Anglo-Saxon hegemony in Early Medieval Britain

_Cultural and political dominance by foreign minority groups_

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Abstract

During the Migration Period and the Early Middle Ages both the political and cultural situation in Britain became completely and utterly changed. Where the Western Roman Empire previously had exerted power over the Celtic British population for more than three decades, it appeared as if next to all elements of Roman or British origin was eradicated and instead exchanged with culturally Germanic features. This was traditionally explained with an Anglo-Saxon genocide of the British. The evidence presented in this thesis, however, rather point to a large degree of continuity between Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain, both when it comes to the rural population and the elite. The conclusion drawn is that the conditions of post-Roman Britain largely contributed to the rapid adoption of Anglo-Saxon culture among the Romano-British elite, in that the population was very much accustomed to a foreign and culturally different people being superior, and as such were more inclined to accept and adapt to the changes. The distinctly insular Anglo-Saxon culture which developed after the adventus Saxonum – the coming of the Anglo-Saxons – did so with a larger degree of British influence than earlier thought, resulting in an elite with mixed British, Roman and Germanic ethnicities. This is reflected in both the archaeological and linguistic material and if one closely examines the written sources. The cultural expression of this elite group was, however, very much Anglo-Saxon, with strong connotations to and ideals of a Germanic heritage. This elite culture obscured or pushed away other cultures, as the chaotic nature of the times made strong identifying and empowering statements necessary, effectively speeding up the process.
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Introduction

The fifth century AD marks the beginning of the Early Middle Ages in Europe and was a time of great political change where the decline of the previously dominant Roman Empire met with large-scale migration and invasion of ‘barbarian’ groups. Britain especially was greatly affected by these developments, and astonishingly, next to no traces remain of British presence in the lowland areas after the mid fifth century. Traditionally this has been interpreted as the foreigners’ brutal slaughter and genocide of the native population, with the survivors either submitting to slavery or fleeing to the mountains of Wales and the north, or across the sea to the continent. While this doubtlessly did happen to some extent, the matters discussed in this master’s thesis suggests the evidence rather points towards the establishment of the Anglo-Saxons as fragmented elite groups, and that their total cultural and political dominance prompted an assimilation of the Britons, accounting for their material absence. This was made possible by the Germanic elite culture filling the void left by the Roman Empire creating a continuity; an increased regional elite control through a greater degree of contact between the ruling elite and the rural population; and the remaining British elite’s willingness to adapt to the changing times.

In writing this dissertation my aim is to explore how such small, independent groups of people can come from the outside and establish themselves as a ruling elite over the native population, effectively obliterating their cultural identity. I will discuss how the Anglo-Saxons, being minority groups, managed to establish total control over the settled people as efficiently as they did, through considering aspects such as the pre-existing conditions both in the cultural and political landscapes of Britain and continental Europe; ideas of identity and ethnic differences in early Medieval Europe; and interactions and dealings the Britons and Anglo-Saxons may have had with each other. Was there an inter-dependency between them, or did the Anglo-Saxons completely dominate all transactions? Were the Britons considered inferior, or just another competition in the quest for power? As an extension of this question – could the supposed

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1 Especially to Brittany, a region in the northwest of France, which was indeed named after Britons who emigrated there in the Early Middle Ages (Léon Fleuriot, Les Origines de la Bretagne; l’émigration, (Paris: Payot, 1980): 52–53).
cultural eclipse have been a conscious political effort to repress the Britons in order to elevate the Germanic culture and ease the Anglo-Saxons’ rise to power?

_Historiography_

Because of the ambiguity and obscurity of the sources, it is difficult to state anything concrete about the Migration Period and Early Middle Ages in Britain. Traditionally the belief of the _adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum_ has in many instances been portrayed as a brutal annihilation of the British population by the Anglo-Saxons, where the natives either were killed, enslaved or forced to flee lowland Britain, their homes, farms and any traces of Roman towns and settlements perhaps set fire to and destroyed. This theory was dubbed the _catastrophic invasion theory_ by Donald A. White, its core consisting of the total “obliterat[jion of] most traces of Romano-British civilization.” Such a belief continued to be prominent for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and still to this day it appears to be the one generally believed by the public. This is for example seen in the version of events as presented by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin in _The Celts: A History_, where he claims that “[t]he situation […] was one of a war to the death between the native Britons and the Anglo-Saxons”.

On the other side of the debate are those who, such as Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, have argued in favour of a less brutal migration. Their theory is that what occurred was a “peaceful and nearly wholesale assimilation of Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon cultures,” where the newcomers were accepted and possibly even welcomed by the native population. This is but one aspect of the debate about the nature and size of the Germanic immigration to the British Isles in the early Middle Ages. Although the ideas of J. M. Kemble regarding the catastrophic

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2 The coming of the Anglo-Saxons, hereafter referred to as the _adventus Saxonum_.
nature of the change were readily accepted, his arguments in favour of a gradual Germanic ‘penetration’ of the island were not. Indeed, there are some problems with this explanation when considering the rapidity of the observable changes in the island, though it probably was the downplaying of Anglo-Saxon achievements as well as its discrepancy with Bede and the other written sources which which posed a problem for the Victorians of his time. In addition to problems regarding bias and ideological and political motifs, which perhaps have been particularly prominent where the Anglo-Saxons are concerned, historians throughout the ages have in many cases been limited by their own perceptions of connections and geographical restraints. This has the potential of subconsciously focusing the studies towards preconceptions or recorded historical evidence. An example of this can be looking directly at genetic connections between Frisia and Anglo-Saxon England on basis of historical records, and not comparing finds with other parts of the world. Sweden and Norway, for instance, would be very interesting in this regard, as the material evidence hints at close connections despite there being no written record of any larger pre-Viking contact.

Turning back to the questions of nature and size, these aspects can essentially be said to have divided the Anglo-Saxon scholars into two fractions. The mass migration, or replacement, model theorises that Anglo-Saxon people replaced the native population on the island – essentially, there having been created a vacuum for their families to move into. Bede, whom we will return to below, appears to have been the primary influence for such a vision, as he for example, when describing the continental origins of the Angles, wrote that “the country of the Angles, that is, the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes

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7 For an insight into J. M. Kemble’s theory, see The Saxons in England: A history of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1876).
and the Saxons, which is called Angulus […] is said to have remained deserted from that
day to this.”

In more recent times the elite takeover model has gained more of a following. Smaller
groups are thought to have replaced the political and governmental plane of the
British chiefdoms or fractions and adopting the existing British subjects as their own, and
thus also “allow[ing] for massive ethnic continuity from late Roman Britain to Anglo-
Saxon England”14. This is a theory perhaps best represented through the writings of
Nicholas J. Higham, with scholars such as Martin Welch waving a flag for the other camp.
Around the turn of the twentieth century this debate appears to have been quite polarised,
with estimates ranging from nearly none to around 10,00015 or even 200,00016 Germanic
settlers. During the last two decades, however, most scholars seem to have accepted that
the truth lies somewhere in between these two models, as argued by John Hines in 1998,
and that neither of them can possibly have been exclusive.17 In any case, even if one were
to use the largest of the proposed numbers, the fact still remains that the immigrants would
have been largely outnumbered by the Britons. There is no evidence for the eradication
of a British presence – rather some continuity is evident in settlements and cemeteries,
even if the British culture and language no longer is visible to us.18 These conclusions do
appear to favour the elite takeover model rather than large scale migration – even if large
numbers immigrated, the Britons would have been more numerous, and if what happened
was, as many scholars propose, heavy assimilation, some Anglo-Saxon elite control must
have occurred. This does not mean, however, that arguments in favour for more general
migration, especially when it comes to environmental factors and settlement dynamics,
are to be discredited.19

13 Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, XV. 31.
15 Ibid, 225.
16 Heinrich Härke, “Population replacement or acculturation? An archaeological perspective on
population and migration in post-Roman Britain,” in The Celtic Englishes III, ed. H. L. C.
Sachsenforschung 11: Die Wanderung der Angeln nach England 46, Internationales
18 Laing and Laing, Celtic Britain and Ireland, 69; Hamerow, Rural Settlements and Society in
Anglo-Saxon England, 15.
19 John Pearce, “Burial, identity and migration in the Roman world,” in Roman Disasporas:
Archaeological approaches to mobility and diversity in the Roman Empire, ed. Hella Eckardt
Although estimating numbers for a period so far removed from our own, and whose sources are so few and unreliable as the early Anglo-Saxon period, is fraught with difficulty and can only be deemed guesswork, another approach to studying the nature of the Anglo-Saxon immigrations have emerged. Though present for a longer time through the study of kingdoms, burial sites and settlement sites, from the 1990s, and especially in the 2000s and onwards, the archaeological field particularly has experienced an increased focus on regional studies. These are proving both very interesting and important to the study of the Anglo-Saxons. Some areas such as Kent and East Anglia, have been subject to more intense study than others due to their unique characteristics and connections with the Franks and Scandinavians respectively. Other regions, however, have also recently been explored, e.g. Wiltshire, Sussex, Essex, Warwickshire and Lincolnshire. Although regional studies are contributing to a more complex picture of the early Anglo-Saxon period, there is still work to be done in order to be able to compare the unique regions with each other and provide a more complete image, as the studies are focused on differing aspects of society, and thus not readily comparable. Despite these difficulties, the general picture emerging appears to be that of regional varieties, with more heavy immigration in some areas than others, and the characters of each quite different. It has become clear that the approach of considering England as a whole, or even broader groupings such as Angles, Saxons and Jutes, as traditionally done, is too simplistic.

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The increased focus on regional studies, as well as the improved organisation of archaeological stray and excavated finds in searchable, digital systems such as the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and the Treasure Annual Reports (TAR), has contributed to highlighting other aspects of the early Anglo-Saxon period, such as distribution patterns and settlement patterns. In the post-war period the revisionism of continental origins has also experienced an increased interest. By looking more closely at regional differences, the presence of other Germanic groups such as the Franks and Frisians have emerged more clearly, as well as a greater understanding of the Scandinavian links particularly displayed in ‘Anglian’ areas. A “new” idea which has gained credit especially during the last decade, and which can be supported surprisingly well by archaeological and other evidence, is that of a common North Sea culture which not only connected Anglo-Saxon England with the continent and Scandinavia through a complex series of networks, but which also might have contributed to a shared identity and cultural exchange – possibly even from Britain to the continent.

Though the archaeological evidence for a long time was thought to display a clear break between Roman and Anglo-Saxon culture and rule, in recent years there has been a growing wish of drawing lines of continuity and finding points of survival between the two, especially when it comes to town centres, law codes, urbanisation and land use. This debate is very central to the perception of the adventus Saxonum in terms of numbers and nature. Other methods or points of interest which have been important to the field of Anglo-Saxon studies during the last few decades have been evidence derived from topography (landscape studies) and linguistic studies, which continue to yield interesting

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results. Disagreements about other aspects of the early Anglo-Saxon period have naturally also occurred, and there are still elements of disagreement, such as ethnic divisions and groupings, and the role played by Christianity, as well as different waves or stages of immigration.

When it comes to the different explanations for the adventus Saxonum and the start of the Anglo-Saxon period, there have been many variations and interpretations during the last few decades. In addition to questions of size, nature and efficiency, timing has experienced heavy debate. There have been attempts at placing the appearance of a more permanent Germanic presence in Britain already during the fourth century. D. J. V. Fisher, for example, writes that he believes there is sufficient evidence for “heavy Germanic settlement in England before the departure of the Romans.” Some have argued for an already existing Germanic population specifically in Kent by the fifth century, which, when considering the geography of the region, does not sound entirely implausible. One can imagine that Kent acted as a “gateway” between the British Isles and the continent, and that it as such was home to many different peoples, e.g. merchants and traders. Joe Allard and Richard North also use linguistic evidence to suggest the presence of “older” groups of Saxons in Kent, who might have been responsible for naming the “newcomers” as distinguishable from themselves geographically. However, all suggested contact between Britons and Anglo-Saxons prior to the fifth century is very speculative. Even were there Germanic people in Kent during the 300s, they certainly did not operate like the organised elite warrior groups which later were to ascertain their authority over larger parts of eastern Britain.

The occurrence of possible Germanic archaeological finds in Britain prior to the late fifth century have also been suggested. Some have identified what has been dubbed “Romano-Saxon” pottery, which they claim originates from the fourth century, and especially J. N. L. Myres argued for evidence of Anglo-Saxon cremation burials dating

from the first half of the fifth century, rather than later.\textsuperscript{33} Instances such as this have been heavily questioned and debated, however, and are now generally thought to be incorrect.\textsuperscript{34} At most they can represent a marginal presence of Germanic mercenaries employed by the Romans, but their significance to the later Anglo-Saxon hegemony does not appear to have been great.

This early presence, however, have sometimes been used to construct a model of different stages or waves of Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain. A small presence of Germanic settlers in the form of hired military or merchants could have existed during the fourth and early fifth centuries, before, as imagined by for example Ó hÓgáin, the mid-fifth century invaders mentioned in the sources such as Hengist and Horsa, would make up a second stage of migration.\textsuperscript{35} A third wave of invasion could then have occurred in the sixth century, when the more reliable historical and archaeological sources can ascertain more Germanic elements. However, this model is too static and constructed – the reality would have been much more fluid and probably seen continual change. What these theories can contribute with in regard to the question of continuity and assimilation discussed in this thesis is the idea of prolonged periods of contact between British inhabitants and Germanic peoples before the actual conflicts and battles started.

Overall one can notice that though the last few decades have seen an increase in the study of details, and the new perspectives this has brought with it, has benefited the general understanding of the \textit{adventus Saxonum} and early Anglo-Saxon period, and especially its complexity, not much have actually changed since the early 1990s regarding the theories surrounding the nature of the period. Now, writing twenty years later, this thesis will look into the changes which have taken place since then, and through the study of the now available historical, archaeological, numismatic, linguistic, topographic and anthropological evidence argue for a theory where the Anglo-Saxons appeared in the vacuum made from the Romans leaving, and that the political conditions coupled with an elite mentality and culture made the Britons adopt Germanic identities instead of British or Roman ones, effectively erasing their material cultural imprint from history. From a historiographical perspective this thesis is therefore firmly in accordance with the modern

\textsuperscript{34} Hines, “The Anglian Migration in British Historical Research,” 157-158.
\textsuperscript{35} Ó hÓgáin, \textit{The Celts: A History}, 214.
elite takeover model and favours a minimalist view of the *adventus Saxonum*. What makes the theory discussed here differ from previous works on the topic is however an increased focus on pre-existing conditions in the British Isles at the time of the *adventus Saxonum*, and how this led to the Anglo-Saxons largely filling a cultural and political vacuum in the wake of the Roman empire, which the British elite did not largely resist, but in fact appears to have embraced.

*Source material*

The recurring problem which presents itself when studying the early Middle Ages is that the sources are few and problematic. The Germanic tribes which settled in Britain did not keep any written records and relied heavily on oral traditions. The written sources which are of use to us for this reason almost exclusively come from outside Anglo-Saxon Britain, and next to none of them are contemporary. The three principal sources for the *adventus Saxonum* and the following happenings, which for over a millennium defined and shaped our understanding of the Early Middle Ages, are *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain), written by the Welsh monk Gildas in the early sixth century, the Northumbrian monk Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People), believed to have been completed in the 730s, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which was originally created in the ninth century.\(^{36}\) The first source can be deemed near-contemporary as its author was born some 50 years after the traditional dating of the *adventus Saxonum*. However, the problem with Gildas and his narrative is the bias which one must assume he possessed. Not only was *De Excidio* a long, very subjective sermon, and not a historical source, but even the name of his work, *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*, suggests a political incentive. The other written sources are equally problematic. Bede, writing in the early eighth century, relied heavily on Gildas, and his accounts were not consistent. The writers of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* seem in turn to use Bede as their primary source, and in addition did not begin writing until the ninth century.\(^{37}\) Other written sources which can provide some pertinent


information are for example annals, law codes, regnal lists and poems, which will all be central in the writing of this thesis.

Other evidence for the period which will be explored in this dissertation is the archaeological material available. In contrast to the written sources these are not problematic in themselves, as they are direct remains which were not fabricated with a particular purpose or message in mind. The trouble, however, lies in how one analyses the material. The physical pieces left behind represent only small fragments of a society and cannot be interpreted as representative for the whole. However, the more evidence is found, the more one can trust the general trends they represent. Pertinent archaeological material which will be looked at in order to best answer the research question of the dissertation will be burial practices and sites, grave goods such as brooches and pottery, settlement sites and patterns, as well as numismatic and palynological evidence (the studies of coins and pollen). It is necessary to look for British presence or influence in these areas of research in order to evaluate whether there was contact between them and the Anglo-Saxons, and to what extent and of what nature it was.

As the theory presented in this thesis is that the Anglo-Saxons did not entirely displace the native population, but rather assimilated them through strict and total cultural and political domination, the linguistic evidence is very important. Language is a strong representation of culture and identity, whose suppression and outlawed status history has shown is often an effective way of eradicating a culture. Traces of Brittonic language in England thus provide significant evidence of Anglo-Saxon attitude and actions towards the native population. Different elements which will be looked into are for example place-names, common names and loan words. For example, places with Celtic name elements could perhaps be evidence of longer surviving British communities.

A central part of this dissertation is the cultural aspect, and with it the identity of the different groups. The extent to which the Anglo-Saxons perceived themselves as part of a larger identity will be explored, whether this was Germanic, Anglian, Saxon, Jutish, a larger North Sea regional culture, or a common elitist European culture. In order to consider this, the nature of the Anglo-Saxon settlement and colonisation of Britain will

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be examined, to see how efficiently they managed to entirely take over the administration of the political, cultural and geographical spheres.

The way in which the Anglo-Saxons managed to appear in the vacuum left by the Roman Empire, and during a very short period of time acquire even stricter control and political and cultural dominance, will be examined in this master’s thesis in a chronological manner. First relevant features of Roman and post-Roman Britain will be discussed, before moving on to the *adventus Saxonum* itself. Then the cultural and identifying features of the Anglo-Saxons once in Britain will be looked into, before the question of whether there was a systematic suppression of the British is examined through the use of linguistic and archaeological evidence.
Roman Britain

In order to be able to examine the actions of the Anglo-Saxons and their contemporaries, it is important to have an understanding of the time in which they lived. Different factors, such as cultural, technological, social, political and environmental elements, all would have affected the possibilities of the various players, and as a consequence their choices. Attempting to be aware of the framework which a society operated within is paramount if one is to analyse it. In order to make the changes brought by the Anglo-Saxons visible, it is necessary to first know what the previous conditions were like. That is what this chapter wishes to outline: the political and cultural climate of Britain during Roman and Post-Roman times, and the much-discussed nature of the *Adventus Saxonum*. Very central to this is the cultural and political landscape: Was the Celtic culture still alive by the Migration Period or was the population largely Romanised in lowland occupied areas? Did aspects of Roman or Celtic Britain survive past the mid 5th century? These questions are paramount to the overall theory of this thesis, which is that the continuity between Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain was quite significant, and that the changes were largely confined to the elite political areas and expressed through cultural appropriation.

Although knowledge of prehistoric times in Britain is scarce, the general characteristics of the native people are that they were speaking a Celtic language, which was shared throughout Europe, used chariots in warfare and occupied hillforts and roundhouses. Through the writings of Greek and Roman scholars such as Ptolemy and Tacitus a distinction can be made between the inhabitants, seeing them as various tribes such as the Dumnonii, operating in Cornwall and Devon, and the Ordovices of northern Wales. This picture must, however, be subject to censure, as the only sources available are those written by conquerors and people of other cultures, not to mention by people separated by great distance. Seeing as the more detailed accounts also appeared as a result of the tribes being subjected to Roman rule, one must assume that the map would look, if not very, then at least a little different prior to the Roman conquest.40

The night on four-hundred-year long period in which the British Isles were under the rule of the Roman Empire is undoubtedly a very significant part of its history, though in some cases its importance might have been overestimated. Ever since the first successful invasion in AD 43, during the following centuries, right up to the final withdrawal from the island and subsequent fall of the Western Roman Empire, Britain was a thorn in the imperial side. Though some submitted easily, several British forces put up resistance for decades, giving birth to figures such as Boudica, the warrior queen of the Iceni tribe. She is said to have almost succeeded at expelling the Romans before being defeated at the battle of Watling Street in AD 60 or 61, a battle which effectively ended successful British rebellions in lowland Britain, ensuring Roman control. However, no emperor ever managed to gain control over the whole island. To the north different tribes of Britons as well as another people, later known collectively as the Picts, resided in present day Scotland, and despite repeated attempts to defeat them and claim their land – called Caledonia by the Romans, probably from the name of one of the largest Pictish tribes, the Caledonii – they never managed to do so. Not aided by the harsh terrain of the highland areas, the Romans had to establish formidable frontiers to fend off the rebellious tribes. Hadrian’s Wall, founded in AD 122, stretched from the River Tyne and across the land to Solway Firth. It would remain the northernmost frontier of the Roman Empire for most of their presence in Britain, apart from the period of 141 to 158, when they managed to push the frontier north to the Firth of Forth and build the Antonine Wall.

