell Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain', (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, pp. 78-114; Ralph Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 11-26.

<sup>22</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>23</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'; Daniel Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 218-32.

For my own late arrival, holy and venerable martyrs, there is an explanation which will, I think, earn pardon from you. It was to carry out your commands that I went to Britain and stayed there. My fellow priests, holy bishops, called me there to make peace.

I was serving you in Britain, and, though I was separated from you by the ocean which surrounds it, it was on your business that I was detained.<sup>24</sup>

In Victricius' time conflict between two opposing ecclesiastical factions often resulted in a request for outside help; thus his journey might have resulted from a council decision.<sup>25</sup>

Victricius did not provide any specific details that would allow us to identify the specific source of discord among the Britons. However, analysis of the text suggests that the source of discord was related to Arianism.<sup>26</sup> There is a strong anti-Arian sentiment running through the sermon. Chapters seven and eight of *De Laude Sanctorum* include a discussion about consubstantiality, a concept rejected by Arianism. Victricius argued that the consubstantiality of the divinity extended to the martyrs because they imitated Christ.<sup>27</sup> Victricius' claim went beyond the accepted orthodox position on consubstantiality, and might have been controversial at the time. However, Victricius was careful to claim that the martyrs were consubstantial by adoption not by nature.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Translations taken from Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', p. 377. 'Et meae quidem, sancti uenerandique martyres, quantum reor, apud uos ueniabilis excusatio tarditatis est. Nam quod ad Britannias profectus sum, quod ibi moratus sum, uestrorum fecit exsecutio praeceptorum. Pacis me faciendae gratia consacerdotes mei salutare antistites euocarunt...Vobis intra Britannias obsequebar, et oceani circumfluo separatus uestro tamen detinebar officio.' Dekkers and Gaar, 'Praising the Saints', p. 70, ll. 23-27 & 31-33.

<sup>25</sup> Frend, 'Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain'. at p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>27</sup> *DLS*, c. 7, ll. 39-49.

<sup>28</sup> *DLS*, c. 8, ll. 21-24; see also Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

The sermon makes clear that Victricius was a supporter of asceticism and that he is defending both it and the cult of martyrs against critics. He went to Britain to settle a dispute and while there he promoted the cult of martyrs. The text repeatedly refers to a church marked by confrontation and division of opinion: 'My fellow priests, holy bishops, called me there to make peace';<sup>29</sup> 'You promote the Lord's peace, and you chose me as (so to speak) interpreter of his decision';<sup>30</sup> 'I instilled in the wise the love of peace'.<sup>31</sup> Victricius also linked his trip to Britain with the defense of martyrs. Therefore should view his reference to episcopal division in Britain within the context of the repercussions of Arianism on the continent.<sup>32</sup>

Victricius described the martyrs as having the ability to forgive: '*habetis quod ignoscatis*'.<sup>33</sup> This might refer to the reception of clerics from Arianism. The official position of the church, as seen in canons of Nicaea, urged reintegration of schismatics through the intercession of the saints and their ability to forgive sins. By calling for peace, Victricius was reacting to the needs of the church of his time.<sup>34</sup>

Victricius' claim that he was in Britain serving martyrs leads us to question if there were relics of martyrs in Britain when he visited. Victricius listed a number of saints in chapter six of the sermon, including John the Baptist,

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<sup>29</sup> *DLS*, c. 1, l. 27: *Pacis me faciendae gratia consacerdotes mei salutare antistites euocarunt.*

<sup>30</sup> *DLS*, c. 1, ll. 37-38: *Pacis Domini estis auctores, cuius me sententiae uelut interpretem delegistis.*

<sup>31</sup> *DLS*, c. 1, ll. 40-41: *Sapientibus amorem pacis infundi.*

<sup>32</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>33</sup> *DLS*, c. 4, l. 43. This line can be translated in a number of ways. Clarke suggests 'You know what it is you pardon' or 'there are sins for you to pardon.' Herval, 'You have the power to pardon.' René Herval, *Origines chrétiennes, de la iie Lyonnaise gallo-romaine à la Normandie ducale (ive-xie siècles). Avec le texte complet et la traduction intégrale du "De laude sanctorum" de saint Victrice (396)* (Paris: Picard, 1966). Regardless, it is clear that Victricius' attributes the relics with the power to pardon sins. Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>34</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

Protasius, Gervasius, Agricola, and Euphemia, but he did not name any British saints.<sup>35</sup> In chapter eleven, he listed the locations of healing relics, such as Constantinople, Antioch, Thessalonica, Naissus, Rome and Ephesus, but again did not mention any in Britain. In the twelfth and final chapter, there is a brief description of several unnamed saints. Included in the list is the following: 'this one, in the hands of the executioners told rivers to draw back, lest he should be delayed in his haste.'<sup>36</sup> This is thought to be a reference to St. Alban of Verulamium, as it closely resembles the story of his martyrdom.<sup>37</sup> If that is the case, then it would be the earliest surviving reference to a British saint. This is an appealing hypothesis, given that the sermon was composed shortly after Victricius returned from Britain, where he might have heard the story of this martyr. However, because Victricius did not name the saint who parted the waters, and the earliest version of the *Passio Albani* has been dated to the mid-fifth century,<sup>38</sup> we cannot say with certainty that it is a reference to Alban.

Since the sermon does not provide details of any British saints, it suggests that there were no known cults before Victricius' arrival; otherwise he would have mentioned them. In fact, Victricius implied that there were no martyrs in Britain because he stated that when he travelled there he was separated from the martyrs.<sup>39</sup> Although Victricius might not have been sufficiently informed about local cults in Britain, his overt statement about the lack of indigenous martyr cults is positive evidence for their absence from

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<sup>35</sup> Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', p. 383;

<sup>36</sup> Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', pp. 398-99: 'ille inter manus carnificum, ne qua mora fieret properanti, iussit redire fluminibus', Dekkers and Gaar, 'Praising the Saints', ll. 104-05, p. 92.

<sup>37</sup> Dekkers and Gaar, 'Praising the Saints', p. 92, n. 104/105.

<sup>38</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'.

<sup>39</sup> See above n. 24. Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*', p. 377: 'Vobis intra Britannias obsequabar, et oceani circumfluo separatus uestro tamen detinebar officio'; Dekkers and Gaar, 'Praising the Saints', p. 70, ll. 31-33.



British Christianity at the time of his visit. This casts doubt on the continuity of any cult in Britain from the period of persecution, including Alban's.

Victricius' *De Laude Sanctorum* is the earliest source to mention the cult of saints in Britain. It suggests that the cult of saints was introduced to Britain not long before the sermon was composed at the end of the fourth century, concurrent with the promotion of saints' cults on the Continent by Ambrose, Paulinus and Damasus. Victricius' trip to Britain should be considered in this context, promoting the cult of saints. Like Ambrose, Victricius promoted the cult in Britain to encourage orthodoxy and church unity.

### 2.3 The invention of a British martyr?

The earliest British saint for whom any information survives is Alban, who has been described as the proto-martyr of Britain.<sup>40</sup> The traditional narrative of Alban holds that he was a citizen of Verulamium, the Roman settlement adjacent to modern St Albans, and was martyred in the third or fourth century. This narrative derives from the *Passio Albani* and later sources that repeated and expanded the story in the *Passio*, such as Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum* and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

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<sup>40</sup> Some examples of this description can be found in Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints; Compiled from Original Monuments and Other Authentic Records, Illustrated with the Remarks of Judicious Modern Critics and Historians*. VI (London: J. Murphy, 1812), p. 309; William Leeson Dickinson, *The Lives of the Saints, or, Notes Ecclesiological and Historical on the Holy Days of the English Church* (London: Church Printing Co., 1865), p. 66; Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Alban Cross', in *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Martin Henig and Philip Lindley (Leeds: Maney, 2001), pp. 85-110. at p. 85. Both Wilhelm Meyer and Wilhelm Levison described Alban as *protomartyr angliae*: Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans' at p. 337.

Research on Alban has tended to focus on the date and location of his martyrdom, rather than on the origins or development of his cult.<sup>41</sup> It is commonly accepted that Alban was martyred at Verulamium either during the persecutions of Severus at the beginning of the third century or during the Diocletian persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>42</sup> Some scholars have suggested that Alban was not martyred at Verulamium. Arthur Wade-Evans argued that he was martyred at Caerleon with Julius and Aaron.<sup>43</sup> Some have proposed London as the site of Alban's martyrdom.<sup>44</sup>

Discussion about Alban and his cult has often included the implicit assumptions that he was an authentic martyr whose cult developed shortly after his presumed martyrdom and continued uninterrupted from the Roman period into the Anglo-Saxon period and beyond.<sup>45</sup> Analysis of the earliest sources that mention Alban indicates that his historicity rests on less solid foundations than previously assumed. The context of the production of the texts suggests a radical interpretation for the origins of his cult in the context of a conflict between orthodoxy and Pelagianism in the fifth century. We need to turn to the sources to determine what is certain or uncertain about Alban and his cult.

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<sup>41</sup> Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens'; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Stephens, 'A Note on the Martyrdom of St Alban'.

<sup>42</sup> A date for Alban's martyrdom under the Diocletian persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century is more widely accepted. Scholars such as John Morris have argued for a date at the beginning of the third century under Septimus Severus. Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'.

<sup>43</sup> Wade-Evans, 'The Site of St Alban's Martyrdom'; Arthur Wade-Evans, *Welsh Christian Origins* (Oxford: Alden, 1934), pp. 131-32.

<sup>44</sup> Karen Louise George, 'The *De Excidio Britonum* of Gildas and the Early British Church: An Interdisciplinary Approach' (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Leeds, 2005), p. 215.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'; Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Stephens, 'A Note on the Martyrdom of St Alban'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'; Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'; Niblett and Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns*; Coates, 'Verulamium: The Romano-British Name of St Albans'.

### 2.3.1 The *Passio Albani*

The *Passio Albani* relates the tale of Alban's martyrdom and a visit to his tomb by Germanus of Auxerre.<sup>46</sup> According to all extant recensions of the *Passio*, Alban harboured a Christian fleeing persecution and presented himself in place of the Christian when the authorities came seeking him. Alban was then sentenced to execution. On his way to the execution, the waters of the river parted for him because the bridge was too crowded to walk across. This miracle seems to have made such an impression on Alban's appointed executioner that rather than execute him, he joined him in martyrdom. Once Alban reached the site of his execution on top of a hill outside town, another miracle was performed when Alban prayed for water and a spring appeared. When Alban was beheaded, the new executioner's eyes popped out of his skull. After the execution, the *Passio* describes a visit to his tomb and place of execution by Germanus of Auxerre, who placed some relics into Alban's tomb and took a bit of dust from the site of Alban's martyrdom.

Although it was listed in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, Wilhelm Meyer was the first scholar to investigate the textual transmission of the *Passio*, which survives in six manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> Although the text in each manuscript is different, Meyer divided it into three recensions, labelled T, P, and E. Two of the recensions are represented by single manuscripts, found in Turin and Paris,

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<sup>46</sup> Editions of the different recensions of the *Passio Albani* are found in Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

<sup>47</sup> Société des Bollandistes, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis*. 2 vols. I, *Subsidia Hagiographica* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898).pp. 34-36; Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*.

which Meyer labelled T and P respectively, while the other recension is represented by four manuscripts.<sup>48</sup>

Based on palaeographic evidence, Meyer dated the production of the Turin manuscript to the end of the eighth century at Corbie, but more recently T.A.M. Bishop has argued that it was produced at Nôtre Dame de Soissons.<sup>49</sup> The other texts in the manuscript consist of other saints' lives, mainly from northeast Gaul. The Paris manuscript, comprised of more wide-ranging hagiographical texts than the Turin manuscript, was probably composed at Saint Maur-les-Fossés in the ninth or tenth century.<sup>50</sup> The four manuscripts that comprise Meyer's E recension include one in the British Library, one in Gray's Inn, London, another in Autun, and the last in Einsiedeln. The Autun manuscript is dated to the ninth or tenth century. The British Library manuscript dates to the ninth century. The Gray's Inn and Einsiedeln manuscripts were both copied in the twelfth century.<sup>51</sup>

Meyer postulated a transmission history of these variant texts as follows: the oldest manuscript, Turin, contains the oldest extant version of the text, written in the early sixth century. This was then abridged to form text E, which was then redacted to form text P. This version of the text, or a text close to it, appears to be Bede's source for his description of Alban's martyrdom, found in

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<sup>48</sup> T (*BHL* 210d) is represented by manuscript Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS D. V. 3; P (*BHL* 211) by Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS lat. 11748; and E is represented by: London, BL MS Add. 11880 (s.ix); Autun, Seminaire, MS 34 (s. ix/x); London, Gray's Inn, MS 3 (s. xii); Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek MS 248 (s. xii).

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, pp. 16-17; Terence A. M. Bishop, 'The Scribes of the Corbie a-b', in *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, ed. by Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 523-36.

<sup>50</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Albert Poncelet, *Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicorum Latinorum Parisiensium*. III (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1889-93), pp. 16-17; Poncelet dates the manuscript to the tenth century, while Meyer favours the ninth century.

<sup>51</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 24. In his edition of the text, Meyer labels Autun A, Einsiedeln E, British Library L, and Gray's Inn J.

chapter VII of Book I in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written in the early eighth century. So according to Meyer's interpretation although the earliest manuscript witness for T is eighth-century and the earliest for P is tenth-century, the texts of all three recensions were written before Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Because he believed the E text was only an intermediary version of the *Passio*, Meyer included in his paper edited texts of T and P, but only an abbreviated version of E. A proper edition of the E text comprising the four different recensions has yet to be published, although the text of the Gray's Inn manuscript has been published by Ian Wood.<sup>52</sup>

Meyer's paper received little attention throughout the twentieth century, and his interpretation of the textual history went unchallenged for nearly a century.<sup>53</sup> Richard Sharpe has recently argued that Meyer misinterpreted the sequence of composition for T, E and P.<sup>54</sup> Sharpe presented a cogent alternative interpretation in which text E is the parent text of both T and P, observing that the entire text of E is found in both T and P, while the discrepancies between E and T are not found in P, and likewise the discrepancies between P and E are not found in T. Thus, text E, rather than being an excerpt of an earlier text, is actually the closest to the original version of the text.

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<sup>52</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'. A transcription of the earliest manuscript of the E text can be found in Wood, 'Levison and St Alban'.

<sup>53</sup> As Richard Sharpe pointed out, Meyer's work was reviewed enthusiastically in *English Historical Review* shortly after publication, and is discussed by Hugh Williams, Hippolyte Delehaye and Wilhelm Levison. Levison summarised Meyer's work in his seminal 1941 article, Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'. After Levison, most scholars, including Sheppard Frere and Charles Thomas, relied on Levison's summary and neglected the original publication by Meyer, with Ian Wood being an exception. See J. Bury, 'Book Review: Die Legende des h. Albanus des Protomartyr Angliae, in Texten vor Beda', *English Historical Review*, 20 (1905), 345-47; Hugh Williams, *Christianity in Early Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912). Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires*; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'. Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (London: Routledge, 1967). Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*. Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'.

<sup>54</sup> For the full argument, see Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'.

The recognition that the E text is the earliest surviving version of the *Passio Albani* has wide ranging implications not only for the interpretation of the *Passio* itself, but also for our understanding of Alban and the origins of his cult. Sharpe himself noted some of the consequences regarding the date of Alban's martyrdom as well as the date and origins of the text itself.<sup>55</sup> Some of Sharpe's observations concerning the revised textual history need to be addressed before moving on to other significant implications.

Sharpe stated that one consequence of the E text being the earliest version is that the *Passio* is no longer useful for trying to determine the date for Alban's martyrdom. The only clue to the date of the martyrdom in E (as well as P) is the ambiguous phrase *tempore persecutionis*, 'in the time of the persecution'.<sup>56</sup> Prior to Sharpe's article details in the T text were used by some scholars to determine the date for Alban's death because it was thought to be oldest version of the text. It is the details in T that have lead scholars such as Wilhelm Levison, John Morris and E. A. Thompson to propose that Alban was martyred at the beginning of the third century.<sup>57</sup>

The T text states that Alban's martyrdom occurred during the reign of Severus, and that Alban was tried by a *cesar* (sic).<sup>58</sup> The Severus of the T text has been assumed to be Septimus Severus, rather than any other imperial Severus, for several reasons, including the facts that Septimus initiated a

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<sup>55</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', pp. 35-37.

<sup>56</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 35; Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain'.

<sup>58</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 46. It is only in T that Alban's judge is described as *cesar*. In E and P, Alban is tried by a *iudex*.

persecution on the continent, and campaigned in north Britain in 208-09.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, near the end of the T recension of the *Passio* is the following sentence: *Tunc impiissimus Cesar examinis, tanta novitate percussis, iniussu etiam principum iubet de persecutione cessare.*<sup>60</sup> The word *principum*, found in all three texts, is a plural noun, implying that there is more than one emperor or authority at the time of Alban's trial and martyrdom.

Meyer thought that this sentence did not make sense, because it states that a caesar acted without permission of the emperors.<sup>61</sup> It would make sense if there was more than one emperor at the time of the martyrdom, although that does not help narrow down the possible dates. Such circumstances do apply to the reign of Septimus Severus. Karen George suggested that the redactor of T believed his source, E, was depicting an occasion when there was more than one emperor, or senior authority, in Britain, rather than referring to the general situation of the whole Roman Empire.<sup>62</sup> Septimus Severus' campaign in northern Britain fits this interpretation. Septimus went to the north with his elder son Caracalla, and left his younger son, Geta Caesar, in the south and in charge, but still accountable to Severus and Caracalla. George suggested that the redactor of T might have been aware of Severus' British campaign as well as his persecutions on the continent, and as a result conflated these events and set it as the backdrop for Alban's trial and martyrdom.<sup>63</sup> Although Sharpe suggested it is unlikely that the redactor of T had such extensive knowledge on

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<sup>59</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 75; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', p. 349; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'.

<sup>60</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 58

<sup>62</sup> George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 212.

<sup>63</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', p. 349; George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p.

the history of Roman Britain,<sup>64</sup> other scholars such as John Morris have followed a similar reading of the evidence and dated Alban's martyrdom to Severus' campaign in the north.<sup>65</sup> Sharpe's revised transmission history of the *Passio* renders such debate about the date of Alban's martyrdom obsolete because 'Severus' and 'cesar' are interpolations and not in the original text.

The arguments that Alban was martyred in the Diocletian persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century ultimately rest on Gildas, who conjectured that this was the date of Alban's death.<sup>66</sup> Sharpe suggested that Gildas might have had access to the E text and based his account of Alban's martyrdom in the *De Excidio Britonum* on this version of the *Passio*.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to recognising that the E text was the oldest version of the *Passio Albani*, Sharpe posited a date for the writing of the *Passio* as well as suggesting the original context of the writing.<sup>68</sup> Sharpe argued that the E text was composed in the mid-fifth century before the composition of the *Vita Germani* by Constantius of Lyon. Sharpe reasoned that because the *Vita Germani* alludes to Germanus' visit to the tomb of Alban, and only briefly,<sup>69</sup> then Constantius must have known about this event from the *Passio Albani*.<sup>70</sup> Thus

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<sup>64</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 35.

<sup>65</sup> Salway, *Roman Britain*, p. 534; Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'. Levison realised that *cesar* was probably an addition to the original text, but still held to Meyer's chronology for the textual history. Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', p. 349.

<sup>66</sup> Levison and Morris dismissed Gildas' conjecture and argued for a date under Septimius Severus in part because Eusebius claimed that Constantius Chlorus, one of the Tetrarchy who had authority in the west, did not participate in the persecutions, or did nothing more than close some churches: Eusebius, *Eusebius Werke*. ed. by Eduard Schwartz and Theodor Mommsen. 2 part 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908). Richard Sharpe and Ian Wood have contested this assertion, pointing out that Eusebius was close to Constantine, the son of Constantius Chlorus, and had motivation to downplay or ignore Constantius' role in the persecution. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'; Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'.

<sup>67</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 35.

<sup>68</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', pp. 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. at p. 262.

<sup>70</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', pp. 35-36.



the *Passio* must pre-date the *Vita Germani*, which was composed sometime around 470.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, it could not have been composed before Germanus' visit to Britain in 429, or at least the last section describing Germanus' visit.

Sharpe suggested that the original version of the *Passio* was written during Germanus' lifetime, and that the E text is the closest version to the original text, but it has undergone at least one modification: the addition of the word '*sanctus*' before Germanus' name.<sup>72</sup> Sharpe asserted that if the original text was written in Germanus' lifetime it would not use the word *sanctus* when referring to the bishop. This assertion overlooks the fact that Meyer's text for E is an edited version of four separate manuscripts. Only one of the manuscripts, the one found in Autun, has the word *sanctus* before Germanus' name. The British Library and Einsiedeln manuscripts use the word *beatus* while the Gray's Inn manuscript has *benedictus*. This does not change Sharpe's interpretation. All three words imply that Germanus was dead at the time of writing. The fact that these different words are used in similar texts implies that there is an earlier version on which they are based, which might have been composed before Germanus died, as Sharpe suggested.

There is persuasive evidence in the *Passio* that it was originally composed in Germanus' lifetime and possibly even commissioned by Germanus himself. Sharpe suggested that text E was originally written to be displayed on *tituli* at a basilica dedicated to Alban in Auxerre by Germanus after his visit to the tomb of Alban.<sup>73</sup> This interpretation is based on one of the

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<sup>71</sup> See below.

<sup>72</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 36.

<sup>73</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', pp. 36-37. Sharpe states that the text would have been written on placards, but the text itself uses the word *tituli*, which could have been directly

interpolations found in the T text. All three versions of the text describe Germanus visiting the basilica where Alban was buried, but the Turin text says that while Germanus was sleeping there after Matins, Alban came to him in a dream and revealed the story of his martyrdom in order for it to be revealed to the public on *tituli*.<sup>74</sup> Sharpe argued that the E text is the version of the *Passio* displayed on the *tituli* mentioned in T.<sup>75</sup> The brevity of the E text would allow it to be displayed in such a way.<sup>76</sup> We also know from other sources that the walls of some fifth- and sixth century churches were decorated with texts, most notably the collection from Tours referred to as the *Martinellus*.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, Sharpe's supposition about the *Passio* being displayed on *tituli* is not unlikely. The assertion that the *tituli* were located in a church dedicated to Alban in Auxerre is less certain.

The *Passio Albani* states that when Germanus visited the tomb of Alban, he deposited relics of all the apostles and martyrs in his tomb, and then took some dust from the site of Alban's martyrdom, but it does not state what Germanus did with the relics.<sup>78</sup> Nor does it mention a church dedicated to Alban

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painted on the wall. See Thacker, 'Martyr Cults Within the Walls: Saints and Relics in the Roman *Tituli* of the Fourth to Seventh Centuries'; Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', pp. 126-27.

<sup>74</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 44, 'Sanctus albanus occurrit sed cum ad basilecam ipsius noctu uigilasset matutinis transactis dum se supore dedisset. sanctus albanus adfuit et que acta fuerant de persecutionibus eius reuelata tradedit et que titulis scripta retenerentur publice declarauit.'

<sup>75</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 36. One of the peculiarities of the *Passio* is that the conversion and execution of Alban are not described in any version of the text. Meyer took this as stylistic fault, but Karen George reasoned that if the *Passio* was originally written on *tituli*, then the need for brevity might explain the omission of the conversion and execution. Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 15; George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 211.

<sup>77</sup> Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 131-35 and 308-17.

<sup>78</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 45. 'Ad cuius basilicam cum beatus germanus episcopus cum omnium apostolorum diuersorumque martyrum reliquiis peruenisset. in eundem locum pretiosa munera conditurus reuelli sepulchrum iubet. ut membra sanctorum ex diuersis regionibus collecta. quos pares merito receperat caelum sepulchri unius teneret hospicium. quibus honorifice depositis atque eleuatis. de loco ipso ubi martyris sanguis effuderat.'

in Auxerre. The earliest reference to a church dedicated to Alban in Auxerre is found in the ninth century text, *Miracula Germani* written by Heiric of Auxerre.<sup>79</sup> Wolfert van Egmond speculated that Heiric, knowing the story of Germanus' visit to Alban's tomb from both the *Passio Albani* and the *Vita Germani* made the connection with a church dedicated to Alban in Auxerre without using another source, and invented the dedication of the church by Germanus.<sup>80</sup> The description of the church of Alban by Heiric does suggest that in the ninth century the church was thought to be old enough to have been dedicated by Germanus.<sup>81</sup> Although the church of Alban is not found in Aunacharius' *Institutio* nor Tertius' *Constitutio*, which mentions nearly every church in Auxerre from before AD 700, these texts are mainly concerned with churches attached to religious communities, and the church of Alban might have been too small to be connected to a religious community.<sup>82</sup>

Jean-Charles Picard has speculated that the church of Alban might have been the building used as the first church in Auxerre.<sup>83</sup> The *Vita Amatoris* describes Amatoris building a new church because the old one was too small to accommodate the growing congregation. Picard believed Germanus rededicated the church after returning from Britain with the relics of Alban.<sup>84</sup> Although the earliest reference to the church dates to the ninth century,

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<sup>79</sup> Heiric of Auxerre, *Miracula Germani*, l. c. 17: 'Reversus ex Britanniis, reliquias antiquissimi pretiosique Albani martyris secum detulit atque intra muros Autissiodori basilicam eis condendis exaedificans, praefati martyris nomine dedicavit.'

<sup>80</sup> Wolfert S. van Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints: Communication in Pre-Carolingian Hagiography from Auxerre*, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 91-92.

<sup>81</sup> Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> Jean-Charles Picard, 'Les Eglises d'Auxerre au temps de saint Germain (418-448?)', in *Saint-Germain d'Auxerre: intellectuels et artistes dans l'Europe carolingienne, IXe-XIe siècles : Auxerre (Yonne), Abbaye Saint-Germain, Juillet-Octobre 1990* (Auxerre: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1990).

<sup>84</sup> Picard, 'Les Eglises d'Auxerre'.

Germanus' return from Britain is the most likely reason for Alban's cult to be introduced to Auxerre and the origin of the church dedicated to him.<sup>85</sup> Whether or not this church contained the *tituli* referred to in the T text, as Sharpe suggests, cannot be determined.

There are significant implications of the revised textual transmission for the *Passio* that Sharpe did not recognise. The idea that Germanus was responsible for the production of the *Passio Albani* has wide ranging implications not only for interpreting the *Passio* itself, but also for our understanding of Alban's historicity and the origins of his cult. If we consider the context of Germanus' journey to Britain, then it can be argued that the cult of Alban was 'invented' by Germanus as part of his campaign against the Pelagians.<sup>86</sup> Germanus' actions at the tomb of Alban can be seen as part of the trend of using the invention of relics to promote orthodoxy that began with Ambrose's discovery of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius at the basilica of SS. Felix and Nabor at Milan in 386.<sup>87</sup>

The description in the *Passio* does not provide any evidence that the tomb of Alban was a place of cult before Germanus' arrival. The T text even states that Germanus did not know the name or story of Alban before he visited the basilica, but that this was revealed to him by Alban while he slept after celebrating Matins.<sup>88</sup> This implies that the cult did not exist before Germanus arrived.<sup>89</sup> Germanus might have invented Alban in his conflict against the

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<sup>85</sup> George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 217.

<sup>86</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

<sup>87</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'. See also Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate', at pp. 168-71.

<sup>88</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 44: 'sanctus Albanus adfuit et, que acta fuerant de persecutionibus eius, revelata tradidit utque titulis scripta retinerentur publice declaravit.'

<sup>89</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

Pelagians, discovering the relics of Alban and having his *passio* revealed to him in a dream.<sup>90</sup> Such an interpretation would render obsolete questions about the date and place of Alban's martyrdom, and with them most of the archaeological speculation about topography.

The *Passio Albani* does not actually mention Germanus' conflict with the Pelagians. However, some scholars have perceived an anti-Pelagian or at least a pro-Augustinian slant in the *Passio*.<sup>91</sup> The Augustinian ideals of baptism, confession and grace are heavily emphasised and the miracles in the text are not directly attributed to Alban himself. During the trial, Alban even declares that confession is better than good deeds.<sup>92</sup> The theological content of the text suggests that it was an anti-Pelagian tract produced at Auxerre.<sup>93</sup>

In summary, the *Passio Albani* appears to have been written at Auxerre in the mid-fifth century after Germanus' visit to Britain, when he invented the cult of Alban. Meyer's E version is closest to the original. Both the E and T versions have anti-Pelagian content, which links Alban's cult with the conflict between orthodoxy and heresy, in this case Pelagianism. Germanus' conflict with Pelagians in Britain is described in the *Vita Germani*, to which we now turn.

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<sup>90</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'. Wood also suggested that it might not be a coincidence that Alban's name is similar to the ancient names for Britain, *Alba* in Celtic and *Albion* in Greek and Latin, as well as the word for the white clothes worn by a neophyte, *alba*. Considering this, Wood wondered if Alban was an invention to symbolise the neophyte British church.

<sup>91</sup> Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', p. 12-13; Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

<sup>92</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus.*, p. 38: 'Albanus respondit iam dixi tibi quia diis tuis non sacrificabo quia periculum est a profecto animi mei Nunc hodie in bonis operibus aliquid addisse quantum periculosius est a bona confessione secessisse.' See also Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', p. 13-14.

<sup>93</sup> Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', pp. 12-13; Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

### 2.3.2 Germanus and Pelagianism

The *Vita Germani* places the context of the invention of Alban's cult in the conflict between orthodoxy and heresy. Germanus was bishop of Auxerre in the early fifth century.<sup>94</sup>

The *Vita Germani* was written by Constantius of Lyon sometime in the second half of the fifth century. Levison dated the text to c. 480 as did Gustave Bardy.<sup>95</sup> René Borius dated it to 475-480 but Richard Sharpe has argued that it is earlier than 470.<sup>96</sup> We know from the surviving letters of commission that Constantius wrote the *Vita Germani* for Patiens, bishop of Lyon; and Censurius, bishop of Auxerre later requested a copy after it was completed.<sup>97</sup> Thus the dates suggested for the composition are all based in part on the dates of the episcopates of Patiens and Censurius. Constantius, Patiens, and Censurius were all correspondents with Sidonius Apollinaris in the 470s. Sidonius described Constantius as 'weighed down by age',<sup>98</sup> which is one reason why Levison, Bardy and Borius supposed the *Vita Germani* was not written later than 480, although the exact date of his death is unknown. Sidonius himself died c. 485, and it is unlikely that Constantius survived him by much, if at all. Sidonius' letters to Censurius are the only measure we have for dating his episcopate. Patiens became bishop c. 450, and still held that office in the 470s when Sidonius wrote to him but had died by 494, when his successor plus one, Rusticus, was bishop. So the only absolute dates with which we can date the

<sup>94</sup> The chronology of Germanus' life and episcopacy has been under heavy debate. The year of his death has been suggested as 437, 442, and 448. For a thorough summary of the discussion, see Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'. at p. 80, n. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', p. 337; Gustave Bardy, 'Constance de Lyon, Biographe de Saint Germain d'Auxerre', in *Saint Germain d'Auxerre et Son Temps* (Auxerre: L'Universelle, 1950), pp. 89-108. at pp. 95-96.

<sup>96</sup> Borius, *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre*. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'. n. 22, p. 80.

<sup>97</sup> *MGH, SRM*, 7, pp. 225-83.

<sup>98</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters* (London: Heinemann, 1936). Book III.II, p. 10: 'persona aetate gravis infirmitate fragilis'.

composition of the *Vita Germani* are c. 450 and 494. Although Sidonius never mentioned the *Vita Germani* explicitly in his correspondence, he did praise Constantius' writing ability, which could be a reference to the *Vita*.<sup>99</sup> If so, then Sidonius' death c. 485 represents the latest feasible date for the composition, but an earlier date is more likely.

Modern scholars have suggested several reasons for Constantius' purpose in writing the *Vita Germani*. Wilhelm Gessel saw it as tool for edification of the audience.<sup>100</sup> Ian Wood considered it a guide for Gallic bishops who were called upon to provide spiritual guidance, secular leadership and practical help to the Gallo-Roman population confronted with the collapse of Roman administration and barbarian incursions.<sup>101</sup> Karen George expanded on Wood's interpretation and argued that the *Vita Germani* is in part an anti-Pelagian text, and indicates contemporary concern for perceived Pelagian tendencies of British clergy in Gaul accompanying Riothamus.<sup>102</sup> According to George, the *Vita Germani* emphasises grace over good deeds. It has also been seen as an attempt by Patiens to compete with the growing popularity of the cult of Saint Martin, which was at the time being promoted by Perpetuus.<sup>103</sup> All of these are valid motivations for the composition of the *Vita Germani*.

For the purposes of this study, we are mainly concerned with Germanus' two trips to Britain to combat the spread of Pelagianism, described in chapters 12-18 and 25-27. Germanus was accompanied by fellow bishops on both

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<sup>99</sup> Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters*. I.1; III.2; VII.18 and VIII. 16.

<sup>100</sup> Wilhelm Gessel, 'Germanus von Auxerre (um 378 bis 448): Die Vita des Konstantius von Lyon als homiletische Paränese in hagiographischer Form', *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte*, 65 (1970), 1-14.

<sup>101</sup> Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'. at p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', pp. 225-28.

<sup>103</sup> Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, p. 34.

occasions. On the first trip he was accompanied by Lupus of Troyes and on the second by Severus of Trier.<sup>104</sup> The first trip occurred in 429.<sup>105</sup> This we know because it is recorded in Prosper of Aquitaine's *Chronicon*, composed only a few years later in 434.<sup>106</sup>

There is a discrepancy between Prosper's account and Constantius' about the impetus for the first journey. Constantius claims Germanus was invited by a council of Gallic bishops convened because of a British petition for help against the Pelagians.<sup>107</sup> Prosper reported that Germanus went to Britain because he was ordered by Pope Celestine on the advice of Bishop Palladius.<sup>108</sup> Palladius would later be sent by Celestine to Ireland, not with the purpose to convert them but to serve Christians already there.<sup>109</sup> Prosper provided additional details about how Pelagianism came to Britain. He stated that Pelagianism was propounded by Bishop Agricola, son of one Severianus.<sup>110</sup> Constantius did not provide these details.

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<sup>104</sup> VG, cc. 25-27.

<sup>105</sup> The historicity of Germanus' second trip was widely debated, but Ian Wood and E. A. Thompson have argued persuasively it was authentic rather than a literary doublet. E. A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain*, Studies in Celtic History, 6. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984); Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'.

<sup>106</sup> Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chroniconum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen (Berlin, 1892), pp. 385-485,

<sup>107</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 12, p. 259: 'Eodem tempore ex Britanniis directa legatio Gallicanis episcopis nuntiavit, Pelagianam persersitatem in locis suis late populos occupasse et quam primum fidei catholicae debere succurri. Ob quam causam synodus numerosa collecta est, omniumque iudicio duo praeclara reigionis lumina universorum precibus ambiuntur, Germanus ac Lupus apostolici sacerdotes, terram corporibus, caelum meritis possidentes. Et quanto laboriosior necessitas apparebat, tanto eam promptius eroes devotissimi susceperunt, celeritatem negotii fidei stimulis maturantes.'

<sup>108</sup> Prosper, *Epitoma Chroniconum*, p. 472: 'Agricola Pelagianus, Severiani episcopi Pelagiani filius, ecclesias Britanniae dogmatis sui insinuatione corrumpit. sed ad insinuationem Palladii diaconi papa Caelestinus Germanum Autisidorensem episcopum vice sua mittit et deturbatis hereticis Britannos ad catholicam fidem dirigit.'

<sup>109</sup> See Dáibhí Ó. Cróinín, 'Who was Palladius, First Bishop of the Irish?', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 205-37.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Markus has speculated that Severianus might have been a Pelagian bishop. Since Pelagianism had so recently been declared a heresy, Markus suggested Severianus was a



Germanus first arrived in Britain after a rough voyage in which demons attempted to prevent a successful crossing with a fierce storm, but their effort was thwarted by Germanus.<sup>111</sup> After Germanus and Lupus travelled around Britain preaching, performing miracles and returning many to orthodoxy, they were challenged to a debate by the Pelagians, in which Germanus and Lupus successfully rebutted the heretics and asserted the authority of the Orthodox Church.<sup>112</sup> After the debate, Germanus healed the blind ten-year-old daughter of a tribunal with the relics which he carried with him.<sup>113</sup> Germanus then confronted and defeated the Saxons and Picts, not with military power but by having the British army chant 'alleluia' repeatedly.<sup>114</sup> Feeling that Britain was now secure, Germanus and Lupus returned to Gaul.

Germanus' second trip to Britain, which occurred not long before he died, was shorter and less eventful. News reached Germanus that the Pelagian heresy was spreading in Britain again, so he embarked upon his second trip there with Severus.<sup>115</sup> After a trouble-free voyage, Germanus and Severus were greeted by Elafius, one of the leading men of Britain, along with the whole province. Germanus discovered that the impact of Pelagianism was not as bad as on his previous visit, as only a few people were spreading the heresy. They were identified and condemned.<sup>116</sup> Germanus then healed Elafius' crippled son, which along with a sermon, was enough to confute the heresy and return the

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British bishop in a 'native' Christian tradition that may have recently been labeled Pelagian but accounted for most British Christians. For more on Severianus see Robert Markus' review of *Saint Germanus and the End of Roman Britain* by E. A. Thompson, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 29 (1985), 115-22 and Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*.

<sup>111</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 13, pp. 259-60.

<sup>112</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 14, p. 261.

<sup>113</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 15, pp. 261-62.

<sup>114</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 17-18, pp. 263-65.

<sup>115</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. ch. 25, p. 269.

<sup>116</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. ch. 26, p. 270.

population to orthodoxy. The Pelagians were exiled from Britain and went to the Continent with Germanus.<sup>117</sup>

Prosper's *Chronicon* attests to the historicity of Germanus' voyage to Britain to fight Pelagianism, but Constantius' description must be viewed with the possibility of an allegorical reading. E. A. Thompson observed that for the passages that relate Germanus' visits to Britain, Constantius is short on specific details.<sup>118</sup> Constantius mentioned no place names, nor did he provide the names of any Britons, with the exception of Elafius, who appears during Germanus' second trip. The Pelagians are not labelled with any titles such as bishop or priest, or with any lay titles.

Despite this observation, Thompson accepted the historicity of the *Vita Germani* in regards to the events during Germanus' journey to Britain.<sup>119</sup> Ian Wood interpreted some of the details of the British trip as at least partially allegorical.<sup>120</sup> For example, the girl Germanus heals during his first visit is ten years old, which corresponds to the number of years since Pelagianism was declared heretical and putatively the amount of time Britain had endured the heresy under Pelagian exiles who fled to Britain. Her affliction, blindness, is symbolic of Britain's separation from the light of the truth. Wood also treated the 'alleluia victory' with scepticism, observing the obvious parallels with the battle of Jericho in the Old Testament.<sup>121</sup>

Regardless of the historicity or otherwise of the details of Germanus' journeys, Constantius depicted Britain as still part of the Roman Empire and

<sup>117</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. ch. 27, pp. 270-71.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, *Germanus and the End of Roman Britain*.

<sup>119</sup> Thompson, *Germanus and the End of Roman Britain*.

<sup>120</sup> Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', pp. 10-11.

<sup>121</sup> Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', pp. 10-11.

orthodox at the time he was writing about it in the second half of the fifth century.

The *Vita Germani* mentions Alban on two occasions, both during Germanus' first visit to Britain. The first is when Germanus visited the grave of Alban immediately after defeating the Pelagians.

