Anglo-Saxon Narratives. Contesting the Past in Britain 1800-2020

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This conference introduced us to the new *Saxones* exhibition, with interesting narratives about the representation of this 'people' through time. This seems an appropriate point to revisit some complementary work I did (nearly 30 years ago now) on representations of 'the Anglo-Saxons' in Britain. In this paper I will present an expanded and updated version of ideas about the historical and archaeological uses of concepts of Anglo-Saxon identities originally published in Lucy (1998) and Lucy (2000), and draw on my subsequent more developed theoretical framework (Lucy 2005); it is striking how much these conceptions have changed in public discourse since that time, while academic discussion has progressed on much the same lines as in the 1990s (though see now Harland 2021 for a critical overview). To affect those more public narratives, we as academics may have to be more vocal in our critiques of them.

In this paper, I will use the term 'Anglo-Saxon' when describing historical conceptions of the population of Britain in the post-Roman period, but 'early medieval' when discussing the material culture found in eastern England from the early 5th to the 7th centuries, often in distinctive forms of cemeteries employing furnished burial, both cremation and inhumation, and their associated settlements.

Pre-Nineteenth Century Developments

Many authors have provided historical assessments of those few documentary sources that refer to the 4th to 6th centuries in Britain (see Dumville 1977; Winterbottom 1978; Reynolds 1985; Sims-Williams 1983; Lapidge and Dumville 1984; Goffart 1988, 235-328; Wood 1990). Wood (1990, 96) summarises this body of scholarship critically: 'the *adventus Saxonum*, whatever it was, is scarcely noticed by 5th and 6th century writers; it is only Bede, interpreting Gildas, who transforms the 'Coming of the Saxons' into a major event in the emergence of England'. Indeed, for the period between the 12th and 16th centuries, the *Brutus* origin myth was far more prevalent, tracing the origins of the Britons back to the Trojans, and introducing the character of King Arthur (see MacDougall 1982 on both this tradition and the Anglo-Saxonism that replaced it). Its replacement came about due to political and religious conflicts (ibid.), such that by the beginning of the 18th century there was a widespread belief in the Germanic origins of core English institutions such as

Parliament and trial by jury and the Church of England (Lucy 1998, 5-9; 2000, 155-159). There was, though, already a widespread European tradition of national characterisation (see Leerssen 2006, 56-70) on which later developments in history, philology and archaeology would build.

It is on subsequent developments that I wish to focus in this paper: the replacement in Britain of such narratives of institutional continuity with those based explicitly on the characterisation of peoples. By the later 19th century there was widespread belief in the narrative that the native populations of Britain had been largely exterminated or driven into Wales and the West by massed forces of Germanic tribes in the 5th and 6th centuries and such narratives are often still subtly implicit in modern academic interpretations (and explicit in public narratives and even in the UK primary school curriculum). It is the development of this narrative through the last two centuries that I want to explore in more depth here, particularly in relation to conceptions of national identity.

The rise of nationalism in the 18th century has been well covered elsewhere (e.g. Hobsbawm 1990; Colley 1992; Wood 2013), as has the history of the broader concept of national thought in Europe (Leerssen 2006). From the formation of the Protestant state after the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, successive wars with Catholic France provided an 'other' for Britons to define themselves against; Colley (1992) describes how an idea of 'Britishness' was superimposed over an array of internal English, Welsh and Scottish differences, and Stapleton (2000, 245) has noted how concepts of British and English identities were elided right through the 19th and 20th centuries (see also the detailed treatment by Kumar 2003). The French Revolution in 1789 prompted Burke (1790) to eulogise the British constitution, stressing its antiquity (Peardon 1933, 163-164). The Napoleonic Wars and the loss of America in the War of Independence served both to bring England and Scotland closer together (Colley 1992, 144) and prompted an interest in periods of national origin and glory, specifically in the medieval period (Peardon 1933, 229-230; Smith 1987, 56). The union also served to create an opposition with Catholic Ireland, with visible antagonism to increasing Irish immigration into Britain after 1800 (Colley 1992, 330). Historians, philologists and then archaeologists all played a fundamental role in reshaping these conceptions of national identity.

The Role of the Historians and Philologists

In *A History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805) Sharon Turner was the first historian to use the concept of Anglo-Saxons in a patriotic sense. In his first edition (ibid., vii) he lamented that, 'the subject of Anglo-Saxon antiquities had been nearly forgotten by the British public', while by the preface to the third edition (1820, v-viii) it could be said that, 'his favourite desire has been fulfilled — a taste for the history and remains of our Great Ancestors has been revived and is visibly increasing'. He was the first of the 'Germanist' historians, arguing that, 'This nation exhibits the conversion of ferocious pirates, into a highly civilized, informed and generous people — in a word, into ourselves' (1799-1805, vol. II, xi-xii) and that, 'Our language, our government and our laws display our Gothic ancestors in every part. They live, not merely in our annals and traditions, but in our civil institutions and perpetual discourse' (ibid., vol. I, 188-9).

