

# **Britons in the Anglo-Saxon Migration Myth**

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**Master of Philosophy in English**

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis entitled, '**Britons in the Anglo-Saxon Migration Myth**', submitted by me towards the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in **English** of Jadavpur University, is based upon my own original work carried out under the supervision of Dr **Prodosh Bhattacharya**, Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University and there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me in part or in whole for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is being carried out, or to any other Institution. A dissertation out of this dissertation entitled 'The Textuality of History and Historicity of Texts: The *Adventus Saxonum*' has also been presented by me at a seminar/conference at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission, as per the M.Phil Regulation (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation work of **Aheli Chatterjee** entitled '**Britons in the Anglo-Saxon Migration Myth**', is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in **English** of Jadavpur University.

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## PREFACE

The construction of Anglo-Saxon identity is unlike the set Medieval European convention of claiming Trojan ancestry. The identity of these tribes was chiefly dependent on their migration from mainland Europe to the British Isles. Their story of migration can be traced as far back as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentes Anglorum* (731 C.E.). Bede in his turn drew heavily from Gildas' account of the fall of Roman Britain in his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (sixth-century). This 'coming of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes' has been distilled by Bede from the coming of the 'Saxons' that Gildas had recorded in *De Excidio*. It creates a 'myth' wherein elements that are deemed extraneous to the construction of the *gentis Anglorum*, like the presence of Britons in any capacity other than that which supports the story of the *Adventus Saxonum*, are reconstructed so that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms might, at least in written record, maintain a homogeneity separate from the Brittonic population. Alfred, during his reign, further solidified the notion of Anglo-Saxon identity. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* further contribute to establishing *Adventus Saxonum* as a fact of history. The myth, by the ninth century, turns into a part of Anglo-Saxon historiography. Alfred's project of translating Latin texts into the vernacular seems to have propagated a certain notion of Anglo-Saxon identity that involved the *Angelþeod/Angelcynn* rather than Bede's *Angli*, 'Angles' or Gildas's *Saxones*, 'Saxons'. This construction of a common identity made its impact felt well into the eleventh century when the idea of *Englaland* is found in the vernacular texts. The concern and need for the promotion of vernacular learning may also be read as the expression of a need for the construction of a national consciousness. It should be remembered that Alfred's Wessex is a kingdom under siege. The threat of Northmen/Danes is very real in Old English writings. But the peculiarity of the Anglo-Saxon construct is such that Scandinavian ancestors were inserted into the

genealogies during Alfred's reign. Rather than being always opposed to the 'Northmen', Alfred maintained a certain level of inclusivity regarding them. On the other hand, the Britons almost disappear from Alfred's *Englalande*. Their existence in Old English writings is gradually marginalized in legal texts like the law codes of Ine. The collective 'Anglo-Saxon' in Old English literature is thus a construct of at least four centuries of making and remaking of the *Adventus Saxonum*. It is the aim of this dissertation to study the process of the construction of the Anglo-Saxon migration myth from the perspective of Briton-Saxon relations. The primary texts that are to be considered are Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (to be referred to as *De Excidio* in the dissertation), Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Historia/Historia Ecclesiastica* for short), the Old English version of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (or 'the Old English Bede'), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, especially the Parker and the Worcester Chronicles, the laws of Ine and Alfred, and Alfred's prefaces to the Old English versions of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* and Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. All Latin texts used are in translation (J.A. Giles's translation in case of Gildas and the translation available online on the website of Fordham University for Bede), and the Old English texts are quoted in the original and are self-translated.

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## INTRODUCTION

Anderson has defined nations as ‘imagined political communities.’<sup>1</sup> Although his work primarily focusses on the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and after, the idea of an ‘imagined’ community may be applicable to earlier polities. Stafford states that ‘history is seen as the story or myth which defines groups; more debatably as the common shared memory by which groups define themselves. These functions of the remembered past can, it is argued, be tapped or manipulated for specific purposes, including and especially for legitimacy. Common to all this work is the perception of the power of the past, its significance for those living in the present, including for their own sense of themselves and their identity.’<sup>2</sup> This dissertation will focus on the Anglo-Saxon community, especially in ninth-century Wessex, and the role played by Anglo-Saxon historiography in defining Anglo-Saxon, and consequently English, identity. The phenomenon chiefly under scrutiny shall be the *Adventus Saxonum*. The coming of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes seems to be the point of origin identified in the Old English tradition as the commonality that gives the Anglo-Saxons their collective identity predicated on common Germanic ancestors who migrated to the island. Howe states that the Anglo-Saxons created a ‘myth of migration’ to be used as the ‘myth of origin’ for their community, adding that ‘the Anglo-Saxons could conceive of themselves as a common people because of the ancestral migration. Despite frequent political rivalries, religious disputes, and some degree of political variation, they could gather a sense of unity from their continental origins as these were memorialized in the central works of their culture.’<sup>3</sup> He identifies Bede as the chief arbiter of the myth in Old English literary

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<sup>1</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 13.

<sup>2</sup>Pauline Stafford, “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles: Identity and the Making of England,” *The Haskins Society Journal* 19, ed. Stephen Morillo and William North (Boydell & Brewer, 2008): 28-50, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/haskins\\_society\\_journal\\_19/anglosaxon\\_chronicles\\_identity\\_and\\_the\\_making\\_of\\_england/7A2075ABE68535FF5BBA1E1249C66031](https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/haskins_society_journal_19/anglosaxon_chronicles_identity_and_the_making_of_england/7A2075ABE68535FF5BBA1E1249C66031), 28.

<sup>3</sup>Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6.

culture and closely examines the relationship of Bede's version to Gildas' narrative of the same event. In relevant ways, 'Anglo-Saxon' identity has been 'imagined' in terms of migration and settlement. As we only have access to their ideology only through their writings, we, in our turn, can only construct the Anglo-Saxon and conversely the Briton in Anglo-Saxon writings through available textual sources. In other words, we cannot conceive how the so-called living Anglo-Saxons categorized or identified themselves. We can but deduce certain patterns and tendencies in the written records of the time.

The first chapter of this dissertation shall explore this relationship between the two narratives of the *Adventus Saxonum* from the perspective of the Britons in this migration myth. Taking Howe's theory as the model, we will examine the impact which Bede had on the treatment of the Britons in Anglo-Saxon literary culture which may be felt well into ninth-century Old English literary culture. The attempt shall be to explore to revisions and reworkings that Bede made to Gildas's narrative with the effort to shed light on such questions as: Why did Bede choose Gildas for his source? How did he rework the narrative of *De Excidio* to write a story of migration and conquest? What was ultimately the position of the Briton and the Saxon after Bede creating his Myth of Migration? How does the Gildasian model of the *Adventus Saxonum* influence the central theme of Migration in the narrative? The second chapter shall concentrate on the dissemination of the migration myth from Bede to the *Chronicles* and its consequences for the Britons in Old English literature, and particularly West-Saxon historiography. As a counterpoint to the notion, in West-Saxon literary culture, which recognises Britons as a community that has been driven out of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the laws of Ine are illustrative of an existing population of Britons in Wessex and the need to legislate for them in seventh-century Wessex. The dynamic of Anglo-Saxon and Briton relations in Old English literature is largely confrontational. For example, the *Chronicle* tends to write Briton into Anglo-Saxon history largely in terms of



conquest and slaughter. There is almost no attention paid to the fate of the Britons post defeat. What is still given narrative space in Bede's work is completely disregarded in the *Chronicles*. These tendencies in the *Chronicle* texts have obvious consequences.

Garmonsway's assertion that *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is 'essential to the historian as the fundamental authority for Old English History...the first national continuous history of a western nation in its own language and the first great book in English prose'<sup>4</sup> is indicative of the reception and influence of the *Chronicle* texts on Anglo-Saxon studies. In such circumstances that narrative devices and biases of the texts are bound to influence its audience (whether medieval or modern) to a certain degree. That is, 'history-writing shapes and narrates the past, and this is critical to its alleged power in the present.'<sup>5</sup> However, Ine's law-code as a counterpoint provides an indication of the complexity of Briton-Saxon relations that is supported by the archaeological and other non-literary sources. This raises questions regarding the ramifications of the 'survival' of Ine's late-seventh century laws in Alfred's late-ninth century *Dōmbōc*. Whether the latter's interest in the preservation of the earlier law text is scholastic or dynastic, we are left with queries regarding Alfred's own standpoint pertaining to the presence of the Britons/Welsh in late ninth- to tenth-century Wessex. It further raises questions of Anglo-Saxon identity. Was there a need for Anglo-Saxons to be purely Germanic to be considered part of the-Saxon *Angelcynn/Angelþeod*? Were Britons recognised as a separate ethnic group in Wessex during Alfred's reign? There is not enough explicit literary evidence either in support or against it. Royal writs like treaties and charters do recognise the Britons or the Welsh as a separate group. However, they are not an essential part of Alfred's kingdom but rather entities that have formed mutually-beneficial alliances with Alfred. We are left to speculate about the political and social status of the Britons in Wessex during his reign. This problem, as reflected in Alfred's laws, will be explored in

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<sup>4</sup>G.N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Rev. Ed. (London: Everyman's Library, 1954), xvi.

<sup>5</sup>Stafford, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles," 40.

detail in the third chapter. This chapter will begin by exploring the political and ideological imperatives behind the dissemination of Bede's myth of migration, and changes (if any) in the attitude towards the Britons in West-Saxon literary culture. It is necessary to understand the ideological climate that dictated the dissemination of Bede's migration myth. Alfred's project of translation played an important role this regard. Just as the contemporary political climate dictated Alfred's selection of texts to be translated, so did the type of texts translated help in the propagation of an ideological stance recognised to be characteristic of Alfred's court.<sup>6</sup>

The ideological significance of Alfred's programme of translation can be felt in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* which collectively amount to an original vernacular work. The *Chronicles* distil the essential message of Bede's migration myth and turn the 'recognised past' of the Anglo-Saxons into historical 'fact'. The influence of Bede's narrative is such that, as late as the eleventh century, later chroniclers referred not only to earlier versions of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* but also to Bede's original work. Therefore, in eleventh-century vernacular Old English texts, the attitude towards Britons had already been 'decided'. They do not 'exist' as a group in the land of the *Angelcynn/Angelþeod*. Since identity is more a social construct than solely a question of heredity, the *Angelcynn* might have included all populations that were under the reign of Anglo-Saxon dynastic lines. Pauline Stafford has claimed that the Parker Chronicle (Manuscript A) 'was a strongly dynastic text. It began life as a copy and continuation of what she calls 'the Alfred chronicle' made in the circle of his

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<sup>6</sup>Here and henceforth the word 'court' shall be used despite its origin being of post-Norman Conquest connotations. Firstly, the word is being used as part of modern English vocabulary for such political bodies and secondly, the Anglo-Saxon royal customs were heavily influenced by Kentish culture which is recognised to have undergone significant continental influence especially of the Frankish Rhinelands; so, the *heal* or 'hall' in Anglo-Saxon prose or poetry might not have been the same as the actual centre of power in late-ninth century Wessex.

son, Edward the Elder'.<sup>7</sup> She stresses its 'Alfredian' and 'dynastic' nature.<sup>8</sup> The Alfredian nature of the text may be understood by one of the factors influencing the political climate of Alfred's reign namely the invasion by the 'Northmen' or 'Danes' also known as the Viking raids that plagued both Alfred's Wessex and eleventh-century England. In the late-ninth century, this pagan 'enemy' would be the common denominator uniting all the 'Christian' interests on the island of Britain as attested by the series of treaties that Alfred signed with not only the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms but also the Welsh kingdoms. This attention to the Viking invasions is seen by Stafford as an important characteristic of the ninth-century *Chronicle* texts which is then carried over into Æthelred's annals that do not survive in the original text. She claims that they have passed by collation and copying into later versions like C (Abingdon Chronicle II), D (Worcester Chronicle) and E (Peterborough Chronicle) and are abbreviated in F (Canterbury Bilingual Chronicle).<sup>9</sup> In the light of this external threat, the ideological standpoint taken up by Alfred and his court seems to suggest a collective Anglo-Saxon identity which, by the eleventh century, no longer predicated itself on actual Germanic origins, because 'England' and the 'English' had already entered the written historiography in texts like the manuscripts C, D and E of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. One might claim that the ultimate expression of this identity-construction would be the Early Middle English text, Laȝamon's *Brut* which is a story written in Old English alliterative metre by a Welshman about Arthur, the great hero of the Britons, who is not mentioned in any Anglo-Saxon work. This phenomenon may ultimately trace its roots back to the construction of the myth of the *Adventus Saxonum* that made such significant contributions to the construction of Anglo-Saxon and ultimately English identity.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 32. Also, for an illustration of the transmission of and the relationship between the surviving *Chronicle* manuscripts see Tony Jebson, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Introduction *Chronicle* Describing the Origins of the Chronicle Tradition, the Surviving Manuscripts, their History and Transmission," *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: an Edition with TEI P4 Markup Expressed in XML and Translated to XHTML1.1 Using XSLT*, last modified 15.12.2006, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/intro.html>.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In his article 'Changing View of the *Adventus Saxonum* in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century English Scholarship', Donald A. White<sup>10</sup> identifies some of the basic reasons for the continued subscription of Anglo-Saxon scholars to what is termed as the 'catastrophic invasion theory' or the 'burn and pillage' model. He holds Bede, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, and the continued dependency of Anglo-Saxon scholarship on Bede's chronology responsible.<sup>11</sup> He points out that Bede probably knew less of the 'coming of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes' than we do. He traces the changes in the critical attitude to this invasion/migration that were noticeable in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English scholarship. On the other hand, for White, archaeology and study of place-names that currently are integral to the interdisciplinary approach towards the *Adventus Saxonum*, are timeless disciplines, depending upon the literary evidence for their absolute chronology'.<sup>12</sup> If the statement is taken to be true, it does not explain the dependency of early Anglo-Saxon scholarship on Bede and the *Chronicles*. Stenton identifies two sources that offer an alternative to the A.D. 449 entry of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*.<sup>13</sup> He focusses on Procopius of Caesera and the independent tradition preserved by Fulda. He points out that these sources were ignored by the 'greatest of Anglo-Saxon scholars writing at the time when these traditions were still alive' as they were considered 'irrelevant to his (Bede's) purpose'.<sup>14</sup> We are thus compelled to reconsider the reasons for Bede's selective myopia. Gildas was the chief textual source for his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Stenton suggests that Bede was not merely borrowing from Gildas but also conforming to the mores of the contemporary Northumbrian

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<sup>10</sup>Donald A. White, "Changing View of the *Adventus Saxonum* in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century English Scholarship," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no.4 (October-December 1971): 585-594, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708979>.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 589-590.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 591.