And so, this damnable heresy being crushed and its authors confuted and the souls of all the faithful restored to the true faith, the priests petitioned the blessed martyr Alban to give thanks to God. When they returned from there, a foe [demon] lying in wait, prepared a trap which crushed the foot of Germanus, not knowing that this affliction to his body would increase his merit just as the blessed Job.<sup>122</sup>

The other mention of Alban in the *Vita Germani* is when Germanus and Lupus are returning to Gaul from Britain: 'Their own merit and the intervention of the martyr Alban secured a calm voyage for them, and a favorable ship restored the priests in peace to their waiting congregations.'<sup>123</sup> Germanus' visit to Alban to give thanks directly after the defeat of the Pelagians links Alban with orthodoxy and Germanus' conflict with the Pelagians in Britain.

Germanus' thanksgiving to Alban after defeating the Pelagians is about all the *Vita Germani* describes regarding Alban and the existence of his cult. It says nothing about whether or not the cult of Alban was established before Germanus' trip. F. R. Hoare's translation of the *Vita Germani* includes the word 'shrine' in the sentence where Germanus and Lupus give thanks to Alban: 'When this damnable heresy had been thus stamped out, its authors refuted,

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<sup>122</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. ch. 16, p. 262. The translation is mine.

<sup>123</sup> Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'. c. 18, p. 265: 'Tranquillam navigationem merita propria et intercessio Albani martyris paraverunt, quietosque antestites suorum desideriiis felix carina restituit.'

and the minds of all re-established in the true faith, the bishops visited the shrine of the blessed martyr Alban, to give thanks to God through him.<sup>124</sup> The existence of a shrine at the time of Germanus' visit would imply that a cult of Alban had been established before Germanus' visit. The text of the *Vita Germani*, however, does not state that there is a shrine to Alban:

Compressa itaque perversitate damnabili eiusque auctoribus confutatis animisque omnium fidei puritate conpositis, sacerdotes beatum Albanum martyrem, acturi Deo per ipsum gratias, petierunt. Unde dum redeunt, insidiator inimicus, casualibus laqueis praeparatos, Germani pedem lapsus occasione contrivit, ignorans merita illius sicut Iob beatissimi afflictione corporis propaganda.

The text merely implies that Germanus and Lupus go somewhere to petition Alban to give thanks to God. The text does not specify a location, but the following sentence begins with the phrase '*unde dum redeunt*', which implies an actual physical location, presumably the basilica mentioned in the *Passio Albani*.<sup>125</sup> Borius' translation follows the original Latin more closely: 'La condamnabile erreur ayant été ainsi réprimée, ses champions confondus et toutes les âmes apaisées par la pureté de la foi, les évêques allèrent prier le bienheureux martyr Alban pour rendre grâces à Dieu par son intermédiaire.'<sup>126</sup>

The archaeological evidence for a shrine existing at the time of Germanus' visit, discussed in chapter four, is inconclusive. Other sources must be consulted to attempt to answer this. All versions of the *Passio Albani* state

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<sup>124</sup> F. R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers: Being the Lives of SS. Martin of Tours, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Honoratus of Arles and Germanus of Auxerre* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), p. 299. An emended version of Hoare's translation, which still uses the word 'shrine', is found in Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, p. 88.

<sup>125</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 45.

<sup>126</sup> Borius, *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre*, p. 153.

that by the time Germanus visited it, Alban's tomb was near or in a basilica.<sup>127</sup>

This is the clearest description of architecture at the site of Alban's grave, but the words used do not indicate a *specific shrine* dedicated to Alban.<sup>128</sup>

The other relevant sources here are Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum* and Bede's *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*. Gildas, writing at the same time or not much later than Constantius,<sup>129</sup> stated that there were martyrs' tombs in Britain, but he did not say what architectural features were associated with Alban's cult.<sup>130</sup> Bede, on the other hand, explicitly stated that after the persecutions of Christians ended a church (*ecclesia*) dedicated to Alban was built over his grave, which persisted up to Bede's day and was the site of many miracles.<sup>131</sup> Bede received his information from the earlier sources, a version of the *Passio* close to the P text, and the *De Excidio Britonum*; and possibly the interpolated *Vita Germani*.<sup>132</sup> However, since Bede was writing three hundred years after Germanus' visit, his statements have no independent evidential value on this matter other than as possible vehicles for repeating information given by others. The consequence is that there is no evidence for the existence of a shrine to Alban before Germanus' visit. Thus Hoare's use of the word 'shrine' in his translation is unwarranted and misleading. The *Vita Germani*, like

<sup>127</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>128</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 45. The text of the British Library manuscript of E reads as follows: 'Ad cuius basilicam cum beatus Germanus episcopus cum omnium apostolorum diversorumque martyrem reliquiis pervenisset. In eundem locum pretiosa munera conditurus revelli sepulchram iubet, ut membra sanctorum ex diversis regionibus collecta quos pares merito receperat caelum sepulchri unius teneret hospicium. Quibus honorifice depositis atque eleuatis de loco ipso ubi martyris sanguis effuderat massam cruenti pulveris rapuit.'

<sup>129</sup> Thomas O'Sullivan has argued for a date range of 515-530 AD, O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date*. Ian Wood has suggested a date of composition ranging from AD 485-530. See Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'.

<sup>130</sup> *DEB*, c. 10, p 92: '...clarissimos lampades sanctorum martyrum nobis accendit, quorum nunc corporum sepulturae et passionum loca...'. This passage will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>131</sup> *HE*, I.7, p. 34: 'ubi postea, redeunte temporum Christianorum serenitate, ecclesia est mirandi operis atque eius martyrio condigna extracta.'

<sup>132</sup> Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, pp. 119-27

the *Passio Albani*, shows no indication that the cult of Alban was established before Germanus' visit, and does not invalidate the theory that Germanus invented the cult of Alban.

The most important thing to note about the *Vita Germani* is that it attests the presence of at least one cult in Britain, which suggests that Victricius' efforts to promote the acceptance of saints' cults, and possibly others whose actions did not survive in the historical record, had been at least partially successful. Furthermore, the cult of Alban was created by Germanus amidst the conflict between orthodoxy and heresy.

#### **2.4 Saints' cults and the Anglo-Saxon conquest**

Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum* (hereafter *DEB*), composed near the beginning of the sixth century, is the only substantial literary text to survive from late antique Britain.<sup>133</sup> In it Gildas set out a brief history of the island followed by a list of complaints against the secular and religious leaders of Britain, and preached about the moral collapse of society.<sup>134</sup> The most significant aspect of Gildas' text in regard to this study is that he mentioned saints' cults in Britain, indicating that the cult of saints continued in Britain after Germanus' visits, and it was no longer associated with combating heresy, demonstrating at least one development in the British church in the fifth century.

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas O'Sullivan has presented a cogent argument that *The De Excidio Britonum* was written sometime between 515-530 AD, and puts to rest any doubt as to the authenticity of Gildas' authorship in *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978). See also Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'.

<sup>134</sup> His polemic style resembles Salvian of Marseille's *De Gubernatione Dei*, written in the mid-fifth century. See Salvian of Marseilles, 'De Gubernatione Dei', in *Salviani Presbyteri Massiliensis: Opera Omnia*, ed. by Francis Pauly, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum*, 8 (Vindobonae: Gerold, 1883), pp. 1-200; 'The Governance of God', in *The Writings of Salvian, the Presbyter*, trans. by Jeremiah O'Sullivan (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1947; repr. 1977), pp. 21-232

Gildas' goals were to provide the British with a common and morally conceived history as a single people, modelled on the example of the Hebrews in the Old Testament; to state that their status as an elect people of God was in peril but not totally lost; and to encourage the British to turn from their wicked ways back to God so that He might save them from the scourge of the invaders.<sup>135</sup> In order to illustrate God's role in granting victory over the Saxons, Gildas portrayed the British as militarily incompetent. This damning description, undermining the character of the British, along with the fact that the Saxons were not driven out of Britain, was exploited by later writers, especially Bede, to twist Gildas' portrait, depicting the British as fallen from God's favour and undeserving of control of Britain.<sup>136</sup>

This study is concerned primarily with chapters 10 and 11, the chapters in which Gildas mentions British saints. Here follows a translation of chapter 10:

God therefore greatly magnified his mercy among us, wishing all men to be saved and calling sinners no less than those who think themselves just. And he, as a free gift, in the time of the above mentioned persecution, as we conjecture, so that Britain would not be thoroughly darkened by the thick darkness of dark night, lit for us the brightest lamps of the holy martyrs, whose tombs for their bodies and places of suffering now, if they had not been taken from the citizens through the grievous separation of the barbarians as well as on account of our many sins, would instil much ardour of divine charity in the minds of the admirers: I speak of Alban of Verulamium and Aaron and Julius of the City of Legions and the rest of the citizens of both sexes in diverse locations standing in the greatest magnanimity in the battle-line of Christ.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *DEB*, c. 1, pp. 87-89. See also Nicholas Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 47

<sup>136</sup> Bede, *HE*, I.22, p. 68. See also Higham, *King Arthur*, p. 56.

<sup>137</sup> *DEB*, ch. 10, p. 92: 'magnificauit igitur misericordiam suam nobiscum deus uolens omnes homines saluos fieri et uocans non minus peccatores quam eos qui se putant iustos. qui gratuito munere, supra dicto ut conicimus persecutionis tempore, ne penitus crassa atrae noctis caligine britannia obfuscaretur, clarissimos lampades sanctorum martyrum nobis accendit, quorum nunc corporum sepulturae et passionum loca, si non lugubri diuortio barbarorum quam plurima ob scelera nostra ciuibus adimerentur, non minimum intuentium mentibus ardorem diuinae caritatis incuterent: sanctum albanum uerolamiensem, aaron et iulium legionum urbis

Some context for chapter 10 is necessary before moving on. This chapter is part of Gildas' history of Britain, which consists of chapters 4-26. This is not history in a conventional sense, and is not intended to stand on its own.<sup>138</sup> Rather, it serves to explain the situation in Britain before getting to the main purpose of *DEB*, a polemic chastising the current secular leaders as well as the clergy for their moral lapse. Chapter 9 paraphrases chapter 8 of Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which describe the persecutions under Diocletian.<sup>139</sup> Chapter 10 describes British martyrs who were executed during these persecutions: Alban, Julius and Aaron. Chapter 11 summarises Alban's passion.<sup>140</sup> Chapter 12 returns to Rufinus' translation of Eusebius.<sup>141</sup> So with these chapters Gildas places the British martyrs into the context of Christianity and persecutions across the Roman Empire.

Gildas tells us that native British sources were not available to him because they had been burned by enemies or taken by exiles when they fled Britain.<sup>142</sup> At the very least, this suggests that Gildas believed there to have been native textual sources. Further, he explains that because of the lack of such native sources he has had to resort to overseas sources, '*transmarina relatione*', which can refer to either textual or oral sources, but is more likely to

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ciues ceterosque utriusque sexus diuersis in locis summa magnanimitate in acie christi perstantes dico.' The translation is mine.

<sup>138</sup> O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date*, pp. 48-76.

<sup>139</sup> Eusebius, *Eusebius Werke*. Book 8.2, pp. 743-47.

<sup>140</sup> Gildas' account is probably based on a version of the *Passio Albani*, either P or E, which suggests that it was in circulation in Britain at the time Gildas was writing. Karen George noted that the vocabulary in chapter 11 of Gildas repeats many words of the P and E versions of the *Passio Albani*, and in the same order, making it likely that Gildas had access to one of these versions of the text. George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 211. Gildas' summary does not include the passage describing Germanus' visit to Alban's tomb. So either the version available to Gildas did not contain that passage or Gildas chose not to include it.

<sup>141</sup> Eusebius, *Eusebius Werke*. 9.1, pp. 804-05.

<sup>142</sup> *DEB*, ch. 4, p. 90.



be textual.<sup>143</sup> We know that some of the sources available to Gildas included Rufinus, Orosius, and Ptolemy.<sup>144</sup>

Analysis of the text indicates Gildas had access to other sources that no longer survive. Chapters 12-26 of *DEB* provide information not found in any other earlier sources, such as the description of Ambrosius Aurelianus, and the Battle of *Mons Badonicus*. Gildas also provides information about British martyrs that we do not find anywhere else. *DEB* is the earliest surviving source that mentions Julius and Aaron. There is no independent corroboration for these martyrs or their cults beyond their names and location. Gildas says they were citizens of the City of Legions, *legionum urbis*. In addition to Caerleon, *legionum urbis* could refer to the other legionary fortresses, York and Chester, which actually carry this name in a number of sources.<sup>145</sup> However, in this instance the identification of Caerleon is suggested by several factors.<sup>146</sup> An eighth-century grant found in the *Book of Llandaff* describes the boundaries of the '*territorium sanctorum martirium julii et aaron*' near Caerleon, and two twelfth-century charters reinforce the grant.<sup>147</sup> Later medieval tradition also held that this was where they were martyred, as described by both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gerald of Wales.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *DEB*, ch. 4, p. 90.

<sup>144</sup> *DEB*, p. 148.

<sup>145</sup> David Dumville, 'The Chronology of De Excidio Britanniae, Book I', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984), pp. 61-84. at p. 82, n. 99; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300-800*, pp. 262-63.

<sup>146</sup> See Williams, *Christianity in Early Britain*, pp. 103-09; G. R. Stephens, 'Caerleon and the Martyrdoms of SS. Aaron and Julian', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 32 (1985), 326-35. at p. 326; and Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent'. at p. 12.

<sup>147</sup> The charter evidence is reviewed in Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', pp. 339-44, and more recently in Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'.

<sup>148</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*. trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966). V.6, p. 131, and IX.12; Gerald of Wales, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*. trans. Thomas Wright (London: H. G. Bohn, 1863), pp. 372-73.

Gildas provides additional information to the story of Alban's martyrdom. Gildas is the earliest source to connect the cult of Alban with Verulamium, the Roman settlement adjacent to the modern town that takes its name from Alban.<sup>149</sup> None of the versions of the *Passio Albani* or the *Vita Germani* say where the tomb of Alban was located, except that it was in Britain. The description of the topography in the *Passio Albani* broadly accords with Verulamium,<sup>150</sup> but could also describe many other contemporary settlements. Alban is led out of town via one of the city gates, crosses the river and goes up a hill. However, the text refers to an arena outside of the walls of the city. There was an arena at Verulamium, but it was inside the city walls.<sup>151</sup> The description in the *Passio Albani* is likely to be a rhetorical device, a *locus amoenus* description, not intended to be literal.<sup>152</sup>

Gildas also stated that on the way to his execution, Alban crossed the river Thames, parting the waters like Moses.<sup>153</sup> This is problematic because Verulamium is not on the Thames, but the Ver. Although Gildas says Alban is from Verulamium, he does not say that this is where he was martyred. Karen George has suggested that Gildas assumed Alban was tried and executed in nearby London, the provincial capital, and a logical place for a capital trial to take place, and afterwards his remains were removed to Verulamium for burial.<sup>154</sup> Such translations are known to have occurred elsewhere. One example is Julian of Brioude, who was from Vienne, and fled to Brioude, where

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<sup>149</sup> *DEB*, ch. 10, p. 92; Sheppard Frere and I. W. Cornwall, *Verulamium Excavations*. 1, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London; no. 28. (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1972).

<sup>150</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Frere and Cornwall, *Verulamium Excavations*; Niblett and Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns*.

<sup>151</sup> Niblett and Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns*.

<sup>152</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', p. 127.

<sup>153</sup> *DEB*, ch. 11, p. 92.

<sup>154</sup> George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 215.

he was killed; and his head was returned to Vienne to be buried with Ferreolus.<sup>155</sup> This does not entirely fit with the description of Germanus' visit in the surviving versions of the *Passio Albani*, which states that he visited the tomb of Alban at a basilica, and the site of his martyrdom. Although the two sites are mentioned as two separate locations, it is implied that they are near to each other.<sup>156</sup> Nor does Gildas himself mention London in connection with Alban. He probably would have done so had this been his assumption. Conceivably, Gildas described Alban crossing the Thames because this is more impressive than crossing the Ver, the fording of which on foot does not amount to a notable feat, whereas having Alban part and cross the Thames magnifies his power and holiness.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, if we follow the interpretation that the story of Alban was invented by Germanus, then debate about the location of Alban's martyrdom is irrelevant. Gildas' mention of the Thames is an embellishment to a fictional account of a martyrdom.

So did Gildas invent the link between Alban and Verulamium entirely? Even if Germanus created the story about Alban's martyrdom, the invention of Alban's cult had to have a physical location at its foundation. It is unlikely that Gildas fabricated the link between Alban and Verulamium. Since the *Passio Albani* and the *Vita Germani* do not mention Verulamium, then Gildas probably received the information from non-textual sources.

Perhaps Gildas himself visited the supposed grave of Alban at Verulamium. In chapter 10, Gildas says that the tombs of the martyrs had been

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<sup>155</sup> Gregory of Tours, 'Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris', in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicorum*, ed. by B. Krusch (Hanover, 1885), pp. 562-84.

<sup>156</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*, p. 45.

<sup>157</sup> George, 'Gildas and the Early British Church', p. 215.

taken from the Britons, on account of their sins and '*lugubri diuortio barbarorum*'. This *diuortium* has often been interpreted as some sort of geographic barrier that existed when Gildas was writing.<sup>158</sup> E. A. Thompson argued that Gildas had no topographical knowledge of Verulamium and assumed it was on the Thames because it was inaccessible due to the *diuortium*.<sup>159</sup> Contrary to this interpretation is the idea that the *diuortium* was not a boundary across which he could not pass, but a separation from the barbarians in a legal sense. However, in order to explain what Gildas meant by *lugubri diuortio barbarorum*, we must first determine what he meant by barbarian.

It has often been assumed that the barbarians Gildas is referring to in chapter 10 are the Saxons. However, it is not clear from the immediate context of the passage that he is indeed referring to the Saxons. The word *barbarus* is only used six times throughout the entire text, and all uses occur in the history section. After chapter 26, Gildas is no longer concerned with barbarians. The word is used ambiguously twice; twice it refers to the Picts and Scots, and twice it refers to the Saxons. When *barbarus* is used in chapter 10, this is its first appearance in *DEB* and the only reference to barbarians in that chapter, and there is no explanation in the immediate context.<sup>160</sup> Since there is nothing before it in the text that it can refer to, if it refers to anything in the text it is something later.

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<sup>158</sup> For example, Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 31; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 106; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300-800*, p. 262; Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', p. 219.

<sup>159</sup> Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', p. 219

<sup>160</sup> There are oblique references in chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 is a summary of the history, and Gildas refers to 'duabus gentibus uastatricibus' and 'de nuntiatis subito hostibus'. In chapter 4, Gildas talks about native British sources being taken from Britain by emigrants or 'ignibus hostium exusta'.

After chapter 10, the next reference is in chapter 18: 'Because from thence the wild barbarous beasts were feared.'<sup>161</sup> The fact that Gildas has been describing attacks by the Scots and Picts and his reference to them in the next chapter suggests that here *barbaricae ferae bestiae* refers to Scots and Picts.<sup>162</sup> The next appearance of the word *barbarus* is in chapter 20, where it is used twice in quick succession: 'The barbarians repel us to the sea; the sea repels us to the barbarians.'<sup>163</sup> This is an excerpt from the letter to Aetius, the third appeal by the British to the Romans for help against the barbarians, and he is clearly talking about the Picts and Scots. Aetius subsequently refuses to help, with disastrous consequences described in chapter 23, which also contains the final two uses of the term barbarian:

Then a pack of cubs burst forth from the lair of the barbarian lioness...On the orders of the ill-fated tyrant, they first of all 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 and 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 so well deserved, sprouted in our soil with savage shoots

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<sup>161</sup> *DEB*, ch. 18, p. 94: in litore quoque oceani ad meridianam plagam, quo naues eorum habebantur, quia et inde **barbaricae** ferae bestiae timebantur, turrets per intervalla ad prospectum maris collocant, et ualedicunt tamquam ultra non reuersuri.

<sup>162</sup> Here Gildas is referring to construction of towers on the southern coast to defend against attacks on that front while a second wall built in the usual manner is built in stone to replace the insufficient turf wall. This is just after the second expedition of the Romans after an initial abandonment, when they tell the Britons that they cannot be bothered and the British must defend themselves. These towers are probably the forts of the Saxon shore built in the third century. See Peter Salway, *A History of Roman Britain* (Oxford: Oxford, 1997), pp. 189-91. Gildas described the Scots and Picts as overseas nations in chapter 14, implying that their attacks are predominantly seaborne. However, we would not expect the Scots and Picts to attack from the south. The obvious barbarian group that would come from this direction are the Saxons, but they are not mentioned by name. Although, considering that Gildas did not have accurate, or chose not to report accurately, information about the dates of construction for Hadrian's Wall, the same might apply with the fortifications on the Saxon shore. Gildas might have been creating what he thought to be a plausible explanation for the construction of these forts.

<sup>163</sup> *DEB*, ch. 20, p. 95: igitur rursus miserae mittentes epistolas reliquiae ad agitium romanae potestatis uirum, hoc modo loquentes: 'agitio ter consuli gemitus britannorum;' et post pauca querentes: 'repellunt **barbari** ad mare, repellit mare ad **barbaros**; inter haec duo genera funerum aut iugulamur aut mergimur;' nec pro eis quicquam adiutorii habent.

and tendrils. The barbarians who had been admitted to the island asked to be given supplies, falsely representing themselves as soldiers ready to undergo extreme dangers for their excellent hosts.<sup>164</sup>

This is the only occasion where Gildas is undoubtedly referring to the Saxons. In the previous paragraph he describes how a council convened with the proud tyrant to decide how to counter the attacks by the Scots and Picts since the appeal to Aetius was refused. The council decides to hire the Saxons to fight the Picts and Scots. This was a typical strategy for dealing with barbarian raids, employed across the Roman Empire during the fifth century, and was used by Aetius himself.<sup>165</sup> The description of this arrangement has credence because Gildas uses the specific terminology associated with these arrangements: namely the words *annona*, 'ration'; and *epimenium*, 'monthly rations'; and *foedus*, 'treaty'. This last is especially significant. This treaty was the official agreement between the British and Saxons whereby the Saxons would fight against the Picts and Scots. Gildas tells us that the Saxons threatened and then proceeded to break the treaty, turning on the British and attacking British towns.

It is surely the breaking of the treaty in chapter 23 to which the *divortium* in chapter 10 refers. There is nothing else for it to refer to. Chapters 24-26

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<sup>164</sup> Here the translation is Winterbottom's. *DEB*, ch. 23, p. 97: tum erumpens grex catulorum de cubili laeanae **barbarae**... hoc est dimidio temporis, saepius uastaret, euctus, primum in orientali parte insulae iubente infausto tyranno terribiles infixit ungues, quasi pro patria pugnaturus sed eam certius impugnaturus.

igitur intromissi in insulam **barbari**, ueluti militibus et magna, ut mentiebantur, discrimina pro bonis hospitibus subituris, impetrant sibi **annonas** dari: quae multo tempore impertitae clauserunt, ut dicitur, canis faucem. item queruntur non affluenter sibi **epimonia** contribui, occasiones de industria colorantes, et ni profusior eis munificentia cumularetur, testantur se cuncta insulae rupto **foedere** depopulatos. nec mora, minas effectibus prosequuntur. igitur intromissi in insulam **barbari**, ueluti militibus et magna, ut mentiebantur, discrimina pro bonis hospitibus subituris, impetrant sibi **annonas** dari.'

<sup>165</sup> Salway, *A History of Roman Britain*, p. 328.

describe the conflict between the British and Saxons culminating in the British victory at Badon Hill, after which fighting continued but at a reduced scale. After chapter 26, Gildas moves on to the complaints against the secular and ecclesiastical leaders and we hear no more of barbarians. Moreover, the circumstances described in chapter 23 fit the interpretation. *Divortium* is a legal term describing the separation of two parties, and the breaking of a treaty would be an appropriate context for the use of the term. So, to return to a question posed above, could the *divortium* have prevented Gildas from visiting the tomb of Alban? If we accept this interpretation of *divortium*, then the *divortium* was an event in the past, not a contemporary physical barrier that impeded access to the tombs.

Gildas makes clear that the loss of martyrs' tombs was a punishment inflicted on the British because of their sins, which in turn was the cause of the separation with the barbarians.<sup>166</sup> For Gildas, the barbarians are merely a rhetorical device with which to illustrate the moral lapse of society. He was not interested, as other late antique writers were, in their origins. He does not provide any geographic context or origin for any of the barbarians he mentions.<sup>167</sup>

This still leaves unexplained by what manner the saints' tombs were taken from the British. The use of the word *adirementur* suggests a material aspect to the circumstances that Gildas is describing. This description of towns

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<sup>166</sup> *DEB*, ch. 10, p. 92: sic non lugubri diuortio barbarorum quam plurima ob scelera nostra ciuibus adimerentur.

<sup>167</sup> A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 278.

being attacked, possibly an exaggeration for rhetorical effect, might explain

Gildas' claim of tombs being taken from the British:

All the major towns were laid low by the repeated battering of enemy rams; laid low, too, all the inhabitants – church leaders, priests and people alike, as the sword glinted all around and the flames crackled. It was a sad sight. In the middle of the squares the foundation-stones of high walls and towers that had been torn from their lofty base, holy altars, fragments of corpses, covered (as it were) with a purple crust of congealed blood, looked as though they had been mixed up in some dreadful wine-press. There was no burial to be had except in the ruins of the houses or the bellies of beasts and birds – saving the reverence due to their holy spirits, if indeed many were found at that time to be carried by holy angels to the heights of heaven.<sup>168</sup>

Due to their position outside the walls of cities, chapels housing the relics of saints and martyrs were vulnerable to attack, especially since they often contained furnishings made of precious materials.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps Gildas was implying that when the cities were destroyed, so too were the tombs of saints. Gildas does not say every town was destroyed. Nor does he specify that the tombs and relics of Alban, Julius and Aaron were taken. There is nothing in the text itself that states that these specific tombs had been taken from the British, or that anything could have prevented Gildas from visiting them. Since Gildas mentions these saints' cults, it implies that they were still active and there was

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<sup>168</sup> Translation by Winterbotton, *DEB*, ch. 24, p. 97-98: ita ut cunctae coloniae crebris arietibus omnesque colonis cum praepositis ecclesiae, cum sacerdotibus ac populo, mucronibus undique micantibus ac flammis crepitantibus, simul solo sternerentur, et miserabili uisu in medio platearum ima turrium edito cardine euulsarum murorumque celsorum saxa, sacra altaria, cadauerum frustra, crustis ac si gelantibus purpurei cruoris tecta, uelut in quodam horrendo torculari mixta uiderentur, et nulla esset omnimodis praeter domorum ruinas, bestiarum uolucrumque uentres in medio sepultura, salua sanctarum animarum reuerentia, si tamen multae inuentae sint quae arduis caeli id temporis a sanctis angelis ueherentur.

<sup>169</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 237. The vulnerability of shrines is illustrated by some examples which retain their original doors, which were heavy for security purposes. Ann Terry, 'The Sculpture at the Cathedral of Eufrasius in Poreč', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 42 (1988), 13-64. Before the seventh century, barbarian invasion was one of the few circumstances in which it was acceptable to move relics from their original resting place. Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 226.



something there, such as their tombs. If there were tombs to these martyrs in Gildas' time, it is not implausible that he visited them himself.

Although Gildas only made a couple of short references to saints' cults in the *De Excidio Britonum*, he conveyed significant information. Gildas' description indicates that at the beginning of the sixth century the cult of Alban was not the only one in Britain. Unlike the other texts discussed above, the *De Excidio Britonum* does not link saints' cults to a conflict between heresy and orthodoxy. Rather, Gildas described martyrs as instruments of salvation that have been taken from the Britons because of their sins. Gildas does not portray a widespread cult of saints in Britain, although it continued to follow the same line of development as mainland Europe, with veneration of martyrs occurring at their graves and the sites of their martyrdoms.<sup>170</sup>

## 2.5 An uncertain martyr

The next source for consideration is the *Libellus Responsionum*, the collected responses of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury. One of the responses, normally referred to as the *Obsecratio Augustini*, concerns Augustine's encounter with the veneration of an uncertain saint. This response presents evidence for another martyr cult in Britain at the time of Augustine's mission. The text of the response, and its omission from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, suggest that the cult was deliberately suppressed.

Before addressing this saint's cult, the authenticity and textual transmission of this text should be discussed. Questions about the authenticity of the *Libellus Responsionum* were raised as early as the eighth century, when

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<sup>170</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 121.

Boniface sought confirmation that Gregory authored the text.<sup>171</sup> Taking a cue from Boniface's doubts, Suso Brechter argued that the *Libellus Responsionum* does not present authentic correspondence between Gregory and Augustine, but is a forgery written by Nothelm of Canterbury in 731 for inclusion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>172</sup> He argued that the text reflected theological and canonical concerns of the eighth-century, dismissing the possibility that these preoccupations had antecedents in the sixth and seventh century.<sup>173</sup> For Brechter, the strongest piece of evidence regarding the inauthenticity of the text was the response concerning kinship and marriage, which is what raised the suspicions of Boniface. However, it has been shown that the portion of the text that caused Boniface's doubts is an interpolation, probably added in the eighth century after the Council of Rome in 721.<sup>174</sup>

Margaret Deanesly and Paul Grosjean responded to Brechter's claims of forgery, rejecting his theory, and suggested that the *Libellus Responsionum* is a collection of Gregorian documents from Canterbury.<sup>175</sup> According to Deanesly and Grosjean, the collection consists of authentic responses from Gregory and a couple of theological disputations originating from Theodore's episcopacy.

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<sup>171</sup> Michael Tangl, *Briefe des Bonifatius. Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). at Tangl 19; see also Bill Friesen, 'Answers and Echoes: The *Libellus Responsionum* and the Hagiography of North-Western European Mission', *Early Medieval Europe*, 14 (2006), 153-72. at p. 158.

<sup>172</sup> Heinrich Suso Brechter, *Die Quellen zur Angelsachsenmission Gregors des Grossen: eine historiographische Studie, Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1941).

<sup>173</sup> Brechter, *Die Quellen zur Angelsachsenmission Gregors des Grossen*. Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum* of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. by Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 15-33. at p. 16, n. 3.

<sup>174</sup> Margaret Deanesly and Paul Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 10 (1959), 1-49.

<sup>175</sup> Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine'.

Deanesly and Grosjean argued that the *Libellus Responsionum* was compiled by Nothelm, who added the preface. Deanesly and Grosjean considered the authenticity of each response individually, and concluded that the collection, with the exception of the interpolation concerning marriage and kinship, can be attributed to Gregory.<sup>176</sup>

Paul Meyvaert stressed the necessity of establishing the manuscript tradition of the text and comparing it to Gregory's other works when considering the authenticity of the *Libellus Responsionum*.<sup>177</sup> Meyvaert's textual analysis revealed a long transmission history before it was incorporated into Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, refuting the theories that Nothelm either forged or compiled the *Libellus Responsionum*.

Meyvaert also demonstrated that the text was transmitted in three different versions: the Letter version, which circulated in northern Italy and Septimania, represented by 10 manuscripts; the Capitula version, distributed in northern Italy, southern Gaul and Switzerland; and the Question and Answer version (hereafter Q/A), which comprises most of the surviving copies at over 100 manuscripts, and its distribution covered Gaul, Britain and Germany. The Letter version is the oldest version of the text. Both of the Capitula and Q/A versions derive from the Letter versions, each introducing different editorial devices to signal when a new response begins, which are absent in the Letter version.<sup>178</sup> After Meyvaert convincingly established the authenticity of the text,

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<sup>176</sup> Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine'.

<sup>177</sup> Paul Meyvaert, 'Les *Responsiones* de S. Grégoire le Grand à S. Augustin de Cantorbéry', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 54 (1959), 879-94; Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum*'.

<sup>178</sup> What appears in the *Libellus Responsionum* preceding Gregory's responses are the conjectured requests from Augustine since his actual correspondence was not preserved.

discussion regarding the *Libellus Responsionum* has moved from textual criticism to other issues.<sup>179</sup>

The *Obsecratio Augustini* appears in all the Letter and Capitula manuscripts, but not all the Q/A manuscripts. However, many manuscripts with the Q/A version do not contain the entire *Libellus Responsionum*, but omit the response on marriage and everything after it. Meyvaert supposed this was done to avoid questions of authenticity.<sup>180</sup> Margaret Deanesly initially rejected the authenticity of this response, suggesting it was neither Gregorian nor referencing a cult from Britain, but later admitted that it probably did refer to a British cult though she maintained doubts about its authorship.<sup>181</sup> Meyvaert presented a cogent argument for the authenticity of the response but did not present any analysis of the content.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> D. H. Farmer and Robert Markus have focused on the literary context associated with the *Libellus Responsionum*. D. H. Farmer, 'St Gregory's Answers to St Augustine of Canterbury', *Studia Monastica* 1(1959), 419-22; Robert Markus, 'The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14 (1963), 16-30. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill and Bill Friesen have discussed the familiarity of the text to continental missionaries such as Boniface. Friesen, 'Answers and Echoes'; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Rome and the Early English Church: Some Questions of Transmission', in *Le Chiese nei Regni dell'Europa Occidentale e I Loro Rapportie con Roma sino all'800* (Spoleto: Centro Studi Alto Medioevo, 1960), pp. 523-24. Rob Meens and Ian Wood have argued that the questions posed by Augustine concerning ritual purity in relation to entering a church are unlikely to have been raised by pagans; instead, the questions indicate that British clergy evangelised the English before the arrival of Augustine and contact between him and British clergy was more extensive than Bede suggests. Rob Meens, 'A Background to Augustine's Mission to Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 5-17; Rob Meens, 'Ritual Purity and the Influence of Gregory the Great in the Early Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History*, 32 (1996), 31-43; Ian Wood, 'Pagan Religions and Superstitions East of the Rhine from the Fifth to the Ninth century', in *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, ed. by Giorgio Ausenda (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1995), pp. 253-79; Ian Wood, 'Some Historical Re-Identifications and the Christianization of Kent', in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. by Guyda Armstrong (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 27-45.

<sup>180</sup> Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum*'.

<sup>181</sup> Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine'.

<sup>182</sup> Meyvaert, 'Responsiones'; Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum*'.

The *Obsecratio Augustini* is in the earliest surviving manuscript of the *Libellus Responsionum*, in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, MS. N.K.S. 58, a Letter version dated to the early eighth century. The response reads:

[Augustine]: I request that the relics of Saint Sixtus be sent to us. [Gregory]: We have done what you asked, so that as for the populace, who are said to venerate the body of a martyr in that place, (and) since to your brotherhood it seems uncertain that he is truly a saint, receiving the benefits of a most holy and authentic martyr, they ought not to worship uncertainties. Yet it seems to me as if the body which is thought by the people to be a martyr does not shine with any miracles, nor do there exist any from the elders, who confess that they heard the order of his passion from their forebears. And thus, the relics that you requested should be preserved separately, and the place in which the aforesaid body (lies) should be barricaded in every way; nor should the people be allowed to abandon the certain and venerate the uncertain.<sup>183</sup>

The response suggests that Augustine encountered a community venerating the relics of a martyr. Augustine asked if there was a surviving *passio* or reports of any miracles associated with the martyr. When the community could not answer affirmatively, Augustine was sceptical about the authenticity of the relics and decided either to add or replace the relics with those of Saint Sixtus.

Most interpretations of this passage suggest that Augustine specifically requested the relics of Sixtus because he planned to either add to or replace the original relics; the relics of a saint with the same name would make the

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<sup>183</sup> The translation is my own. For alternative translations, see Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 124, and Margaret Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury* (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 78. The Latin text can be found in Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine', p. 29, n. 1: 'Obsecro ut reliquie sancti Syxti nobis transmittantur. Fecimus que petisti ut quatenus populo qui in loco martyris corpus dicitur uenerare quia tue fraternitati uerum sancta sit. Uidetur incertam sanctissimi et probatissimi martyris beneficia suscipiens. Colere incerta non debeat. Mihi tamen uidetur quasi corpus quod a populo esse cuius martyris creditur. nullis hic miraculis corruscare. et neque aliquis de antiquioribus existunt. qui se a parentibus passionis eius ordinem audisse fateantur. Ita reliquie quas petistis seorsum condite sunt, ut locus in quo prefatum corpus modis omnibus obstruatur, nec permittatur populus certum deserere. et incertum venerari.'

transition more acceptable for the community attached to the cult.<sup>184</sup> However, it is not certain if the cult Augustine encountered was venerating a martyr named Sixtus. The oldest surviving manuscript, N.K.S. 58, only has the name Sixtus attached to the relics Gregory sends to Augustine, but not the relics found in Britain, a point which no other scholar has mentioned. Later versions of the manuscript supply Sixtus' name in association with the martyr being venerated in Britain.<sup>185</sup> However, there is no reason to dismiss the likelihood that the relics in question were thought to belong to a martyr named Sixtus. As far as the Saint Sixtus whose relics Gregory sent to Augustine, Deanesly and Grosjean persuasively argued that they belonged to Pope Sixtus II, martyred under Valerian in 258, whose cult was popular in Augustine's time, though Sixtus' cult would later be eclipsed by his senior deacon, Lawrence, who was martyred a few days after him.<sup>186</sup>

Although the *Libellus Responsium* is only a record of Gregory's replies, and does not contain Augustine's actual correspondence, both Sharpe and Stancliffe speculated on Augustine's reaction to encountering the cult and his intentions. They both accepted that Augustine found a community of British Christians venerating a martyr named Sixtus.<sup>187</sup> According to Sharpe, Augustine

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<sup>184</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'; Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of St Augustine'.

<sup>185</sup> One example is found in a manuscript found in Milan, Ambros. MS. S. 33 sup., a *Capitula* version of the text dating to the ninth century: 'Decimo quoque capitulo petisti ut reliquiae sancti Sixti martyris nobis transmitti debuissent. Fecimus quae petisti, ut, quatenus populo qui in loco quodam sancti Sixti martyris corpus dicitur venerari, quod tuae fraternitati utrumne veraciter sanctus sit, videtur incertum, sanctissimi et probatissimi martyris beneficia suscipiens, colere incerta non debeat.' Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine', p. 29, n. 1.

<sup>186</sup> Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine', pp. 29-32.

<sup>187</sup> It is assumed that it was a community of British Christians near Canterbury venerating the relics since it is unlikely that such veneration would be practiced by Anglo-Saxon migrants or their successors. Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ*

thought the British believed the relics belonged to Sixtus II, and because Augustine knew the relics of Sixtus II were in Rome in the catacombs of St Callistus he concluded that the relics must be false.<sup>188</sup> Stancliffe, on the other hand, argued that Augustine understood that the similarity of names between the martyr he found and the martyred pope was just coincidence. However, due to the lack of a *passio* and reported miracles, Augustine requested relics of Sixtus II from Gregory to add them to the ones already present, thus ensuring that the locals were venerating a bona fide saint. Gregory's response, specifically the phrase '*mihi tamen videtur*', indicates a more severe reaction; he wants Augustine to act differently than what he proposed, removing the relics and cutting off access to the shrine.<sup>189</sup> Sharpe's interpretation is too speculative and underestimates Augustine's intelligence. The text does not describe the relics as being false, only uncertain, which supports Stancliffe's suggestion that Augustine was more concerned with the lack of a *passio* and miracles.

Various locations for the site of the cult have been proposed, even though the text does not state where the cult of Sixtus was located. Sharpe reasoned that because Sixtus was a martyr, the cult must have been located in one of the principal towns of Roman Britain, where the trial for a capital case would take place.<sup>190</sup> He dismissed all the sites on his list for various reasons except Winchester and Silchester, and preferred the latter as it might have been on Augustine's route to meet the British bishops, as described in Bede's

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*Church from 597 to 1066*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984); Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury*, Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'.

<sup>188</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 124

<sup>189</sup> Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of St Augustine', p. 121.

