GENEALOGICA & HERALDICA XXXVI

Origins, Journeys, Destinations

Proceedings of the
36th International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences
Boston | September 24–28, 2024

American Ancestors
A National Center for Family History, Heritage & Culture
2025

The Anglo-Saxon Invasion of England and its Genealogical Implications

Myth and Reality

Dr. Paul A. Fox, FSA, FHG, AIH

Dark Age Britain

During the course of the fifth century the mighty machine of state that had been the western Roman Empire came to an end when most of its lands fell under the control of Germanic warriors who for centuries had sat at the margins of Roman civilisation. Britain was an exception in that its western reaches remained intact under the control of the Romanised population. The sixth century British monk Gildas, writing his *De Excidio Britonum* in Latin, provides the earliest surviving account of what happened during those times, an account which was known to the first English monastic historian, Bede, (d.735) whose own history was finalised in around 731. Gildas reported that an unnamed 'proud tyrant' had invited three ship loads of Saxons to Britain as mercenaries or foederati, and that their rebellion had led to a Saxon invasion.[1] Bede, who was aided by Albinus, Abbot of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury (a monastery founded in 599) elaborated on Gildas. He named the proud tyrant as Vortigern and the mercenaries who arrived in three longships as Hengest and his brother Horsa, whom, he stated, had founded the kingdom of Kent in 449.[2] The date of their arrival was in the 430s, and a continental source confirms that they had rebelled against their Roman masters by 452.[3]

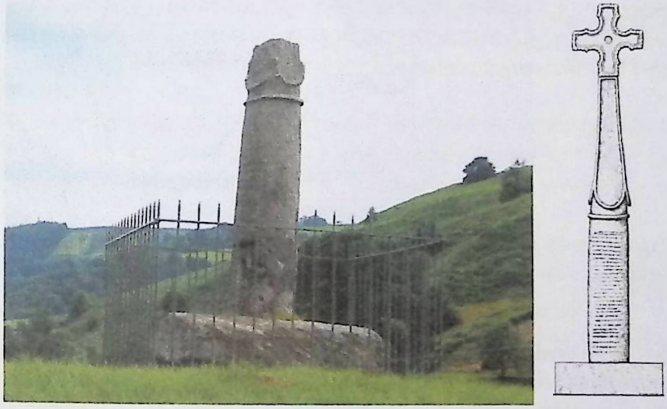

Figure 1: Eliseg's Pillar in Denbighshire, Wales, and a reconstruction thereof from nearby Vale Crucis Abbey.
Photographs by the author.

The Romano-British kings

What can be said of the genealogy of this era? Various Welsh kings from at least the early ninth century onwards recorded pedigrees which linked them to the Roman past. The famous genealogical pillar of Eliseg (**Figure 1**) was erected by Concenn (Cyngen in modern Welsh)

---

1 Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and other works*, trans. Michael Winterbottom (London, 1978), chapter 23.1.
2 Bede, *Opera Historica*, trans H.E. King, 2 vols (London and Harvard, 1962), vol. 1, chapter xv.
3 Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 471-4.

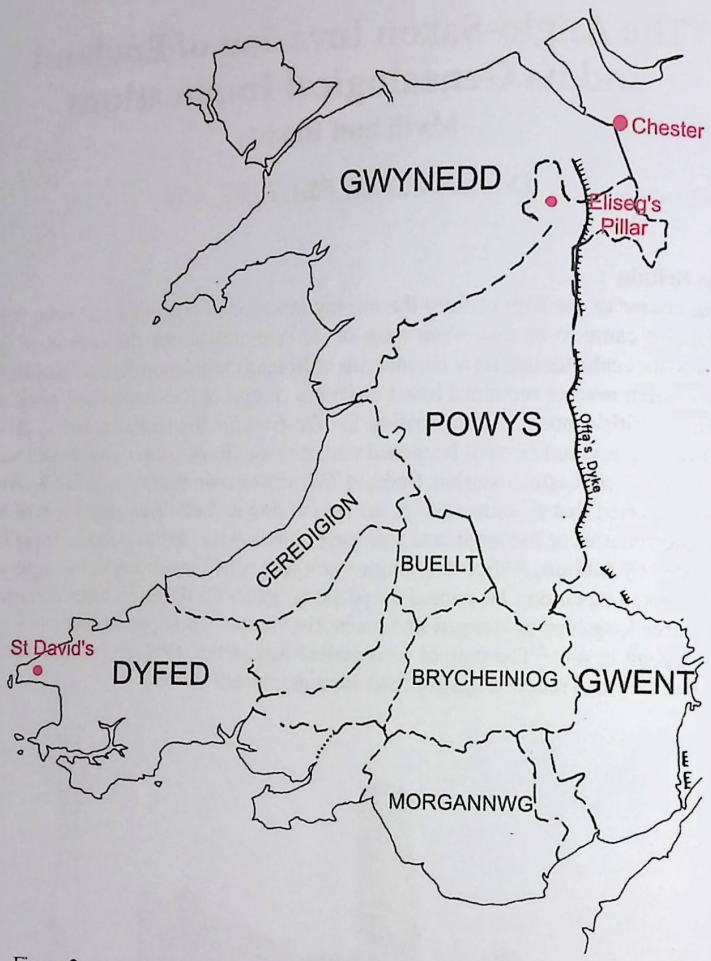

Figure 2: map of early medieval Wales with the location of Eliseg's Pillar.
Drawn by the author based on David Walker, *Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 1990), p.3.