<sup>13</sup>F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd Ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-8.

court. In his article 'Bede's use of Gildas', M. Miller points out that Bede's sources also included the Kentish dynastic propaganda.<sup>15</sup> Gildas may have been only concerned with the three boatloads of Saxons that burned and pillaged their way through the English coastline, but for Bede tying Hengest and Horsa to these three ships was tantamount to claiming descent from not just royalty but Woden-born royalty; an act that is retrospective and a matter of prestige, not history. This prestige was tied to the seniority of Kent as a political and cultural ideology which was so relevant to the ecclesiastical seniority of Canterbury.<sup>16</sup> This claiming descent from Woden is a distinct position maintained by the Anglo-Saxons. Elizabeth M. Tyler states that the relationship of Anglo-Saxon England to Rome and its successors was anomalous in the same way that they rejected any claim to Trojan descent unlike the Roman Empire or its successor the Carolingian Empire.<sup>17</sup> For example, on one hand Æthelwead used allusion to parallel the arrival of Hengest and Horsa to the arrival of Aeneas in Actium while on the other he identified the young men from Germania as descendants of Woden, illustrating a simultaneous fascination with Troy and an assertive unwillingness to subordinate Anglo-Saxon origins to Troy.<sup>18</sup> Alfred's reign saw the attempt at assimilation of Viking settlers by insertion of Scandinavian ancestors into Æthelwulf's genealogy but Trojan origins, the distinctive legacy of the Roman Empire and hence Frankish dominance, was rejected to maintain an outsider status while freely using the ancient position of Troy to reinforce the same.<sup>19</sup> This self-awareness of being of Germanic stock is characteristic of Old English and especially Alfredian texts. Whitelock points out that there is an acceptance of Germanic ancestry but there is also a distinct construction of a collective of *Anglecynn/Angelþeod* (Alfred) as opposed to the 'Angles' and 'Saxons' of the older

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<sup>15</sup>M. Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas," *The English Historical Review* 90, no.355 (April 1975): 241-261, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/566923>.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England: Precedent without Descent," *The Review of English Studies* 4, no.263 (1 February 2013): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgs083>

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 20.

Northumbrian writers.<sup>20</sup> A conscious self-fashioning of *being* a distinct nation of people who speak *Englisc* as opposed to Saxon is a characteristic of Alfred's reign with roots that can be traced back to Bede's history. Whitelock points out that despite evidences of third-century Saxon raids along the Channel and North Sea coasts, Bede and subsequently *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* firmly subscribe to Hengest, Horsa and the three boatloads of Saxons.<sup>21</sup>

This persistence of the 'myth' of migration, which can and does turn into a story of invasion, is part of the rhetoric which reinforces the distinctive Anglo-Saxon identity. This mythmaking has been explored extensively by Nicholas Howe.<sup>22</sup> His focus is on the various 'migrations' that are central to Anglo-Saxon culture. Both Gildas and Wulfstan (*Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, 1014) use the rhetoric of 'invasion' as a social commentary on what they perceive as the moral degeneration of their fellow countrymen. Likewise the rhetoric of 'migration', found in texts like the *Finnsburh Fragment*, and the 'Finnsburh Episode' in the text of *Beowulf*, reinforces the idea of a pan-Germanic root for Anglo-Saxon identity.<sup>23</sup> This story of migration/invasion is a myth sustained in Old English texts by erasure of a significant ethnic group from Anglo-Saxon England. Thus, the Britons, make little or no appearance in Old English historiography, thereby turning their story into a narrative of erasure. Nick Higham points out that the German-ness of England was a carefully-cultivated narrative that is not supported by archaeological evidence or non-literary/non-historiographical Old English texts. He goes on to question the unassailable fact of a Germanic Anglo-Saxon England and attempts to locate the significant British population thereby problematizing the Migration Myth that is integral to the construction of the German-ness of the Anglo-Saxon collective

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<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1952), 11-13.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>22</sup>Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 8-32.

identity.<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the same, Christopher Snyder illustrates that opposite scenario existed as well where Brittonic identity was defined by what the Britons were not; namely, pagan and English.<sup>25</sup> The support for the catastrophic invasion theory is not only provided by Anglo-Saxons but also Britons, as any history that is not a story of clear-cut separation of the two groups is detrimental to the identity-creation for both groups that depends on their identity-creation that is dependent on each becoming the ‘Other’ for the other. Snyder writes:

An ongoing controversy is recorded in opinions on the scale of migrations. The conventional view, based mainly on the evidence of Gildas and Bede, would have massive numbers of German immigrants overwhelming the British population in a series of bloody wars – the ‘burn and slaughter’ model. The minimalist position, which is currently gaining a lot of adherents, sees the ‘conquest’ as the work of a relatively small number of warrior elites from the continent who impose their language and material culture on the Britons... The large number of weapons in early Anglo-Saxon burials suggests that the movement was highly militarized, though weapons clearly played a symbolic role in pagan Germanic burial rites.<sup>26</sup>

Hooke has also illustrated the presence of Anglo-Saxon settlements predating the chronology provided by Bede or the *Chronicles*.<sup>27</sup> Snyder further provides evidence for the ‘desertion model’ where he states that a large-scale depopulation and especially evacuation of towns in Eastern Britain support Gildas’ testimony and explains the lack of destruction layer in most evacuated towns. There is support provided by *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* which do not record the conquest of a single British town until the Battle of Dyrham in 577, when the three cities that were taken are in the west, thus severely compromising any narrative of large-scale catastrophic invasion that eliminated the Brittonic population in one fell swoop.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Nick Higham, “Britons in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 2-5.

<sup>25</sup>Christopher A. Snyder, *Britons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 75.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>27</sup>Della Hooke, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988).

<sup>28</sup>Snyder, *Britons*, 89.

We are then faced with the problem of how, despite evidence to the contrary in the text itself, the *Chronicles* have managed to sustain the myth of the ‘burn and slaughter’ model. Pauline Stafford has explored this conundrum in terms which examine the writing of history as an ideological if not a necessarily pragmatic activity.<sup>29</sup> Unlike early scholars like Reginald Poole,<sup>30</sup> who stressed the value of the *Chronicles* as annalistic records of historiography, Stafford claims that the texts ‘maybe anonymous and difficult to place. But they once had scribes, compilers, authors, patrons and audiences who lived in specific circumstances. If we can learn to place them, we will have a series of snapshots of identities attitudes and uses of history across these critical centuries.’<sup>31</sup> She states that the *Chronicles* during Alfred’s reign ‘wrote of West Saxons, Mercians, Northumbrians and others; and also, occasionally of *Angelcynn*. The meaning of that term for Alfred and his audience has been read carefully. In the context of those sections of the *Chronicles* dealing with Alfred’s reign , its usage indicates a view of a people wider than the West-Saxons, bound together by common Christianity, faced by a common enemy, and potentially ruled by Alfred...It may derive...from a reading of Bede’s history of the *Angli*...read in the context of Alfred’s late-ninth century hegemonic aspirations and of the struggle against external invaders’.<sup>32</sup> The scope of Alfred’s construction of the Anglo-Saxon collective identity is further defined by Stephen J. Harris as surpassing the limits of a nation or a religion (Christianity). He proposes that the ethnogenesis of the Anglo-Saxon collective identity is based on the idea of ‘Christendom’ underlying which is a notion of pan-Germanic collective ethnicity that is rooted in the continent and subscribed to by the ideology propagated by the ‘Alfredian’

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<sup>29</sup>Stafford, “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.”

<sup>30</sup>Reginald Lane Poole, *Chronicles and Annals: A Brief Outline of their Origin and Growth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926).

<sup>31</sup>Stafford, “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,” 50.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.



texts.<sup>33</sup> One of the key ‘Alfredian’ texts is the Old English translation of the *Historia Brittonum* which formed the bridge between Bede’s Latin text and the Alfredian project of promoting vernacular literature (whether translations or originals). The thesis entitled ‘The Old English Translation of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* in its Historical and Cultural Context’ (2015) makes an interesting point regarding the treatment of the Britons in the Old English Bede. He states that there was a relaxation of attitude towards the Britons which can be uncovered from the translated text. He asserts that it was a product of the diplomatic relations between Alfred’s court and the Welsh kingdoms.<sup>34</sup> Whereas this study questions the oppositional nature of Briton-Saxon relations, Katherine Leah Miller explores Briton and Anglo-Saxon from the perspective of slavery. Her thesis entitled ‘The Semantic Field of Slavery in Old English: *Wealh, Esne, Præl*’ concisely encapsulates the semantic relations between the category ‘Britons’ and the moniker *wealh*.<sup>35</sup> Both of these theses explore the Briton in Anglo-Saxon writings and how the ‘Briton’ had influenced the socio-political realities of Anglo-Saxon Britain from different perspectives.

Concluding this review, it can be stated that critical evaluation of the *Gildas*, Bede and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* in light of the *Adventus Saxonum* (the coming of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes) has recognized the myth of migration and problematized the story of the ‘three long ships’ with attention being paid to evidence from non-literary disciplines that support Germanic presence in Britain prior to 449 and Brittonic presence in England post the ‘coming of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes’. As far as the ideological imperatives are

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<sup>33</sup>Stephen J.Harris, “The Alfredian ‘World History’ and Anglo-Saxon Identity,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100, no.4 (October 2001): 482-510,<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27712138>.

<sup>34</sup>Andreas Lemke, “The Old English Translation of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* in its Historical and Cultural Context” (Ph.D diss., Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2015), [https://www.academia.edu/10607316/The\\_Old\\_English\\_Translation\\_of\\_Bedes\\_Historia\\_Ecclesiastica\\_Gentis\\_Anglorum\\_in\\_its\\_Historical\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Context](https://www.academia.edu/10607316/The_Old_English_Translation_of_Bedes_Historia_Ecclesiastica_Gentis_Anglorum_in_its_Historical_and_Cultural_Context).

<sup>35</sup>Miller, Katherine Leah. ‘The Semantic Field of Slavery in Old English: *Wealh, Esne, Præl*’. Ph.D diss, The University of Leeds, September 2014. [https://www.academia.edu/16703288/The\\_Semantic\\_Field\\_of\\_Slavery\\_in\\_Old\\_English\\_Wealh\\_Esne\\_%C3%9Er%C3%A6l](https://www.academia.edu/16703288/The_Semantic_Field_of_Slavery_in_Old_English_Wealh_Esne_%C3%9Er%C3%A6l).

concerned, there are substantial critical analyses of the process of constructing an Anglo-Saxon collective identity that is distinct from the construct of the Roman Empire or the Frankish empire and which identifies itself with a greater continental Germanic identity and begins with the story of the advent of the Germanic races into the isle of Britain.

## CHAPTER 1

### Gildas, Bede and the *Adventus Saxonum*

Nicholas Howe has claimed that ‘the Anglo-Saxons could conceive of themselves as a common people because of the ancestral migration’<sup>36</sup> and states that ‘migration became the central myth of the culture’<sup>37</sup>. According to him, the *Adventus Saxonum* was a construct but nevertheless was a powerful enough ‘myth of origin’ to provide the communal identity for the Germanic tribes in Britain. It is a matter of historical record that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were neither as united nor as homogeneous as they are represented in what Howe terms the ‘remembered’ past of the Anglo-Saxons. The exercise in building of a communal identity can largely be credited to the oral traditions of the Anglo-Saxons which looked upon the continental migration to the British Isles as a common denominator of their cultural identity. Bede, as a member of the church, took it further to accommodate this pagan past into the scheme of a Christian present and future. *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* in 731 C.E. may be identified as the text that laid the foundation for the migration myth in written records of the Anglo-Saxons’ remembered past.

It is, therefore, interesting that in choosing his sources, apart from the oral narratives, Bede opts to follow Gildas, a sixth-century British monk who bemoans the ‘ruin’ of Britain in his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*. We are forced to speculate regarding Bede’s rationale for selecting Gildas as his source. Was it due to a dearth of material? But he, himself claimed that there was a rich oral tradition that supported the story of the *Adventus*. As Howe states, ‘the Anglo-Saxons’ memory of the pagan past...distinguishes them from other medieval peoples that emerged from obscurity to achieve prominence such as continental Saxons and Normans of the tenth century...[T]here was no need to invent a

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<sup>36</sup>Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 6.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Roman or Trojan legacy because the Germanic past survived'<sup>38</sup>. In face of such a strong tradition valorising the Germanic migration, the choice of a text by a British monk is noteworthy. Howe theorizes that this decision was influenced by the fact that Gildas provided Bede with something that other sources could not. He locates the migration of the pagan Anglo-Saxons in a Christian framework.<sup>39</sup> Even if Gildas' narrative is that of a British defeat where the Saxons are the barbaric invaders, nevertheless his account sets down one of the central themes of the migration myth of the British Isles: that of a chosen land of God that is visited by calamities in the form of invasions and plagues as punishment for the sins of the people living in that land. His work is almost elegiac in its lament for the 'sinful' state of the Britons and the invasions that he sees as God's intervention in the lives of His people. This framework/model works uniquely to Bede's advantage because it lends a certain legitimacy to the migration of the pagan Anglo-Saxons as the instrument of divine judgement. Bede only needed to make one major revision to the narrative: change the it from a story of British defeat to that of an Anglo-Saxon victory. In this process of reworking Gildas' narrative, Bede identifies the common enemy that would unite all the Germanic settlers on the island into a communal whole of the 'Anglo-Saxon': the Britons. On one hand the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is an account creating a stable myth of origin for the Anglo-Saxons. But on the other it identifies the recognisable 'Other' for them and embarks on laying the foundation for the slow process of marginalizing and eventually erasing the Britons from the map of Anglo-Saxon Britain.

If the *Historia* and the *De Excidio* are read together, we are able to identify the markers of Bede's reworking of the text to establish a precedent and continuum for the legitimacy of the Anglo-Saxons' right to the island. There is a pervasive self-awareness in his narrative of writing serious history as attested by his attention to chronology and names.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 40-50.

Gildas' rhetoric, on the other hand, is not that of a historian but that of a priest giving a sermon with ample interpolations from the Bible. He is more concerned with the moral degeneracy of the Britons of this time as well as the tyranny of British kings. He classes the "Saxons" as the greater scourge than the Picts and the Scots and is severely critical of the British invitation to Germanic mercenaries to fight of the northern threat:

Then all the councillors, 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 sheep-fold), the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful both to God and men, to repel the invasions of the northern nations. Nothing was ever so pernicious to our country, nothing was ever so unlucky. What palpable darkness must have enveloped their minds – darkness desperate and cruel! Those very people whom, when absent, they dreaded more than death itself, were invited to reside, as one may say, under the self-same roof. Foolish are the princes, as it is said, of Thafneos, giving counsel to unwise Pharaoh.<sup>40</sup>

The language of the lines above is not that of a historian recording contemporary events but is that of a sermon being delivered at a pulpit against a nation that is seen to be morally corrupt. The quote from Bible at the end is one of many that are spread across Gildas' text. In his vision the Saxons are "accursed" but the Britons are worse because they invited such threat and compounded the problem. Bede in *Historia Ecclesiastica* draws from this very source, but his account qualifies the 'Saxons'. It is not just a matter of adherence to the practice of writing history but actually a very conscious effort on his part to appeal to the tastes of his audience (the king of Northumbria in this case) who are accustomed to heroic verse covering trans-Germanic borders. Bede traces the two mercenary commanders' lineage thus:

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<sup>40</sup>Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain: De Excidio Britanniae*, trans. J.A.Giles (Rockville: Serenity, 2009), 32.