<sup>190</sup> Sharpe's list of possible sites included the *civitas* capitals in the southeast: London, Canterbury, St Albans, Colchester, Chichester, Silchester, Winchester and Cirencester. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 125.

*Historia Ecclesiastica*, book II, chapter 2.<sup>191</sup> Sharpe neglected the possibility of a translation of the relics to a non-principal town. Furthermore, Sharpe's interpretation assumed the cult was that of a genuine martyr and did not consider the possibility that it was invented after the persecutions ended, as was the cult of Alban.

Deanesly suggested the cult was in Canterbury and identified Sixtus' shrine as the church of St Martin used by Bertha and Liudhard, because the most obvious holy place in Canterbury for them to practice Christianity would have been be a martyrium still in use.<sup>192</sup> However, there is no evidence for this interpretation in any textual sources. Nicholas Brooks suggested the community was close enough to Canterbury to provide Augustine with the location of Roman period churches in the Roman town.<sup>193</sup> He also presented St Osyth, near Colchester in Essex, as the possible site of the cult, because the pre-Conquest name of the town, *Cicc*, modern Chich, might have derived from the name Sixtus.<sup>194</sup> It is unlikely that the location of the cult will ever be know since there are no other traces of a cult of Sixtus in England in the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Sharpe dismissed London and Canterbury on the grounds that the words Gregory uses to describe the location, '*in quodam loco*', indicate that it was a place with which Gregory was unfamiliar with. He dismissed St Albans because it already had a local saint, neglecting the possibility that one site could host more than one martyr, as is the case with Julius and Aaron at Caerleon. Sharpe dismissed Colchester because it was 'anglicized' too early for a British cult to have survived, although he did not explain what this means or how it could preclude the survival of a cult. Chichester was dismissed with the unsubstantiated claim that it was still pagan territory in Wilfrid's time. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 125.

<sup>192</sup> Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury*, p. 79.

<sup>193</sup> Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 20.

<sup>194</sup> Brooks presented this theory for St Osyth's as the site of Sixtus' cult in a paper at the 1997 conference, 'Paganism to Christianity' held in Oxford. See Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of St Augustine', p. 146, n. 90.

<sup>195</sup> Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury*, p. 80.



Whether or not Augustine followed Gregory's instructions, the cult appears to have been suppressed. There is evidence that Bede deliberately omitted reference to the cult of Sixtus in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. In book I chapter 27, Bede presented a transcription of the Q/A version of the *Libellus Responsionum*, but he did not include the *Obsecratio Augustini*. Deanesly and Meyvaert assumed that the *Obsecratio Augustini* was simply not in the copy of the *Libellus Responsionum* used by Bede.<sup>196</sup> However, all other questions from the *Libellus Responsionum* are included, even the question on kinship and marriage, the response that was normally omitted from other copies of the text. Furthermore, Meyvaert argued that the passage from the *Libellus Responsionum* in Bede's *Vita Cuthberti* appeared to be taken from a Capitula version of the text, whereas the version used in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the Q/A version, which suggests that Bede might have had more than one copy of the *Libellus Responsionum*.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, all surviving copies of the Capitula version contain the *Obsecratio Augustini*. Thus it is possible Bede had a copy of the *Libellus Responsionum* with the *Obsecratio Augustini*. If so, it is not unreasonable to assume he omitted it to downplay the role of the British church in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>198</sup>

## 2.6 Anglo-Saxon revisionism

With the exception of Victricius' *De Laude Sanctorum* and the *Obsecratio Augustini*, the passages from the sources discussed above were incorporated into the first book of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (hereafter

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<sup>196</sup> Deanesly, *Augustine of Canterbury*; Deanesly and Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine'; Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum*'.

<sup>197</sup> Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum*'.

<sup>198</sup> Ian Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 1-17.

*HE*). Some of the texts Bede merely paraphrased while others he copied almost verbatim. Although Bede did not add much factual information to what is presented in the earlier texts, Bede's use of them tells us several things about how British cults were received by the Anglo-Saxon Church after the Augustinian mission. Bede framed these texts in a manner which reinforced his aim to downplay and vilify British Christianity.<sup>199</sup>

Book 1 of the *HE* covers the history of Britain from the first invasion by Julius Caesar to the beginning of Augustine's mission. Bede drew his material from a variety of sources, including Pliny and Tertullian, but primarily from Orosius and Gildas.<sup>200</sup> After an introductory chapter explaining the situation in Britain, Bede related the history of Roman Britain in chapters 2-11. Chapters 12-16 cover independent Britain and the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Chapters 17-21 recount Germanus' two trips to Britain. After a chapter describing strife among the Britons, Bede introduced the story of Augustine's mission in chapters 23-34. The important chapters here are chapter 7, Alban's martyrdom, and chapters 17-21, the account of Germanus' trips to Britain to fight Pelagianism.

Bede's account of Alban's martyrdom is drawn from the P text of the *Passio Albani*, or something close to it,<sup>201</sup> and also the *De Excidio Britonum*.

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<sup>199</sup> Aside from his primary intention, the edification of his audience, Bede's purpose with the *HE* was to construct a history for the English, linked to the history and geography of Britain as well as Rome and the Christian church. Bede was promoting the role of Gregory the Great in the conversion of the English, while downplaying or ignoring the influence of the Frankish and British churches. *HE*, preface, pp. 1-7; See also Brooks, *Bede and the English*, p. 3; Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine'.

<sup>200</sup> *HE*, preface, p. 4: 'A principio itaque uoluminis huius usque ad tempus, quo gens Anglorum fidem Christi percepit, ex priorum maxime scriptis hinc inde collectis ea, quae promeremus, didicimus.'

<sup>201</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus.*, pp. 48-60. Bede also includes a reference to Alban from Venantius Fortunatus' *In Praise of Virgins*, *MGH Auctores Antiquissimi* IV. 1 (*Carmina* VIII. iii), p. 185. Van Egmond has opened up the possibility that rather than using a copy of the *Passio Albani*, Bede's information on Alban derived from the interpolated *Vita Germani*: Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, pp. 119-27.

Bede followed Gildas in placing Alban's martyrdom under Diocletian,<sup>202</sup> but there are some differences between them.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Bede did not include the account of Germanus' visit to the shrine from the *Passio Albani* in this chapter. Instead, he stopped the narrative from the *Passio* at the point where the judge ends the persecutions and moved the *Passio* account of Germanus' visitation to Alban's shrine to chapter 18, where it fits into an account of Germanus' trips to Britain taken from Constantius' *Vita Germani*.<sup>204</sup>

The rest of the chapter is taken from *De Excidio Britonum*, chapters 10-11. However, whereas Gildas only mentioned that Alban was a citizen of Verulamium, Bede described Alban's martyrdom as having occurred at Verulamium, for which he supplied both the Roman name and two variant English names for the settlement.<sup>205</sup> Bede is the earliest source to state that this is where Alban was martyred and that a church was built in Verulamium dedicated to Alban when the persecutions ended.<sup>206</sup> This is probably an inference based on the *Passio Albani* (P text), which states that there was a basilica there when Germanus arrived.<sup>207</sup> Bede also repeated Gildas on Julius

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<sup>202</sup> *DEB*, c. 10, p. 92.

<sup>203</sup> Bede presented an account of the persecutions under Diocletian in chapter six, taken from Orosius' *Adversum Paganos*. Gildas, on the other hand, used Rufinus' Latin translation of Eusebius as a source for these persecutions. Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*. trans. Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Zangemeister, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889). VII.25, pp. 263-66; Eusebius, *Eusebius Werke*. Book 8.2, pp. 743-47.

<sup>204</sup> Bede placed the account of Germanus' visit to Alban's shrine between the brief mention of Germanus giving thanks to Alban after his victory over the Pelagians and the following sentence, which describes Germanus injuring his foot due to a trap set by a demon. *HE*, I.28, pp. 61-63.

<sup>205</sup> *HE*, I.7, p. 34: 'Passus est autem beatus Albanus die .X. Kalendarum Iuliarum iuxta ciuitatem Uerolamium, quae nunc a gente Anglorum Uerlamacæstir siue Uaeclingacæstir appellatur, ubi postea, redeunte temporum Christianorum serenitate, ecclesia est mirandi operis atque eius martyrio condigna extracta. In quo uidelicet loco usque ad hanc diem curatio infirmorum, et frequentium operatio uirtutum celebrari non desinit.'

<sup>206</sup> *HE*, I.7, p. 34.

<sup>207</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus.*, p. 45: 'ad eius basilica sanctus germanus episcopus cum omnium apostolorum diuersumque martyrium.'

and Aaron but added no new information about them.<sup>208</sup> Although one of Bede's aims was to obscure and denigrate British Christianity, he included accounts of Alban, Julius and Aaron- because they were Roman martyrs their Britishness could be overlooked. Furthermore, Alban's cult was too well-known to ignore. It had been brought to the Continent by Constantius, and was mentioned by Venantius Fortunatus.<sup>209</sup>

Bede deliberately placed his account of Germanus' trips to Britain out of chronological sequence to emphasise the error of the British Christians. Aside from some additional material taken from Prosper's *Chronicon* and the *Vita Lupi*,<sup>210</sup> most of Bede's account of Germanus' two trips to Britain was taken almost verbatim from the *Vita Germani*, chapters 12-18, and 25-27.<sup>211</sup> Chapter 17 opens with Prosper's description of Pelagianism spreading to Britain via Agricola, son of Severianus. However, Bede follows Constantius claiming that Germanus' mission was directed by a synod in Gaul rather than Prosper's

<sup>208</sup> *HE*, I.7, p. 34: 'Passi sunt ea tempestate Aaron et Iulius Legionum urbis ciues, alique utriusque sexus diuersis in locis perplures, qui diuersis cruciatibus torti, et inaudita membrorum discerpitione lacerati, animas ad supernae ciuitatis gaudia perfecto agone miserunt.' Bede also mentions these three martyrs in his *De Ratione Temporibus*, (*MGH Auctores Antiquissimi Chronica Maiora*, 13, p. 295.). Alban is included in his martyrology, Bede, 'Martyrologium', in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina*, ed. by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1862), pp. Col. 797-1148., col. 953. However, Bede did not provide as much information on the martyrs in either of these sources as he does in the *HE*.

<sup>209</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *In Laude Uirginum*, *MGH*, AA, IV.1 (Carmina VIII. iii), p. 185: 'egregium Albanum fecunda Britannia profert'. Bede quoted the line from Venantius at the beginning of *HE* I. 7.

<sup>210</sup> In chapter 21, Bede stated that Severus, Germanus' companion on the second trip, was a student of Lupus. This information about Severus was taken from the *Vita Lupi*, not the *Vita Germani*. However, this information does appear in later versions of the *Vita Germani* that incorporate interpolations from various sources. Wolfert van Egmond argued that Bede used the interpolated version of the *Vita Germani* as his sources for cc. 17-21 of the *HE*. His argument is contra Levison, who argued that Bede was the source for many of the additions to the interpolated *Vita Germani*; Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints*, p. 119-120; Wilhelm Levison, 'Bischof Germanus von Auxerre und die Quellen zu seiner Geschichte', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 29 (1904), 95-175. The passages that are common to both the *HE* and the interpolated *Vita Germani* draw upon sources that Bede also utilised elsewhere in the *HE*, which means that the issue of which source drew on the other cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

<sup>211</sup> These are the only chapters from which Bede copied directly, but at the end of his chapter 21 he summarised chapters 28-39 of the *Vita Germani*, which span the events of Germanus' life between his second trip to Britain and his death and burial in Ravenna.

statement that Germanus was sent by Pope Celestine at the bequest of

Palladius:

**Bede, *HE*, I.17**

Ante paucos sane aduentus eorum annos heresis Pelagiana per Agricolam inlata, Seueriani episcopi Pelagiani filium, fidem Britanniarum feda peste commaculauerat.

Uerum Britanni, cum neque suscipere dogma peruersum gratiam Christi blasphemando ullatenus uellent, neque uersutiam nefariae persuasionis refutare uerbis certando sufficerent, inueniunt salubre consilium, ut a Gallicanis antistitibus auxilium belli spiritalis inquirant.

**Prosper, *Chronicon*:**

Agricola Pelagianus, Severiani episcopi Pelagiani filius, ecclesias Britanniae dogmatis sui insinuation corrumpit.<sup>212</sup>

**Vita Sancti Germani, c. 12:**

Eodem tempore ex Britanniis directa legatio Gallicanis episcopis nuntiavit, Pelagianam perversitatem in locis suis late populos occupasse et quam primum fidei catholicae debere succurri.<sup>213</sup>

Bede used Prosper as a source for two earlier chapters in book 1. In chapter 10 Bede quoted Prosper regarding the origin and spread of Pelagianism.<sup>214</sup> In chapter 13, Bede mentioned Palladius' journey to Ireland, directed by Pope Celestine in AD 431, two years after Germanus' first trip to Britain.<sup>215</sup> It is mentioned in the chronicle only a few lines after the reference to Germanus' first trip to Britain that Bede quotes at the beginning of chapter 17. Thus, it is certain that Bede deliberately placed Germanus' visits out of chronological sequence.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>212</sup> *MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi* 9, p. 472.

<sup>213</sup> *Levison, MGH, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, 7.

<sup>214</sup> *HE*, I.10, p. 38. Plummer, p. 24.

<sup>215</sup> *HE*, I.13, p. 46: 'cuius anno imperii VIII Palladius ad Scottos in Christum credentes a pontifice Romanae ecclesiae Celestino primus mittitur episcopus.'; Plummer, p. 28.

<sup>216</sup> Ian Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan: Bureaucrat and Charismatic?', in *L'Église et la Mission au VI<sup>e</sup> Siècle: La Mission d'Augustin de Cantorbéry et les Églises de Gaule sous l'Impulsion de Grégoire le Grand Actes du Colloque d'Arles de 1998*, ed. by Christophe de Dreuille (Paris: Les Édition du Cerf, 2000), pp. 148-79. at pp. 170-76.

Bede also interrupted his paraphrase of Gildas' chapter 26 to recount Germanus' missions. Chapter 16 of the *HE* includes the beginning of chapter 26 of the *De Excidio Britonum*, which describes the conflict between the British led by Aurelius Ambrosius, and the Anglo-Saxons, up to the battle of *Mons Badonicus*. Whereas Gildas proceeds to describe civil strife among the British, setting up the complaints against secular leaders, Bede begins his account of Germanus' missions to fight Pelagianism in Britain.<sup>217</sup> Bede returns to chapter 26 of the *De Excidio Britonum* in his chapter 22, immediately after his account of Germanus. This is a brief chapter in which he presents his most explicit condemnation of the British. After repeating Gildas on the civil strife of the British, Bede denounces them for not preaching to the Angles and Saxons.<sup>218</sup> Bede moved the account of Germanus in order to juxtapose the description of Pelagianism in Britain with Gildas' account of British infighting, highlighting the errors of British Christians before introducing Augustine, the worthy herald of the proper faith to the English, who supplant the British as God's chosen people.<sup>219</sup> After this, Bede quotes no more from Gildas, and begins his story of Augustine's mission, which covers the rest of book I, chapters 23-34.

Bede's *HE* is a complex document and the author's underlying agenda and motivations at the time of writing should be considered when using it as evidence for the development of British saints' cults. One of Bede's main purposes with the *HE* was to present Augustine's mission as a new beginning for Christianity in Britain. Therefore Bede had to dismiss and belittle evidence of

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<sup>217</sup> Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan', p. 176.

<sup>218</sup> *HE*, I.22, p. 68.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* See also Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400-1066* (London: Hambledon, 1999), p. 15.

continued British Christianity from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>220</sup>

The cult of Alban could not be ignored because it was well-established and well-known. However, Alban was a Roman martyr and his Britishness could be disregarded. The account of Germanus' visit to Britain was deliberately placed anachronistically in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* to emphasise the errors of British Christians.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Analysis of the textual sources reveals significant evidence for the origins and development of martyr cults in late antique Britain. Although modern scholars have assumed that the martyrial cults began during the persecutions, the earliest evidence suggests the cult of saints was not introduced to Britain until the end of the fourth century by Victricius of Rouen.<sup>221</sup> Native martyr cults emerged in the fifth century with the invention of the cult of Alban by Germanus of Auxerre.<sup>222</sup> Both Victricius and Germanus used the cult of saints to promote orthodoxy over heresies such as Arianism and Pelagianism. The *De Excidio Britonum* and *Obsecratio Augustini* indicate that by the sixth century there were at least several martyr cults in Britain, including those dedicated to Alban, Julius and Aaron, and Sixtus.<sup>223</sup> Gildas also suggests that by this time the cult of saints was not exclusively linked with the promotion of orthodoxy, an indicator of at least one significant development in the British Church.<sup>224</sup>

The outline of the creation and growth of British saints' cults presented here corresponds to continental trends. Martyr cults emerged in other provinces

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<sup>220</sup> Robert Markus, *Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St. Paul's Rectory, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>221</sup> Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*'; Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate'; Rouen, 'De Laude Sanctorum'.

<sup>222</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'; Wood, 'Levison and St Alban'.

<sup>223</sup> Gildas, *D E B*.

<sup>224</sup> Gildas, *D E B*.

of the Western Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century, and were used by figures such as Ambrose of Milan to promote orthodoxy over heresies. The parallels between the development of British and continental martyr cults reinforces the idea that Britain was not isolated during Late Antiquity.

The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons beginning at the end of the sixth century had an impact on the native martyr cults. The cult of Sixtus, which was not associated with textual sources such as a *passio* or *vita*, was suppressed. The cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron, which were linked to widely circulated texts, were not suppressed but appropriated. The suppression and appropriation of native saints' cults by the Anglo-Saxon Church also extended to cults dedicated to confessor saints, which are discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 3: The textual evidence part 2: confessor cults

### 3.1 Overview

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the cult of saints initially focused on martyr cults, but it eventually expanded to incorporate non-martyr saints, referred to as confessors.<sup>1</sup> The inception of cults dedicated to confessor saints varied throughout the provinces of the Western Roman Empire. Although the cult of martyrs took off in Spain in the fourth century, there is no evidence for the development of confessor saints before the eighth century.<sup>2</sup> Confessor cults did not take off in Italy until the tenth century with some exceptions, such as Ambrose of Milan, Apollinaris of Ravenna and Zeno of Verona.<sup>3</sup> Confessor saints were embraced fairly early in Gaul.<sup>4</sup> The cult of Martin of Tours had its origins during Martin's lifetime,<sup>5</sup> although its popularity grew substantially in the later fifth century due to the promotion of his cult by Perpetuus, a successor of Martin's as bishop of Tours. Many other confessor cults emerged in Gaul during the late-fifth century, mostly dedicated to bishops, including Germanus of Auxerre and Hilary of Poitier.

The present chapter examines the textual evidence for the development of cults dedicated to British confessor saints. The relevant sources consist of

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<sup>1</sup> For the development of the terms *martyr* and *confessor*, see Delehaye, *Sanctus*, pp. 74-121 (chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints'. (pp. 23-24); A. T. Fear, *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, Translated Texts for Historians, 26 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> The early confessor saints were often accorded martyrial status. Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints', pp. 19-23; Jean-Charles Picard, *Le Souvenir des Évêques: Sépultures, Listes Épiscopales et Culte des Évêques en Italie du Nord des Origines au Xe Siècle* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1988), pp. 116-22 and 575-719.

<sup>4</sup> Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*; Ian Wood, 'The Audience of Architecture in Post-Roman Gaul', in *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. by L. A. S. Butler and Richard Morris (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1986), pp. 74-79; Wood, 'Topographies of Power'; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'.

<sup>5</sup> Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini* was composed during Martin's lifetime and made Martin famous before his death.

the *Vita Samsonis*,<sup>6</sup> Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,<sup>7</sup> the *Miracula Nynie*,<sup>8</sup> and the *Vita Niniani*.<sup>9</sup> The evidence attests the existence of native British confessor cults by the time of the Anglo-Saxon conversion. The *Vita Samsonis* is the earliest evidence for the cult of a British confessor saint. The cult of Ninian was fully developed by the eighth century, when it was appropriated by the Anglo-Saxon Church. Traditionally scholars have not associated the early cults of British confessor saints with the survival of Christianity in Roman Britain. However, since the idea of the reintroduction of Christianity to Western Britain in the post-Roman period has been thoroughly discredited,<sup>10</sup> the early confessor saints can be seen as a product of the same tradition of Christianity that has its roots in Roman Britain. Similarly to the case of the martyr saints, the development of cults dedicated to native British confessor saints suggests that Britain was in line with the cult of saints on the continent. In the following, this chapter provides a summary of known late antique confessor cults as reflected in surviving textual sources.

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol* (Paris: CNRS, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, *HE*. Hereafter *HE*.

<sup>8</sup> *MGH, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, 4, pp. 943-62. For an English translation see John MacQueen, *St Nynia* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp. 88-101.

<sup>9</sup> A. P. Forbes, *St Ninian and St Kentigern* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), pp. 137-57.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Hughes, 'The Celtic Church: Is This a Valid Concept?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 1 (1981); Wendy Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford: Oxbow, 1992), pp. 12-21. Richard Sharpe, 'Some Problems Concerning the Organisation of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 230-70. Although published in 1984, the article did not impact scholarship until late in the decade. Sharpe's revisionist model partly made its mark via Colmán Etchingham. See Colmán Etchingham, 'The Early Irish Church: Some Observations on Pastoral Care and Dues', *Ériu*, 42 (1991), 99-118; Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin, 1999).

### 3.2 Samson

Samson was a sixth-century British bishop and monk who founded monasteries in Britain, Ireland, and on the continent, including Pental and Dol.<sup>11</sup> The *Vita Samsonis* is the earliest *vita* of a British confessor saint, which makes Samson's cult the earliest attested cult of a British confessor saint. Therefore, Samson's cult is significant because it signals a major development in the cult of saints in British Christianity, the development of cults devoted to confessor saints, rather than martyrs. The *Vita Samsonis* and the cult of Samson can be placed at the beginning of the cult of British confessor saints.

The *Vita Samsonis* consists of a prologue and two books.<sup>12</sup> The prologue describes the circumstances which inspired the composition of the *Vita* and a convoluted account of the sources of information.<sup>13</sup> The prologue claims that the primary source was an aged and anonymous monk who was the nephew of Henoc, a cousin of Samson. Henoc in turn received his information from Samson's mother, Anna, and had written down much of the information.<sup>14</sup> The nephew of Henoc was familiar with the material from readings of it at a monastery in Britain founded by Samson, where he had lived for 80 years

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<sup>11</sup> Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*. Hereafter VS. Samson's historicity is attested by his attendance at a council in Paris between 556 and 573. An edition of the text from the council can be found in C. Munier and Carlo de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae*. 2 vols, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 148-148A. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963), pp. 205-210. For the debate about the date of the council, see André Chédeville and Hubert Guillotel, *La Bretagne des Saints et des Rois, Ve-Xe Siècle* (Rennes: Ouest France, 1984), pp. 64 and 122.

<sup>12</sup> The division of the work into two books does not appear in the earliest manuscript witnesses, and was only introduced in a seventeenth-century edition by Mabillon. Joseph-Claude Poulin, 'La "Vie ancienne" de Samson de Dol comme réécriture (BHL 7478-7479)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 119 (2001), 261-312. (p. 264).

<sup>13</sup> The only scholar who seems to accept the account of the author's sources at face value is the translator of the only English translation of the VS to date: Thomas Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925). Ian Wood suggested that the account of the author's sources might be deliberately convoluted. Ian Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* (Munich: Hannover Hahn, 1988), pp. 369-84. at pp. 383-84.

<sup>14</sup> VS prologue, 2, pp. 140-142.

before moving to another monastery associated with Samson on the continent.<sup>15</sup>

The first book of the *Vita Samsonis* describes events related to Samson's life from before his birth up to his death in Brittany. According to the *Vita*, Samson was educated by Illtud at his monastery (Llantwit Major).<sup>16</sup> After being ordained priest, Samson left Illtud's monastery for one headed by Piro (Caldey Island).<sup>17</sup> During his time there, Samson visited his sick father and persuaded most of his family to adopt the monastic lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> After Piro's death, Samson was chosen to be abbot.<sup>19</sup> He then travelled to a monastery in Ireland with some Irishmen returning from Rome.<sup>20</sup> When he returned from Ireland, Samson was appointed bishop at Illtud's monastery. After his consecration, Samson left the monastery of Illtud, passed through Cornwall and arrived in Brittany where he established the monastery at Dol. Samson then intervened in a Frankish political dispute in support of Judwal against Conomorus for the secular rule of Brittany.<sup>21</sup> Samson died at Dol and was buried there in the monastery he founded.<sup>22</sup>

The second book of the *Vita Samsonis* is primarily an exhortation to venerate Samson by celebrating his feast day. However, it includes one story from Samson's life in Britain. The episode relates Samson's experience with a

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<sup>15</sup> VS prologue, 2, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> VS I. 7-11, pp. 156-164. The author claims Illtud was a disciple of Germanus. The chronology of this claim is implausible, as the lifetimes of Samson and Germanus were separated by a century. Germanus died at the latest around 446 and Samson is recorded as attending a council in Paris between 556 and 573. The mention of Germanus was possibly an attempt by the author to link Samson to another saint that was known and venerated on both sides of the English Channel. See Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', p. 381.

<sup>17</sup> VS I.20, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> VS I.29, pp. 188-190.

<sup>19</sup> VS I.36, pp. 198-200.

<sup>20</sup> VS I.37, p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> VS I.45-52, pp. 210-22.

<sup>22</sup> VS I.61, p. 234.

certain deacon, Morinus, who was corrupted by a devil. Morinus died, but his soul was eventually redeemed after Samson personally fasted and prayed for him for several days, and ordered masses to be sung for him.<sup>23</sup> Book II also includes two stories about posthumous miracles at Dol associated with Samson's crosier, involving its theft and return, and its use to stop a fire.<sup>24</sup>

The *Vita Samsonis* has been traditionally dated to the seventh century, although some scholars have advocated a ninth century date for the production of the *Vita*.<sup>25</sup> The matter has recently been complicated by a theory proposed by Joseph-Claude Poulin that suggests there was an early text which was re-written by a second author, who might have abridged some sections as well as added some interpolations, resulting in current state of the *Vita*.<sup>26</sup>

The assumption of a seventh-century date for the text rested on several factors. The date is derived in part from the convoluted account of the sources in the prologue, which if taken at face value, would place its composition no more than a lifetime after Samson's death, since it claims to have been written

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<sup>23</sup> VS II.7-9, pp. 248-254.

<sup>24</sup> VS II.10, 15, pp. 254-258, 266-268.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Le Moine de La Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne* (Rennes: Plihon et Hommay, 1905); François Duine, *Saints de Domnonée: notes critiques* (Rennes: Bahon-Rault, 1912); François Duine, *Questions d'hagiographie et Vie de S. Samson*. 8, Bretagne et les pays celtiques (Paris: Champion, 1914); François Duine, *Les Légendes du Pays de Dol en Bretagne* (Dol: Association François Duine, 1963); Joseph Loth, *L'Émigration Bretonne* (Rennes: E. Barais et Cie, 1883); Joseph Loth, *Les Noms des saints bretons* (Paris: H. Champion, 1910); Joseph Loth, *Saint Samson de Dol* (Paris: H. Champion, 1914); Joseph Loth, 'La Vie la plus ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol, d'après des travaux récents: remarques et additions', *Revue celtique*, 35 (1914), 269-300; Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol*; E. Durtelle de Saint-Sauveur, *Histoire de Bretagne des origines à nos jours* (Rennes: Plihon, 1946); Hubert Guillotel, 'Les origens du ressort de l'évêché de Dol', *Mémoires de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Bretagne*, 54 (1977), 31-68; Bernard Merdrignac, 'La Première Vie de Saint Samson: étude chronologique', *Studia Monastica*, 30 (1988), 243-89; Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography'; Pierre Flobert, 'Le Témoigne du rédacteur de la Vie Ancienne de Saint Samson sur sa date relative', in *Bretagne et pays celtiques: langues, histoire, civilisation*, ed. by Gwennolé Le Menn and Jean-Yves Le Moing (Saint-Brieuc: Skol Uhel ar Vro, 1992), pp. 161-66; Joseph-Claude Poulin, 'Hagiographie et politique: La Première Vie de Saint Samson de Dol', *Francia*, 5 (1977), 1-26; Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol'.

<sup>26</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol'.

when the nephew of the cousin of Samson was still alive, although over the age of 80.<sup>27</sup> Another reason the text has been attributed a seventh-century date is that the *Vita* describes Brittany as a dependency of the Frankish kingdom,<sup>28</sup> a sentiment more likely to be expressed in the seventh rather than ninth century.<sup>29</sup> On linguistic grounds the *Vita Samsonis* is also compatible with a seventh-century date. The use of some Greek words, including *thesseras* and *theomacha*, imply a context of early Hisperic Latin writing.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the latest textual source identified with certainty for the *Vita Samsonis* is Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis*, written at the end of the sixth century.<sup>31</sup>

Some scholars have argued for a later date. Robert Fawtier argued that the *Vita* was composed in the late eighth or ninth century to promote Dol in a diocesan conflict with Tours.<sup>32</sup> Joseph-Claude Poulin developed this argument and dated the composition specifically to the reign of Louis the Pious, when Dol attempted to establish its own metropolitan authority independent of Tours.<sup>33</sup> Certain aspects of Fawtier and Poulin's arguments can be dismissed for several reasons. Both scholars pointed to the obvious parallels between the *Vita Samsonis* and Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini* as evidence for its use in a conflict between Dol and Tours.<sup>34</sup> While the influence of the *Vita Martini* is

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<sup>27</sup> VS prologue, 2, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> VS I.53-58, pp. 224-230.

<sup>29</sup> Wendy Davies, 'On the Distribution of Power in Brittany in the Mid-Ninth Century', in *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. by M. Gibson and Janet L. Nelson (Oxford: BAR, 1981), pp. 87-89; Poulin, 'Hagiographie et Politique', p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Michael W. Herren, *The Hisperica Famina: A New Critical Edition with English Translation and Philological Commentary. I, The A-Text* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), p. 45-46; Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', p. 382.

<sup>31</sup> Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Fawtier, *La Vie de Saint Samson: essai de critique hagiographique* (Paris: Champion, 1912); Robert Fawtier, 'Saint Samson, Abbé de Dol: réponse à quelques objections', *Annales de Bretagne*, 35 (1921), 137-70.

<sup>33</sup> Poulin, 'Hagiographie et Politique'.

<sup>34</sup> Poulin, 'Hagiographie et Politique'.

indisputable, its significance is questionable.<sup>35</sup> The *Vita Martini* was widely known from the time of its production and it was a large influence on subsequent hagiographical material. Thus the parallels between the *Vita Martini* and the *Vita Samsonis* need not imply any ulterior motives on the part of the author of the *Vita Samsonis*. Furthermore, neither the *Vita Martini* nor the *Vita Samsonis* emphasize the episcopal functions of their subjects. Sulpicius Severus was more concerned with Martin's asceticism than his role as bishop. The same can be said about the *Vita Samsonis*, which portrays Samson as a monastic founder and reformer at various houses in Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the *Vita Samsonis* does not state that Samson was bishop of Dol. It describes him being consecrated as bishop in Wales,<sup>37</sup> but it never specifies an episcopal see over which he held authority.<sup>38</sup> The point is that the *Vita Samsonis* would not have been an ideal text to support the claims of authority or independence by Dol against Tours.<sup>39</sup>

An intermediate date of the mid-eighth century was proposed by Pierre Flobert, the editor of the most recent edition of the *Vita Samsonis*.<sup>40</sup> Flobert's argument was based on perceived borrowings from some of Bede's New Testament commentaries.<sup>41</sup> However, Poulin has pointed out some weaknesses in Flobert's argument.<sup>42</sup> For one, the perceived borrowings are not

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<sup>35</sup> Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', p. 380.

<sup>36</sup> VS I.36, 38, 59, pp. 198-200, 200-202, 230-232.

<sup>37</sup> VS I.43-44, pp. 208-210.

<sup>38</sup> The fact that the VS does not describe a specific see associated with Samson suggest he was an *episcopus vagans*. See L. Gougaud, *Les Chrétientés Celtiques* (Paris: Librairie Victor Le Coffre, 1911), pp. 121-22; Poulin, 'Hagiographie et Politique', p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', p. 380.

<sup>40</sup> Flobert, 'Le Témoigne du rédacteur de la *Vie Ancienne de Saint Samson* sur sa date relative'; Pierre Flobert, 'La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson et l'histoire', *Études celtiques*, 29 (1992), 183-90; Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*.

<sup>41</sup> Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>42</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', pp. 284-85.

word for word, but are paraphrases or adaptations at best.<sup>43</sup> One of the supposed references involves the well-known episode of Samson's encounter with a witch, referred to in the text as *theomacha*. Flobert argued that the term *theomacha* was taken from Bede.<sup>44</sup> However, Hubert Guillot attributed it to Rufinus.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, unlike allusions to other sources found in the *Vita Samsonis*, the supposed allusions to Bede are not signalled in the manuscripts by marginal notes.<sup>46</sup> The possible allusions to the writings of Bede in the *Vita Samsonis* cannot be accepted with certainty. Despite the uncertainty about references to Bede, Poulin did not dismiss the idea altogether and accepted Flobert's idea of Bede's influence, with reservations.<sup>47</sup>

A new interpretation of the *Vita Samsonis* by Joseph-Claude Poulin has dramatically altered the nature of the debate. Through close textual analysis, Poulin reached the conclusion that the extant version of *Vita Samsonis* is the result of two phases of writing by separate authors.<sup>48</sup> The original work, which Poulin referred to as the *primigenia*, was written by the figure named in the prologue, Samson's cousin Henoc, who compiled it on the continent then

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<sup>43</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 284.

<sup>44</sup> Flobert, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*, p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> Guillotel, 'Les origens du ressort de l'évêché de Dol', pp. 33-34; Bernard Merdrignac, 'Une course en char dans l'hagiographie Bretonne? Saint Samson contre la *Theomacha*', in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, ed. by John Carey, Maire Herbert, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001), pp. 140-58. (pp. 148-49); Joseph-Claude Poulin, 'À propos du diocèse de Dol: Saint Samson et la question des enclaves', *Francia*, 6 (1979), 610-15. (p. 611); Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 284.

<sup>46</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 284.

<sup>47</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 285.

<sup>48</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol'. Before Poulin's article was published, scholars tended to see the text as if it were a unitary work by a single author and used it as a direct witness of the time in which it was written (seventh century or later) or the time it was depicting, during the life of Samson in Great Britain and the continent. However, Poulin pointed out that as far back as 1905, Arthur de La Borderie suggested it was the work of two authors and François Duine adopted a similar position and labelled the original work the *primigenia*. La Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne*, p. 562. François Duine, *Mémento des sources hagiographiques de l'histoire de Bretagne*, Bulletins et mémoires de la Société Archéologique du Département d'Ille-et-Vilaine (Rennes: Bahon-Rault, 1918), p. 31.



returned to a monastery in Britain founded by Samson.<sup>49</sup> The *primigenia* was subsequently rewritten by an anonymous monk from Dol. Poulin presented many indications in the text itself that it is a re-working of an earlier source. The existence of an older text is mentioned several times in the *Vita*.<sup>50</sup> In the prologue this work is attributed to the deacon Henoc. In addition to the references to the older work, Poulin also used the table of contents at the beginning of the text as evidence for the two phases of writing. The items listed in the table do not correspond entirely with the content of the text. Poulin deduced the table was original to the work. Therefore, what is listed in the table was in the *primigenia* while the passages not mentioned in the table can be considered interpolations by the redactor.<sup>51</sup>

Poulin suggested the circumstances under which the revision occurred. It seems that there was no narrative work dedicated to Samson at Dol. The redactor discovered the existence of the *primigenia* and travelled to Britain to collect more information on Samson at the monasteries associated with him, especially that of Piro, at Caldey Island. The amalgamation of the work resulted in the extant version of the *Vita Samsonis*.<sup>52</sup>

There are several important implications stemming from Poulin's theory, not only for dating the text, but also its historical interpretation. Poulin's theory does not resolve the dating issue, but rather complicates things since there are

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<sup>49</sup> VS prologue, 2, 4; I.38; II.8, pp. 142, 144, 200-202, 250-254.

<sup>50</sup> The older text is mentioned in VS prologue, 2, 4; I.1, 38; II.1, 2, 6, 8, 11, 14, and in the colophon at the end of book I. See pp. 142, 144, 146-148, 202, 238-240, 248, 258-260, 266.

<sup>51</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', pp. 263-67. The interpolations consist of the entire prologue; book I, the end of chapter 7 and all of 8, chapters 22-24, 33-34, the end of chapter 38, the end of chapter 41, all of 42 and the beginning of chapter, chapters 45-47, chapter 51, the beginning and end of chapter 52, the beginning of chapter 53, chapter 60, the second half of chapter 61, the colophon, and all of book II, except for chapters 7-9 which might have been part of the *primigenia* but were cut and then added to book II.

<sup>52</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 298.

now two texts to date. Poulin suggested the possibility that Henoc composed the *primigenia* during Samson's own lifetime or shortly thereafter.<sup>53</sup> The *Vita* is predominantly about Samson's career in Britain before moving to the continent. What survives from the *primigenia* does not recount the death of Samson or much of his career in Brittany. The account of Samson's death seems to be an interpolation by the redactor. It is reasonable to assume that the *primigenia* by Henoc is a seventh-century work and the revision by the anonymous monk from Dol dates to the ninth century.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of the *Vita Samsonis* and the cult of Samson for the present study is that they can be placed at the beginning of the cult of British confessor saints. Although the narrative of the *Vita Samsonis* features figures who were subsequently the subject of veneration, such as Illtud, Dubricius, and Piro, it does not mention any cults related to these figures at the time of Samson. This suggests that confessor cults had not developed by Samson's lifetime or by the time the *primigenia* was written. The idea that there were no cults associated with British confessor saints in the sixth century is also supported by their absence in Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum*, which only mentions martyr saints.<sup>55</sup> Gildas mentioned the '*paene totius Britanniae magistrum elegantum*', which has been interpreted as a reference to Illtud.<sup>56</sup> The reference does not describe Illtud as a saint, which suggests that he was not viewed as such when Gildas composed the *DEB*.

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<sup>53</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', pp. 291-92.

<sup>54</sup> Poulin pointed out that if there are traces of Bede in the *primigenia*, Henoc would have been a very distant cousin of Samson, and a seventh century date would be impossible for the composition of the *primigenia*. Poulin maintained the mid-eight century chronology proposed by Flobert with reservations, and suggested that the work of the redactor was ninth century. Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 299.

<sup>55</sup> *DEB* 10, p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> *DEB* 36, pp. 104 and 153.

The closest thing to cult activity depicted in the *Vita Samsonis* is the veneration of a standing stone associated with Samson. This is mentioned in the passage relating to during Samson's journey across Cornwall on his way to the continent. While walking through Trigg, he encountered some apostates worshipping an idol, '*fanum*'.<sup>57</sup> Samson chastised them for doing so, and although at first they refused to stop worshipping the idol, when one of them fell off his horse and died, they immediately stopped.<sup>58</sup> Samson destroyed the idol. Following this description is a declaration that the author has travelled to the site where this occurred, and seen and touched with his own hands the standing stone, '*lapide stante*', in which Samson inscribed a cross with iron.<sup>59</sup> Poulin saw this claim as original to the *primigenia* and attributed it to Henoc.<sup>60</sup> This suggests the veneration of a secondary relic associated with Samson in Cornwall as early as the seventh century, when the *primigenia* was written.

The *Vita Samsonis* attests to the development of the cult of Samson and the emergence of cults of British confessor saints, centred on holy men such as bishops and monks from the sixth century. It shows that the cult of Samson emerged by the seventh century, when the *primigenia* was written. The *Vita Samsonis* depicts Britain, specifically western Britain, with a thriving monastic culture in the sixth century. Although Samson's cult was based on the continent at Dol, Samson and his cult were a product of British Christianity.