king of Powys[4], who died in Rome in 854, in honour of his great-grandfather Eliseg who had reunited the inheritance of Powys after the region had been occupied by Offa, the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia. The cross is located near Offa's Dyke (**Figure 2**), and probably celebrates the end of Mercian hegemony following the great victory by Egbert of Wessex over the Mercians at the Battle of Ellendun in 825.[5] An abbey founded nearby in 1201 was named Valle Crucis in reference to the cross, which was pulled down by the Puritans during the Civil War, its damaged inscription first recorded in 1696.[6] In 1779, prior to the cross being re-erected, an excavation of the mound beneath took place, and a long cist grave was found within the context

[4] The name of Powys derives from the Latin Pagus meaning a farming region or rural backwater. It was part of the territory of the Romano-British tribe of the Cornovii, whose tribal capital at Wroxeter was occupied well into the sixth century.

[5] Thomas Williams, *Lost Realms, histories of Britain from the Romans to the Vikings* (London, 2022), pp. 288-9.

[6] Nancy Edwards, 'The Pillar of Eliseg', in D.H. Evans *Valle Crucis Abbey* (3rd edition Cardiff, 2008), pp. 53-6.

of a more ancient barrow.[7] Such a long cist grave would be in keeping with an interment from the fifth or sixth century, plausibly therefore the pillar was erected on a famous spot where one of Cyngen's ancestors had been buried. According to the *Annales Cambriae*[8], Cyngen acceded in 808, making him a contemporary of Charlemagne (d. 814).[9] A pedigree on the upper part of the column is succeeded by a section of badly damaged text, below which reference is made to two or more sons of Vortigern by Sevira the daughter of Maximus the king (the western Roman Emperor Magnus Maximus, d. 388), namely Britu and Pascent.[10] The implication of the text is that the Powys line had a special connection with the Romano-British high king Vortigern.

Another key early work on British history, the *Historia Brittonum* is believed to date c. 830[11], and therefore to be contemporary with the genealogy of Eliseg's Pillar. It includes a pedigree of Fernvail, a contemporary king of Buellt in 830, back to Vortigern through his son Pascent.[12] This source also relates that Vortigern retreated to a stronghold in Dyfed and died there.[13] The earliest Welsh pedigrees, now known as the Harleian genealogies (HG), are considered to have been compiled at St David's in the era of Eliseg's Pillar, incorporating some pedigrees which are significantly earlier.[14] One of these (HG 27) gives a more complete rendition of the ancestors of Cyngen, king of Powys, filling in what was either not recorded, or has been lost from Eliseg's Pillar (**Figure 3**).[15] Towards the head of the pedigree are Maucant (Mawgan) and his father Pascent (Pasgen, king of Buellt). Pasgen's father is given as Cattegirn in HG and Vortigern in the *Historia Brittonum*.[16] Pasgen son of Vortigern was also the ancestor of the Kings of Gwent, as recorded in another very early pedigree.[17] That Cattegirn is a scribal corruption of Vortigern seems apparent from a slightly later version of the same pedigree drawn up for Rhodri Mawr (d. 878) who inherited Powys through his mother Nest who was Cyngen's sister.[18]

Likely the most ancient of the Harleian pedigrees (HG 22) is that of Cyngen's ancestor Selyff, king of Powys, who was killed at the Battle of Chester c. 615, who once again descends from Pasgen and his father "Cattegirn." It is to be wondered whether such an outstandingly early record might have taken as its source some funerary text; Ben Guy also considers it likely that the Harleian genealogies might have been in part constructed from a lost chartulary of St David's abbey containing charters which went back to within a generation of two of St David himself (d. 601).[19]

It became the accepted fact in the histories that the first king of Powys was Cadell of the Gleaming Hilt who, like King Arthur, is an almost entirely legendary figure. The legendary careers of both men were incorporated into the Welsh histories that began to be written in the

---

7 'The Pillar of Eliseg', *Arch Cambrensis* new ser no. 8, Oct 1852 pp. 295-302 (301-2).

8 The *Annales Cambriae* took their final form in 954-77, but take as their basis a collection of records kept contemporaneously at St. David's from at least the late eighth century, see David Thornton, 'Kings, Chronologies and genealogies', *Prosopographica et Genealogica*, vol. 10 (Oxford, 2003), p. 9.