This work came at a time of growing interest in, and appreciation of, German literature and philosophy (WILEY 1971, 2-3). MANDLER (2000, 228) argues that, unlike their continental counterparts, English intellectuals paid remarkably little attention to ideas of nationality in the 1830s and 1840s (as opposed to the dominant framework of civilisation), although the popular English press was starting to interest itself in national history and folklore (see KUMAR 2003 for a detailed account of the importance of British identities instead). English history was not even formally taught at any of the ancient universities until after 1848 (MANDLER 2000, 228-229).

It is, though, in this mid 19th century atmosphere of national self-promotion in continental Europe (via such diverse means as music, literature, national education programmes and dictionaries, national traditions and flags, national museums and not least national origin myths; see LEERSSEN 2006, 186-203) that the reframing of historical interpretation in Britain needs situating. We will see that the 1860s and 70s saw a shift in Britain towards an enthusiasm for 'democratic Teutonism', whose academic foundation lay in the work of J. M. Kemble (MANDLER 2000, 239), but whose first stirrings can be seen in the novel *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott, first published in 1819, which implicitly linked language and racial descent (LEERSSEN 2006, 205-206; POLIAKOV 1974, 50-51; see also SIMMONS 1990 for a more detailed account of the role of British history and literature).

Kemble had become interested in the Anglo-Saxon language while studying at Cambridge and went on to publish an edition of *Beowulf* (1833) and deliver a course of lectures at Cambridge in 1834 on Anglo-Saxon language and literature (DNB, 369-370). He also travelled to Göttingen to work with the philologist Jacob Grimm in 1834 (see WILEY 1971 and SHIPPEY 2009 for assessments of the latter's influence). (Grimm's reply of 18/9/1832 to Kemble's first correspondence notes 'It is a stroke of fortune that also in England the inclination toward the Anglo-Saxon language seems now to have awakened.

With the possession of rich, unpublished manuscripts you can then soon outdo us foreigners' (WILEY 1971, 23)).

Kemble engaged in forthright criticism of other scholars, particularly 'Oxford Professors of Anglo-Saxon' (SIMMONS 1990, 68-69; SCATTERGOOD 2009, 5-6; see SHIPPEY 2009, 78 for an assessment of Kemble's academic shortcomings). Although in 1814 John Conybeare (Professor of Anglo-Saxon and Professor of Poetry at Oxford) had called for the publication and study of the legacy of Anglo-Saxon poetry and his papers were posthumously republished as *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826; BRADLEY 2018, 7), there was a dominant narrative - in Germany and Denmark as well as Britain - that the English were ignorant and negligent of their historical heritage. In 1834 Kemble was disparaging about the unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Saxon studies, and was in turn criticised for his adherence to the Danish and Germanic approaches to scholarship (SCATTERGOOD 2009, 6; BRADLEY 2018, 8).

Drawing on those more critical continental approaches, in *The Saxons in England* (1849) Kemble questioned the narratives of Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles as detailed by Turner (SIMS-WILLIAMS 1983, 1): 'I confess that the more I examine this question, the more completely I am convinced that the received accounts of our migrations, our subsequent fortunes, and ultimate settlement are devoid of historical truth in every detail.' (KEMBLE 1849, vol. I, 16). Although he did not doubt that the migrations took place, and that the current population of England was Germanic in their spirit and institutions, he saw the transformation as a gradual process beginning in the 3rd century AD, with AD 449 being an episode within this, rather than a decisive event in the history of England, and one which did not involve population replacement: 'The mass of the people, accustomed to Roman rule or the oppression of native princes, probably suffered little by a change of masters, and did little to avoid it' (KEMBLE 1849, 20). However, even Kemble demonstrates in his work the influence of the emerging concept of nationhood and the 'Volk' with its essential characteristics; this was drawn from the Danish and German historiographic tradition from the end of the 18th century (see LEERSSEN 2006, 97-101 for its origins in the writings of Herder) and used to document and celebrate national characteristics and the historical achievements of the northern peoples (SHIPPEY 2009; BRADLEY 2018, 9).

Grimm's central role in this growing conceptualisation in the first half of the 19th century has been well documented, particularly his assertions of the equivalency of nation, 'Volk' and national language (LEERSSEN 2006, 179-185; SHIPPEY 2009, 65). WOOD (2013, 170-171) and LEERSSEN (2006, 182-185) both detail how Grimm's discussions of language history were used to argue for the earlier presence of Germanic tribes in particular regions, and therefore where their allegiance should lie in the present, such as in his central contributions to the Schleswig-Holstein question in 1848, where he even proposed a motion that war should be declared on Denmark. By the middle of the 19th century, such approaches were common

in Europe, encompassing craniology and physiognomy as well as philology in the national family trees that were created (Barkan 1991, 16-17; Olsen and Kobyliński 1991, 9; Leerssen 2006, 207-208), and their growing influence in Britain can be seen in the work of the 'Oxford School' of historians.