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<sup>57</sup> VS I.48-51, pp. 216-20.

<sup>58</sup> VS I.49, p. 218.

<sup>59</sup> VS I.48, p. 216: 'In quo monte et ego fui signumque crucis quod sanctus Samson sua manu cum quodam ferro in lapide stante sculpsisset adoravi et mea manu palpavi.'

<sup>60</sup> Poulin, 'La "Vie Ancienne" de Samson de Dol', p. 302.

### 3.3 Ninian

Ninian was a British bishop at Whithorn. The dates of his career, as well as his true identity, are the subject of debate, but his cult was certainly substantial by the eighth century, when the Northumbrian kingdom expanded into southwest Scotland. The textual evidence suggests that Ninian's cult was too strong to suppress, so it was appropriated, and in the process, Ninian was stripped of his British ethnicity.

Bede provides the earliest mention of Ninian, but there are two other texts that describe his life and miracles. The verse life of Ninian, the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* was written in the late eighth century by students of Alcuin, at York or Whithorn, who sent it to him as a gift after he went to the continent.<sup>61</sup> The prose life, the *Vita Niniani*, was written by Aelred of Rievaulx between 1154 and 1160.<sup>62</sup> John MacQueen postulated the existence of two lost texts: an original prose Latin *vita*, on which the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* was based, and a later Anglo-Saxon prose *vita*, from which Aelred drew his material.<sup>63</sup>

Bede's description, from book III chapter 4 of the *HE*, conveys a lot of information in few words:

For the southern Picts, who dwell on this side of those mountains, had, it is said, long before forsaken the errors of idolatry, and received the true faith by the preaching of Bishop Ninias, a most reverend and holy man of the British nation, who had been regularly instructed at Rome in the faith

<sup>61</sup> Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 147. The Latin text is in *MGH, PLAC IV*, pp. 943-62; English translation in MacQueen, *St Nynia*. For the Manuscript, see Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 177, n. 140. Michael Lapidge argued for York as the place of composition. See Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin literature, 600-899* (London: Hambledon, 1996), pp. 381-98.

<sup>62</sup> John MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian', in *Galloway: Land and Lordship*, ed. by Richard D. Oram and Geoffrey P. Stell (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1991), pp. 17-25.

<sup>63</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian'.

and mysteries of the truth; whose episcopal see, named after St. Martin the bishop, and famous for a church dedicated to him (wherein Ninias himself and many other saints rest in the body), is now in the possession of the English nation. The place belongs to the province of the Bernicians, and is commonly called the White House, because he there built a church of stone, which was not usual among the Britons.<sup>64</sup>

The basic facts reported by Bede are also found in the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* and the *Vita Niniani*. The *Miracula* and *Vita* also include a story about Ninian coming into conflict with a King Tudwal, and also include reports of miracles associated with the saint.

Even though the later *vitae* are dependant on now-lost texts,<sup>65</sup> several pieces of evidence suggest that Bede did not have access to or was unaware of a textual source for Ninian; nor was Bede the primary source for the later *vitae* on Ninian.<sup>66</sup> Charles Plummer pointed out that Bede prefaced his information on Ninian with the phrase '*ut perhibent*', which he typically used to signal information for which he had no written source.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Bede did not depict any miracles associated with Ninian. Any *vita* composed in Bede's day or earlier would have emphasised miracle stories; and if Bede had seen a *vita* of

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<sup>64</sup> Translation from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*. trans. A. M. Sellar (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907). *HE*, III.4, p. 222: 'Namque ipsi australes Picti, qui intra eosdem montes habent sedes, multo ante tempore, ut perhibent, relicto errore idolatriae, fidem ueritatis acceperant, praedicante eis Verbum Nynia episcopo reuerentissimo et sanctissimo uiro de natione Brettonum, qui erat Romae regulariter fidem et mysteria ueritatis edoctus; cuius sedem episcopatus, sancti Martini episcopi nomine et ecclesia insignem, ubi ipse etiam corpore una cum pluribus sanctis requiescit, iam nunc Anglorum gens obtinet. Qui locus, ad prouinciam Berniciorum pertinens, uulgo uocatur Ad Candidam Casam, eo quod ibi ecclesiam de lapide, insolito Brettonibus more fecerit.'

<sup>65</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian', p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian'.

<sup>67</sup> Bede and Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*. 2 vols. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 128. See also MacQueen, *St Nynia*, p. 12.

Ninian, he is likely to have included some miracle stories from it in the passage from the *HE*.<sup>68</sup>

Bede's most likely source for the information on Ninian was Pechthelm, a student of Aldhelm and correspondent of Boniface, who was appointed as the first English bishop of Whithorn around the time Bede was writing the *HE*.<sup>69</sup> Some scholars, such as A. A. Duncan and D. P. Kirby, have suggested that Bede could have received his information on Ninian from the delegation from Nechtan that came to Jarrow in 710.<sup>70</sup> However, MacQueen rightly demonstrated that the emphasis on Whithorn in the passage from the *HE*, and the fact that Pechthelm is acknowledged elsewhere in the *HE* for supplying information, strongly suggests Pechthelm as Bede's informant on Ninian.<sup>71</sup>

An early date for Ninian has been widely accepted among modern scholars, but not universally agreed. The question of Ninian's floruit is subject to much debate, with scholars arguing for either a fifth- or sixth- century date.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian', p. 20; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*.

<sup>69</sup> Bede stated that Pechthelm was bishop at the time he was writing. See *HE*, V.23, pp. 558-60. The date of Pechthelm's appointment is also ambiguous. It has traditionally been interpreted as occurring quite close to the completion of the *HE* in 731. However, the use of the word *nuper* allows that Pechthelm might have held the appointment for several years before the completion of the *HE*. See *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), II, 343.

<sup>70</sup> A. A. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona and the Picts', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, ed. by R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 27-32.; D. P. Kirby, 'Bede and the Pictish Church', *Innes Review*, 24 (1973), 6-25.

<sup>71</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian'. Bede cites Pechthelm as a source in *HE*, V.13 and 18, pp. 502 and 512. MacQueen suggested that Pechthelm might have known the lost prose *vita*, and thus it might be the ultimate source for Bede's information. MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian', p. 20. On the other hand, Levison suggested that the lost *vita* was composed after the *HE*, and might have used it as a source, citing the fact that the later *vitae* which are dependant on the lost prose version report little additional biographical data on Ninian. Wilhelm Levison, 'An Eighth-century Poem on St. Ninian', *Antiquity*, 14 (1940), 280-91.

<sup>72</sup> For some recent articles, see Daphne Brooke, *Wild Men and Holy Places: St Ninian, Whithorn and the Medieval Realm of Galloway* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994); Dauvit Broun, 'The Literary Record of St. Nynia: Fact and Fiction?', *Innes Review*, 42 (1991), 143-50; Alan Macquarrie, 'The Date of Saint Ninian's Mission: A Reappraisal', *Records of the Scottish Church*

The discussion has been complicated by the recent suggestion from Thomas Clancy that Ninian is to be identified with Finnian, which would place Ninian in the sixth century.<sup>73</sup> Bede did not give specific dates and only stated that Ninian was active a long time before, '*multo ante tempore*', Columba arrived in Iona in 563.<sup>74</sup> A fifth-century date is traditional, stemming from the *Vita Niniani* which claims that Ninian was a contemporary of Martin of Tours (c.316-397).<sup>75</sup> In the following I will examine the arguments for dating Ninian's floruit in detail.

MacQueen has argued for a date range of 400-450 for Ninian and the establishment of a monastic community at Whithorn.<sup>76</sup> MacQueen's argument was based on textual evidence from Bede's *HE* and the *Miracula Nynie*.

MacQueen identified the Tudwal mentioned in the *Miracula* with a figure listed in Welsh genealogies, Tutagual, described as the great-grandson of Magnus Maximus (383-88).<sup>77</sup> MacQueen posited Tudwal's reign as c.410-440.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, MacQueen argued that the term '*casa*', which appears in the place-name for Ninian's episcopal see, '*Candida Casa*', was used in primary

*Society*, 23 (1987), 1-25. Peter Hill, *Whithorn and St. Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984-91* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), pp. 1-4.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Owen Clancy, 'The Real St Ninian', *Innes Review: Scottish Catholic Historical Studies*, 52 (2001), 1-28; Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Scottish Saints and National Identities in the Early Middle Ages', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 397-421; James A. Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian', *Innes Review*, 53 (2002), 40-59; G. W. S. Barrow, *Saint Ninian and Pictomania*, Whithorn Lecture, 12 (Whithorn: Friends of the Whithorn Trust, 2004); Wood, 'Britain and the Continent'; Jonathan Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint: Whithorn Excavations 1984-2001', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. by Jane Murray (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 9-18; MacQueen, *St Nynia*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>74</sup> *HE*, III.4, p. 222. The fact that Bede did not provide a specific date heavily implies he did not know. See MacQueen, *St Nynia*, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Aelred, 'Vita Niniani', in *The Lives of St Ninian and St Kentigern*, ed. by Alexander Penrose Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1874), pp. 137-57. Aelred states that Ninian visited Martin on his return to Britain from Rome, obtained masons with which to build the stone church at Whithorn, and upon learning of Martin's death, decided to dedicate the church to him. *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), II. 128-129.

<sup>76</sup> MacQueen, *St Nynia*, pp. 12-21, 86-87.

<sup>77</sup> MacQueen, *St Nynia*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>78</sup> MacQueen, *St Nynia*, p. 16.

sources such as Augustine's *Confessions* to refer to early monastic communities in Gaul.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, according to MacQueen, the reference to Tudwal and the term 'casa' place Ninian firmly in the fifth century.

While MacQueen's chronology is based on textual evidence, other scholars have placed Ninian in the fifth century based on the archaeological evidence at Whithorn, which suggests the presence of a Christian community from an early date.<sup>80</sup> An early date for occupation at Whithorn was already suggested by the Latinus stone,<sup>81</sup> but the recent excavations by Peter Hill presented new data on a wider scale.<sup>82</sup> The Latinus stone has been dated to the fifth century and includes Christian iconography and Latin text from the Vulgate.<sup>83</sup> The text does not mention Ninian, but does state that Latinus and his daughter established a *sinus* (asylum?) at the site, which might refer to a church. Ninian's church, if it existed, now lies under the medieval structure and other, later ecclesiastical buildings.

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<sup>79</sup> MacQueen, *St Nynia*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 275-94; Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*; Leslie Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain, AD 550-850* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2003); David C. Cowley, 'Early Christian Cemeteries in Southwest Scotland', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. by Jane Murray (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 43-56; Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint'.

<sup>81</sup> Katherine Forsyth, '*HIC MEMORIA PERPETUA*: The Inscribed Stones of Sub-Roman Southern Scotland', in '*Able Minds and Practiced Hands*': *Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century*, ed. by Sally M. Foster and Morag Cross (Oxford: Oxbow, 2005), pp. 113-34; Katherine Forsyth, 'The Latinus Stone: Whithorn's Earliest Christian Monument', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. by Jane Murray (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 19-42.

<sup>82</sup> On the Latinus stone, see Forsyth, 'The Inscribed Stones of Sub-Roman Southern Scotland'; Forsyth, 'The Latinus Stone'; Peter Hill, 'Whithorn', *Current Archaeology*, 96 (1985), 27-29; Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*; Peter Hill, 'Whithorn, Latinus and the Origins of Christianity in Northern Britain', in *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: Essays in Honour of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. by Helena Hamerow and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), pp. 23-32. On the impact of the excavations at Whithorn, see Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint'.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Thomas, *Whithorn's Christian Beginnings*, Whithorn Lectures, 1 (Whithorn: Friends of the Whithorn Trust, 1992), pp. 1-10; Forsyth, 'The Latinus Stone'.



The excavations between 1984 and 2001 uncovered material dating back to c.500, including inhumation burials oriented east-west and Mediterranean pottery.<sup>84</sup> Nothing positively dated earlier than c.500 was found, although the excavator did not rule out an earlier occupation of the site.<sup>85</sup> Hill noted that the excavated area could represent an expansion on an existing site.<sup>86</sup> Considering the extent of the site of Whithorn c.500, then a date in the late fifth century for the earliest occupation of the site is possible.<sup>87</sup> There is no substantial reason that the nucleus was not occupied earlier than the margins, and could have been a shrine and settlement in the early fifth century, even if a later date is more likely.<sup>88</sup>

The archaeology has been used by some scholars to argue a sixth-century date. The lack of earlier evidence was adduced by Macquarrie for his theory that Whithorn was a "greenfield" site colonised by newcomers c. 500.<sup>89</sup> Macquarrie hypothesised that the site was established and developed by a community arriving *en masse*, which echoes the model of the invalidated 'Celtic

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<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Wooding, 'Cargoes in Trade Along the Western Seaboard', in *External Contacts and the Economy of Late Roman and Post-Roman Britain*, ed. by Ken Dark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), pp. 67-82; Cowley, 'Early Christian Cemeteries'; Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint'. The Mediterranean ware can take the site back into the fifth century, with proposed date ranges of c.475-525 and c.525-550. Ewan Campbell, *Imported Material in Atlantic Britain and Ireland c. AD 400-800*, CBA RR, 157 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007). Dendrochronology produced some fifth century dates for some planks from the excavation. Plank 8739 gave a *terminus post quem* of AD 466. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*, pp. 596 and 173.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*, p. 8. All the dendrochronological material came from the Southern Sector, at the furthest extent at the site. Biv and Bv amphora sherds were also retrieved from this area of the site, which places sixth-century material at the furthest extent of the site. Wooding expressed reservations regarding Hill's model for the importation of the amphora alongside E ware. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*, p. 324. Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Macquarrie, 'The Date of Saint Ninian's Mission'; Alan Macquarrie, 'St Ninian of Whithorn', in *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093*, ed. by Alan Macquarrie (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1997).

Church' model.<sup>90</sup> However, it is no more appropriate to adduce archaeological evidence to support a sixth century date than for a fifth century date. Ninian could be sixth century even if the community dated to the fifth. While the archaeology neither supports nor rebuts any of the statements about Ninian and Whithorn made in the textual sources, it does provide a context for a Christian community and ecclesiastical activity as early as the beginning of the sixth century and possibly earlier. Archaeology cannot provide evidence for the name of the saint, but the continuity of the site from an early date to the eighth century puts the burden of proof on those that would argue that 'Ninian' was not present from the beginning.<sup>91</sup>

Several scholars have argued or accepted a sixth-century date for Ninian, including Alan MacQuarrie, Thomas Clancy, Geoffrey Barrow, and J. A. Fraser.<sup>92</sup> Macquarrie argued that a fifth-century date did not fit the traditional information about Ninian's biography, especially the trip to Rome and the association with Martin of Tours.<sup>93</sup> Macquarrie also identified Tudwal with a different figure than MacQueen. Macquarrie claimed that the Tudwal associated with Ninian was the father of Rhydderech, king of the Strathclyde Britons in the late sixth century.<sup>94</sup> Macquarrie's claims have been rebutted. The connection to Martin is probably an embellishment by Aelred, based on supposition from

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<sup>90</sup> Hill invoked Gaulish monks in his interpretation. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*, p. 12. Regarding the concept of the 'Celtic Church', see Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church'; Hughes, 'The Celtic Church'; Sharpe, 'Some Problems'. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 95; Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', pp. 9, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> Macquarrie, 'The Date of Saint Ninian's Mission'; Clancy, 'The Real St Ninian'; Clancy, 'Scottish Saints and National Identities in the Early Middle Ages'; Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian'; Barrow, *Saint Ninian and Pictomania*.

<sup>93</sup> Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> Tudwal is described in the *Historia Brittonum* as participating in campaigns with Urien of Rheged c585-92 and is also mentioned in the *Annales Cambriae* as having died 612 or 613.

Bede's mention of the church at Whithorn dedicated to Martin.<sup>95</sup> The depiction of Ninian as a bishop 'regularly' educated in Rome is not incompatible with a fifth-century date.<sup>96</sup> The dates of Rhydderech, if accepted, would make his father Tudwal active around the same time as Columba, not as Bede stated, '*multo ante tempore*', no matter how you translate it.<sup>97</sup>

Thomas Clancy has presented a radical new interpretation arguing that Ninian is a doublet of Finnian of Moville, a British saint who worked in Ireland and corresponded with Gildas.<sup>98</sup> This hypothesis places Ninian in the sixth century. Clancy's argument hinges on the idea of a scribal error mistaking *Uinniau* for *Ninniau*. According to Clancy, Finnian's cult developed away from Whithorn, was brought to Whithorn, and became the cult of Ninian through the mistranscription of the saint's name, or Whithorn was Finnian's primary site.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> MacQueen, 'The Literary Sources for the Life of St. Ninian'. Bede did not state that Ninian himself was responsible for the dedication, merely that the church where he was entombed, his episcopal see, bore the dedication. Regardless of the date of Ninian, there is a broad consensus that the Martin dedication need not be attributed to Martin himself. The dedication almost certainly post-dates 461, when Martin's cult grew in popularity and his relics were translated to a new basilica in Tours, after which other dedications to him are recorded. See also Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 18-20. For the possibility that the dedication occurred during a period of Frankish influence in Galloway before the Anglo-Saxon presence at Whithorn in the eighth century, see Wood, 'Britain and the Continent'.

<sup>96</sup> MacQueen, *St Nynia*, p. 26; Wood, 'Britain and the Continent'. Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 16.

<sup>97</sup> The meaning of '*multo ante tempore*' is ambiguous and debatable. Macquarrie argued that the phrase '*multo ante tempore*' referred to a single lifetime. This argument was based on other phrases found in the *HE*, since this particular phrase appears the one time. Other similar phrases in the *HE* do seem to refer to a single lifetime, but as MacQueen pointed out, in those instances they are looking forward in time, not backwards. Macquarrie, 'The Date of Saint Ninian's Mission'; MacQueen, *St Nynia*, pp. 22-24.

<sup>98</sup> Clancy, 'The Real St Ninian'. Clancy, 'Scottish Saints and National Identities in the Early Middle Ages', pp. 399-404. Ó Riain argued that Finnian was Irish. For an overview of the debate about the identity of Finnian, aside from the question of whether or not he was Ninian, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 291-93.

<sup>99</sup> Clancy, 'The Real St Ninian'. On the wider identity of Finnian see David Dumville, 'St. Finnian of Movilla: Briton, Gael, Ghost?', in *Down History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. by Lindsay Proudfoot (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1997), pp. 71-84; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Finnio and Winniau: A Return to the Subject', in *Ildánach Ildrech: A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana*, ed. by John Carey, John Koch, and Pierre-Yves Lambert (Andover: Celtic Studies, 1999), pp. 187-202.

Several scholars have pointed out numerous difficulties with Clancy's argument. One of the most significant difficulties is the assumption that the 'literary cult' of Ninian developed independent of the geographical centre of the cult at Whithorn.<sup>100</sup> Clerics at Whithorn would probably have noticed such a misspelling and been aware that the saint whose shrine at Whithorn was *Uinniau* not *Nyniau*.<sup>101</sup> The misspelling of the name of the saint in two sources, Bede's *HE* and the *Miracula*, is difficult to reconcile with the probability that such a mistake would go unnoticed. Fraser argued that the misspelling is evidence that the *Miracula* was not composed at Whithorn. However, as Wooding has pointed out, it is more logical that the assumption that *Uinniau* was Ninian is inaccurate.<sup>102</sup> Clancy argued that *Uinniau* was misspelled as *Ninniau*. However, in Bede and the *Miracula*, Ninian's name is '*Nynias*'. The consistent misspelling of *Nyn-* from *Uinn-* is unlikely.<sup>103</sup> Wooding suggested that a hiatus in occupation at Whithorn between the date of the Latinus stone and Bede's informant might support the theory that the name was forgotten and inaccurately reported from external sources.<sup>104</sup> However the archaeology demonstrates continuity, which makes continuity of record more likely.<sup>105</sup>

Thus Clancy's argument that Ninian is identical with Finian is implausible. It depends on the consistent scribal error of the unattested hypocoristic *Uinn-* being mistaken for *Nyn-* a known name, and such an unlikely

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<sup>100</sup> Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian'.

<sup>101</sup> Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian', p. 54; Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian'. Wooding agreed with Barrow that a later conflation with Finian is enough to explain the problems raised by Clancy. Barrow, *Saint Ninian and Pictomania*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>103</sup> Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian', p. 54; MacQueen, *St Nynia*, p. 153; Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', pp. 12-13.

<sup>105</sup> Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint', p. 15.

mistake going unnoticed by a long established cult at Whithorn. Added to that are some discrepancies between the narratives of Ninian and Finnian. Bede stated that Ninian was regularly instructed at Rome. The life of Finnian explicitly states that he never went to Rome. However, even if we dismiss Clancy's argument that Ninian was Finnian, that does not rule out a sixth-century date.

The significant differences in the context of Ninian's career between a fifth- or sixth century date have been noted by Ian Wood. A fifth-century date for Ninian would place him in the final years of Roman Britain, or in a post-Roman world. Ninian would have been a contemporary of Germanus, Palladius and Patrick. The putative trip to Rome can be placed alongside Pope Celestine's interest in Britain and Ireland attested by his involvement in Germanus' trip to Britain and Palladius trip to Ireland to serve the Christian community there. Celestine's interest might have also inspired Ninian's missionary activity among the southern Picts. A sixth century date for Ninian would put him in a world that was no longer Roman. The textual evidence depicts a world on monasticism and penitentials. Ninian would have been a contemporary of Gildas and Samson.<sup>106</sup>

Regardless of Ninian's floruit, by the eighth century when the Northumbrian kingdom expanded into southwest Scotland, his cult was substantial, or Bede would not have mentioned it.<sup>107</sup> The cult was too big to

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<sup>106</sup> Wood, 'Britain and the Continent', p. 73.

<sup>107</sup> Bede described Pecthelm as being recently appointed first bishop of Whithorn after an increase in the number of believers there. *HE* V.23, pp. 558-60. Bede did not explain what he meant by an increase in believers, which could refer to apostatised Britons who reconverted or a population increase. See Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition*, Studies in Medieval Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 265; Paul Meyvaert, 'A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross: *Ecclesia* and *Vita Monastica*', in *The Ruthwell Cross*, ed. by Brendan Cassidy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95-166. (p. 148); Orton, Wood, and Lees,

suppress and thus was appropriated, and Ninian's British identity overlooked and ignored in the texts. Pechthelm, after being appointed bishop at Whithorn, may have sought to appease the local population by maintaining a popular cult.<sup>108</sup>

Bede displayed an explicit bias against British clergy whenever they were mentioned in other parts of the *HE*. Yet, with Ninian, Bede described a British bishop with praise and no criticism. Bede criticised the British for not preaching to the Angles or Saxons.<sup>109</sup> Ninian escaped the criticism levelled at other British clergy because he conducted missionary work, albeit to Picts not Anglo-Saxons. Bede's account of Ninian also presents him as following continental, rather than British religious norms.<sup>110</sup> First of all, Ninian built a church of stone, which Bede claimed was unusual for the British. Second, Ninian is further distinguished from other British clergy because Bede makes clear that Ninian followed Roman orthodoxy: '*qui erat Romae regulariter fidem et mysteria ueritatis edoctus*'.<sup>111</sup> The emphasis on Ninian's training in Rome effectively erases Ninian's British origins.<sup>112</sup>

*Miracula Nynie Episcopi* attests the flourishing of Ninian's cult and its appropriation by the Anglo-Saxon Church after the Northumbrian annexation of Galloway.<sup>113</sup> In the *Miracula*, similarly to Bede, Ninian's British origins are

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*Fragments of History*, p. 127. On the date of Pechthelm's appointment as bishop of Whithorn, see Bede and Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, p. 343.

<sup>108</sup> Nora Chadwick, 'St. Ninian: A Preliminary Study of Sources', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society*, 27 (1950), 9-53.

<sup>109</sup> *HE*, I.22, p. 68.

<sup>110</sup> Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*, p. 128.

<sup>111</sup> *HE*, III.4, p. 222.

<sup>112</sup> Ian Wood, 'Ruthwell: Contextual Searches', in *Theorizing Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, ed. by Catherine Karkov and Fred Orton (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 104-30.

<sup>113</sup> Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*, pp. 128-130.

completely ignored and his journey to Rome has no identified starting point.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Ninian is presented as a Roman saint, which would have been more acceptable to the audience than a British saint.<sup>115</sup> After returning to Britain and evangelising the Picts, Ninian is opposed by King Tudwal, the only explicitly British figure in the *Miracula*, who is given an unsympathetic role.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, two of the miracles at his tomb involved people with English names, Pethgils and Plecgils, which bolster Ninian's depiction as a Northumbrian saint.<sup>117</sup> The *Miracula* attests the appropriation of the cult of a popular British saint, and can be seen in the context of the Northumbrian Church obliterating British tradition as it expanded its territory.<sup>118</sup>

In summary, sometime in the fifth or sixth century Ninian served a Christian community in Galloway. After he died, veneration of Ninian developed into a substantial cult. When Pechthelm was appointed bishop of Whithorn, around the time Bede was writing the *HE*, Ninian's cult was appropriated by the Anglo-Saxon church. This further attests the development of the cult of saints in Britain along the same lines as the continent from, whereby confessor saints such as bishops, monks and ascetics became the focus of saints' cults after martyr cults.<sup>119</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

The *Vita Samsonis*, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *Miracula Nyniae*, and the *Vita Niniani* show the development of cults of British confessor saints. Internal textual

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<sup>114</sup> *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*, p. 128.

<sup>116</sup> *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*, 3-5.

<sup>117</sup> Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*, p. 129.

<sup>118</sup> For the expansion of the Northumbrian Church and the relationship of Whithorn and Ninian to the Ruthwell monument, see Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*, pp. 128-130. Archaeological evidence suggests a substantial cult site when the Anglo-Saxons took over. See Wooding, 'Archaeology and the Dossier of a Saint'.

<sup>119</sup> See chapter 1, above.

evidence in the *Vita Samsonis* indicates that the cult of Samson was the first cult dedicated to a British confessor saint. Samson's cult developed in Brittany in the seventh century, when the earliest version of the *Vita Samsonis* was written. In contrast, Ninian's cult developed on a site outside the area of the Roman province that was flourishing by 500.<sup>120</sup> The *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Miracula Nyniae* indicate his cult was fully developed by the eighth century. Most importantly, these sources overlooked or ignored Ninian's Britishness and appropriated him for the Anglo-Saxon Church.

Considered together, the textual sources from chapters two and three show that Britain, rather than being isolated from mainland Europe, experienced the same developments vis-à-vis the cult of saints. The cult of saints was introduced to Britain at the end of the fourth century. Native martyr cults developed in the fifth century and were followed by confessor cults beginning in the seventh century. Having examined the textual sources, we now turn to the archaeology.

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<sup>120</sup> Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*; MacQueen, *St Nynia*.



## **Chapter 4: The archaeological evidence part 1: churches**

### **4.1 Overview**

Many sites have been presented as archaeological evidence for the presence of late antique saints' cults in Britain. These sites conform to the traditional model for cult sites: churches found in extra-mural Roman cemeteries. The first half of this chapter will discuss this model and address some problems of interpretation and their implications regarding the present understanding of late antique saints' cults in Britain. As there are alternative explanations for the reuse and construction of churches in Roman cemeteries, the reuse of Roman mausolea or construction in an extra-mural cemetery is suggestive but not conclusive evidence for the presence of a saints' cult.

In this chapter I argue that the archaeological evidence conforms with the general understanding of the development of the cult of saints as discussed in the preceding chapters. The evidence does not indicate sites that experienced uninterrupted continuity from martyrdom to cult. Rather, the evidence suggests that when churches were built during Late Antiquity, sites where martyr graves were expected to be found were sometimes chosen, whether or not it was the grave of an authentic martyr. The traditional model is still useful because the features associated with the model are the best indicators for the possible presence of a cult. There are only a few sites where there is suggestive evidence for a cult in Late Antiquity. However, these sites are significant because, corroborating the interpretation of textual sources, they support the idea that the cult of saints in Britain roughly followed the same development pattern as other provinces in the Western Roman Empire and that Christianity

persisted in the province between the dissolution of Roman administration and the Anglo-Saxon conversion.

#### 4.2 Archaeology and the cult of saints

The investigation of saints' cults emerged as a theme in British archaeology in the 1970s and 80s, most notably in publications by Martin Biddle and Warwick Rodwell.<sup>1</sup> The interest in the archaeology of saints' cults arose at this time for several reasons. One motive was the reassessment of sites such as Lullingstone, Stone-by-Faversham, and Folkestone, where churches were found to overlie Roman mausolea.<sup>2</sup> Another cause was the development of church archaeology as a new sub-discipline, in turn the result of several factors. The publication in 1965 of Taylor & Taylor's *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* alerted scholars to the archaeological significance of churches.<sup>3</sup> Excavations at Brixworth,<sup>4</sup> Deerhurst,<sup>5</sup> Repton,<sup>6</sup> Whithorn,<sup>7</sup> and Wearmouth-Jarrow,<sup>8</sup> also created a climate of ferment and interest. The promotion of this field by the Council for British Archaeology and the incorporation of rescue archaeology into

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<sup>1</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Warwick Rodwell, 'Churches in an Historic Town', in *Historic Churches: A Wasting Asset*, ed. by Warwick Rodwell and Kirsty Rodwell (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977), pp. 24-41; Rodwell, 'From Mausoleum to Minster: The Early Development of Wells Cathedral'; Warwick Rodwell, 'Churches in the Landscape: Aspects of Topography and Planning', in *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement*, ed. by Margaret Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford University Department for External Studies, 1984), pp. 1-23; Warwick Rodwell, 'The Role of the Church in the Development of Roman and Early Anglo-Saxon London', in *In Search of Cult: Archaeological Investigations in Honour of Philip Rahtz*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 91-99; Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Taylor and Yonge, 'The Ruined Church at Stone-by-Faversham: a Re-Assessment'.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*.

<sup>4</sup> E. D. C. Jackson and Eric Fletcher, 'Excavations at Brixworth, 1958', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 24 (1961), 1-15.

<sup>5</sup> Philip A. Rahtz, *Excavations at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, 1971-73* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> H. M. Taylor, 'St. Wystan's Church, Repton, Derbyshire: A Reconstruction Essay', *Archaeological Journal*, 144 (1987), 205-45.

<sup>7</sup> Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*.

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Cramp, G. Bettess, and F. Bettess, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005).

ecclesiastical procedures of the Church of England were also significant factors.<sup>9</sup>

The rise of church archaeology in Britain coincided with the rise of the Late Antiquity paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Along with the scholars mentioned in chapter 1, archaeologists such as Charles Thomas questioned general assumptions about the Roman to medieval transition in Britain.<sup>11</sup> Philip Barker's excavations at Wroxeter suggested that the Decline and Fall view might not be accurate.<sup>12</sup> The research on the cult of saints associated with the Late Antiquity paradigm motivated archaeologists like Biddle and Rodwell to consider British cults. All these factors together helped inspire further archaeological investigation. As a result, many scholars have speculated that the Anglo-Saxon cult of saints might have rested upon a Romano-British foundation.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The traditional model

The traditional model for the archaeological investigation of saints' cults focuses on special graves and churches in extra-mural Roman cemeteries.<sup>14</sup> The model

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Biddle, Daphne M. Hudson, and Carolyn M. Heighway, *The Future of London's Past: A Survey of the Archaeological Implications of Planning and Development in the Nation's Capital* (Worcester: Rescue, 1973); P. V. Addyman and Richard Morris, *The Archaeological Study of Churches* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1976); Warwick Rodwell, *The Archaeology of the English Church: The Study of Historic Churches and Churchyards* (London: Batsford, 1981); Richard Morris, 'Introduction', in *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, ed. by John Blair and Carol Pyrah (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1996), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Brown, 'The Rise and Function'; Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain: The Hunter Marshall Lectures Delivered at the University of Glasgow in January and February 1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Charles Thomas, *Bede, Archaeology, and the Cult of Relics*, Jarrow Lecture; 1973. (Jarrow: H. Saxby, 1973); Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Barker et al., *The Baths Basilica Wroxeter: Excavations 1966-90* (London: English Heritage, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, pp 1-45; Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 1-20; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 10-34; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints'.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'.

developed from an understanding of the development of the cult of saints whereby cults arose from the veneration of martyrs at graveside feasts outside the walls of Roman towns.<sup>15</sup> The development of cults led to edification, in the architectural sense, of saints' graves. The model assumes that the architectural elaboration of martyrs' graves and the material manifestation of cults followed a regular pattern.<sup>16</sup>

Roman mortuary shrines are referred to as *cella memoriae* and *martyria*. As mentioned in chapter 1, *cellae memoriae* are a type of mausoleum, small buildings which provided shelter at the graveside. *Memoriae* are structures which had been built for the burial of wealthy or important people since long before the rise of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> *Martyria* were defined by André Grabar as monuments built for the purpose of marking the location of the tombs of martyrs and organising the space around their grave for the use of the cult and sheltering the faithful.<sup>18</sup> Richard Krautheimer defined *martyria* as structures over the sites that bore witness to the Christian faith, either by referring to events in Christ's life or passion, or sheltering the grave of a martyr.<sup>19</sup> *Martyria* also drew from the tradition of venerating heroes with the erection of shrines.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this study, *memoria* is understood as a mausoleum while *martyrium* refers to a *memoria* associated with a saint or martyr, regardless of whether or not the saint was authentic. Relics were often translated to secondary shrines. Secondary shrines were not common before the late sixth century, when the

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<sup>15</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 4. Cemeteries were located outside the walls of settlements due to Roman burial law, normally located just outside the walls, near the gates and along the roads. For the Roman law proscribing burial outside the city, see Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmundian Constitutions*, pp. 239–40, book 9, title 17, on the violation of tombs. See also Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'.

<sup>16</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, pp. 11–52.

<sup>17</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 216.

<sup>18</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium*. I, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, p. 361.

<sup>20</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 212.

laws restricting the movement of relics and burial to extra-mural areas were relaxed.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the widespread belief that burial near the saints, *ad sanctos*, would improve one's chances of salvation, *cellae memoriae* became the focus of burial for other Christians who wanted to be in proximity to the holy dead.<sup>22</sup> For example, Ambrose, bishop of Milan, arranged for his brother, Satyrus, to be buried next to Saint Victor in his *cella memoria*.<sup>23</sup> By the early sixth century burial *ad sanctos* was usually reserved for wealthy laity and high ranking clergy.<sup>24</sup> As cults were promoted, *memoriae* became the focus for construction of more elaborate structures, and many of the *cellae memoriae*, or simply *memoriae*, were enlarged to accommodate additional burials.<sup>25</sup> With continued popularity, the shrine could be enlarged into a church.

If the cult became more popular still, the church might affect settlement patterns.<sup>26</sup> There were several ways in which this could happen. One process involved the abandonment of the Roman settlement in favour of establishing an early medieval settlement centred on the church. The location of modern St Albans is supposedly a result of this process.<sup>27</sup> In another, the settlement expanded to envelop previously extra-mural areas, as for example, at Jerusalem,<sup>28</sup> or the best known example, St Peter's, Rome. A third saw settlement develop a split focus, maintaining the original Roman town centre

<sup>21</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> See Ambrose, 'De Excessu Fratris sui Satyri' in *Patrologia Latina*, 16, cols. 1345-1414; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 116-29. See also Ferdinando Reggiori, *La Basilica Ambrosiana: Ricerche e Restauri 1929-1940* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1941).

<sup>24</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Rich, *The City in Late Antiquity*; Ward-Perkins, 'Urban Continuity?'

<sup>27</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999).

while adding to it a satellite focus around the cult site. Tours is a good example of this process.<sup>29</sup>

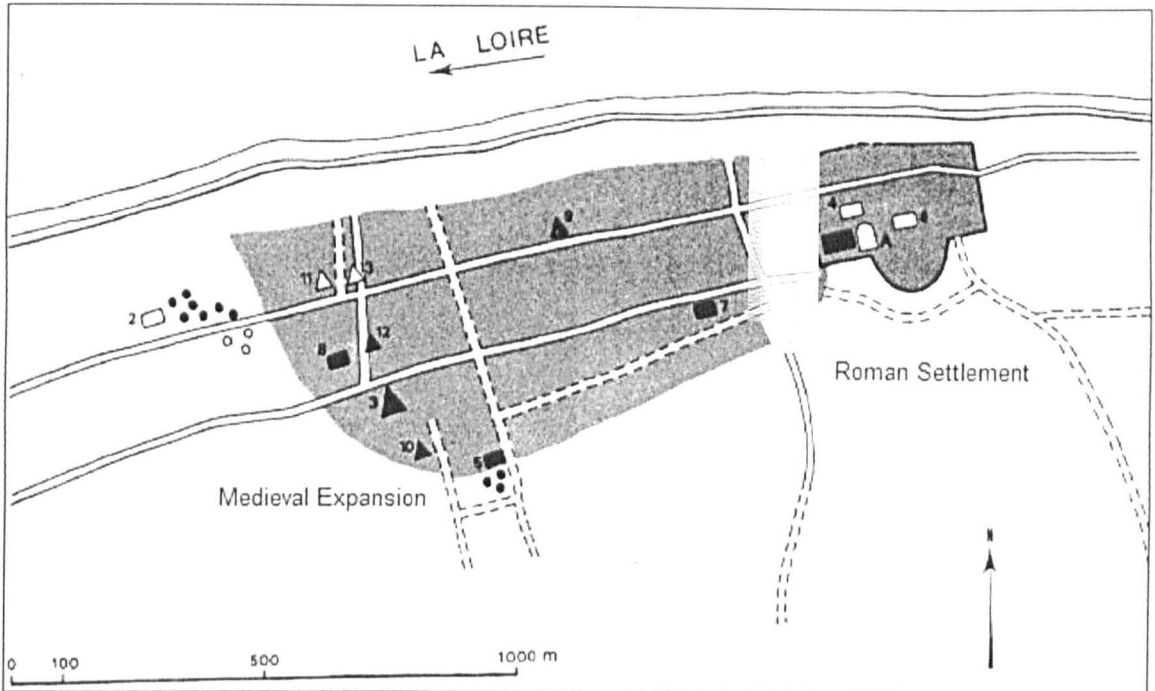


Figure 4.1: *Tours in the fourth and fifth centuries (after Galinié)*

Scholars have focused on recognising these patterns as a method of identifying possible cult sites with Roman origins.<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm Levison, inspired by excavations at Bonn and Xanten, where this process apparently took place, suggested that St Albans and Caerleon might be authentic British examples of late Roman martyr cults.<sup>31</sup> The model has been employed to argue for the presence of cults at other sites where special graves and churches are found over cemeteries and/or adjacent to Roman settlements. Some examples include Stone-by-Faversham, Lullingstone, Folkestone, St Martin's Canterbury, St Helen's Worcester, St Andrew's Wroxeter, and St Mary de Lode Gloucester,

<sup>29</sup> Galinié, 'Archéologie et topographie historique de Tours - IVème - XIème siècles'; Galinié, 'Reflections on Early Medieval Tours'.

<sup>30</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'.

<sup>31</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'.

which will be re-assessed in the framework of the new interpretive model in the second part of this chapter.

