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The social and political background

The English language became established in the island of Britain in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. The settlement here of Anglo-Saxon peoples must be understood as one part of the radical cultural and political transformation of the late Roman world traditionally known as the 'Age of Migrations' or the 'Barbarian Invasions' (Figure 1).[1] In Britain there occurred a more radical linguistic and cultural change than elsewhere in the Western Roman Empire – that is, in the barbarian successor kingdoms that emerged from Roman Gaul, Spain and Italy. Whereas on the Continent Latin became the dominant language, spoken at all levels of society (eventually developing into the modern Romance languages of French, Spanish and Italian), in Britain Latin speech went into decline. In most of the lowland zone Romano-British culture was overwhelmed during the fifth and sixth centuries by that of pagan Germanic incomers, whose language was to develop into Old English; whilst in the west of Britain Latin also gave way, but to variant forms of the indigenous Celtic or Brittonic language (Primitive Welsh and Cornish).

It is not clear why Britain's linguistic fortunes were so distinctive. In the fourth century AD the island had been divided into a number of Roman provinces, with capitals at London, York, Lincoln and Cirencester. In the lowland zone, a Latin-speaking ruling elite had lived in high style in rural Roman villas and had also formed the dominant class in some twenty walled towns, most of which served as the administrative capitals of tribal territories or *civitates*. Latin had also remained – to judge from inscriptions – the language of the army, even though the late Roman troops themselves had been recruited from outside the Empire. Latin was also the language used for the brief inscriptions (or 'legends') upon Roman coins issued by numerous imperial mints on the Continent. Latin is therefore likely to have been the language of trade, certainly of long-distance trade, throughout the West.[2] As the fourth century progressed, the Romano-British elite had followed the imperial family's example and adopted Christianity, beginning to abandon

their former pagan temples. Bishoprics are also likely to have been established in the main towns.[3] In late antique Britain – as throughout the West – Latin was also the language in which the Christian Scriptures were transmitted, in which Christian liturgy was conducted and in which Christian theology was debated. How securely an urbanized Roman economy and this Christian Latin culture had actually taken root, even in lowland areas of late fourth-century Britain, remains an issue of debate.[4]

What does seem clear, however, is that the successive withdrawals to the Continent of all the mobile elements of the Roman army of Britain in the late fourth and early fifth century had culminated in the Emperor Honorius's renunciation in *c.* 410 of the Empire's commitment to control Britain, and had left the Latin-speaking civil aristocracy of Britain in a particularly vulnerable position.[5] Only for about a generation did the island's senatorial aristocracy prove able to negotiate the kind of agreement with groups of barbarian ('Saxon') warrior-settlers that elsewhere in the Empire helped to ensure the continued domination of Latin culture and speech. British tradition (preserved by Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum*) remembered thereafter a 'Saxon' rising against their British employers. English tradition (recorded by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) preferred to record the arrival in the middle years of the fifth century of a succession of Anglo-Saxon warrior-leaders and their followers in a few ships, which Bede termed 'the arrival of the English' (*adventus Anglorum*). The subsequent victories of these leaders or of their descendants over British enemies were remembered as the foundation of English kingdoms and dynasties.[6]

In southern and eastern Britain this political and cultural transformation is detectable in the archaeological record by newly established burial grounds, the so-called 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries' of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries – some containing only cremation burials, with the ashes placed within hand-made but highly decorated pots or urns; some comprising inhumation burials with accompanying grave-goods (especially jewellery and weapons); while others were mixed-rite cemeteries (that is, with both cremations and inhumations).[7] Unless DNA analysis from burials in many of these cemeteries comes to provide clear and consistent evidence, it is unlikely ever to be possible to assess what proportion of those buried were immigrants of Germanic origin and speech, and what proportion were men and women from the indigenous British population, who had either been compelled or had chosen to use the new cemeteries and to adopt Anglo-Saxon burial practices and accoutrements. At present therefore, archaeology cannot determine whether the Anglo-Saxon settlements involved a migration of peasant farmers from the Continent or comprised a series of military land-takings by a Germanic warrior-elite, which subjected the indigenous British rural

population. But the designs of the cremation urns and most of the stylistic links of the jewellery and weapons buried as grave-goods do establish that the cultural affiliation of these burials was predominantly, though not exclusively, with the North German and Danish homelands of the Anglo-Saxons and with the 'Frisian' coastal sites of the Low Countries (Figure 1). These cemeteries may therefore already represent a conscious adoption of an Anglo-Saxon or 'English' identity in lowland Britain.

Linguistic evidence for the relations of Anglo-Saxons, Britons and Latin speakers in these 'Dark Ages' has proved equally problematic.[8] The extreme rarity of loan-words of Celtic origin in Modern English and their virtual absence from the recorded word-store of Old English indicates that Brittonic languages were perceived as having inferior status to English; British words were eschewed in written English, lest they betrayed the writer's low status. But the ways in which Old English came to differ in its morphology and syntax from other West Germanic languages hints that people whose first language was Celtic may have had a considerable influence upon how the English language developed within Britain. That would fit with the evidence of place-names. While the British names for many major Roman sites survived in use (at least as one element of the Anglo-Saxon and modern English names), a considerable number of Celtic names, especially of rivers and natural features, were also retained and applied to adjacent settlements throughout the lowland zone. But the vast bulk of the modern names of rural settlements (farms, hamlets and villages) are English coinages of the Anglo-Saxon period; they reflect the ultimate dominance of Old English in lowland Britain, but we do not have any clear chronology for their formation. Many of the earliest English names seem (like the Celtic survivals) to have been topographic names. 'Habitative' names, such as those in *-ham* and *-tun*, are not now presumed to be early formations from the period of the 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries'; some of them can indeed be shown to preserve the names of particular tenth- or eleventh-century lords, rather than (as once supposed) of the first Anglo-Saxon founders of new settlements. What remains clear is that the survival of a small but significant Celtic element in the place-names in even the most easterly English regions points to the survival of a population of Celtic origin, whose language was to be lost over a number of generations.