The 'Oxford School' (actually a group of close friends who were clerics and men of independent means, largely on the fringes of academe) can be argued to have had the most influence on conceptualisations of 'the Anglo-Saxons' in the second half of the 19th century, particularly their ideas of democratic Teutonism. The works of Edwin Guest, E. A. Freeman, William Stubbs and J. R. Green were thoroughly reliant on the historical frameworks found in Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, while also drawing heavily on developing nationalistic conceptions (Freeman 1869; 1872; 1881; 1888; Green 1874; 1881; 1883; Guest 1850; 1883; Stubbs 1870; 1874; 1906). These works all served to promote the idea of 'Anglo-Saxonism' – that the Anglo-Saxons were an historically attested race, with common ties of blood, language, geographical origin and culture (a 'Volk' in fact); that Anglo-Saxon societies were the fullest expression of civil and religious liberties with a particular genius in political affairs; that the Anglo-Saxons of Britain had virtues and talents which elevated them above other peoples; that those attributes (which included reason, restraint, self-control, love of freedom, hatred of anarchy, respect for the law and distrust of enthusiasm) were transmissible from one generation to the next; and that those could therefore be contaminated or limited by physiological or biological forces inside the nation or race (Curtis 1968, 11-12).

Parker (1981, 828) argues that Freeman's ideas on race were influenced by those of Thomas Arnold from the 1840s (Arnold became Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford in 1841; see Simmons 1990, 72-73), particularly the idea that the English were, 'the new standard bearers of European culture with a special destiny', and Arnold had identified race, language, institutions and religion as the key elements of nationality. While these ideas were ultimately derived from German philological research on Aryan languages, Freeman incorporated these into a framework with more biological elements, albeit incorporating the notion of adoption as well as biological descent (Wood 2013, 207-210).

Parker details the mutual influence of Freeman's racial ideas on his political involvement, particularly in relation to the Turks: defining the latter as non-Aryan was used to argue for the expulsion of Turkey from Europe. The Teutons were supreme among the Aryans, and the English the most fortunate of the Teutonic nations, particularly in their ability to cross seas and make new homes (Parker 1981, 839). This sense of racial hierarchy soon developed into anti-Semitism (ibid., 840-842). Freeman's ideas on race were promoted in the US through a lecture tour in 1881-2 (Parker 1981, 825 n.5), and from that point (with the resultant interaction with those of 'non-Aryan' heritage) developed into full blown, impassioned and offensive racism and he argued for a limitation to be placed on full American citizenship on racial grounds (ibid., 843-5). As Parker (1981, 846) concludes: 'His thesis of racial differences, though initially based on liberal attitudes within the context of the Aryan world, never overcame his early Anglo-Saxon prejudices towards the Welsh and the French, and led to attitudes of race-hate towards non-Aryans. A search for identity led all too easily to hostility to those beyond the pale.'

Other members of the Oxford School displayed similar views on Anglo-Saxon heritage. Green thought that, 'the English conquest was a sheer dispossession and slaughter of the people whom the English conquered' and that, 'the new England…was the one purely German nation that rose upon the wreck of Rome' (Green 1874, 9, 11), while Kingsley (the historical novelist who held the Chair of Medieval History at Cambridge from 1860) could assert in a lecture to undergraduates that Teutonic purity, 'had given him, as it may give you, gentlemen, a calm and steady brain, and a free and loyal heart; the energy which springs from health; the self-respect which comes from self-restraint; and a spirit which shrinks from neither God nor man, and feels it light to die for wife and child, for people, and for Queen' (Kingsley 1864, 50-51). Together, they were a dominant influence because of the popularity and accessibility of their writings. Green's *Short History* (1874) became a manual for schools and a primer for advanced students, selling hundreds of thousands of copies (Gooch 1952, 331), and Kingsley's lectures at Cambridge were far more popular than those of the academic historians; together they influenced whole generations of children and young people, even though their views were subject to continued criticism (e.g. Saint John 1862; Pike 1866; Pearson 1867; Nicholas 1868; Allen 1880; Palmer 1885).