They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father was Vecta, son of Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces deduce their original. (I.XV)<sup>41</sup>

Here, Bede shows his awareness of the Germanic practice of drawing lineage from the gods of Teutonic mythology. This practice was, as stated before, quite unique to the Anglo-Saxons in Britain of early- and late-medieval Europe because, rather than subscribe to the continental model of tracing ancestry from Troy (which the Britons also did as evidenced in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* by Nennius), the Anglo-Saxon kings traced their genealogies back to the gods of Germania and Scandinavia. As Tyler has claimed:

Unlike many European ruling houses, the Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties did not claim Trojan origins; rather they traced their descent back to euhemerized pagan Germanic gods. Their eschewal of the Trojan ancestors shared by continental and insular neighbours was not the consequence of ignorance. On the contrary, the Anglo-Saxons, who settled within the limits of the Empire after the withdrawal of Rome from Britain, constructed a self-consciously distinctive position.<sup>42</sup>

Bede is aware of this identity politics characteristic of Anglo-Saxon genealogies, and here he is consciously adhering to it. The actual account of the coming of the mercenaries is qualified by mention of the ethnicities of the people who came to the eastern shores of Britain. Unlike Gildas who groups them under the umbrella term “Saxons”, Bede distinguishes them categorically:

Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East Angles, the Midland Angles, Mercians, all the

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<sup>41</sup>Bede, “Medieval Sourcebook Bede (676735): Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Book I,” Fordham University, accessed on 18.05.2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.asp>.

<sup>42</sup>Tyler, “Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England.” 1-20.

race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the English.(I. XV)<sup>43</sup>

Bede's history is geared towards an Anglian audience which is moreover royalty.

Such details of racial origins reflect his attempt to write a history for the Anglo-Saxon race in England. Howe states that this categorization is artificial as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were significantly heterogeneous. Also, this account creates a 'map' for the migration myth where all categories are ordered in a rhetoric that is simplified enough and powerful enough for mass appeal.<sup>44</sup> The rest of his account draws most of its facts from Gildas:

Then the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army. The newcomers received of the Britons a place to inhabit, upon condition that they should wage war against their enemies for the peace and security of the country, whilst the Britons agreed to furnish them with pay... In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over into the island, and they began to increase so much, that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time repelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates. At first, they obliged them to furnish a greater quantity of provisions; and, seeking an occasion to quarrel, protested, that unless more plentiful supplies were brought them, they would break the confederacy, and ravage all the island; nor were they backward in putting their threats in execution. In short, the fire kindled by the hands of these pagans proved God's just revenge for the crimes of the people; not unlike that which, being once lighted by the Chaldeans, consumed the walls and city of Jerusalem. For the barbarous conquerors acting here in the same manner, or rather the just Judge ordaining that they should so act, they plundered all

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<sup>43</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

<sup>44</sup>Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 60.

the neighbouring cities and country, spread the conflagration from the eastern to the western sea, without any opposition, and covered almost every part of the devoted island. Public as well as private structures were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; the prelates and the people, without any respect of persons, were destroyed with fire and sword; nor was there any to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the miserable remainder, being taken in the mountains, were butchered in heaps; others, spent with hunger, came forth and submitted themselves to the enemy for food, being destined to undergo perpetual servitude, if they were not killed even upon the spot some, with sorrowful hearts, fled beyond the seas. Others, continuing in their own country, led a miserable life among the woods, rocks, and mountains, with scarcely enough food to support life, and expecting every moment to be their last. (I. XV)<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that in paraphrasing Gildas' tirade against the state of Britain into the single phrase 'cowardice of the Britons', Bede is propagating a certain notion of the category of the "Briton". Within a passage which clearly fleshes out Saxon treachery and violence, he still manages to apportion responsibility on the Britons' 'cowardice' implying that the Angles, Saxons and the Jutes were successful in pillaging and destroying because the Britons were not brave enough. The success of only three boatloads of mercenaries is seen as reinforcing this notion. Bede's rhetoric ignores the fact that Gildas is equally pejorative of the Saxons as the British tyrants if not more so:

A multitude of whelps came forth from the lair of this barbaric lioness, in three cyuls as they call them, that is, in three ships of war, with their sails wafted by the wind and with omens and prophecies favourable, for it was foretold by a soothsayer among them, that they should occupy the country to which they were sailing three hundred years, and half of that time, a hundred and fifty years, should plunder and despoil the same. They first landed on the Eastern side of the island, by the invitation of the unlucky king, and there fixed their sharp talons, apparently to fight in favour of the island, but alas! more truly against it. Their mother-land, finding her first brood thus successful, sends forth a larger company of her wolfish offspring, which sailing over, join themselves to their bastard-born comrades. From that time the germ of iniquity and the root of contention planted their poison amongst us, as we

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<sup>45</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."



deserved, and shot forth into leaves and branches. The barbarians thus being introduced as soldiers into the island, to encounter, as they falsely said, any dangers in defence of their hospitable entertainers, obtain an allowance of provisions, which, for some time being plentifully bestowed, stopped their doggish mouths. Yet they complain that their monthly supplies are not furnished in sufficient abundance, and they industriously aggravate each occasion of quarrel, saying that unless more liberality is shown to them, they will break the treaty and plunder the whole island.

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 nearby towns and lands, it reached the other side of the island, and dipped its red and savage tongue in the western ocean. In these assaults, therefore, not unlike that of the Assyrian upon Judea, was fulfilled in our case what the prophet describes in the words of lamentation; "They have burned with fire the sanctuary; they have polluted on earth the tabernacle of thy name." And again, "O God, the gentiles have come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have been defiled," &c. So that all the columns were levelled with the ground by the frequent strokes of the battering ram, all the husbandmen routed, together with their bishops, priests, and people, whilst the sword gleamed, and the flames crackled around them on every side. Lamentable to behold in the midst of the streets lay the tops of lofty towers, tumbled to the ground, stones of high walls, holy altars, fragments of human bodies, covered with livid clots of coagulated blood, looking as if they had been squeezed together in a press; and with no chance of being buried, save in the ruins of the houses, or in the ravening bellies of wild beasts and birds; with reverence to be spoken for their blessed souls, if, indeed, there are many found who were carried, at that time, into the high heaven by the holy angels. So entirely had the vintage, once so fine, degenerated and become bitter, that, in the words of the prophet, there was hardly a grape or ear of corn to be seen where the husbandman had turned his back.

Some therefore, of the miserable remnant, being taken in the mountains, were murdered in great numbers; others, constrained by famine, came and yielded themselves to be slaves forever to their foes, running the risk of being instantly slain, which truly was the greatest favour that could be offered them: some others passed beyond the seas with loud lamentations instead of the voice of exhortation. "Thou hast given us as sheep to be slaughtered, and among the Gentiles hast thou dispersed us." Others, committing the safeguard of their lives, which were in continual jeopardy,

to the mountains, precipices, thickly wooded forests, and to the rocks of the seas (albeit with trembling hearts), remained still in their country.<sup>46</sup>

This long section from *De Excidio* apart from the extremely graphic description of gore and violence in the first recorded Briton-Saxon war, it also encapsulates the biblical rhetoric employed throughout this work. Gildas uses biblical references to draw parallels between Britain and Judea as both being under siege from foreign powers that are moreover barbaric and also pagan. His language draws binaries between civilized British Christianity and the pagan Saxon barbarity. Bede on the other hand, whitewashes the excess gore and glosses over these nuances with his focus on the narrative framework of tribulations being the divine judgement for the sins of the inhabitants of the island. What is truly problematic in Gildas, is his assertion that there was relative peace in south-east Britain after the first Saxon rebellion and the victory of the Britons at *Mons Badonicus*. Gildas follows this up with a Britain involved in civil wars where despite the relative peace regarding foreigners, the Britons themselves were engaged in internal strife:

After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field, to the end that our Lord might in this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Badon-hill[sic], when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes, which was (as I am sure) forty-four years and one month after the landing of the Saxons, and also the time of my own nativity. And yet neither to this day are the cities of our country inhabited as before, but being forsaken and overthrown, still lie desolate; out foreign wars have ceased, but our civil troubles still remaining. For as well the remembrance of such terrible desolation of the island, as also of the unexpected recovery of the same, remained in the minds of those who were eyewitnesses of the wonderful events of both, and in regard thereof, kings, public magistrates, and private persons, with priests and clergymen, did all and every one of them live orderly according to their several vocations. But when these had departed from this world, and a new race succeeded, who were ignorant of this troublesome time, and had only experience of the present prosperity, all the laws of truth and

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<sup>46</sup>Gildas, *Ruin of Britain*, 32-35.

justice were so shaken and subverted, that not so much as a vestige or remembrance of these virtues remained among the above named orders of men, except among a very few who, compared with the great multitude which were daily rushing headlong down to hell, are accounted so small a number, that our reverend mother, the church, scarcely beholds them, her only true children, reposing in her bosom; whose worthy lives, being a pattern to al[l] men, and beloved of God, inasmuch as by their holy prayers, as by certain pillars and most profitable supporters, our infirmity is sustained up, that it may not utterly be broken down, I would have no one suppose I intended to reprove, if forced by the increasing multitude of offences, I have freely, aye, with anguish, not so much declared as bewailed the wickedness of those who are become servants, not only to their bellies, but also to the devil rather than Christ, who is our blessed God, world without end.<sup>47</sup>

In this section Gildas is aware of the criticism that might levelled at the Britons as a nation for their constant civil wars and what he perceives as unchristian behaviour exhibited by the whole nation barring a very small minority. But the criticism which is directed at the Britons by Bede is of another variety altogether. It is, as Bede states, that of failure as evangelists, their inability to convert the pagan foreigners to the faith which would be taken up later by the Roman Church after the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms:

Among other most wicked actions, not to be expressed, which their own historian, Gildas, mournfully takes notice of, they added this that they never preached the faith to the Saxons, or English, who dwelt amongst them; however, the goodness of God did not forsake his people whom He foreknew, but sent to the aforesaid nation much more worthy preachers, to bring it to the faith. (I. XXII)<sup>48</sup>

Bede claims that Gildas is aware of this failure which is not apparent from Gildas' text. He may have been aware of the implied criticism in his own words, but they apparently only refer to the political and ecclesiastical corruption in Britain. However, by making the above statement, Bede makes explicit any such implied criticism whereby the Anglo-Saxons can be on their way to gain moral currency giving them the right to 'own' the island. The

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 35-37.

<sup>48</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

primary assertion that begins the *Historia* is the belief that Britain is a spiritual land geographically sealed off from the continent that can only be possessed by the worthy like the Anglo-Saxons who were, in the sixth-century, under the direct aegis of the Roman Evangelical mission (the factor which reconciles the pagan past of the Anglo-Saxons with their Christian present). There have been further accusations against Gildas who supposedly ‘ignored’ the Germanic settlements in Britain prior to 449. It is a fact which can be supported by archaeological evidence.<sup>49</sup> But perhaps the description of the *Adventus* should be examined in the light of Britain’s colonization in both Roman times and in the migration era. Nick Higham has suggested that the conundrum of Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons should be examined in terms of the notions of Roman-ness, British-ness, English-ness and Other-ness.<sup>50</sup> According to him Britain has always been the ‘Other’ for the *Romanitas*. According to him, for Rome, Britain has always been a barbaric ‘Other’ with Britain’s *Romanitas* being fragile compared with other Roman colonies in Europe. The harsh climate and geographical isolation coupled with governance in the form of punitive expedition and political pogrom has led to Britain’s ‘Otherness’. The fact that Britain entered the Empire late, Higham points out, resulted in a distinct cultural identity for the Britons despite there being a a strong Latin elite culture in Southern Britain.<sup>51</sup>

As it has been stated before, Gildas continually draws parallels between contemporary Britain and Biblical Judea. He describes the Britons as un-warlike passive people who are constantly being tested by God using invaders and wars. Like the biblical characters their faith as true Christians is tested by God which is seen as the cause for

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<sup>49</sup>Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3.

<sup>50</sup>Nick Higham, “Historical Narrative as Cultural Politics: Rome, ‘British-ness’ and ‘English-ness’,” in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 68-79.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

Britain's colonization and series of invasions.<sup>52</sup> This formulation is problematic because in accounts like that of Julius Caesar, the Britons are described as accomplished soldiers:

But the barbarians, upon perceiving the design of the Romans, sent forward their cavalry and charioteers, a class of warriors of whom it is their practice to make great use in their battles, and following with the rest of their forces, endeavored[sic] to prevent our men landing. In this was the greatest difficulty, for the following reasons, namely, because our ships, on account of their great size, could be stationed only in deep water; and our soldiers, in places unknown to them, with their hands embarrassed, oppressed with a large and heavy weight of armor [sic], had at the same time to leap from the ships, stand amid the waves, and encounter the enemy; whereas they, either on dry ground, or advancing a little way into the water, free in all their limbs in places thoroughly known to them, could confidently throw their weapons and spur on their horses, which were accustomed to this kind of service. Dismayed by these circumstances and altogether untrained in this mode of battle, our men did not all exert the same vigor [sic] and eagerness which they had been won't to exert in engagements on dry ground.<sup>53</sup>

This begs the question of what it was that Gildas was attempting in describing the British as he does. Higham states that Gildas was engaged in establishing an idea of "Britishness" that conformed to his beliefs regarding the British Church. He states that in the sub-Roman period, Britain reverted from the *Romanitas* into a cultural identity that was a form of 'otherness'.<sup>54</sup> Britain's atypical experience of the Empire gave rise to an increasing distance from the 'Roman-ness' expected of a territory of the Roman Empire. 'Continental elite culture' continued to stigmatize Britons as *barbari*.<sup>55</sup> In this context Gildas' construction of cultural identity is sometimes, in direct opposition to Rome. His construction of ethnicity is modelled on Old Testament Israelites.<sup>56</sup> Gildas' formulations regarding British Christianity

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<sup>53</sup>Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, trans. W. A. McDevitte and W.S. Bohn, accessed on 15.05.2014, <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.1.1.html>.

<sup>54</sup>Higham, "Historical Narrative," 72.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 74.

envisages a doctrine closer to the true faith and distinct from the broader *Romanitas*.

However, this leads to the issue of reading Bede as drawing upon and commenting on Gildas' text. Britain's relative isolation in terms of church practices after the Roman cessation c.400 meant that when preachers like Augustine went from Rome to pagan England, their church practices were different from those of the isolated British Church. Moreover, the accusation of insularity and failure to convert the pagan settlers in Rome led to increased marginalisation of British Christianity as an 'other'. Bede's account is indicative of the definition of self-hood that the English identity would gain not just due to the direct conduit to Rome but also due to the presence of a convenient cultural and religious 'other' that is Britain and British Christianity.