The pagan culture of the Anglo-Saxon settlers of Britain was fundamentally changed in the course of the seventh century by the two Christian missions to the English: the Roman monks sent by Pope Gregory I to Kent under King Æthelberht in 597, who were led by St Augustine, and the Irish-speaking monks from Iona under St Aidan received by King Oswald of Northumbria in 635. In his remarkable *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,

completed in the year 731,[9] the Northumbrian monk Bede indicates that by the end of the sixth century a dozen or more pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been established in eastern and southern Britain, ranging from the Isle of Wight and the West Saxons in the south to Bernicia in the north-east, lying between the river Tees and the Firth of Forth (Figure 2). Bede concentrates upon the conversion of the ruling dynasties of these kingdoms to Christianity, having little to say about the beliefs of the mass of the rural population.[10] Bede did preserve Pope Gregory's advice to Augustine to facilitate the conversion process by reusing pagan temples as churches (after appropriate ritual cleansing) and by allowing great feasts at timely Christian anniversaries in lieu of the seasonal pagan animal sacrifices (*HE* I.30). That process of acculturation has given the English their days of the week named after pagan gods (Tiw, Woden, Thor and Frei), their Christmas ceremonies involving 'Yuletide' feasting (deriving from the pagan midwinter ceremony of *Giuli*), and most remarkably of all their retention of the name 'Easter' for the annual celebration of the supreme Christian commemoration of Christ's Resurrection, which is actually that of the Germanic fertility goddess Eostre, whose springtime fertility rites survive in popular gifts of decorated eggs.

Bede records the succession of bishops to the sees established by the two missions and the dramatic fluctuations of pagan and Christian fortunes in the seventh century. His *Ecclesiastical History* reinforced the message that the English were a 'chosen people' by calculating dates for events in their history from the birth of Christ; he thereby pioneered the use of AD dating and influenced subsequent history-writing in Europe, leading to the modern all-purpose numbering of years according to the so-called 'common era'. Bede's own mastery of the complexities of the Christian inheritance of solar and lunar calendars led him to emphasize the conflicts between the Roman and Irish missions over the calculation of the date of Easter and the difficulties in both his native Northumbria and in the kingdoms under its influence arising from the two missions' use of divergent calendars until 664, when King Oswiu supported Roman practice at the Synod of Whitby (*HE* III.25–6). That decision paved the way for the learned Greek ecclesiastic, Theodore, a papal nominee as archbishop of Canterbury (668–90), to reorganize the English Church. In his time and in the following quarter-century a network of monasteries (or 'minsters') was established in every Anglo-Saxon kingdom and diocese as the foundation for Christian worship and for routine pastoral work.[11]

It is noteworthy that the areas of Britain whose ecclesiastical history Bede recounts in detail correspond closely with those where the 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries' had been established. By contrast he seems to have had little knowledge of territories under English rule west of the Pennines, where

the British language lasted longer and where British churches may still have endured within his lifetime. Bede's intention was indeed to minimize the role of British Christianity, emphasizing instead the sins of the Britons, their doctrinal errors and their failure to convert the Anglo-Saxons. That all helped to justify the English takeover of much of the island of Britain and the continued reduction of Britons to servile or tributary status. Bede's purpose here, like that of the later *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, was to present Anglo-Saxon kings as the true successors of the Romans in the legitimate Christian rule of the island. In this endeavour his work is notable for its assumption that the kingdoms of his own day, which he considered to have 'Jutish', 'Saxon' or 'English' origins (*HE* 1.15), nonetheless shared a common ecclesiastical history, that of a single English people (*gens Anglorum*). That interpretative model reflected the structure of the English Church deriving from Gregory I's scheme for two provinces, each with twelve subordinate bishoprics under metropolitan sees at London and York (*HE* 1.29) – although in the event the southern archbishopric was to be set up at Canterbury in 597 (rather than at London), and not until 735 did it prove possible to establish York as an archbishopric. What emerged by the mid-eighth century was a Church with provinces for the 'southern' and the 'northern' English, which were never, however, in the pre-Conquest period to gain ecclesiastical authority over the politically independent British, Scottish or Pictish kingdoms of the west and north. York's authority therefore always remained significantly smaller than Canterbury's, with at most four suffragan sees in comparison to Canterbury's eleven or twelve. Within lowland Britain, however, the development of a common English identity was facilitated by the greater wealth and military power of the English rulers and also by the perception that the English Church was alone in being considered orthodox at Rome. The Anglo-Saxon Church was indeed careful throughout its history to maintain very close links with the papacy, in part as a means of strengthening the concept of a shared English Christian identity within Britain.