9 John Williams Ab Ithel (ed.), *Annales Cambriae* (London, 1860), p.11. Specifically the death of Cyngen's father Cadell, king of Powys, was recorded in 808.

10 P.C. Bartum (ed.), *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 1-3.

11 Thornton 2003, op cit. p. 15.

12 John Morris (ed.), 'The Historia Brittonum' in *Nennius, British History and the Welsh Annals* (London, 1980, hereinafter *HB*), chapter 49, p. 33.

13 *HB*, chapter 47, p. 32. The implication that Vortigern and had many wives is implausible.

14 Ben Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy, an introduction and textual study* (Woodbridge, 2020) p. 60.

15 Bartrum 1966, op. cit, p.12 (Harleian Ms. 3858 no. 27). For an account of the Harleian Genealogies see Ben Guy 2020, op. cit., pp. 53-79.

16 *HB* chapters 48-49, p. 33.

17 Guy 2020, op. cit., pp. 39, 154-5 dates the pedigree to 829/30, but cites evidence that it was originally composed a generation earlier, and taken into the *Historia Brittonum* from an earlier written source. A pedigree of the descendants of Vortigern is in Peter C. Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies A.D. 300-1400*, vol. 1 (Aberystwyth, 1974) plates 13-14. The pedigree makes Cyngen the son of Cadell, King of Powys, who has been interpolated into each of the three versions of the Powys pedigree in different places.

18 Jesus College MS 20 no. 18, cited in Bartrum p. 46. Guy 2020 pp. 289-90.

19 Ben Guy, 'The earliest Welsh genealogies: textual layering and the phenomenon of "pedigree growth"', in *Early Medieval Europe* vol. 26 no. 4 (2018), pp. 462-485.