In his narrative, Bede proceeds to ignore any presence of Britons in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms after the former satisfied the demands of his migration myth. An interesting example would be Mercia during the reign of Penda, its last pagan ruler whose defeat in 655 would herald the triumph of Christianity in England. Bede writes:

At this time, King Oswy [Oswyn] was exposed to the fierce and intolerable irruptions of Penda, king of the Mercians, whom we have so often mentioned, and who had slain his brother; at length, necessity compelling him, he promised to give him greater gifts than can he imagined, to purchase peace; provided that the king would return home, and cease to destroy the provinces of his kingdom. That perfidious king refused to grant his request, and resolved to extirpate all his nation, from the highest to the lowest; whereupon he had recourse to the protection of the Divine goodness for deliverance from his barbarous and impious foes, and binding himself by a vow, said, "If the pagan will not accept of our gifts, let us offer them to Him that will, the Lord our God." He then vowed that if he should come off victorious, he would dedicate his daughter to our Lord in holy virginity, and give twelve farms to build monasteries. After this he gave battle with a very small army against superior forces: indeed, it is reported that the pagans had three times the number of men; for they had thirty legions, led on by most noted commanders. King Oswy [Oswyn] and his son Aifrid [Alfrid] met them with a very small army, as has been said, but confiding in the

conduct of Christ; his other son, Egfrid, was then kept an [*sic*] hostage at the court of Queen Cynwise, in the province of the Mercians. King Oswald's son Etheiwald [Ethelwald], who ought to have assisted them, was on the enemy's side, and led them on to fight against his country and uncle; though, during the battle, he withdrew, and awaited the event in a place of safety. The engagement beginning, the pagans were defeated, the thirty commanders, and those who had come to his assistance were put to flight, and almost all of them slain; among whom was Ethelbere, brother and successor to Anna, king of the East Angles, who had been the occasion of the war, and who was now killed, with all his soldiers. The battle was fought near the river Vinwed, which then, with the great rains, had not only filled its channel, but overflowed its banks, so that many more were drowned in the flight than destroyed by the sword. (III. XXIV)<sup>57</sup>

As a counterpoint to this account, Damian J. Tyler's dissertation on ethnic composition of Early Mercia during Penda's reign is a useful example.<sup>58</sup> Bede's construction of homogeneity in descriptions of Mercia are challenged here by claiming that Mercia had a significant Christian British population as evidenced by the number of unfurnished burials found within the kingdom's borders (furnished burials being an Anglo-Saxon cultural practice at this point in time). Tyler is cognizant of the disappearance of such cultural markers with the dissemination of Mediterranean ideals through Christianity.<sup>59</sup> But Early Mercia, according to him, had more cultural heterogeneity. He also gives the examples of place names that are markers of ecclesiastical establishments in pagan Mercia:

There are several place-names in the western midlands with *eccles-* prefixes. *Eccles-* place-names are generally thought to indicate British church sites, places which were recognizable as churches when their English names were formed. The *eccles* element derives ultimately from the Latin *ecclesia*, via Old Welsh *egles* and Old English *eclēs*.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook Bede (676735): Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Book III," Fordham University, accessed on 18.05.2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-bookIII.asp>.

<sup>58</sup>Damian J. Tyler, "Early Mercia and the Britons," in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 91-101.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 99

This study seriously calls into question Bede's formulations of a homogenous Anglian Mercia. There can only be speculation regarding Bede's decision to do so but a very simplistic explanation would be that he was writing a 'history' for and of the elite dominant classes who were of Germanic extraction and history is hardly ever cognizant of the non-elite presence. But this explanation is, as stated, simplistic at best though rather pertinent when Tyler has demonstrated the presence of elite Britons in Early Mercia. Another way of looking at it would be by questioning Bede's own position in contemporary history. He was writing from the location of a ninth-century Christian with ties to the Northumbrian royal house. His account needed to satisfy the expectations of his royal audience who at least thought of themselves as being of Germanic extraction. Therefore, it is natural for his account to be coloured by the cultural determinants of his time. But that does not explain Bede's ignoring of the British Christian population in Mercia while writing about an ecclesiastical history. It may be explained by two inter-related factors: Bede's need to document Christian triumph over a homogeneously pagan region and his need to document a triumph of the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of an English or rather an Anglo-Saxon branch closely linked to its ideals. The former loses its narrative force if he has to acknowledge the presence of British Christians and accommodate a cultural heterogeneity. The latter is a conscious construction of a cultural identity where the Anglo-Saxons are more civilized, and Christian compared with the Britons who followed the British church. As stated earlier, the Britons provided the cultural and religious 'Other' in terms of which Anglo-Saxon identity could be constructed in the Early Old English period. Damian Tyler goes on to say that the ethnic plurality of Penda's hegemony is indicative of a political solidarity among the two cultural groups in Mercia indicative of a cohesive group identity based on shared elite status between the pagan Anglo-Saxons and the Christian Britons. He claims that such tolerance was possible because Penda was a pagan and the gradual loss of such values of co-existence was



due to the ethnicity preached by Christian Anglo-Saxons like Bede whereby we have later examples like Offa who built a wall separating the Britons from the Mercians.<sup>61</sup> Tyler's theory may be plausible but Penda's supposed tolerance needs to be examined in a context that is more political such that, a possible explanation might be given for the imperatives behind Penda's attitude. Unlike the Britons in his kingdom who were not interested in aggressive evangelical practices (if we are to believe Bede and Gildas' continental contemporaries), the Christianity from Rome was more pro-active in its evangelical practices. Penda's son Peada's conversion created political ramifications whereby the non-Christian rulers in Mercia felt the rise of English Christianity as a political and military threat heralding bloody conflicts. Although this explanation in itself is inconclusive it is a probable one when there is such dearth of historical accounts of that time from which any definite conclusions for Penda's attitude might be inferred.

Another pertinent point in Tyler's essay is the common denominator of an elitist position in theories of cultural dominance. The 'cohesive group identity' is possible because in Early Mercia there was a common denominator of a socio-political elite due to the presence of elite Britons. But the accepted view of Brittonic presence in Anglo-Saxon England does not support Britons in such prominent positions. Bede's attempt to write the Anglo-Saxons 'into' to the history of Britain and simultaneously to write the Britons 'out' of it may be summarized in the way Wulfstan describes Gildas. Howe makes a noteworthy distinction in this regard where he states that Wulfstan's use of the word *peodwita* to refer to Gildas. This word was used to stand for the word 'historian'. But Howe draws our attention to the literal meaning which is 'one who knows the people'. In other words, Gildas is not a historian so much as writing for and about his own people.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Bede (despite his

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>62</sup>Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 10-11.

claim to the title of a serious historian) might also be called a *peodwita*, i.e. he, too is writing for and about his own 'people'.

## CHAPTER 2

### Britons and Saxons in the Migration Myth

The effects of Bede's 'Myth of Migration' can be observed in later ninth century texts like the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the different recensions of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The significance and influence of the migration myth were considerable enough for it to survive in its entirety into ninth century West-Saxon literature. Notwithstanding the policies behind the translation projects of this period, the subject-matter must have had church sanction as well as popular currency to have been deemed important as part of this project. We do not know of other texts that may not have survived, but it is undeniable that Bede's version of the Migration Myth was significant for the scribes of the ninth-century. As Howe points out, whatever else the Old English translator may have edited out from Bede's original work, the Migration Story was preserved in its entirety.<sup>63</sup> In a sense, Bede's attempt at creating a 'Myth of Migration' was successful enough to have persisted well into the ninth century. Here, it is important to remember that to derive from Bede's narrative is also to subscribe to Bede's political and religious stance. Not only was he a revered church father that provided the necessary church sanction for the survival of his *Historia* but his writing also reflected his political leanings (that of the Northumbrian royal house). In this regard, Bede's reference to his affiliations is implicit in his preface to the *Historia*. The ninth century Old English translation was possibly an undertaking under the patronage of King Alfred along with a lost original of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which is considered the source for the Parker or Winchester Chronicle (A). But the tone and construction of the narrative has largely remained the same as that of Bede's work, albeit much truncated in the *Chronicle* texts. Bede's influence is particularly marked in three

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 69.

important areas: the date of the *Adventus Saxonum*, the narrative of Anglo-Saxon victory (as opposed to Gildas's emphasis on British defeat), and a complete removal, at least from written historiography, of the British by A.D.655. Take Bede's original account of the *Adventus Saxonum* for example:

In the year of our Lord 449, Martian, being made emperor with Valentinian, and the forty-sixth from Augustus, ruled the empire for seven years. Then the people of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king [Vortigern], arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their[the Britons'] country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly, they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army. The newcomers received of the Britons a place to inhabit, upon condition that they should wage war against their enemies for the peace and security of the country, whilst the Britons agreed to furnish them with pay. (I. XV)<sup>64</sup>

Bede's account begins with a conscious effort at chronology. He 'fixes' the date of the *Adventus* as A.D. 449, a date that has led to generations of scholars to subscribe to the 'catastrophic invasion theory',<sup>65</sup> whereby Britain was conquered by a barrage of invading 'Saxons' as attested by the three infamous ships despite evidence to the contrary that indicate Briton-Saxon interaction even before the arrival of the three boatloads of Saxons. Howe theorizes that Bede was not unaware of stories to the contrary but made a conscious decision to 'fix' the date of the *Adventus* as he needed a simple and powerful beginning for his Myth of Migration. As a matter of fact, there is an indication of Bede's awareness of Saxon

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<sup>64</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

<sup>65</sup>Donald A. White, "Changing View of the *Adventus Saxonum* in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century English Scholarship," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no.4 (October-December, 1971): 585-594 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708979>, 589.

presence in Britain before A.D.449 evident in the fact that he had to explain away the sudden massive increase in the Germanic population of Britain:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over into the island, and they began to increase so much, that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. (I. XV)<sup>66</sup>

The next logical question would be, why 449? It may be speculated that the ‘invitation’ by Vortigern was ‘official’ enough to mandate the presence of Anglo-Saxons warriors on British soil (as opposed to traders and the odd mercenary who settled in southern Britain well before any such official appeal. Also, Bede chose to follow the basic model set by his primary source Gildas (as mentioned in the preceding chapter) which might account for his selection of this moment in history. Bede’s established chronology gained enough credibility that his account was translated with almost no significant changes almost two centuries later. If we question the amount of the information retained by the translator of Bede in the ninth century, we will find that this account of the *Adventus* is translated almost verbatim with minor allowances for the linguistic conventions of the Old English language:

Da wæs ymb fēower hund wintra and nigon and fēowertig fram ūres Drihtnes menniscnyse þæt Martiānus cāsere rīce onfēng and vii gear hæfde. Sē wæs syxta ēac fēowertigum fram Agustō þām cāsere. Ða Angelþēod and Seaxna wæs gelaðod fram þām foresprecenan cyninge, and on Breotone cōm on þrim myclum scypum, and on ēastdæle þyses ēalondes eardungstōwe onfēng þurh ðæs ilcan cyninges bebod, þe hī hider gelaðode, þæt hī sceoldan for heora ēðle compian and feohtan. And hī sōna compeden wið heora gewinnan, þe hī oft ær norðan onhergedon; and Seaxan þā sige geslōgan. Þā sendan hī hām ærenddracan and hēton secgan þysses landes wæstmbærnyse and Brytta yrgþo. And hī þā sōna hider sendon māran sciphere strengran wigena; and wæs unoferswīðendlic weorud, þā hī tōgædere geþēodde wæron. And him Bryttas sealdan and gēafan eardungstōwe betwih him, þæt hī for

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<sup>66</sup>Bede, “Medieval Sourcebook: Book I.”

sibbe and for hǣlo heora ēðles campodon and wunnon wið heora fēondum, and hī him andlyfne and āre forgēafen for heora gewinne.<sup>67</sup>

[It was about four hundred and forty-nine winters from the reincarnation of our Lord that Emperor Martian ascended to the throne and ruled for seven years. That was also the forty-sixth after the Emperor Augustus. Then the Angle-people and Saxons were invited by the aforesaid king, Vortigern, and came to Britain in three large ships, and received a dwelling place in the eastern part of the island through the instruction of that same king, who invited them here, so that they might battle and fight on behalf of their (Briton's) homeland. And they soon fought against their enemies who had often before attacked them from the north; and the Saxons then were victorious. Then they sent a messenger home and commanded him to speak about the fertility of this land and the cowardice of the Britons. And straightaway they sent here more ships with stronger warriors; and it was an invincible army when they were joined together. And the Britons offered and gave them a dwelling place amongst themselves, so that for peace and for prosperity they would fight and battle for their homeland against their enemies, and they gave them provisions and property for their battles.]

Bede proceeds to draw in words a concise 'map' of the migrating Anglo-Saxons with a precise origin and destination of their journey:

Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany, Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West-Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East-Saxons, the South-Saxons, and the West-Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain deserted to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East Angles, the Midland Angles, Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the English. The two first commanders are said to have been Hengist and Horsa. Of whom Horsa, being afterwards slain in battle by the Britons, was buried in the eastern parts of Kent, where a monument, bearing his name, is still in existence. They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father

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<sup>67</sup>Onions, C.T., *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, Rev. Ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1967), 42.

was Vecta, son of Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces deduce their original. (I. XV)<sup>68</sup>

He renders further authenticity to his narrative by naming the two commanders invited by Vortigern. This insertion of Hengest and Horsa into the narrative was probably a result of his audience's expectations involving the existing oral traditions. The story of the arrival of these two mercenaries would have been a staple for the heroic tradition of the Anglo-Saxon courts with the added relevance of being a direct allusion to what Miller terms 'Kentish dynastic propaganda'.<sup>69</sup> The tradition among Anglo-Saxon royalty of tracing their genealogy back to Woden was a requirement for their political legitimacy. As it would be later illustrated by the genealogies in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Anglo-Saxon royalty tended to trace their ancestry back to the Germanic tribes and ultimately the pagan god Woden. We might question the reason for Bede's inclusion of a pagan God as the mythic ancestor of the Anglo-Saxons despite being a Christian. But Bede's source was not only Gildas but also the oral tradition of the Anglo-Saxons and the vernacular traditions of heroic lays prevalent in the Kentish culture where Hengest and Horsa were considered to be important predecessors and ancestors. It was probably very important to Bede's royal audience that the troops summoned by Vortigern were led by 'Woden-born royals'.<sup>70</sup> Bede's innovation lies in the fact that he ties them to the entire Anglo-Saxon *þeod* of Britain as common ancestral leaders. It may be speculated that this device used by Bede had gained enough popularity that in the ninth-century translation, it was preserved almost verbatim:

Cōmon hī of þrim folcum ðām strangestan Gērmanie, þæt is of Seaxum and of Angle and of Gēatum. Of Gēata fruman syndon Cantware and Wihtsætan; þæt is sēo þeod þe With þæt ēalond oneardað. Of Seaxum, þæt is, of ðām lande þe mon hāteð Ealdseaxan, cōman Ēastseaxan and Sūðseaxan and Westseaxan. Of Engle cōman

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<sup>68</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

<sup>69</sup>M. Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas." *The English Historical Review* 90, no.355 (April 1975): 241-261, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/566923>, 254.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

Ēastengle and Middelengle and Myrce and eall Norðhembra cynn; is þæt land ðe Angulus is nemned, betwyh Gēatum and Seaxum; and is sǣd of ðære tide þe hī ðanon gewiton oð tōdæge þæt hit wēste wunige. Wǣron ārest heora lāttēowas and heretogan twēgen gebrōðra, Hengest and Horsa. Hī wǣron Wihtgylses suna, þæs fæder wæs Witta hāten, þæs fæder wæs Wihta hāten, þæs fæder wæs Woden nemned, of ðæs strynde monigra mǣgða cyningcynn fruman lǣdde.<sup>71</sup>

[They came from among the three strongest Germanic folk, that is of the Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes. Of Jutish origins are the people of Kent and of the Isle of Wight; that is the people who inhabit the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is from that land which is called Old Saxony, come the East Saxons, South Saxons, and West Saxons. From the Angles come the East Angles and Middle Angles and Mercians and all the people of Northumbria; it is that land which is named Angeln, between Jutland and Saxony; it is said that from the time they left there until the present day that it remains deserted. The first of their leaders and commanders were two brothers, Hengest and Horsa. They were the sons of Wihtgysl, whose father was called Witta, whose father was named Woden, from whose lineage many tribes of royal races claimed origin.]