The use of the English language for the imposition of law and the maintenance of justice was another factor encouraging the general adoption of English identity. There survive four law-codes in the names of seventh-century English kings, three from Kent (Æthelberht, Hlothhere and Eadric, and Wihtred) and one from Wessex (Ine). Like all later Anglo-Saxon legislation (from the laws of King Alfred to those of Cnut) and in contrast to the continental barbarian codes, these early laws are all in the vernacular language rather than in Latin.[12] They strongly suggest that the law-courts of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had operated in the English language from the start and that access to the law depended upon use of that language. While the preservation of the text of laws in the name of King Æthelberht of

Kent – the first Anglo-Saxon king to be baptized a Christian – was of course a product of the continuity of church archives in Kent, we should beware presuming that the Anglo-Saxons had hitherto only known unwritten customary law, and that written law should itself be reckoned an innovation of the Gregorian mission – along with the Latin alphabet, the Holy Scriptures and Latin liturgical and exegetical books. For it seems very unlikely that St Augustine of Canterbury (or his Roman companions) composed any of Æthelberht's laws – except perhaps for the first clause providing legal protection for churchmen. All the rest seem uniformly non-Christian (or pre-Christian) in content. Until Æthelberht's baptism, laws may for generations have been written down in Old English (or in earlier West Germanic languages) in the runic alphabet (or *futhorc*, as it is called from its first six letters) by pagan rune-masters.[13]

The conversion of the English to Christianity meant that education had initially to be geared to training English monks and priests to read and understand the Scriptures and to deliver Christian rituals in Latin. It is therefore of interest that in the school of Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian at Canterbury there developed a practice of annotating the Latin biblical texts and many basic works of the Church Fathers with Greek or Latin synonyms written above key words in a smaller script, as a means of conveying inherited learning and also of translating some terms into English as a basic educational device. Lists of such 'glosses' were soon being formed and circulated for memorization.[14] We know, moreover, from Bede's account of the poet Cædmon that Christian poetry was being composed in the English language in the later seventh century, and (intriguingly) by one whose name was British and who seems to have been of peasant status until his admission into the male community at Whitby (*HE* IV.22). That may hint at the development of English identity in the North Riding of Yorkshire. We possess precious eighth-century witnesses to the Old English text of Cædmon's *Hymn*, as well as to a version of the anonymous *Dream of the Rood*. But the bulk of the extant Old English poetry, both religious and secular, is only extant in manuscripts of the late tenth or early eleventh century, and we lack – except perhaps for the heroic secular masterpiece *Beowulf* – clear means of determining whether the extant texts were composed significantly earlier than the script of the manuscripts.[15] What seems clear is that Old English poetry, both Christian and secular, was preserved in Anglo-Saxon monastic libraries and reflects the taste of the almost exclusively aristocratic membership of those houses.[16]

The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the seventh and eighth centuries were the product of frequent warfare, both with the British kingdoms on the western marches and with their Anglo-Saxon neighbours. Two general developments

are evident: military predominance tended to pass to those Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had a frontier with territories still under British rule, whose inhabitants could be enslaved or made tributary; secondly, the smaller Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were gradually subjected to the larger ones, and their royal dynasties were suppressed. Bede provides striking examples of both processes (*HE* I.34, IV.16): he recounts how no previous ruler before the pagan Northumbrian king Æthelfrith (592–616) had either rendered more land habitable for the English by exterminating the natives or subjected more of them to payment of tribute; he also records how the Christian West Saxon warrior-king Ceadwalla (685–8) compelled the pagan Jutish princes of the Isle of Wight to accept baptism and then had them executed, as part of a process to 'drive out all the natives' (*omnes indigenas exterminare*) and to replace them with men of his own (West Saxon) people. Bede's willingness to use the language of ethnic cleansing reveals that the forcible expulsion of existing landed lords was a normal concomitant of warfare in this period. Later in the eighth century, when our narrative sources are less informative, it is still possible to demonstrate, chiefly from the evidence of charters, comparable processes by which King Offa of Mercia (757–96) suppressed the ruling dynasties and local aristocracies of Kent, the South Saxons and the Hwicce and began to install Mercian nobles in their place.[17]

This process by which the 'pike' among the English kingdoms 'swallowed the minnows' had developed until just four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms remained by the early ninth century: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia (which had taken over the whole Midland area between the Thames and the Humber) and Wessex, which had come to dominate all the area south of the Thames and was seeking to wrest control of the former East Saxon kingdom from the Mercians. English historians have indeed often been tempted to interpret the course of Anglo-Saxon political history as one of progress towards the desired political objective of a single English nation-state. Significant stages in that process have been detected in a famous passage of Bede's *History* (*HE* II.5) in which he claimed that Æthelberht of Kent was the third of seven English rulers to exercise a lordship (*imperium*) over all the southern English kingdoms. Bede only extended his list as far as Kings Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu, who ruled the Northumbrian kingdom between 617 and 670, and who at times had authority over the southern English and even over parts of northern Britain as well. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, compiled in Wessex at the court of King Alfred in the 890s, bombastically adds Alfred's grandfather King Ecgberht (802–39) to the list as the eighth *Bretwalda* ('mighty ruler' or 'ruler of Britain'), on the basis of his very brief conquest of the Mercians and of the peace that he established with the Northumbrians in the same year (829).[18]