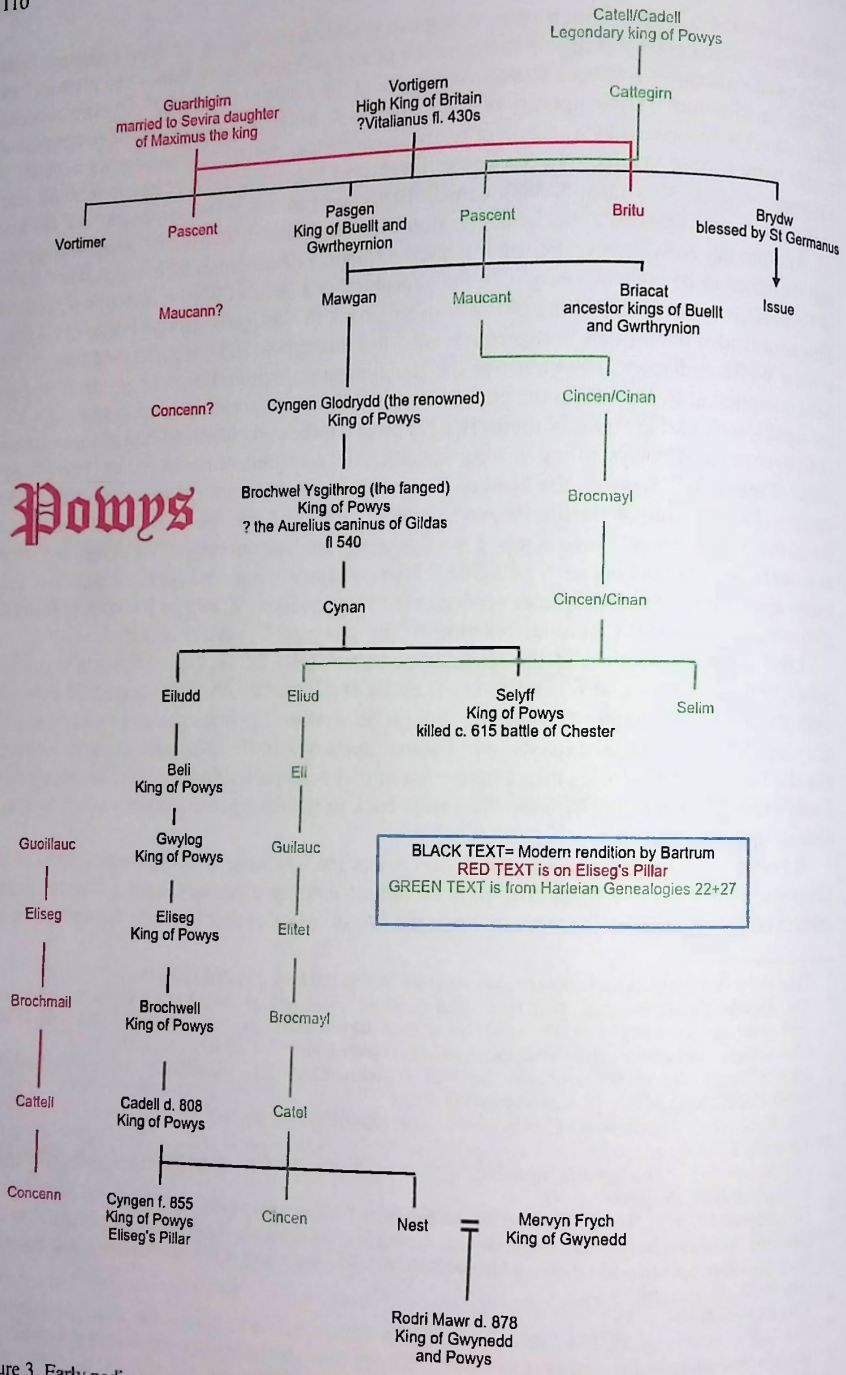

Figure 3. Early pedigrees of the Kings of Powys comparing the damaged text from Eliseg's Pillar with the Harleian genealogies and from the account in Peter Clement Bartum, *Welsh Genealogies AD 300-1400* vol. I (Aberystwyth, 1974), tables 13 and 14.

ninth century.[20] Cadell has been added to HG 22 and 27 as the father of "Cattegirn" and to the Rhodri Mawr pedigree as the father of Pascent (and grandson of Vortigern). There is no place where Cadell's name could have appeared in the more intact lower section of Eliseg's Pillar, from which it might be argued that the Pillar once carried a purer and more accurate version of the pedigree, not having been subjected to later rationalisations.[21] Ben Guy's recent textual comparisons have highlighted how over later centuries the Welsh princely pedigrees became increasingly manipulated as time progressed.

There will always be concern when the ancestry of a ruling line becomes a matter of politics that prestigious ancestors might be added, the most infamous case being that of the Kings of Dyfed, for whom four entirely different bogus pedigrees were concocted, three of them showing descent from Magnus Maximus, two of these adding for good measure a descent of Maximus from Constantine the Great, which is genealogically impossible based on our current understanding.[22]

In the case of the ancestry of the kings of Powys the later insertion of Cadell in no way invalidates the pedigree, any more than the interpolation of the god Woden into the pedigrees of the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex invalidates Cerdic as their ancestor. We must next consider whether it is even remotely plausible that the Kings of Powys could have descended from Vortigern. In favour of Vortigern being a genuine ancestor is the fact that he had always received a pretty bad press from the Welsh chroniclers, whereas his great adversary Ambrosius Aurelianus, who defeated the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Mount Badon, was the great hero of the Welsh. Gildas stated that Ambrosius had grandsons[23], which would have afforded a perfect opportunity for a forger of pedigrees, and yet no Welsh dynast claimed descent from him in the first millennium. Ambrosius was evidently not connected with Wales, but Vortigern was. It is distinctly likely that Vortigern went by the Roman name of Vitalinus.[24] Ambrosius fought with Vitalinus in a British Civil War at Wallop in current-day Hampshire in 437.[25] At Nevern in Dyfed is a large Celtic cross from his time inscribed with the words Vitalinus emeritus (*Vitaliani emereto*).[26]

Both historically and chronologically it is plausible that a daughter of Magnus Maximus could have married the British high king. Maximus (**Figure 4a**) was born in around the year 335 and brought up on the estates of his kinsman Count Theodosius in Hispania.[27] He first came to

---

[20] Williams, *Lost Realms*, op. cit., p. 274.

[21] The difficulty of making sense of the damaged lower section of Eliseg's pillar cannot be overstated, but there does occur together two names of individuals known from other sources as sons of Vortigern, namely Pascent and Britu, with the later being described as the son of Vortigern whom St Germanus blessed, followed by "autem (or alterem) filius Guarthigirn quemque peperit ei Sevira filia Maximi Regis." This has been interpreted at a reference to Britu being the son of Sevira and Vortigern, but could equally be translated a Britu who was another son of Sevira and Vortigern. Note also that the form Guarthigirn is used, a variant which might easily be mistranscribed as Cattegirn in an eroded text. Line 21 might also name Pascent's son Maucann (or Mawgan, see Bartrum p. 203). For the translation of the text in question see Bartrum, op. cit., p. 2.

[22] Ben Guy, 'Constantine, Helena, Maximus: on the appropriation of Roman history in medieval Wales c. 800-1250', *J. Medieval History* vol. 44 no. 4 (2018), pp. 381-405. The remaining descents which were claimed in the Welsh genealogies from Magnus Maximus (as delineated in Bartrum 1974, op. cit, plate 18) are all definite fabrications.

[23] Gildas, op. cit, chapter 25.3, p.28.

[24] J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, A.D. 395-527 (Cambridge, 1980), p.1176. In *HB* chapter 49 Vortigern is said to be son of Vitalis, son a Vitalinus, an apparently record of his family name.

[25] As was recorded using Roman consular dates in the Chronography addendum of the *Historia Brittonum*, see Nennius, op. cit, chapter 66, pp. 39, 80. Wallop is not far from Amesbury, which it has been postulated might derive its name from Ambrosius, see John Morris, *The Age of Arthur, a history of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (London, 1995), p. 100.