Although there are local exceptions, the topography of the British Isles can roughly provide a distinction between where the Romans exerted influence and where they did not gain ground. The lowland zone of what would later roughly become England was where the Romans enjoyed most control, and therefore they did not need to be present there as much as in border areas and places of unrest. The highland zone, characterised by pastoral land and hills taller than 200 metres, is mainly to the north of Scotland and west of Wales, and though the Romans did later gain control of the latter area, they were never as successful in implementing their culture and authority in these areas as in the

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43 Salway, *A History of Roman Britain*, 4-5.
lowlands, probably due to the relative isolation of the highland communities and the more challenging terrain.\textsuperscript{44}

**Parallel societies**

To the Roman Empire Britain remained a mysterious place where barbarous tribes presented opportunities to gain power and glory. The climate made it impossible to grow the crops which characterised the empire further south. It was to them, essentially, the end of the world. Still, the social, political and cultural impact of Roman features on Britain must not be underestimated. Being subject to control by a foreign force for over three hundred years, how many native British elements really survived the Roman occupation unaltered? Despite the large presence of Roman soldiers on the island, both in active duty and pensioned, the actual contact between the occupiers and the native rural communities does not appear to have been great. The soldiers, who themselves were of very mixed ethnicity from all corners the Roman Empire, predominantly stayed in forts and fortresses, most of which were in the highland zones of the west and the north, where the chances of rebellion were greatest. In these areas what Higham and Ryan have named a ‘frontier society’ developed.\textsuperscript{45} Here the military pressure was high, and as the camps developed into permanent settlements, markets or smaller towns known as *vici* brought the community into contact with the soldiers. These centres would, however, have been quite unique in the landscape, which mostly remained littered with native British settlements, farms and small-scale villages. Larger communities of Britons were seemingly extremely rare, and only a handful are known, such as Carmarthen – *Moridunum* – in western Wales, which probably acted as a provincial capital – *civitas* – for the British tribe of the *Demetae*. However, Carmarthen never grew to become a large town, though the Romans did for a shorter period of time occupy a fort there.\textsuperscript{46} In the lowlands the military presence was considerably smaller, and Roman settlement largely consisted of villas and walled towns, and though the towns here were more numerous and usually, something which to this day puzzles scholars, walled or fortified, the

\textsuperscript{46} John Wacher, *The Towns of Roman Britain* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1995).
uninterrupted Iron Age British inheritance of farmsteads remained the norm. The general *modus operandi* of the Romans was to allow local native leaders and tribes to continue administering an area as client kingdoms, which they could do due to the relatively sophistication of the tribal social system, most likely centred around the giving of tribute.\textsuperscript{47} Because of this the difference between pre-Roman and Roman rule might not have been that great to the average farming family, with the exception of access to Roman resources, goods and technology. Interestingly, the British farmers seem to have quite easily adopted Roman features, such as their more efficient plough.\textsuperscript{48} This is important to take notice of, as it is evidence of people in Britain being easily influenced by foreign powers, and comparable with the Anglo-Saxon situation.

Despite there being only limited contact between the native farming population and the Roman conquerors, the Romans seemed to rely quite heavily on taxation as well as recruitment of young British men to the army in other parts of the Empire. Despite this, the Britons were not considered citizens of the Roman Empire, but *peregrini* – foreigners – until the *Constitution Antoniniana* in 212, when the Emperor granted citizenship to nearly all inhabitants of the empire. However, while the Britons in the yearly years were not considered citizens of the empire, they were still subject to Roman law.\textsuperscript{49} Although the Britons seem to have been considered inferior in some respects – for instance they did not entertain the right to appeal to a higher authority than the governor in criminal cases, which Roman citizens did\textsuperscript{50} – and the members of the Roman army and the British farming population appear to have lived in parallel societies, there is also clear cut evidence for closer contact between the incomers and the native population. Most noticeable is perhaps marriage between foreigners and British women, famously illustrated by the elaborate grave of Regina, who was buried on Hadrian’s Wall. The inscription on her grave reads …

\textsuperscript{47} Kramer, *Britain and Ireland*, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{48} Wacher, *The Towns of Roman Britain*.
\textsuperscript{49} Korporowicz, “Roman Law in Roman Britain,” 134.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 137.
This was followed by an inscription summing this up in Palmyrene. The *Catuvellauni* was a Celtic tribe in south-eastern Britain, and that Regina was a freedwoman suggests that she was of high birth – from the elite layer of society. Her husband, Barates, is said to have been from Palmyra, which lies in today’s Syria, and of enough wealth to be able to create a monument in his wife’s memory. Whether Barates was a soldier or a merchant, it is easily argued that high-ranking Roman men married British high-ranking women, creating an elite of Romano-British mixed cultural heritages.

Traditionally it has been nigh on impossible to ascertain the ethnicity of remains when there is no inscription stating it, and only uncertain theories such as the Britons being of shorter stature at least to the Anglo-Saxons have been put forth. Other than that, eventual grave goods have usually been the determining factors for ethnicity. Newer isotope analyses allow for a broader interpretation, where the genetics of the deceased can be compared with the grave goods, though the technology still carries its restrictions in terms of certainty. The picture painted by these methods presents four different categories of burials: local both isotopically and in burial; foreign isotopically and in burial; local isotopically and foreign in burial; and foreign isotopically and local in burial.\(^{52}\) One should however be careful with such classifications, as what is considered “local”, “native” or “Celtic” does not always appear clearly in archaeology, and objects such as certain pots and brooches might not signify any adoption of British customs, but rather the availability or every-day use of such in that area.

Despite the problematic nature of the sources and available methods, however, Roman Britain was without a doubt a place where contact between the native inhabitants and people from other cultures was not an uncommon occurrence. The empire, stretching from today’s Iraq and Egypt in the east to present day Portugal and England in the west at its greatest, encompassed many ethnicities and different peoples. Life as a soldier was

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something which presented many opportunities for the young men of the empire, and possibilities of earning fame, glory, riches and social standing brought men from all corners of the realm into the military, and as a consequence often far away from their homelands. In Britain the presence of both individuals from the Mediterranean, the middle East and North Africa are known.\textsuperscript{53} Surprisingly, this type of movement does not appear to have been exclusive to male soldiers, though the majority certainly must have been so. Women, and even children, also travelled across the realm, as parts of family groups and settlers.\textsuperscript{54}

Other social classes were represented in Roman Britain in addition to soldiers and their families. Before the Roman conquest in 43, the Britons were in close contact with the continent through trade, and sources bear witness to them not being unfamiliar with foreign peoples, describing them as “friendly to strangers, having become used to them through the Cornish tin trade.”\textsuperscript{55} Being a part of the vast trading and infrastructural networks of the Roman Empire opened Britain to an even greater market, and invited contact with merchants from a larger geographical area. This shows us that the British people were exposed to a variety of languages and cultures – Germanic was just another in a long line. As the British were already accustomed and open to adopting features from a elite cultures like the Roman, it would have been easy to do so again when another one gained popularity or became purposeful.

Another important foreign presence, besides merchants and soldiers, were mercenaries hired by the Roman army from outside of the empire. Due to the sheer size of the realm, and their policy of conquest and expansion, they faced the problem of fighting battles in several different directions at once. To be able to deal with both internal conflicts and the many external threats, paying independent fighting bands from amongst the “barbarians” was crucial. In Britain both Angles and Saxons were employed by the Romans, and though scholars disagree as to how important this was for the migrations there in later times, it at least makes it evident that the Germanic people were both known to and knowledgeable about the British Isles previous to the \textit{Adventus Saxonum}.

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\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibid}, 536.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid}, 541.
\textsuperscript{55} Salway, \textit{A History of Roman Britain}, 39.
The many foreign ethnical groups represented in Medieval Britain are called diaspora communities. They were inherently different from the ‘host’ community, and through sources such as the laws it is easy to notice that they were very aware of the fact. The identity of a diaspora community is based on their common ancestry and culture. Ethnical groups moving to another part of the world are known to stick together, creating smaller communities within the ‘host’ community. One can thus imagine how the society was divided in ‘Roman’ and ‘British’ or ‘barbarian’ cultures. However, although the native inhabitants and the Roman visitors seem to have lived in two parallel societies, there was, as mentioned above, some interaction between them. Through intermarriage and second-generation immigrants another type of community emerged, where elements from the origin culture were blurred, and merged with the native cultures – the Romano-British. Sources reveal that Britons, especially those living in present day Wales, even several centuries after the end of Roman Britain still seem to have thought of themselves as heirs to the Roman Empire and referred to Latin as their language.

Social stratification

Even with the interactions between locals and foreigners one can find evidence for, there is disagreement about the degree to which the native inhabitants of Britannia were affected by Roman culture, and not only because of the diaspora mentality. Through the writings of Tacitus it is known that the Britons were encouraged to adopt their culture through participation in activities such as going to the baths, wearing Roman style dress and speaking Latin. Some historians have taken this to mean that the Roman culture was actively imposed upon most of the British population, resulting not in a continued British tradition, but the hybrid culture dubbed Romano-British. This was a theory most notably presented in *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, written by Francis Haverfield and published in 1912, which has continued influence today. The usage of Roman brooches, pots and coins has been seen as evidence for the British population adopting Roman.

56 Deckers and Tys, “Early Medieval Communities Around the North Sea”, 82.
57 Korporowicz, “Roman Law in Roman Britain,” 150.
58 Ibid, 13722.
culture, and the building of Roman style *villa* amongst the Celtic leaders has been especially pointed out.⁵⁹

Another aspect which adds a slightly different perspective from the one of cultural appropriation is that the local chieftains or petty kings, being subject to Roman law saw the opportunities and privileges which came with being Roman.⁶⁰ Prior to 212, as mentioned above, the Britons were not considered citizens of the Roman Empire, but the emperor was free to grant Roman privileges or even citizenship to whomever he saw fit.⁶¹ Such benefits might have been a contributing factor to British inhabitants wanting to display Roman characteristics, and also have provided an incentive for the higher classes of society to marry into Roman families. Theories such as this then presents the option of Romanisation as an active process and choice on the British side, rather than assimilation. Something similar might have occurred with the Anglo-Saxons as the ruling elite, prompting the Britons to attempt to assimilate themselves as much into the elite culture as possible in order to gain advantages.

More recent tendencies in the fields of history and archaeology, however, have focused on separating the elite from the masses when dealing with cultural change.⁶² A problem with both the archaeological and written sources is that the poor or common people rarely are represented. The written word would have remained reserved for the educated and the higher born, and the archaeology up until the 1980s mainly focused on excavating the Roman forts and cities rather than rural British homesteads.⁶³ Burials of people with a lower social standing tend not to be richly furnished, if grave goods are present at all. Though the distribution of material goods such as pottery from the far-flung sea born exchange network in the Roman Empire was so extensive that it reached the very bottom of society, there seems to be no grounds for believing in a “national” Romano-British culture where also common farming families adopted Roman speech and way of life.⁶⁴ The elite, however, wanting to elevate their position in society, married into...

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⁶¹ Korporowicz, “Roman Law in Roman Britain,” 134.
⁶² Eckardt et al., “People on the move in Roman Britain,” 535.
⁶³ Rogers, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain*, 63.
Roman families and started implementing Roman customs into their lives. This again resulted in the upper layers of society recognising themselves as heirs to the Roman legacy, both through a new elitist culture and probably familial bonds. This would also have set them apart from the general population, who would have remained distinctly British, only utilising the resources provided by their Roman over-lords, such as pottery and coins. In other words, society, with law codes, better infrastructure and technology, villas and vici and the larger markets made life somewhat different for the average Briton, but culturally the Romans might have had little impact on the general population.

The social structure during the Roman period in Britain as outlined above seems not to have survived the withdrawal of the imperial administrative units. Since some local British leaders survived as vassal-kings and were allowed to keep control of their native or tribal kingdoms, such as the king Cogidubnus of the British tribe the Regni around Chichester,\(^65\) it is not that difficult to imagine that some of this local government would have survived the collapse of Roman control or have reverted back to it as a consequence. The native British social system was one based on landholding, tribute and patron-client relationships, which might have persisted into the fifth and sixth centuries despite the upper layer of administration disappearing.\(^66\) This would have resulted in fragmented social hierarchy and political landscape, with varying degrees and characteristics of local rule. Importantly, this would have provided the incoming Germanic groups with easier access to political power than if there existed some kind of centralised government. In addition, such a politically fractioned and stratified society would explain the regional variations of the adventus Saxonum.

Other interesting features of post-Roman Britain are the economic and cultural changes which took place after the imperial withdrawal from the island. Prior to any typically Germanic features beginning to appear in any significant numbers the distinctly Romano-British features seem to have become scarce. The economy suffered, as one can see in the decline of pottery and monetary exchange of coins and coin minting, and several settlements were abandoned.\(^67\) Though there in some areas is evidence of British style

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\(^{66}\) Scull, “Approaches to Material Culture,” 73.

burials up to AD 500 and beyond, generally British archaeological evidence is very scarce after the 430s, and native British elements are throughout the Roman period all but impossible to identify without the Roman elements of pottery and coinage as signifiers. This leaves British style burials essentially invisible, and the absence of British elements in Anglo-Saxon burial grounds cannot be used as an argument against their presence. Another thing to consider, however, is the possibility of the Romano-British burials only representing the elite of Roman Britain. With the withdrawal of the Roman Empire the now Romanised but British local elite might have reverted to more native burial practices, possibly because of the limited Roman cultural material available, which is impossible to recover through archaeology. The archaeological evidence, however scarce, points to continued use of Romano-British cemeteries and settlements during the fifth, and in some instances, the sixth centuries, though the nature of the material culture changes. As argued by John Baker, this would also make it possible to argue for the British archaeological footprint only emerging when adopting features of Germanic culture. Discrepancies between the burial rites and the material culture might therefore also represent a British presence – though whether this is the result of intermarriage, acculturation, assimilation, British survival or slave-taking, is impossible to ascertain.

The Roman occupation of Britain laid the foundations for the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Roman period Britain was a culturally ambiguous society, with influences from and contact with many different cultures, and with the Roman culture and way of life as an ideal. The leading men and families were part of a Romano-British mixed nobility with close cultural, familial and political ties to the continent. As the Romans otherwise operated as a parallel society to the native farming population, the general public was for the most part not very affected by the presence of the empire, and the society was largely stratified. The Britons were used to contact with other cultures and languages, as well as another culture being considered more important and more worthy than their own. However, where the Romans had operated as a strong central government with acceptance of many different identities, the Anglo-Saxons were fractioned warrior groups

70 Baker, *Cultural Transition in the Chilterns and Essex Region*, 256.
with a focus on Germanic features as expressions of power. All of these aspects are important when considering how the Anglo-Saxons managed to gain control over the Britons as quickly and efficiently as they did.
Continental Anglo-Saxons

The topic focused on in this master’s thesis is undoubtedly cultural and ethnical in nature, being a question of what happened to one group of people when faced with another. Whether the emphasis and belief of identity and “race” was indeed prominent during this time will be addressed in a later chapter, but the fact remains that present-day understandings of the period will be coloured by modern perspectives on them – one culture disappeared, and another appeared. This chapter will focus on who the Anglo-Saxons might have been before they arrived in the British Isles in the Early Middle Ages, in order to be able to consider their background and the preconditions for the spread of their culture.

**Angles, Saxons and Jutes?**

Though ethnicity in itself is a very difficult topic,71 what is known to us is that the Anglo-Saxons were several Germanic tribes, probably from the very north of present-day Germany and southern Scandinavia. This is derived from both written and archaeological sources.72 They spoke different Germanic dialects and lived in a society which was seemingly built on strict hierarchical structures based on kinship ties and alliances.73 However, the term Germanic is problematic in that it’s very generic, usually referring to broad linguistic and cultural similarities. To differentiate the tribes from one another, and from other European tribes like the Franks and the Alamanii, is nigh on impossible. Many of the previously used methods, such as the identification of culturally unique material goods and burial practices, have in studies over the past few decades been proved insufficient and unprecise.74 Traditionally, perhaps originating from the writings of Tacitus as well as archaeological evidence, cremation has been seen as a common trait of

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71 Williams, “Remains of Pagan Saxondom?”, 64.
all Germanic culture. In the post-Roman period, however, this was not the exclusive way of burial, and both on the continent and in Britain inhumation was practiced, often accompanied by grave goods. Why this might have been so will be returned to in later chapters.

The different Germanic tribes spoke a mutually intelligible tongue despite there being regional differences. The sources recording their society are unfortunately not contemporary, nor unbiased, since they appear to not have kept any written records themselves. The best sources are therefore outsiders’ accounts, and they cannot be completely trusted. The writings of the Northumbrian monk Bede are some of the best insights there is into the continental Germanic societies, but he writes several centuries after they arrived in Britain, and he can therefore not be considered a completely trustworthy witness. The gist of his stories, however, are probably based in some truth, and are worth taking into consideration. What he does explain, amongst other things, is that the “Old Saxons” – e.g. the continental Saxons from whom the “new” Saxons in Britain had come – did not have any permanent kings but were ruled by an elite structure in peace times. When it came to war, one of the more prominent figures was chosen to lead them into battle, often by casting lots. Even if this is an account of the society of the Old Saxons during the eighth century, it is possible that this way of organising had a tradition stretching back to before the adventus Saxonum.

The high percentage of weapon finds in male inhumation graves both on the continent and in Britain in the post-Roman era has by some been interpreted as a general right to bear arms, and perhaps also defining of the status of a free man. Equipment such as knives and spears might have been part of a Germanic man’s hergewede, strictly personal belongings which would follow you into the afterlife. The quality and quantity of the items could have been representing the social, economic and legal status of the

person – the more specialised and rarer, the better. The same could be said for women, the female equivalent, *gerade*, being reflected in for example jewellery and dress customs.⁸⁰

The Germanic tribes of the continent are however not identical with what was later described as Anglo-Saxons. They were not one people, and they most likely did not operate with one common purpose. The question of where they really came from is one which still to this day invites debate. Bede writes in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* that the “newcomers […] came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes.”⁸¹ He then proceeded to outline exactly where the different tribes had immigrated from, and where they had settled: the Jutes (hailing from present-day Denmark in southern Scandinavia) were concentrated in Kent and the Isle of Wight and the corresponding mainland belonging to the kingdom of Wessex at the time of Bede; the East Saxons, South Saxons and West Saxons came from what was then known as

⁸⁰ Härke, “‘Warrior Graves’?,” 22-23.