It seems clear that several Mercian kings – Penda (626×33–55), Wulfhere (658–75), Æthelbald (716–57) and Offa (757–96) – had for somewhat longer periods of their reigns also been able to exercise a similar lordship over the southern English. These periodic military 'over-kingships' did not, however, amount to a regular office with settled institutions for succession and government. Their power depended upon the uncertain fortunes of battle. Yet the huge potential profits from booty and tribute and from trading captives as slaves attracted several Anglo-Saxon rulers to attempt to gain this form of predatory hegemony. An insight into the wealth of gold and silver and into the superb metalworking craftsmanship available to such powerful overlords in the seventh century is provided on the one hand by the 'Sutton Hoo ship-burial' (very probably the memorial of King Rædwald of the East Angles, the fourth overlord in Bede's list); and on the other by the 'Staffordshire Hoard', which contained inter alia wonderfully fine gold and garnet decorative adornments for the handles of more than seventy-five dress-swords. It thus conveys some impression of the conspicuous wealth that drew warriors into the service of Mercian overlords in the later seventh century.[19]

Owing to the remarkable longevity of two Mercian kings, Æthelbald (716–57) and Offa (757–96), the powers exercised by Anglo-Saxon overlords in the eighth century seem to have been becoming more durable. But neither ruler proved able to establish a lasting dynasty. Indeed the insecurity generated within an overlord's retinue, as age made him less willing to lead profitable military expeditions, may help to explain Æthelbald's murder by his own retainers at Seckington (Warwickshire) in 757. Offa was indeed to make a more coherent effort to perpetuate his regime by adopting methods of legitimization that had been successfully pioneered on the Continent by the Carolingian dynasty. In order to have his son Ecgfrith consecrated as king in 787, i.e. during the father's lifetime, Offa pushed through a radical restructuring of the English Church by raising his Mercian see of Lichfield to metropolitan status (at Canterbury's expense). But the antagonisms among the former royal families, aristocracies and leading ecclesiastics, whose power Offa had curtailed so radically, provoked a violent rejection of Mercian rule both in Kent and in East Anglia as soon as Offa died. Moreover, the death of Ecgfrith, in 796, within a few months of his father, exposed the fragility of Offa's plans and appeared to provide a divine judgement that Offa's violence had indeed exceeded what was appropriate for a Christian king.[20] Within a few years the archbishopric of Lichfield had been abolished and Canterbury's authority over the whole of its province re-established (803).

In the ninth century the trajectory of English political history changed. The rulers of the continuing Northumbrian, Mercian, East Anglian and West Saxon kingdoms now all faced a common external threat. In 793 seaborne

Viking raiders sacked the Northumbrian royal monastery of Lindisfarne, an event that caused Alcuin to lament that 'never before has such a terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made'.[21] Similar raids in successive years on Bede's former monastery of Jarrow (794) and on Iona (795) indicate the start of regular pagan Scandinavian raiding; there are also hints in Kentish charters between *c.* 790 and 815 that this Viking threat persuaded both Offa and Cenwulf of Mercia (798–821) to attempt to restructure military service and the building of fortresses and bridges to counter the new danger. Though the poverty of our narrative sources for English history in the first half of the ninth century has obscured the details of this early Viking activity, we can detect a new phase of 'Danish' activity in 851, when for the first time in England a 'heathen army' spent the winter on the island of Thanet rather than returning in the autumn to Scandinavia. That practice, already pioneered on the Continent, enabled Viking armies to remain longer in the field and to terrorize and extract booty from English rulers far more systematically than hitherto. Thus the 'great heathen army' which arrived in East Anglia in the autumn of 865 was thereafter to move each autumn to new winter quarters in different English or British kingdoms until the year 879, when a newly raised force followed the same strategy on the Continent (where its great size was also noted) for thirteen years until this 'large army' (*se micla here*) returned to England between 892 and 896. A final phase of ninth-century Viking activity had been reached when sections of these large armies under particular commanders chose to give up their full-time raiding and instead take over and rule territories in England. Thus the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes how in 870 the Danes killed King Edmund of East Anglia and 'conquered all the land', how in 876 'Healfdan shared out the land of the Northumbrians and they proceeded to plough and support themselves', and how the following year saw the 'sharing out' of the eastern half of Mercia.[22]

The Viking conquests of the 870s destroyed three of the four ninth-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria); but East Anglia and the southern half of Northumbria were soon to be replaced by new kingdoms with Scandinavian dynasties, while in the East Midlands a more fragmented regime emerged, structured around Viking boroughs. In these conquered areas Christian institutions struggled to survive in any form; indeed East Anglia, the East Midlands and Lindsey were to lack bishops for about seventy-five years. Pagan Scandinavian warriors became the lordly class, and distinctively Scandinavian legal customs and terminology were to be retained there throughout the rest of the Anglo-Saxon period, so that the region came to be known as the 'Danelaw'. Old Norse speakers also came to

have a huge influence on the evolution of the English language, particularly on that of the East Midlands, the dialect which underlies Modern English. Scandinavian speech also affected the place-names of the region, so that Norse terms (such as *-by* and *-thorp*) for farm settlements were used for new names, usually in conjunction with Scandinavian personal names. It remains controversial whether this huge linguistic impact could have been achieved just through the evolution of successive contingents of Viking armies into an enduring landed aristocracy in northern and eastern England, or whether we also need to posit a significant migration of Scandinavian peasant-farmers into the Danelaw.[23]