In their views, however, the members of the Oxford School were by no means alone: ethnic nationalism and the racialised approach, and even the racism that could result, was the dominant interpretive framework across Europe in the later 19th century (see Stepan 1982; Stocking 1987; Hobsbawm 1990, 104-109; Geary 2002; Leerssen 2006, 209-218). Stepan (1982, 4-6) argues that, even if unconsciously, most British scientists shared the view by the mid 19th century that, 'fixed and distinct racial types provided the key to human history and destiny', and that these could be ordered into a graded sequence from superior to inferior (ibid., 17). She details the influence that Robert Knox had on these debates in Britain and the US (Stepan 1982, 41-43), particularly his focus on the Saxons and Celts in his *The Races of Men* (1850). That book contained a long discussion of the Saxon race, described as about to become the dominant race in the world, with superior qualities, and which could not be altered by environment or crossing with other races. Stocking (1987) detailed the considerable influence of Knox's writings on racial thinking in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, which included the founding of the Anthropological Society of London by Knox's disciple, James Hunt (Stepan 1982, 44-45). As Stepan (1982, 46) argues, 'Races were now seen as forming a natural but static chain of excellence, whether on the basis of nervous

organisation, skull shape or brain size. The hierarchy of races was believed to correspond to, and indeed to be the cause of, what most people took to be the natural scale of achievement in the world, with the European on top and the African or aboriginal Australian invariably at the bottom…In short, by the middle of the century, a new racial science had come into being in which races were indeed, as Knox claimed, "everything"'.

Even with acceptance of theories of evolution, race formation was seen as a closed and distant episode of human history; racial science thus remained the dominant framework, and attention in the later 19th century increasingly turned to the local 'races' of Europe (STEPAN 1982, 84-86). John Beddoe, President of the Anthropological Society of London, could, for example, write about *The Races of Britain* (1885) and place them within an 'index of nigrescence' and Haddon published *The Races of Man and their Distribution* (1909; considerably revised in 1925). In the 1880s Collignon similarly used the cephalic index (head shapes) to classify the French population into three 'races' – dark-haired Celtic, light-haired Kymri from the north and brunette Mediterranean (STEPAN 1982, 98). The Kymri equate to the Teutonic peoples described by other authors (STEPAN 1982, 98-100, who also details the complex equation that sometimes existed with the concept of Aryan peoples; see too POLIAKOV 1974). Inheritance of appearance and morphology was similarly extended into inheritance of behaviour and intelligence by Galton (e.g. his *Hereditary Genius* of 1869; STEPAN 1982, 113-117) as a justification for eugenics, which gained considerable popularity in the early 20th century in Britain as well as elsewhere, although it also attracted considerable criticism within Britain particularly (STEPAN 1982, 117-123; BARKAN 1991, 228-276).

STEPAN (1982, 144-145) points out that such views had been challenged as early as 1897, by the sociologist Robertson in *The Saxon and the Celt*, who pointed out the fallacy of equating race and language, arguments which can also be found in Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) (see too MÜLLER 1888, in direct contradiction to his own earlier work). It was only with that challenge and especially the Nazi atrocities in the 1930s and 40s that the popularity of racial science began to decline (STEPAN 1982, 140-143; BARKAN 1991); see, for example MONTAGU (1942) *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*. With the development of the field of genetics in the decades leading up to 1950 these ideas came to be challenged in popular and broader scientific thought (STEPAN 1982, 146-169; BARKAN 1991). However, even Huxley and Haddon's *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial' Problems* (1935) retained a concept of 'ethnic type' and argued for use of the term 'ethnic group' instead of race; STEPAN (1982, 167) argues that it was a challenge to German racism, rather than race biology itself.

George Pitt-Rivers (grandson of the archaeologist) was a vocal advocate of Aryanism and Nazi Germany in the 1930s, to the extent that he was later held as a political prisoner in England during 1940-42. He promoted the study of 'ethno-

genics' for examining 'interaction of race, population and culture', arguing that meaningful distinctions lay in a 'race-cultural complex' of 'People' – such as Celtic, Aryan and English (BARKAN 1991, 291-292), feeding these views into the work of the Race and Culture Committee established by the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1934 (BARKAN 1991, 286-292). In 1968 Stocking had noted that the race paradigm seemed to have disappeared from science in the 1950s (but see now BARKAN 1991 and SCHAFFER 2008 for an updated view), although the same cannot be said to be true for popular conceptions (STEPAN 1982, 182).

What did this mean for archaeological conceptions of 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Celts', given that these views were widely held in both popular historical opinion and science? By the end of the 19th century there was an implicit assumption that English success and superior qualities could be equated with 'Germanic' origins, and these assumptions were to have far-reaching effects on the interpretation of the growing body of post-Roman archaeological evidence in Britain.