*Figure 1. The North Sea Region after the adventus Saxonum according to Bede.*
“Old Saxony” in present day Northern Germany; and the East Angles, Middle Angles, Mercians and Northumbrians emigrated from *Angulus*, “the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes and the Saxons”82, which approximately corresponds with Schleswig-Holstein. Such a presentation, however, appears to be heavily influenced by how the kingdoms at the time of Bede’s writings were laid out, rather than based on actual historical fact.83

The trouble with the theory presented in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* does not appear to lie with the continental origins of the tribes, which archaeology attests to being somewhat accurate – pottery and metalwork found in the north of Germany and Southern Denmark bear enough of a resemblance with their Anglo-Saxon counterparts as to establish quite a strong connection with that part of the continent.84 The problem arises when a distinction between “Anglian” as opposed to “Saxon” or “Jutish” is attempted made. Traditionally, when the scholarly paradigm was dominated by culture history, it was believed that the existence of different ethnical tribes was self-evident, distinguishable through their own distinctive and unique material culture, which could be discovered through archaeology.85 Especially distinctions in brooches and burial practices have been considered evidence for one or the other, with cremation typically Anglian and inhumation Saxon,86 and for example cruciform and square headed brooches Anglian, saucer brooches typical of Saxon areas, and quoit-style brooches evidence of Jutish connections.87

Typological studies like these have been questioned in later years as new information, such as an increase in single finds due to heightened interest in metal detecting, has complicated the picture, and especially since the new theoretical approach

84 *Ibid*, 77.
of ‘processual’ archaeology entered the scene in the 1980s. The patterns which emerge, as shown by Tania Dickinson in her reassessment of saucer brooch finds in 2010, are of a much broader distribution. The saucer brooches, which one would expect to find in Saxon areas, appear all over southern Britain, also in places considered Anglian, as there for example is quite a large concentration of them in Mercia. An aspect of this, however, is that in another study from 2010, about brooch distribution in Kent, which was thought to be a Jutish kingdom, Laura McLean and Andrew Richardson discovered that there is a discrepancy between those brooches found in excavations and hoards and those from single finds. Cruciform brooches, which as mentioned above, was typical of Anglian regions in burials, are almost non-existent in the Anglo-Saxon burials recovered in Kent, but when looking at stray finds, they represent the largest single group. In contrast, annular brooches, which are quite common finds in burials, are underrepresented when it comes to single finds. Why this is so is still debated, but it is safe to say that the assignment of particular brooch types to represent specific ethnicities is no longer valid. The distribution patterns now reflect a diverse and fluid floration of brooches, with only broad regional patterns recognisable, and they are not direct evidence of ethnic groups.

This might also signify a fluidity within settlement in the early Medieval period, with a complex pattern of different immigrants scattered across the island. The artwork and craft styles found on Anglo-Saxon or contemporary artefacts reflect varied influences. Especially the presence of elements best paralleled by Frankish and Scandinavian artefacts are represented. The archaeological evidence certainly provides evidence for close connections, and these are regionally varied. In Kent the links are undoubtedly closest with Merovingian Gaul, and it has been argued by some that these

88 Flierman, Saxon Identities, 32.
90 Ibid, 190.
93 Hills, Origins of the English, 104.
are even older than the fifth century. When it comes to Scandinavia, East Anglia especially
demonstrate close material and social ties.\textsuperscript{95}

Elements of for example Frisian origin have also been suggested,\textsuperscript{96} and parallels
can be seen between burials in southern Holland and Anglo-Saxon Britain\textsuperscript{97} – this is to a
degree reflected in near-contemporary sources.\textsuperscript{98} Whether these connections reflect direct
presence of other ethnic groups than Angles, Saxons and Jutes, strong mercantile
connections, a general, fluid Germanic culture, or a broad inter-regional elite gift
exchange, is at present unclear. Perhaps all of the above were factors in the complex
picture that is Early Medieval Britain. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the
evidence of Frankish and Frisian presence in or connections with Britain was due to the
Anglo-Saxons either bringing with them their cultural expressions or the people
themselves, as they needed to cross their territories on their way to the island.\textsuperscript{99} I,
however, see no reason why groups of Frisians and Franks, and indeed other Germanic
peoples, could not be included in the Anglo-Saxon group – especially since the only
evidence restricting their origins to Anglia, Saxony and Jutland is a document written
several hundred years later.

One must simply, as of now, be content with characterising the Anglo-Saxons as
several different tribes and groups of people migrating to Britain from Northern Europe,
and these peoples as a whole can at best be termed Germanic. It was not before the eighth
century (roughly 250 years after they reportedly started arriving in Britain) in continental
Europe that these people were recorded collectively as Anglo-Saxons, in order to
distinguish them from the “Old Saxons”, who did not migrate and were still living in
Northern Europe. The Germanic inhabitants of Britain, when unrelated to the continental
Saxons, were for the most part called Angles, and not Saxons.\textsuperscript{100} Why this was so is

\textsuperscript{95} Hines, “The Origins of East Anglia in a North Sea Zone,” 73.
\textsuperscript{96} Williams, “Remains of Pagan Saxondom?”, 53.
\textsuperscript{97} Dijkstra and Koning, “‘All quiet on the Western Front?’,” 62.
\textsuperscript{98} Christopher Scull, “The \textit{adventus saxonum} from an Archaeological Point of View: How Many
Phases Were There?” Provisional pre-publication text, 2016: 3.
\textsuperscript{99} See for example: Herwig, \textit{The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples}; Fisher, \textit{The Anglo-
Saxon Age} c. 400-1042.
\textsuperscript{100} Asser, Alfred the Great, in \textit{Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred, and other
contemporary sources}, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth: The Penguin Press,
1983).
uncertain, but the fact that Mercia, an Anglian kingdom, was dominant during the eighth century, might explain that this was a generalisation.

In Britain, the first mention of Anglo-Saxons as one group came with King Alfred the Great, probably after he was made king of both the Anglian kingdom of Mercia as well as Saxon Wessex in 886. Then “all Angel cyn [...] þæt buton Deniscra monna hæfniende wæs,” – “all English people, who were not burdened with the Danes” – were subjected to his rule, according to the Welsh monk Asser’s 893 biography of Alfred.\(^{101}\) Though most inscriptions on coins and references made to Alfred previous to this titled him *Saxonum rex*, king of the Saxons, since the mid-880s he is increasingly proclaimed “king of the Angles and Saxons” or “king of the Anglo-Saxons”, written as *rex Anglorum et Saxonum* (Worcester 889), *Anglorum Saxonum rex* (Glastonbury 891, Abingdon ?), *Angol Saxonum rex* (Wilton 892, Malmesbury ?), and *Angulsaxonum rex* (Old Minster Winchester ?), the latter which was also found in six remaining charters.\(^{102}\) This bears witness to an idea of two separate ethnic groups within the British Isles, but it is uncertain whether this was a true representation of the political landscape, a conscious effort to unite the people against the Danes, or something else entirely. The origin of the idea of Britain as being inhabited by Angles and Saxons is uncertain. What is clear to us is that Anglo-Saxon kings started claiming descent from continental Germanic ancestors, legitimising their claim to the throne through genealogies and ancestries going back to the pagan gods. This is evident through their regnal lists and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, as well as Bede’s comments to Gildas’ origin story: “[Hengist and Horsa] were the sons of Whitgisl, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent”.\(^{103}\) By the time Bede was writing in the eighth century, the idea of a common Germanic heritage creating an Anglo-Saxon people was apparent.\(^{104}\) This perception was of such a strong character that the people in Britain, having been Christianised and thus believed themselves above the “pagan” or


\(^{102}\) *Alfred the Great*, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge.


“barbarian” people of the world, actually felt a responsibility to their continental origins, and sent missionaries there to preach the word of God.\textsuperscript{105} 

\textit{Germanic people in Roman Britain} 

The Germanic tribes on the continent were in contact with the Roman Empire in different ways. Not only were they oftentimes employed in their armies, but they also raided, fought and traded with them – the occurrence of some Germanic people being employed in the Roman army did not by any means signify that the tribes of northern Europe were allies of the Empire. The groups and individuals which were hired as mercenaries appear to have done this on their own incentive, and not as a collective group. The “barbarians” of the continental North were as large a problem to Rome as were the Picts in Britain, and the Persians, Huns, Slavs, Goths, Arabs and all the other peoples on the outside of the Roman Empire daring to fight back or trying to gain riches and control by attacking their vast neighbour. In addition to being a threat to the mainland troops around the Rhine, the Saxons, to use the term applied to them by the Romans, also appeared as pirates, pillaging the shores of the Empire by ship as early as 286.\textsuperscript{106} It has traditionally been thought that the threat posed by the Saxons at sea was the cause of large-scale construction of forts along the shore of both mainland Gaul and Britain during the third century especially. In Britain the south-eastern coast especially was fortified, and due to one reference in a non-contemporary source, possibly from the fifth century, of a \textit{ Comes Litoris Saxonici per Britanniam}, or Count of the Saxon Shore in Britain, the forts became described as Saxon Shore Forts, thought to have been protecting Britain and Gaul against extensive raiding by seaborne Saxons.\textsuperscript{107} 

The reason behind the construction of these forts have, however, been contested by scholars during the last few decades. Looking at the contemporary sources, references to Saxon piracy on the south-eastern coast of Britain during the third century, perhaps the most common and widely accepted interpretation, is almost non-existent, with most of the problems coming from Irish or Pictish raiders, or the Franks from and in the

\textsuperscript{105} Flierman, \textit{Saxon Identities}, 94.  
\textsuperscript{106} Herwig, \textit{The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples}, 42.  
\textsuperscript{107} Korprowicz, “Roman Law in Roman Britain,” 140.
Possibilities of the forts being constructed not, as previously believed, as protection against Germanic pirates, but rather as nodal points and commercial centres – since a great number of them developed *vici* – connecting the mainland of Roman Gaul and the island of Britain have gained popularity, and arguments such as distance, as well as the lack of historical evidence, make it seem less likely that the Saxons actually were the seafaring terrors later legacy has made them out to be.

The forts constructed in the north of Britain were of another character than those in the south-east. They were constructed at a later date, during the fourth century, and though they were not as numerous or solid as their southern counterparts, the archaeology from these sites clearly reveal that they were in fact attacked. The possibility of pirate activity here coming from people based north of the Rhine also makes more sense, as they are geographically much closer to this area. The idea that the Saxons of the third century bypassed the relatively unprotected north and sailed a greater distance in order to attack a heavily militarised and fortified south is simply inconceivable. In addition to this, if the attested raids on northern Britain started in the fourth century, they appear to have begun at a time when the Roman Empire was weakened, which is important to note with regards to the *adventus Saxonum*. The previously general tendency to see these forts as having a common character and purpose must be considered both a hindrance to the understanding of the period, as well as overly simplified.

An alternative explanation which has been presented for the naming of both sides of the English Channel as *litus Saxonicum* – the Saxon Coast – is that instead of the Saxons committing piracy in the area, they might have settled there. This interpretation has existed for several centuries, but since the mid-nineteenth century it has been overshadowed by the ideal of the Anglo-Saxons as a fierce warrior people, born out of the Victorian surge of patriotism. One must be careful, though, not to simply choose to believe the argument which best fits into one’s theory. The fact remains that the only near-contemporary source to the ideas of a ‘Saxon Shore’, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, is ambiguous concerning both who the author is and when it was written, as well as the only existing versions are much later that the text itself claims to be, and as such cannot without

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109 Ibid, 84.
reservations be considered credible.\textsuperscript{111} Despite all the problems in connection with the idea of Saxon Shore forts built primarily as defences against Saxon pirates, this theory is still widespread and generally agreed upon.\textsuperscript{112} The only conclusion one can draw from the evidence is that it is impossible at present to establish the nature of the Saxon Shore Forts, but it seems unlikely that Germanic people regularly attacked Britain before the fifth century, their raiding previous to this appearing to be constricted to the continent.

There is one incident, however, where it is clear that Saxons could, and did, invade the island of Britain in order to plunder and loot. Through the Roman Ammianus Marcellinus, writing from the eastern part of the empire a generation later, events taking place in 367 – though the validity of this date is debated – are known to us.\textsuperscript{113} He tells the story of a Roman army weakened by losses elsewhere in the realm being attacked simultaneously and at different locations on both sides of the Channel by groups of different origin and ethnicity. This operation, called the “great” or the “barbarian” conspiracy, was quite successful, causing great damage to the Roman army and economy both in Britain and Gaul. The tribes reportedly taking place in the attack were Picts, \textit{Scotti} (an Irish tribe, only later settling in Scotland), \textit{Attacotti} (a possibly British tribe of unknown location) and deserters from the Roman army itself from the islands, and from the continent the Franks and Saxons.\textsuperscript{114} That these attacks seemingly were coordinated between the “barbarian” tribes across the sea bears testament to the level of contact possible to them. They must have been able to communicate quite well, as well as react quickly and maintain connections. This action on their behalf was probably born out of opportunity, the internal unrest in the Roman ranks and weakened state of the defences making it possible for outsiders to attack.

The Anglo-Saxon culture which was to all but eradicate the evidence of British and Roman features in a matter of half a century has close links with northern Germany and southern Scandinavia. It was undoubtedly Germanic in character, despite it being very difficult to ascertain whether the immigrants to Britain during the fifth century were

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 73-74.
\textsuperscript{112} See for example: Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}.
\textsuperscript{113} James E. Fraser, \textit{From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 55-56.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, op. cit.
actually groups of Angles, Saxons or Jutes, or Franks, Frisians or others. Most likely people from all these sister cultures were part of the *adventus Saxonum*. What is important to note is however their knowledge of Roman Britain. Though extensive contact between the different political groups the North Sea region during the early Middle Ages was very much intertwined and the different fractions very much knowledgeable about each other.
An *adventus Saxonum*?

Apparently coinciding with and coming in the wake of the weakening of the western Roman Empire in the fourth century, groups of Germanic warriors began appearing in the British Isles from the fifth century onwards. As the research question of this thesis has to do with how these Anglo-Saxon groups managed to ascertain their political and cultural superiority over the existing population as quickly and efficiently as they did, it is imperative to look at how the actual process of taking over the island might have occurred. In this chapter the nature of the *adventus Saxonum* is examined through the only sources which provide any sort of concrete evidence about this specific phenomenon rather than the whole general period – the written sources. What can they tell us about the way in which the Anglo-Saxons arrived and treated the British population?

The wave of immigration dubbed the *adventus Saxonum* after the writings of the Venerable Bede, has been subject to historical writings of both the sixth, eight and seventeenth centuries, to mention a few. Detailed, in-depth study of the period, however, did not become interesting to scholars until the nineteenth century, and for the century and half after that, the tendency, according to Donald White, was to view the *adventus Saxonum* and subsequent colonisation in a nationalistic light – either in favour of romanticising pre-conquest Britain, or the Anglo-Saxon achievements.\[115\] Since then there have been many different approaches and theories about the nature of the so-called invasion. Jürgen Kramer presents three different ones in his book *Britain and Ireland: A Concise History*: either the Anglo-Saxons were thought to have been peacefully invited to settle in Britain as whole families; deliberately conquered the land to drive away the inhabitants; or invited by the British people as mercenaries who later settled there.\[116\] Though the earliest historians in the field preferred to dismiss the few written sources as fiction and folk-lore, the third theory – a belief formed and defended by Victorian historians which clearly borrows directly from such a source – has traditionally been domineering. The idea was that the Anglo-Saxons forcefully drove the existing population west and northwards by committing genocide and burning down farms and

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homesteads, successfully “obliterate[ing] most traces of Romano-British civilization.”

Though the early scholars disagreed about the extent to trust the written sources – from discarding them utterly to trusting every word – next to none doubted this third hypothesis which White has dubbed the “catastrophic invasion theory”. The more evidence was presented, the more the lack of British or Roman features reinforced the belief that the only way there could have been this clear a break – as opposed to a gradual change or development – was through a sudden, destructive invasion that left no one to produce, use or wear the elements. Next to none believed in a continued Romano-British survival or presence, such as this thesis argues in favour of.

The total obliteration of Celtic presence, however, seems to be entirely based on one specific source with dubious historicity – the British monk Gildas’ sixth century *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain). Had this manuscript been lost to history, like presumably so many others have been, the evidence left to us would no doubt point to inarguably different scenarios. The reason this one source has been lent trust to the degree it has is probably due to the fact that the written evidence on a whole for the early Middle Ages is underwhelming, and the *adventus Saxonum* might have become subject to historical writing, and indeed speculation, already by Gildas’ time. The fact that one of the most revered historians of the Middle Ages, the Venerable Bede, relied heavily on the account found in *De Excidio* seems to have led to its theory being presented almost as first-hand evidence ever since the eighth century.

The essence of the version presented therein is that the Britons, fearing attacks from the Picts in the north, “invited” Saxons to come to the island and help defeat their enemies. The Saxons, whether due to dismay with payment, or as destined, divine punishment against the Britons, proceeded to slaughter their hosts, taking control over the island “from sea to sea”. The simplified version of these events, presented as a single, high-scale invading force flooding the island and taking over, has however in more recent times been proved to be highly misleading. Other evidence such as poetry and Easter Annals stemming from the following centuries reveal that the Anglo-Saxons

118 Ibid, 593.
battled the Britons – and indeed other Anglo-Saxon groups – fiercely for quite a long time, both gaining and losing control. Despite this, the catastrophic invasion theory seems to still be domineering the general conception outside of scholarly circles.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that other theories, though they had been present for a longer time, were lent increasing support, and the idea of a more gradual and nuanced process of migration gained popularity.\(^\text{121}\) This is due to newer evidence hinting at for example continuity instead of abandonment at settlement sites – which will be returned to later in this thesis as it supports its theory of one elite culture replacing another and inheriting many of its features. These more nuanced theories can however also present a problem. Their diversity makes it difficult to reconcile them into one story line, and often they are just listed as several possibilities or different purposes. An example of this is how the BBC present the *adventus Saxonum* to school children in their online history resources. Under the headline “Find out why the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain. Did they all come for the same reason?” four different scenarios are suggested. Either the Anglo-Saxons came to fight, farm, find new homes or they were “invited”.\(^\text{122}\) To make all of these theories fit into the same story line, it is easy to just state that some people came for one reason and some for another. However, that all of these different scenarios were at play at once seems unlikely, especially in the initial phase. Kramer’s approach, to list the different theories and in essence say that “we don’t know what is correct”, is perhaps the most honest way of presenting the *adventus Saxonum* and is one used by many today.\(^\text{123}\) On the other hand, it does the field of history no good to abandon such an important question altogether and settle for not knowing. One should at least attempt to reconcile the different evidence into a working hypothesis.

Since the mid-twentieth century many lesser known theories have also been presented, especially when it comes to chronology and dating. Some, such as Leslie Alcock, Joe Allard and Richard North, identify several possible waves and stages of Germanic settlement, which are not entirely compatible with the traditional large-scale invasion story.\(^\text{124}\) One such element is the presence of Germanic people in Britain much earlier than the mid-fifth century, when the *adventus Saxonum* is thought to have begun.

\(^\text{121}\) White, “Changing Views of the Adventus Saxonum”, 593.
\(^\text{122}\) BBC Bitesize, “When did the Anglo-Saxons come to Britain?”.
\(^\text{123}\) Kramer, *Britain and Ireland*, 25.
These theories will be very interesting to look at in connection with their potential cultural impacts. The hypothesis fronted in this thesis is that the invasion happened more gradually, in different stages, and less drastically than earlier believed, although at the same time not as completely peacefully as some may have suggested.\textsuperscript{125}

\textit{De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae}

Turning to the sources which form the basis of the different theories it is easy to see why there is such disagreement between historians. The problems one encounters when using Gildas’ \textit{De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae}, the most contemporary document, as a historical source are many. The work is in reality an extremely long sermon, whose theme or purpose was to criticise the contemporaries and predecessors of Gildas for their bad decisions and their Godlessness. Gildas, being of Romano-British descent, appears very prejudiced against the Anglo-Saxons, which is understandable from a perspective where his ancestors and their contemporaries might have been forcefully displaced, killed or relieved of their political powers. However, writing only a generation later than when the first large-scale Anglo-Saxon invasions are thought to have occurred, the stories and memories would have been quite fresh to society. This proximity in time makes the \textit{Excidio Britanniae} one of the most significant sources, despite its controversial content.

The chain of events was according to Gildas that, after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire from the British Isles, the neighbouring tribes of Picts, Scots (Irishmen) and pagan Britons which had been kept somewhat at bay by the Roman military began heavily raiding and pillaging the unprotected lowland areas. As a reaction to this, Gildas claimed that the following happened:

\begin{quote}
“Then all the counsellors, together with that proud tyrant Gurthrigern [Vortigern], the British king, were so blinded, that, as a protection to their country, they sealed its doom by inviting in among them (like wolves into the sheep-fold), the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful both to God and men, to repel the invasions of the northern nations.”\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

This in itself is not an unlikely story. Employing mercenaries from one people to protect against the attacks of another appears to have been a common strategy during the Antique

\textsuperscript{125} See for example: J. M. Kemble, \textit{The Saxons in England} (1849); Kramer, \textit{Britain and Ireland}, 25.