The attempt of the 'great army' to subjugate all four of the English kingdoms failed when King Alfred of Wessex (871–99) defeated 'King' Guthrum in the battle of Edington (878) and oversaw his baptism as a Christian in an elaborate ceremony involving thirty of his followers. Between 892 and 896 the successor 'great army' tried once more to conquer southern England, but by then King Alfred's military reforms had taken root and had fundamentally altered the balance of power in his favour.[24] Alfred and the ecclesiastical advisers attracted to his court regarded the Viking assaults as God's punishment of a people who had permitted the decline of religious life and of Latin learning in England. Their programme to assuage the Lord's anger by devising a strong Christian education in the English language for all aristocratic English children through the provision of vernacular versions of the books 'most important for men to know' was outlined in the king's preface to the translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, produced *c.* 890. It was accompanied by English versions of other patristic works, of Bede's *History* and by the composition of a new work, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, depicting the West Saxon dynasty as the successors in Britain of Christian Roman emperors.[25]

Alongside the West Saxon success against the Vikings, a fragment of the former Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria also remained independent north of the river Tees, under a dynasty of ealdormen based in Bamburgh; and western Mercia likewise avoided submitting to Scandinavian rule by alliance with Wessex, first under Ealdorman Æthelred and then from 910–19 under his widow, Æthelflæd (King Alfred's daughter). These developments enabled King Alfred and his successors to present themselves from the 890s as kings of the 'Anglo-Saxons' and his grandsons – King Æthelstan (924–39), Eadmund (939–46) and Eadred (946–55) – as 'kings of the English' (using the title *rex Anglorum*) from 928 onwards. Such titles portrayed the conquest of Midland and Northern England by Alfred's able descendants as a process of unification of the English people, rather than as the conquest of northern and eastern kingdoms by the southern dynasty. Key stages in the northward extension of

the dynasty's rule were: (1) the systematic conquest of Essex, East Anglia and the east Midlands by Edward the Elder and his sister Æthelflæd, by means of the incremental garrisoning of fortified boroughs; (2) King Æthelstan's incorporation of the kingdom of York under his rule in 927, seemingly confirmed by his great victory over a coalition of Scottish, British and Scandinavian northern rulers at the battle of *Brunanburh* (937), commemorated in Old English verse; and (3) the final expulsion of the last Viking ruler of the kingdom of York, Eric 'Bloodaxe', in 954, which paved the way for King Eadred's rule there.

These successful conquests made Alfred's descendants and their leading aristocratic supporters in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries phenomenally rich. The kingdom's growth facilitated a gradual restructuring of local government in the later tenth century, whereby the old Mercian provinces under ealdormen came to be replaced by smaller 'shires' based upon boroughs that had first been built either by Edward the Elder and Æthelflæd or (within the Danelaw) by the Danish armies. The new 'shires' served as the principal territories of judicial, military and fiscal administration. In the late Anglo-Saxon period the shire-reeve (sheriff) was normally an official appointed by the king to preside over the biennial meetings of the shire court, to exact fines and administer justice there; and to raise taxation and military forces from the shire community. Within the shires were smaller districts – called 'hundreds' in English regions or 'wapentakes' in much of the Danelaw – which were both fiscal units with regular assessments in terms of 'hides' or 'carucates' for taxation purposes and also judicial units with monthly courts, chiefly serving the needs of the rural peasantry of the locality. Both shire and hundred courts administered a harsh justice, set out in the law-codes issued in the names of the kings and built upon the principle that everyone had to take an oath of loyalty, to belong to systems of suretyship for the maintenance of peace, and to attend the appropriate courts regularly.[26]

The precocious establishment in the course of the tenth century of this remarkably centralized legal and fiscal administration throughout most of the English kingdom, that is, in territories south of the river Humber, was matched by the silver pennies issued in the name of each successive king, which became a uniform national coinage of high standard, available throughout the kingdom and serving as the sole legal currency both for trading and for fiscal purposes.[27] Royal control of this coinage was effective: foreign coins did not circulate in England, being instead melted down and reissued as English pence. After King Edgar's reform of *c.* 973 new coin 'types' were issued simultaneously throughout the kingdom at five- or six-yearly intervals (later every three years) by named moneyers working in named

boroughs or mint-towns. The coinage was also plentiful: the largest issue, in the reign of Cnut, may indeed have been in excess of forty million coins. That may have reflected a temporary need to pay off his troops and fleets, but by the early eleventh century the coinage both reflected and was itself generating significant urban and commercial growth in many of the kingdom's towns or 'boroughs'.[28] Urban and commercial development did indeed go hand in hand with the development of the coinage, the shire system and English law in the south and the Midlands. But its extension northwards was less regular. York, Chester and Lincoln each became substantial mints served by many moneyers, but they remained virtually the only mints or boroughs in northern England. Moreover, although Yorkshire and Lincolnshire did come to bear the name of 'shire', they were actually simply the older Scandinavian provinces, retaining their divisions into three 'ridings' or third parts (*þriðjungar*).