#### 4.2.2 Problems with the traditional model

The model is based upon a potential misinterpretation of the textual sources which assumes uninterrupted continuity at cult sites from martyrdom to shrine to church.<sup>32</sup> The only known case in the Western Roman Empire where a cult probably experienced uninterrupted continuity is St Peter's, Rome. The traditional model neglects the chronology for the development of the cult of saints, in which the cult of saints arose in the late fourth/early fifth century, long after the end of persecutions.<sup>33</sup> This underpins the significance of the dating of saints' cults in textual sources, thus some of the initial investigations for Alban and other early saints have been looking for the wrong thing. Cult sites would have attained features that separated them from any other gravesite only when their cults were heavily promoted, which was not common until the sixth century in Gaul and later still in Italy and Spain.<sup>34</sup> Yet, scholars have sought evidence dating to the period of persecutions, such as a third-century burial and associated shrine.<sup>35</sup>

Another problem is that the evidence at many sites is too ambiguous for precise dating. This means that without excavation the date when these buildings were first used for Christian worship cannot be determined precisely

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<sup>32</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'; Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, pp. 11-52.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, p. 216.

<sup>35</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

and could have been anytime from Late Antiquity to the late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>36</sup>

The reuse of Roman material has been explored by several scholars over the past two decades. There are alternative interpretations for the reuse of mausolea and construction of churches in extra-mural cemeteries, functional and symbolic. Tyler Bell's work has revealed that most of the Roman structures that were later reused as churches originally had secular functions.<sup>37</sup> Sites for the construction of churches might also have been determined by less obvious natural features, such as springs, which might have played a part in their choice for Roman settlement.<sup>38</sup> Tim Eaton has argued that in the early medieval period, Roman material was often selected for use even when it would have been easier to obtain quarried stone.<sup>39</sup> The work of Bell and Eaton shows that in early medieval Britain, Roman material carried symbolic meanings in addition to functional uses, such as the idea of longevity and authority.<sup>40</sup> These interpretations are not mutually exclusive with each other or the presence of a cult at these churches.

The traditional model is useful for identifying possible cult sites, but not prescriptive or conclusive. The model needs to be revised so that interpretation of the evidence is reconciled with the current understanding of the chronology of the cult of saints. It also needs to take into account the possibility that some

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<sup>36</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>37</sup> Tyler Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings: Christian Associations and Roman Masonry in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 42 (1998), 1-18; Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*.

<sup>38</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Tim Eaton, *Plundering the Past: Roman Stonework in Medieval Britain* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> See also David Stocker, 'Rubbish Recycled: A Study of the Re-use of Stone in Lincolnshire', in *Stone: Quarrying and Building in England, AD 43-1525*, ed. by D. Parsons (Chichester: Phillimore, 1990), pp. 83-101.



cults might have developed around martyrs that were not authentic, as argued in chapter 2. The evidence supports the argument that cults arose long after the end of persecutions as well as the idea that Christianity persisted in Britain from the collapse of Roman administration to the Anglo-Saxon conversion. Some sites may have been used for the construction of churches because they were in a location where a martyr's grave was expected, regardless of whether or not there was an authentic martyr's grave present. The evidence should be taken on a case by case basis, using all available evidence, not just the archaeological.

Taking all this into account, the evidence shows some early churches that might have been built at the time of the rise of the cult of saints. Their sites may suggest the presence of churches associated with martyr cults. However, these cults have not left any other trace in the textual sources, which suggests that these cults might have been abandoned or suppressed or appropriated.

### **4.3 The evidence**

#### **4.3.1 Churches over Roman mausolea**

Investigation at several sites has revealed some churches with apparent foundations on Roman mausolea. These include several in Kent: Stone-by-Faversham, Lullingstone, Folkestone, and St Martin's Canterbury. One is in East Anglia: Icklingham. There are two sites in the west: Wells and St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester. These sites constitute the best archaeological evidence for late antique cults in Britain based on the traditional model. Taking into account the problems with the model, some of these sites still present significant evidence that suggests the possible presence of cults. The Kent group will be discussed first.



Figure 4.2: Churches in cemeteries and over mausolea

The Kent group make an interesting study because most of the sites in this group have an element of the Old English *-stan*, meaning 'stone', in their place-name. Examples include Stanes in Thanet, Cuxton, Keston, Maidstone and Teston. Stuart Rigold has argued that in Kent this element almost invariably suggests a Roman stone building – which can often be associated with early churches that used the Roman structure as foundations.<sup>41</sup> Outside Kent, the *-stan* element was not used exclusively for sites of Roman building but also prehistoric megalithic monuments.<sup>42</sup> Its use in Kent is probably due to the high concentration of surviving Roman structures in the area in the Anglo-Saxon

<sup>41</sup> Stuart Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 87 (1973), 31-41.

<sup>42</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered'.

period.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the sites considered below, this toponymic argument suggests the possible reuse of Roman structures at other sites that have not been examined archaeologically, like Cuxton.<sup>44</sup>

The Kent group are also noteworthy because of possible links to Augustine of Canterbury. Bede described Augustine and his colleagues re-using Roman buildings to build new churches.<sup>45</sup> Some of the sites described below might represent such sites.

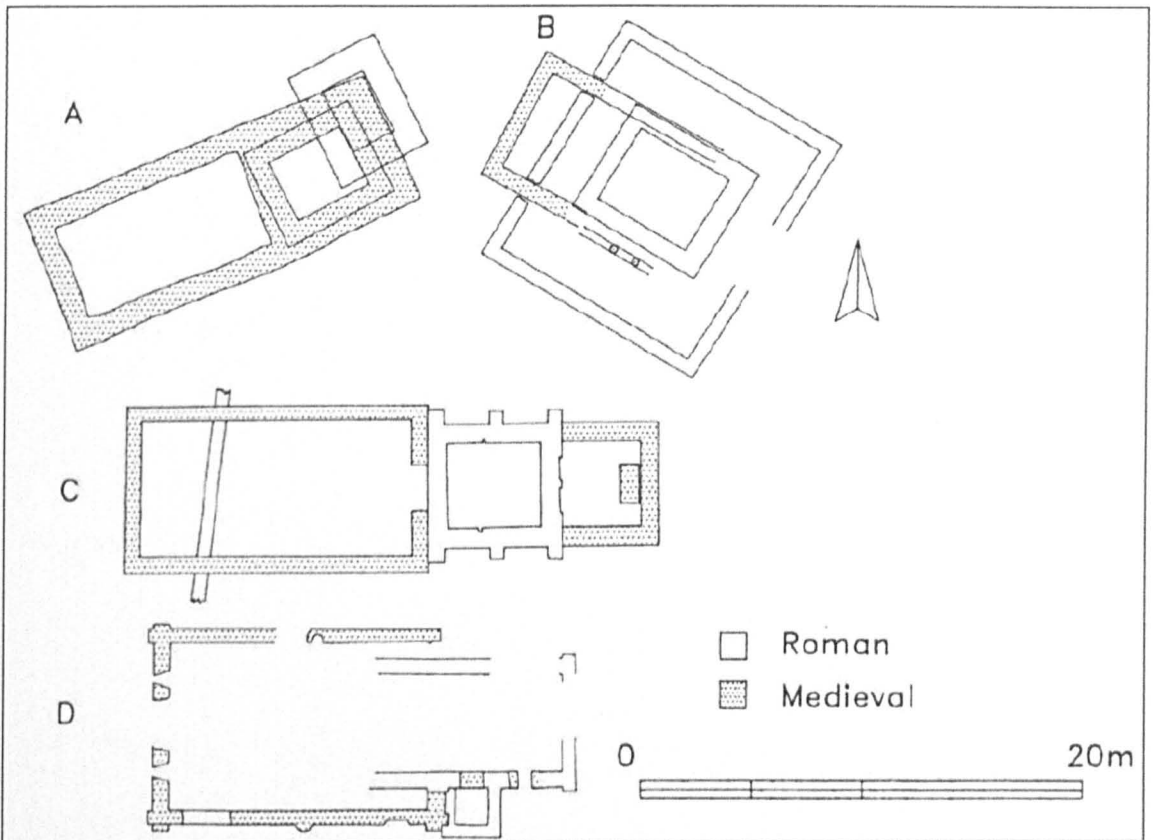


Figure 4.3: Churches over mausolea: A) Wells B) Lullingstone C) Stone-by-Faversham D) St Martins, Canterbury

<sup>43</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered'.

<sup>44</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered'.

<sup>45</sup> HE I.26 & I.33. See also Nicholas Brooks, 'The Ecclesiastical Topography of Early Medieval Canterbury', in *European Towns: Their Archaeology and Early History*, ed. by M. W. Barley (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1978), pp. 487-98; Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*; Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, pp. 123-27 and 131-32.

#### 4.3.1.1 Stone-by-Faversham, Kent

Stone-by-Faversham is on Watling Street between Faversham and Sittingborne, and adjacent to the Roman settlement of Durolevum. The excavation of a nearby Roman cemetery at Ospringe uncovered no fewer than 387 burials.<sup>46</sup> The church at Stone-by-Faversham was the first site in Britain to be recognised as an early church built atop a Roman mausoleum. The site was investigated in 1872 by the Kent archaeological society and again in 1926 by William Hawley.<sup>47</sup> The site was listed by the Taylors.<sup>48</sup> The most recent investigations were conducted by Fletcher and Meates in 1967-68.<sup>49</sup> The site was re-assessed in 1981 by H. M. Taylor and D. D. Yonge.<sup>50</sup>

The original Roman structure is nearly square, measuring 6.1 m by 5.8 m externally, and 4.4 m by 4 m internally. The initial interpretation of the structure by Fletcher and Meates based upon the standing remains was that this was a Romano-Celtic temple with an external ambulatory, although the excavation encountered no evidence for an ambulatory.<sup>51</sup>

Several burials were found in the excavations, including one child on the south side of the building, and a few on the east side of the Roman structure. One is a child burial to the south of the structure, oriented north-south with the head to the north (facing south).<sup>52</sup> Calibrated radiocarbon dating of the remains

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<sup>46</sup> Whiting, Hawley, and May, *Report on the Excavation of the Roman Cemetery at Ospringe, Kent*.

<sup>47</sup> The only published results from the 1872 excavation are some illustrations by J. T. Irvine, in Irvine, 'On the Remains'. Hawley's investigation was never published.

<sup>48</sup> Harold McCarter Taylor and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 577.

<sup>49</sup> Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham'; Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham Second Report'.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor and Yonge, 'The Ruined Church at Stone-by-Faversham: a Re-Assessment'.

<sup>51</sup> Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham'.

<sup>52</sup> Fletcher and Meates dismissed the possibility that the burial belonged to a Christian based on this criterion. However, orientation is not always a secure criterion on which to interpret whether

returned a date of AD 460 ± 110. These dates leave open the possibility that the burial was contemporary with the construction of the building during the Roman period or as late as the adaptation of the structure into a church. The burials on the east side of the structure consist of one grave holding two infants, an individual adult burial, and a burial of three adults commingled.

The interpretation of Fletcher and Meates, supported by Taylor and Yonge, is that the original structure was a *cella memoria*, built in the fourth century, and the nave was added sometime the early sixth century. Fletcher and Meates argued that it is unlikely that the building was abandoned for any long period between its initial construction and the addition of the nave. They suggested that it was not originally a Christian structure, but that it was adapted for Christian purposes between the initial construction and the addition of the nave, indicated by the burials that might date to this time.<sup>53</sup> Fletcher and Meates also suggested that the structure might have been a *martyrium*, presumably based on its subsequent use as a church, but seemed more inclined to assume its origins were not Christian since they did not explain or pursue this interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

The dating sequence proposed by Fletcher and Meates for Stone-by-Faversham certainly fits the chronology for the growth of the cult of saints. The original *cella memoria* was built in the fourth century when saints' cults were growing in popularity. The possibility that the original structure was a *martyrium* should not be discounted. The additional burials around the structure might

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a burial is Christian or pagan, especially for one dated this early. See Richard Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1983), p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham', pp. 282-85.

<sup>54</sup> Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham Second Report', p. 67.

have been motivated by the desire for *ad sanctos* burial. The addition of the nave and conversion of the *memoria* into a church in the sixth century parallels contemporary trends on the continent.<sup>55</sup> Even if the original structure was not a *martyrium*, the site might have been chosen for the construction of a church because it resembled the type of site where one was expected to be found. Bell suggested that the site might also represent an Augustinian rebuild.<sup>56</sup> However, a sixth century date for the addition of the nave predates Augustine's mission. If there was a saints' cult at Stone-by-Faversham, it was most likely a local cult that eventually was abandoned or suppressed without leaving any other historical trace.

#### 4.3.1.2 Lullingstone

The site at Lullingstone does not exactly fit the traditional archaeological model. The site is not in an extra-mural cemetery adjacent to a walled Roman settlement. It is a church over a Roman mausoleum next to a Roman villa. The mausoleum was succeeded by a church which possibly dates to the Anglo-Saxon period. Lullingstone is also exceptional in that the villa itself was used as a church in the late Roman period. Excavations at Lullingstone were conducted from 1949-61, lead by Meates.<sup>57</sup>

The villa was built in the late first century. Occupation of the site, indicated by finds of coins and pottery, probably predates the construction of the villa. One room in the villa, referred to as the Deep Room due to its sunken feature, was converted into a *nymphaeum* at the end of the second century. After a period of abandonment in the third century the Deep Room was used

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<sup>55</sup> May Vieillard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: Champion, 1976); Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*.

<sup>56</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*.

again for ritual purposes in the fourth century. Two busts were placed in the room on steps, in front of which libations were performed.

The earliest indication of Christian practice at the villa dates to the end of the fourth century, when one of the rooms in the villa, Room A, was converted into a church. The adaptation for a Christian function is indicated by the installation of two painted plaster murals in Room A, one depicting the chi-rho monogram and the other a group of *orantes*. The Deep Room was sealed off at around the same time.

The mausoleum associated with the villa was built around AD 300. The plan of the mausoleum follows a typical plan of temples of the Roman period found in Britain and Gaul, measuring 12.2m square with an ambulatory. This led Meates to describe it as a temple-mausoleum, a term that subsequently has been applied to discoveries of similar structures at Hemel Hempstead and Bancroft.<sup>58</sup> The mausoleum originally contained two burials in lead coffins laid in a north/south orientation. The burial pit also contained grave goods, including flagons and game pieces. One of the coffins was removed but the easternmost coffin and the grave goods were left untouched. The surviving coffin was decorated with a scallop shell design and the body was packed in gypsum.

Meates argued that the burials and mausoleum were associated with a pagan cult, possibly associated with the cult of water spirits in the Deep Room, and was abandoned by the time Room A was converted to a church. Meates suggested the villa complex was abandoned altogether in the early fifth century,

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<sup>58</sup> David S. Neal, 'A Sanctuary at Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead', *Britannia*, 15 (1984), 193-215; R. J. Williams, R. J. Zeepvat, and Carol Allen, *Bancroft: The Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Settlements and Roman Temple-Mausoleum* (Aylesbury: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 1994).

based on lack of coin finds. However, this is not a reliable indicator as coin circulation in Britain ceased altogether in the fifth century.<sup>59</sup> The date for the end of activity on site must remain an open question.

Sometime after the villa was abandoned the mausoleum was used for the foundations of a church. The original Roman mausoleum only housed two burials, but after it was converted to a church, more burials were added, some of which were found south of the church. There was one inhumation in the church, and one more on the north side. There may have been more on the east side, but hill-wash carried away the eastern portion of the structure together with any trace of burials that might have been there.

Meates, along with Taylor and Taylor, suggested a foundation in the Anglo-Saxon period for the church, based on the fabric of the walls and its appearance in the written record by 1115.<sup>60</sup> Meates offered several reasons for the reuse of the mausoleum as a church. He proposed that the mausoleum might have been chosen for the practical reason of using standing Roman walls. However, Meates downplayed the functionalist explanation by suggesting that it is unlikely that any remains of the mausoleum were still visible above ground when the church was built.<sup>61</sup> This is difficult to reconcile with the near parallel alignment of the church and mausoleum foundations. It also undermines a symbolic reuse argument, because it is unlikely that it would be deliberately sought out for symbolic reuse if it were no longer visible.

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<sup>59</sup> Graham Webster, 'Progress Report--I. Roman Britain: The Trend of Recent Ideas', *Greece & Rome*, 5 (1958), 16-31. (p. 22).

<sup>60</sup> Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*; Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, p. 402.

<sup>61</sup> Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*, p. 126.



Meates suggested that the religious significance of the site, both pagan and Christian, could have persisted in local memory. To support this interpretation, he cited Pope Gregory the Great's instruction to Augustine to use pagan *fana*, (an ambiguous term that could be translated as 'shrines'), rededicating them as Christian churches, as a possible explanation for converting the mausoleum to a church.<sup>62</sup> However, the reference to Gregory's instruction to Augustine to rededicate *fana* is inappropriate in this instance for a couple of reasons. First, Gregory seems to have been referring to temples that were still in use when Augustine arrived in Britain, two hundred years after the mausoleum was supposedly abandoned and long after the Deep Room had been sealed.<sup>63</sup> Second, the precise date for the foundation of the church is unknown, so citing Gregory's instruction would be appropriate only if it had been founded in the early seventh century, when the Anglo-Saxons were being converted by Roman missionaries.

The church at Lullingstone is not a solid fit for the traditional model since it is not in an extra-mural cemetery. However, the interpretation of the site can fit the chronology of the cult of saints. The villa was converted into a house church at the same time the cult of saints was growing in popularity in the late fourth century. The graves suggest *ad sanctos* burial. The early end of the date range for the conversion of the mausoleum into a church is contemporary to the most popular period of constructing mausolea churches on the continent.

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<sup>62</sup> Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*, p. 123; *HE*, I.30.

<sup>63</sup> The existence of such temples is still debated, since aside from a speculative article by John Blair, no such temples have been recognised. See Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and Their Prototypes'; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 71.

### 4.3.1.3 Folkestone

As with Lullingstone, the church at Folkestone lies on the foundations of a Roman structure associated with a villa. The site was investigated by commercial works led by R. C. Jenkins in 1869 and 1875. From 1921-25 Samuel Winbolt excavated a villa complex about 600 m east of the buildings discovered in 1869. Frank Jenkins, son of R. C. Jenkins, revisited the site in 1952. Despite these various investigations, publication has been poor and incomplete, especially in regards to the structure that was reused as a church. R. C. Jenkins published articles with partial descriptions in 1873 and 1876.<sup>64</sup> Winbolt published a monograph in 1925, which focused on the villa.<sup>65</sup> Frank Jenkins' work was never published.<sup>66</sup>

The nineteenth-century excavations uncovered a church built on the foundations of a Roman structure. Although Jenkins published a plan, the scale is not clear.<sup>67</sup> The dimensions recorded for one building allowed the scale to be reconstructed and it is estimated to have been about 10 m long, containing two rooms and a subterranean chamber, described as a 'crypt with well faced walls'.<sup>68</sup> The reconstructed scale shows the putative mausoleum to be similar in size to that of Stone-by-Faversham.<sup>69</sup>

Several burials were discovered during the earliest investigations, but the descriptions are vague and incomplete, stating only that some skeletons were

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<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, 'Archaeological Progress in Kent'; Jenkins, 'On a Roman Hypocaust Discovered at Folkestone AD 1875'.

<sup>65</sup> Winbolt, *Roman Folkestone: A Record of Excavation of Roman Villas at East Wear Bay, With Speculations and Historical Sketches on Related Subjects*.

<sup>66</sup> Although the investigations were never published, the notes of the unpublished report are held by the National Monuments Register, which were reviewed by Tyler Bell. See Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 169.

<sup>67</sup> Jenkins, 'On a Roman Hypocaust Discovered at Folkestone AD 1875'.

<sup>68</sup> William Page, *The Victoria History of the County of Kent*. III, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England* (London: St Catherine, 1932), pp. 114-15.

<sup>69</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 170.

found underneath and in the walls, and omitting such details of number, location, orientation, sex or age.<sup>70</sup> Five more burials, at least one in a coffin, were discovered on the south side of the structure in the investigations by Frank Jenkins in 1952.<sup>71</sup>

Rigold argued that the structure was a Roman mausoleum that was later used for the construction of a church in the seventh to eighth century, which became the focus of burials, similar to Stone-by-Faversham and Lullingstone.<sup>72</sup> He also identified the church as that of St Botolph, based on a passage in the itinerary of John Leland.<sup>73</sup>

Based on the limited information available, Folkestone exhibits some of the characteristics of the traditional model. There is a Roman mausoleum reused as a church. The associated graves might reflect *ad sanctos* burials. The later tradition suggesting the church was dedicated to St Botolph is also highly suggestive. As with Stone-by-Faversham, this site might have been rebuilt after Augustine's mission. Unfortunately, the nature of the site will likely remain confusing due to the fragmentary evidence and poor publication of excavations to date. The dating is not precise enough to determine if the site was converted to a church before or after Augustine's mission.

#### **4.3.1.4 St Martin's Canterbury**

The church of St Martin's, Canterbury is exceptional in that primary textual sources, namely Bede, attest its Roman origins and use as a church before

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<sup>70</sup> Jenkins, 'Archaeological Progress in Kent', p. 479; Jenkins, 'On a Roman Hypocaust Discovered at Folkestone AD 1875', p. 174.

<sup>71</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 169.

<sup>72</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered'.

<sup>73</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered', p. 32; See also Lucy Toulmin Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543* (London: G. Bell, 1906), p. 64.

Augustine's mission.<sup>74</sup> Bede also claimed the dedication to Martin also predates Augustine's mission.<sup>75</sup> Unlike St Albans and Caerleon, discussed below, here the textual evidence and archaeological evidence reinforce each other.

Limited archaeological excavation and observations made during various restoration works have revealed a complex sequence for the church of St Martin's, with the possibility that it is built on the foundations of a late Roman mausoleum.<sup>76</sup> The western half of the chancel is the earliest visible phase, followed by the present nave. Both phases employ Roman bricks used in Canterbury in third and fourth century contexts, and briefly after the arrival of Augustine in 597, although there is a difference in construction technique between the two phases.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, both phases could be dated to the late Roman period or early Anglo-Saxon period.

The ambiguity of the dates for these phases is one of a few points of contention regarding interpretation of the church. Taylor and Taylor classed it in their period A I, c. 600 or later, interpreting it as an Augustinian rebuild.<sup>78</sup> Frank Jenkins was non-committal but expressed doubt about the church's Roman origins due to the absence of any nearby Roman burials. D. F. Mackreth discounted the possibility of Roman origins for the building because he thought the chancel was too small to be a Roman building.<sup>79</sup> However, Charles Thomas

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<sup>74</sup> HE I.26.

<sup>75</sup> HE I.26.

<sup>76</sup> Jenkins, 'St Martin's Church at Canterbury: A Survey of the Earliest Structural Features'; Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, pp. 143-45. Tatton-Brown, 'St Martin's Church in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries'; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 170-74.

<sup>77</sup> Tatton-Brown, 'St Martin's Church in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries'; Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*.

<sup>79</sup> D. F. Mackreth, 'Roman Public Buildings', in *Urban Archaeology in Britain*, ed. by John Schofield and Roger Leech (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1987), pp. 133-46. (p. 138).

suggested that the chancel might have originally been a Roman mausoleum, comparing it to Stone-by-Faversham, and that the nave was added around the time of Augustine's mission.<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Brooks has presented a similar interpretation.<sup>81</sup>

In response to Jenkins's doubts about the lack of nearby Roman burials it should be noted that the site has never been excavated in such a way as to rule out the possibility that graves are present. Cremation burials have been discovered about 50 m south of the church.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, topographically it is in the right place, outside the city on the road towards Richborough, and in line with the other extra-mural churches at Canterbury.

Another issue of debate is the dedication. This church is traditionally identified as the one described by Bede in *HE*, I. 26, which was used by Bertha and Liudhard; and after their arrival, Augustine and his colleagues. There is debate over whether or not this identification is correct. Charles Thomas argued that the church is too small to have been used by the missionaries and suggested that the church now dedicated to St Pancras, another extra-mural church nearby that does lie over a cemetery, was the one used by Bertha.<sup>83</sup> However, Richard Morris pointed out that the arguments against St Martin's as the church described by Bede can be dismissed if the assumption that Bede was correct about the church being built in the Roman period is removed. Morris suggested that after arriving in Canterbury, Bertha and Liudhard appropriated the standing *cella memoria* for their private devotions, which would

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 171-72.

<sup>81</sup> Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400-1066*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 172.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 172-73.

not require a large church.<sup>84</sup> The nave was added at some point after Augustine's mission, but sometime before Bede received his information the Roman origins of the *cella memoria* were confused with the construction of the whole church.<sup>85</sup>

The identification of this church as the one used by Bertha and Liudhard is reinforced by the discovery near the church in the nineteenth century of Merovingian coins dated to the sixth century.<sup>86</sup> These coins had loops added to them and were probably part of a necklace that had been deposited in a burial near the end of the sixth century.<sup>87</sup> Among the coins was a medallion inscribed with the phrase 'LEUDARDUS EPS', which can confidently be rendered as 'Bishop Liudhard'.<sup>88</sup> The medallion secures a connection between the church and Liudhard.

The dedication provides a link between this church and the cult of Martin. The date of the dedication has been debated, but the most likely explanation is that it was attributed to the church when Bertha and Liudhard began using it in the sixth century. As discussed in chapter two, dedications to Martin are not likely to predate 471, and Bertha's family had strong links to the cult of Martin.

The church of St Martin's, Canterbury, is a classic example of the traditional model: an extra-mural church founded on a mausoleum. However, the archaeological and textual evidence suggest that it was not converted into a church until shortly before or just after Augustine's arrival in Kent. St Martin's is

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<sup>84</sup> Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Grierson, 'The Canterbury (St Martin's) hoard of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon coin ornaments', *British Numismatic Journal*, 27 (1952), 39-51. (pp. 41-43); Martin Werner, 'The Liudhard Medalet', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), 27-41.

<sup>87</sup> Grierson, 'The Canterbury Hoard'.

<sup>88</sup> Grierson, 'The Canterbury Hoard'. See also Werner, 'The Liudhard Medalet'.

thus a good example of a site that typifies the *revised* model. The church reused a mausoleum because it was the appropriate place to build a church, regardless of whether or not there was an existing cult associated with the structure.

#### 4.3.1.5 Icklingham

Excavations at Icklingham conducted in 1974 by Stanley West and Judith Plouviez uncovered an inhumation cemetery of 41 burials dating to the late fourth and early fifth century.<sup>89</sup> The cemetery was associated with a small settlement and villa.<sup>90</sup> The significance of this site lies in two buildings discovered in the cemetery during the excavations, buildings B & C. Both were built of stone and tile. Building B is a rectilinear structure measuring 7.4 x 4.6 m, with the long axis oriented east/west.<sup>91</sup> Less than 10 m to the east, and in line with the long axis, is building C, a small apsidal structure, measuring 1.7 x 1.6 m, also oriented east/west. This building was incorporated into a larger structure, made of a more perishable material, probably wood. The interior included a step, or raised shelf.<sup>92</sup>

These buildings were interpreted as having a Christian ecclesiastical function, with building B a church, and building C serving an unknown purpose, but with the possibility that the two were joined by the lost timber building.<sup>93</sup> The Christian nature of these buildings is nearly beyond doubt due to the discovery near the structures during the same excavations of three lead tanks inscribed

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<sup>89</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham'.

<sup>90</sup> H. Prigg, 'The Roman House at Icklingham', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 34 (1878), 12-15.

<sup>91</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham', p. 71.

<sup>92</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham'.

<sup>93</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham', pp. 121-22.

with the chi-rho monogram.<sup>94</sup> Lead tanks of the type found at Icklingham have been interpreted as baptisteries dating to the late Roman period.

The discovery of the lead tanks in the cemetery underlines the strong link between baptism and death. The two rites were viewed with a certain symmetry, both embodying the death of one life and rebirth into another.<sup>95</sup> This link came to be reflected architecturally, with fonts regarded as tombs, and the baptisteries resembling mausolea.<sup>96</sup> Two examples from later in the Anglo-Saxon period further illustrate this association. At Canterbury, a church dedicated to John the Baptist was built in the eighth century for the purpose of celebrating baptisms and housing the burials of bishops.<sup>97</sup> It has also been suggested that the crypt at Repton began in the eighth century as a free-standing mausoleum which also functioned as a baptistery, evidenced by a drain which issued to the northwest from under the floor level of the crypt.<sup>98</sup>

Despite its location in a cemetery, the excavators interpreted building B as a congregational church, with the apse structure as a font, and dismissed the possibility that it started as a mausoleum.<sup>99</sup> However, considering the link between death and baptism mentioned above, the possibility that the apse was both font and mausoleum should remain a valid hypothesis.

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<sup>94</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham', pp. 74-75. Christopher J. Guy, 'Roman Circular Lead Tanks in Britain', *Britannia*, 12 (1981), 271-76; Dorothy Watts, 'Circular Lead Tanks and Their Significance for Romano-British Christianity', *Antiquaries Journal*, 68 (1988), 210-22; Frances Mawer, 'The Lost Lead Tank from Icklingham, Suffolk', *Britannia*, 25 (1994), 232-36.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Morris, 'Baptismal Places: 600-800', in *People and Places in Northern Europe 500-1600*, ed. by Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 15-24., at pp. 18-19.

<sup>96</sup> J. G. Davies, *The Architectural Setting of Baptism* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962).

<sup>97</sup> H. M. Taylor, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cathedral Church at Canterbury', *Archaeological Journal*, 126 (1969), 101-30.

<sup>98</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints', pp. 16 and 22.

<sup>99</sup> West and Plouviez, 'The Romano-British Site at Icklingham', pp. 121-22.



The church at Icklingham epitomises the traditional archaeological model. It was built in a cemetery adjacent to a Roman settlement. The associated burials suggest *ad sanctos* burial. The date for the church coincides with the rise of the cult of saints in the late fourth/early fifth century. Although not conclusive, this site is perhaps the best archaeological evidence for a native British cult between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon period.

#### 4.3.1.6 Wells

Some archaeological features uncovered at Wells have been presented as a possible *martyrium*. However, the evidence is ambiguous and its interpretation has been subject to much debate. Prior to excavations in 1978-80, it was thought that there was no Roman habitation at Wells.<sup>100</sup> The excavations on the southeast side of the present cathedral, which was built in the late twelfth century, revealed evidence of activity in the Roman period, including a putative Roman mausoleum that was superseded by a series of structures.<sup>101</sup> Some features were discovered that Rodwell interpreted as signs of exterior walls of the mausoleum, indicating a plan similar to the temple-mausolea at Lullingstone, Hemel Hempstead, and Bancroft.<sup>102</sup>

Rodwell suggested that the mausoleum might have been originally associated with a villa. Although such a structure has not been found, this theory is supported by finds around the area, including pottery, wall plaster,

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<sup>100</sup> Rodwell, 'From Mausoleum to Minster: The Early Development of Wells Cathedral', p. 50.

<sup>101</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*.

<sup>102</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*; Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*; Neal, 'A Sanctuary at Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead'; Williams, Zeepvat, and Allen, *Bancroft: The Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Settlements and Roman Temple-Mausoleum*.

glass, tile and coins all dating to the Roman era.<sup>103</sup> Occupation of the site in the Roman period is also suggested by a stone coffin found in the Lady Chapel, which was reused and interred in the later middle ages, as well as a stone fragment with a partial inscription.<sup>104</sup> In addition to Roman habitation, the excavations revealed signs of prehistoric activity on site, probably attracted by the springs.<sup>105</sup>

The putative mausoleum displayed several phases of use. In its initial phase, a pit was dug below natural ground level and six timber posts and planks were installed to reinforce the walls of the hole. Rodwell described this as a burial chamber for a mausoleum. Although no trace was found, Rodwell postulated the interment of one or two lead coffins. In its second phase, the timber planks were replaced with stone, yet the six posts were left in place, indicating the presence of a superstructure.<sup>106</sup>

During the Anglo-Saxon period, the contents of the burial chamber were removed and it was used as an ossuary, housing the remains of at least 41 individuals, including adults, adolescents and children, possibly the remains of original occupants of the mausoleum.<sup>107</sup> One of the skulls exhibited a fatal sword blow to the left side of the forehead, which Rodwell might be the relic of a martyr, although this is speculation.<sup>108</sup>

In the tenth century the mausoleum was demolished and a mortuary chapel was built on the same site. This chapel was in line with the axis of the

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<sup>103</sup> Rodwell, 'From Mausoleum to Minster: The Early Development of Wells Cathedral', p. 52.

<sup>104</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>105</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>106</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*, pp. 40-45.

<sup>107</sup> Rodwell, *Wells Cathedral: Excavations and Structural Studies, 1978-93*, pp. 75-79.

<sup>108</sup> Rodwell, 'Churches in the landscape'. at p. 14.

Anglo-Saxon minster only a few meters to the west, built c. 776, and also in line with St Andrew's Well, to the east, one of the natural springs from which Wells takes its name. The chapel was originally free-standing but it was eventually joined to the eastern end of the minster. The minster and chapel were demolished in the twelfth century when the current structure was built.

John Blair saw several problems with Rodwell's interpretation and presented an alternative interpretation of the structure that placed its construction and use entirely in the Anglo-Saxon period, rejecting its Roman origins.<sup>109</sup> Blair expressed doubt that the timber structure indicated by the post-holes of the mausoleum could have remained standing from the post-Roman period until the tenth century, and that there are no reasons for dating it earlier than ninth or tenth century. Furthermore, he speculated that rather than a mausoleum with a below ground burial pit, it probably functioned as damp-proofing for a superstructure, perhaps an ossuary or relic platform considering its location outside the Anglo-Saxon minster.

The archaeology on site is heavily disturbed by intense building and occupation of the site, and the evidence allows both Rodwell's and Blair's interpretations. However, Blair was correct to assert that there is no solid evidence to date the putative mausoleum to the Roman period. While the structure might have been associated with the cult of saints in the Anglo-Saxon period, such a use before the eighth century must remain speculation.

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<sup>109</sup> John Blair, 'Wells: Roman Mausoleum, or Just Anglo-Saxon Minster?', *Church Archaeology*, 5-6 (2004), 134-37.

#### 4.3.1.7 St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester

The church of St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester, differs from the sites explored thus far because although it overlies a mausoleum tentatively dated to the fifth century, the mausoleum in turn overlies two earlier Roman buildings.<sup>110</sup> Not much is known about the first building on the site. Remnants of wall plaster indicate it was a high status building. The second building might have been a bath complex or possibly part of a temple precinct. Its status as a public building is confirmed by a large column associated with this phase, a feature that is unlikely to be found in a private building.<sup>111</sup>

The second building was probably built around the middle of the second century.<sup>112</sup> This date is based on pottery finds beneath the building, the dating of the mosaic in Room B (two similar mosaics found elsewhere in Gloucester have been dated to the mid-second century) and a radiocarbon date from a beam found in the destruction levels of Room A, calibrated to 100 BC – AD 230.

Although the excavators considered the possibility that the second building was part of a temple precinct, they argued it was probably part of a baths complex.<sup>113</sup> The interpretation is based on the finds of the large column, a room heated by a hypocaust, the mosaics and painted wall plaster. The column probably belonged to a baths basilica immediately to east of the excavated area. The site bears similarities to baths sites at Caerleon. It resembles the legionary baths, which also have the baths basilica adjacent to the *apodyterium*. Furthermore, like the castle baths at Caerleon, it is situated between the walled city and the adjacent river.

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<sup>110</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church'.

<sup>111</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church', pp. 111-112.

<sup>112</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church', p. 111.

<sup>113</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church', p. 112.

Finds of burned plaster indicate that the second structure was destroyed by fire. It was succeeded by a timber mausoleum built on a level of rubble from the previous structure. The evidence suggests that the walls were still standing when construction began because the mausoleum respected the alignment of the earlier building, as do all subsequent structures, including the present church. The mausoleum was probably built sometime in the fifth century. The evidence for this date consists of a coin of Theodosius I (388-95) and late fourth-/early fifth-century pottery found in the levels between the second structure and mausoleum. Additionally, the type of timber construction used seems typical of late Romano-British vernacular architecture.<sup>114</sup> The mausoleum was not set directly on the ground, but it was set on padstones, similar to a putative church at Richborough, Kent.<sup>115</sup>

The mausoleum contained three burials, two of which were later removed along with the skull of the third. The two empty graves contained upright stones, which Bryant interpreted as robbed cist burials, a common burial practice in western Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries. Bones from the burials were too contaminated by ground water for radiocarbon dating. The structure was badly damaged or destroyed by fire, which might have been the occasion for the removal of the burials. The robber cuts for the burials closely follow the original grave cuts suggesting the burials were not there for very long before removal. The excavators speculated that the burials might have been re-

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<sup>114</sup> S. James, A. Marshall, and M. Millett, 'An Early Medieval Building Tradition', *Archaeological Journal*, 141 (1984), 182-215. (pp. 201-03).

<sup>115</sup> P. D. C. Brown, 'The Church at Richborough', *Britannia*, 2 (1971), 225-31.

interred in a new building specifically built for the purpose of veneration, but there is no evidence to support this.<sup>116</sup>

The mausoleum was replaced by another timber structure with a paved forecourt and four associated burials. No datable evidence was recovered from this phase, and therefore it could have been built anytime between the sixth and ninth century. However, the construction style shares affinities with buildings dating to the eighth and ninth century, which is the date preferred by the excavators.<sup>117</sup>

The next phase of building is difficult to interpret, as it consists of an extensively burned surface with little evidence of foundations. The following phase is almost certainly the nave of an Anglo-Saxon church, dated to the tenth century. The successive structures are interpreted as churches preceding the later medieval and present St Mary de Lode.

There is no evidence that the Roman building preceding the mausoleum had a Christian use. Furthermore, the excavators stated that the evidence does not allow an answer as to whether or not the initial burials in the mausoleum were Christian, but they suggested that interment in a secular Roman building indicates it was converted into a sacred one.<sup>118</sup> Bryant and Heighway also suggested that the removal of the bodies from the mausoleum marked the transition to a Christian church or oratory.<sup>119</sup> Steven Bassett compared St Mary-

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<sup>116</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church', p. 122.

<sup>117</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church', p. 122.

<sup>118</sup> Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings'; Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>119</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church'.

de-Lode to St Helen's at Worcester, which he argued was a British church predating the Anglo-Saxon bishopric.<sup>120</sup>

Whether or not the original burials were Christian, the site was later selected for use as a Christian church. The site of the mausoleum seems to have been chosen for practical reasons, since it probably used standing ruins of a baths complex with no religious function. The timber building that succeeded it might have been a *martyrium* or a mortuary chapel, like the one at Wells. The associated graves suggest *ad sanctos* burial. However, the ambiguity of the date for the construction of this building allows a wide range of interpretation. If it was built in the sixth century, then it is more likely that it was deliberately using a site associated with burials and possibly religious functions. The greater the span of time between the construction of the mausoleum and the building of the second timber structure, the less likely the mausoleum remained standing, or a tradition or memory about the mausoleum persisted. If a date in the eighth or ninth century is accepted, as suggested by the excavators, then a functional or even coincidental reuse of the mausoleum is more likely.

#### **4.3.2 Churches in late Roman extra-mural cemeteries**

In addition to the sites discussed above, there are at least twenty-nine known churches that fit the topographic model and lie in cemeteries outside of walled Roman settlements in Britain (see table 1). They could overlie Roman mausolea, but there is insufficient information available to confirm or rebut such speculation. Churches in the southeast will be discussed first.

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<sup>120</sup> Bassett, 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands'.