The above account is followed by the account of Saxon defeat at Badon Hill under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus, but where Gildas ends his story, Bede continues the tale of eventual Anglo-Saxon victory and a gradual elimination of Romano-British presence from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. An example of the erasure of Britons from the Anglo-Saxon territories in Britain can be found in the account which immediately follows Bede's map of migration:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over into the island, and they began to increase so much, that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time repelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates. At first, they obliged them to furnish a greater quantity of provisions; and, seeking an

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<sup>71</sup>Onions, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 43.



occasion to quarrel, protested, that unless more plentiful supplies were brought them, they would break the confederacy, and ravage all the island; nor were they backward in putting their threats in execution. In short, the fire kindled by the hands of these pagans proved God's just revenge for the crimes of the people; not unlike that which, being once lighted by the Chaldeans, consumed the walls and city of Jerusalem. For the barbarous conquerors acting here in the same manner, or rather the just Judge ordaining that they should so act, they plundered all the neighbouring cities and country, spread the conflagration from the eastern to the western sea, without any opposition, and covered almost every part of the devoted island. Public as well as private structures were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; the prelates and the people, without any respect of persons, were destroyed with fire and sword; nor was there any to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the miserable remainder, being taken in the mountains, were butchered in heaps; others, spent with hunger, came forth and submitted themselves to the enemy for food, being destined to undergo perpetual servitude, if they were not killed even upon the spot some, with sorrowful hearts, fled beyond the seas. Others, continuing in their own country, led a miserable life among the woods, rocks, and mountains, with scarcely enough food to support life, and expecting every moment to be their last. (I. XV)<sup>72</sup>

This account sets the confrontational tone of the Briton-Saxon dynamic that is faithfully translated into Old English:

Ne wæs ðā ylding tō þon þæt hī hēapmælum cōman mārān weorod of þām þēodum þe wæ ær gemynegodon. And þæt folc ðe hider cōm ongan weaxan and myclian tō þan swīðe þæt hī wæron on myclum ege þām sylfan landbīgengan ðe hī ær hider laðedon and cýgdon.

Æfter þissum hī ðā geweredon tō sumre tīde wið Pehtum, þā hī ær ðurh gefeoht feor ādrīfan. And þā wæron Seaxan sēcende intingan and tōwyrde heora gedāles wið Bryttas. Cýðdon him openlice and sædon, nemne hī him mārān andlyfne sealdon, þæt hī woldan him sylfe niman and hergian, þær hī hit findan mihton. And sōna ðā

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<sup>72</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

bēotunge dædum læstom, bærndon and hergedon and slogan fram ēastsæ oð westsæ, and him nænig wiðstōd. Ne wæs ungelīc wræcc þām ðe iū Chaldēas bærndon Hierusalēme weallas and ðā cynelican getimbro mid fýre fornāman for ðæs Godes dome, nēh ceastra gehwylce and land forheregeode wæron. Hruran and fēollon cynelico getimbro somod and ānlīpie, and gehwær sācerdas and mæsseprēostas betwih wībedum wæron slægene and cwylmde; biscopas mid folcum būton ænigre āre scēawunge ætgædere mid īserne and līge fornumene wæron. And ne wæs sē bebyrignysse sealde þām ðe swā hrēowlīce ācwealde wæron. And monige ðære earman lāfe on wēstenum fanggene wæron and hēapmælum sticode. Sume for hunger heora fēondum on hand ēodon and ēcne þēowdōm gehēton wið ðon þe him mon andlyfne forgēage; sume ofer sǣ sorgiende gewiton; sume forhtiende on ēðle gebidan, and þearfende līf in wuda and in wēstenum and on hēan cleofum sorgiende mōde symle dydon.<sup>73</sup>

[It was not long before more troops came in crowds from those people that we mentioned before. And the people who came here began to grow and expand to the extent that they were a great terror to those same inhabitants who had invited and summoned them here previously.

After this, they were united by agreement with the Picts, those whom they had before driven far away through battle. And then the Saxons were seeking a cause and opportunity for their separation with the Britons. They told them openly and said to them that unless they gave them more provisions they would take and plunder it themselves wherever they might find it. And immediately the threat was carried out; they burned and ravaged and killed from [the] east[ern] sea to west[ern] sea, and no one could withstand them. This was not unlike the former vengeance of the Chaldeans when they burned the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the royal buildings with fire on account of God's judgement, the land near the city was ravaged. Royal and private buildings were together razed to the ground, and everywhere priests and mass-priests were killed and slain among altars; bishops with the people, without any mercy being shown, were destroyed with sword and fire together. And nor was there any burial given to those who were so cruelly killed. And many of the wretched people remaining were captured in the wilderness and stabbed enmasse. Because of hunger, some walked into the hands of the enemy and were called into eternal slavery among those to whom they had given provisions; some went sorrowing over the sea;

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<sup>73</sup>Onions, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 43-44.

some remained, always fearful, in their native land, and lived in deprivation in the deserted woods or dwelled on high cliffs, always with a grieving mind.]

Bede's translator shows a marked fidelity to the *Adventus* recorded in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, showing that it was influential enough to function as a myth of origin for the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. In an age where the history of the nation was the history of its king/monarch/leader, Bede's account draws from narratives that are most likely to satisfy his audience – be it a sixth century work by a British cleric or the traditional myths of origin familiar to his audience. However, the significance of this story does not change almost two centuries later at the time of a different monarch and a vastly different political situation where the Saxons were no longer the invaders but the ones being invaded. To understand the political prerogatives driving the direction towards which Bede's story is to move, we have to examine the versions in the various manuscripts of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as they are not only explicit ecclesiastical records (evolved from the Easter tables recorded and maintained in monasteries and went on to take on an annalistic form as further details were added to the entries) but also implicitly political records of the time. The story of the *Adventus* is truncated to the basic facts in the *Chronicle* entries:<sup>74</sup>

449. Her Martianus[sic] 7 Ualentines onfengon rice 7 ricsodon . vii. winter. 7 On hiera dagum Hengest 7 Horsa from Wyrtegeorne geleapade Bretta kyninge gesohton Bretene on þam staþe þe is genemned Ypwinesfleot, ærest Brettum to fultume, ac hie eft on hie fuhton...Se cing het hi feohtan agien Pihtas, 7 hi swa dydan 7 sige hæfdan swa hwar swa hi comon. Hi ða sende to Angle 7 heton heom sendan mare fultum 7 heom seggan Brytwalana nahtnesse 7 ðæs landes cysta. Hy ða sendan heom mare fultum. Ða comon þa menn of þrim mægþum Germanie, of Ealdseaxum, of Anglum, of Iotum. Of Iotum comon Cantware 7 Wihtware, þæt ys seo mæið ðe nu eardað on Wiht, 7 ðæt cynn on Westsexum þe man gyt hæst Iutna cyn. Of Ealdseaxon comon

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<sup>74</sup>Tony Jebson, "Manuscript A: The Parker Chronicle: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Electronic Edition (Vol1) Literary Edition," *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: an Edition with TEI P4 Markup Expressed in XML and Translated to XHTML1.1 Using XSLT*, last modified 15.08.2007, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/a-a-L.html>.

Eastsexa 7 Suðsexa 7 WestSexan. Of Angle comon, se a siððan stod westi betwux  
Iutum 7 Seaxum, Eastengla, Midelangla, Mearca 7 ealle Norðhymbra.

[In this year (lit. 'here') Martian and Valentinian came to power (lit. 'received  
kingdom') and ruled for seven winters. And in their days Hengest and Horsa, invited  
by Vortigern, king of the Britons, invaded Britain in the place named Ebbsfleet, first  
to the help of the Britons, but they (i.e., Hengest and Horsa) afterwards fought them  
(i.e., the Britons). The king commanded them to fight against the Picts and they did  
so, and were victorious (lit. 'had victory') wherever they came. Then they sent  
[messengers] to Angeln, and commanded them to send more help and to speak of the  
worthlessness of the Britons and the excellence of the land. Then they sent them more  
help. Then came the men from three great German Nations, of the Old Saxons, of the  
Angles, of the Jutes. From the Jutes came the men of Kent and the Wightwarrians that  
is the tribe which now dwells in the Isle of Wight and the tribe in Wessex which is  
still called kindred of the Jutes. From the Old Saxons came the East Saxons (Essex)  
and South Saxons (Sussex) and West Saxons (Wessex). From Angeln which has ever  
since remained deserted between the Jutes and the Saxons, the East Angles, the  
Middle Angels, the Mercians and all Northumbrians.]

455. Her Hengest 7 Horsa fuhton wiþ Wyrhtgeorne þam cyninge, in þære stowe þe is  
gecueden Agelesþrep, 7 his broþur Horsan man ofslog; 7 æfter þam Hengest  
feng to rice 7 Æsc his sunu.

[This year, Hengest and Horsa fought against the king Vortigern, in the place that is  
called Eylesford. His brother Horsa was slain and after that Hengest and his son came  
to power]

457. Her Hengest 7 Æsc fuhton wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is gecueden  
Crecganford 7 þær ofslogon .iiiiim. wera, 7 þa Brettas þa forleton Centlond 7 mid  
micle ege flugon to Lundenbyrg.

[This year Hengest and Ash fought against Britons in the place which is called  
Crayford and there slew four thousand men, and the Britons then forsook Kent (lit.,  
'Kent land') and with great fear fled to London]

465. Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton uuþ Walas neah Wippedesfleote 7 þær .xii. wilisce  
aldormenn ofslogon, 7 hiera þegn an þær wearþ ofslægen, þam wæs noma Wipped.

[This year Hengest and Esc Ash? fought against the Welsh near Wippedfleet and there slew twelve Welsh leaders and a certain retainer of theirs was slain there, who was named Wipped.]

473. Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wiþ Walas 7 genamon unarimedlico herereaf, 7 þa Walas flugon þa Englan swa fyr.

[This year Hengest and Esc fought against the Welsh and took innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled the English like fire.]

477. Her com Eþle on Bretenlond 7 his .iii. suna, Cymen 7 Wlencing 7 Cissa, mid .iii. scipum on þa stowe þe is nemned Cymenesora, 7 þær ofslogon monige Wealas 7 sume on fleame bedrifon on þone wudu þe is genemned Andredesleage.

[This year Ella came to the land of the Britons and his three sons, Cymen and Wlencing and Cissa, with three ships at the place which is named Cymenshore, and there slew many Welsh and some in flight they drove into the wood which is named Andreds'ley.]

485. Her Eþle gefeagt wiþ Walas neah Mearcꝛedesburnan steþde.

[This year Ella fought against the Welsh near Mecred's-Burnsted.]

488. Her Æsc feng to rice 7 was .xxiiii. wintra Cantwara cyning.

[This year Ash succeeded to the kingdom and was the Kentish king (lit., 'king of the Kent-dwellers) [for] twenty-four years (lit., 'winters').]

491. Her Eþle 7 Cissa ymsætton Andredescester 7 ofslogon alle þa þe þærinne eardedon; ne wearþ þær forþon an Bret to lafe.

[This year Ella and Cissa besieged Andreds-cester and slew all those who dwelled therein; and not one Briton was left there afterwards.]

495. Her cuomon twegen aldormen on Bretene, Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu, mid .v. scipum in þone stede þe is gecueden Cerdicesora 7 þy ilcan dæge gefuhtun wiþ Walum.

[This year came two leaders to Britan, Cerdic and his son Cynric, with five ships at the place which is called Cerdics-ore and the same day fought against the Welsh.]

501. Her com Port on Bretene 7 his .ii. suna Bieda 7 Mægla mid .ii. scipum on þære stowe þe is gecueden Portesmūþa 7 ofslogon anne giongne brettiscmonnan, swiþe eþelne monnan.

[This year came Port to Britain and his two sons Bieda and Mægla with two ships in to the place which is called Portsmouth and slew a young British man, a great native person.]

508. Her Cerdic 7 Cynric ofslogon ænne brettiscyning, þam was nama Natanleod, 7 v. þusendu wera mid him. Æfter was þæt lond nemned Natanleaga oþ Cerdicesford.

[This year Cerdic and Cynric slew a British king who was named Natanleod and five thousand men with him. After that land was named Natanleaga until Charford.]

514. Her comon Westseaxe in Bretene mid .iii. scipum in þa stowe þe is gecueden Cerdicesora, Stuf 7 Wihtgar, fuhton wiþ Brettas 7 hie gefliemdon

[This year came the West Saxons into Britain with three ships at the place which is called Cerdic's-ore, Stuf and Whitgar fought against the Britons and they (Britons) fled.]

The *Chronicle* entries truncate the narrative to short precise events. The entry under 449 is a précis of Bede's account of the *Adventus* following which the account becomes one or two line entries in the text. As Stenton states, the *Chronicle* entries from 449 to 560 are only about 'landings, battles and deaths of kings.'<sup>75</sup> How should these terse entries be read in the larger context of the Myth of Migration? It may be suggested that the *Chronicle* entries are a distillation of the 'facts' that are seen as 'important', 'accurate' and 'relevant' to the narrative of Anglo-Saxon victory at the expense of not just a British defeat but a complete

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<sup>75</sup>Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20-21.

removal of the Britons from Old English narratives of Anglo-Saxon history. Relevance in this context seems to confine itself to the ‘event’ of 449 and the consequent appearance of different Anglo-Saxon leaders/commanders who deserve names and an unknown quantity of seldom named Britons who continued to be defeated or slaughtered/conquered. The graphic descriptions of violence in Gildas is first sanitized by Bede and eventually disappears from the *Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* makes a major contribution to White’s ‘catastrophic invasion theory’<sup>76</sup> whose firm foundations were laid by Bede two centuries prior to any original Old English texts on record. In a textual campaign that gradually removes British presence apart from stories of the Britons being invaded and conquered, we might recover them as a recognisable and recognised ethnic group in Anglo-Saxon texts from non-literary works like the law code of Ine during the Early West-Saxon period.

The laws of Ine are unique in the body of Anglo-Saxon writing because it mentions a British presence in seventh-century Wessex. It implies a socio-political situation where such legislation granting legal protection to the Britons (*Walas/Wylisc*) was felt to be necessary by the highest legislative power in the kingdom, i.e. the king. Martin Grimmer identifies a total of eight laws that refer to Britons/Welshmen. He regards this law code as atypical because, unlike earlier law codes by Saxon kings or even Alfred’s laws (for which he acknowledges his debt to Ine), Ine’s laws grant legal status to the Britons/Welsh.<sup>77</sup> It reflects a social scenario where Brittonic ethnicity necessitated legal recognition which is very different from the confrontational context in which the *Chronicle* portrays Anglo-British relations. The laws dealing with the *wealh/Wylisc* or free Britons and Welsh are five in number and deal with one of the fundamental legal rights of Anglo-Saxon society, the ‘wergild’. It is the compensation provided to a victim’s kin or lord by the offender in the event of murder. Ine’s code

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<sup>76</sup>White, “Changing View Of Adventus Saxonum,” 589.