The reign of Edgar (957–75) marked the apparent apogee of the English royal dynasty's power within the kingdom and was remembered as a welcome time of peace, when the king supported a monastic 'Reformation', led by 'Saints' Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald, whom the king appointed to the richest English sees of Canterbury, Winchester and Worcester respectively. They founded reformed monasteries, where the *Rule of St Benedict* and a common customary, the *Regularis concordia*, composed by Æthelwold, were intended to be followed and where the pious king's protection would prevent secular encroachment upon monastic freedom and in return the monks would provide loyal prayers for the king and his family. Several of the forty-odd monasteries established in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries were to endure until the Dissolution and their libraries have preserved the bulk of the surviving manuscripts and manuscript books from Anglo-Saxon England. The reformed monasteries became centres of education and of Latin learning, imitating the intellectual concerns of Carolingian monasticism; and in the second generation they were to house the two most prolific, learned and accomplished authors of Old English prose, namely Ælfric, abbot successively of Cerne and Eynsham, and Wulfstan, bishop of London (996–1002) and later both of Worcester and of York (1002–23).[29]

The landed power of the tenth-century English kings weakened as they extended their power northwards by means of deals with the local Anglo-Scandinavian elites and also purchased peace on their northern frontier by encouraging the southwards ambitions of the Gaelic-speaking kings of the Scots at the expense of local British and Anglo-Saxon dynasties. Thus King Eadmund, after ravaging Strathclyde in 945, immediately recognized the claims of King Malcolm I of the Scots over that former British kingdom; while in 973 Edgar was to cede Lothian (the area from the Tweed to the Forth) to Malcolm's son King Kenneth II, thereby abandoning English claims

to rule a territory that had been under English rule for more than three centuries. That cession may have served to curtail any ambitions of northern conquest and of royal status harboured by the English lords of Bamburgh.[30] The Anglo-Scottish border, which thus came to be established on its modern Tweed–Solway line, made a mockery of the English kings' continued claim to rule all England or all *Angelcynn*. Indeed the dominant element among the nobility of the developing Scottish kingdom was thereafter to be of English speech and culture.

The ninety years from 975 to 1066 were characterized by military and political failures and the foreign conquests of 1016 and 1066. Æthelred II's succession in 978 as a minor occurred after his young half-brother Edward (975–8) was murdered; and after that inauspicious start most of Æthelred's long reign (978–1016) was to experience new and sustained Scandinavian Viking raids.[31] At one level the English kingdom responded impressively to this renewed threat: English armies were re-equipped with expensive helmets and with body armour ('byrnies') of mail, the earthwork and timber defences of the boroughs were replaced with stone walls and gateways at huge cost in labour and materials, and growing sums of silver were raised from taxation to buy off the Danish armies with payments of 'Danegeld'.[32] Indeed when the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicates that between 991 and 1018 phenomenal sums totalling 240,500 pounds of silver were raised both as tribute and to pay Scandinavian troops, it seems to have been well-informed. We do not know whether Æthelred (whose name literally means 'noble counsel') acquired the critical punning sobriquet *Unræd* ('no counsel', 'folly' or 'treachery') in his own lifetime. But the various meanings of *Unræd* leave intriguing doubt whether blame was being placed upon the king's advisers, his own foolishness or indeed on his criminally treacherous behaviour. Æthelred had been too young at his accession to have yet been trained as a warrior, but as king he never took personal command of English armies against the Danish forces endangering his kingdom. He thereby failed in the chief duty of an early medieval king. Military leadership therefore passed to the leading nobles and it is no surprise that many were disinclined to risk their lives in defence of a king unwilling to share their danger. The crushing defeat of the East Saxon force under Ealdorman Byrhtnoth in 991 was portrayed by an Old English poet in *The Battle of Maldon* as a striking example of named English nobles heroically fulfilling their obligations to their lord by fighting on to the death, even when that fight had become hopeless. But in the short run the poet's message may not have countered the negative effect of defeat on English morale.[33]

Æthelred's inadequacies as a military leader were followed by the early death at the end of 1016 of his son and successor, King Edmund 'Ironside', after a year of battles. This left the army of the Danish leader, Cnut, son of

King Svein Forkbeard of Denmark, in undisputed control of England. King Cnut reinforced his conquest of England by marrying Æthelred's widowed queen, the Norman princess Emma, and by taking care to rule with the advice of the archbishops of Canterbury and of York, and also of powerful earls, both Danish and English. For much of his reign (1016–35), however, Cnut was to be an absentee king, for it took a decade of expeditions using his English wealth (and troops) for him to win the thrones of both Denmark and Norway (1028).[34] In England he created a regime capable of running the kingdom in his absence and of supervising the transmission of power to his sons, Harold Harefoot (1036–40) and Harthacnut (1040–2) – the rival offspring respectively of Ælfgifu of Northampton and of Emma – but at the cost of ceding much effective territorial power to his leading nobles. When both Harold I and Harthacnut died young after brief reigns and without offspring, the English succession passed back to Æthelred's lineage; Edward 'the Confessor' (1042–66) was the elder (and the only surviving) of Æthelred's two sons by Emma. He had been raised ever since the accession of Cnut in exile in his mother's homeland (Normandy). Edward proved to be a survivor of considerable political cunning in the face of the power struggles of Earls Siward of Northumbria, Leofric of Mercia and Godwine of Wessex, and of their sons. But Edward's marriage to Godwine's daughter, Edith, produced no child, and in consequence his reign became a long preamble to an expected contest for the English throne. Edward wished the crown to pass to the family of the dukes of Normandy, which had sheltered him throughout his youth; but there is little sign that he had reconciled any of his Anglo-Scandinavian nobles to that outcome.[35]