[26] R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1945), pp. 423-4; V.E. Nash-Williams, *Early Christian monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 197.

[27] A.H.M.Jones, J.R.Martindale and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE), vol. 1 A.D. 260-395, p.588, Magnus Maximus 39.

Britain c. 369 with the Count as a junior officer, and on a subsequent tour of duty was acclaimed as emperor by the Britons in 383, whereupon he invaded Gaul with the legions stationed in Britain. The Emperor Theodosius I (**Figure 4b**), son of Count Theodosius, officially recognised him as Augustus in 386, his rule extending to all parts of the western Roman Empire apart from Italy.[28] Maximus' decision to take Italy as well in 388 led to his downfall and execution. His son Flavius Victor, then only a child, was strangled, but Theodosius permitted the daughters to be brought up by their mother.[29] Thus it is evident that all his children were very young on his death in 388. Vortigern's marriage to 'Sevira' can only have been after the execution of the father, which works chronologically for marriage to a man who reached the height of his power in the 420s.

Emperor Magnus Maximus 383-388

solidus 383-4 Trier

D. N. MAG MA-XIMUS P.F. AUG

Emperor Theodosius I 379-395

solidus 383 Constantinople

D.N. THEODO-SIUS P.F. AUG

Figure 4, above 4a: gold solidus of the Emperor Magnus Maximus; below, 4b: solidus of the Emperor Theodosius I.

Marriage by Vortigern to a daughter of Magnus Maximus would have brought him great prestige in Britain, as well as giving him a link to the imperial Theodosian house which still ruled both the eastern and western empires. A reconstruction of the great Roman family of the Anicii suggests that another daughter of Magnus Maximus likely married Felix Ennodius who had served as proconsul of Africa in 395, and was grandmother of Petronius Maximus, emperor in 455, and also ancestress of Anicius Olybrius, emperor in 472.[30]

It is worth noting that Magnus Maximus made effective use of barbarian foederati, a strategy also employed by Vortigern, and which Gildas considered had triggered the Saxon take-over of south-eastern Britain. If Magnus Maximus was indeed the (by then deceased) father-in-law of Felix Ennodius, in accordance with Settipani's reconstructions he would also have been an ancestor of Charlemagne.[31] There are many genealogists who would dismiss a Gallo-Roman

[28] John Matthews, *Western aristocracies and the imperial court AD 364-425* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 180-1.

[29] *Ambrose Epistolae* 40.32; PRLE, op. cit., vol 1 p.961, Flavius Victor 14.

[30] T.S. Mommaerts and D.H. Kelley, 'The Anicii of Gaul and Rome', in John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: a crisis of identity?* (Cambridge, 1992) pp. 111-21.

[31] Christian Settipani, 'Les Ancêtres de Charlemagne', 2nd ed, *Prosopographia et Genealogica* vol.16 (2015), pp. 213, 238.

ancestry for Charlemagne on the grounds that it is all supposition and impossible to verify. A good professional genealogist has been trained never to release a pedigree that cannot be completely verified, and Settipani's pedigrees include many dotted lines. They are based on the interpretation of surviving historical documents, combined with onomastics, more specifically in the naming patterns employed by the aristocracy in late Roman Gaul and Francia. There is a powerful statistical and genetic argument that Charlemagne must have had Roman imperial descents, which every reader of this paper who has but a single European ancestor will share (see below). There even exists a plausible line of descent of Charlemagne from the Emperor Augustus.[32] But of course such speculations must never be allowed to find their way into verified pedigrees. It is worthy of note that neither Charlemagne nor his contemporary biographers found it expedient to claim any Roman descents.

The Anglo-Saxons

It is time now to consider the Anglo-Saxons. The traditional understanding of the *Adventus Saxonum* was that a large-scale invasion of Germanic tribes subjugated the Romano-British in eastern Britain turning them into virtual slaves who were forced to abandon Christianity and compelling them to speak Old English. The most recent DNA evidence confirms a very substantial migration (**Figure 5**), but despite this the archaeological record speaks more of peaceful co-existence, with no large scale destruction of existing towns and properties.[33] The Romano-Britons adopted Germanic customs, fashions, and language, and new kingdoms came to be established which took names based on those of the Angles and Saxons (East Anglia, Sussex, Essex, Middlesex, Wessex), under kings who later claimed Germanic antecedents.