\textsuperscript{126} Gildas, \textit{De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae}, Section 22.
and Middle Ages. Examples of this are for instance the various ways the Vikings engaged with the Irish, Scots and British peoples they encountered when they arrived a few centuries later. Vikings mercenaries especially in Ireland were hired by local kings in order to fend off competing neighbours.\(^\text{127}\) Interestingly, the ethnic perspective does not appear to have been much of a hindrance in cases such as these, and certainly not enough to prevent alliances from forming. This, as we shall see, was also something which was done with the Anglo-Saxons, some of whom probably had been employed in Britain by the Roman army. If this is true, then the Britons might well have turned to the Anglo-Saxons for help when faced with the impossible task of protecting themselves without the aid of the Roman army, which had been a constant presence on the island for centuries.

What follows of Gildas’ account, however, is all but impossible to prove or discard. He claims that the Saxon warriors arrived already planning to turn on their employers and used every opportunity to complain about their wages and threaten to overrun the Britons. The first people who arrived were there, according to the \textit{Excidio Britanniae}, in order to test the waters and report back to the mother-land, wherefrom more people were to be sent over to plunder for a hundred and fifty years, before subsequently occupying it for the same amount of time.\(^\text{128}\) Gildas describes them as appearing on the eastern side of the island in three \textit{cyuls}, ships of war, but does not name any individuals. This is significant when later comparing this work to the writings of Bede. These descriptions are impossible to use with any certainty when creating a history of the \textit{adventus Saxonum}. Gildas was not under any circumstances a historian, and much of the information found within the \textit{Excidio Britanniae} does not add up with either archaeological or other written sources, especially when it comes to dates and years.

The work is, as earlier mentioned, written as a sermon, Gildas’ goal being to condemn the sins of his forefathers and contemporary British rulers, and essentially place blame at the same time as explaining the events which led up to his present in light of God’s will. To do this he uses a lot of examples from the Bible and present the actions of the Anglo-Saxons as God’s punishment of Britons too weak in their belief. Being a Briton himself, and looking at the derogatory language he uses when referring to the Anglo-

\(^{128}\) Gildas, \textit{De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae}, section 23.
Saxons, calling their actions poisonous and likening them to predatory animals such dogs, wolves and lions, one cannot believe that Gildas was in any way an objective source. The utter destruction he describes is certainly exaggerated, there being no evidence for this in the archaeological material.

The problems connected with Gildas and the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* has prompted some historians to completely disregard him as fictitious.\(^1\) His importance to the historical writings about the *adventus Saxonum* is not, however, to be disregarded. In addition to being the earliest source available to us, he also appears to have been the main source used by the Venerable Bede, whose writings on the coming of the Anglo-Saxons would become influential to many generations of historians, his accounts essentially shaping the perception of the *adventus Saxonum* even to this day, and earning him the honour of often being referred to as the “father of English history.” The *Excidio Britanniae* contains a great deal of the elements which traditionally characterise the historical beliefs about the Anglo-Saxon invasion, these ideas being reinforced by other works, like Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, who were using Gildas as their primary source. Importantly, the belief of a totally displaced and obliterated British presence in what was later to become England following the Anglo-Saxon migrations seems to stem from this work – and is most certainly an exaggeration. Gildas also claims that the Saxons were so successful that they invaded the whole island, managing to get as far as the Irish Sea, destroying everything in their way:

“For the fire of vengeance, justly kindled by former crimes, spread from sea to sea, fed by the hands of our foes in the east, and did not cease, until, destroying the neighbouring towns and lands, it reached the other side of the island, and dipped its red and savage tongue in the western ocean.”\(^2\)

If this did indeed happen, the Anglo-Saxons evidently did not manage to keep control of the places which they conquered, since Britons continued to control the western areas for many centuries after this, especially the areas in present-day Wales and Cornwall. The reasons for many of the theories presented by Gildas as being in direct contrast to other evidence, even though he wrote but a generation after the occurrences were supposed to have taken place, might have to do with the chaotic nature which must have characterised

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\(^{2}\) Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, section 24.
the situation of the fifth and sixth centuries in Britain. If the elite population consisted of, as I believe, people of a mixed Romano-British culture and Christian beliefs, they must have made up at the very least most of the learned people in the island, being responsible for the making of history and the writing down of important events. That no such records exist from the post-Roman period might suggest that the Anglo-Saxons did indeed destroy the people in such positions, along with their property, and drove them from their homes or killed them. On the other hand, it could also point to the swiftness of the invasion, leaving no time for detailed records of the changes. The *Excidio Britanniae* gives the impression of all British people being slaughtered and all their settlements destroyed, but, as previously stated, this is certainly not reflected in the archaeological material. What Gildas might have done, however, is disregard the rural British population as inconsequential, being of a lower status and perhaps also of an entirely different class. This fits very well with them not being part of a Romano-British culture, which was reserved for the elite, and distinct from the general population. The Romano-British elite, which Gildas himself was part of, might very well have been subjected to Anglo-Saxon opposition to such a degree as being experienced as very dramatic and catastrophic. In this way, by separating Gildas’ “British” group from the common people, one can incorporate his writings with the other existing evidence, which point to a continuation of settlement and farming, in accordance with the theories presented in this thesis – that the common population mostly remained unscathed, but the Anglo-Saxon culture replacing the Romano-British as the ideal on political and cultural levels.

When discussing the credibility of Gildas, one cannot forget the purpose of the *Excidio Britanniae*, which was to cast judgement and in a forceful and convincing way condemn the actions of historical and contemporary characters. To do this it is evident that some events would have to be highlighted and exaggerated, while others left out. With the wrath of God being the explanatory reason behind the events, the *Excidio Britanniae* shares many likenesses with other Medieval texts seeking to make sense of losses against non-Christians. For example, the writings of the Viking raid on Lindisfarne in 793 come to mind as sharing similarities, where the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports forewarnings such as “immense flashes of lightening and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons
were seen flying in the air,“131 and the letters from Alcuin of York to the Northumbrian king Æthelred and Higbald, the Bishop of Lindisfarne, revealing his belief that this was divine punishment for the sins of the English such as vanity and idolisation of Viking traders.132 Another important element to consider is that if the situation was as speculated about above, then the lack of sources and possible uncertainty of the first hand witnesses of a confusing and chaotic period might have contributed to speculation and half-formed ideas already at the time of the events, and as a consequence the adventus Saxonum might have been subjected to unreliability of historical and legendary writing already by the time of Gildas.

**Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum**

As earlier mentioned, the one person who has probably contributed the most to the historical interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon migration is the Northumbrian monk Bede. He lived and worked at the monastery Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in the late seventh to early eighth century. His most famous work *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Ecclesiastical history of the English people, has almost become regarded as that of true and first-hand evidence by some historians. There are, however, also questions regarding the writings of Bede. His primary source was most certainly Gildas’ *Excidio Britanniae*, which has already been called into question above. Writing much closer in time to the actual events than one does today, he must also have had access to other sources, and there is a general consensus that the monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow was very well stocked, and that Bede had many scholarly and royal contacts. By assuming that there must have existed plenty of sources connected with the adventus Saxonum to which he had access to, some scholars have argued that Bede’s ready acceptance of Gildas’ account signifies a general consensus of these chains of events in eighth century scholarly circles. In other words, if there existed many different sources which Bede knew of, and his writings still largely match those of Gildas, then the other sources must also have done so.133 However, if the situation during the late fifth and sixth centuries was as theorised

in this thesis, with large portions of the learned elite uprooted or disturbed and the situation chaotic and confused, the sources available might have been fragmented, or even non-existent or destroyed. With the Germanic invaders not having a written culture, but rather an oral one, there would not have been many sources to be found from the period in question at all, and Bede might have had to rely on the only more or less complete written account he was able to find – that of Gildas in *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*.

Bede must, however, have relied on more than just the *Excidio Britanniae* in his work. Through the mentions of new information not found in any earlier sources, one can be certain that he had access to accounts such as oral origin legends and written royal genealogies from the different kingdoms in Britain in the seventh and eighth century. The trustworthiness of these origin stories, however, is very questionable. Bede writes in *Historia ecclesiastica* that the…

“first leaders [of the Angles] are said to have been two brothers, Hengist and Horsa. Horsa was afterwards killed in battle by the Britons, and in the eastern part of Kent there is still a monument bearing his name. They were sons of Wihtgisl, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent.”

This origin story as here presented cannot really be considered anything but fiction. Woden was, as known, the leader of the pagan Gods, and as such must represent the attempt of royal lines to establish themselves as superior to the common population by being descended from the deities. These stories were almost certainly later constructions of emerging kingdoms and their attempt to legitimise their elevated positions and right to rule. Faced at this time with the threat of the Vikings, the origin stories tracing back to the same source might also have been an attempt to create or strengthen the idea of unity, nations and fellowship. This is evident from most all of the preserved genealogies of Anglo-Saxon royal families going back to Woden. The part about Hengist and Horsa seems to be an attempt at making the legendary origin stories fit into the version of Gildas, where three war ships are described as being the beginning of the Germanic arrivals,

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which in itself is closely connected with other common origin myths of a small number
of ships arriving with the founding fathers and a prophecy.\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{cccc}
Wecta & Wægdæg & Bældæg & Wihtlæg \\
Witta & Sigegar & Brand & Wermund \\
Wihtgisl & Swæfdæg & Alloc & Offa \\
Hengist & Sigegeat & Angewit & Frewine \\
Octa & Sæfald & Ingwy & Wig \\
Eormenric & Sæfugl & Esa & Gewis \\
Æthelberht & Westerfalca & Eoppa & Angletheow \\
Eadbald & Wilgil & Ida & Eomer \\
Ærcenberht & Uxfre & Æthelric & Ic\l
Ecgberht & Yffe & Æthelfrith & Esla \\
Whtred & Ælle & Oowy & Esla \\

Kent & Northumbria I & Northumbria II & Wessex \\

c & & & \\

c

\end{tabular}
\caption{A possible genealogy of some of the Anglo-Saxon royal houses going back to
Woden, and further, based on the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Historia ecclesiastica. Note
the inclusion of Hengist, Cerdic and Icel, legendary founding fathers in origin myths.}
\end{figure}

Another problem one encounters when reading Bede’s account of the \textit{adventus Saxonum},
is that it actually changes over time and, seemingly, with the purpose of his writings.
Especially when it comes to dating, his earlier historical work called the \textit{Greater
Chronicle}, which acted as chapter 66 of his \textit{De temporum ratione}, The Reckoning of
Time, is inconsistent with \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}. In addition, the way in which he portrays
the nature of the migration is that of smaller groups of warriors in the Greater Chronicle,
whilst in the Ecclesiastical History it appears more along the lines of a large-scale
invasion. This is connected with Bede’s attempt at explaining the large Germanic
presence of his own days and the way they were distributed throughout the island. He

\textsuperscript{136} Barbara Yorke, “Anglo-Saxon Origin Legends,” in \textit{Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters:
Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks}, eds. J. Barrow and A. Wareham (Aldershot: Ashgate,
appears to have attempted to match the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms he knew from his own time to that of geographical continental origins – another way of creating a history and legitimacy for the English royal houses.

This seems to suggest that knowledge of where they came from was something which the Anglo-Saxons kingdoms attempted to regain and re-establish from what little bits and pieces were known to them, or indeed manipulate and change to fit their needs. A common history is central to unified kingdoms, and tracing ancestry and history back to a mutual, mythical common origin is something almost defining of nations, and which continued throughout the ages, for example with the historical views of historicism and nationalism in the 1800s, or the Swedish numbering of kings, still today dependent on mythical and legendary figures. As such the sources dealing with origin stories might be regarded more as political remains of the emergence of kingdoms rather than accurate first-hand knowledge, though one cannot, of course, disregard the possibility of them being based on elements of truth. In any case it is important to note that having a Germanic identity was extremely important to the Anglo-Saxon elite families, and the British elements appear to have been downplayed or disregarded, despite many of the origin stories and royal names being Celtic in origin (this will be returned to later in this thesis).

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

Other than adding a few more details to the story, Bede does not stray far from Gildas’ story. The third source initially mentioned as the last of the main historical sources for the *adventus Saxonum*, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, also seems to have based its early contents on the British monk’s writings, though also through Bede. The nature of this work is somewhat different than those of Gildas and Bede. Where the *Excidio Britanniae* was intended as a sermon or accusation and the *Historia ecclesiastica* a historical work – albeit politically bent and inspired – the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was in fact a number of annals, whose intent was to be updated year by year with important happenings and incidents, such as the deaths of kings and the fighting of battles etc. The first, original chronicle was probably begun at the behest of king Alfred the Great at his court in Wessex

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in the late ninth century. The chronicle was then copied and distributed to different monasteries throughout England to be continuously updated there. The annals were continued for quite a long time, the Peterborough Chronicle even being updated as late as 1154. This separation in time and geography made the different manuscripts include specific and unique entries, and the study of these can be both exhausting and interesting. To us, however, its import relies on the fact that although the contemporary notation was begun in the ninth century the entries go back to the year 60 BC. The entries between that first one and the contemporary ones, almost certainly from the 890s, are therefore of a historical nature, and the scribes must have used existing sources in order to compile them and attempt to put them into a chronological, historical and continuous account. The first mention of the Germanic migration in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is from the year 449, which appears to be almost entirely copied from Bede’s Ecclesiastical History.

Although the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is largely dependent on Bede and Gildas for the entries of the fifth and sixth centuries, it also includes some information not found in any of the previously mentioned sources. These appear to be origin stories of the other royal houses, such as the kingdom of Wessex – unsurprisingly, as the Chronicle is thought to have originated from there. Of special interest to the questions asked in this thesis, however, are the annotation which beginning in AD 495, which reportedly marks the arrival of the founding fathers of the West Saxon dynasty, Cerdic and his son Cynric. This passage, when compared with later ones, such as that of AD 611, clearly shows us that the chronology is extremely muddled. In AD 611 Cynegils, said to be the son of Ceol, son of Cutha, son of Cynric, son of Cerdic, is written as succeeding to the throne of Wessex. The problem clearly appears when comparing this with the 495 entry:

“A.D. 495. This year came two leaders into Britain, Cerdic and Cynric his son, with five ships, at a place that is called Cerdic's-ore. And they fought with the Welsh the same day. Then he died, and his son Cynric succeeded to the government, and held it six and twenty winters. Then he died; and Ceawlin, his son, succeeded, who reigned seventeen years. Then he died; and Ceol succeeded to the government, and reigned five years. When he died, Ceolwulf, his brother, succeeded, and reigned seventeen years. Their kin goeth to Cerdic. Then succeeded Cynegils, Ceolwulf's brother's son, to the kingdom; and reigned one and thirty winters.”

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138 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, entry for the year of 495.
If one tries to use the years provided within this entry for figuring out the chronology, and 495 as the starting point, it soon becomes obvious that things do not add up. If Cynric became king in 495, that is if indeed the mysterious year of “then” signifies the same time as earlier stated, he would have been king until 521, when Ceawlin succeeded him. Ceol would then have been made king in 538, Ceolwulf in 543 and finally Cynegils in 560. This is about fifty years earlier than 611, when he is supposed to have started his reign. If one does it the other way around, however, Cynric’s reign does not begin before 546, over fifty years after he was supposed to have arrived. In addition, other sources provide different dates, and there are therefore a multitude of possible time periods. The studies of these early dynasties are quite extensive, and no consensus on the matter has been made to this day and will also likely not be reached any time soon. Other problems with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are connected to the genealogy itself, which is not consistent. For example, in the 676 entry, Cynegils is said to be the son of Ceolwulf, and not Ceol.

Even more interesting than the problems facing the chronology and genealogy, which affect the credibility of the source, is the nature of the names of the historical (or mythical) figures themselves. For example, Cerdic, Ceawlin and Cenwalh (son of Cynegils) all appear to be anglicisations of Celtic British names. The possibilities this opens up are incredible but can only be subject to speculation. Were these figures actually British, who married or otherwise merged with Saxon migrants? Were they not amongst the first to arrive – which they in any case in all probability were not, considering the chronology – but rather descendants of Germanic immigrants taking British wives, and as such representative of an Anglo-British elite? Another possibility is that the British legends and history somehow got tangled up with the Anglo-Saxon ones, but this also points towards a degree of interaction between them – which would support the theory argued for in this thesis, that the British elite abandoned or downplayed their own culture in favour of the Anglo-Saxon elite culture.

Other names such as those of Hengist and Horsa, founding brothers of Jutish Kent, literally translating to stallion and horse, are probably mythical figures, in this case possibly remnants of a long Indo-European tradition of worshipping the horse. Cynric

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139 Ibid, op. cit.
directly translates to “kingdom” and as such, although the name is clearly Germanic, might also look like the fabrication of a founding father. Another interesting theory is that these origin stories are attempts at creating a linear and geographical explanation for the political climate at the time the annals were written. This could have been done by trying to explain existing Celtic or Latin place names as eponyms of their own founding fathers, and as such legitimising their claims to the areas: a person named “Port” was imagined as having arrived in Portsmouth, but rather than being named after its founder, portus is the Latin word for harbour. Another example of this is the name Wihtgar, thought to be modelled after Wihtgara, meaning “the people of Wight”. The early name for the people later known as the West Saxons was the Gewisse, and as such naming of the nephew of Cerdic and founder of the West Saxon dynasty Wihtgar might have been an attempt at legitimising the West Saxon influence on the Isle of Wight. Whether one of these theories comes close to the actual proceedings, or if there is an entirely different explanation, one cannot ignore that there must have been some interaction between Anglo-Saxons and Britons in order for British names to have become those of Anglo-Saxon historical and/or legendary characters in their origin stories. This is highlighted by the fact that the Germanic connections appear to have been strong and expressing one’s continental ancestry and heritage would become very important to the Anglo-Saxons in the years to come.

There are however several examples of seemingly purely Anglo-Saxon historical kings who carry names signifying British connections. The name of the first Christian king of Sussex, Æthelwealh, translates to “noble Briton” or “noble foreigner”, and the name of his West Saxon rival Cædwalla is an anglicisation of the Welsh name Cadwallon. As seen in the laws laid down by Cædwalla’s successor to the West Saxon throne, Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694.

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144 Barbara Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms of early Anglo-Saxon England (London and New York: Routledge, 1990): 138-9. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694. Æthelwealh, Cædwalla and Ine are all mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see for example entries for the years of AD 661, 685 and 694.
associating them with the British backgrounds, even as they had meticulous genealogies proclaiming their direct descents from continental Germanic forefathers. There is no answer to why this was so, but intermarriage between Anglo-Saxon rulers and British noble women, or Anglo-Saxon kings with mistresses of British descent, might provide an explanation. Perhaps were these names also results of the convergence of petty British kingdoms or Anglo-Saxon overlords.\textsuperscript{146} In such cases where the ruler of an Anglo-Saxon tribe or kingdom had British heritage or connections, it might have been even more important to prove one’s Germanic roots through genealogies, traditions and material culture. This would provide an explanation for why the material culture would change so radically over the course of just a few years, and also for the increase of the finds.