<b>Dedication</b>	<b>Location</b>
St Peblig	Caernarfon
St Dunstan	Canterbury
St Mary	Canterbury
St Pancras	Canterbury
St Paul	Canterbury
Ss. Peter and Paul	Canterbury
St Sepulchre	Canterbury
St John the Evangelist & St Teulyddog	Carmarthen
St Cecilia	Cirencester
St Lawrence	Cirencester
St Botolph	Colchester
St George	Dorchester (Fordington)
St Cattwg	Gelligaer
St Oswald	Gloucester
St Mary	Godmanchester
All Saints	Great Chesterford
St Mary Minor	Ilchester
St Michael	Lichfield
St Andrew	London (Holborn)
St Bride	London
St Martin in the Fields	London
St Mary	Old Malton
St Alban	St Albans
St German	St Albans
St Stephen	St Albans
St Alban	Worcester
St Helen	Worcester
St Andrew	Wroxeter
St Helen on the Walls	York

**Table 1:** Churches in Roman extra-mural cemeteries.



Canterbury has been discussed already in relation to St Martin's church, the site used by Bertha and Liudhard. Three of the churches listed here are associated with the monastic complex founded by Augustine: SS. Peter and Paul, St Mary, and St Pancras. Bede claimed that the church of SS. Peter and Paul was built from the foundations by Augustine.<sup>121</sup>

Nicholas Brooks argued that when Augustine arrived in Canterbury, he and his missionaries deliberately emulated the topography of Rome by occupying or building extra-mural cemetery churches.<sup>122</sup> If this was so, then the topography of Canterbury would have still looked 'Roman' enough to imitate that of Rome, with Roman cemeteries still recognisable, with above ground structures such as St Martin's. However, considering all three of these overlie a late Roman inhumation cemetery, the possibility that one or all of them have foundations on a mausoleum cannot be eliminated, at least not without excavation. The other Canterbury churches, St Dunstan's, St Paul's, and St Sepulchre, cannot be securely dated before the Norman Conquest, but they too lie over late Roman cemeteries.

London's extra-mural cemeteries include St Andrew's (Holborn), St Bride's and St Martin's in the Fields.<sup>123</sup> Recent excavations at St Martin's have uncovered some very significant finds. Excavations in 2006 conducted by the Museum of London Archaeological Service uncovered 25 graves, most dating to the late sixth/early seventh century, but with one in a stone sarcophagus

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<sup>121</sup> HE I.26; Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*; Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity'; Brooks, 'The Ecclesiastical Topography of Early Medieval Canterbury'; Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, pp. 123-27.

<sup>122</sup> Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity'.

<sup>123</sup> Biddle, Hudson, and Heighway, *The Future of London's Past*.

dating to the late fourth/early fifth century.<sup>124</sup> One of the graves had no corporeal remains, but did contain grave goods, including a gold pendant inlaid with blue-green glass, other glass beads and fragments of silver, possibly from a necklace, and two pieces of amethyst. A tile kiln dating to the early fifth century was also discovered. This is the only tile kiln found in London and the latest dated Roman structure in London. The presence of the kiln indicates nearby construction activity, probably a large building.

These finds attest an early history to the site of St Martin in the Fields. Ian Wood suggested that the later burials might be associated with Bertha and Aethelbert, who expressed interest in the ecclesiastical development of London.<sup>125</sup> Wood also suggested that the empty grave with the grave goods is of particular interest, and that it might have been the grave of a relative of Bertha.<sup>126</sup> The absence of a body suggests that it was a temporary burial and that the body was removed after a few months or years for relocation inside a church, possibly an earlier version of St Martin's.<sup>127</sup> The empty grave has a parallel at St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln, where a hanging bowl was discovered in a grave from which the body had been removed.<sup>128</sup>

The Roman sarcophagus burial suggests that there may have been a church on the site from the late Roman period, perhaps a small mausoleum or mortuary chapel, which might be the reason it was chosen for the later burials.

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<sup>124</sup> The excavation is too recent to appear in academic literature but summary articles appeared in newspapers. See Dalya Alberge, 'Roman London Redrawn After Burial Find', *The Times*, 1 December 2006; David Keys, 'Is This 1,400-Year-Old Treasure Evidence of Christianity's First Foothold in Britain?', *The Independent*, 1 December 2006, p. 28.

<sup>125</sup> Keys, 'Christianity's first foothold in Britain'.

<sup>126</sup> Keys, 'Christianity's first foothold in Britain'.

<sup>127</sup> Keys, 'Christianity's first foothold in Britain'.

<sup>128</sup> Michael J. Jones, 'St Paul in the Bail, Lincoln: Britain in Europe?', in *Churches built in Ancient Times: Recent Studies in Early Christian Archaeology*, ed. by Kenneth Painter (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1994).

The dates of the burials suggest there might have been a gap in use of the site between the mid-fifth and late sixth century. However, more recent excavations under the London Transport Museum have discovered late fifth-/early sixth-century burials, indicating occupation of London at a time when it was previously thought to be abandoned.<sup>129</sup> The evidence here presents a plausible context for a cult. The dedication to Martin points to a potential link with his cult in the sixth century if the site was connected to Bertha.

The abbey cathedral of St Alban's is discussed in detail below, in relation to the textual evidence and the excavations by the Biddles, but there are two other extra-mural cemeteries at St Albans: St Stephen's and St Germain's. St Germain's lies over the main cemetery of Verulamium outside the southeast gate on Watling Street. Tradition describes the origin of this church as the house Germanus stayed in when he injured his foot after visiting the shrine of St Alban. This explanation is probably a retro-active attribution. Neither of these churches exhibits evidence for an early cult association.

The church of St Botolph's, Colchester, presents one more example from the south east. Rodwell convincingly argued for a foundation at least as early as the seventh century, and suggested a late Roman cemetery church was also likely.<sup>130</sup>

The churches discussed so far in this section are all found in the southeast, and are likely to have come under Anglo-Saxon political control quite early, sometime in the fifth century. If they were the sites of saints' cults, then

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<sup>129</sup> Mike Pitts, 'Anglo-Saxon London may Date Back to AD500', *British Archaeology*, 101 (2008),

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<sup>130</sup> Rodwell, 'Churches in an Historic Town'. p. 34.

the cults were probably suppressed or abandoned. Any remaining structures associated with the cult might have been reused after the Anglo-Saxon conversion for symbolic and/or functional reasons.

Sites in the west probably experienced British political and ecclesiastical continuity up to the seventh century. Stephen Bassett argued that the *civitas* capitals in the west might have been bishops' seats in the fifth and sixth centuries, being taken over by Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century.<sup>131</sup> Using textual and topographical evidence he argued for the British origins of some of the churches on the list, including St Helen's, Worcester; St Michael's, Lichfield; and St Andrew's, Wroxeter.<sup>132</sup> Of these, only Wroxeter was a *civitas* capital.

Excavations by Philip Barker at Wroxeter have shown evidence of continued occupation and substantial building there in the fifth and sixth century.<sup>133</sup> Barker argued that the *frigidarium* of the baths complex was converted to use as a church in the fifth century, and that the large mansion which replaced the basilica was the residence of the bishop of Wroxeter, who was the leading figure responsible for the sustained occupation and rebuilding of the town.<sup>134</sup> The evidence for continued occupation and Christian presence at Wroxeter, St Andrew's location over an extra-mural cemetery provides a context for a saint's cult here, although any such interpretation is speculative.

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<sup>131</sup> Bassett, 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands'.

<sup>132</sup> Bassett, 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands'. Bassett also discussed St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester, which was covered above.

<sup>133</sup> Phil Barker, *From Roman Viroconium to Medieval Wroxeter: Recent Work on the Site of the Roman City of Wroxeter* (Worcester: West Mercian Archaeological Consultants, 1990); Barker et al., *The Baths Basilica Wroxeter*, Philip Barker and R. H. White, *Wroxeter: Life and Death of a Roman City* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999).

<sup>134</sup> Barker and White, *Wroxeter: Life and Death of a Roman City*, pp. 125-26.

The other sites discussed by Bassett, at Worcester and Lichfield, were not the locations of *civitas* capital, but Bassett argued for British origins of these churches, most convincingly at St Helen's, Worcester. Bassett postulated that although they were not *civitas* capitals, they are likely to have been bishops' seats.<sup>135</sup> Bassett did not speculate on the fact that they were located over extra-mural cemeteries, but a connection to a saint's cult would provide a good reason for bishops to select these sites for their seat.

Ilchester and Cirencester are two more *civitas* capitals with churches in Roman extra-mural cemeteries. Robert Dunning noted the occurrence of Roman burials around St Andrew's, Ilchester, and argued that it might have originated as a Roman shrine.<sup>136</sup> An origin as a saint's shrine is another possible, albeit speculative explanation. The churches of St Cecilia and St Lawrence lie outside the walls of Cirencester. Reece and Catling argued that a late Roman origin for these churches is a more preferable interpretation than an early Anglo-Saxon origin.<sup>137</sup>

For these sites in the west, the most likely interpretation is that they experienced uninterrupted British Christian use up to the seventh century. Although other functional and symbolic motivations for the origins of these churches are also likely, the location of these churches over extra-mural cemeteries allows the possibility for associations with saints' cults from the late fourth and fifth centuries.

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<sup>135</sup> Bassett, 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands'.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Dunning, 'Ilchester: A Study in Continuity', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 119 (1975), 44-50. at p. 46.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Reece and Christopher Catling, *Cirencester: The Development and Buildings of a Cotswold Town*, BAR British Series, 12 (Oxford: BAR, 1975), p. 13.

### 4.3.3 Sites mentioned in the textual sources

St Albans and Caerleon have been at the forefront of archaeological attention because they are mentioned in early textual sources. These sites have been presented as classic examples of the archaeological model for saints' cults.<sup>138</sup>

St Albans has been frequently described as the only known example of a Christian site in Britain that experienced uninterrupted continuity from the Roman period into the early middle ages.<sup>139</sup> Interpretation of these sites has been driven by a potential misreading of the textual sources. Although the textual evidence suggests that these were sites associated with cults during Late Antiquity, the archaeological evidence at these sites is inconclusive. The evidence at St Albans does not actually demonstrate uninterrupted continuity. The supposed church of Julius and Aaron at Caerleon has yet to be found. Had the early textual evidence had not survived, these sites would not necessarily deserve the attention they have received. Although these sites exhibit some of the features of the traditional model, other sites discussed above present more convincing evidence for the presence of a cult.

As noted above, in 1941 Wilhelm Levison speculated that the cathedral church of St Albans was built over a late Roman martyrial shrine.<sup>140</sup> From the textual sources discussed in chapter 2, St Albans and Caerleon were the only known sites in Britain which might hold such a shrine. Levison's speculation

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<sup>138</sup> Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints'.

<sup>139</sup> Some recent examples include Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, pp. 131-33; Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 75; James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept of Late Antiquity'. at p. 29.

<sup>140</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'.

was substantially inspired by recent excavations in his native Germany at Bonn and Xanten which revealed Roman origins for the medieval cult sites.<sup>141</sup>

In the case of Bonn, excavations from 1928-30 beneath the late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century crypt in the church of St Cassius and St Florentius revealed successively a Carolingian church, burials dating from the Frankish and Roman periods, and a late fourth century mausoleum.<sup>142</sup> This mausoleum remained the focus of all subsequent renovations of the church. Similarly, at the church of St Victor in Xanten, excavations under the pavement of the chancel in 1933 exposed earlier structures, including a *cella memoria* and the purported bones of the martyrs for whom it was built.<sup>143</sup> The *cella memoria* was initially dated to the late Roman period (third-fourth century),<sup>144</sup> but a recent re-evaluation by C. J. Bridger of the original excavation by H. Borger has determined that the *cella memoria* actually dates to the sixth century.<sup>145</sup>

Due to Levison's emphasis on these sites, they were accepted as standard models for cult sites against which subsequent work has been compared. Thus, archaeologists have sought architectural features associated with cults, such as *cella memoria*, dating to the late Roman period, (third/fourth century). The revised date for the *cella memoria* at Xanten underlines the importance of clarifying the chronology of the archaeological evidence for

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<sup>141</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', pp. 358-59.

<sup>142</sup> Hans Lehner and Walter Bader, 'Baugeschichtliche Untersuchungen am Bonner Münster', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 136/137 (1932), 1-211.

<sup>143</sup> G. P. Kirsch, 'Scoperta di una chiesa cimiteriale del V secolo in una cimitero cristiano antico a Xanten sul Reno', *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, 11 (1934), 363-71.

<sup>144</sup> Kirsch, 'Scoperta di una chiesa cimiteriale del V secolo in una cimitero cristiano antico a Xanten sul Reno', p. 370.

<sup>145</sup> C. J. Bridger, 'Forschungsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Besiedlung in Xanten', in *Spurenlese: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Xantener Raumes*, ed. by Gundolf Precht and Hans-Johan Schalles (Cologne: Rheinland, 1989), pp. 179-90.

saints' cults. Either Bonn and Xanten need to be reconsidered as standard models, or the idea of the standard model should be revised to reflect the chronology of building associated with cults.

When Levison was writing no archaeological investigation had yet occurred at the cathedral church of St Alban, nor had anyone uncovered any site in Britain which might parallel Bonn and Xanten. Levison suggested that excavation might show whether St Albans began as a late Roman martyrial shrine, or if the tradition of Alban's Roman origin was a medieval invention. It was several decades before any excavations took place at the cathedral church of St Alban, and as will be demonstrated in the following, Levison's hypothesis remains unsubstantiated.

#### **4.3.3.1 St Albans**

Between 1978 and 1995 Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle conducted a series of excavations around St Albans abbey to test Levison's hypothesis about the abbey's origins and determine if the present abbey, built in the twelfth century, overlies its Anglo-Saxon predecessor.<sup>146</sup> They uncovered a Roman cemetery, possible evidence of feasting activity in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and buildings dating to the late Anglo-Saxon period.

Fifty graves were excavated in campaigns in 1982-84 and 1994-95. These burials, most of which were in wooden coffins, were under the cloister of the abbey and probably extend under the nave. Based on the artefacts found in the graves and contemporary grave fill, including pottery, jewellery, coins and metal scrolls, the burials were dated from the third to the fifth century, with the

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<sup>146</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans'.



majority dating to the fourth and fifth century. The third century burials were located in the southern portion of the excavated area, indicating that the original focus lies to the south of the excavations.<sup>147</sup>

A gravelled surface was added in the late fourth century and used into the fifth century. It was used intensively, repaired repeatedly, and completely re-laid on at least one occasion. The finds on this surface included: 108 coins, 70 fragments of glass, and 718 pottery sherds. The Biddles claimed that this ratio of coins to fragments of glass and pottery sherds suggests a high rate of coin loss to use of glass vessels and breakage of containers and that a find composition such as this is typical of sites of fairs, markets and festivals.<sup>148</sup>

Such find ratios of coins to glass and pottery are also found at some Romano-British sanctuaries associated with ritual or festival activities like Great Dunmow, Essex, a shrine with a gravel-floored building;<sup>149</sup> and Woodeaton, Oxfordshire.<sup>150</sup> Since the gravelled surface at St Albans is in a cemetery, Biddle suggests it is the result of the feasts celebrated at a martyr's grave.<sup>151</sup> However, feasting alone does not necessarily indicate a martyr or saint, as graveside feasting was normal in cemeteries in the Roman world.<sup>152</sup> It is debatable whether or not rites performed by families at the tombs of their relatives and

<sup>147</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey', p. 65.

<sup>148</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'. at p. 62. See also Richard Reece, *Coinage in Roman Britain* (London: Seaby 1987), pp. 91-94; Peter Curnow, 'Coin Lists: Some Problems of the Smaller Site', in *Coins and the Archaeologist*, ed. by J. Casey and Richard Reece (London: Seaby, 1988), pp. 57-72.

<sup>149</sup> N. P. Wickenden, *Excavations at Great Dunmow, Essex: A Romano-British Small Town in the Trinovantian Civitas*. 41, East Anglian Archaeology Report (Chelmsford: Essex County Council and Chelmsford Archaeological Trust, 1988).

<sup>150</sup> R. Goodchild and J. R. Kirk, 'The Romano-Celtic Temple at Woodeaton', *Oxoniensia*, 19 (1954), 15-37; J. R. Kirk, 'Bronzes from Woodeaton, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, 14 (1949), 1-45; J. Bagnall Smith, 'Interim Report on the Votive Material from Romano-Celtic Temple Sites in Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), 177-203.

<sup>151</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey', p. 62; For a description of the festivals associated with saints in the fourth century, see Peter Brown, 'Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 1-24.

<sup>152</sup> Brown, 'Enjoying the Saints'.

observance focused on a saint's grave can be differentiated by archaeology. However, at St Albans, the concentration and density of the finds and the repair and re-laying of gravelled surface suggest intense use, and large numbers of people, more than normal familial graveside feasting.

There are a few artefacts found on site which indicate activity on site after the late Roman period, dating from the fifth to the ninth century. These include a silver hand-pin, dated to the fifth or sixth century, found in the post-Roman buried turf below the south end of the *cellarium*; a copper-alloy disk attachment dated to the late seventh century or later, found in the chapter house during contractor work in 1979; and a copper alloy pin dated from the late seventh to ninth century, found in the debris fill of the south end of the *cellarium*.<sup>153</sup>

Post-Roman occupation of the site is also suggested by material found in the lower rooms of the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon corridor which was deposited there as a result of construction work in the late eleventh century. This material consisted of Romano-British coins, glass and pottery, painted yellow plaster, pink plaster, and window glass, hinting at an undiscovered structure.<sup>154</sup> Excavations also revealed a range of tenth century buildings that extended the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical complex to the north, connecting the original centre to a new church. This complex of buildings was superseded by Norman construction of a new abbey church and monastic buildings.

Although one of the stated goals for the Biddles' excavations was to test Levison's theory about the origins of the church at St Albans, they did not find a

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<sup>153</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey', p. 65.

<sup>154</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey', pp. 65-67.

late Roman basilica over a grave belonging to Alban. This is not surprising for several reasons. The area they investigated probably lies uphill and north of the focus of the cemetery, leaving open the possibility for future significant discoveries. The Biddles were also looking for evidence based on a potential misreading of the written sources, seeking a Roman basilica erected over a third-century burial, which presumed an unbroken continuity from a genuine martyrdom.<sup>155</sup> However, the earliest evidence for cult activity would not appear until the late fourth century, when the cult of saints became popular following the invention of Gervasius and Protasius by Ambrose, or in the early fifth century, when Germanus arrived and invented or promoted the cult of Alban.

The Biddles argued that the cumulative evidence revealed by the excavations provides the context for a late Roman martyrial cult,<sup>156</sup> which might be correct. However, the evidence does not show evidence of an authentic martyrdom with a cult arising after the end of persecutions in the early fourth century. The installation and use of the gravelled surface coincides with the rise of the cult of saints in the late fourth and early fifth century, and indicates use of the cemetery contemporary to Germanus' visit. Despite the often-cited textual evidence that gave rise to the generally uncritically accepted hypothesis about the cult of Alban at St Albans, the archaeological evidence is inconclusive and does not ascertain more than the existence of a Roman cemetery with signs of feasting and buildings erected in the tenth century.

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<sup>155</sup> The Biddles accepted John Morris' dating for the martyrdom of Alban. Morris, 'The Date of Saint Alban'.

<sup>156</sup> Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey'.

#### 4.3.3.2 Caerleon

There is not much evidence for the cult of Julius and Aaron at Caerleon. In addition to Gildas' reference to them, the evidence consists of Roman burials and references to a church dedicated to them mentioned in charters dating to the eighth and twelfth centuries.<sup>157</sup>

Gildas, writing in the first half of the sixth century, is the earliest author to mention the martyrs Julius and Aaron, and he describes them as citizens of the city of legions, by which he probably means Caerleon.<sup>158</sup> Although none of the historical sources, including the earliest, describe them as soldiers, George Boon speculated that Julius and Aaron might have been soldiers because Caerleon was the site of the fort of the Second (Augustan) Legion.<sup>159</sup> If so, this would provide a *terminus ante quem* for their martyrdom, because the legion abandoned Caerleon and moved to Richborough, and the fort was demolished, sometime during the reign of the usurpers Carausius and Allectus, 287-96.<sup>160</sup> Gildas claimed that they died in the Diocletian persecutions, c. 303, after the legion had abandoned Caerleon.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, evidence of continued occupation in and around Caerleon after the legion had departed provides a context for the martyrdoms of Julius and Aaron if they were civilians executed in

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<sup>157</sup> George C. Boon, *Isca: The Roman Legionary Fortress at Caerleon, Mon* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1972); Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent'; Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'.

<sup>158</sup> *DEB*, ch. 10: '[...]Aaron et Iulium legionum urbis ciues'. See also above.

<sup>159</sup> Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent', pp. 12-13. The story of the centurion, Marcellus of the Seventh (Gemnia) Legion, based in Léon, Spain, is an example of a military martyr who was not executed so much for his religious beliefs as publicly disgracing himself and by association, the legion. During a banquet, Marcellus threw down his military belt, sword and vine-stock (insignia for his rank as centurion) and declared that he was a soldier of Christ, and refused to serve the emperors and worship gods of stone and wood. His refusal to recant led to his execution. See Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). Marcellus story is number 2509. See also John Helgeland, 'Christians and the Roman Army', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), pp. 724-831. at pp. 780-83.

<sup>160</sup> George C. Boon, *The Legionary Fortress of Caerleon-Isca: A Brief Account* (Caerleon: Roman Legionary Museum, 1987), p. 43. Boon, *Isca: The Roman Legionary Fortress at Caerleon, Mon*.

<sup>161</sup> *DEB*, c. 10.

the Diocletian persecutions. Investigations have shown that the legionary baths remained standing well into the middle ages, as did one of the Roman arches.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, additional investigations at Caerwent, 13 km away, indicate the presence of a Christian community there in the late Roman period. The evidence consists of a putative house church in which a bowl inscribed with a chi-rho was discovered dated to the end of the fourth century, which Boon suggested was used for the agapé.<sup>163</sup>

Ian Richmond suggested that if Julian and Aaron were civilian martyrs, then they might have been executed in the amphitheatre. He argued that a ruined cell on the short axis at the amphitheatre at Caerleon might have been converted into a shrine commemorating the martyrs.<sup>164</sup> Richmond believed that the existing brick niche was inserted after the original level of the arena had been filled. However, Richmond's interpretation contradicts that of the Wheelers, for whom the date of this niche is third century, long before any cult activity would have occurred.<sup>165</sup> There are examples of niche shrines in amphitheatres, such as at Salona, in Dalmatia. In addition to the niche shrine here, there is a free-standing church built in the centre of the amphitheatre, like the one found Tarragona, Spain.<sup>166</sup> However, the niche shrine and churches

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<sup>162</sup> J. David Zienkiewicz, *The Legionary Fortress Baths at Caerleon. Vol. I - The Buildings* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1986); Raymond Howell, 'The Demolition of the Roman Tetrapylon in Caerleon: An Erasure of Memory?', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 19 (2000), 387-95.

<sup>163</sup> Boon, 'The Early Church in Gwent', pp. 15-21.

<sup>164</sup> Ian Archibald Richmond and Peter Salway, *Roman Archaeology and Art* (London: Faber, 1969), p. 180.

<sup>165</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler and T. V. Wheeler, 'The Roman Amphitheatre at Caerleon, Monmouthshire', *Archaeologia*, 78 (1928), 11-218. (pp. 137-38).

<sup>166</sup> Johannes Brøndsted et al., *Recherches à Salona. II* (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz, 1933), pp. 109-10, 145-46, fig. 56. Frane Bulić, 'Escavi dell'anfiteatro romano di Salona negli anni 1909-1912 e 1913-1914', *Bulletino di archaeologia e storia dalmata*, 37 (1914), 22; Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*, pp. 221-22. TED'A, *L'Amfiteatre Romà de Tarragona, la Basílica Visigòtica i l'Eglésia Romànica*, Memòries d'Excavació (Tarragona: Taller Escola d'Arqueologia, 1990).

were built in the sixth century. Compared to these, the evidence for a martyrs' shrine in the Caerleon amphitheatre is at least sketchy if not entirely speculative. Another site in Britain where an amphitheatre shrine has been suggested is Chester, where the church of St John is adjacent to the amphitheatre.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, the question of whether they were soldiers or civilians, or indeed authentic martyrs, is probably beyond resolution.

The saints are mentioned in several charters found in the *Book of Llandaff*.<sup>168</sup> Among them are an eighth century grant delimiting the boundaries of the '*territorium sanctorum martirium julii et aaron*' to Bishop Nudd, and two twelfth-century charters. While the eighth-century charter only describes a territory of Julius and Aaron, suggesting an endowment of some kind, the twelfth-century charters actually mention a church, '*ecclesiam Julii et Aron*'. It appears that Alban was added to the dedication of the church in the middle of the twelfth century, because the later charter, dated 1143, describes the church thus, '*ecclesiam sanctorum julii et aaron atque Alban*'.<sup>169</sup> Eventually Julius and Aaron's names were dropped from the title.<sup>170</sup>

Various scholars have sought to identify the location of the shrine of Julius and Aaron in a Roman cemetery outside Caerleon on a scarp overlooking the Usk, on the road to Caerwent, above Great Bulmore farm. Here excavations have uncovered a third-century Roman settlement in a line paralleling the

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<sup>167</sup> See below.

<sup>168</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans and John Rhys, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dav* (Oxford: Bellows, 1893). The charter evidence is reviewed in Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', pp. 339-44, and more recently in Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs'.

<sup>169</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', pp. 341-43.

<sup>170</sup> Jeremy Knight, 'Britain's Other Martyrs: Julius, Aaron and Alban at Caerleon', in *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Martin Henig and Philip Lindley, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, 24 (Leeds: Maney, 2001), pp. 38-44.

course of the river.<sup>171</sup> Roman burials and grave slabs have been discovered in the area throughout the past two centuries.<sup>172</sup> In 1815 a mausoleum was discovered containing one stone sarcophagus and eight tombstones.<sup>173</sup> A limited rescue excavation in 1976 in advance of a pipe trench uncovered an additional mausoleum and another tombstone.<sup>174</sup> The excavators of Great Bulmore suggested that the settlement there was built to replace another settlement on the southwest side of the fortress where the soldiers' families lived, which was demolished sometime during the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211).<sup>175</sup> Despite these excavations, the actual church of Julius and Aaron has yet to be found.

The cults of Alban, Julius and Aaron are often cited as cults that originated in the Roman period and persisted into the Middle Ages, but the archaeology does not demonstrate this. Without the textual evidence, St Albans and Caerleon would probably be unremarked. Thus St Albans and Caerleon have come to be seen as typifying a phenomenon that is in fact better represented elsewhere – a good instance of what can happen when archaeology is coaxed to back up a slender and problematic written record. The site of St Albans, so frequently cited as the classic model of a cult site that continued from Roman to medieval Britain, does not fit the traditional model. Other sites present more noteworthy evidence, consisting of churches

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<sup>171</sup> Blaise Vyner, 'Excavations at Great Bulmore Near Caerleon', in *Monographs & Collections: Relating to Excavations Financed by H.M. Department of the Environment in Wales. 1, Roman sites*, ed. by George C. Boon (Cardiff: Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1978), pp. 25-34.

<sup>172</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler, 'A Roman Pipe-burial from Caerleon, Monmouthshire', *Antiquaries Journal*, 9 (1929), 1-7; George C. Boon, 'Mensa Dolenda - A Caerleon Discovery of 1774', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 25 (1973), 246-58; Vyner, 'Excavations at Great Bulmore Near Caerleon'.

<sup>173</sup> Vyner, 'Excavations at Great Bulmore Near Caerleon', p. 28.

<sup>174</sup> Vyner, 'Excavations at Great Bulmore Near Caerleon', p. 28.

<sup>175</sup> Vyner, 'Excavations at Great Bulmore Near Caerleon', p. 34.

potentially dating to the fifth and sixth centuries over burials dated to the fourth and fifth century.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the sites hitherto presented as archaeological evidence for late antique cults in Britain. These sites fit the traditional model for archaeological investigation of saints' cults. The model consists of churches that reuse Roman mausolea or overlie extra-mural cemeteries.

While the sites fit the description of the traditional model, the archaeological evidence does not support some of the assumptions associated with it. Previous interpretations employing this model have presumed that sites exhibiting the pattern experienced uninterrupted continuity from the grave of a saint/martyr to shrine to church. None of the sites discussed present evidence for unbroken continuity of a saint's cult from the Roman to medieval period. The absence of evidence for uninterrupted continuity corresponds to the current understanding of the development of the cult of saints. As discussed above, the cult of saints rose in popularity long after the end of persecutions. Widespread construction of *cella memoriae* and *martyria* associated with cults did not occur in the West until the fifth and sixth centuries.

The evidence varies widely among the sites discussed here. Not all of them were certainly first used as a church during the period under consideration in the present study. The suggested dates for the foundation of these churches span a wide range from the fifth century into the late Anglo-Saxon period. At Wells, the context is so disturbed that it is very difficult to determine when the original structure was first built. It is not even certain that the original structure



here was a Roman mausoleum. It might have been a mausoleum associated with a villa, as at Lullingstone, but no villa structure has yet been found. The original structure at Wells might not have been built until the Anglo-Saxon period. The churches at Stone-by-Faversham and Folkestone are certainly over Roman mausolea. However, the date that the mausolea were converted to churches ranges from the sixth to the seventh century, which suggests that the churches could have been associated with either native British Christianity or the Augustinian mission. The same applies to Lullingstone, although a date in the later Anglo-Saxon period is more likely for the first use of the church here. St Martin's Canterbury was most likely converted into a church by Bertha and Liudhard or Augustine. The sites most likely to have been associated with a tradition of native British Christianity are St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester, and Icklingham.

The archaeological evidence examined here consists of a few churches that reused Roman mausolea sometime after their original construction. Although the reuse of mausolea is not conclusive proof for a cult association, it must be considered as one of the more probable interpretations. It is notable, however, that the reuse of mausolea does not indicate true continuity. Instead, it suggests that when the churches were built, the mausoleum was chosen because of the symbolism attached to it, including the association with the Roman Empire and its authority, as well as the longevity implied by the use of stone.<sup>176</sup> In a sense, the reuse of mausolea was a way of constructing an artificial continuity, or as Tyler Bell described it, perceived or affirmed

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<sup>176</sup> Eaton, *Plundering the Past: Roman Stonework in Medieval Britain*; Jane Hawkes, 'Iuxta Morem Romanorum: Stone Sculpture in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. by Catherine Karkov and George Hardin Brown, 2003), pp. 69-100.

continuity.<sup>177</sup> The specific reuse of mausolea however, also suggests that in addition to the associations listed above, the site was chosen because it is where the grave of a martyr was expected, whether or not it was the grave of an actual martyr.

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<sup>177</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*, p. 131.

## Chapter 5: The archaeological evidence part 2: cemeteries

### 5.1 Overview

The cult of saints was closely linked to burial practices. Cult sites developed from the veneration of saints, authentic or invented, at the sites of their graves. Chapter four discussed sites that have been presented as evidence for cults in late antique Britain where early churches overlie extra-mural Roman cemeteries. This chapter focuses on other archaeological sites that have been presented as possible cult sites: the cemeteries of Poundbury, Cannington and Llandough. Each of these cemeteries exhibits some of the changes in burial patterns seen across the western Roman provinces, as well as features associated with the cult of saints. The cemeteries are considered here within the wider context of burial archaeology and the changing interpretations of burial practices. The evidence suggests the continuity of Christianity and the development of the cult of saints.

### 5.2 Changing burial practices

Burial practices across the provinces of the Western Roman Empire underwent significant changes from the fourth to seventh centuries.<sup>1</sup> Up to the fourth century, burials were typically cremations or inhumations with various orientations, often accompanied by grave goods, and sometimes overlapping other burials. From the fourth century onward, two general burial trends can be identified, allowing for some regional variation.<sup>2</sup> One trend is distinguished by

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Halsall, *Early Medieval Cemeteries: An Introduction to Burial Archaeology in the Post-Roman West*, New Light on the Dark Ages (Skelmorlie: Cruithne, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> David Petts, 'Burial in Western Britain AD 400-800: Late Antique or Early Medieval?', in *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700*, ed. by Rob Collins and James Gerrard (Oxford:

the inclusion of a wide range of grave goods such as weapons, jewellery and pottery vessels. Accompanied burial included varied body positions, crouched, prone or supine, and varied orientation with a tendency for a north-south alignment. Decapitation burials and cremations can also be included in this group. The other burial trend is characterised by inhumation in an extended supine position and by a paucity, but not necessarily a total lack, of grave goods. These burials were oriented east-west with head to the west and often placed in burial containers, such as wooden coffins, stone-sarcophagi and stone-lined graves. Such burials were sometimes interred in mausolea or separated from other burials by ditched enclosures. Inhumations are also associated with managed cemeteries, where burials were laid out in neat rows with little or no overlap of graves.<sup>3</sup> By the eighth century, this type of burial was the predominant form while deposition of grave goods nearly stopped altogether.

Interpretation of the changing burial practices has varied according to general trends in archaeological theory as well as the dominant paradigms regarding the transition from the classical to medieval period. Under culture-historical and processual approaches as well as the Decline and Fall paradigm, changes in burial practice were primarily attributed to the barbarian migrations and/or religious beliefs. There was also a heavy emphasis on classification and interpretation of grave goods.<sup>4</sup>

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Archaeopress, 2004), pp. 77-87; L. Quensel-von Kalbern, 'Putting Late Roman Burial Practice (From Britain) in Context', in *Burial, Society and Context in the Roman World*, ed. by John Pearce, Martin Millett, and Manuela Struck (Oxford: Oxbow, 2000), pp. 217-30.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 232.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves: A New Perspective', in *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700*, ed. by Rob Collins and James Gerrard (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), pp. 89-101. (p. 89).

The interpretations presented under cultural-historical approaches, processual archaeology and the Decline and Fall paradigm have been gradually superseded by post-processual approaches and the Late Antiquity paradigm. Alternative interpretations of burial practices have been presented with less emphasis on barbarian invasion and religion and more on social change, symbolism and ideology.<sup>5</sup> Recent research has suggested that the decline in grave goods and switch to east-west oriented burials owed more to economic and cultural factors rather than religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup> Such approaches came with the recognition that burial practices and grave goods are not a passive or direct reflection of culture.<sup>7</sup> Burial practices and grave goods are actively and consciously constructed with a symbolic grammar by the living for the living.<sup>8</sup> Although grave goods remain a major point of interest, discussion has expanded to cover other burial attributes, such as the setting of burials within

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<sup>5</sup> Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds, 'Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales: Past, Present and Future', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 1-23; Petts, 'Burial in Western Britain'; Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves'; Williams, 'Rethinking Early Medieval Mortuary Archaeology'; Williams, *Death and Memory*; Bonnie Effros, 'Beyond Cemetery Walls: Early Medieval Funerary Topography and Christian Salvation', *Early Medieval Europe*, 6 (1997), 1-23; Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages, Transformation of the Classical Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Bonnie Effros, 'Grave Goods and the Ritual Expression of Identity', in *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 189-232.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to John Michael Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. by Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 177-201; Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology*, pp. 49-62; A. Boddington, 'Models of Burial, Settlement and Worship: The Final Phase Reviewed', in *Anglo-Saxon cemeteries: A Reappraisal*, ed. by Edmund Southworth (Far Thrupp: Sutton, 1990), pp. 177-99; Guy Halsall, 'The Origins of the Reihengräberzivilisation: Forty Years On', in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. by J. F. Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 196-207; Halsall, *Early Medieval Cemeteries*. Dawn Hadley, 'The Historical Context of the Inhumation Cemetery at Bromfield, Shropshire', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 70 (1995), 143-55; Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave Goods in Conversion Period England*, *BAR British Series*, 261 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997); Simon Burnell and Edward James, 'The Archaeology of Conversion on the Continent in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries: Some Observations and Comparisons with Anglo-Saxon England', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 83-106.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves', p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves', p. 89.

the cemetery and the setting of the cemetery within the landscape,<sup>9</sup> and how burial practices relate to gender and age.<sup>10</sup>

Up to the late twentieth century, interpretation of burials was heavily influenced by a number of assumptions stemming from a simplistic paradigm of Christianisation. The leading assumption about burial was that there was a prescribed form of Christian burial. This consisted of inhumation with an east-west orientation and a prohibition against grave goods. It was also often assumed that cemeteries could be either exclusively Christian or pagan.<sup>11</sup> These assumptions derive partly from early Christian writers such as Athanasius, Tertullian and Minucius Felix, who described what they thought were appropriate Christian burial practices.<sup>12</sup> However, the correlation between

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Sam Turner, 'Coast and Countryside in 'Late Antique' Southwest England, ca. AD 400-600', in *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700*, ed. by Rob Collins and James Gerrard (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), pp. 25-32; Sam Turner, 'Making a Christian Landscape: Early Medieval Cornwall', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 171-94.

<sup>10</sup> Bonnie Effros, 'Skeletal Sex and Gender in Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology', *Antiquity*, 74 (2000), 632-39; Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul*; Bonnie Effros, 'Memories of the Early Medieval Past: Grave Artifacts in Nineteenth-Century France and Early Twentieth-Century America', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, ed. by Howard Williams (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 255-80; Effros, 'Grave Goods and the Ritual Expression of Identity'; Guy Halsall, 'Social Change Around AD 600: An Austrasian Perspective', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), pp. 265-78; Halsall, 'Female Status and Power in Early Merovingian Central Austrasia: The Burial Evidence'; Guy Halsall, 'Burial, Ritual and Merovingian Society', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Joyce Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 325-38.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials for the Recognition of Christian Cemeteries', in *Burial in the Roman World*, ed. by Richard Reece (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977), pp. 46-53; Christopher Sparey-Green, 'Where are the Christians? Late Roman Cemeteries in Britain', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp. 93-107; John Wacher, ed., *The Civitas Capitals of Roman Britain: Papers Given at a Conference Held at the University of Leicester, 13-15 December, 1963* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966); Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*.

<sup>12</sup> Athanasius, 'Vita S. Antonii', in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Jacques Paul Migne, pp. col. 967-71; Athanasius, 'Life of St. Anthony', in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. by Caroline White (London: Penguin, 1998); Tertullian, *De Anima*. trans. J. H. Waszink (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1947); Tertullian and Minucius Felix, *Apology: De Spectaculis*. trans. T. R. Glover (London: Loeb, 1931); Tertullian and Minucius Felix, *Apologetical Works. Octavius*. trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin Quain (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1950). See also Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials'; Sparey-Green, 'Where are the Christians? Late Roman Cemeteries in Britain'; Audrey L. Meaney,

the works of these writers and actual Christian burial practice during Late Antiquity is uncertain. Although inhumation and an east-west orientation were associated with Christian burial in the later Middle Ages, this was not necessarily true during Late Antiquity.<sup>13</sup>

There were also assumptions about pagan burial.<sup>14</sup> As there was a defined form of Christian burial, pagan practice also included a defined burial form. Since Christian burial consisted of inhumation, cremation burial was assumed to be pagan, as were decapitation burials.<sup>15</sup> Any burial which contained grave goods was thought to be that of a pagan because of the assumed prohibition of such goods in Christian burials. The inclusion of grave goods was also attached to assumptions about ethnicity and status. It was thought that the type of grave goods could be used to identify the specific ethnicity of the individual in a burial. Furthermore, the number and quality of grave goods was thought to be directly related to the status of the individual.

Recent scholarship under post-processual approaches and the Late Antiquity paradigm has deconstructed many of these assumptions, demonstrating that direct correlations between burial practices, ethnicity and religion cannot be drawn. Furthermore, there is no evidence for a prescriptive definition of a Christian or pagan burial during Late Antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Rather, there was a plurality of burial practices influenced by many different factors, of which

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'Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), pp. 229-41. (p. 238, n. 54).

<sup>13</sup> Eric Rebillard, 'Église et sépulture dans l'Antiquité tardive (Occident latin, 3e-6e siècles)', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 54 (1999), 1027-46.

<sup>14</sup> Bailey Young, 'The Myth of the Pagan Cemetery', in *Spaces of the Living and the Dead: An Archaeological Dialogue*, ed. by Catherine Karkov, Kelley Wickham-Crowley, and Baily Young (Oxford: Oxbow, 1994), pp. 61-85.