Edward's death on 5 January 1066 lit the fuse for the long-anticipated succession struggle. Earl Harold Godwineson, though having no hereditary claim, seized power and had himself crowned king at Westminster on 6 January, as King Harold II. He decisively defeated an invading Scandinavian force under the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada, at the battle of Stamford Bridge (25 September), but was himself killed and his army destroyed at Hastings by the forces of Duke William of Normandy (14 October 1066). King William I's coronation on 25 December 1066 initiated the rule of his dynasty and the start of a dramatic replacement of the entire English aristocracy by a new ruling class of French-speaking barons, whose cultural domination of England was to last for some three centuries.

NOTES

1. For general surveys, see L. Musset, *Les invasions: les vagues Germaniques* (Paris, 1965), translated as *The Germanic Invasions: the Making of Europe AD 400–600*

(London, 1975); and more recently G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007) and C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2005), esp. pp. 80–124.

2. Roman coinage is conveniently surveyed in R. Reece, *The Coinage of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2002). There is as yet no conclusive proof that Latin was in general use in late Roman towns in Britain for everyday purposes, in the manner that the Vindolanda tablets establish this for a second-century military site.
3. For minimizing interpretations of the role of Christianity in Roman Britain, see D. Watts, *Religion in Late-Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (London, 1998); W. H. C. Frend, 'Roman Britain: a Failed Promise', in *The Cross Goes North*, ed. M. Carver (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 79–91; and N. Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 116–20, 127–8; for maximizing interpretations, see C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (London, 1981); M. Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London, 1984), pp. 214–16; and D. Petts, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2003).
4. For the view that Roman towns had already been in decay in the fourth century, see R. Reece, 'Town and Country: the End of Roman Britain', *World Archaeology* 12 (1980), 77–92; for the related view that Christianity had been particularly weak in Roman Britain, see Frend, 'A Failed Promise'.
5. The spectacular hoards of late Roman silver that include Christian items, such as those at Canterbury, Corbridge, Hoxne, Mildenhall, Water Newton and Traprain Law, stand witness to the insecurity of that aristocracy in the late fourth or early fifth century, and also to its failure to recover that wealth. See J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300–700* (London, 1977), pp. 15–20.
6. The best general introduction remains *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. J. Campbell, E. John and P. Wormald (Oxford, 1989), pp. 20–44; for individual kingdoms, see *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. R. Bassett (Leicester, 1989), and B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990); for the English primary sources, late though they are, see *EHD*, pp. 148–58 (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*), and 642–51 (Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*).
7. For the mixture of burial rites in England from *c.* 400–700, see *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. H. Hamerow, D. Hinton and S. Crawford (Oxford, 2011), pp. 221–87.
8. See A. Bammesberger, 'The Place of English in Germanic and Indo-European', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, I, *The Beginnings to 1066* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 26–66; and the papers of P. Schrijver, R. Coates, H. Tristram, O. J. Padel and D. Probert in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 165–244. For place-names, see M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England* (London, 1978); and M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000).
9. The fundamental edition remains *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969). Colgrave's translation was conveniently reissued under the same title by Oxford World's Classics with updated annotation, ed. J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford, 1994).
10. The best account of the conversion remains H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1990), which can be supplemented by N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings* (Manchester, 1997).

11. For the territorial impact of 'minsters' on English material culture and ecclesiastical topography, see J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 8–228; for a wider reassessment of English monasticism, see S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600–900* (Cambridge, 2006).
12. For the laws in question, see *EHD*, pp. 391–478; for parallel OE text and translation, see *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough (Cambridge, 1922), and *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1925).
13. Convenient introductions are R. W. V. Elliot, *Runes: an Introduction*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1989) and R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999); for the continental origins, see *Old English Runes and their Continental Background*, ed. A. Bammesberger (Heidelberg, 1991). The inscribing of *The Dream of the Rood* in runes upon the Ruthwell Cross (see below, ch. 16) warns against the presumption that runes were only used for texts of a few words.
14. M. Lapidge, 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', *ASE* 15 (1986), 45–72, at 53–62; for the texts, see *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed. B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, CSASE 10 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 297–424.
15. For the difficulty of dating the composition of anonymous poetry, see below chs. 3, 6 and 8. Even the composition of *Beowulf* is still attributed to various periods between the eighth and the turn of the eleventh century; see the essays in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981), and esp. M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41.
16. The fundamental study here, whatever the date of *Beowulf*, is P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. T. Farrell, Brit. Archaeol. Reports 46 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32–95, reprinted in his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 30–105.
17. The interpretation of these processes by F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp. 206–12, has been subject to detailed revision, as the charter and numismatic sources have come to be better understood; see e.g. N. Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 111–14; and Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 111–17.
18. Key modern studies of the 'Bretwaldaship' include E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 1–63; P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald *et al.* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129; and S. Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda', in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. C. B. Kendall and P. S. Wells (Minneapolis, MN, 1992), pp. 103–23.
19. R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. (London, 1975–83); for the Staffordshire Hoard, see K. Leahy and R. Bland, *The Staffordshire Hoard* (London 2009). A lower level of royal (or aristocratic) display is represented by the burial at Prittlewell (Essex); see S. Hirst *et al.*, *The Prittlewell Prince* (London, 2004).
20. For the archbishopric of Lichfield and its association with Offa's plans to incorporate Kent and other kingdoms within Mercia, see Brooks, *Church of Canterbury*,