\textit{Other written sources}\n
There are a few other medieval texts which can be said to be related to, or which mention, the early Anglo-Saxons, but these are all on a much smaller scale than Gildas, Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. For example, the Gallic Chronicle, written in Gaul in the late fifth century, contains the mention of the \textit{adventus Saxonum} which is the closest in date of composition of all of the sources, perhaps written but a generation after the first migrations were to have happened. It is stating the following for the year 441:

\begin{quote}
“The [Britons], which to this time had suffered from various disasters and misfortunes, are reduced to the power of the Saxons.”\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

This dating is however very much debated, and it is argued whether this, as with all fifth and sixth century sources, is reliable, especially when it comes to the distance and their knowledge of British matters. The collection of manuscripts known as \textit{Historia Brittonum}, attempting to create a history of the British people, written in the early ninth century and traditionally, however disputed, attributed to the Welsh monk Nennius, briefly includes some Anglo-Saxon passages such as regnal lists and an account of the \textit{adventus Saxonum} which is probably based largely on Gildas.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}, 143.
\textsuperscript{147} Robert Vermaat, “The Gallic Chroniclers of 452 and 511,” \textit{Vortigern Studies: British History 400-600}.
When it comes to other sources for the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period, and not specifically for transition from a post-Roman society to that of Anglo-Saxon rule, the selection is greater, but still not very large – earning the Middle Ages its nickname of the “Dark Ages”. Different annals and chronicles as well as regnal lists, are more reliable for the later period, and one can also find evidence in the archaeological material such as coins and graves to support the evidence found therein.\textsuperscript{149}

Other sources which might shed some light on Anglo-Saxon and British society and culture are poems and law codes. The relevant poems are for example \textit{Y Gododdin} by the British poet Aneirin (possibly the brother of Gildas) whose backdrop is a battle between the British kingdom of Gododdin, in present day southern Scotland and northern England, and their allies called from a great geographical area stretching as far as north Wales, against the Angles who had settled in Deira and Bernicia in the same region; and \textit{Beowulf}, which, although set in Scandinavia, was written by an unknown Anglo-Saxon poet, and it is assumed that many of the cultural features such as feasting and great halls were identical or similar to those of the Anglo-Saxons. It has even been speculated whether some of the figures therein can actually be linked to actual historical persons.\textsuperscript{150}

The sources still available in this day and age which can provide some information concerning the Germanic migration are of various characters and dubious historical quality. Almost all of them appear to rely heavily on the account presented by Gildas in his \textit{De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae}, and then perhaps especially Bede’s elaboration on the tale. Neither Bede, Gildas or the information found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle can be said to be entirely objective, historically accurate or chronologically reliable. On the other hand, it is important to note that this does not signify that one should entirely disregard them as unhistorical or as of having no value to the debate, as traditionally done by some.

So, what can the early sources contribute with to the current debate? For one they are imperative to understanding the previous work done on the period, as they not only shaped the beliefs, though in many ways subconsciously, of the scholars, but perhaps even more importantly they indirectly determined the questions asked. The material


approach of the Culture-Historical Archaeology which characterised the early twentieth century was greatly focused on cataloguing and determining different material cultures, and figuring out where they originated from by comparing it to the continental archaeological finds. If Bede had not identified the Angles, Saxons and Jutes as the invaders of the fifth century, the nineteenth and twentieth century scholars might have focused on different geographical areas than what they did – largely attempting to match the English material with areas in Northern Germany. The preconceptions created by Bede in this way helped create a focus which otherwise might not have been as dominant, as other tribal groups such as different Scandinavians, Franks and Frisians appear to be well represented in the material culture, but largely missing from the common picture painted of the adventus Saxonum – even to this day their contribution usually only appear in scholarly work, and are not visible to the general public.

Despite the limitations the sources might have had on the scholarly debate there are some general ideas which might be important to consider. In many ways, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the sources can confirm or validate theories developed through principles such as archaeology and linguistics. For example, though the dating of the adventus Saxonum is still ambiguous, the archaeological evidence points to a Germanic presence in Britain at least by the mid sixth century, if not before, which might very well indicate that Bede was not too far off in his dating of the first arrivals to the mid fifth century – after all, if they did indeed arrive as just a few fleets of warriors, one would have to be exceedingly fortunate to find just their remains after the passage of one and a half millennium.

The sources also contain a few broad ideas which one should not make light of. Though Gildas’ story of catastrophic destruction and genocide does not add up with any later indications, or indeed, the political situation of his own time, his account of various battles between the Britons and the invaders are undoubtedly at least based on somewhat contemporary and accurate sources, though some of it might have been derived from legends and poems already by his time. Especially the mention of a battle at Mount Badon – which might have been on a hilltop near Bath, though there is no general

152 Hills, Origins of the English, 24-25.
153 Alcock, Arthur's Britain, 68.
consensus on the matter – is very interesting, both in its own right, and for the later connotations to the legendary figure of King Arthur, and also the figure of the Roman war leader Ambrosius Aurelianus whose emphasised Roman connections appear to have been important to legitimising his power over the “citizens”.\textsuperscript{154} There seems to be no reason to doubt Gildas’ description of his own time as part of a longer lasting peace, or at least an absence of active battle, between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, for indeed were it not so, he would most likely only have had more to criticise the British leaders for. In addition, even though he vividly describes the destruction of his British fatherland and the genocide of its people throughout the rest of the \textit{De Excidio Britanniae}, Gildas indirectly gives the impression of a largely cultivated landscape with quite a large population.\textsuperscript{155}

Bede’s division of the English into only the Angles, Saxons and Jutes might not be based on objective historical facts, but they do provide an insight into the social, mental and political sphere of eighth century Anglo-Saxon Britain, at the same time as it might reflect the actual ratio of size of the coming groups, or at least whom the “winners” of the political landscape of England had become. It also seems likely that the Britons might have turned to the Germanic tribes for military support against the Picts and Scots (Irish). Though the raiding, invasion and migration of Irish tribes on the western coast of Britain is not something which will be examined in this thesis, archaeology and linguistic evidence points to a large Irish presence in southwestern Britain, mostly concentrated in South Wales, Cornwall and Devon, with evidence of ogham scriptures dating back to the fifth and sixth centuries.\textsuperscript{156} As such, the story told by Gildas and Bede, when stripped of all dubious and artistic details, might provide us with a general outline of the \textit{adventus Saxonum} and the following years: With the withdrawal of the Roman Empire from the British Isles the military presence which had protected them against their neighbours for centuries disappeared, and the Picts and Scots were virtually free do to with the Britons as they pleased. The British elite left might have employed Germanic mercenaries to protect them, and something convinced these people to attempt to take control over the territories they arrived in for themselves. What ensued was a period of battles between

\textsuperscript{154} Nicholas J. Higham, \textit{The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994): 46.
\textsuperscript{155} Higham, \textit{The English Conquest}, 166-167.
\textsuperscript{156} hÓgáin, \textit{The Celts: A History}, 217; Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}, 76.
fractions of the British rulers and the Germanic warrior tribes for social and geographical hegemony.

The evidence provided by the written sources for the *adventus Saxonum* and the following years is problematic, but still provide us with some important clues as to how the Anglo-Saxons, and perhaps also the Britons, thought. There was no catastrophic invasion as envisaged by Gildas, but instead the sources reveal significant contact between the incoming Anglo-Saxons and the Britons. This is evident in their mixed naming practices and shared or adapted origin stories. Another crucial feature which these sources provide us with is the importance of an Anglo-Saxon identity to the elite in the Early Middle Ages. The royal houses went to great lengths to fabricate and create believable genealogies and histories. When compared to the relatively high number of British style names found in the sources\(^{157}\), this point to a society where there was a mixture of British and Anglo-Saxon ethnicities and identities in the elite groups, but where the Germanic culture was thought superior. All of this supports the theories of this thesis, that the British population largely survived incoming Anglo-Saxon groups who established themselves as the new elite culture at the fall of the Roman Empire, and that the Britons thereafter were largely assimilated into the new culture – just as they had been with the Romans. What was different between the Roman and the Anglo-Saxon periods, however, and which will be more thoroughly explored later, was that where the Romans were a centralised, strong and distant overlord, the Anglo-Saxons appeared as fractioned, smaller groups, who lived in much closer contact and proximity to the population, making the process incredibly efficient and complete.

\(^{157}\) There is however also some presence of other naming practices, such as Frankish elements. E.g. the Kentish king Eormenric.
Anglo-Saxon identity

The source material discussed above tells us that their Germanic identity was extremely important to the Anglo-Saxon elite during the early Middle Ages. It essentially replaced the previous elite culture of the Romans, and because the Britons were used to another culture and identity being politically and socially advantageous, the resistance might not have been that great. It would have been almost natural to British people wanting to better their position in society to adopt as much of an Anglo-Saxon identity as possible in order to fit in with the new elite group. What this identity entailed is however somewhat of a mystery, which this chapter will examine.

The differences and similarities between the ways the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings governed Britain are fascinating. The Roman Empire in many cases allowed the local British elite to continue as vassal, or sub-kings under their direct rule. Almost the same happened when the Great Heathen Army led by the Viking Ívarr invaded Northumbria. After slaying the Northumbrian kings Osberth and his rival-turned-ally Ælle in York in 867, they installed the English nobleman Ecgberht as king under their command. The Anglo-Saxons, however, despite there being some evidence for certain British communities paying tribute to them,158 appear in most cases not to have followed this model of overlordship, but rather to have replaced the British kings themselves. This is most likely due to theirs not being a common goal – they were almost in as much conflict with each other as with the Britons. This shift from central to local power allowed for closer contact with the Britons than what the Romans had implemented.159 The question remains if this reflects a difference in mentality and the goals of the invaders, or whether it was simply the circumstances of being several, independently driven groups, which resulted in this outcome.

According to the information discussed in the previous chapters groups of Germanic settlers probably arrived in the British Isles sometime in the fifth century, and after fighting fractions of Britons in various battles, they managed to establish rule directly or indirectly over several areas. It has been established that this happened in

158 Higham, The English Conquest, 164.
159 Allard and North, Beowulf and other Stories, 15; Higham and Ryan, The Anglo-Saxon World, 87.
different ways and to varying degrees in each region, but what is certain is that the traces of “native” or Romanised material culture appear to have mostly disappeared from the east by the time of the sixth century. The further east the less British evidence is recovered, even though there is next to no evidence for the appearance of a distinctly Anglo-Saxon material culture during the first half of the fifth century, and it even looks like Roman villas were still occupied to some extent during this time.¹⁶⁰ The end of the fourth century was not an economically stable time for the Roman Empire – and by extension Britain – and many settlements appear to have been abandoned. The pottery industry suffered, and the previously thriving economy based on minted coins all but ceased to exist.¹⁶¹

Despite this decline the fact remains that by the mid-sixth century Germanic style features had completely swamped lowland Britain. The material culture, burial practices, settlements and political and religious features were all distinctly different from what it had been before, and the closest resemblances were found in the northern parts of continental Europe. Although one in later years have been able through studies such as archaeogenetics, palaeobotany and landscape archaeology to identify a substantial degree of continuity between sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain,¹⁶² at least when it comes to farming and rural settlements, there is no denying the totality and rapidity of Anglo-Saxon cultural and political dominance. The mentality and identities of the different parties become very central and important to understanding the processes in instances such as this, where one group has asserted both their cultural and political dominance over another. Did the Anglo-Saxon perceive themselves as part of a continental Germanic culture? Were the Angles, Saxons and Jutes part of what they thought of as distinct or similar cultures? What part did an eventual Roman identity play for both sides? Did the Anglo-Saxons think themselves superior to the Britons, or was it all a matter of individuals bettering their own position no matter who the subjects were, with culture and ethnicity not playing any significant role? It is impossible to with any certainty state what other people think and feel, and especially when considering that they lived over 1500 years ago, but trough looking at the few sources available to us, such as linguistics, poetry,

jurisdiction and connections, it is possible to at least establish plausible theories on the
matter.

In the Anglo-Saxon field of study ethnicity has been one of the most central
themes, especially since the reigning historical perspective prior to the mid-twentieth
century was the culture history approach, in which one culture is thought to have impact
on another culture, and the direct result of this union is what can be discovered through
excavations. Using material culture as definite proof of ethnicity, and even identity, is
however not without risk, as the ideas and perceptions of present-day people need not
match those of their ancestors. For example, one cannot with certainty say that it was race
or geographical origin which untied the Anglo-Saxons, or Christianity the subjects of the
Roman empire, without providing more substance to the argument. It is crucial to note
that as identity is not equivalent with ethnicity or nationality, which is also true for our
day and age, it is neither static and permanent, but rather fluid and open for manipulation.

The eighth and ninth centuries were times of nation-building tendencies and
seemingly deliberate constructions of kingdoms, and one can identify the use of for
example both Germanic, legendary and even concealed British ancestry in the different
origin stories of the kingdoms as a political construct to strengthen their legitimacy.\textsuperscript{163}
Bede might have had political motives for presenting Anglo-Saxon history in the ways
he did, and the use of unifying terminology by for example Alfred the Great in face of
the Viking invasions was certainly a deliberate way of creating an identity. It is evident
that identity is a powerful tool which can determine actions and ways of thinking. It is
therefore important to look for expressions of identity in different ways than just ethnicity,
and as such, parallels in the material culture between for example the people of Kent and
the Franks and the Angles and the Scandinavians, but one cannot for this reason proclaim
that they identified, or acted, as a single group. The material culture could, however, be
used in order to signify or enhance these connections, whether actual, or politically
motivated.\textsuperscript{164}

In this way the identity of groups of people can be explored. The ways in which
they chose to dress, speak, practice and otherwise express their identity one must believe

\textsuperscript{163} Hills, \textit{Origins of the English}, 105.
\textsuperscript{164} See for example: Paul Blinkhorn and Duncan H. Brown, “Pottery and Identity in Late Saxon
can be reflected in the material culture, and whether or not the genetics and ethnicity matched these material identities is possible to set aside for present purposes.\textsuperscript{165} Some, perhaps especially the distinctly anti-migrationalist school of processual archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s, have argued for a minimal number of Germanic settlers, and explained the change in material culture through the British adoption, or idolisation, of continental identity and cultural expression. This view is however quite controversial, and the sheer magnitude of the cultural change protests this theory. It seems unrealistic that the Britons would entirely shift their practices from their familiar British and Christian Roman features to that of another foreign culture without more prerogative and without outside influence. The overwhelming presence of Germanic features in fifth and sixth century archaeology does however discredit the notion of all Germanic elements representing finds of an incoming elite, and must therefore point to some form of British adoption of Anglo-Saxon traits.\textsuperscript{166}

\textit{Insular developments}

As the lack of written sources from the early Anglo-Saxon period leaves us with only the material evidence, it is prudent to explore this before making any assumptions or drawing conclusions as to the identity of the inhabitants of the British Isles in the sixth century. The traditional studies of the material were done in light of the historical sources, in particular Bede, and thus focused on identifying distinguishing elements of the three continental tribes mentioned in his \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, namely the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. In areas thought to have been claimed by these brother cultures, particularly in light of the “heptarchy” – the seven greater kingdoms of the early Middle Ages of Kent, Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria – it was thought possible to distinguish between them based on art and model styles of for example brooches and pottery. Especially Kent, Wessex and East Anglia have at times been thought to provide something close to standards for Jutish, Saxon and Anglian material culture respectively.\textsuperscript{167} It is possible to identify some differences between the geographical areas,

\textsuperscript{165} See for example: Suzuki, \textit{The Quoit Brooch Style and Anglo-Saxon Settlement}, 19.
\textsuperscript{166} Scull, “Approaches to Material Culture,” 78.
but it is important to note that most of the evidence from the middle and late Anglo-Saxon period is representative for a time when different kingdoms actively politicised and manipulated the concept of identity in order to strengthen their powers.

For the purpose of identifying the most unmodified cultural expressions of the early Anglo-Saxon settlers, it is therefore prudent to focus on the archaeological evidence from the early Anglo-Saxon period, from around the mid-fifth to the late sixth century, when one can see the focus shifting from perhaps smaller tribes settling in and ascertaining authority over areas and peoples, to larger and more centralised kingdoms and royal families rivalling for power. Already by the late fifth century, however, it is possible to see the emergence or construction of insular identities. The Germanic settlers in Britain seem to have thought of themselves as distinctive, and the material expressions developed insular characteristics. Even so, they appear to have maintained quite close contact with their “parent societies”, and the cultural exchange between the Anglo-Saxons and the continental Germanic peoples continued despite the distance.168 An example of this can be made of the saucer brooch, which originates in Frisia and Saxony in the early stages of the fifth century, but was developed into a fully cast form in Britain, which is uncommon to find on the continent. This appears to be a truly Anglo-Saxon product, and the cast saucer brooches are the artefacts which are the most numerous, as well as the one with the widest distribution pattern and longevity, being worn up to the late sixth century.169 The few instances where such brooches, and other specifically Anglo-Saxon artefacts are found in continental Europe might be the result of an exchange of culture going from the island of Britain and back to their parent societies or trading partners. As Dijkstra and de Koning noted,

“the material culture gives no indication that, in the 5th century, West Frisia was chosen by Anglo-Saxon settlers from the Elbe-Weser area as a new home. Only at a later stage, in the 6th century, are Anglo-Saxon influences visible in part of the material culture.”170

170 Menno Dijkstra and Jan de Koning, “‘All quiet on the Western Front?’ The Western Netherlands and the ‘North Sea Culture’ in the Migration Period,” in Frisians and their North Sea Neighbours: From the Fifth Century to the Viking Age, eds. J. Hines and N. IJssenagger (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017): 64.
In this way there is also a distinction between “Germanic” and “Anglo-Saxon” identities or cultures, the second signifying, at least during the latter parts of the Anglo-Saxon period, not an ethnically distinct culture, but rather the material culture which developed in lowland Britain in the decades after the adventus Saxonum. This is a culture which is distinct from its continental counterparts, and it is next to impossible to say anything about the ethnicity of the people with whom these artefacts were buried or utilised – whether they were of continental, insular or mixed origins. Despite this it is possible to identify some cultural or material distinctions between the regions of lowland Britain, albeit with the precaution that cataloguing and categorising cultural expressions is far from being reliable processes, and, as Christopher Scull writes, especially

“The cultural geography of continental Europe during the Migration Period is extremely complex, with no absolutely clear-cut material cultural boundaries, and this situation is reflected in the fifth-century archaeology of eastern England.”

Overall, the finds from lowland Britain in the early Anglo-Saxon period reflect some common trends. As a rule, it is thought that male weaponry and female dress and jewellery best represents expressions of cultural identity, and especially the brooches which kept the dresses in place, whether at one or both shoulders, or in the front, are of interest. Examples of this are the great square-headed brooch and the cruciform brooch. The regional and chronological trend changes of cruciform brooches present quite drastic developments in the ways in which they were styled and worn. The early versions of these brooches were mostly confined to East Anglia and Lincolnshire and were quite simple and functional. During the fifth century, however, they grew both in size and detail, and also became more visibly worn. It appears as if the cruciform brooches which were earlier an understated and natural part of a cultural heritage during the span of a century became very much regarded and, crucially, used as expressions or symbols of typically Anglian, or north-eastern English, if you will, identity. Whether this was something implemented by the Angles themselves as a statement of Germanic or elitist connections,

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171 Baker, Cultural Transition in the Chilterns and Essex Region, 256.
172 Scull, “Approaches to Material Culture,” 73.
173 Alcock, Arthur’s Britain, 158.
or actually also reflect British attempts to explicitly use the culture of the newly established elite to attempt to further their position in society, is an intriguing question.

This would to an extent mimic the situation during the Roman period. Either way, expressing a belonging to Anglian culture or identity became increasingly desirable during the fifth and sixth centuries, to Angles, Britons or both. The great square-headed brooches can also be seen as evidence to this growing awareness of identity, in that they initially were quite widely distributed, before they grew in quantity, before being more regionally restricted – interestingly in areas where they in the initial phases had not been frequent.175

Rivalling influences

Though there were significant overlaps and parallels of the material culture in the different regions of early Anglo-Saxon England, there were also quite intriguing variations. When compared with the other regions, the material evidence recovered from Kent in particular stands out from the other parts of Anglo-Saxon Britain. Not only are there a greater number of items recovered, but also their diversity and value make Kent stand out from its neighbouring kingdoms. A lot of these artefacts are in fact Frankish imports, which is not found in such quantities or qualities elsewhere on the island. For example, copper buckles and belt-set types imported from Francia are quite common finds, as are gold bowls and glass vessels.176 Whether this is a consequence of contact and trade with the mainland of Frankish Gaul due to their geographical proximity or a real presence of Frankish peoples, is debated. Some, like Ian Wood and Martin Welch have even suggested that Anglo-Saxon overlords might have been paying tribute, or been subject, to Frankish kings.177 Whether this was the case, or the exchange was part of larger trading networks and connections, the connection between Kent and the Merovingians would continue to be strong throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, with intermarriages and elite exchanges. At the very least there was a significant Frankish influence in Kent as

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early as the fifth century, which might have affected the way the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants perceived and practiced their identity and culture.