<sup>15</sup> Meaney, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead', p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West'.

religious belief was only one. Religious affiliation was probably signalled, if at all, in ways that left no trace in the archaeological record, such as the liturgy of a funeral ceremony, and did not require a specified location or certain grave goods.<sup>17</sup> The supposed dichotomy between 'pagan' and 'Christian' burial has been drawn too sharply.<sup>18</sup>

It is necessary to examine some of the assumptions about burial before moving on to the cemeteries of Poundbury, Cannington and Llandough.

### 5.2.1 Inhumation and orientation

Inhumation was thought to be Christian on the assumption that Christians were concerned with the preservation of corporal remains in anticipation of resurrection.<sup>19</sup> The early Christian writers Tertullian, Athanasius and Minucius Felix wrote about Christian burial practice. Tertullian, writing in the third century, portrayed Christian burial practice as anointing the body with spices and placing it in a tomb.<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, writing in the fourth century, described Christian burial as deriving from the Jewish tradition of anointing the body with myrrh and aloes, bound in linen and deposited in an unused tomb; this burial form being sanctified by the example Jesus' burial as depicted in the gospels.<sup>21</sup> Minucius

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<sup>17</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Sally Crawford, 'Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual', *World Archaeology*, 36 (2004), 87-102.

<sup>19</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials'; Sparey-Green, 'Where are the Christians? Late Roman Cemeteries in Britain'; Christopher Sparey-Green, 'The Rite of Plaster Burial in the Context of the Romano-British Cemetery at Poundbury, Dorset (England)', in *Römerzeitliche Gräber als Quellen zu Religion, Bevölkerungsstruktur und Sozialgeschichte*, ed. by Manuela Struck (Mainz: Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 1993), pp. 421-32.

<sup>20</sup> Tertullian and Felix, *Apology: De Spectaculis*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>21</sup> Athanasius, 'Vita S. Antonii', ch. 90, col. 967-71; John 19. 39-42; Matthew 27. 59-60; Mark 15. 46-47.



Felix expressed contempt for cremation because of his belief in the literal of the resurrection of the body, a view he shared with Tertullian.<sup>22</sup>

Based on these primary sources, Christopher Sparey-Green has argued that gypsum and plaster burials were a distinctly Christian form of burial because it was a way to preserve the body.<sup>23</sup> However, there are some difficulties with Sparey-Green's argument. Many of the examples Sparey-Green illustrates do not adhere strictly to the form of burial described in the primary sources, which entails interment in a rock-cut tomb, preferably unused. This would not have been feasible in many parts of the Roman Empire, including most of Britain. The only examples cited by Sparey-Green that can be said to fulfil these criteria are the ones from the catacombs in Rome.<sup>24</sup> Sparey-Green used the presence of gypsum and plaster to identify Christian burials, but the texts speak about anointing with oil, myrrh and aloes, and say nothing of gypsum and plaster. Another problem with Sparey-Green's argument is that we do not know, and are unlikely to ever know, how much the works of Athanasius, Tertullian and Minucius Felix actually influenced Christian burial practice in Late Antiquity. It is unlikely that their works were so well-known as to impact burial practice on a widespread basis.

Assumptions about orientation are also related to the belief that early Christians determined burial practice in anticipation of bodily resurrection at the

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<sup>22</sup> Minucius Felix, 'Octavius', in *Tertullian. Apology. De Spectaculis: Minucius Felix* (London: Loeb, 1931), pp. 314-437. (pp. 340-43 and 420-21); translation in Tertullian and Felix, *Apologetical Works. Octavius*. See also James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. 12 vols. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 457; Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*, p. 52 and p. 238, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials'; Sparey-Green, 'Where are the Christians? Late Roman Cemeteries in Britain'.

<sup>24</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials', p. 47.

second coming of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Modern scholars have suggested that Christians were interred with an east-west orientation with head to the west so that when they rose up out of the grave they would be facing east, towards Jerusalem, where Christ would appear.<sup>26</sup> Sparey-Green has admitted that the origins for this assumption are more difficult to trace, although he suggested the description of Jesus' resurrection in Matthew.<sup>27</sup> This assumption does not hold up because there are known examples of Christian burial with a north-south orientation.<sup>28</sup> Burial orientation was also often influenced by local landmarks. There are also non-Christian explanations for east-west orientation. As with inhumation, there is no evidence that orientation is a reliable indicator of whether or not the individual was Christian or pagan.

### 5.2.2 Christian and pagan cemeteries

Although the belief that Christians and pagans buried their dead in exclusive cemeteries is widespread, as with inhumation and orientation, it has little support from evidence. Scholars such as Philip Rahtz, Christopher Sparey-Green and Dorothy Watts have argued that certain practices were either particular to, or adopted at, Christian funerals. These scholars argued that certain features of burials could determine whether or not entire cemeteries were Christian or pagan.<sup>29</sup> As discussed above, Christopher Sparey-Green claim that the presence of plaster burials could indicate that a cemetery was

<sup>25</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials', pp. 46-47.

<sup>26</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials', pp. 46-47; Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*. 15 vols. 12 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907). XII 2666-69.

<sup>27</sup> Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials', p. 47; Matthew 24. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*. III (London: Murray, 1915), p. 162.

<sup>29</sup> Philip A. Rahtz, 'Late Roman Cemeteries and Beyond', in *Burial in the Roman World*, ed. by Richard Reece (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977), pp. 53-64; Christopher Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials for the Recognition of Christian Cemeteries', in *Burial in the Roman World*, ed. by Richard Reece (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977), pp. 46-53; Dorothy Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991).

Christian is not entirely convincing. Plaster burials are not a reliable indicator of Christian burial and cannot be used to determine whether or not an entire cemetery can be classified as Christian.

Phillip Rahtz rejected the traditional classification of inhumation cemeteries in England as either Roman or Anglo-Saxon and presented four new categories: sub-Roman secular, sub-Roman religious, hill-top settlement, and early Christian.<sup>30</sup> Although he was attempting to articulate the religious beliefs displayed in cemetery features, Rahtz's categories reflect the geographic locations of the cemeteries with respect to Roman, Iron-Age, or Christian sites, rather than the religious beliefs of those who were buried in the cemeteries or more appropriately the people that buried them there. One problem with his classification system is that some sites can be placed in more than one category. For example Poundbury is near a Roman settlement, an Iron Age hilltop settlement, and a villa. Cannington is near a Roman town and a reoccupied Iron Age hill fort.

Dorothy Watts has concentrated her research on religion in late Roman Britain.<sup>31</sup> Building on the work of Rahtz, she developed detailed criteria and a formula for determining whether or not a cemetery was Christian.<sup>32</sup> Her criteria were divided into internal and external evidence. The internal evidence consisted of:

1. east-west grave orientation;
2. burials remaining undisturbed by other burials;
3. body position (e.g. supine extended or prone);

<sup>30</sup> Philip A. Rahtz, 'Late Roman Cemeteries and Beyond', in *Burial in the Roman World*, ed. by Richard Reece (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1977), pp. 53-64.

<sup>31</sup> Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*; Watts, *Religion in Late Roman Britain*.

<sup>32</sup> Dorothy Watts, *Christian and Pagans in Roman Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 88.

4. the inclusion of infant burials treated with the same respect as adult burials;
5. absence of decapitation burials;
6. absence or paucity of grave goods; the occurrence of Christian inscriptions in situ;
7. the presence of mausolea, focal graves, and plaster burials; and
8. the presence of a nearby, contemporary 'pagan' cemetery.

To this she added external evidence:

1. documentary evidence of a martyr or bishop;
2. finds of Christian artefacts nearby such as lead tanks, Christian graffiti;
3. hoards and mosaics with Christian symbols;
4. destruction of nearby pagan sites or artefacts with possible later re-use by Christians; and
5. concealment of pagan artefacts in nearby hoards (presumably hidden by fleeing pagans).

Watts gave different weights to all these criteria and presented a scale which measured the probability that the sample cemeteries were Christian. As with Rahtz's categorisation of cemeteries, there are limits to this approach. Watts considered only cemeteries with an east-west grave orientation. By excluding cemeteries with that were not east-west cemeteries, Watts' survey does not embrace all possible types of evidence. Watts also neglected to consider proximity of a cemetery to a church as a criterion, which would be a useful indicator of the Christian function of a cemetery.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, not all of these criteria are distinctly or exclusively Christian. As discussed above, east-west orientation and plaster burials are not a reliable indicator of a Christian burial.

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<sup>33</sup> Although no structures in Britain have been indisputably identified as churches for the period Watts considered (first to fifth century AD), many structures near late antique cemeteries have been interpreted as churches, such as at Lamyatt Beacon, Silchester, and Lullingstone. Watts herself considered the evidence for many these and other putative churches in a chapter immediately following her exploration of Christian cemeteries. See Watts, *Christians and Pagans*, ch. 4, pp. 99-145.

Nor is the presence or absence of grave goods, an attribute that is discussed below.

Charles Thomas has also considered the development of Christian cemeteries.<sup>34</sup> Thomas argued that the development of enclosed cemeteries were exclusively Christian and began in northern and western Britain from the fifth century onwards. Thomas' argument was based partly on the association of such cemeteries with class I inscribed memorial stones as well as place-name evidence.<sup>35</sup> However, inscribed memorial stones and place names are not reliable means of dating sites. David Petts has recently argued that enclosed cemeteries did not develop until much later than Thomas originally stated, from the eighth century at the earliest.<sup>36</sup>

Similar arguments have occurred regarding cemeteries on the continent. The occurrence of row-grave cemeteries, also known as *Reihengräberfeld* or *cimetièrre par rangee*, was interpreted as a barbarian introduction, since many of the burials included grave goods.<sup>37</sup> However, Edward James has argued that there is no evidence that these cemeteries were a barbarian introduction, since they have not been found in the supposed homelands of the barbarian groups with which they are associated.<sup>38</sup> Halsall also demonstrated the influence of pre-existing late-Roman burial rites on row-grave cemeteries.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, pp. 48-90.

<sup>36</sup> David Petts, 'Cemeteries and Boundaries in Western Britain', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2002), pp. 24- 46.

<sup>37</sup> Halsall, 'The Origins of the Reihengräberzivilisation: Forty Years On'.

<sup>38</sup> Edward James, 'Cemeteries and the Problem of Frankish Settlement in Gaul', in *Names, Words, and Graves: Early Medieval Settlement*, ed. by Peter Sawyer (Leeds: School of History, University of Leeds, 1979), pp. 55-89. (pp. 71-74).

<sup>39</sup> Halsall, 'The Origins of the Reihengräberzivilisation: Forty Years On'.

Despite the arguments of Sparey-Green, Rahtz, Watts and Thomas, research shows that the idea of exclusive Christian cemeteries did not exist during Late Antiquity. The existence of consecrated Christian burial grounds, where people were required to be buried, is not attested until the tenth century.<sup>40</sup> The earliest English reference is in a law of Æthelstan, c. 930 which forbids the burial of an unreconciled perjurer in a hallowed graveyard.<sup>41</sup> The earliest known liturgies used to consecrate burial grounds date to the 970s.<sup>42</sup> For the period under consideration, it is not likely that all the people buried in a single cemetery, or more importantly the people who buried them, shared identical beliefs throughout the time the cemetery was in use. Before the tenth century, there was no standard type of cemetery.<sup>43</sup> Exclusive Christian cemeteries were not required during Late Antiquity.<sup>44</sup>

### 5.2.3 Grave goods

There have been many assumptions associated with grave goods, most notably regarding religion, ethnicity and status. Under the Decline and Fall paradigm, it was believed that grave goods could be used to identify the religion, ethnicity and status of the individuals with which they were interred. Therefore, much

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<sup>40</sup> Zadora-Rio, 'The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories'.

<sup>41</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 463-66; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Helen Gittos, 'Creating the Sacred: Anglo-Saxon Rites for Consecrating Cemeteries', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2002), pp. 195-208.

<sup>42</sup> Helen Gittos, 'Sacred Space in Anglo-Saxon England: Liturgy, Architecture and Place' (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 55-61; Gittos, 'Creating the Sacred', pp. 195-201; Cécile Treffort, 'Consécration de cimetière et contrôle épiscopal des lieux d'inhumations au Xe siècle', in *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident*, ed. by Michel Kaplan (Paris: Sorbonne, 2001), pp. 285-99; Zadora-Rio, 'The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories'. at pp. 12-13.

<sup>43</sup> Dawn Hadley and Jo Buckberry, 'Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 121-47.

<sup>44</sup> Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West', p. 186; Rebillard, 'Église et sépulture dans l'Antiquité tardive'; Zadora-Rio, 'The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories'.

research focused on producing typologies and chronologies of artefact types.<sup>45</sup> Artefact types were directly equated with ethnic groups, i.e. the barbarian tribes that primary sources describe invading the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity, including the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Franks, and the Angles, Saxons and Jutes.<sup>46</sup> Archaeologists interpreted archaeological evidence according to an uncritical understanding of primary sources. Grave goods were used to track the migration and settlement pattern of barbarian groups.

In Britain, the two burial groups described at the beginning of the chapter have a distinct geographical distribution. Burials with grave goods, both inhumations and cremations, are found predominantly in the south and east, while unaccompanied burials are found primarily in western Britain.<sup>47</sup> The broad geographic distribution reinforced the idea that accompanied burials equated with Germanic burials of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, while unaccompanied burials were Romano-British or native. Scholars such as J. N. L. Myres and E. T. Leeds equated the variation in grave goods found in eastern England with the different ethnic groups described in Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain to track their migration and settlement patterns.<sup>48</sup>

The burial archaeology of early medieval Britain until recently focused primarily on the burials with grave goods.<sup>49</sup> The lack of interest in unaccompanied burials was driven by the assumption that all unaccompanied

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<sup>45</sup> Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves'.

<sup>46</sup> Young, 'The Myth of the Pagan Cemetery', p. 68.

<sup>47</sup> Petts, 'Burial in Western Britain'; Quensel-von Kalbern, 'Late Roman Burial Practice'.

<sup>48</sup> Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*; Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England*; J. N. L. Myres, *The English Settlements*, *The Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Lucy and Reynolds, 'Burial'. at pp. 1-3.

burials were uniform, and had nothing that warranted study.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on grave goods is demonstrated by the term 'final phase burials', indicating the last stage of burials accompanied by grave goods.<sup>51</sup> The decline and gradual abandonment of grave goods was seen as a reflection of the adoption of Christianity. Until recently, there was a lot of focus pursuing the question as to why use of grave goods came to an end, to the neglect of the burial patterns over a longer period of time.<sup>52</sup>

Post-processual approaches and the Late Antiquity paradigm have overturned the assumption about a direct correlation between ethnicity and grave goods. Scholars such as Herwig Wolfram, Walter Pohl, Patrick Geary, and Andrew Gillett have demonstrated that ethnicity was a much more fluid concept than previously assumed.<sup>53</sup> The significance is that grave goods are not a reliable indicator of ethnicity.

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<sup>50</sup> However, the excavations of Winchester Old Minster by Martin Biddle have undermined the assumptions about a uniform Christian burial throughout the middle ages. See Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Dispersal or Concentration: The Disposal of the Winchester Dead Over 2000 years', in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 210-47.

<sup>51</sup> Lucy and Reynolds, 'Burial'. at p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Lucy and Reynolds, 'Burial'.

<sup>53</sup> For the development of the "Vienna school" concerning "ethnogenesis", see Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Herwig Wolfram, 'Origo et Religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts', *Early Medieval Europe*, 3 (1994), 19-38; Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Walter Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 17-69; Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*; Patrick J. Geary, 'The Crisis of European Identity', in *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 33-42; Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*. Halsall, 'Movers and Shakers'. For criticisms of the Vienna school, see especially Walter Goffart, 'Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?', in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Andrew Gillett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 21-37. For a response to Goffart's criticisms, see Walter Pohl, 'Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: A Response', in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Andrew Gillett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 221-39. See also Heinrich Härke, 'The Nature of Burial Data', in *Burial and Society: The Chronological and Social Analysis of Archaeological Burial Data*, ed. by Claus Kjeld Jensen and Karen Høilund Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1997), pp. 19-27; Heinrich Härke, 'Material Culture as Myth: Weapons in Anglo-Saxon Graves',



Another assumption about grave goods is that they were prohibited in Christian burial. Therefore any burial that contained grave goods must be pagan. This assumption has also shown to be inaccurate. Paucity of grave goods is common in Roman and pre-Roman cemeteries, not just Christian cemeteries. In Roman cemeteries the type of burial could have an impact on the survival of grave goods, as sarcophagi and mausolea could be, and often were, easily robbed.<sup>54</sup> Lack of grave goods can be explained by the poverty of the settlement or family associated with burials, by their unwillingness to relinquish useful objects, or by a non-Christian religious belief or custom which deplored the practice.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the presence of grave goods is not inconsistent with Christianity. Christian graves could be as rich as pagan graves.<sup>56</sup> For example, the tomb of Saint Cuthbert contained many rich items.<sup>57</sup> Ian Wood demonstrated that burial customs of Christian elites in south-east Gaul, which consisted of ostentatious displays of wealth in dress and grave goods, did not change much between the fourth and sixth century.<sup>58</sup> There are many other examples from Alamannia, Bavaria, Rhineland and north-west Frankia of rich burial associated with churches in the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries.<sup>59</sup>

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in *Burial and Society: The Chronological and Social Analysis of Archaeological Burial Data*, ed. by Claus Kjeld Jensen and Karen Høilund Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), pp. 119-27; Heinrich Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 125-70; Heinrich Härke, 'Archaeologists and Migrations: A Question of Attitude?', *Current Anthropology*, 39 (1998), 19-45.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Wood, 'Sépultures Ecclésiastiques et Sénatoriales dans la Vallée du Rhône (400-600)', *Médiévales*, 15 (1996), 13-27.

<sup>55</sup> Philip A. Rahtz, 'Late Roman Cemeteries and Beyond', p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West'.

<sup>57</sup> See C. F. Battiscombe, *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert: Studies by Various Authors* (Oxford: Durham University, 1956) and James Campbell, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 80-81.

<sup>58</sup> Wood, 'Sépultures Ecclésiastiques et Sénatoriales'.

<sup>59</sup> Simon Burnell, 'Merovingian to Early Carolingian Churches and Their Founder-Graves in Southern Germany and Switzerland: The Impact of Christianity on the Alamans and the Bavarians' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford, 1988), pp. 110-94, 247-52, 519-45; Alain Dierkens, 'Cimetières Mérovingiens et Histoire du Haut Moyen Âge: Chronologie, Société,

Two richly furnished sixth-century burials under Cologne cathedral further demonstrate the compatibility of grave goods and Christian burial.<sup>60</sup> The presence or absence of grave goods is not a reliable indicator of whether or not the interred individual was Christian or pagan.

The last assumption regarding grave goods is that they were a direct reflection of the status of the individual with which they were buried. It was thought that the more grave goods and the higher the wealth of the grave goods, the higher the status of the individual. Nonetheless, post-processual approaches have suggested that the presence, amount and wealth of grave goods were more influenced by social anxiety caused by economic and political uncertainty than religious beliefs.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, grave goods were not a direct reflection of social organisation.<sup>62</sup>

#### **5.2.4 Burial *ad sanctos*, special graves and saints' graves**

Discussion thus far has shown that there was no uniform method for burying pagans, Christians, Romans or barbarians. Burial attributes expressed ideas of identity such as gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation in complex ways. Considering this, it must be asked how can the graves of saints be recognised in the archaeological record, if at all? Certain burial attributes have been

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Religion', *Acta Historica Bruxellensia: Histoire et Méthode*, 4 (1981), 15-70. at pp. 67-69; Bailey Young, 'Exemple Aristocratique et Mode Funéraire dans la Gaule Mérovingienne', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 41 (1986), 379-407. (pp. 394-401); Burnell and James, 'The Archaeology of Conversion', pp. 96-103.

<sup>60</sup> Edward James, 'Royal Burials Among the Franks', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), pp. 243-54. (pp. 247-48 and 253).

<sup>61</sup> Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz*; Halsall, 'Female Status and Power in Early Merovingian Central Austrasia: The Burial Evidence'; Guy Halsall, 'Towns, Societies and Ideas: The Not-So-Strange Case of Late Roman and Early Merovingian Metz', in *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Neil Christie and Simon T. Loseby (Aldershot: Scholar, 1996), pp. 235-61; Halsall, 'Burial, Ritual and Merovingian Society'.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, 'Artefacts in Early Medieval Graves', p. 90.

presented as evidence for saints' graves. These attributes consist of *ad sanctos* burial and special graves.

Bonnie Effros and Guy Halsall have argued that between the seventh and tenth centuries display of social status shifted from the inclusion of grave goods to above-ground features and the physical location of the grave.<sup>63</sup> The shift is reflected by the increased use of ground surface level markers such as sarcophagus lids, gravestones, stone crosses and enclosures.<sup>64</sup> Grave goods afforded only a temporary display of prestige to a limited audience during the funeral, while surface level markers displayed prestige for a much longer time and to a wider audience.<sup>65</sup> Prestige was indicated by proximity to important features, most often the grave of someone holy such as a saint, in other words, *ad sanctos* burial.<sup>66</sup> John Blair argued that *ad sanctos* burial was an alternative to furnished burial as a method of displaying status of the dead in a comparatively emphatic way.<sup>67</sup>

Burial *ad sanctos* was not the same thing as 'Christian' burial. The essence was proximity to a sacred focus, either the relics of a saint or an altar used for mass, rather than inclusion within the boundaries defined by consecration. Although this type of burial could be denied to those deemed

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<sup>63</sup> Effros, 'Beyond Cemetery Walls'; Effros, 'Grave Goods and the Ritual Expression of Identity'; Halsall, 'Social Change Around AD 600: An Austrasian Perspective'; Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz*; Halsall, 'Female Status and Power in Early Merovingian Central Austrasia: The Burial Evidence'; Halsall, 'Towns, Societies and Ideas'; Halsall, 'Burial, Ritual and Merovingian Society'.

<sup>64</sup> Halsall, 'Social Change Around AD 600: An Austrasian Perspective', at p. 269.

<sup>65</sup> Halsall, 'Social Change Around AD 600: An Austrasian Perspective', p. 269.

<sup>66</sup> Christian Sapin, 'Architecture and Funerary Space in the Early Middle Ages', in *Spaces of the Living and the Dead: An Archaeological Dialogue*, ed. by Catherine Karkov, Kelley Wickham-Crowley, and Baily Young (Oxford: Oxbow, 1994), pp. 39-60.

<sup>67</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 58-65.

unworthy, it did not mark all other kinds of burial as shameful or un-Christian.<sup>68</sup> The practice of *ad sanctos* burial varied in different regions on the continent.<sup>69</sup> In Provence and western Gaul, basilicas that served large rural areas as well as towns attracted thousands of burials.<sup>70</sup> In the Frankish areas of northern Gaul where the Church had not penetrated deeply into the countryside, row-grave cemeteries were the norm up to the seventh century.<sup>71</sup> The burial of Clovis in 511 near the grave of St Genevieve in a basilica outside the walls of Paris set the pattern of *ad sanctos* burial for Frankish kings and aristocracy.<sup>72</sup>

'Special graves' is a phrase that has been applied to a wide variety of burials found in cemeteries dated from the fourth to seventh centuries. A descriptive, as opposed to prescriptive, definition may be presented as burials that are distinct from others in the same cemetery, separated by circular or rectilinear enclosures or structures.<sup>73</sup> Special graves could also be distinguished by paths leading to them or dense concentrations of burials around them, which are referred to as focal graves.<sup>74</sup> Special graves found in cemeteries could indicate the presence of a saint, or the belief in the presence of a saint, which would not alter the significance of the site. They might be the features that precede a church foundation over a saint's grave. Charles Thomas argued that these burials represent the British and Irish equivalent of *cella memoriae* found

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<sup>68</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 60 and 464. See also Marios Costambeys, 'Burial Topography and the Power of the Church in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 69 (2001), 169-89; Effros, 'Beyond Cemetery Walls'. For a criticism of Effros, see Zadora-Rio, 'The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories', pp. 10-11.

<sup>69</sup> Bailey Young, 'Paganisme, Christianisation et Rites Funéraires Mérovingiens', *Archéologie Médiévale*, 7 (1977), 5-81.

<sup>70</sup> Young, 'Paganisme, Christianisation et Rites Funéraires Mérovingiens'. at pp. 11-12; Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West', p. 182.

<sup>71</sup> Young, 'Paganisme, Christianisation et Rites Funéraires Mérovingiens', pp. 11-12.

<sup>72</sup> Young, 'Exemple Aristocratique et Mode Funéraire dans la Gaule Mérovingienne', p. 383; James, 'Royal Burials'. at p. 256; Ward-Perkins, 'Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?'. at pp. 529-30.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, pp. 58-62.

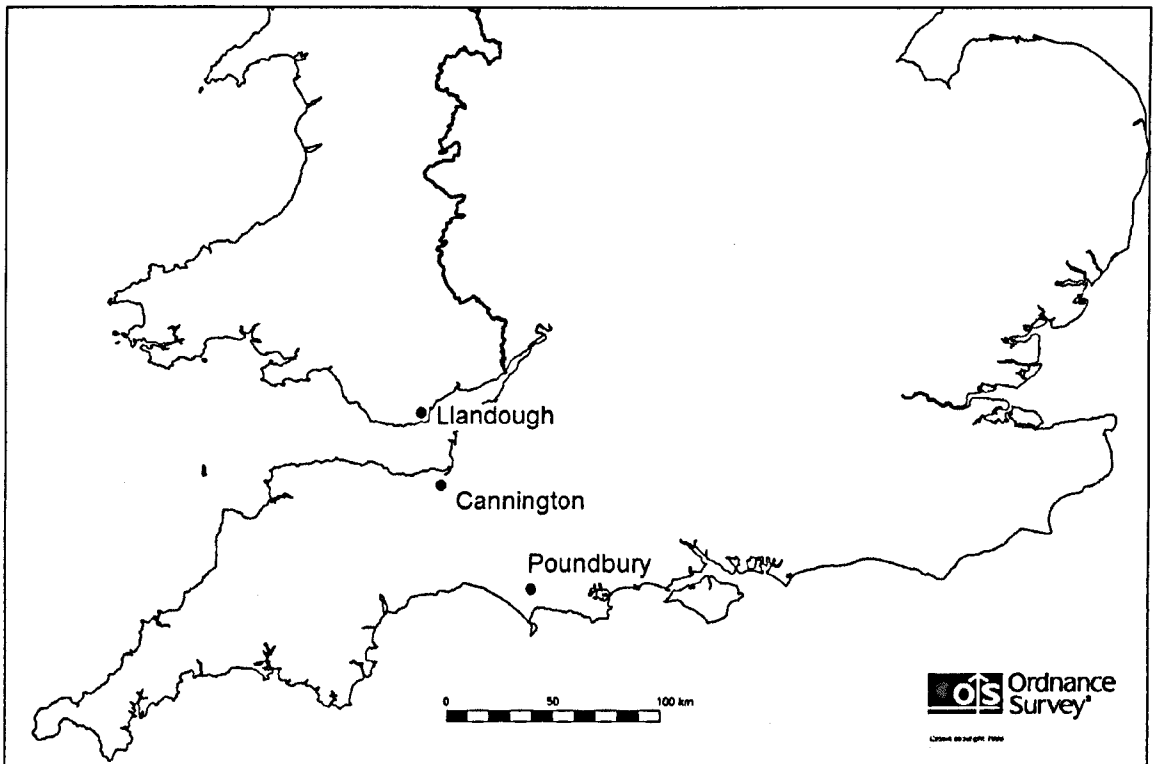
<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, pp. 58-62.

on the continent and that they played an integral part in the development of cemeteries in west and north Britain during the early medieval period.<sup>75</sup>

Unfortunately, the same characteristics described here could also apply to other forms of high-status burial, such as founders' graves. Thus there can be some difficulty distinguishing one from the other. Interpretation can never be absolutely certain but sometimes can suggest one interpretation to be more likely than the other. For example, if a cemetery appears to be associated with a Christian religious community, i.e. a monastic community, then a special grave is perhaps more likely to belong to an individual who was venerated, at least locally, as a saint.

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, pp. 132-166. Other sequences for the development of cemeteries have been suggested. See Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane, 'The Archaeology of the Early Church in Wales', in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford: Oxbow, 1992), pp. 1-12. at p. 10. Richard Sharpe has noted that parallels with *memoriae* need not be sought as far afield as the continent, since examples of such are found in Britain. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 128; Petts, 'Cemeteries and Boundaries'.



*Figure 5.1: Late antique cemeteries with possible cult associations*

### **5.3 The evidence**

Some cemeteries in Britain show certain features in common with burial trends on the continent and suggestive of the cult of saints. Discussion now turns to three of these cemeteries, which have several features in common. They are all associated with Roman settlements, are near Iron Age hill-forts that were reoccupied after the Roman period, and contain hundreds of burials.

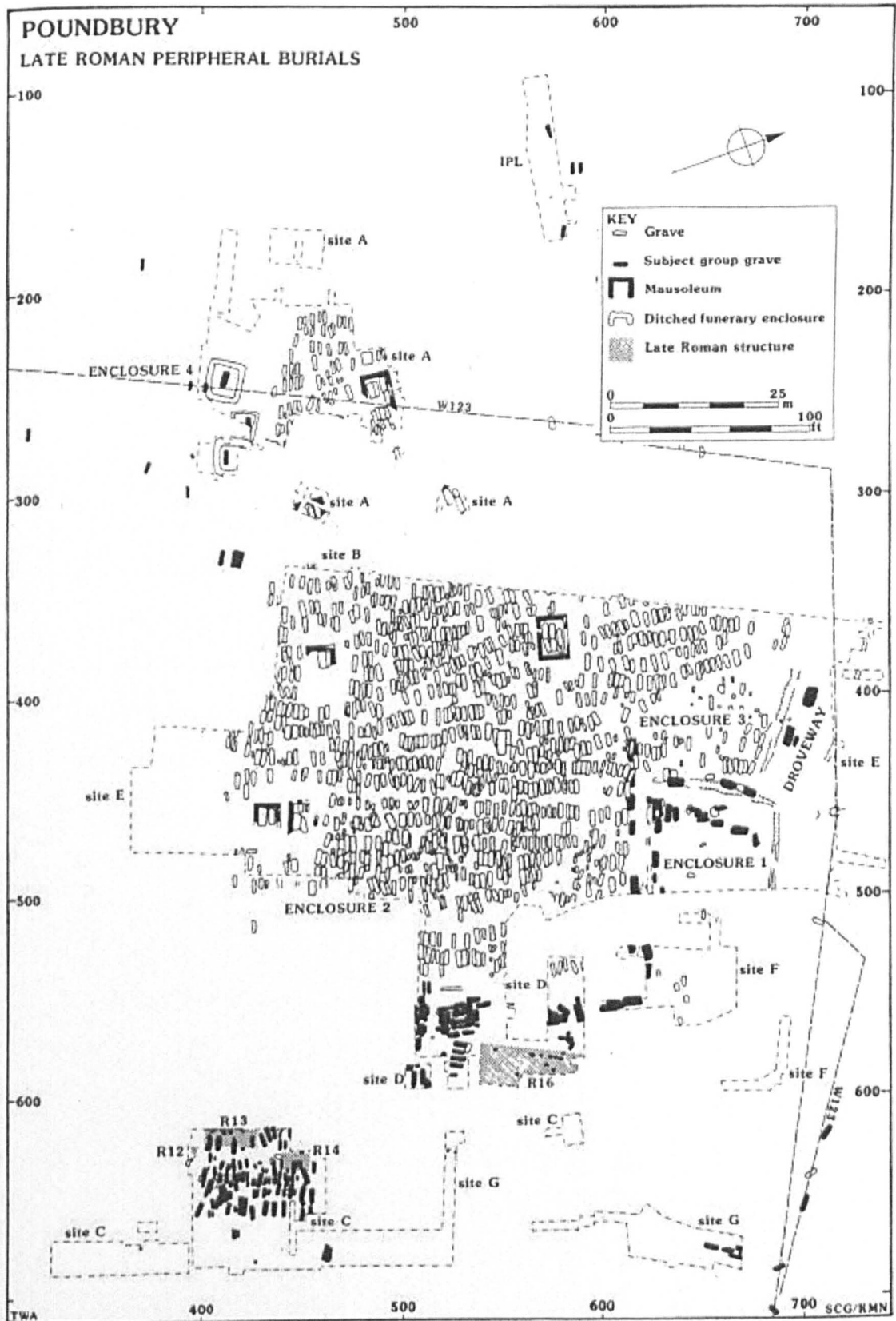


Figure 5.2: Poundbury Cemetery

### 5.3.1 Poundbury

The cemetery at Poundbury, near Dorchester in Dorset, contains a number of special graves, including the largest number of mausolea yet found in a cemetery from Roman Britain. The site lies to the northwest of the Roman town of Durnovaria (modern Dorchester) on the road to Lindinis (modern Ilchester) and east of the Poundbury Camp Iron Age hillfort.<sup>76</sup> The cemetery is adjacent to a small Roman suburban settlement consisting of two simple courtyard houses and enclosures dating from the third century to the seventh century.<sup>77</sup>

Excavation of the cemetery was undertaken between 1966 and 1980, and uncovered over 1400 inhumations, although the total number of burials has been estimated at around 4000.<sup>78</sup> The excavators divided the burials into three cemeteries. Cemeteries 1 and 2 were small and associated with occupation dating to the third and fourth centuries. Burials here included both inhumations and cremations.<sup>79</sup> The inhumations included overlapping burials, displayed a variety of alignments and included many grave goods. The present study is concerned with cemetery 3, where the special graves were found. The burials in cemetery 3 were laid out in neat rows of inhumations, with few or no grave goods, and oriented east-west. Burials were contained in wooden coffins and stone-lined graves. The burials began in the enclosure of one of the settlement

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<sup>76</sup> D. E. Farwell and Theya Molleson, *Excavations at Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset 1966-1982* (Dorchester: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1987).

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Sparey-Green, D. E. Farwell, and Theya Molleson, *Excavations at Poundbury, 1966-80* (Dorchester: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> Sparey-Green, Farwell, and Molleson, *Poundbury Cemeteries*; Sparey-Green, 'The Significance of Plaster Burials', p. 50.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead: From Roman Cemetery to Post-Roman Monastic Settlement at Poundbury', in *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700*, ed. by Rob Collins and James Gerrard (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), pp. 103-11. at p. 103.



buildings but expanded into a neighbouring enclosure, maintaining the neat rows and orientation.<sup>80</sup>

The excavator, Christopher Sparey-Green, defined three categories of special grave at Poundbury, which he labelled special burial groups, focal burials, and mausolea burials. The special burials consisted of gypsum-packed burials in coffins of various types, including stone, wooden and lead-lined wooden. There were a total of 66, found at regular intervals across the site. Eleven were found inside mausolea (features R1-3 and 7-11), and the rest were distributed in 19 groups (SG1-19).<sup>81</sup>

There were three focal burials (F1-3). The first was the burial of an adult male in a plaster-packed, lead-lined coffin which was succeeded by an infant burial. A New Forest ware jug, dating to the early or mid-fifth century was deposited over the infant burial. The second was an adult male, aged around 50, buried with two infants buried either side of him, with his hands on their heads. These were buried beneath what appears to be a charred, wooden door. The third focal burial was a male, aged around 40, found just to the north of a mausoleum (feature R8). This burial had a path leading to it, leading uphill from the settlement.<sup>82</sup>

The excavations at Poundbury contained the largest group of mausolea yet found on a single site from Roman Britain.<sup>83</sup> A total of eight were found in the excavated area of the cemetery and an additional one is postulated in an area that was not excavated. All the mausolea had simple rectangular plans

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<sup>80</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 103.

<sup>81</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 104.

<sup>82</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 104.

<sup>83</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 105.

and measured around 4.7m x 6.5m, although one mausoleum, R3, was a bit longer than the others, measuring at least 7.3m. The mausolea overlay simple internments. However the excavation revealed a complex relationship between burials and structures. The mausolea were used in multiple phases. For some mausolea, the burials clearly predated the structure. For others, the structure came first and then burials were inserted. Several mausolea showed signs of domestic and craft-related activity.<sup>84</sup>

Two of the mausolea, R8 and R9, deserve special attention. During excavation evidence was recovered that indicated that both of them contained interior decoration. The wall plaster for R9 was too deteriorated for any reconstruction but much of the decoration for R8 has been recreated. The south wall had figures in purple, green and white robes, some of which were carrying rods and one wore a white headdress. In the centre of the wall was a chi-rho against a blue background. The east wall featured a nude figure surrounded by sweeps of blue and white, possibly representing water. The west wall, which was re-plastered at some point, featured a cityscape in semi-aerial perspective. On the ceiling were painted figures in white.<sup>85</sup>

The decorations clearly have Christian connotations, as evidenced by the chi-rho on the south wall. Although the discovery of a mausoleum with a highly decorated interior of such scale and quality is unusual for Roman Britain,<sup>86</sup> there are parallels with sites in other parts of the Empire. The east wall has been

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<sup>84</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 105.

<sup>85</sup> Norman Davey and Roger Ling, *Wall-Painting in Roman Britain* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1982), pp. 106-110; Elizabeth Hartley, Jane Hawkes, and Martin Henig, *Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor* (York: York Museums and Gallery Trust, 2006), p. 91; Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', pp. 105-106.

<sup>86</sup> Sparey-Green speculated that mausolea like the ones at Poundbury might have been more common in Britain than the evidence suggests because of the difficulty of recognising them in the archaeological record. Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 105.

interpreted as a depiction of Adam and Eve, similar to one found Sopianae, modern Pécs in Hungary.<sup>87</sup> The cityscape on the west wall might be a depiction of the Holy City, which has a parallel with a third century tomb of the Aurelii in the catacombs of Rome.<sup>88</sup> Sparey-Green suggested that this scene might commemorate the completion of a pilgrimage by one of those entombed in the mausoleum.<sup>89</sup> The figures in the south wall in coloured robes have been interpreted as the living while those on the ceiling could be the dead entombed in the mausoleum.<sup>90</sup> This also has parallels with a mausoleum in Pécs.<sup>91</sup>

Artefacts and features within the mausoleum indicate that it was for more than just interment. Finds from the mausoleum suggest a period of use from the late fourth and into the fifth century. The finds consist of a late form of black burnished ware found in the construction trench as well as an occupation layer inside the mausoleum.<sup>92</sup> The occupation layer inside also included some late glass ware from drinking vessels or glass lamps similar to that found at Burgh Castle.<sup>93</sup> A pierced coin featuring the chi-rho was also found on the eastern side of the interior floor.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, finds from robber trenches suggest that the mausoleum remained standing until the post-medieval period.<sup>95</sup> These features

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<sup>87</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 105; Krisztina N. Hudák and Levente Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place: Discovering the Early Christian Cemetery of Sopianæ/Pécs*. trans. Marianne Sághy, *Örökségi füzetek, 4* (Pécs: Pécs/Sopianæ Örökség Közhasznú Társaság, 2005), pp. 17-25.

<sup>88</sup> Maurizio Borda, *La Pittura Romana* (Milan: Società Editrice Libreria, 1958), p. 316.

<sup>89</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 109.

<sup>90</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 105.

<sup>91</sup> Hudák and Nagy, *The Early Christian Cemetery of Sopianæ/Pécs*, pp. 31-51.

<sup>92</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 106.

<sup>93</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead'; Stephen Johnson, *Burgh Castle: Excavations by Charles Green 1958-61*, East Anglian Archaeology Report, 20 (Dereham: Norfolk Archaeological Unit, 1983).

<sup>94</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead'.