The role of the archaeologists

Until the late 1840s the vast majority of published early medieval material was from Kent, but the subsequent growth in recognition, excavation and publication of cemeteries in other parts of the country soon led to the realisation that regional variation could be identified. Charles Roach Smith (co-founder of the British Archaeological Association in 1843) linked regional variations in brooch styles and other artefact types to Bede's 8th-century account of Jutish, Saxon and Anglian territories in the *Ecclesiastical History*, such that Kentish material was linked with the Jutes, saucer brooches with the Saxons and cruciform brooches with Anglian areas (ROACH SMITH 1850, 88-9). Thomas Wright expanded on this in *The Celt, the Roman and the Saxon* (1852), explaining in detail the differences between artefacts of the three supposed tribal groups. Roach Smith was in contact with scholars in France, and noted several similarities between the Kentish material and that being found in cemeteries near Dieppe (ROACH SMITH 1852), even suggesting that some of the graves in Kent could be Frankish migrants (ROACH SMITH 1860, 135).

Kemble had moved to Germany in 1849 and increasingly turned to archaeology (SCATTERGOOD 2009, 10), cataloguing the archaeological collections of the Royal Museum in Hanover and producing a series of papers on burial rites (1856; work later republished posthumously as *Horae Ferales* 1863 following his death in 1857). He too noted similarities between material in Britain and on the continent, particularly between cremation urns during a visit to Hanover Museum, concluding that, 'The urns of the "Old Saxon" and those of the "Anglo-Saxon", are in truth identical…The bones are those whose tongue we speak, whose blood flows in our veins' (KEMBLE 1856, 280; see also WILLIAMS 2006). Kemble thought that by the comparison of such urns, 'we are brought…many

steps nearer to our forefathers on the banks of the Elbe and its tributary rivers, and we can henceforth use indifferently the discoveries of Englishmen and North Germans for the elucidation of our national treasures' (KEMBLE 1863, 230).

These perspectives fed into archaeological discussions on how Roman Britain had become England. In the 1870s the constitutional historian Stubbs had argued that the conquest, 'was the result of a series of separate expeditions, long continued and perhaps, in point of time, continuous, but unconnected, and independent of each other' (STUBBS 1874, 59), while by 1907 Chadwick could reject in *The Origin of the English Nation* the notion, 'that the invasion was carried out by small groups of adventurers acting independently of each other. It seems to be incredible that such a project as the invasion of Britain could have been carried out successfully except by large and organised forces' (CHADWICK 1907, 12). He also did not doubt that Gildas was accurate in his depiction of the extermination of many of the natives (1907, 184), and was followed by Åberg who, in *The Anglo-Saxons in England*, suggested that the actual invasion, 'as far as can be judged, was undertaken with large and organised forces' (ÅBERG 1926, 1), with a date between AD400 and 450 tallying well with the archaeology.

Leeds disagreed about the motivations of these incomers though: 'They came in the first instance not as a proud military power seeking fresh fields to conquer, but in search of loot and plunder, mere bands of ravening pirates…once the legions were withdrawn, they descended in hordes on the shores of Britain…Force of circumstances, or natural bent, drove them to seek a new home; they came as immigrants' (LEEDS 1913, 14). Baldwin Brown, too, in *The Arts in Early England*, which was essentially an archaeological survey of all the then available evidence, concluded that, 'In the case of the Teutonic migrations in general the moving mass was made up of families not individual men-at-arms, and the women accompanied their husbands and fathers along the march and to the verge of the battlefield' (BALDWIN BROWN 1903-15, 47). These observations seem to be driven by archaeological evidence for the highly gendered burial furnishing found in early medieval cemeteries that was becoming increasingly apparent.

E. T. Leeds, from 1908 Assistant Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, published *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* in 1913, partly as a result of having catalogued the Evans collection of finds from cemeteries in Kent, East Anglia and Oxfordshire. More than forty years later, it could still be said that this work had transformed early medieval archaeology, 'giving it its continental background, showing for the first time how material was to be studied and interpreted, and raising in acute form the questions of the validity and limitations of the surviving literary sources. It made the masses of archaeological material intelligible for the first time. All work done since on pagan-period grave-goods has been done under its shadow or in working out or modifying its conclusions' (BRUCE-MITFORD and HARDEN 1956, xiii; this

festschrift to Leeds was published shortly after his death). Keeper of the Ashmolean from 1928 until his retirement in 1945, Leeds published several key papers, including his massive survey of the 'minor' brooch types, complete with distribution maps, entitled *The distribution of the Angles and Saxons archaeologically considered* (1945). There was for him no question that the brooch distributions could be taken as clear indicators of the presence of distinct ethno-cultural groups.