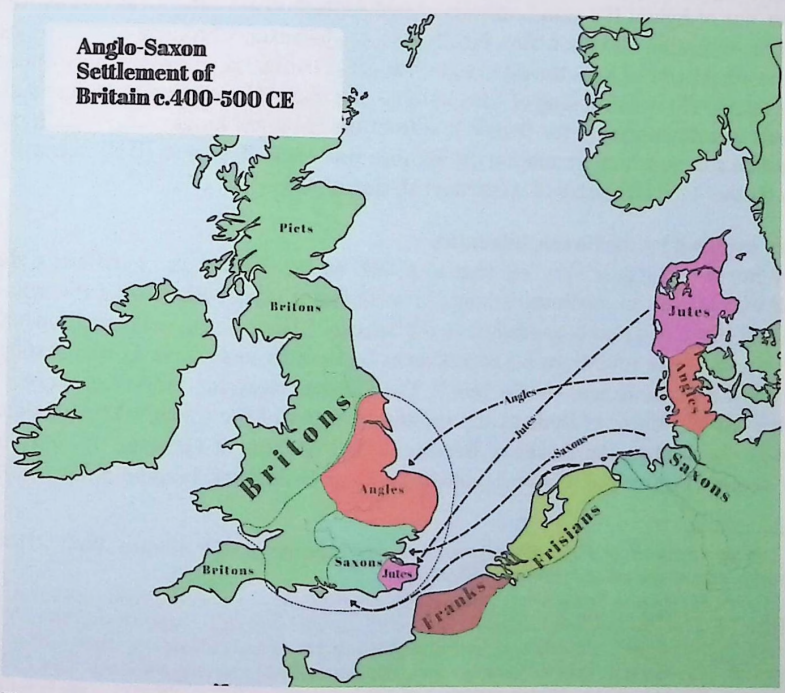

Figure 5: the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain during the fifth century, source theanglosaxons.com.

[32] Settipani, op.cit., pp. 292-3.

[33] Max Adams, *The First Kingdom* (London, 2021), chapters 1-5.

The Kingdom of Kent

Let us take as a case example the best documented of the new Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the early period, Kent. Here the archaeology shows a strong element of continuity from Roman times. The very name of Kent is taken from the Romano-British tribe that lived there, the Cantiaci. Hengest, the Germanic warrior who was granted control of Kent by Vortigern, is a fascinating character in that details of his earlier heroic career are preserved both in the great Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf, and in a smaller related poem known as the Finnsburgh fragment.[34] These show him to have been not a 'Saxon' but a Jute in the service of a Danish king, who on the king's behalf was raiding in Frisia. The Kentish kings, who claimed descent from Hengest, described themselves as kings of the Angles, and Pope Gregory the Great described Aethelbert king of Kent as such in a letter written to that monarch. The fifth century archaeology of Kent shows clear signs of connection with Jutland and with the adjacent territory of the Angles, also on the Jutland peninsula of Denmark.[35] The kings of Kent referred to themselves as the Eskingas after Hengest's successor Aesc, so the line of descent is unclear, but plausibly Aesc was the son of a daughter of Hengest.

The Eskingas eventually died out in the male line, so their ancestry only matters to us genealogically today if the kings of Wessex, who came to rule Kent, were descended in the female line from them, Alfred the Great being the ancestor of our current royal family. Such a descent is highly probable, but cannot be proved.[36] Egbert II (d.839) King of Kent (and Egbert I of Wessex), the grandfather of Alfred the Great, was son of Eahlmund sub-king of Kent (d.785), said by Alfred the Great's biographer Asser to have been of the Wessex royal house. The choice of the name Egbert for his son is interesting as there had been an earlier Egbert, king of Kent. Moreover, one of Egbert II's grandsons was named Aethelbert after the great king of Kent who received St Augustine into his realm. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 823 states "the inhabitants of Kent turned to Egbert because earlier they were wrongly forced away from his relatives" (by Offa, king of Mercia). The only plausible solution to the conundrum is that Egbert was descended in the female line from the Eskingas kings of Kent. Unfortunately we cannot be sure in which generation the alliance was made. The most likely scenario is that Egbert's mother was a daughter of Aethelbert II king of Kent (killed 762).[37]

Heraldry inspired by the Saxon Adventus

Heraldry might not appear very relevant to a talk on the Dark Ages, but Bede's chronicle was read with interest in medieval Saxony, in particular it was deduced from this source that Hengest and Horsa had also been leaders of the Saxons.[38] Their names mean stallion and horse respectively, and from 1369 from his accession as Duke of Brunswick, in Lower Saxony, Duke Magnus used a *horse salient* on his seal.[39] The German historian Gobelinus Person in his *Cosmidromius* of 1418 cites Bede as the presumed origin of the usage.[40] The heraldic horse continued to be used by the Dukes of Brunswick and Electors of Hanover, as *Gules a horse courant argent* (**Figure 6a**). George Ludwig Duke of Brunswick became King George I of

---

[34] J.R.R.Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Finnsburgh fragment* (London, 1940); Gordon Ward, 'Hengest' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* vol. 61 (1949) pp. 77-97.

[35] J.N.L. Myers, *The English Settlements* (Oxford, 1986) pp.115-6.

[36] K.P.Witney, *The Kingdom of Kent* (London, 1982) p.198; Heather Edwards, 'Ecgberht-Egbert (d.839)' West Saxon or Kentish origins?, *New DNB* expressed doubts concerning Egbert's descent from Cerdic, because she saw Egbert's links with Kent as being so strong. Her argument is severely criticised in: M.L. Bierbrier, Medieval Genealogy) vol. 2 no. 5 (Jan 2008), p. 382.