<sup>95</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 106.

and artefacts, along with the Christian nature of the wall decorations, suggest that the mausoleum might have been used as a small church.<sup>96</sup>

The mausoleum was an important feature in the layout of the cemetery. Sparey-Green has suggested that the site might have been an early British monastic site. The shift from late-Roman villa to monastic site is a pattern known in Gaul.<sup>97</sup> Sparey-Green also suggested that the site was succeeded by a nearby Anglo-Saxon monastery at Charminster.<sup>98</sup> Such a pattern of development has been postulated for other sites in Dorset.<sup>99</sup>

The cemetery at Poundbury exhibits a lot of evidence which suggests the possible presence of a cult on site. Focal grave three was associated with a path leading to it, which implies some sort of veneration. One of the mausolea, R8, was probably used as church. If so, then the burials within the mausolea would have been perceived as important individuals, some of whom might have been saints. Although ultimately unprovable, the evidence is highly suggestive. At the very least, the cemetery demonstrates a strong presence of Christianity from the late-Roman period that continued into the Anglo-Saxon period.

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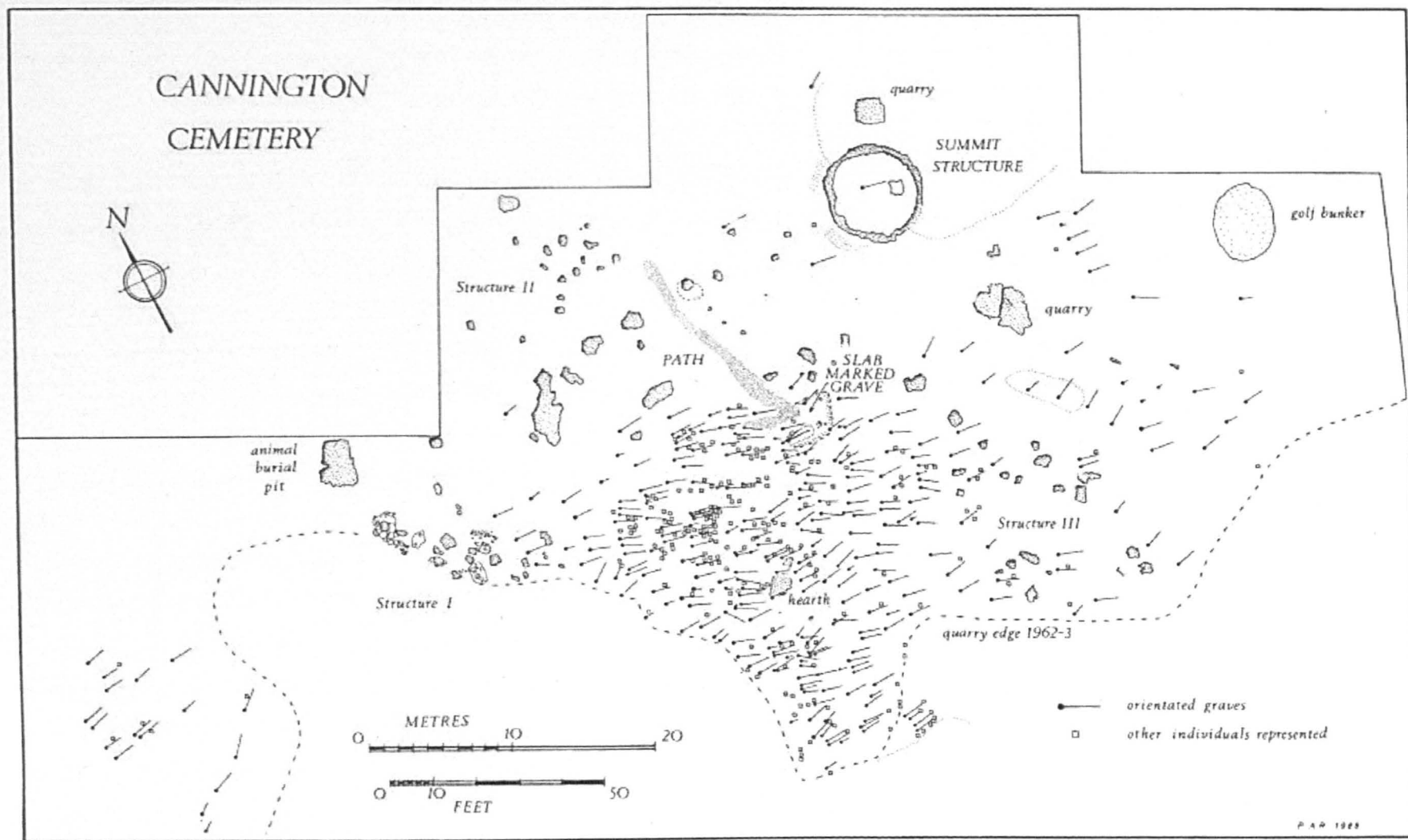
<sup>96</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 106.

<sup>97</sup> John Percival, 'Villas and Monasteries in Late Roman Gaul', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48 (1997), 1-21.

<sup>98</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', p. 110.

<sup>99</sup> Teresa Anne Hall, *Minster Churches in the Dorset Landscape*, BAR British Series, 304 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000).

Figure 5.3: Cannington Cemetery



### 5.3.2 Cannington

The cemetery at Cannington, near Bridgwater in Somerset, has been frequently compared to Poundbury. As with Poundbury, Cannington was adjacent to an Iron Age hillfort that was reoccupied after the Roman period.<sup>100</sup>

The cemetery is also near a Roman period settlement, Combwich, on the River Parrett at the terminus of a Roman road from Ilchester.<sup>101</sup> Cannington is roughly contemporary with Poundbury, with most burials dated from the late third to the seventh or eighth centuries. Most relevant for the present study is the fact that features at Cannington, two special graves, have been presented as evidence for saints' cults at the site.<sup>102</sup>

The excavation from 1962-63 by Philip Rahtz uncovered 542 graves. However, the excavation covered an unknown proportion of the whole cemetery. Burials have been discovered and recorded on site for over a century.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, quarrying destroyed much of the cemetery before the excavations, and the site has now been completely destroyed by quarrying. The excavators have estimated the total population of the entire cemetery might have been anywhere between 1500 and 5000, with their best estimate at 2000.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Philip A Rahtz, 'Cannington Hillfort 1963', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 113 (1969), 56-68. See also Ian Burrow, *Hillfort and Hill-top Settlement in Somerset in the First to Eighth Centuries A.D.*, *BAR British Series*, 91 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981).

<sup>101</sup> Philip A. Rahtz, S. M. Hirst, and S. M. Wright, *Cannington Cemetery: Excavations 1962-3 of Prehistoric, Roman, Post-Roman, and Later Features at Cannington Park Quarry, Near Bridgwater, Somerset*. 17 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 63; Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West'. at pp. 182-83.

<sup>103</sup> C. W. Whistler, 'Ethandune AD 878 - King Alfred's Campaign from Athelney', *Sagabook*, 2 (1899), 153-97; C. W. Whistler, 'Battle-Burial, Probably of Danes', *Sagabook*, 5 (1905), 22-23; C. W. Whistler, 'The Battle Burials at Cannington Park', *Sagabook*, 5 (1908), 237-42; C. W. Whistler, 'Local Traditions of the Quantocks', *Folklore*, 19 (1908), 35-51.

<sup>104</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 59.

The burials consisted of rock-cut inhumations, possibly laid out in rows and oriented east-west with head to the west.<sup>105</sup> Only a small portion of the graves contained grave goods.<sup>106</sup> The finds included knives, coins, combs, glass beads, brooches and pins, interpreted as Roman, western British and Anglo-Saxon in type.<sup>107</sup> Most of the grave goods have a wide date range, and only a few were closely datable, but they tend to date to the late Roman and post-Roman period.<sup>108</sup> Calibrated radiocarbon dating of 26 burials also indicates a date range from the late third to the seventh or eighth centuries for the use of the cemetery.<sup>109</sup>

The special graves consist of one burial in an uncertain type of structure at the summit of the hill on which the cemetery was sited, and a slab-marked grave at the centre of a dense concentration of secondary burials and associated with a path to the grave.

The structure at the summit of the hill, FT43, comprised several features which presented interpretive difficulties. The structure could have been either a barrow over grave 424, or a walled structure in which the burial was interred.<sup>110</sup> It was surrounded by a circular trench, and covered by a low mound. The mound exhibited angularities that suggest it might have been a walled structure that fell into ruin, thereby creating the mound.<sup>111</sup> In addition to the central grave, two additional burials were immediately adjacent to it, on the southwest side just outside the trench, graves 428 and 438. Other than these two, the area

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<sup>105</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 111.

<sup>106</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 84.

<sup>107</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. xxiii.

<sup>108</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, pp. 31, 387-92.

<sup>110</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, pp. 45-50.

<sup>111</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 45.

immediately around the feature was void of burials. Graves 424 and 426 were adult males while 438 was a young child. The two burials outside the structure were secondary to FT43 and bore no obvious relationship with the structure.<sup>112</sup> Calibrated radiocarbon dating of grave 424 returned a date range of AD 210-440. The grave fill featured 78 shards of Roman pottery and 33 shards of prehistoric pottery. Roman pottery as well as Roman glass was also found in primary contexts of the feature, securing a date in the Roman period for the feature. The burials exhibited no unusual features except their association with the structure and the fact that they were slightly longer and deeper than other burials in the cemetery.<sup>113</sup>

The summit structure was the most dominant feature of the cemetery for the entire duration of the site. It appears to have been the nucleus of the earliest phase of the cemetery, with subsequent burials radiating outwards to the south and east.<sup>114</sup> The excavators suggested the FT43 might have been shrine or a temple, possibly equivalent to a *cella memoriae*.<sup>115</sup> This interpretation has been supported by other scholars, such as Donald Bullough and John Blair.<sup>116</sup>

The other special grave, number 409, was rock-cut and interred beneath a box-like slab structure, FT26. The individual remains belonged to a juvenile around the age of 13.<sup>117</sup> The remains were extended, partially disarticulated, and oriented east-west with head to the west. There were no grave goods,

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<sup>112</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 49.

<sup>113</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 49.

<sup>114</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 50.

<sup>115</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West', pp. 182-83; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 63.

<sup>117</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 54.



although 4 shards of prehistoric pottery were found in the fill. Samples from the burial produced a calibrated radiocarbon date of AD 620-1020.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the box-like slab structure, other notable features were associated with grave 409. The burial was surrounded by a dense concentration of secondary graves, which sometimes intercut each other, but none of which cut into grave 409. The excavators interpreted the secondary graves as attempts to be buried as close as possible to grave 409 without actually disturbing it.<sup>119</sup> There was a clearly defined path worn into the bedrock leading to the slab-marked grave from the northwest. Rahtz observed that this path most likely lead not from the nearby hillfort but from Combwich, which suggests continued settlement there during the use of the cemetery and after the Roman period.<sup>120</sup>

As Rahtz and others have noted, the features associated with grave 409 are suggestive of the burial of a saint.<sup>121</sup> The path leading to the grave shows continuous visitation of the grave over a long period of time, which suggests the grave was the site of pilgrimage. The dense concentration of burials surrounding the grave, indicating a desire to be buried as close as possible to the grave, suggests *ad sanctos* burial. This grave constitutes what might be the best archaeological evidence for a saint's cult in late antique Britain.

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<sup>118</sup> This date range might be inaccurate: other samples that were tested by the same lab were subsequently retested by another lab which returned earlier dates than the initial test. Samples from grave 409 were unavailable for retesting. However, an earlier date would not invalidate the interpretation. Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, pp. 54 and 387-92.

<sup>119</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 54.

<sup>120</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 415.

<sup>121</sup> Rahtz, Hirst, and Wright, *Cannington Cemetery*, p. 413.

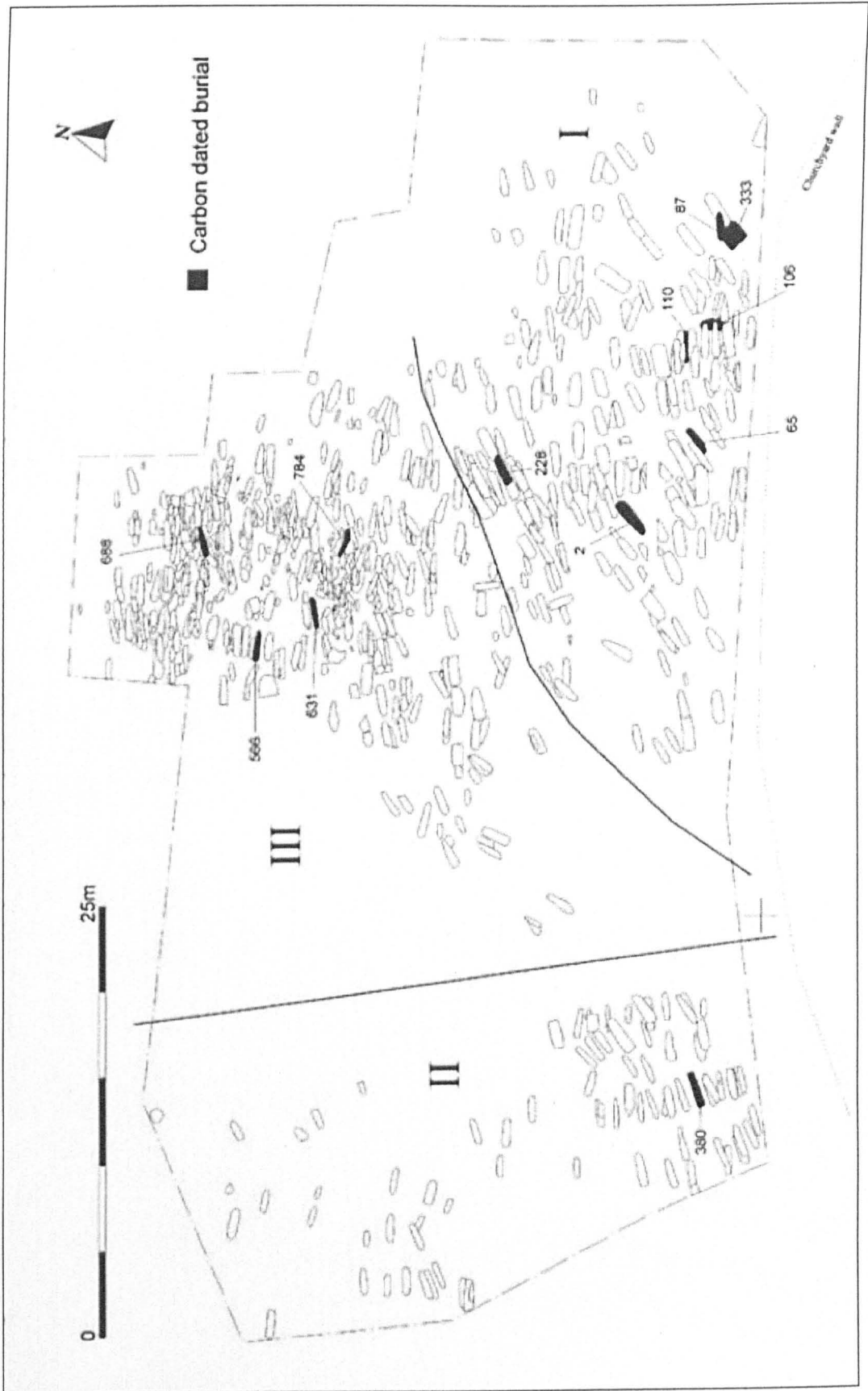


Figure 5.4: Llandough Cemetery

### 5.3.3 Llandough

The cemetery of Llandough in Glamorgan, near Cardiff, shares several features with Poundbury and Cannington. As at Poundbury, the cemetery is adjacent to a Roman villa. Furthermore, like both Poundbury and Cannington, it is near an Iron Age hillfort that was reoccupied after the Roman period, in this case Dinas Powys. The cemetery also surrounds the church of St. Dochdwy, which according to textual sources was associated with an early medieval monastery.<sup>122</sup>

There were a total of 1026 burials, all inhumation (814 individual inhumations, 212 disarticulated groups). The burials were all oriented roughly east-west, and showed signs of being arranged in rows. The cemetery also exhibits separate burial groups with a higher concentration of burial, one of which surrounds a burial which possibly dates to the Iron Age. It is a pit burial, a type of burial that is an atypical form of burial in the Iron Age, yet many have been found on Iron Age sites across southern Britain.<sup>123</sup> It might be associated with the Iron Age settlement found underneath the nearby Roman villa.<sup>124</sup> The excavators speculated that the earlier burial may have originally been associated with a landscape feature or surface monument which has since

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<sup>122</sup> Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds., *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), p. 51; Wendy Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978); Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1979); Jeremy Knight, 'From Villa to Monastery: Llandough in Context', *Medieval Archaeology*, 49 (2005), 93-107.

<sup>123</sup> Isolated burials in the Iron Age were rare. The pit burial also appears to be associated with ritual deposition. See R. Whimster, *Burial Practices in Iron Age Britain*, *BAR British Series*, 90 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1981), p. 191; and J. D. Hill, *Ritual and Rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex*, *BAR British Series*, 242 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1995).

<sup>124</sup> Holbrook and Thomas, 'An Early-Medieval Monastic Cemetery at Llandough', p. 86; and H. Owen-John, 'Llandough: The Rescue Excavation of a Multi-Period Site near Cardiff, South Glamorgan', in *Biglis, Caldicot and Llandough: Three Late Iron Age and Romano-British Sites in South-East Wales, Excavations 1977-79*, ed. by D. M. Robinson (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1988), pp. 123-77.

been destroyed, but may have been visible to those who created the later, fourth- to eighth-century burials, and used it as a focus for burial.<sup>125</sup>

The concentration of burials around the putative Iron Age grave suggests *ad sanctos* burial. If the grave does date to the Iron Age then it is most likely not an authentic Christian saint. However, this does not eliminate the possibility of a cult associated with a grave. It could have been the object of veneration that was later rationalised as the grave of a saint. An example for this is a case in Dijon, where Ian Wood speculated that the cult of Benignus in Dijon was created to legitimise the veneration of a special grave of prehistoric origin.<sup>126</sup>

Although calibrated radiocarbon dating undertaken on some of the burials is not precise enough to say if burial at the site was continuous from the Roman period or *de novo*, the excavators posit a chronological break between villa and cemetery. Their interpretation is as follows. The villa was abandoned in the mid-fourth century. The land then passed to a local leader, possibly from the adjacent hill fort of Dinas Powys. A possible link between the two sites is suggested by the find of Bii amphora ware, which dates from the late fifth to early sixth, at both locations. This local leader, or a successor, then established the monastery.

Such continuity from villa to monastery is a possible interpretation supported by similar examples in Britain. As mentioned above, the site of Poundbury might also have developed from a Roman villa into an early

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<sup>125</sup> Holbrook and Thomas, 'An Early-Medieval Monastic Cemetery at Llandough', p. 89.

<sup>126</sup> Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion'.

monastery.<sup>127</sup> The pattern of development from villa to monastery is one that is known in Gaul.<sup>128</sup>

In addition to the putative cult attached to the Iron Age grave, textual evidence presents a link to a St Dochdwy. The foundation of the monastery is attested by the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae*, the *Life of Cainnech*, and the *Book of Llandaff*. The *Annals of Ulster* includes an entry dated 1 January *sub anno* 473 which states '*Quies Docci episcopi sancti Britonum abbatis*'.<sup>129</sup> However, it appears to have been added in the tenth century or later.<sup>130</sup> The *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae*, dated to the ninth or tenth century, includes Dochdwy (as 'Doccus') with David and Gildas.<sup>131</sup> More reliable are the charters in the *Book of Llandaff* which include witnesses described as clergy of Sanctus Docguinnus or Docunnus. There are 31 charters in total that include such witnesses, dating to the seventh and eighth century. The charters from the *Book of Llandaff* have been dated by Wendy Davies to 625-85, and slightly later by Patrick Sims-Williams.<sup>132</sup> The written sources place the date of lifetime of Dochdwy sometime between the late fifth and early seventh century, which potentially makes him a contemporary of Ninian or Samson.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead', pp. 109-10.

<sup>128</sup> John Percival, *The Roman Villa: An Historical Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Percival, 'Villas and Monasteries in Late Roman Gaul'.

<sup>129</sup> Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocail, *The Annals of Ulster: to A.D. 1131* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), p. 51.

<sup>130</sup> Knight, 'From Villa to Monastery', p. 101

<sup>131</sup> Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), pp. 142-146.

<sup>132</sup> Davies, *The Llandaff Charters*; Patrick Sims-Williams, *Britain and Early Christian Europe: Studies in Early Medieval History and Culture* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995).

<sup>133</sup> The documentary evidence for Dochdwy is more fully described in Knight, 'From Villa to Monastery'.

The cemetery at Llandough presents burial practices seen in other cemeteries in Britain and on the continent. The finds of Bii amphora sherds suggest continued contact with mainland Europe, possibly the Mediterranean, as well as the reoccupied hillfort at Dinas Powys. The Iron Age burial suggests the possibility of an invented cult, while textual sources attest an association with a local confessor saint.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on additional archaeological sites that have been presented as possible cult sites. Discussion has described the difficulty distinguishing between Christian and pagan burials during Late Antiquity. There were no prescribed or uniform methods for Christian or pagan burial. Although certain features can suggest possible saints' graves, the same attributes are also associated with other types of high status burial.

Nonetheless, the cemeteries of Poundbury, Cannington and Llandough present significant evidence that suggests the presence of local saints' cults. At Poundbury, some of the special graves were found in a mausoleum that might have been used as a church. The cemetery itself might have been associated with a monastic community. The slab-marked grave at Cannington shows signs of *ad sanctos* burial as well as pilgrimage. Documentary evidence links the cemetery at Llandough with a monastic community and Saint Dochdwy. The Iron Age burial there might parallel the case of Saint Benignus, where an ancient burial subject to local veneration was appropriated and legitimised as the grave of a saint. The grave might even have been thought to have belonged to Saint Dochdwy himself. Although these interpretations maintain some

uncertainty, these three sites together present what is perhaps the strongest archaeological evidence for undocumented saints' cults in late antique Britain.

Aside from the possible saints' graves, these cemeteries exhibit evidence of continued Christian practice in Britain during Late Antiquity. The possible church and monastic community at Poundbury has already been mentioned, as well as the attested monastic community at Llandough. Furthermore, the cemeteries also exhibit some of the same burial trends seen across the other provinces of the Western Roman Empire, reinforcing the inclusion of Britain within the Late Antiquity paradigm.

## **Chapter 6: Britain in Late Antiquity**

### **6.1 Overview**

The preceding chapters have examined the presumed continuity of early martyr cults from the time of the persecutions into the Middle Ages. After reviewing the conclusions of chapters two through five, this chapter brings the texts and archaeology together by examining the appropriation of the past. The textual and archaeological evidence demonstrate that one of the key features of the invention and promotion of a cult was the creation of an artificial continuity, referencing the past to lend legitimacy and reinforce the authenticity of the cult. The main research questions introduced in chapter 1 are revisited and addressed. The conclusions demonstrate that an interdisciplinary methodology and the Late Antiquity paradigm are appropriate and applicable to the study of the cult of saints in Britain.

### **6.2 A review of the conclusions thus far...**

To date, academic discussion has neglected the origins of the cult of saints in Britain. Scholars have assumed that cults emerged soon after the supposed martyrdoms during the time of persecutions and experienced uninterrupted continuity into the Middle Ages. Analysis of the evidence demonstrates that assumptions about continuity are inaccurate. The texts and archaeology illustrate that martyr cults probably emerged long after the persecutions. The earliest evidence indicates that the cult of saints was introduced to Britain at the



end of the fourth century by Victricius of Rouen.<sup>1</sup> The first native martyr cult in Britain, devoted to Alban, was most likely invented in the early fifth century by Germanus of Auxerre.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as indicated by Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum* and the *Obsecratio Augustini*, additional martyr cults, dedicated to Julius, Aaron and Sixtus, developed between the time of Germanus and Gildas.<sup>3</sup>

Initially the cult of saints was often used to promote orthodoxy over heresies. Victricius used the cult of martyrs to combat Arianism while Germanus invented the cult of Alban amidst his conflict with Pelagianism. At the time of Gildas, the cult of saints was no longer used to promote orthodoxy, which suggests the British Church was secure from heresies such as Arianism and Pelagianism.<sup>4</sup>

As with British martyr cults, the origins of cults dedicated to British confessor saints has also received little attention. Nevertheless, the textual sources such as the *Vita Samsonis*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the *Miracula Nyniae* and *Vita Niniani*, allow us to draw some conclusions regarding their development. The *Vita Samsonis* may indicate that the cult of Samson was the earliest cult dedicated to a British confessor saint: the earliest version of the text was written in the seventh century. Ninian's cult was fully developed by the eighth century when it was recorded by Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and promoted by the *Miracula Nyniae*. The cult of Ninian developed in an area on

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*'; Clark, 'Translating Relics: Victricius of Rouen and Fourth-Century Debate'; Rouen, 'De Laude Sanctorum'.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'; Wood, 'Levison and St Alban'.

<sup>3</sup> Gildas, *DEB*.

<sup>4</sup> Gildas, *DEB*.

the periphery of the Roman province of Britain at a site that developed in the fifth century.<sup>5</sup>

The origins of the cult of saints in Britain presented by the analysis of the textual sources parallels the current understanding of the origins of saints' cults on the Continent. Martyr cults grew popular throughout the western provinces of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century, and were used to promote orthodoxy by figures such as Ambrose of Milan. Cults dedicated to confessor saints emerged some time after the early martyr cults. The parallel development of the cult of saints in Britain and the Continent suggests that Britain was not isolated from the rest of Europe during the post-Roman period, despite long-standing assumptions to the contrary.

The archaeological evidence associated with the cult of saints was evaluated in chapters four and five. Examination of the archaeological evidence has undermined some of the assumptions associated with the traditional model for archaeological investigation of saints' cults. This model consists of churches that reused Roman mausolea or are sited over extra-mural Roman cemeteries, and presumes uninterrupted continuity of site use from the death or burial of putative martyrs through to the construction of a shrine or church over the grave of the saint. There is no evidence for uninterrupted continuity from the Roman to medieval period at any of the sites presented as possible cult sites. The lack of continuity is not problematic. On the contrary, the discontinuity corresponds to the proposed understanding of the development of the cult of saints based on textual sources. As discussed above, saints' cults grew in popularity from the end of the fourth century, long after the end of persecutions. Construction of

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<sup>5</sup> Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian*; MacQueen, *St Nynia*.

architectural features associated with saints' cults did not occur on a widespread basis until the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence varies greatly among the sites of churches over mausolea. The sites most likely to have been used by native British Christians for religious purposes are Icklingham and St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester. Of the other church sites discussed in chapter four, none were certainly used as a church before the Anglo-Saxon conversion. The churches at Stone-by-Faversham and at Folkestone, both in Kent, were built over Roman mausolea sometime from the sixth to seventh century. The date range for the construction of these churches means the builders could have been associated with either native British Christianity or post-Augustinian Christianity. The church of St Martin's, Canterbury, is likely to have been converted by Bertha, Liudhard or Augustine, in the late sixth or early seventh century. The church at Lullingstone is more likely to have been first built in the later Anglo-Saxon period. The context at Wells is so disturbed that it is almost impossible to determine when the first structure was built, or even if the church indeed overlies a Roman mausolea.

The reuse of Roman mausolea for Christian churches is not conclusive evidence for associations with saints' cults, but it must be considered as one of the more probable interpretations. Such reuse is not evidence for continuity of use at the site, but it does suggest that mausolea were chosen because of the symbolism associated with such structures. Mausolea might have been chosen for the sites of churches because of their associations with the Roman Empire

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<sup>6</sup> Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West*. p. 216.

and its authority as well as the longevity associated with stone construction.<sup>7</sup> The reuse of mausolea created an artificial continuity forging a link with the Roman past.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these associations, mausolea might have been chosen for the sites of churches because this is where graves of martyrs were expected to be located.

The ability to identify the site of a saints' grave in the archaeological record has been complicated by traditional approaches for interpreting late antique burial practices. The main focus of research has been an attempt to distinguish Christian and pagan burials. Such approaches do not account for the complexity of burial practices, which varied widely and were determined by myriad factors. There were no prescribed practices for either Christian or pagan burials. However, some features can suggest that a particular grave was believed to belong to a saint. The sites of Poundbury, Cannington and Llandough exhibit evidence that suggests the existence of local saints' cults. The cemetery at Poundbury includes a mausolea that might have been used as a church containing special graves. Cannington includes a grave with signs of *ad sanctos* burial and pilgrimage. The cemetery at Llandough is associated with documentary evidence of Saint Dochdwy and a monastic community. Llandough also contains an Iron Age burial that appears to have been venerated and might have been erroneously considered as a saint's grave. Together, these sites present the most persuasive evidence for undocumented saints' cults in late antique Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> Eaton, *Plundering the Past: Roman Stonework in Medieval Britain*; Jane Hawkes, 'Iuxta Morem Romanorum: Stone Sculpture in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. by Catherine Karkov and George Hardin Brown, 2003), pp. 69-100.

<sup>8</sup> Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*. p. 131.

In addition to the possible saints' graves, the cemeteries attest the continuity of Christianity in Britain during Late Antiquity. Llandough and possibly Poundbury were associated with monastic communities. The burial trends seen at these cemeteries parallels contemporary trends on the continent, reinforcing the assertion that Britain was not isolated at this time.

### 6.3 Appropriating the past in late antique Britain

The reuse of Roman mausolea and cemeteries as the physical focus for saints' cults is the same process seen at early Anglo-Saxon burial sites associated with prehistoric monuments described in chapter one. The churches that overlie Roman mausolea, Stone-by-Faversham,<sup>9</sup> Folkestone,<sup>10</sup> Lullingstone,<sup>11</sup> St Martin's Canterbury,<sup>12</sup> at Mary-de-Lode,<sup>13</sup> and the putative church at Poundbury,<sup>14</sup> demonstrate definite appropriation of burial monuments of the long dead for Christian use possibly associated with saints' cults. The reuse of Roman mausolea was deliberate and symbolic. It was an appropriation of the past and created an artificial continuity with the Roman period. The reuse of Roman mausolea imparted cult sites with legitimacy and presented authenticity.

The reuse of Roman monuments in association with the cult of saints as a means of legitimising cults is supported by the textual sources. The chronological discrepancy between the persecutions and the earliest cults

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<sup>9</sup> Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham'; Fletcher and Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham Second Report'; Taylor and Yonge, 'The Ruined Church at Stone-by-Faversham: a Re-Assessment'.

<sup>10</sup> Rigold, 'Roman Folkestone Reconsidered'.

<sup>11</sup> Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone*.

<sup>12</sup> Jenkins, 'St Martin's Church at Canterbury: A Survey of the Earliest Structural Features'; Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*. pp. 143-45. Tatton-Brown, 'St Martin's Church in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries'; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*. pp. 170-74.

<sup>13</sup> Bryant and Heighway, 'Excavations at St. Mary de Lode Church'.

<sup>14</sup> Sparey-Green, 'Living Amongst the Dead'.

underlines an important point about martyr cults: regardless of whether or not the martyr was genuine, the creation of martyr cults involved a reinterpretation of the past, by appropriating the relics of the ancient dead, and the sites and burial monuments associated with them.<sup>15</sup> The textual sources associated with martyr cults were composed long after the persecutions but refer back to them to present the martyrs as authentic and authoritative.<sup>16</sup> The *Passio Albani* does not give a precise date for Alban's martyrdom, but refers back to *tempore persecutionis*.<sup>17</sup> Both Gildas and Bede placed the British martyrs Alban, Julius and Aaron within the broad history of Christianity and precisely date them to the Diocletian persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>18</sup>

The promotion of martyr cults in association with conflicts of orthodoxy demonstrates that the link to the past, specifically the persecutions, imparted legitimacy and authority on cults.<sup>19</sup> Although Victricius' *De Laude Sanctorum* indicated that the cult of martyrs had not developed in Britain at the time he visited at the end of the fourth century, he promoted the cult of saints in association with conflicts over orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup> The invention of the cult of Alban by Germanus in the fifth century to combat the Pelagian heresy reinforces the authority of saints conferred by reference to the past.<sup>21</sup> The same process occurred with martyr cults on the Continent. The discovery of Protasius and

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<sup>15</sup> On the authority projected by saints, see Wood, 'Topographies of Power'; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'.

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion'. p. 35; Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*. p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> *DEB*, 10, p. 92; *HE*, I.7, pp. 28-34.

<sup>19</sup> On the authority of saints see Wood, 'Topographies of Power'; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France'.

<sup>20</sup> Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>21</sup> Wood, 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre'.

Gervasius by Ambrose, which has already been mentioned, is one example.<sup>22</sup> Ambrose was responsible for several other inventions, including Vitalis and Agricola at Bologna.<sup>23</sup>

The same process of appropriating the past also occurred in regards to British confessor cults. The textual sources related to Ninian placed him in the distant past. Bede presented an ambiguous date for Ninian's floruit, *multo ante tempore* before Columba's arrival at Iona in 563, and linked him to Rome.<sup>24</sup> The *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* is as ambiguous as Bede regarding the date of Ninian and also linked him to Rome. The *Vita Niniani*, composed in the twelfth century, linked the saint to Martin of Tours, grounding him in the Roman past. Although the date of Samson is more certain than that of Ninian, due to documentation of a council he attended, the hagiographical material regarding Samson is ambiguous regarding the chronology of his lifetime, similarly to Ninian. The *Vita Samsonis* presents a convoluted account of the span of time between the life of Samson and the composition of the *Vita*.<sup>25</sup> The complicated textual transmission of the *Vita Samsonis* can be viewed as a microcosm of the concept of appropriating the past. The living memory of Henoc was appropriated by the anonymous ninth-century redactor of the *Vita*.

The link between monument reuse and textual sources has been studied in other areas of the early medieval period. Michael Hunter observed the flexibility of literary representations of the past in Anglo-Saxon texts, which wove together Roman, Germanic and Old Testament sources indiscriminately

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*. pp. 35-36.

<sup>23</sup> Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). 347-50.

<sup>24</sup> *HE*, III.4, p. 222.

<sup>25</sup> *VS* prologue, 2, pp. 140-142.

when describing their heritage.<sup>26</sup> The process of monument reuse mirrors this flexibility.<sup>27</sup> Bonnie Effros argued that the archaeological evidence attests to reuse more frequently than textual sources.<sup>28</sup> However, as discussed in this thesis, these two types of evidence can in some cases be used in conjunction to demonstrate the importance of monument reuse and textual sources in the development of saints' cults. A good example for this practice is the *Vita Samsonis*, which includes an account of Samson encountering the worship of a standing stone by apostates whom he chastises.<sup>29</sup> After convincing the apostates to return to orthodoxy by performing a miracle, Samson inscribed a cross on the standing stone, an act of appropriation. The author of the *vita* claims to have seen the stone himself and touched the cross with his own hands, indicating that the stone continued to be venerated, but in a Christian context.

The case studies examined in this thesis demonstrate that the appropriation of the past was a feature of the invention and promotion of the cult of saints in late antique Britain. Although cults did not experience uninterrupted continuity from the lifetimes of the saints, they presented the illusion of continuity through both material culture and texts. As with early Anglo-Saxon burials that reused prehistoric monuments, the reuse of Roman mausolea presented an antiquity that evoked legitimacy and authority. The textual sources situated the lives of saints in the past, providing authenticity for their cults.

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Hunter, 'German and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 29-50.

<sup>27</sup> Effros, 'Monuments and Memory'. p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> Effros, 'Monuments and Memory'. p. 117.

<sup>29</sup> VS, I.48-49, pp. 216-18.



#### 6.4 The cult of saints, Britain and the Late Antiquity Paradigm

This thesis set out to determine when the cult of saints was introduced to Britain; what factors determined whether or not a cult survived or was abandoned or suppressed; and what impact, if any, the Augustinian mission and conversion of the Anglo-Saxons had on native British saints' cults. The interdisciplinary approach outlined in chapter 1 allows such questions to be posed and answered. The textual sources analysed in chapters two and three depict the introduction and development of the cult of saints in Britain. Victricius' *De Laude Sanctorum* indicates that the cult of saints was introduced to Britain at the end of the fourth century to promote orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> The *Passio Albani* and *Vita Germani* demonstrate that the promotion of orthodoxy in association with the cult of saints continued with the invention of the cult of Alban in the fifth century.<sup>31</sup> The *Vita Samsonis*, Bede's *HE*, and the *Miracula Nynie* depict the development of the cult of saints, and the emergence of cults devoted to native British confessor saints, Samson and Ninian.<sup>32</sup> The development of confessor cults from a native British Christianity that originated in the Roman period reinforces the continuity of Christianity and shows parallels with the evolution of the cult of saints on the Continent.

A variety of overlapping factors determined whether a saints' cult survived or was abandoned or suppressed. The role of texts played a large part in the survival of cults. The production of a *passio* or *vita* could be indicative of the size and popularity of a particular cult. The cult of Alban began in the fifth

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<sup>30</sup> Rouen, 'De Laude Sanctorum'; Pérez-Martínez, 'Arianism in Britain'.

<sup>31</sup> Meyer, *Die Legende des h. Albanus*; Constantius, 'Vita Sancti Germani'.

<sup>32</sup> VS; *HE*; MGH, *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, 4, pp. 943-62.

century and enjoyed popularity throughout the Middle Ages. The *Vita Samsonis* ensured the survival of his cult on the Continent. The reference to saints in non-hagiographical texts also played a role. The earliest reference to Julius and Aaron is in Gildas' *DEB*, which provided very little information regarding these saints other than their names and the fact that they were citizens of the city of Legions. The archaeological sites associated with putative cults serve as a counter example. Any cults at the sites discussed in chapters four or five diminished without leaving any record in the textual sources. The cult of Dochdwy can be seen as existing in limbo, with the only remnants of his cult appearing in the dedication to his church and references in charters collected in the *Book of Llandaff*.

The Augustinian mission and Anglo-Saxon conversion had a large impact on the appropriation and suppression of native British cults. Due to their size, the cults of Alban and Ninian could not be suppressed and thus were appropriated by the Anglo-Saxon Church. The Britishness of native saints was downplayed or ignored in texts produced by Anglo-Saxons, such as the case of Ninian in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Miracula Nyniae*. Conversely, the cult of Sixtus was suppressed, partly as the result of the absence of any textual source supporting his authenticity. Contrary to Bede's portrayal, the mission of Augustine does not represent a new beginning for Christianity in Britain. Augustine did not arrive in a province devoid of Christianity, and previous interpretations of Christianity in Britain, which assume there was a total break

after the Roman period,<sup>33</sup> are challenged by the survival of a Christianity that was strong enough to produce native saints' cults devoted to martyrs and confessors. The development of the cult of saints along the same trajectory as on the Continent also reinforces the idea that Britain was not isolated from the Continent during Late Antiquity.

This thesis proves that the Late Antiquity paradigm is applicable to Britain and allows a more complete understanding of the cult of saints despite the dearth of datable evidence. The Late Antiquity paradigm allows the use of both history and archaeology, and the ability to raise appropriate questions and answer them through the reassessment of case studies. The interdisciplinary approach has contributed to original conclusions in this field, demonstrating that the use of archaeological and textual evidence together can produce a viable study with meaningful results. The interdisciplinary examination of different types of evidence can reinforce our understanding of the development of the cult of saints in Britain.

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<sup>33</sup> Frend, 'Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain'; Frend, 'Roman Britain, A Failed Promise'; Frere, 'The End of Towns in Roman Britain'; Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*; Victor Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1950); C. A. Ralegh Radford, 'The Early Church in Strathclyde and Galloway', *Medieval Archaeology*, 11 (1967), 105-26; C. A. Ralegh Radford, 'Christian Origins in Britain', *Medieval Archaeology*, 15 (1971), 1-12.

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