J. N. L. Myres, although a lecturer in modern history at Oxford from 1926, Librarian of Christ Church from 1938 and of the Bodleian from 1948 until his retirement in 1965, had early archaeological interests, and contributed to R. B. Collingwood's *Roman Britain* in 1936, but in later life devoted much of his spare time to research into early medieval pottery. His monumental *A Corpus of Pagan Anglo-Saxon Pottery* was eventually published in 1977, after his major synthetic work *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (1969), and he concluded with *The English Settlements* (1986). MYRES (1937, 320) saw archaeology as having the potential to throw light on 'the main questions outstanding in this period – the character and distribution of the earliest settlements, the continental provenance of the invaders, the fate of Romano-British institutions and population'. The direct equivalence drawn by both Leeds and Myres between particular brooch and pot types and specific groups is evident in their earliest work: as well as clear demarcations of Anglian, Saxon and Jutish territories, Leeds has an area labelled 'Anglo-Saxon' on his 1913 map (fig. 4), covering that area of East Anglia where there were documented overlaps of the supposed distinctive types, which was also highlighted by Myres decades later (MYRES 1937, 325-6; also LEEDS 1945, 78-80).

These questions remained central to early medieval archaeology until the 1990s (and arguably the present day), for example in the work of Sonia Chadwick Hawkes and Vera Evison, both prolific excavators of early medieval cemeteries. While the reasons for migration were debated, there was little questioning of the idea that the material evidence recovered from cemeteries could be anything other than the remains of migrants from other areas, or their direct descendants (COLLINGWOOD and MYRES 1936, 342-3; LEEDS 1936, 29-30; LEEDS 1945, 5; LEEDS 1946, 30; also HAWKES 1982, 65, where they were now described as 'boat people' in an interesting take from contemporary events, much as discussions of invasion had characterised the earlier part of the 20th century). Differences in the styles of metalwork and pottery were used to try to discern different origins for the various peoples who were said to have settled in Britain. While MYRES (1970, 3) could note that most of the statement in the *Ecclesiastical History* was undoubtedly derived from the political geography of Bede's own day (the early to mid 8th century), he did not question those groupings at a fundamental level. Instead, he went on to 'test' Bede's distributions of peoples against those he discerned in the pottery assemblages. Despite the ambiguities, similarities between pottery forms were still

interpreted as indicators of migration: 'Both the earlier and simpler manifestations and the more exuberant developments of the second half of the [5th] century occur in Britain exactly as they do in Germany. This can only mean that folk who enjoyed this particular vogue were pouring into Britain throughout this time and bringing this exotic taste with them' (MYRES 1970, 18). The pottery styles were such a direct indicator that MYRES (1970, 23) could state, 'In the earliest days it would seem that folk of Angle and Saxon, and indeed other, antecedents were establishing themselves indiscriminately over the regions that were later dominated by Anglian regimes'. Similarly, EVISON (1981, 137) could state, 'The saucer brooches ornamented with five running spirals have been regarded as a reliable indication of the presence of fifth-century Saxons, for they occur in a limited area between the mouths of the Elbe and Weser before the migration, and further developments of the species take place only in England'.

Because there was such a clear connection made between artefact types and incoming peoples, attempts were made to identify 'native' or 'British' elements in the material culture of burial practices. Examples are COLLINGWOOD and MYRES (1936, 449) arguing for inhumation to be seen in that light and LEEDS (1936, 3; 1945, 44) seeing hanging bowls, penannular, annular and disc brooches as evidence for the continuing existence of 'Britons' in the 'Anglo-Saxon' settlements. MYRES (1956, 16) identified a class of pottery he termed 'Romano-Saxon' (later identified as a typical later 4th-century product by GILLAM 1979 and ROBERTS 1982). This encapsulates the problem. Because of the assumption that identity can be linked to artistic style, and that very few objects apparently carry on in production from the 4th to the 5th centuries (i.e. 'British' material culture), 'Britons' are therefore impossible to identify within this construction. I have detailed before (LUCY 2000, 174) how the various ideas within this framework interconnect: (1) artefacts are assumed to be direct indicators of ethnic identities, (2) those identities are often assumed to be 'natural' ones, inherited from one's parents, and (3) such identities were all-important, separating 'Anglo-Saxon' from 'Briton' and determining their attitudes towards one another.

The role of material culture is therefore seen as straightforward in a lot of the archaeological literature before the 1990s (and even since: e.g. PALM and PIND 1992; see HARLAND 2021 for a critical overview of recent work, including aspects of my own). The different styles of artefact were thought to directly reflect the mixture of the Germanic settlers migrating to England in the 5th and 6th centuries. I have argued before that many artefact types and burial practices which are characterised as 'Germanic' (on the basis that they are of non-classical form, or are decorated in a 'barbaric' style) actually originate in those associated with the later Roman army (LUCY 2000, 166-167; see also HILLS 1979; HASELOFF 1974 and GOFFART 2006 for a sustained historiographical critique of the concept of Germanic). These include practices of furnished and weapon burial, decorated belt-sets and many of the brooch types and their decorative styles known from early medieval

cemeteries. As LEEDS (1945, 5) noted of small-long brooches: 'They are so much a feature of English Anglo-Saxondom that it is astonishing to find that they are seemingly quite scarce in the districts from which the invaders came'.