[37] Sir Anthony Wagner, *Pedigree and Progress* (London, 1975), pedigree 29, p. 188. For a very detailed analysis see K.P. Whitney, *The Kingdom of Kent* (London, 1982), pp. 198-215.

[38] This was probably correct since the settlers of the western part of Kent were Saxon.

[39] James Lloyd, 'The Saxon steed and the White Horse of Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana* vol. 138 (2017) pp.1-36.

[40] M. Jansen (ed) *Cosmidromius Gobelini Person* (Münster, 1900), pp. xxxviii-xliv, 11.

England in 1714 and incorporated the horse into the English royal arms. A century earlier, in 1611, John Speed applied the arms *Gules a horse salient argent* to his map of Kent, having picked up on an account by Richard Verstegan on the usage of these arms in Saxony, Anglia and Westphalia following the example of Hengest, published in 1605.[41] The *Kentish Post* began to use the shield on its header in 1726, and thereafter it came into widespread usage in Kent. It was used on the seal of Kent County Council from 1889, but was not formally granted to the county by the College of Arms until 1933 (**Figure 6b**).

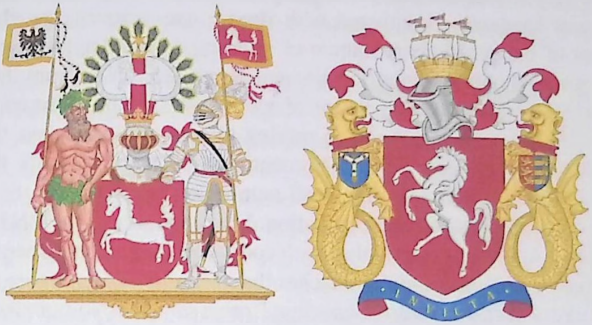

Figure 6, left 6a: arms of the Duchy of Hanover; right, 6b: arms of the County of Kent.

Oxfordshire and the origins of Wessex

Another English county which provides a highly relevant archaeological case study is Oxfordshire, where from the second half of the fifth century the Saxons influence became strong in the upper Thames valley, with grave goods matching those from the coastal plain of northernmost Germany around the mouth of the Weser, i.e. Saxony.[42] Goods were being traded with the other areas settled by Saxons in Sussex, Essex and West Kent. Here the pattern of peaceful co-existence between Britons and Saxons repeats itself, lasting well into the sixth century. A late Roman cemetery in Dorchester-on-Thames carried a mean radiocarbon date of 530-550, with artefacts including a later fifth century Roman military belt.[43] Not far to the west of here on the ancient Ridgeway is believed to be the site of the great battle of Mount Badon, which Bede dated to the reign of the Emperor Zeno (474-491).[44] Later Welsh historians placed Arthur at this battle, but the best scholarship now places Arthur and his victories in a later period and in the far north of Britain in the kingdom of the Goddodin, now lowland Scotland.[45]

The significance of Oxfordshire is that it contained the kingdom of the Gewissae, homeland of the West Saxon kings, whose progenitor, the sixth century ruler Cerdic bore a British name, a variant of Caraticos (in Latin, Caractacus). The name of his father was Elesa[46], a name which is only otherwise found from the early Middle Ages in the genealogy of the Kings of Powys. We have already seen it on Eliseg's pillar. In subsequent generations the kingdom of Wessex successfully expanded westwards into British held territories carrying with it Saxon traditions. The account of Cerdic and his son Cynric given in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle between 495 and 534 is confused, which is hardly surprising as a British ancestry for his descendant Alfred the

[41] Richard Verstegan, *A restitution of decayed intelligence: in antiquities, concerning the most noble and renowned English nation* (Antwerp, 1605), pp.120-1.
[42] John Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), pp.7-8.
[43] Blair, op cit pp. 3-6.
[44] He also placed the battle 44 years after the arrival of Hengist, following what it supposed to have been a more accurate version of Gildas than the one we posses today, Judith McClure and Roger Collins (edd.), Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of The English People and The Great Chronicle* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 29, 327-8.
[45] Alistair Moffat, *Arthur and the lost kingdoms* (London, 1999).
[46] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* trans and ed. by Michael Swanton (London, 1996), p. 16 AD 552 (Winchester manuscript).

Great could not be contemplated, and so Cerdic was supplied with a false narrative of having arrived with three shiploads of warriors, and was given a suitably Germanic pedigree with descent from the god Woden (Odin).