<sup>77</sup>Martin Grimmer, “Britons in Early Wessex: The Evidence of the Law Code of Ine,” in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 104.

computes a free man's worth on the wergild-scale on the basis of how much land he owns or does not own. calculated in 'hides'. The law code states that the wergild of a *wealh gafolgelda* shall be 120 shillings; that of his son, 100 shillings. Grimmer further mentions that the compensation for killing a slave is 60 shillings (normally) but in some cases 50 shillings. The offender can also "compound for a scourging" by a sum of 12 shillings.<sup>78</sup> The words *wealh gafolgelda* can be translated as Briton/Welsh taxpayer. The law code uses other words to denote foreigner and slave (*elðeodig* and *þeow* respectively) and uses the term *ðeowwealh* to denote a Briton/Welsh slave. The computation of wergild for the *wealh/Wyliscmon* has been tabulated by Grimmer:<sup>79</sup>

An owner of five hides-----600 shillings (Ine 24.2)

A *horswealh* (a horseman who is a Briton) in the king's service-----200 shillings (Ine 33)

An owner of one hide or a taxpayer-----120 shillings) (Ine 23.3,32)

A son of a taxpayer-----100 shillings (Ine 23.3)

An owner of half a hide-----80 shillings (Ine 32)

An owner of no hide-----60 shillings (Ine 32)

He contrasts this with the comparative wergilds for the Saxons where they 'appear to be granted a wergild ranging from 1200 down to 200 shillings. A member of the king's household (a *geneat*) had a wergild of 1200 shillings.'<sup>80</sup> He references Ine 19 which states that a member of the king's household would be allowed to swear for 60 shillings if his wergild is 1200 shillings. He further states that 'a 200-shilling wergild is used to establish the amount of compensation due for a man killed by a raiding party with the instruction that the same formula be applied "in the case of the nobler born". This can be taken to mean that a 200-shilling man was not of the nobility and was therefore probably a *ceorl* (the lowest rank

<sup>78</sup>F. L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 42-43.

<sup>79</sup>Grimmer, "Britons in Early Wessex," 105.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid



of the law-worthy). A further law sets out compensations for 200-, 600- and 1200-shilling men, from which it might be deduced that a 600-shilling man was of a class higher than that of a *ceorl* (reference to Ine 34, 34.1, 70).<sup>81</sup> If we follow Grimmer's argument then it is obvious that there is a disparity in the valuation of the Britons/Welsh in Ine's Wessex. They have been legislated for but the highest recorded status is double the wergild for a Saxon landholder of five hides than it is for a Briton/Welsh. This imbalance is also demonstrated in Ine 54.2 where the law measures the "oath-worthiness" of Briton/Welsh in comparison to a Saxon. It states that a Welshman (*Wyliscne mon*), if reduced to penal slavery (*witeðeowne*), can be compelled to submit to a scourging if by an oath taken by the accuser of 12 hides but in case of an Englishman (*Engliscne*) it would require an oath of 34 hides.<sup>82</sup> Here Grimmer points out that Dorothy Whitelock had claimed 34 to be an error which should be read as 24 in keeping with the ratio between the wergilds of the English and the Briton/Welsh.<sup>83</sup> He also points out that the word of a Saxon held more value than the word of a Briton.<sup>84</sup> Ine 46 states that accusation for cattle-stealing can be denied by an oath of 60 hides if the accused is allowed to produce an oath. This being the basic premise, Ine 46.1 clarifies the issue further by stating that, if the accuser is an Englishman, it would require an oath of double the value (120 hides) to deny it. However, if the accuser is Welsh then the amount does not change.<sup>85</sup> What is apparent from this list is that a Briton was valued as exactly half the worth of a Saxon in Early Wessex. One might enquire why Ine bothered to legislate for the Brittonic population of Wessex if they are considered so inferior. One explanation would be that the population was substantial to warrant legislation which begs the question of why it was not done before. Grimmer's view is that Ine wished to establish stability within his kingdom because of the constant wars he was fighting (against Kent and Mercia) and the internal

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid. For the references to Ine's laws see Attenborough, *Laws*, 42-43, 46-47, 58-59.

<sup>82</sup>Attenborough, *Laws*, 54-55.

<sup>83</sup>Grimmer, "Britons in Early Wessex," 106.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid

<sup>85</sup>Attenborough, *Laws*, 50-51.

conflicts in his kingdom.<sup>86</sup> The next question should be where this substantial population of Britons came from and if they had always been present in the kingdom of Wessex. A solution to this problem might be Wessex's wars of expansion westward which annexed territories which had significant Brittonic populations.<sup>87</sup> In this context, attention needs to be paid to the distinct terms used to denote the Britons. As seen earlier, all references to the Britons in for this section were given as *wealh/Wylisc*. This was done so that the racial divide and cultural identity construct could be kept separate. The word *wealh* stands for Briton but it is also the root word for "Welsh" from the plural *wealas*. However, Ine's laws also use the term *Wylisc* but specifically in contexts where the word *Englisc* appears. It is not quite clear how these terms are to be translated. It is probable that "Briton" might refer to the general Brittonic population in an ethnic sense or it might be a vestige from earlier forms of address meant for the Britons already living in parts of Wessex. Similarly, "Welsh" can refer to the Brittonic population of the newly-annexed territories or it might be the term used to construct the binaries of "English" and "Welsh". On the other hand, they might just be inexactitudes in the use of words frequent in texts like *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* although there is no denying their significance in studying the origins of the Britons/Welsh in the Laws of Ine.

With respect to the presence of the Britons in Ine's laws as legal subjects, Alex Woolf has theorised the phenomenon in economic terms. According to him, the system of valuation where a Briton is valued at half the amount of a Saxon is a legal system designed to facilitate the marginalisation of the Brittonic population along economic lines. He states that in a legal dispute between a Saxon and a Briton, the Briton will be bankrupted first because of the disparate valuation of oaths. In a political situation where the overlords changed because of wars of expansion, legal impetus was provided so that the land rights might pass into the hands of the Saxons. Also, the 'apartheid' inherent in the legal code would encourage the

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<sup>86</sup>Grimmer, "Britons in Early Wessex," 107.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 108.

Britons to leave for Welsh territories which would be a more efficient solution than large scale ethnic cleansing by direct aggression.<sup>88</sup> Woolf's model is based on the economic implications of such a system but whether we can read the law code as an expulsion of Britons through legislation is questionable. This theory does provide an alternative to the 'burn and slaughter' model and gives a logical imperative to the "migration" theory whereby Britons did not flee in panic by the droves but were encouraged to systematically withdraw from a territory via legal means. But it can be easily argued that loss of land rights and racial discrimination which Woolf is accusing Ine of, could have given rise to rebellion which was precisely what Ine wished to avoid according to Grimmer. Unfortunately, the dearth of records of such Anglo-British encounters (which itself may be a conscious choice on part of Old English authors) prohibits any definitive argument for or against any of these theories. The fact which is given is that Ine, a king of Early Wessex was somehow compelled to write laws giving legal status to Britons and in the process, to 'write' the Britons into the body of Old English texts as a separate cultural identity making up a significant population of Anglo-Saxon Wessex. The awareness of Britons as a foreign entity, and not just a separate ethnic group, may be found from linguistic evidence as well. In her thesis, Leah Miller explores the semantic implications of the word *wealh* which is often a placeholder for 'Briton' or 'Welsh'.<sup>89</sup> She states that the implication of 'foreigner' is incorporated in the semantic of this particular word which is often glossed as 'Briton, Welsh, Foreigner, Slave'.<sup>90</sup> This suggests that at a semantic level the Britons are seen as 'foreign' to the Anglo-Saxons. This element of 'foreign-ness' has also been implied in Bede's *Historia* where all the ethnic groups identified by him are seen as migrating populations:

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<sup>88</sup>Alex Woolf, "Apartheid and Economics in Anglo-Saxon England." in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 115-129.

<sup>89</sup>Katherine Miller, "Semantic Field of Slavery," 9.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

At first this island had no other inhabitants but the Britons, from whom it derived its name, and who, coming over into Britain, as is reported, from Armorica, possessed themselves of the southern parts thereof. When they, beginning at the south, had made themselves masters of the greatest part of the island, it happened, that the nation of the Picts, from Scythia, as is reported, putting to sea, in a few long ships, were driven by the winds beyond the shores of Britain, and arrived on the northern coast of Ireland, where, finding the nation of the Scots, they begged to be allowed to settle among them, but could not succeed in obtaining their request. Ireland is the greatest island next to Britain, and lies to the west of it; but as it is shorter than Britain to the north, so, on the other hand, it runs out far beyond it to the south, opposite to the northern parts of Spain, though a spacious sea lies between them. The Picts, as has been said, arriving in this island by sea, desired to have a place granted them in which they might settle. The Scots answered that the island could not contain them both; but "We can give you good advice," said they, "what to do; we know there is another island, not far from ours, to the eastward, which we often see at a distance, when the days are clear. If you will go thither, you will obtain settlements; or, if they should oppose you, you shall have our assistance." The Picts, accordingly, sailing over into Britain, began to inhabit the northern parts thereof, for the Britons were possessed of the southern. Now the Picts had no wives, and asked them of the Scots; who would not consent to grant them upon any other terms, than that when any difficulty should arise, they should choose a king from the female royal race rather than from the male: which custom, as is well known, has been observed among the Picts to this day. In process of time, Britain, besides the Britons and the Picts, received a third nation the Scots, who, migrating from Ireland under their leader, Reuda, either by fair means, or by force of arms, secured to themselves those settlements among the Picts which they still possess. From the name of their commander, they are to this day called Dalreudins; for, in their language, Dal signifies a part.

Ireland, in breadth, and for wholesomeness and serenity of climate, far surpasses Britain; for the snow scarcely ever lies there above three days: no man makes hay in the summer for winter's provision, or builds stables for his beasts of burden. No reptiles are found there, and no snake can live there; for, though often carried thither out of Britain, as soon as the ship comes near the shore, and the scent of the air reaches them, they die. On the contrary, almost all things in the island are good against poison. In short, we have known that when some persons have been bitten by serpents, the scrapings of leaves of books that were brought out of Ireland,

being put into water, and given them to drink, have immediately expelled the spreading poison, and assuaged the swelling. The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish, or fowl; and it is remarkable for deer and goats. It is properly the country of the Scots, who, migrating from thence, as has been said, added a third nation in Britain to the Britons and the Picts. There is a very large gulf of the sea, which formerly divided the nation of the Picts from the Britons; which gulf runs from the west very far into the land, where, to this day, stands the strong city of the Britons, called Aicluith. The Scots, arriving on the north side of this bay, settled themselves there.

Britain had never been visited by the Romans, and was, indeed, entirely unknown to them before the time of Caius Julius Caesar, who, in the year 693 after the building of Rome, but the sixtieth year before the incarnation of our Lord, was consul with Lucius Bibulus, and afterwards while he made war upon the Germans and the Gauls, which were divided only by the river Rhine, came into the province of the Morini, from whence is the nearest and shortest passage into Britain. Here, having provided about eighty ships of burden and vessels with oars, he sailed over into Britain; where, being first roughly handled in a battle, and then meeting with a violent storm, he lost a considerable part of his fleet, no small number of soldiers, and almost all his horses. Returning into Gaul, he put his legions into winter quarters, and gave orders for building six hundred sails of both sorts. With these he again passed over early in spring into Britain, but, whilst he was marching with a large army towards the enemy, the ships, riding at anchor, were, by a tempest either dashed one against another, or driven upon the sands and wrecked. Forty of them perished, the rest were, with much difficulty, repaired. Caesar's cavalry was, at the first charge, defeated by the Britons, and Labienus, the tribune, slain. In the second engagement, he, with great hazard to his men, put the Britons to flight. Thence he proceeded to the river Thames, where an immense multitude of the enemy had posted themselves on the farthest side of the river, under the command of Cassibellaun, and fenced the bank of the river and almost all the ford under water with sharp stakes: the remains of these are to be seen to this day, apparently about the thickness of a man's thigh, and being cased with lead, remain fixed immovably in the bottom of the river. This, being perceived and avoided by the Romans, the barbarians not able to stand the shock of the legions, hid themselves in the woods, whence they grievously galled the Romans with repeated sallies. In the meantime, the strong city of Trinovantum, with its commander Androgeus, surrendered to Caesar, giving him forty hostages. Many other cities, following their example, made a treaty with the Romans. By their assistance, Caesar

at length, with much difficulty, took Cassibellaun's town, situated between two marshes, fortified by the adjacent woods, and plentifully furnished with all necessaries. After this, Caesar returned into Gaul, but he had no sooner put his legions into winter quarters, then he was suddenly beset and distracted with wars and tumults raised against him on every side. (I.I & I.II)<sup>91</sup>

The narrative not only identifies the Britons, Scots, Picts and Romans as migratory groups but also effectively divorces the island from any inherent claims by a single group on grounds of being a native population. Howe states that Bede envisages Britain as a land that has been reserved by the Lord for the worthy and this worth is to be calculated in terms of piety and evangelical success.<sup>92</sup> We might argue that a narrative construct such as this laid the foundation for the gradual removal of Britons from the 'history' of the island and the model which provides Bede the avenue to do so was constructed by Gildas, ironically a Briton himself.

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<sup>91</sup>Bede, "Medieval Sourcebook: Book I."

<sup>92</sup>Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 51.

## CHAPTER 3

### Alfred and the Anglo-Saxon Myth of Origin

The transmission of the migration myth in the late ninth-century Old English textual culture is largely a product of King Alfred's 'programme of translation'. In the prose preface to the Old English version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care/Cura pastoralis*, Alfred outlines his logic and reasoning behind the need for vernacular translations of 'selected' Latin texts that were deemed as essential reading:

Ælfred kyning hāteð grētan Wærferð biscep his wordum luflice ond frēondlice. Ond ð ē cýðan hāte ðæt mē cōm swīðe oft on gemyndhwelce wiotan iū wæron giond Angelcynn ægðerge godcundra hāda ge woruldcundra, ond hū gesæliglica tīda ðā wæron giond Angelcynn, ond hū ðā kyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces on ðām dagum Gode ond his ærendwrecum hīersumedon, ond hīe ægðerge hiorasibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehīoldon ond ēac ut hiora ēðel gerymdon, ond hū him ðā spēow ægðerge mid wīge gemid wīsdōme, ond ēac ðā godcundan hādas hū giorn e hīe wæron ægðerge ymb lāre ge ymb liornunga ge ymb ealle ðā ðīowotdōmas ðe hīe Gode dōn scoldon, ond hū man utanbordes wīsdōm ond lāre hieder on lond sōhte, ond hū wē hīe nū sceoldon ute begietan gif wē hīehabban sceoldon. Swæ clæne hīo wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðæt swīðe fēawa wæron behionan Humbre ðe hiora ðēninga cūðenunderstandan on Englisc, oððe furðum ān ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englis c āreccēan; ond ic wēne ðætte nōht monige begiondan Humbrenæren. Swæ fēawa hiora wæron ðæt ic furðum āne ānlēpne ne mæg geðencean besūðan Temese ðāðā ic tō rīce fēng. Gode ælmihtegum sīe ðonc ðætte wē nū ænigne onstal habbað lārēowa.