Frankish artefacts are not solely found in Kent, but also elsewhere in southern Britain. However, outside of Kent their character is quite different. If one were to use Sussex as an example, it is worth noting that Harrington and Welch identify the Frankish material there as being more frequent in the eastern parts compared with the western. It is also exclusively restricted to the downlands, the upland cemeteries containing no evidence of Kentish or Frankish influence. Many of the sites containing such elements, however, can be said to have a “strategic location or at the very least [be] related to the main routeways.” 178 This could indicate that the Kentish and Frankish material found in Sussex, and elsewhere in southern, Saxon Britain, such as Wessex, are products of trade rather than any real presence of Jutes or Franks. This sharp divide between the zones where trade might have occurred, and the virtual absence of foreign artefacts in the upland cemeteries could indicate an adversity to non-Saxon elements, and thus differing cultural identities. The presence of Frankish artefacts without apparent Kentish influence, however, has been suggested as hinting at attempted Frankish influence there as well as in Kent, however on a much smaller scale, perhaps due to geographical situations.

Despite the large body of evidence of Frankish influence in south-eastern Britain, and Kent in particular, in the early Middle Ages, the population of Kent was undoubtedly of Scandinavian heritage. 179 Only 36% of excavated Phase A cemeteries produced Frankish elements, 180 whereas much of the other archaeological material, such as some types of cruciform brooches, gold bracteates and relief/square-headed brooches (some, like Myres, also claim to see links between pottery in Kent and Jutland, but this has been quite heavily contested), point to a heritage or continued contact with northern Germany or Scandinavia. 181 The study of the early Anglo-Saxon bracteates, for example, illustrate this. These are discs of precious metal, usually gold or gilded, hung and used as jewellery, are found across Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries and might reflect imports by the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers. What is interesting about this particular type of artefact is

178 Harrington and Welch, *The Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Southern Britain*, 193.
180 Harrington and Welch, *The Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Southern Britain*, 192.
that it seems to indicate differences set within a wider Germanic culture, as do most of the early Germanic material culture. A little under half (25 of the 56 known examples) of the bracteates found were recovered mostly, though not exclusively, from what has typically been regarded as Anglian areas, stretching from Essex north to Lincolnshire and Humberside, and more to the west down across Nottinghamshire to Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. There has even been one recovered recently on the Isle of Wight. Interestingly, however, more than half of the known bracteate examples (29) are found in eastern Kent.182

The bracteates are very much similar to their much more numerous Scandinavian counterparts, and it has been suggested that they were fifth century heirlooms from Jutland, imported by the earliest Anglo-Saxon, or more specifically Jutish, migrants.183 Whether this is true, or they were, as others have argued, produced locally, the fact remains that they closely mirror the bracteates of Scandinavia and northern Germany in the fifth and sixth centuries, and thus appear to signify either a cultural inheritance, a strong ideological, political or idolising affiliation, or indeed both.184 The differences of use in Kentish and Anglian areas is very interesting. Where the Anglian bracteates are found in both cemeteries, single hoards and other instances, the Kentish examples appear to have had much more restricted areas of use, mostly being linked with women of royal connections.185 In addition, the cruciform brooches used in Kent appear to have been repeatedly repaired and worn despite the fact that they would have been considered old-fashioned, and that they in Anglian England rather developed newer styles, something which was not done in Kent.186

Could this be a sign of more cultural awareness, and a need to promote it, amongst the Anglo-Saxons in Kent than in the other parts of Britain? In light of the significant Frankish influence, it is not difficult to see that the Anglo-Saxon elements might have been more protected and promoted than elsewhere. Though connections with Francia

seems to have been highly regarded, the people of Kent appear to have perceived themselves as strictly Anglo-Saxon, or Jutish if you will, and had more reason to strongly promote it than in areas of Britain where there were only northern Germanic cultures attempting to establish hegemony. This does signify that the early Anglo-Saxon settlers were very much aware of their heritage, and that showcasing this connection was important.

However, there is also evidence for cultural exchange between the different settling groups within Britain, as well as in Scandinavia and on the continent, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. This, coupled with the trend in typological development of for example the great square-headed brooches and the cruciform brooches, which show a similar pattern where the general distribution grows and expands before later becoming more restricted, points in the direction of more fluid borders or focus on identity. Belonging to and showing off a common Germanic heritage seemed in the early phases to have been more important than the individual groups of Anglian, Saxon, Jutish, Frankish, Frisian etc. In a chaotic period of settlement where many different groups attempted to ascertain their position over another group speaking different languages, it might have been easier to point to a Germanic or continental origin rather than diffuse and confusing regional differences. In addition, these regional identities might just not have been very important to the Anglo-Saxons’ identities to begin with. By the time of the seventh century, however, the situation had changed. By then the conflict was not between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons, but mostly amongst the Anglo-Saxons themselves, fighting for areas and in order to increase their influences and power. It might then have become important to highlight the differences between themselves and their competitors.

Despite the fact that many of the artefacts evolved from their continental forms into distinctly insular styles following their introduction to Britain, some, such as the cruciform brooches found in areas typically regarded Saxon, also appear to show a development parallel to the one taking place on the continent. This signifies that there must have continued to be close contact between at least some of the Anglo-Saxon settlers

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187 Ibid., 269.
and their parent societies, and to such a degree that cultural exchange could take place. Scull has noted that the cultivation and maintenance of such links with the homelands is reflected in anthropologic studies of immigrant populations. The idea of a stronger connection between the migrant groups and their continental origins has gained a following in scholarly circles since the 1990s, when the theory of a common “North Sea” or “maritime” culture was argued in favour for. This has perhaps been studied most thoroughly by Christopher Loveluck, Pieterjan Deckers and Dries Tys, and picked up on by many others.

It has become increasingly evident that coastal communities sharing many of the same elements are found on both sides of the North Sea and the English Channel, and there are several indicators which point to an extensive and complex network of exchange. The most important evidence about such connections to this thesis is the linguistic aspect. It has been noted that dialectal variations continued to evolve and spread across the North Sea. What is interesting about this is that the exchange did not only go one way, from the continent to Britain, but dialectal features – as well as material culture as seen above – are shown to have been introduced for example to Frisia from Britain. This is evidence of close contact between the people on both sides of the sea, which continued to thrive for many centuries.

Though it in many cases can be easy to think of the sea as a distancing geographical border between different cultures, which cut people off from each other in the way for example mountains can do, there are many examples throughout history, and perhaps particularly in the Middle Ages, which point to the sea rather than cutting off, actually connecting people. Even whole kingdoms could exist on different sides of a body of water, some examples being the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata around the North Channel in the sixth and seventh centuries, Viking Denmark with areas both in Denmark, Viken

190 Scull, “Approaches to Material Culture,” 76.
192 Loveluck and Tys, “Coastal societies, exchange and identity along the Channel and southern North Sea shores of Europe, AD 600-1000,” 142.
(present day Norway and Sweden) and the Danelaw in England in the ninth and tenth centuries, or the Mediterranean empires of Antiquity. In the case of Early Medieval Europe, it is evident that the sea did connect people, and that communication and exchange across borders was maintained.\textsuperscript{194} As evident through even language being affected, the connection must have been quite strong, “implying intense interaction across the North Sea”.\textsuperscript{195} The significance this for the Anglo-Saxon perception of identity is more difficult to ascertain, but the cultural similarities to Europe must have been more evident than to the British. It would imply that the Anglo-Saxon elite was part of a larger European nobility, with which they maintained strong ties and connections. We know that this was so, as there are examples of Anglo-Saxon kings marrying European princesses, such as the famous union of Æthelberht, son of the Kentish king Irmenric, and the Frankish princess Bertha, daughter of king Charibert of Naustria.\textsuperscript{196}

\textit{British identities}

The identities of the British or Romano-British population are even more obscure to us than Anglo-Saxon identities. As previously stated, distinctive Romano-British features all but disappeared after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire from the British Isles. Though there are indications that some Roman features such as the occupation of villas continued for at least a short while after AD 400,\textsuperscript{197} some have argued for a small “renaissance” of Celtic or native British culture in the south-west. This can be seen through the re-usage of the pre-Roman hillforts,\textsuperscript{198} though one must think that the reason for this relocation is the better security these forts offered in a chaotic time, rather than a liberated people reclaiming their previous way of life.

\textsuperscript{195} Deckers and Tys, “Early Medieval Communities Around the North Sea”, 82.
Despite this possible re-emergence of a “Celtic” British elite, the study of post-Roman identity through material culture is all but impossible to conduct in the same manner than one can with the Germanic settlers. Where Anglo-Saxons buried grave-goods which could help identify their political or social affiliations, the Romans and Britons rarely used to deposit artefacts in their graves. In the western parts of Britain, what would later become Wales and Cornwall, where the Anglo-Saxons did not manage to exert their influence, the Roman elements such as language and customs were still visible, though elite elements do appear to have become more and more mixed with indigenous practices.\textsuperscript{199} The few British artefacts detectable during the Roman period are mostly imported pottery, and there is virtually no visible material culture in the gap left between the withdrawal of the Romans to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. The continuation of Roman elements in western Britain – which all but disappeared when the Anglo-Saxons started adopting them\textsuperscript{200} – might not indicate an active choice of identifying as Roman, but if one looks to the written sources there are indications that there at least in some circles were people who did identify as Roman more than they did British.

The extent to which the average Briton identified with being a Roman is of course impossible to establish. It has previously in this thesis been proposed that it was mostly the elite which adopted the Roman ways of life and its culture, but by the fifth century one can assume that there was also a larger presence of pensioners from the Roman army settled on the island, and that the leading British families had married Romans for several centuries.\textsuperscript{201} Because of this we must assume that at least some of the leading families identified more with Roman culture than an indigenous British culture. Examples of this might be the Romano-British war-leader Ambrosius Aurelianus, the only named person who supposedly lived during the fifth century in Britain.\textsuperscript{202} In addition to having a very Roman name, Gildas describes him in \textit{Excidio Britanniae} as “being strengthened by God”, and his parents having been “adorned with the purple”.\textsuperscript{203} This seems to indicate

\textsuperscript{200} Gerrard, \textit{The Ruin of Roman Britain}, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{201} Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}, 20.
\textsuperscript{203} Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae, section 25.
that he was Christian, and that his parents were of noble Roman birth. Korporowicz emphasises in his study of Roman law in Britain that the “native inhabitants of what is now modern Wales believed that they were heirs of the Roman tradition [and] referred to Latin as their language […].” It is however important to remember that the only sources available to us are those written by a (probably religious) elite, who according to the theory fronted in this thesis themselves would have come from a more Romanised background than the “common” people. The masses might not even have been originally thought to have been included in such an image – the “people” of Gildas might as well have been a group entirely different from the native British farming population, who did not merit a mention. When it comes to language it is self-evident that Latin never replaced the Brittonic language, as it never died out and is spoken in Wales to this day, as well as for example the now all but extinct Manx and Cornish, who survived for many centuries. As Charles-Edwards ascertained, “[…] a British noble was far more likely to speak Latin than a British peasant.”

Another question to ask oneself is whether the Roman features might have been especially emphasised as the opposite of the Saxons. The Roman cultural elements might have been seen as something differentiating the elite living in western Britain from their neighbouring Anglo-Saxon competition, and as such the culture might have been actively used to set themselves apart and create an opposing identity. This has connotations to the behaviour of other peoples being attacked by outside forces. An example of this is the West Saxons appearing to have actively rejected for example pottery styles with Mercian or Scandinavian associations when they were facing the Viking invasions. What is very interesting, though, is that the use of Roman elements was to change drastically over the next few centuries, becoming incredibly important when forming larger Anglo-Saxon kingdoms through invoking connotations of imperial power.

205 Korporowicz, “Roman Law in Roman Britain,” 150.
207 Blinkhorn and Brown, “Pottery and Identity in Late Saxon England,” 475.
208 For example, many later Anglo-Saxon kings were depicted in a similar way to the Roman emperors on their coins. Albert the Great is perhaps the best-known example of this practice. Catherine E. Karkov, *The Art of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011): 107.
If the Anglo-Saxons promoted their own culture and suppressed the existing cultures in Britain, the question remains of which cultures they were actually suppressing. Were the Roman elements, being the previous elite culture, seen as a danger to the Germanic claims of power and actively crushed? If this was the case, what about the “native” British cultural elements? As earlier ascertained, these were already mostly archaeologically invisible by the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, so the absence of British findings after the *adventus Saxonum* is simply not good enough evidence for their disappearance. The adoption of Anglo-Saxon customs may then not be seen as active suppression of British elements, but rather attempts at bettering one’s position in society through mirroring the customs of those better off, and as such trying to advocate one’s inclusion in the group.

The Anglo-Saxon identity appears to have been closely connected with a larger European elite culture, with which they remained in close contact. Despite this, the material culture of the Anglo-Saxons developed a distinctly insular character. The theory for this presented in this thesis is that the contact between the Britons and the incoming Germanic elite was to a greater extent than what has been proposed previously. The distinct British material culture, which had been mixed with Roman expressions for several hundred years, was already all but archaeologically invisible by the fifth century, and if it continued to be used by the larger population for a longer period of time it would be difficult for us to discover. The elite, however, had no qualms marrying into and adopting the new elite culture, as it was politically and socially advantageous. The distinctly different Anglo-Saxon identities in the British Isles appear to have developed at a later date, when the chaotic early period of settlement had passed.
Systematic suppression?

There is no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons perceived and used their culture as something superior and characterising of a political elite. In addition, there does exist some evidence pointing to this happening at the expense of a British culture, or at least that it was regarded as inferior. The Anglo-Saxons’ repression of the Britons is, however, mostly evident through the absence of features, rather than the presence of them. On the other hand, there are some aspects of linguistics and archaeology which might shed some light on the way the Anglo-Saxons interacted with the Britons, and their attitudes towards adopting Celtic or Roman features, which will be explored in this chapter. The results support this thesis’ theories about continuity between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, as well as leaning more towards the Anglo-Saxon culture being a separate elite culture, which identifying association could provide one with societal advantages. Therefore, it is my belief that it was through both an Anglo-Saxon elitist attitude of superiority, and incentive by ambitious Britons hoping to gain access into the upper classes, that the Anglo-Saxon culture managed to gain stronghold within the society as quickly as it did, rather than a systematic suppression of British identities.

Linguistics

The only real evidence available to us where the contrast between being Anglo-Saxon and being British is seen, is found in the differences in weregild (“man-price”) and degrees of trustworthiness found in the laws of king Ine of Wessex from late seventh century. These ascertain the political power of a “Welshman” as opposed to an “Englishman”, and it is evident that the Britons as a rule were of lower social and political standing than the Anglo-Saxons, though material wealth also had a large part to play in one’s position. There were several distinctions to the ethnic group called the “Welsh”. Owning property or being in the service of the king might lift a Welshman to a higher social level, but the general rule was that the majority of Britons were of a much lower standing than the Anglo-Saxons.209

In addition to this, the language used in these law codes to describe the ethnic groups within the West Saxon kingdom in the late 600s are of much interest. An Anglo-Saxon person is defined as being an *engliscmon* – Englishman – and British persons are referred to as *weales* – Welshmen.\(^{210}\) Now, the term *wealh* has several different meanings and interpretations. Not only did it later become the way of referring to the people from the country Wales in western Britain, but at the time of Ine’s reign it apparently translated to “foreigner” or “stranger”.\(^{211}\) This is a peculiar way of referring to someone who is more native to the land than what oneself is – particularly, as has been proved, since the Anglo-Saxons were quite aware of their continental connections. For this reason, and because there at this time also was a clear difference between “Angles” and “Saxons”, it is probable that the term *Englisc* was used to describe people speaking the Germanic language variants in Britain, and that those considered *weales* spoke a “foreign”, subordinate tongue which the Anglo-Saxons could not understand – nor had any wish to learn.\(^{212}\)

Language thus appears to have been one of the most important cultural and social identity markers. It is one of the most effective ways of recognising ethnic or local identity, perhaps because it is difficult to change the way one speaks. It is one of the first things noticeable when meeting a person, also in this day and age.\(^{213}\) Another important point is that *wealh* also translates to “slave”, though this is apparently something which developed at a later date than the seventh century.\(^{214}\) This is most definitely a strong indication of the subordinate status of the British as compared with the Anglo-Saxons. However, the laws of Ine reveal that also Englishmen could be unfree.\(^{215}\) The naming of an entire people as “slaves” and “foreigners”, however, clearly must mean that they generally were of a lower social standing than the Anglo-Saxons, despite there existing both lower-standing Englishmen, and Britons of higher social status.

\(^{210}\) “The Laws of Ine,” see for example cap. 23 §3 and cap. 24.
\(^{212}\) Ward-Perkins, “Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?” 524.
The political imbalance revealed in the laws of Ine acts as further evidence of the advantages of being identified as an Anglo-Saxon person. The Britons and the English lived in close contact with each other, and not in the more distant, parallel communities of Roman times.\textsuperscript{216} This proximity and exposure to the Anglo-Saxon culture, coupled with the evidentially great advantages of being identified as something different than a “slave” or “foreigner” with lesser rights, would have acted as a strong incentive for a Briton to adopt a more Anglo-Saxon expression. It has been suggested by several scholars that there must have existed a bilingual period where Britons spoke both British and Anglo-Saxon languages, which seems like a reasonable assumption.\textsuperscript{217}

As paradoxical as it might seem that a minority’s language dominates that of the majority of the people, this is a linguistic situation which is quite common, where a smaller political elite subjects a larger group of people. The elite language is superstrate and supresses the substrate language of the subjected population, which means that there is very little lexical transfer – in other words, few loan-words borrowed from Brittonic languages into Old English.\textsuperscript{218} This is very clearly reflected in the number of loanwords from Celtic languages into English. Despite the imagined close day-to-day contact between the two groups, only a very limited number of Brittonic common words made their way into the Old English vocabulary, most of which are only found in dialects, or are no longer in use. The few Brittonic loan words found in the English language today are usually words describing things non-existent in Anglo-Saxon society, such as whiskey or loch. Although a larger number of these are found in Old English rather than its modern descendant, as time has diminished their numbers, they were never very numerous.\textsuperscript{219} An example of such a word which has since disappeared is sacerd (priest).\textsuperscript{220}

Despite the small-scale lexical transfer between Brittonic and Old English dialects, however, the Anglo-Saxon language would be affected through phonological

\textsuperscript{216} Higham and Ryan, The Anglo-Saxon World, 87; Allard and North, Beowulf and Other Stories, 15.
\textsuperscript{217} Jackson, Language and History in Early Britain, 245; Markku Filppula, Juhani Klemola and Heli Paulasto, English and Celtic in Contact (New York: Routledge, 2008): 245.
and morpho-syntactic transfer, so that Brittonic slowly influenced and changed the development of Old English. What this means is that the Britons “shifted to the language of their conquerors and selected for transfer those features of their native language which were the most salient ones,” as Hildegard Tristram put it.\(^{221}\) This is convincing evidence of the superior attitude employed by the Anglo-Saxons towards the British.

Other linguistic studies can however also shed some light on Anglo-British interactions. While the Anglo-Saxons borrowed next to no ordinary vocabulary from the Britons, they did adopt some place-names.\(^{222}\) The study of these can help establish more about both the degree of survival of a British presence or culture, and the settlement patterns of the incoming Anglo-Saxons. Though most surviving Celtic place-names are found on the northern and western edges of England, where the Anglo-Saxon influence battled that of the remaining British authorities, there are a scattering of traces of previous Brittonic place-names also in the “core” areas the Anglo-Saxon territory.\(^{223}\) Most of these are, however, descriptive of landscape formations such as hills and valleys. This could possibly be because the territories which (at least many of) the Anglo-Saxons came from in Denmark and northern Germany are flatter and distinctly different from the rolling hills found in parts of Britain, resulting in an Anglo-Saxon lack of vocabulary to describe such formations. The place-names containing such features are, however, usually compound words, consisting of both a Brittonic and an English element. That these descriptive topographic words were not adopted into the lexical vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons, but rather used as a reference onto which one added an English element, could however point to there being little understanding of their meaning.\(^{224}\) Examples of such Brittonic elements found in place-names in central parts of England can be *dun* “hill fort” (Doncaster), *comb* “valley” (Cambridge), *lin* “lake” (Lancaster),\(^{225}\) and *Eccles* “church”.\(^{226}\) In addition, a number of rivers continued to be known by their Brittonic

\(^{221}\) Tristram, “Why Don’t the English Speak Welsh?”, 199.
\(^{225}\) Allard and North, *Beowulf and other Stories*, 16.
Despite these few examples of remaining Brittonic geographical terms, even in the far west in Devon and Shropshire the place-names recorded in the tenth century are almost all Old English rather than Welsh in derivation, the Anglo-Saxons having replaced the Brittonic and Latin place-names with Old English ones.