Reliance on this 'straightforward' interpretation of material culture or burial practice as directly indicating ethnic origins of their users means that the vast majority of accounts of the 5th century are phrased in terms of some variant of the migration or invasion argument (the emphasis on one or the other often varying in response to the prevailing political climate: see LUCY 2000, 165). In archaeological accounts these were often explicitly linked to references from Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: EVISON (1965, 83-4) references Aelle's fleet landing in Sussex, and MYRES (1969, 114, map 8): 'Distribution of some objects to illustrate the age of Aelle of Sussex (477 – c. 500)') offers a distribution of artefacts dating to his reign, mapped against locations associated with his campaigns, for example. Even today, the majority of accounts and chronologies of early medieval material culture in England are implicitly assumed to start in the middle of the 5th century, in line with the received historical framework (see e.g. HARRINGTON and WELCH 2014; WALTON ROGERS 2007). This has only started to be challenged in very recent decades (e.g. HILLS and LUCY 2013; LUCY 2016), but the full implications of this have yet to be worked through.

That revision will need to involve a fundamental reconsideration of the chronological frameworks in current use, and a dismantling of the equations made between artefact and ethnic identity; not easy, when they are so ingrained in understandings of what early medieval material culture represents. However, advances in radiocarbon dating of the period (HINES and BAYLISS 2013), in isotopic analysis that may allow some assessment of areas of childhood origin (e.g. LIGHTFOOT and O'CONNELL 2016), and more sophisticated chronological approaches that deliberately set traditional historical frameworks aside (HILLS and LUCY 2013) all offer constructive routes forward. Recent work has started to set aside pre-conceived notions about the ethnic affiliations of certain types of material culture in the 4th and 5th century, and instead has looked in detail at contextual usage (e.g. COOL 2010; GERRARD 2013; HILLS and LUCY 2013; LUCY 2016; SWIFT 2019 and the general arguments put forward in LUCY 2005 and HARLAND 2021); such approaches offer potential for future reconsiderations of the period more broadly and now offer a firm basis to build on.

Early medieval archaeology and culture-history: chicken or egg?

A key question is how the work on early medieval Britain related to developments in prehistory during the earlier part of the 20th century, particularly in light of the dominant narrative that culture-historical archaeological approaches originating in Germany were responsible for later abuses for political purposes.

In 1895 the German philologist and prehistorian Gustaf Kossinna put forward the idea that archaeology was capable of isolating cultural areas which could be identified with specific ethnic or national units and traced back into prehistory (Arnold 1990; Malina and Vasícek 1990, 62; Veit 1989, 37; Wiwjorra 1996). This and later works (Kossinna 1911; 1928) drew directly on the scientific approaches then current, promoting the thesis that material culture traditions could be specifically connected with linguistic groups, with a suggested, 'one-to-one relationship between language, culture and peoples from known historical sources', which could then be used to trace migration routes in the post-Roman world and promote modern claims to territory, on the basis that areas had originally been German homelands (Geary 2002, 34-5).

Gordon Childe published *The Aryans* in 1926, building on these arguments of Kossinna (who had argued that the source of European culture lay in the North, rather than in the Near East), but soon revised his views on Nordic superiority (Barkan 1991, 56, points out that Childe retained the concept of 'distinct' sub-groups within a population, although this need not correlate to culture). However, his method was the same (e.g. Childe 1929; 1935), and promoted the idea that human history was peopled by groups with clearly identifiable 'cultures' and static boundaries; those could then be equated with the peoples or tribes first documented historically within a known area (Veit 1989, 40). Change within an area could only be accounted for by events such as contacts, migrations and conquests (Jones 1996, 65; 1997, 12). Even after the damnation of Kossinna following the Second World War (see Veit 1989 for a detailed discussion of the uses to which his methodology had been put, but also Kossinna's propaganda work during World War One, and his attempts to influence the political decisions made at Versailles), the methodology itself was not subjected to the same degree of critique and Childe himself continued to use the same principles in his research, though not for the same ends, with the concept of an 'archaeological culture' which could be employed even back into deep prehistory (Childe 1951; Veit 1989, 42-43; see Lucy 2005, 87-8).

I have previously pointed out (Lucy 1998, 13; 2000, 175) that early medieval archaeology in Britain and elsewhere had, in fact, used the key ideas of culture-history for many decades before they were formally stated by Kossinna. Because the documentary sources for the historic past (as we saw above, not unproblematic in themselves) described a world of distinct groups of people – the Saxons, Angles and Jutes, for example – early archaeologists such as Roach Smith were thus expecting to be able to discern tribal differences in the material they excavated from cemeteries in the 1840s and 50s, and it was an obvious next step for them to link the objects they discovered to the tribal groups which the historical sources apparently described. Indeed, this has convincingly been argued to be the very model which early prehistorians such as Childe and Kossinna adopted when they applied their theories to periods lacking such historical sources (e.g. Childe

1925; Piggott 1931; Hawkes 1931; see Musset 1975 cited by Anthony 1990, 896 and also Goffart 2006, 278 n13, where he makes the link to the ideas of Stubbs and Freeman, but is incorrect in assuming that Kossinna was the first to give these ideas archaeological grounding, as this was already common practice for early medieval archaeological interpretation in Britain since the middle of the 19th century).