Ond forðon ic ðē bebīode ðæt ðū dō swæ ic gelīefe ðæt ðū wille, ðæt ðū ðē ðissa woruldðinga tō ðām geæmetige swæ ðū oftost mæge, ðæt ðū ðone wīsdōm ðe ðē God sealde, ðærðær ðū hiene befæstan mæge, befæste. Gēðenc hwelc wītu ūs ðā becōmon for ðisse worulde, ðāðāwē hit nōhwæðer ne selfe ne lufodon ne ēac oðrum monnum ne lēfdon: ðone naman æne wē lufodon ðætte wē Cristne wæren, ond swīðefēawa ðā ðē awas.

Ðā ic ðā ðis eall ġemunde, ðā ġemunde ic ēac hū ic ġeseah, ærðæmðe hit eall forherg od wære ond forbærned, hū ðā ciricean ġiond eallAngelcynn stōdon māðma ond bōca ġefylða ond ēac micel meniġeo Godes ðiowa. Ond ðā swīðe lýtle fiorme ðāra bōca wiston, forðæmðehīe hiora nānwuht onġiotan ne meahton forðæmðe hīe nāron on hiora āgen ġeðīode āwritene; swelce hīe cwæden: Ūre ieldran, ðāðe ðāsstōwa ær hīoldon, hīe lufodon wīsdōm ond ðurh ðone hīe begēaton welan ond ūs læfdon. Hēr mon mæ ġ ġīet ġesīon hiora swæð, ac wē himne cunnon æfterspyriġean, ond forðæm wē habbað ð nū æġðer forlæten ġe ðone welan ġe ðone wīsdōm, forðæmðe wē noldon tō ðæm spore midūre mōde onlūtan.

Ðā ic ðā ðis eall ġemunde, ðā wundrade ic swīðe swīðe ðāra ġōdena wiotona ðe ġiū wæron ġiond Angelcynn, ond ðā bēc ealla befullangeliornod hæfdon, ðæt hīe hiora ðā nænne dæl noldon on hiora āgen ġeðīode wendan. Ac ic ðā sōna eft mē selfum andwyrde ond cwæð: hīene wēndon ðætte æfre menn sceolden swæ reccelease weorðan on d sīo lār swæ oðfeallan. For ðære wilnunga hīe hit forlēton, ond woldonðæt hēr ðy m āra wīsdōm on londe wære ðy wē mā ġeðēoda cūdon.

Ðā ġemunde ic hū sīo æ wæs ærest on Ebreiscġeðīode funden, ond eft, ðā hīe Crēacas ġeliornodon, ðā wendon hīe hīe on hiora āgenġeðīode ealle, ond ēac ealle oðre bēc. Ond eft Lædenware swæ same, siððan hīe hīe ġeliornodon, hīe hīe wendon ealla ðurh wīsewealhstōdas on hiora āgen ġeðīode. Ond ēac ealla oðra Cristna ðīoda sumne dæl hiora on hiora āgen ġeðīode wendon. Forðy mēðyncð betre, ġif īow swæ ðyncð, ðæt wē ēac suma bēc, ðāðe nīedbeðearfosta sīen eallum monnum tōwiotonne, ðæt wē ðā on ðæt ġeðīodewenden ðe wē ealle ġecnāwan mæġen, ond ġedōn swæ wē swīðe ēaðe magon mid Godes fultume, ġif wē ðā stilnesse habbað, ðæt eall sīoġioguð ðe nū is on Angelcynne frīora monna, ðāraðe ðā spēða hæbben ðæt hīe ðæm befēolan mæġen, sīen tō liornunga oðfæste, ðāhwīleðe hīetō nānre oðerre note ne mæġen, oð ðone first ðe hīe wel cunnen Englisc ġewrit ārædan. Lære mon siððan furður on Lædenġeðīode ðā ðemon furðor læran wille ond tō hīeran hāde dōn wille.

Ðā ic ðā ġemunde hū sīo lār Lædenġeðīodes ær ðissum āfeallen wæs ġiond Angelcynn, ond ðēah moniġe cūdon Englisc ġewrit ārædan, ðāongan ic onġemang oðrum mislicum ond manigfealdum biġum ðisses kynerīces ðā bōc wendan on Englisc ðe is ġenmed on Læden Pastoralisonð on Englisc Hierdebōc, hwīlum word be worde, hwīlum andġit of andġiete, swæswæ ic hīe ġeliornode æt Pleġmunde mīnumærcebiscepe ond æt Assere mīnum biscepe ond æt Grimbolde mīnum mæsseprīoste ond æt Iohanne



mīnum mæsseprēoste. Siððan ic hīe ðāgeliornod hæfde, swāswā ic hīe forstōd, ond swā ic hīe andgītfullicost āreccēan meahte, ic hīe on Englisc āwende: ond tō ælcumb iscepstōle on mīnum rīce wille āne onsendan; ond on ælcra bið ān æstel, se bið on fift egum mancessan. Ond ic bebōde on Godes namanðæt nān mon ðone æstel from ðær e bēc ne dō, ne ðā bōc from ðām mynstre: uncūð hū longe ðær swā gēlærede biscepa s sīen, swāswā nū, Gode ðonc, gēwelhwær siendon. Forðy ic wolde ðætte hīe ealne gæt ðære stōwe wæren, būton se biscep hīe mid him habban wille, oððehīo hwær tō læ ne sīe, oððe hwā oðre bī wrīte.<sup>93</sup>

[King Alfred bids his loving and friendly words to greet Bishop Wærferth, and bids to inform you that it very often comes to my mind what wise men there formerly were throughout England, both of holy and secular orders; and how blessed the times were then throughout England; and how the kings who then had power over the people obeyed God and his ministers; and how they held their peace, their morality and their power within their borders, and also increased their kingdom without; and how they prospered both in war and in judgement; and also how eager the sacred orders were about both teaching and learning, and about all the services that they ought to render to God; and how men from abroad came to this land in search of wisdom and teaching, and how we now must get them from abroad if we shall have them. So completely had wisdom declined in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English, or indeed could translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe that there were not many beyond the Humber. So few of them were there that I indeed cannot think of a single one south of the Thames when I became king. Thanks be to God almighty that we now have any supply of teachers.

Therefore I command you to do as I believe you are willing to do, that you free yourself from worldly affairs as often as you may, so that wherever you can establish the wisdom that God gave you, you may establish it. Consider what punishments would befall us in this world when we neither would love wisdom at all ourselves, nor would leave it for other men; we would love the name alone that we were Christians, and very few of the practices.

Then as I remembered all this, I also remembered how I saw, before it was all destroyed and burnt, how the churches throughout all of England stood filled with treasures and books, and there also were great many of God's servants. And they had very little benefit from those books, for they could not understand anything in them,

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<sup>93</sup>Onions, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 4-7.

because they were not written in their own language. As if they said: 'Our ancestors, who formerly held these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and left it to us. Here we can still see their footprints, but we do not know how to follow them. And therefore, we have now lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not bend down to their tracks with our minds.'

Then I remembered how the Law was first composed in the Hebrew language, and afterwards, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it all into their own language, and also all other books. And afterwards the Romans in the same way, when they had learned them, translated them all through wise interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian peoples translated some part of them into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also translate certain books, which are most needful for all men to know, into that language that we all may understand, and accomplish this, as with God's help we may very easily do if we have peace, so that all the youth of free men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it, be set to learning, while they are not useful for any other occupation, until they know how to read English writing well. One may then instruct in Latin those whom one wishes to teach further and promote to a higher rank.

Then when I remembered how knowledge of Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many knew how to read English writing, then I began among the other various and manifold cares of this kingdom to translate into English the book that is called in Latin 'Pastoralis', and in English "Shepherd-book," sometimes word for word, and sometimes sense for sense, just as I had learned it from Plegmund my archbishop and from Asser my bishop and from Grimbold my masspriest and from John my masspriest. When I had learned it I translated it into English, just as I had understood it, and as I could most meaningfully render it. And I will send one to each bishopric in my kingdom, and in each will be an æstel worth fifty mancuses [weight of gold]. And I command in God's name that no man may take either the æstel from the book or the book from the church. It is unknown how long there may be such learned bishops as, thanks to God, are nearly everywhere. Therefore, I would have them always remain in place, unless the bishop wishes to have the book with him, or it is lent out somewhere, or someone is copying it.]

Alfred opens his preface by lamenting the decline of learning and the dearth of learned men in Anglo-Saxon Britain. Lack knowledge of the vernacular is as lacking as the

knowledge of Latin. He begins his address to his Bishop and straight away hints at the translation of texts from Latin to English when he states that there are very few reliable and knowledgeable translators available for the job. He follows it up by recalling the past glory and high standard of the learning in the island which he states has been adversely affected by the constant wars and invasions. This statement would have been particularly meaningful in the context of the respite from the Viking raids of the ninth century. Learning, according to Alfred, had reached a state where people both north and south of the Humber were not only Latin illiterate but also lacking in knowledge of the vernacular. Alfred straight away gives equal space in his account to both Latin and English. Then he broaches the topic of translation in a circuitous manner. Rather than directly appealing for translation of Latin works into English, Alfred questions why no one had ever done so before. He immediately negates any negative consequences of questioning the learned men of church by saying that learned men of the past did not think that there would come a day when knowledge of Latin would be in such dire straits. Alfred then proceeds to justify his argument by drawing upon the heaviest authority that a churchman would recognise: The Bible. He points out the Latin Bible itself is a translation and the text is involved in an ongoing project of being translated into other languages. If so, then perhaps it would be beneficial to translate certain books into the vernacular to promote learning with the Bishop's consent of course. Alfred, then immediately remembers that people formerly, despite being Latin illiterate, people were English literate and thus states that he has decided to translate Gregory's work as part of this project.

This prose preface is considered not only as Alfred's preface to this particular work but also to his other translation projects as well. Apart from a theme of decline in knowledge of Latin, the king also points out a very important fact that the literate among his subjects, as few as they seemed to be, were well-versed in the vernacular. It indicates implicitly that Latin

learning and learning in general may have declined but there was hope as literacy in English might promote learning and eventually Latin learning among the Anglo-Saxon youth. As seen in the preface, Alfred argues that even God's words needed to be translated from Hebrew into Greek and then into Latin. If so, the Latin texts could also be translated into Old English, the lingua franca of his kingdom. His argument is not only for the programme of translation but also a larger project of fostering literacy among his masses (freemen, of course). Alfred also lays the foundation of his methodology when writes, *hwīlum word be worde, hwīlum andgit of andgiete*, translated from the Latin tag *verbum e verbo ... sensum de sensu*.<sup>94</sup> This is important enough for him to repeats it in his Proem to the Old English translation of Boethius:

Ælfred kuning wæs wealstod ðisse bēc ond hīe of Bōclædene on Englisc wende, swā hīo nū is gedōn. Hwīlum hē sette word be worde, hwīlum andgit of andgite, swā swā hē hit þā sweotolost ond andgitfullīcast gewreccan mihte for þām mistlicum ond manigfealdum weoruldbisgum þe hine oft ægðer ge on mōde ge on līchoman bisgodan. Ða bisgu ūs sint swīþe earfoþrīme þe on his dagum on þā rīcu becōman þe hē underfangen hæfde, ond þēah ðā hē þās bōc hæfde geleornode ond of Lædene tō Engliscum spelle gewende, þā geweorhtē hē hī eft tō lēoðe, swā swā hēo nū gedon is; ond nū bit on for Godes naman hē halsað ælcne þāra þe þās bōc rædan lyste, þæt hē for hine gebidde, ond him ne wīte gif hē hit rihtlīcor ongite þonne hē mihte, for þām þe ælc mon sceal be his andgites mæðe ond be his æmettan sprecan þæt hē sprecð ond dōn þæt þæt hē dēþ.<sup>95</sup>

[King Alfred was the translator of this book and he translated it from Latin into English as it is now done. Sometimes he translated word by word, sometimes meaning for meaning, just as he might render that most intelligibly and most meaningfully on account of the various and manifold worldly troubles which often occupied him both in mind and in body. The troubles are very difficult for us to count which in his days befell the kingdom which he had received and nevertheless when he had learned this book and rendered it from Latin into English speech then he made it again into verse just as it is now done; and now he begs and entreats in God's name

<sup>94</sup>Dorothy Whitelock, "The Prose of Alfred's Reign," in *Continuations and Beginnings*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966) 79, fn. 1.

<sup>95</sup>Onions, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 8.

each of those who would wish to read this book that he should pray for him and should not blame him if he should understand it more correctly than he was able to, because each man is obliged to speak that which he speaks and do that which he does according to the measure of his understanding and according to his leisure.]

In the proem, Alfred talks about the many troubles that befell his kingdom which might be a reference to the political realities of his time. He was chiefly troubled by the Viking invasions of the late ninth to early tenth centuries. Wessex, when he came to power, was engaged in a series of wars with the Danes. Alfred's 'England' was a kingdom under threat. It is necessary to locate Alfredian writings in this climate of being besieged by foreign enemies. The transmission of the Anglo-Saxon myth of migration in the late-ninth century needs to be read in such a socio-political context.

Consequently, there arises queries regarding the 'message' of the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* for Alfred's clergymen, priests, courtiers and learned masses. Although the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia* is not considered to have been undertaken directly under the aegis of Alfred's programme (it is considered chiefly a Mercian work), there is a high probability that it was influenced by the general trends of Alfred's circle. The logic of reading Bede's work in congruence with Alfred's programme lies in the fact that there was once again a need for the message of pan-Germanic ancestry for all of the *Angelcynn* whether they were Mercians, Northumbrians, Saxons or Angles. Bede's migration myth provides legitimizing rhetoric for the occupation of the island of Britain by the Germanic tribes. It was a simple and powerful message that provided 'divine' justification for the existence of the *Angelcynn* in Britain and the defeat and expulsion of the Britons from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

However, Andreas Lemke after Rowley, points out that the portrayal of the Britons in the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* has been subtly revised from the original Latin.<sup>96</sup> He states that there has been an quiet whitewashing of the overarching moral degeneracy characteristic of the Britons in Bede's original work. He argues that there were records of Alfred's treaties with the Welsh kingdoms to present a united Christian front to the pagan Viking threat. As such, the audience for the Old English version of Bede would also include the Welsh as well as the *Angelcynn* which required modification in the portrayal of the Britons in the text. His assertion is perhaps a little problematic as it does not address certain concerns. Firstly, the 'Welsh' audience that he talks about need to be identified as either Britons in Wessex with enough social standing and means to be literate or as the general audience in the Welsh kingdoms of Britain. If it is the latter, then we are forced to question the level of knowledge in *Englisc* for the Britons/Welsh not living in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It presupposes a scenario where the Old English vernacular had gained enough currency to be significant. The Welsh courts and literati found it more convenient to read and understand Old English or at least as convenient as understanding ecclesiastical Latin (it is necessary to keep in mind that the Welsh kingdoms were also Christian with presumable a certain level of access to Christian learning and texts). As for the presence of Britons with significant standing in Alfred's Wessex, it is attested by Asser who wrote the *Life of King Alfred*. He is a prime example of a Welshman from Wales having enough proficiency to assist Alfred in his project of translation. Hence, it does somewhat justify the subtle differences found in the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica*. However, it also raises a very pertinent issue which would bring us to the second point, i.e. how to 'read' the Britons in Alfred's *Dōmbōc*.