The Genetic impact of the Adventus

In the century from around 450 the Anglo-Saxons took control of lands in Kent, Sussex and East Anglia, but the great majority of the island remained under British control. A recent genetic study of a very substantial number of early medieval DNA samples—460 in total, with 285 from south-east England—, compared with Bronze age samples, has shed considerable light on the extent of the genetic contribution of migrants in the Anglo-Saxon era. It reveals that the average genetic contribution of Continental North Sea DNA (from the areas of lower Saxony, Frisia and Denmark) to the population of south-east England in the early Anglo-Saxon period was 76%. Due to further population mixing this has fallen to less than 50% in the present-day population of the same area.[47] This continental signature is only 1% in the Bronze Age population of Britain, but based on a small number of samples from the second century accounts for 15% of the Romano-British population. The remainder of the DNA matches that of Britain in the Bronze Age, except along the south coast, including Kent, where about a quarter of the DNA from early medieval samples matches that of Gallo-Roman (more specifically Iron Age) France, and a further quarter matches ancient British samples. No samples were examined from the south coast during the Roman period, but a strong cultural influence can be discerned between the south coast of England and France in the early medieval period. Notwithstanding, since it was reported by Julius Caesar that the Gallic tribe of the Belgae had settled on the south coast region, some genetic contribution from this source seems likely.[48] The ties between the Frankish kingdom and Kent were notably strong, and it was through Francia and through Bertha (the queen of Aethelbert, king of Kent, and daughter of the Frankish king) that this kingdom accepted conversion to Christianity in 596. Moreover the name of Aethelbert's father, Eormenric, sounds distinctly Frankish.

Looking at the distribution of Y chromosome haplogroups in the male populations of Britain, the so-called 'Celtic' parts of the British Isles have less of the Scandinavian I1a haplogroup than England, having instead a greater proportion of the R1b haplogroup which predominates over the whole of the British Isles. The predominant R1b sub-group is, however, quite distinct between England and the 'Celtic' parts of Britain. A large proportion, amounting to 40% of male lineages in England and lowland Scotland have R1b-U106, the epicentre of which is the estuary of the Rhine.[49] The other side of the coin is that in the western parts of Britain the predominant haplogroup is R1b-L21, which is understood to be a signature of the pre-Roman population.[50] U106 is an important constituent of the genetic signature of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Haplogroups absent in the Bronze Age population of Britain comprised 73% of the Y chromosomes of south-east England in the early medieval period.[51] The autosomal DNA data from the cemeteries show that the migrants comprised men and women in similar proportions.

A genetic signature from the Norman Conquest has been hard to detect since the Norman elite constituted such a tiny proportion of the population. What then was the impact of the preceeding and larger scale Viking incursions into Britain during the time of the Danelaw in the ninth and tenth centuries? A Viking genomic study has concluded that no more than 6%

---

47 Stephen Leslie, Bruce Winney, Garrett Hellenthal et al, 'The fine scale Genetic structure of the British population', *Nature* 519 (2015), pp. 309-14.

48 Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, V. 12.

49 Haplogroup I1 accounts for 15% of Englishmen and has a considerably higher prevalence in Scandinavia where it is found in 25-45% of males. This is the second major 'Germanic' marker. More specifically I1-M253. Other haplogroups which arrived with the Anglo-Saxons were R1A-M420 and I2a1-L460, see Joscha Gretzinger, Duncan Sayer, Pierre Justeau et al, 'The Anglo-Saxon migrations and the formation of the early English gene pool', *Nature* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-05247-2.

50 It is found in 5-20% of males in England.

51 These include R1A-M40 and I1-M253.

of the current English genomic base is Danish Viking, and 4% Norwegian Viking.[52] Although the authors had difficulty in distinguishing Viking era Danish from Anglo-Saxon in the contemporary population , they observed a notable Swedish genetic aspect to Viking era Danes in Denmark, and the Swedish element of the UK gene pool is very limited. On that basis they calculated that the Viking component of Danish ancestry in England is around 6%. Data from the 2022 study of early medieval DNA might help to clarify the distinction between Vikings and Anglo-Saxons. The current population of Jutland, that part of Denmark from which the Angles and Jutes came, does not show any significant Swedish component. The figure for Danish constituent of the present-day English population derived from the Viking study is 37%, of which the 'Anglo-Saxon' element is 31%.

The profound influence of largely invisible population movements on the gene pool has been demonstrated by a study which encompassed 40 different populations from all parts of Europe.[53] For many thousands of years humans have been migrating, sometimes across vast distances, for reasons of trade. Any two individuals from neighbouring populations (i.e. peoples/countries) will have at least a hundred common ancestors within the last thousand years. The statistical consequence of the genetic findings is that anyone alive in Europe more than a thousand years ago who left descendants will be an ancestor of every European. This calculation leaves one feeling dumbfounded. All of this is work in progress, and our understanding will continue to evolve as more and more genomes are extracted from ancient remains.

---

[52] Ashot Margaryan, Daniel Lawson, Martin Sikora et al, 'Population Genomics of the Viking World', *Nature* 585 (2020), pp. 390-6, see supplementary note 11.11.

[53] Peter Ralph and Graham Coop, 'The Geography of recent common ancestry across Europe', *PLOS Biology* vol. 11 no. 5 (2013), e1001555.