Such a renaming of places seems to have been a widespread occurrence. Although it might seem odd at first, with the Britons supposedly having greatly outnumbered the Anglo-Saxons, it is actually almost to be expected in instances such as this. The practice of renaming sites is consistent with a conquering elite mentality and it “can play an important role in political conquest,” as written by Oliver Padel. For example, the practice of renaming places also occurred during the invasion and settlement of the Vikings, resulting in many Scandinavian place-names particularly in the northern parts of England. During Roman times only their military settlements and larger sites were given Latin names, and not many of them remain in current place-names other than -chester/-cester from Latin castra (“camp”) (as in Doncaster and Chester). The smaller British settlements retained their Brittonic names, though Latinised. This could be explained by the difference in attitude between the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons: to the Romans Britain was just another part of the Roman Empire, which was already vast and diverse, and in which there was already a diversity of languages and cultures. Many were only there for a period of time before leaving for other places or to go home. The Anglo-Saxons, however, appear to have come to personally settle the land. To them it was more important that the Britons submitted to their rule, as they were made up of fractioned units instead of being a massive central power. For this reason, they were also in much closer contact with the local population, and capable of enforcing the changes to a larger degree than the Romans had been.

Linguistic studies are however not always interpreted as supportive of the elite culture model. Richard Coates argues in “Invisible Britons: Linguistics” that the language situation during the Anglo-Saxon period, with next to no borrowing of lexical word from

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227 Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 197.
228 Ward-Perkins, “Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?” 521.
229 Padel, “Place-names and the Saxon Conquest of Devon and Cornwall,” 225.
230 Williamson, “East Anglia’s Character and the ‘North Sea World’.”
Brittonic into Old English and only a smattering of Brittonic topographical place-names and personal names continuing to exist after the *adventus Saxonum*, points to the most likely explanation being the traditional catastrophic invasion theory. He compares the situation in Britain to other historical situations where a conquering elite gained control over a larger subordinate population, such as the Romanisation of the Basques and the Viking settlement of Gaelic areas.\(^{232}\)

What Coates however fails to consider is the unique situation post-Roman Britain was in at the time of the *adventus Saxonum*. Rather than being an independent and confident culture with strong connections to their native tongue, such as was the case in Coates’ “parallel” situations, the Britons had been subjected to Roman rule and active Romanisation for several centuries. They were used to a distinct elite culture asserting itself on a higher level, and Latin acting as an administrative and superior *superstrate* language. As such it is to be expected that they would not be as rigid in protecting their language as one would be elsewhere where a foreign elite culture asserting itself was a new phenomenon. In addition to this, the Anglo-Saxons would have been in closer contact with the Britons than the Romans were, as they consisted of independent fractions rather than an organised nation. This meant that Brittonic and Old English would have much more interaction with each other than Brittonic and Latin. Though this could be interpreted as having larger potential for lexical transference, it could rather signify stricter Anglo-Saxon control over language, and better knowledge of the Old English language among the Britons. When one then considers the theory of *super-* and *substrate* languages, the lack of Brittonic elements is very much explicable.

Another feature of Anglo-Saxon place-names is of interest, however. In addition to there being a small number of adapted Brittonic place-names, some English place-names actually bear evidence of surviving British communities after an Anglo-Saxon political dominance was established. Examples of this can be found in the names Walcot, Wallasey, Walshaw and Walton – consisting of both a first element derived from *walh* – meaning Welsh or Briton – or places where the British term for themselves, *cumbre*, is used, such as in Comberton and Cumberworth.\(^{233}\) Curiously, the place-names with *walh*

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as an element are seemingly somewhat evenly distributed throughout present-day England and are not confined to the fringes.\footnote{Kenneth Cameron, “The meaning and significance of Old English \textit{walh} in English place-names (with appendices by M. Todd and J. Insley),” \textit{Journal of the English Place-name Society} 12 (1980).} It has been speculated about whether these places were the settlements of British slaves,\footnote{Coates, “Invisible Britons: Linguistics,” 190.} or whether they were remote locations where the Anglo-Saxon influence was slow to infiltrate. John Baker, however, notes that most of the place-names formed with \textit{walh} as an element were relatively important and central places.\footnote{Baker, \textit{Cultural Transition in the Chilterns and Essex Region}, 182.} Could these places therefore be interpreted as quite the opposite to “slave hamlets”? Perhaps they were rather the homes of prestigious and wealthy British leaders who managed to preserve their influence and identity alongside the Anglo-Saxons. Higham and Ryan note that some Britons “retained control of many localities, even in lowland areas where their authority interleaved with the new Saxon settlement.”\footnote{Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}, 56.} An explanation for this could be that some Germanic leaders allowed parts of the British elite to keep some of their governing powers as tribute-paying vassals – just as it had been practiced by the Romans.\footnote{Higham, \textit{The English Conquest}, 164.}

Although the Anglo-Saxons undoubtedly thought their own culture superior to that of the Britons, one can see that they in the years to come were not above working with Britons if it would benefit them. For example, in 623 the Mercian ruler Penda allied himself with the Welsh prince Cadwallon in order to defeat the Northumbrian king Edwin,\footnote{Martin Welch, \textit{English Heritage Book of Anglo-Saxon England} (Batsford: English Heritage, 1992): 46; Dáithí Ó hOgáin, \textit{The Celts: A History}, 227.} and until the eight century the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and Welsh kingdoms such as Gwynedd were allies more so than enemies.\footnote{Damian J. Tyler, “Early Mercia and the Britons,” in \textit{Britons in Anglo-Saxon England}, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007): 92.} There would also come to be close connections between the Welsh king Hywel Dda and the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex.\footnote{Rhys Jones, “Early state formation in native medieval Wales,” \textit{Political Geography} 17, no. 6 (1998): 674.} The aspect of identity is undoubtedly most important in times where two cultures are in opposition with each other, and less so where fractions of the same culture is at war. This can be seen, as earlier mentioned, in king Arthur’s building
of a common Anglo-Saxon identity when faced with the Vikings, downplaying the opposing Anglian and Saxon features which had previously been in focus.

Another interesting observation in this discussion is one that for example Barbara Yorke made in her 1995 book *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*:

«Certainly, the lack of effective late-Roman government in the south-west may indicate that native British rule survived or was re-invented in these more distant locales, and that hill-forts were re-used by a controlling elite who were either part of this tradition or who emerged out of the more Romanised civitates.»

It is not surprising that when faced with the weakening of Roman control some Britons should attempt to strengthen their own power, whether these were already vassals of the empire or newer players – in all probability both of these scenarios would have occurred. It seems reasonable to believe that the Britons who managed to keep or gain political control during Roman times were more secure in their position at the time of the Empire’s withdrawal, and also when faced with the incoming Germanic groups. As such, they might have retained some of this political power as the Anglo-Saxons focussed on weaker territories, possibly earning their settlements characterising names containing *walh* or *cumbre*.

Of course, this is all speculation. What seems to be almost certain, however, is that some factions of a British elite continued to exist alongside the new Anglo-Saxon governments. This was perhaps especially the case in more distant localities where the Roman roads were not as numerous and the landscape more demanding, as the Anglo-Saxons, which will be explored in greater detail later, made use of the already existing Roman networks in order to gain control of the Britons more efficiently. The seventh century Peak district is an interesting case to study when it comes to competition or coexistence between native and immigrant elites. The barrow burials from the century reveal next to no British artefacts, the only indicators being quartz pebbles or antler tines, but traditions such as the Christian way of burying the dead facing westwards or aligned east-west, and the Late Roman or earlier rock-cut graves, can be found. There are also some barrow burials with no visible connections to Christian, British or Roman cultures, which might represent purely Anglo-Saxon origins, such as purely earth-dug graves, as

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opposed to the British stone- or part stone-cut barrows, indicating that there was some Germanic immigration into the area. In many of the seventh century Peak district barrow burials there is a combination of features, where a traditionally British grave is accompanied by Anglo-Saxon artefacts.\textsuperscript{244} This completely fits the previously described picture from elsewhere in Britain, where the Britons used Anglo-Saxon material culture in order to either display wealth or an identity capable of bettering their positions in society. It could also bear witness to a merging of cultures, for example through intermarriage, which is certain to have happened, though the extent of this remains debated.

In either case, it is evident that though one at first glance may think the linguistic elements in the early Middle Ages point to the near extinction of British presence due to the durability of the mother tongue, on closer examination there is also plenty of evidence for the survival of both British people and their language. Some Britons also retained a higher position in society than some Anglo-Saxons, or some form of government over certain localities. Language was however undoubtedly another form of Anglo-Saxon control over the Britons, and Old English acted as a superstrate language. The written language of the literate, religious Britons was primarily Latin, and as such, when English became the language of the government, there was no room for Brittonic other than as a spoken language at home, rendering it all but invisible to history.

I would argue, however, that the extent to which this linguistic change happened does seem to favour a higher number of immigrants than those introduced by the most extreme minimalist theories. There would have to have been a significant amount of contact between the hosts and the incomers in order for the changes happening to reach the degree and the rapidity it did. However, these immigrant Anglo-Saxons without a doubt established themselves as an elite, and by no means can the Adventus Saxonum be characterised as a mass migration. They most probably arrived in smaller fractioned groups which established control over smaller or larger territories based on the local levels of government and organisation, resulting in a patchwork of regional chiefdoms – although much points to the Anglo-Saxons not settling down or being connected with

specific areas in the beginning phase, and rather consisting of mobile groups operating within specific areas – which could also be a way of maintaining control.

**Archaeology**

As briefly seen above, archaeological evidence can also shed some light on the way the Anglo-Saxons asserted their authority, through the study of burial and settlement sites. They can tell us important information about the degree of continuity between Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain, and how the Anglo-Saxons acted. The two burial styles which are thought defining of the Anglo-Saxons are cremation and furnished inhumations. Both of these mortuary practices, for uncertain and probably various reasons, occurred across Britain from the fifth century onwards. Although one or the other seems to have been preferred by certain communities or families, sometimes both practices are found in the same cemetery, so-called “mixed-rate cemeteries”. Cremation appears to have been largely dominant in the early phase during the fifth century.

Though both cremation and furnished inhumations have traditionally been considered characteristic of Anglo-Saxon presence, it is especially inhumations accompanied by grave goods which can be used to a larger degree in identifying and studying Anglo-Saxon culture. However, the previously dominant preconception of material culture signifying identity, such as a seventh century male grave accompanied by weapons denoting a wealthy Anglo-Saxon, can both be useful and correct, but also present a problem. For example, it is all but impossible to find a grave which can be attributed to a Briton through the objects buried with it, as there are almost no certain native artefacts found in Early Medieval graves. This has traditionally been one of the reasons why the Britons were thought eradicated, but in later years it has been proposed that the unfurnished graves might actually be an indicator of British identity rather than

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248 Härke, “‘Warrior Graves’?,” 22-23.
that of a poor Anglo-Saxon. If this is to some extent true, then Britons and Anglo-Saxons could in many cases be found buried in the same cemeteries. As earlier mentioned, recent studies have shown that the previous method of typologically categorising ethnicity based on material culture is problematic, and in many cases can lead to false interpretations. For example, about half of the male burials in the fifth and sixth centuries which are dubbed Anglo-Saxon on basis of the material culture associated with them, there is a distinction between those buried with weapons and those buried without them. According to Heinrich Härke this might indicate that the half buried without weapons are Britons as they were generally shorter than those buried with them, and since weapon burial largely is a Germanic tradition.

In addition to these theories, newer chemical research methods, though still far from completely trustworthy, have also made it possible to ascertain ethnicity to a greater degree than in earlier years. Interestingly, a 2014 isotopic study undertaken on 19 individuals from the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery in Berinsfield in the Upper Thames Valley yielded unexpected results. Despite the mortuary practices and material culture being typical of early Anglo-Saxon burials, only 5.3 % (1/19) of the test subjects contained values confidently signifying continental origins. In addition to this one man, only one other individual had a slight possibility of being an immigrant from elsewhere in Europe, and two of the others were most likely from somewhere else in Britain. This means that at least 15 of the 19 individuals – 79 % – buried in the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery were actually Britons local to the Upper Thames Valley.

Although it is important to take into consideration that such studies are still in their early phases, and the investigated material make up an extremely small percentage of the known Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, if one is to believe the results of this investigation, it all but proves that some Britons adopted Germanic material culture already in the earliest phases, and that the acculturation was a rapid process, at least in some localities of Britain. In light of the study’s discovery, however, it is interesting to consider other early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, especially the many found in or close to older existing

251 Susan Hughes et al. “Anglo-Saxon origins investigated by isotopic analysis of burials from Berinsfield, Oxfordshire, UK.”
British or Romano-British burial sites. Whilst there certainly is reason to credit theories about Germanic newcomers burying their dead in the same places as their predecessors as a sign of either greater or continual power, the question is how many of the cemeteries which possibly can be dominated by Britons adopting Germanic fashions. However, the numbers, if they existed, would most likely be subject to great local variations. As not nearly enough such studies have been carried out, one must for now settle with taking the possibility of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries containing accultured Britons into consideration.

Though cremations, inhumations and barrow burials are all Germanic customs, Loveluck has suggested an alternative explanation for barrow burials. He theorises that the Anglo-Saxons’ burying of the dead in barrows instead of cremating them might have been an attempt to display their power in a way familiar to the British population, as the Late Roman custom had been unfurnished inhumation.\(^{252}\) Although furnished inhumation certainly was a Germanic tradition equally as much as cremation, the choice might have fallen on the former as a way of deliberately showing off one’s superiority to the local custom – a similar custom, only more elaborate and expensive.

Cremation was the most common mortuary practice in the early phase of Germanic immigration, but inhumations increase in areas and times when the competition for power was at its strongest.\(^{253}\) This can be illustrated for example by there having been found twice as many burials and objects in the eastern parts of Sussex as in the western parts.\(^{254}\) To the east Sussex bordered Kent, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom with the most diverse archaeological material found, and where many different groups appear to have vied for power. Especially the Franks might have enjoyed great influence there. According to Harrington and Welch, Kent also appears to have been wealthier than its neighbours, and with access to more diverse and precious materials.\(^{255}\) Though it is not surprising that there should be more of a mix of cultures in Kent than elsewhere in Britain, given its geographical placement as somewhat of a “gateway” to the continent, elaborate and expensive burials might indicate instability and stark competition rather than wealth and power.

\(^{252}\) Loveluck, “Acculturation, Migration and Exchange,” 91. In this case specifically in the Peak district.
\(^{253}\) Scull, “Approaches to Material Culture,” 77.
\(^{254}\) Harrington and Welch, The Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Southern Britain, 193.
\(^{255}\) Ibid, 173.
Furnished inhumations, and at its most extreme, barrow burials, are certainly powerful statements of wealth. This is because it was only available to an elite with access to great resources, as it required both extreme forces of manual labour and an economy capable of burying — essentially throwing away — valuable items. They are also extremely visible, public monuments, displaying an elite’s power over nature herself. The burial mound’s effect on the reputation of the ancestors was of as much, if not more, importance than the actual burying of the dead. This type of explanation for the burying of high-status items, called the *potlatch* phenomenon, has been widely accepted in later years, and especially after the post-processualist archaeology movement gained popularity.²⁵⁶

It is therefore not surprising that there should be more finds of high-status burials in areas where the competition was strong. What is interesting is that in light of the burial evidence from Sussex is that there appears to have been considerably more competition with Kent to the east than with Wessex to the west. Was this because Wessex focused its attention on the British in the west, and Kent towards Sussex? If so, is this a matter of competition between ethnic groups, with Saxons versus Britons and Saxons versus Jutes? Or simply a result of the geography of the island and the direction of incoming groups?

As burials in themselves were public displays of power, the burial of an Anglo-Saxon person in a Romano-British cemetery would send a strong signal. What that signal was is up for interpretation, but it could for example either be seen as an overpowering or replacement of the former rulers, or indeed the opposite, that is, continuation of power. The reuse of Bronze Age barrows, as done in for example the Peak District, might in this way have been a way of creating legitimacy and appropriating the older powers,²⁵⁷ or indeed a signal of an elite take-over, which is central to this thesis’ aspect of continuity.

Although the Anglo-Saxons certainly created a new elite culture and identity — which was very different to the Roman one — and brought with them many changes to Britain, it can be argued that the degree of continuity was relatively high between the late Roman and the early Anglo-Saxon periods. Not only did the burial practises and locations in some ways resemble those of the Romano-British, but Roman settlement sites appear to have continued to be centres at least for some time also after the *adventus Saxonum*.²⁵⁸

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²⁵⁷ Loveluck, “Acculturation, Migration and Exchange,” 84.
This can for example be seen in the location of the early Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery Spong Hill in Norfolk and the closely related smaller Roman town of Billingford about three kilometres to the east. Tom Williamson have noted that several fifth century cemeteries, including Spong Hill, the largest excavated Anglo-Saxon cemetery to date, with at least 2259 cremations and 57 inhumations, were connected with central Roman places, and thus that the civitas or their immediate surroundings continued to be central and important sites to the local groups which succeeded them. Although it is rare to find evidence of continuity for a longer time between settlement sites of the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, both Spong Hill and Billingford appear to have been inhabited both by people making use of both Roman and Anglo-Saxon material expressions. Though the excavations at Billingford revealed only a few Germanic objects from the early Saxon period, four continental style buildings (three post-hole and one sunken-featured building) were discovered and proven to have been placed around the apparently existing Romano-British field system ditches, dating them to the early Anglo-Saxon period. This was confirmed by Saxon style pottery found in the top layers of the ditches, which means that the two periods to some extent must have overlapped.

Spong Hill, which was to become an important Anglo-Saxon cemetery, in use from the first half of the fifth to the middle of the sixth century, “has revealed copious evidence of Roman-period occupation.” Evidence from this place also suggests that Roman features were visible in the early stages of burial of Germanic cultural material. As more radio-carbon studies are done on late Romano-British settlement sites and cemeteries, more and more of them are proven to have survived well into the fifth, and even in some cases the sixth and seventh centuries. Evidence for this can for example be the cemeteries at Shakenoak and Tubney Wood in Oxfordshire and Horcott Quarry in Gloucestershire, where it has been proved that the Roman burial practices continued into

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261 Heather Wallis, “Romano-British and Saxon Occupation at Billingford, Central Norfolk,” *East Anglian Archaeology* 135 (2011): 76. The only Early Saxon objects found at Billingford were a cruciform side-knob, a cruciform brooch, another brooch and a razor.
the sixth century, as well as the even longer-surviving sites of Cannington and Shepton Mallet in Somerset, and Wasperton in Warwickshire.  

The pattern which emerges is one of greater British continuity to the west than to the east, just as one would expect seeing as the Anglo-Saxons expanded their power westwards from the North Sea, enabling British rule to survive longer in those parts of the island. Despite the general decline after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire and the decrease in arable land one might expect from a deteriorating population following Germanic invasions, palaeobotanical studies of pollen levels actually reveal that more land was being cultivated in the fifth century than the previous one. This could be seen as evidence for larger numbers of farmers immigrating from the continent, but an alternative theory might be that the Anglo-Saxons needed to found new settlements because they were much more fractioned than the previous government, and that they attempted to ascertain rule over smaller territories than the Romans had done. This might be true at least for the earliest phase of the Anglo-Saxon age, which would fit well with the theories of this thesis.