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<sup>96</sup>Lemke, "The Old English Translation," 310-357.

The particular sections to give attention to would be Alfred's laws and the laws of Ine. It should be noted that Ine's laws survive only in this *Dōmbōc* so the scribes were definitely 'Alfredian' and even if the king did not need to 'sully his hands with ink' (as E.G. Stanley states)<sup>97</sup> nevertheless, we might say that the writ manages to transmit the royal prerogatives. In other words, the vocabulary used in recording Ine's Laws is definitely that of Alfred's Englisc. With regard to this we might draw attention to Alfred's claims regarding his laws:

Ic ða Ælfred cyning þās togædere gegaderode, 7 awritan het monege þara þe ure forengan heoldon, ða ðe me licodon; 7 manege þara þe me ne licodon ic āwearp mid minra witenas geðeahte, 7 on oðre wisan bebead to healdanne. Forðam, ic ne dorste geðristlæcan þara minra awuht fela on gewrit settan, forðam me was uncuð, hwæt þæs ðam lician wolde, ðe æfter ūs wæren. Ac ða ðe ic gemette awðer oððe on Ines dæge, mines mæges, oððe on Offan Mercna cyninges oððe on Æpelbryhtes þe ærest fulluhte onfeng on Angelcynne, þa ðe me ryhtoste ðuhton, ic þa heron gegaderode, 7 þa oðre forlet.<sup>98</sup>

[Then I, King Alfred, have gathered together these, and have commanded to write many of those which our predecessors held and which I conformed to; and many of those I did not like I rejected, with my counsellors' advice, and in others I have ordered the wise to hold. Since I did not dare to presume by any means to set down in writing many of my own, therefore, I cannot tell what of these would please those who were to be after us. But those which I encountered—either in day of Ine, my Kinsman, or in those of Offa, king of the Mercians, or in the time of Æthelberht, who was the first to be baptised among the English people—those which I thought just, I then collected herein, and those others abandoned.]

Alfred clearly states here that he had compiled only those laws which he deemed 'just' while rejecting others. This included those of Ine as well. It should be noted that nowhere in his laws does Alfred refer to the Britons/Welsh in his territory. But then again, he appends the laws of Ine which significantly legislate for at least three categories of *wealth* as well as making a distinction between the *Wylisc* and the *Englisc*. The inclusion of Ine's laws may

<sup>97</sup>E.G. Stanley, "Alfred's Prefaces," *The Review of English Studies* New Series 39, No. 155 (August 1988): 349-364 (Oxford: OUP, 1988), URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/516766>, 363.

<sup>98</sup>Attenborough, *Laws*, 62.

have been due to his being a kinsman and a king of the West Saxons (Alfred calls himself *Westseaxena Cyning* here) but it might also indicate the earlier laws being in practice during his time. This makes his statement problematic where he claims that he has distilled everything he considers relevant and ‘just’ from Ine in his own law code. This may indicate that either Alfred did not consider the Britons in his kingdom as a recognizable category or at least, at a judicial level, there was no distinction between the *Englisc* and *Wylisc* in Wessex. But at the level of ideology this distinction must have existed because these words were used in his vocabulary and we can safely say that his *Angelcynn* did not include the Britons.

However, the Parker Chronicle which is considered to be a copy of an earlier lost copy of the ninth-century original (also lost) thus reflecting the political mood and ideology during Alfred’s reign, records these following entries which may be taken as indications of Saxon-Briton interactions at non-confrontational level.<sup>99</sup>

495. Her cuomon twegen aldormen on Bretene, Cerdic 7 Cynric his sunu, mid .v. scipum in þone stede þe is gecueden Cerdicesora 7 þy ilcan dæge gefuhtun wiþ Walum.

[This year came two leaders to Britan, Cerdic and his son Cynric, with five ships at the place which is called Cerdics-ore and the same day fought against the Welsh.]

508. Her Cerdic 7 Cynric ofslogon æne brettiscyning, þam was nama Natanleod, 7.v. þusendu wera mid him. Æfter was þæt lond nemned Natanleaga oþ Cerdicesford.

[This year Cerdic and Cynric slew a British king who was named Natanleod and five thousand men with him. After that land was named Natanleaga until Charford.]

These Chronicle entries may be read with reference to Stenton’s statement that ‘no one inventing an ancestor for these kings would have been likely to give him so singular a name as Cerdic’.<sup>100</sup> His argument hinges on the fact that it does not correspond to any known English name and majority opinion states that it is derived from the Old Welsh ‘Ceretic’. He

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<sup>99</sup>Tony Jebson, “Manuscript A: The Parker Chronicle.”

<sup>100</sup>Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 25.



claims that the relation between early Saxon raiders and Britons may not exclusively have been confrontational. With due recognition of the fact that a lone textual example is not adequate, we might consider the non-literary sources supporting greater interaction between the two communities and assume that the *Angelcynn* of Alfred might have had Brittonic ancestry mixed in them. Although the impressions in Old English texts seem to convey recognisable categories of the *Angelcynn* and the *Wyliscmen*, identity itself has very little to do with biology. Genetic inheritance is not the only factor that determines the identity of a community. Alfred's notion of the *Angelcynn* may or may not have been inclusive of all ethnicities in his kingdom, however by the eleventh century, the term *Angelcynn/Angelþeod* had assumed a much more encompassing connotation. Pauline Stafford states that in the eleventh century, the Viking raids had led to a need for a common racial identity that could unite *Englaland/England* against the external threat.<sup>101</sup> The word *Angelcynn* may be seen as having a definition which is not necessarily dependent on Germanic ancestry. However, the racial myth that is used to strengthen the notion of a common racial identity is that of the Anglo-Saxon Migration Myth. Texts like the Worcester Chronicle, as Stafford states, not only references what she calls the Alfredian sources, but also refers back to Bede's original work. One example of such derivation may be seen in the preface to the *Chronicle*:

Brytene igland is ehta hund mila lang 7 twa hund mila brad, 7 her synd on þam iglande fif geþeodu, Ænglisc, Brytwylsc, Scottysc, Pihtisc 7 Boclæden. Ærest wæron buend þyses landes Bryttas, þa comen of Armenia, 7 gesæton suþonwearde Brytene ærost. Ða gelamp hit þæt Pehtas comon suþon of Scitthian, mid langum scipum na manegum, 7 þa comon ærest on Norð Ybernian up, 7 þær bædon Scottas þæt hi þær moston wunian. Ac hig noldon heom lyfan, for þon þe hig cwædon þæt hi ne mihton ealle ætgædere gewunian þær. 7 þa cwædon þa Scottas, we magon eow hwæþere ræd gelæron. We witon oþer igland her beeastan, þær ge magon eardian gyf ge wyllað, 7 gyf hwa eow wiðstent, we eow fultumiað þæt ge hit magon gegangan. Ða ferdon þa Pihtas 7 geferdon þis land norþanweard, suþonweard hit hæfdon Bryttas, swa we ær

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<sup>101</sup>Stafford, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles," 33.

cwædon. 7 þa Pihtas heom abædon wif æt Scottan, on þa gerad þæt hi gecuron hyre  
 cynecynn aa on þa wifhealfe, þæt hy heoldon swa lange syþþan. 7 þa gelamp ymbe  
 geara ryne þæt Scotta sum dæl gewat of Ybernian on Brytene, 7 þæs landes sumne  
 dæl geeodon, 7 wæs heora heretoga Reoda gehaten, fram þam hy synd genæmmede  
 Dalreodi. Syxtigum wintrum ær þon Crist wære acænned, Gaius Iulius, Romane  
 Casere, mid hundehatigum ceolum gesohte Brytene. Ðær he wæs ærest geswænced  
 mid grimnum gefeohte, 7 mycelne dæl his heres forlædde. 7 þa he forlet his here  
 gebidan mid Scottum, 7 gewat suð into Galwalum 7 þær gegaderode syx hund scipa,  
 mid þam he gewat eft into Brytene. 7 þa hi ærost togædere geræsde, þa mon ofsloh  
 þæs kaseres gerefan, se wæs Labienus gehaten. Ða genamon þa Walas 7 adrifon  
 sumre ea ford ealne mid scearpum stængum greatum innan þam wætere. Seo ea hatte  
 Tæmese. Ða þæt onfundon þa Romani, þa noldon hig faran ofer þone ford. Ða flugon  
 þa Brytwalas to þam wuduwestenum. 7 se kasere geeode wel monige heahburh mid  
 myclum gewinne, 7 eft gewat into Galwalum.<sup>102</sup>

[The island of Britain is 800 miles long, and 200 miles broad. And there are in the  
 island five; English, British, Scottish, Pictish, and Latin (lit. 'book-Latin'). The first  
 inhabitants of this land were the Britons, who came from Armenia, and first settled  
 Britain southward. Then it happened, that the Picts came south from Scythia, with not  
 many long ships; and, came up first in the northern part of Ireland, and they told the  
 Scots that they must dwell there. But they would not give them leave; for they (the  
 Scots) told them(the Picts) that they might not all dwell there together; and then said  
 the Scots, we may however give you advice. We know another island here to the east  
 be. There you may dwell, if you wish to; and if anyone withstand you, we will assist  
 you, so that you may gain it. Then the Picts went and journeyed to this land  
 northward, southward the Britons had it, as we before said. And the Picts requested  
 wives from Scots to them, on condition that they(the Picts) chose their kings always  
 on the wife's side; which they held to, so long since. And it happened, around the run  
 of years, that some portion of Scots went from Ireland into Britain, and acquired  
 some portion of the land, and their leader was called Reoda, from whom they are  
 named Dalreodi. Sixty winters before that Christ was born, Gaius Julius, Emperor of  
 the Romans, with eighty ships (keels) sought Britain. There he was first beaten in a  
 grim battle, and lost a large part of his army. And then he let go of his army to wait  
 with the Scots, and went south into Gaul, and there gathered six hundred ships, with

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<sup>102</sup>Tony Jebson, "Manuscript D: Cotton Tiberius B.iv: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Electronic Edition  
 (Voll) Literary Edition," The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Edition with TEI P4 Markup Expressed in XML and  
 Translated to XHTML1.1 Using XSLT, last modified 06.08.2007, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/d/d-L.html>.

which he went again into Britain. When they first rushed together, Caesar's tribune, whose name was Labienus, was slain. Then took the Britons sharp piles, and drove them with great clubs into the water, at a certain ford of the river called Thames. When the Romans found that, they would not go over the ford. Then fled the Britons to the fastnesses of the woods; and Caesar, having after much fighting gained many of the chief towns, went back into Gaul.]

Prefacing the work with this short summary of the island's geography and the origin of its inhabitants not only attests to the importance accorded to Bede's narrative of migration but also indicative of a fidelity to Alfred's original purpose of defining the origins of the *Angelcynn/Angelpeod*. Read in the eleventh century context, the preface not only reiterates the migratory nature of all ethnicities found in the island of Britain but also reinforces the warning which continued to be reiterated in texts like Bede and implied in Alfred's project: the *Angelcynn/Angelpeod* might become the next Britons which becomes a glaring reality in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. The Gildasian model that was perfected by Bede continued to be relevant in Old English rhetoric where invasions and calamities were repeatedly treated (at least in the literary culture) as judgement of the Lord for the sins of the peod of England. The eleventh-century Viking raids had given rise to the necessary condition for the need of a united racial identity which probably had no strict ethnic requirements (just not being Viking was probably enough) in actuality but at the level of ideology this 'identity' hinged on common Germanic origin of the people of *Englaland* and their myth of migration.

## CONCLUSION

Nicholas Howe observes that ‘an origin myth becomes an account of the ancestral past which despite any evidence to the contrary, gives a group its irreducible common identity.’<sup>103</sup> For the Anglo-Saxons and later, the English, this ‘origin myth’ seemed to have been the *Adventus Saxonum*, through which ‘migration became the central myth of the culture’.<sup>104</sup> Anglo-Saxon and consequently English identity were consciously constructed at least in written records, by a remembered past of a common Germanic ancestry. As the dissertation has shown, along with the transformations of the *Angelcynn* and *Angelpeod*, there have been significant changes in the category of the Briton/Welsh within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. On the one hand, they are the chief antagonists in the migration myth of the Anglo-Saxons. Therefore, they had to be systematically removed from the territory of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. But, on the other hand, they were found to be of enough significance in seventh-century Wessex to be legislated for as a separate category. By the late ninth and tenth centuries, the political climate of Wessex and the ideological stance of Alfred’s court had rendered the Briton-Saxon relations in West Saxon literary culture more complex than ever. Despite the need for faithfulness to such sources like Bede, there was also a need for ‘softening’ the attitude towards the Welsh. This was a matter of expediency as Christian Britain needed to be united against the pagan Northmen/Danes and it was because of this requirement of a ‘Christian’ identity and church-sanctioned authority that the creation of the Anglo-Saxon Migration Myth based itself on the account of a sixth-century British monk who clearly saw the Saxons as invaders of the most vile kind. However, this singular piece of writing provided that central model for the Migration Myth of the Anglo-Saxons which was essentially a Christian model. It needed some creative revision to turn from a story of invasion to one of migration. In many ways, the entity called the ‘Briton’ has been a

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<sup>103</sup>Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 5.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

significant influence on the creation, propagation, and reception of the migration myth. The model used was first created by a Briton. The chief antagonists and a very useful 'Other' for the Anglo-Saxons were also the Britons. In later propagation and reception, a lot of the editing in the vernacular translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was due to the delicate nature of relations between Alfred and the Welsh Christian kingdoms. Britons have always been a consideration in 'writing' the myth of migration whether the way they have been portrayed has been unfavourable or borderline neutral. It may be speculated that by the time of the Norman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon England probably had a significantly large population of Brittonic/Welsh extraction. However, the Briton or Welsh ceased to exist as a recognised separate ethnic group within England's borders, having been put under the umbrella term of the *Angelcynn/Angelpeod*. In other words, pre-Conquest *Englaland* of the eleventh-century belonged to the *Angelpeod*, who were to be united against foreign – and pagan – threats like the Vikings.

Such claims are made based on the available texts which are supported by non-literary evidence. As Carol Symes had pointed out, we do not know how the people of the Middle Ages categorised themselves.<sup>105</sup> They could hardly see themselves as 'medieval', given that the 'modern' age was yet to come. Similarly, we do not know if Anglo-Saxons thought of themselves as *Angelcynn* or if they considered the Britons living alongside them as a separate ethnic group. The same is true for the Britons in Anglo-Saxon England. What we do have access to are certain non-literary sources of information and a limited number of literary sources from which we might make educated conjectures regarding the notions of identity in medieval post-migration and pre-Conquest Britain. However, we can reasonably claim that Anglo-Saxon identity hinged itself on the *Adventus Saxonum* and the Britons had an ongoing

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<sup>105</sup>Carol Symes "When We Talk about Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 715-26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23308224>.

dynamic with the Anglo-Saxon discourse of identity. In conclusion, we may refer to Anderson who stated that ‘communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they were imagined.’<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 13.

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