pp. 111–27; for the changing judgement of Alcuin, the Anglo-Saxon scholar at Charlemagne's court, on Offa's policies before and after his death, see *EHD*, nos. 198 and 202 (pp. 849–51, 854–6).

21. *EHD*, no. 193 (pp. 842–4). Modern study of the Vikings derives from P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London, 1962), who used archaeological and numismatic evidence to challenge the negative reactions of the victims of Viking raids and to minimize the exaggerations of monastic writers. N. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: the Crucible of Defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 29 (1979), 1–20, suggested that contemporary annals may be more trustworthy than Sawyer allowed. There is a valuable Europe-wide synthesis in S. Coupland, 'The Vikings in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England to 911', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, II, *c. 700–900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 190–201. The course of the recorded Viking raids is mapped clearly in D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 32–54.
22. *EHD*, pp. 192–5.
23. Sawyer, *Age of the Vikings*, pp. 145–67 challenged scholars to rethink the interpretation of Scandinavian place-names; see K. Cameron, 'Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs, parts I–III', in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasions and Scandinavian Settlements*, ed. K. Cameron (Nottingham, 1975), pp. 115–71, and G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavian Settlement in the British Isles and Normandy: What the Place-Names Reveal', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350*, ed. J. Adams and K. Holman (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 137–47. For a synthesis from an archaeological standpoint, see D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester, 2006).
24. A most valuable collection of translated sources for King Alfred is S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983); for Alfred's military reforms, see R. Abels, *Alfred the Great* (London, 1998), pp. 194–207.
25. For the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, see *EHD*, pp. 887–90; for other productions of Alfred's court school, see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 123–62; for the debates on the nature of Alfred's role, see M. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23, and J. Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 189–215.
26. We have law-codes in the name of every king from Alfred (871–99) to Cnut (1016–36); see *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. Attenborough, and *Laws from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. Robertson; for the workings of the system, see the articles of P. Wormald on 'Frankpledge' and 'Oaths' and of S. D. Keynes on 'Shire' in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 192–3, 338–9, 420–2.
27. There is still no modern survey of the whole Anglo-Saxon coinage, but P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, I, *The Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1986) covers the period to the mid-tenth century; J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, I, *c. 600–1272*, 3rd edn (London, 1994) lists the succession of coin types; and D. M. Metcalf, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and*

Norman Coin-Finds, c. 975–1086, Royal Numismatic Society 32 (London, 1998) covers circulation in the later period.

28. The suggestion that by 1066 about one-tenth of the population already lived in towns was made by P. Sawyer, 'The Wealth of England in the Eleventh Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 15 (1965), 145–64, at 164, from estimates of the English population at the time of *Domesday Book*. J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), p. 189, supports figures in that range, rather than the cautious minimizing estimates of H. C. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 89, 302–9, 364–8. For a survey of urban development from archaeological evidence, see R. A. Hall, '*Burhs* and Boroughs: Defended Places, Trade and Towns', in *Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, pp. 600–21.
29. Both authors are particularly distinguished for their Old English sermons ('homilies'), which utilize a wide range of patristic and Carolingian theological and hagiographical works; both have distinctive prose styles and their works were extensively disseminated in monastic libraries in the eleventh century. For references, see below, chs. 9, 11 and 15.
30. For the development of the Anglo-Scottish border, see G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Anglo-Scottish Border', in his *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973), pp. 139–61; M. O. Anderson, 'Lothian and the Early Scottish Kings', *Scottish Historical Review* 39 (1960), 98–112; and A. A. M. Duncan, 'The Battle of Carham 1018', *Scottish Historical Review* 55 (1976), 20–8.
31. Modern understanding of Æthelred's reign derives from the essays in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, British Archaeological Reports, Brit. ser. 59 (1978), and from S. D. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980).
32. For body armour, see N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', in *Ethelred the Unready*, ed. Hill, pp. 81–104; for re-walling boroughs in stone, see *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, I, *600–1300*, ed. D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 42, 172–3, 233; for the scale of taxation to pay off the Danes, see M. K. Lawson, 'The Collection of Danegeld and Heregeld in the Reigns of Æthelred II and Cnut', *EHR* 99 (1984), 721–38, and 'These Stories Look True', *EHR* 104 (1989), 951–61.
33. *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford, 1991) provides text, translation and an important range of critical studies, but the poem's precise date of composition remains uncertain; see also below, chs. 3 and 6.
34. For Cnut's rule and his dynasty, see M. K. Lawson, *Cnut, England's Viking King* (London, 2004); and for the exceptional political role of two eleventh-century queens, P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* (Oxford, 1997).
35. F. Barlow, *King Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970), provides the standard, perhaps unduly sympathetic, analysis of the reign.

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