Based on the discussion above, it does seem like there was some correlation between the places important to the Romans and the centres of Anglo-Saxon activity. This is also to be expected, if one accepts that the native population mostly continued to inhabit the land. Post-Roman Britain was, however large the decline had been since the golden age of the Western Roman Empire, a landscape very much still in use, with farmsteads, fields, roads and trading sites essentially everywhere. As such it would have been difficult for the incoming Germanic people to avoid pre-existing sites, and one would also imagine that simply adopting existing social and political structures, as well as occupying already built and established centres would have been much easier than attempting to tear down and/or establish completely new ones.

It has earlier been thought that the Anglo-Saxons preferred to settle in communities of villages in the lower ground of river valleys as opposed to the Romano-British upland villas and pastoral agriculture. This has however been contested in later years and was primarily a conclusion drawn from lack of or misinterpretation of

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264 Higham and Ryan, _The Anglo-Saxon World_, 87.
It has in the past decades been acknowledged that where the Romans had built in stone, Anglo-Saxons who re-occupied central places, such as London and Lincoln, primarily erected timber or wattle buildings, which only appear as soil to modern archaeologists. Therefore, rather than avoiding of Romano-British settlements, it has been proved that the Anglo-Saxons in some cases inherited or took over the Romano-British infrastructure and continued to use the central places as sites of power and activity. Canterbury and York are examples of this, as is Dorchester. As the Anglo-Saxons expanded their power west- and northwards, it is clear that they also reoccupied the settlements of the British leaders they defeated, like the Northumbrian king Ida did with the important British fortress Bamburgh in the mid-sixth century. The names of several central places in eastern Britain, such as London, Thames, Kent and Dover, are also anglicisations of Roman (and previously British) place-names, which were probably kept since they were already well-established in the larger community. This would ease the transition of power, and their survival also suggests that they continued to be central geographical markers.

When it comes to settlement and building practices, there are several features which distinguish Germanic buildings from other traditions. Long-houses, Grubenhäuser and (smaller and larger) halls were all common features. Grubenhäuser, also called pit-houses, are made by digging a pit in the ground and then constructing the house on top, usually supported by corner posts. This resulted in a sunken floor, which was probably planked over, and was a building technique widely used by the earliest Anglo-Saxons. What they, surprisingly, did not seem to have taken with them, however, were the large long-houses with three aisles, which were very common on the continent. The

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267 Alcock, Arthur’s Britain, 189.
269 Allard and North, Beowulf and Other Stories, 16.
270 Dijkstra and Koning, “‘All quiet on the Western Front?’,” 61.
continental great halls such as described in the heroic poem *Beowulf*\(^{272}\) therefore appear to have been impractical or otherwise unsuitable for the early Anglo-Saxon period in Britain. Possible explanations for this might have been because the situation was so unstable and chaotic that one group did not stay in one place for a long enough period of time to build one, that the risk of them being destroyed was too great, or that the incomers did not have enough resources to have them constructed.

Of course, in later years, in connection with the growing elitist society and the emergence of kingdoms, great halls would again become the status symbol of Anglo-Saxon building traditions, though this time distinctly different from their ancestors. Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxons sometimes appear to have borrowed from British traditions instead of continental. Yeavering in Northumbria is an example of this, where a previously important British religious site was made into an Anglo-Saxon royal *villa* using Romano-British building traditions, respecting the infrastructure already in place.\(^{273}\) Another example is Doon Hill in present-day Scotland, where excavations revealed a timber hall with an annexe which “was apparently the direct successor of an earlier hall which the excavator suggests had been built by the former British owner.”\(^{274}\) On a larger scale the entire layout of Anglo-Saxon Kent also appears to have been modelled on, or evolved from, the Romano-British organisation of the province, similarly to how the Franks on the continent preserved the Roman organisation of regions.\(^{275}\)

Based on the evidence presented above, though material culture was indeed a strong indicator of Germanic identity, it seems as if the traditions and customs were more important, at least in the earliest stages, than the cultural expressions themselves. The first phase of Anglo-Saxon immigration must have been an unstable, chaotic time where the different foreign groups perhaps functioned more as travelling war bands than political units. As earlier mentioned, they did not immediately settle in one place, as there have been found for example Anglian style brooches in later Saxon areas, and vice versa.\(^{276}\) Despite this it is clear that some objects and styles were connected with specific rituals

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\(^{275}\) *Ibid*, 27.
or groups of people, and not readily interchangeable. An example of this can be the early Anglo-Saxon gold bracteates which appear to have been exclusively connected with wealthy women in Kent, perhaps as a ritual or religious rite, or indeed a continuation of Roman practices.\(^{277}\) However, the bracteates had ambiguous uses in other parts of Britain. No matter how one chooses to interpret this, it is clear that material culture had different meanings and connotations to different groups.

An interesting theory to consider is whether the confusing mixing of different cultural expressions might be an indicator of people attempting to establish a Germanic identity without the complete knowledge of the origins of the different styles. In this light the cemetery at Spong Hill becomes very interesting. The artefact and pottery styles recovered from the cremation urns and accompanying objects reveal several close parallels on the continent, but these come from a wide variety of places, including lower Saxony, the very north of Germany, Jutland and other parts of Scandinavia.\(^{278}\) As Nicholas Higham notes in *The Anglo-Saxon World*, “this regional community in East Anglia seems to have been able to pick and choose the material they wished to adopt and/or copy, taking ideas from numerous different sources”.

What this should be interpreted as is difficult to ascertain, but the evidence suggests close contact and parallel activity across the North Sea. It is safe to say that the communities in Britain in the fifth century had knowledge of and contact with a wide network of Germanic societies, and that they were not opposed to adopting foreign traditions and cultural expressions. Who the community who used the cemetery at Spong Hill consisted of is of course impossible to say for certain, but evidence does suggest, as explained above, that there was some continuation between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon period, and that Roman objects were still being deposited at the same time as Anglo-Saxon cultural material had become the main mortuary expression.\(^{279}\) A theory which could help to explain this apparent discrepancy is that the community to whom Spong Hill belonged was of Romano-British origins, who after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire was subjected to Germanic influence either through extensive contact or political activity. One has to assume that there would have been some Anglo-Saxon immigration

\(^{279}\) *Ibid, op. cit.*
to the area, but it is difficult to believe that they could have been as numerous as to be burying approximately 2500 individuals over the course of 150 years. The most likely explanation therefore seems to be that of a significant British population who used Germanic cultural expressions, perhaps because it was now more readily available than Roman, but also because it was more politically advantageous.

Despite almost everything pointing towards the extinction or disuse of Roman or British elements when it comes to most parts of society, both politically, linguistically, materially, culturally and traditionally, it is possible to find some, if not much, evidence of British influence also in the Anglo-Saxon periods. Apart from some surviving geographical and social structures, and a handful of personal names and place names, it is in the art styles and craftwork hints at British connections can be found, though they are few and far between. Perhaps the most widely acknowledged “Celtic” objects to be found associated with Anglo-Saxons are the hanging-bowls. These are artefacts wrought with mystery, for as their use is unknown and their origins clearly British, most hanging-bowls found in Britain are recovered from Anglo-Saxon graves. Sutton Hoo, the grandest Anglo-Saxon burial place discovered to date, produced two hanging-bowls with Celtic features, and in addition an equally ambiguous sceptre adorned with a stag, whose style also point to British influences. It is in metal-working that most traces, small though they be, of Romano-British traditions can be identified, contributing with techniques and artefact types which were added to and further developed by the Anglo-Saxon expressions. An example of this is the quoit style brooch, which was long thought to have Jutish origins. Though the motifs in many cases mirror continental styles, the techniques are decisively Roman. It is therefore suggested that the Anglo-Saxons employed Romano-British metalworkers in their smiths, who learned to fashion Germanic styles in their work. Alternatively, the smiths were responding to a market demanding Germanic styled objects rather than Roman, as a consequence of a change of which was considered the elite or ruling people.

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283 Inker, “Technology as Active Material Culture: The Quoit-brooch Style,” 51.
Though there is no overwhelming evidence pointing to how the Anglo-Saxons regarded and treated the native population of Britons or Romano-Britons, the fragments discussed in this chapter do allow one to draw some conclusions. It seems impossible now to believe that all British activity was discouraged or discontinued. In fact, the evidence examined above appears to point to two possible scenarios: either that the Anglo-Saxons were not opposed to adopting some British features, or that one is in fact largely looking at Britons heavily adopting Germanic traditions and material culture. Both the linguistic and archaeological evidence appear to correspond well with this thesis’ theories of a higher degree of continuity between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, and especially the large presence of surviving British elements after the adventus Saxonum, even though most of them are probably historically invisible. In addition, despite the Anglo-Saxons undoubtedly regarding the British culture of less value than their own Germanic, or North Sea, culture, the rapid adoption of Anglo-Saxon cultural material was probably in a large part due to British incentive to gain access to the advantages of the new elite.
Conclusions

The English are historically one of the peoples which have had the most impact on world history, and their language has as a natural development become the *lingua franca* of the modern world. Their history is a vast one, which has attracted many a researcher, but the very origin of this people is still obscure and debated. The Anglo-Saxons, whom many to this day find pride in identifying with, were originally not native to the island of Britain, but several independent Germanic tribes who migrated there in the early Middle Ages. The original population of the Celtic Britons, whom due to the rule of the Roman Empire had become Romano-British, had developed a cultural and military elite with *villas* and *citadels*. After the coming of the Anglo-Saxons, however, these features appear to have been almost completely obliterated. This is believed to have happened over a relatively short space of time, and we know that in what would later become known as England there are next to no remaining traces of a British cultural presence left after the fifth century, and rather Germanic elements have taken over. Traditionally this has been taken to mean, in accordance with the earliest writings of Gildas, Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a brutal slaughter and genocide of the existing population, with the survivors either submitting to slavery, or fleeing to the west and north, or indeed across the sea to Brittany. It is my belief, however, that what happened rather was a total and utterly cultural and political Anglo-Saxon dominance in the more easily accessed geographical areas of lowland England, explaining the lack of Romano-British presence in these parts.

The main question asked in this thesis is how the Anglo-Saxons managed to establish hegemony in Britain as efficiently and quickly as they did. Many different theories have been suggested throughout the years, but none of them seem to offer an explanation which can fit with all the seemingly contradictory evidence. The largest questions within this field of study are without a doubt connected with the migration of the Anglo-Saxons itself, and scholars disagree about whether they arrived as mercenaries during the Roman occupation, as raiders in the post-Roman period, were invited there by the Britons themselves, migrated as whole families who settled peacefully, or came to take over as a political elite. The theory which throughout this thesis has stood out as the most convincing, is that the Anglo-Saxons originally arrived in groups of warriors intent on raiding the island as the Britons were left more or less defenceless after their
abandonment by the Roman Empire. It is evident that there was a lot of contact across the North Sea during the Migration period. One must be careful not to think of Antiquity and Medieval societies as static, isolated nationalities where “everyone” farmed their land and had little knowledge of the world surrounding them. That is anything but the truth. There was a lot of contact between different societies and cultures, and they were capable of organising and planning large-scale actions, as the “barbarian conspiracy” is evidence of. The Germanic peoples had a great deal of knowledge about Britain through working there as mercenaries, as well as trading with and pillaging them. They would therefore have been very much aware of the situation in Britain and seen its situation as an opportunity to establish themselves as a new elite where there now were none.

However, the *adventus Saxonum* was not a large-scale organised event. The Germanic groups which arrived in Britain from the fifth century onwards originated from different places of the northern part of the continent, arriving independently and at different times. These peoples included Jutes, Saxons, Angles, Frisians and Franks, and possibly also others who were completely lost to history. These groups must have been of various sizes and numbers. Some, like the Angles, must have been a larger number of people, whilst others, such as the Frisians and Franks, came in smaller quantities and were perhaps swallowed up by the other Germanic cultures of larger presence. This could explain, for instance, why the Jutes seem to have kept alive their old cultural signifiers when faced with the “threat” of the Angles and Saxons, whose identity was more secure due to their numbers, and as a consequence were more perceptive to input from other sources.

The Anglo-Saxon invading groups would have attempted to ascertain their authority over the areas in which they settled. Establishing rule over the Britons would not have been difficult if they followed the Roman model the inhabitants of the island were already accustomed to through hundreds of years of subjection. Roman Britain had been a divided and stratified society, where the Roman and British leading families married each other and were part of a Romano-British elite. This elite layer of society was very distant from the common people, and much more a part of European nobility than of the rural Celtic Britons. They resided in *villas* and central places like nodal points scattered across the island and existed as a parallel to the rest of the society, who mostly lived on single farmsteads or in hamlets.
The difference between being ruled by one large, well organised military nation, however, and that of many small, culturally and politically fractioned Anglo-Saxon warrior bands, would have been vast. It is very important to distinguish between the upper class of society and that of the rural population, which probably remained distinctly “Celtic”. By replacing or subjecting the Romano-British sub-kings without also having a centralising government, the new Anglo-Saxon rulers effectively created smaller administrative units, and as settlers instead of governing visitors in specialised forts, must have come into closer contact with the locals than what the Romans had done. There is evidence pointing to also the Anglo-Saxons to some degree upholding the Roman tribute-paying system, which allowed for some continuity of local British rule. That Britons did keep control of, or at least still resided in, several localities many years after the adventus Saxonum is evident in place-name studies, as there are a number of places which bear a name containing the elements "walh" or "cumbre" (meaning Welsh and Briton), such as Walcot or Comberton. That these places in many cases were connected with high-status or central sites suggests that they were more likely sub-lords of the Anglo-Saxons rather than their slaves. On the other hand, these place-names almost certainly also bears witness to places where British identities survived for a longer period of time than elsewhere.

This larger degree of contact with the ruling elite and the rest of the population would have had a bigger influence on the daily life of the Britons, but also brought their culture much closer their rulers. After quite a short amount of time, British elements started appearing in Anglo-Saxon material culture, most probably due to the metalworkers being British and employing their old techniques to making a new style. This might have been because the Anglo-Saxons employed British workers in their forges, but it might also have been born out of a market which was wanting to express Anglo-Saxon identities because of it being a symbol of status. That Britons attempted to use Germanic cultural expressions in order to advance their social standing is perhaps reflected in the confusing nature of the early material culture. They were exposed to a variety of different styles, from Scandinavia, Anglia, Saxony, Frisia and Frankia especially, and were not always able to, or cared to, distinguish between them. In addition, that such a distinctly insular Anglo-Saxon style should develop despite the North Sea region being as closely connected as it was, and cultural and linguistic change happening
parallelly on both sides of the English Channel,\textsuperscript{284} might just be attributed to Britons inadvertently lending their Romano-British backgrounds to their development.

The way Roman Britain was organised would prove important to the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons managed to gain control. There appears to have been some continuity between the two periods, though this is difficult to say for certain. What is of great importance is however that the Britons were accustomed to there being a ruling elite culturally different from themselves. From Roman times they were used to another culture that their own being the ideal and politically and socially advantageous. As the Roman Empire weakened and Germanic people arrived in their absence – and the British defences were next to non-existent as the Roman army had been responsible for them for several centuries – the culture of the Anglo-Saxons became the new ideal. Many Britons might have seen this as an opportunity to climb the social ladder – and doing so entailed displaying Anglo-Saxon identities.

As studies have shown, the number of Anglo-Saxon invaders could not have been very large when compared with the British population. There is therefore a discrepancy between the number of Anglo-Saxon style objects and the presence of ethnically Germanic people in Britain. Evidence that there was a greater originally British percentage hidden underneath the Anglo-Saxon material recovered from Early Medieval Britain is found in several, however vague, sources, both archaeological and historical. Newer isotopic analyses at early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries such as Berinsfield have shown that the majority of the people buried with Anglo-Saxon objects were in fact of British origins.\textsuperscript{285} In addition, many Anglo-Saxon kings bear names which hint at British descent or connections, for example Cædwalla and Æthelwealh, and the royal origin stories in some instances build on British traditions. On the other hand, despite there obviously being a significant British presence also in the Anglo-Saxon elite societies, displaying Germanic heritage and identity seems to have been of great importance, as they went to great lengths to emphasise it through for example genealogies going back to continental and legendary figures, and wore even more elaborate weapons and jewellery than the continental Anglo-Saxons themselves.

\textsuperscript{284} Loveluck and Tys, “Coastal societies, exchange and identity along the Channel and southern North Sea shores of Europe, AD 600-1000,” 142.
\textsuperscript{285} Susan Hughes et al. “Anglo-Saxon origins investigated by isotopic analysis of burials from Berinsfield, Oxfordshire, UK.”
The overwhelming display of wealth in elaborate objects and the escalating rate of furnished burials both reflect an unstable society where one needed to constantly assert one’s power. This is in accordance with a community where there is suddenly a vacuum of power, and many rivalling groups – be they British or Germanic – attempt to fill the void left. The times must have been chaotic and often rapidly changing. Such a picture fits well with which customs were adopted from the continent, in that smaller and more portable elements like wearable items and simpler constructions were numerous, but larger features like great halls were absent. On the other hand, it is important to remember that this situation is something which mostly would have affected the ruling classes of society. Studies of for example pollen levels have shown that the common population most probably continued relatively undisturbed.\textsuperscript{286} The archaeology of the greater proportion of the population is all but invisible to us. Those cemeteries and settlements in which objects are found are mostly reflecting of people of a higher status. These were the persons who would benefit the most from attempting to fit into the new elite groups.

In this particular instance identity is of greater importance than ethnicity. As there as previously mentioned are decidedly Anglo-Saxon kings who bear British names, Anglo-Saxon identity appears to have not been defined by ethnicity – although inheritance and lineage were very much important given the genealogies claiming Germanic descent. Perhaps was language and material culture more important in fitting in with the elite during the early stages of Anglo-Saxon Britain. If all this is so, there is no wonder that the Anglo-Saxon culture gained popularity as quickly as it did. The British culture, as very visible in the later laws of Ine of Wessex, was certainly considered inferior, something which it already had been regarded as for several centuries. The remaining British elite who interacted with the early Anglo-Saxon incomers appear to have readily adopted their culture and identity in order to better their own position in society. In this way the Anglo-Saxons did not have to impose their culture on a resisting population, but it was rather helped along by the British elite’s conscious choice of abandonment of their Romano-British heritage. This is not surprising, considering the ruins which were left of the Roman Empire – its associations were at the time of instability and weakness. In addition, being a part of the Roman Empire as well as the North Sea

\textsuperscript{286} Higham and Ryan, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon World}, 87.
region had made the British Isles well connected with and knowledgeable about other cultures and languages. Roman Britain itself was a mixture of many different nationalities, and intermarriage between the elite families among them was probably not uncommon, as demonstrated by the Syrian Barates and his British wife Regina. In other words, Roman Britain was a melting pot of different cultures. The introduction of another and it gaining popularity as an elite ideal would not have been that big of a change for the Britons.

In this way Roman Britain laid the ground work for the *adventus Saxonum*. Post-Roman Britain was an easy target for incoming groups of warriors seeking territory and power. As Guy Halsall writes in his *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, the fall of the Roman Empire produced the “barbarian migration”, rather than the Anglo-Saxons causing the Roman Empire to fall.\(^{287}\) Without the preconditions of a people subjected to several centuries of being told their culture was inferior and unsuited to rule, the Anglo-Saxon advancement in Britain would most certainly not have been as efficient and rapid as it was. The Romano-Britons’ adoption of the new Anglo-Saxon elite culture resulted in the development of a new mixed Anglo-British elite, which maintained their contacts with the continent and continued to regard their Germanic heritage as superior. The British culture elements had already begun to fade out of the archaeological evidence by the time of the *adventus Saxonum*, and it is therefore incorrect to interpret its later absence as the absence of British people themselves. Rather, another culture had gained status and political advantages.

It was therefore the Anglo-Saxons’ superior attitude towards their own culture, coupled with the fact that several centuries of Roman rule had accustomed the Romano-British elite to there being a distinct elite culture separate from the rest of the population’s. The consequence of this is that there was a high degree of continuity between Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain when it comes to both ethnicity and organisation, but that the society took on a completely new and different identity and outward image. As the competition for power was very strong both between the Britons themselves, the different Anglo-Saxon groups, and between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, this process happened extremely quickly.

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