'Anglo-Saxon attitudes' in the present

Where does this historiographically informed reconsideration of the relationship between material culture and ethnic identity leave us in archaeological terms? Here, I'd like to repeat my previous conclusions: 'While the English were undoubtedly a product of the first millennium AD…this may have been due at least in part to the scholarship of Bede and others like him – that it is in the writing of 'national' histories that nations can become created. I am very much more doubtful that interpretation of cemetery evidence can tell us of similar processes. What it can give us insight into is much more limited in scope – yet, I think, far more interesting. Cemeteries can tell us, though skeletal data, something of the physical conditions of existence. Through the grave-goods which were buried, they can tell us a variety of things about the production and exchange of artefacts and materials, which might throw some light on social relations in this period. In the symbolism apparent within the burial rite we see something of ideational schemes, and what the mourners thought it was important to emphasise about the dead person, whether it was their age, their gender, their status within a community or a mixture of all of these. Analysis of cemeteries can tell us about attitudes to space and landscape, and studying the history of sites tells us about the sense of permanence felt by those using (and thus maintaining) them.

I am, however, far more circumspect about the ability of cemeteries to tell us very much at all about the 'ethnic' origins of the people buried in them. Too many interpretations have been put forward which see ethnicity as a fixed, inheritable aspect of social identity, which can be simply "read off" from the grave-goods which were buried with the deceased.' (Lucy 2000, 185).

Nothing in the last 20 years has led me to question any of that; new techniques such as isotopic and aDNA analysis can complement the other sorts of archaeological data, but still have to be interpreted critically rather than simplistically (see Lucy 2005, 92-93, 106; Hills 2003). More sophisticated conceptions of ethnic identity are being explored, which take social construction and practice into account, but again, these are not readily taken on board by many of those working directly with cemetery material.

However, it is public perceptions that are more problematic; theoretical challenges to conceptions of ethnic interpretation may be starting to percolate into academic discourse (although see Harland 2021 for an assessment of the generally slow

progress of this in early medieval archaeology in Britain), but they do not seem to have impacted at all on wider understandings (Harland 2021 also offers a more detailed survey of alt-right uses of concepts of Anglo-Saxons, and the problematic assumptions underpinning much popular – and some academic – discussion of DNA studies).

In the early 1980s, MacDougall (1982, 144) could describe Anglo-Saxonism as, 'a spent myth which has outlived its political usefulness'. But it has clearly seen a revival, particularly in the US, where Wilton (2020) highlights that using 'Anglo-Saxon' as an ethno-racial term accounts for vast majority of its uses (alongside being used as a term to describe the British/US style of capitalism). Two-thirds of the mainstream American uses of 'Anglo-Saxon' since 1990 are ethno-racial. The British pattern is quite different, in that the majority of uses relate to pre-Conquest references (ibid.).

Even in Britain though, as archaeologists and historians, we seem not to have done a good enough job in challenging these popular historical frameworks. It is notable, for instance, that the current UK primary school curriculum contains a unit entitled 'Invaders and Settlers', covering Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, and publicly available teaching material could easily have been written in the mid 19th century (see, for example https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zxsbcdm/articles/zq2m6sg).

In recent years, popular (and increasingly political) narratives on British identity have again returned to one of origins. In the optimism of the early 2000s, the idea that Britain was part of Europe, and always had been, with exchange of people and ideas, fitted comfortably with contemporary archaeological interpretations. Debates around Brexit have upended that; to defend 'divorce from Europe' it has become more politically helpful to frame the past as one of invasion and conflict, rather than contact and cooperation. This is particularly the case when the hard right of the Conservative Party (now just known as the Conservative Party) is using such allegorical themes to argue for post-Brexit Britain in *Britannia Unchained* (Kwarteng et al. 2012; although the reviews are still pretty damning; see also Evans 2018). The then UKIP leader Henry Bolton could say unchallenged in a national radio broadcast in 2017 that, 'In certain communities the indigenous Anglo-Saxon population is nowhere to be seen. We've got entire communities, entire areas of towns, where we've got no Anglo-Saxon British people. New arrivals over the last 20 years are entirely dominant'.

It is important that academics challenge these interpretations wherever possible, as they will otherwise just seep further into populist usage. This is why exhibitions such as *Saxones* are so important, as they can help combat such views in an accessible way. Perhaps in Britain we need our own?

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