Constructing Early Anglo-Saxon Identity in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*

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The chronicle compiled at King Alfred's court after 891 was part of his educational reform and was also part of an attempt to create a common national identity for the English. This can be seen in the contemporary annals (i.e. from 871 to 891), but the large body of annals drawn together from diverse sources for the preceding nine centuries shows this same focus. The earlier annals, while not necessarily compiled at the same time, were selected and manipulated with the same goals, and are organised thematically into annals which explore Britannia's roots as a Roman colony, its development as a Christian nation, and the *adventus* of the Germanic tribes. Barbara Yorke has shown some of these accounts to be semi-historical or mythological, but they are juxtaposed with historically accurate descriptions. While the early annals have a different compilation context than those which document Alfred's reign, they were nonetheless selected, organised and inflated in order to legitimise the line of Cerdic and bestow authority on Alfred as well as his descendants. In this, they follow the same model as later annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*.¹

In light of recent research, it seems well established that the compilation of the "Common Stock" or "Alfredian Chronicle" (i.e. the annals to 891 common to most *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*) was a courtly endeavour and that the exemplar for the earliest A-manuscript was a product of King Alfred's scholarly circle.² While Alfred's personal involvement in this may not have been particularly large,³ the political thought of his circle of scholars can be detected throughout the annals. Annals for Alfred's reign and for the reigns of his father and

- 1 For discussion of the term 'The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*' as opposed to the more accurate plural title (used in this chapter) see Pauline Stafford, "The Making of Chronicles and the Making of England: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles after Alfred," *TRHS* 6th ser. 27 (2017), 65–86, at pp. 65–66.
- 2 Nicholas Brooks, "Why is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle about Kings?" *ASE* 39 (2011), 43–70; Anton Scharer, "The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court," *EME* 5:2 (1996), 177–206.
- 3 Malcolm Godden, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" *Medium Aevum* 76 (2007), 1–23; Janet Bately, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited," *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009), 189–215.

grandfather seem to have a different character than the early annals (i.e. those before approx. 800).⁴ There were clearly various stages of compilation and it may make more sense to view the early annals as having been compiled and added to smaller groups of contemporary annals which were circulating in the late 9th century;⁵ they were nonetheless sorted and compiled at some point as a whole.⁶ The early annals mix Roman legacy, Christian history, and mythical accounts of the Germanic tribes' arrival in England from sources like Bede, Orosius, Gildas, recent memory and oral tradition.⁷ This chapter will show how these historical subjects are presented throughout the early annals into the 7th century as a concerted effort to promote a unified Anglo-Saxon identity, part of a larger ideological programme which was being promulgated at King Alfred's court. Whatever the elliptical content of the annals may hide, their selection, structure, and form all reveal something about their composition context.

Barbara Yorke was one of the first scholars to occupy herself with the nature of the early West Saxon annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* as a unit.⁸ Very little work on the early annals as a whole has been done otherwise; this choppy and piecemeal history is seen as providing the modern historian with evidence

- 4 Janet Bately, "The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1978), 93–129.
- 5 John Quanrud, "The Sources of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to the Annals of the 890s" (Univ. of Nottingham, PhD thesis, 2014); Frank Stenton, "The South-Western Element in the Old English Chronicle," in his *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England: Being the Collected Papers of Frank Merry Stenton*, ed. Doris Mary Stenton (Oxford, 1970), pp. 106–15; Robert Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo Saxons*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1939), vol. 2; A.J. Thorogood, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the Reign of Ecgbert," *EHR* 48(1933), 353–63; Courtney Konshuh, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles: Writing English Identity* (forthcoming).
- 6 Bately has convincingly argued against the compilation of a large set of annals from around 855 (in Alfred's father Æthelwulf's reign) on linguistic grounds. This means that whatever the state of the sources gathered for the Common Stock, they were likely all first put together in Alfred's reign. Janet Bately, "Manuscript Layout and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Donald Scragg (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 1–22.
- 7 Including a whole host of other antique and early medieval sources, such as Isidore's *Chronicon*, Rufinus' Latin translation of Eusebius' *Church History*, Jerome's *de Viris Illustribus*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *Chronica Maiora* and *Minora*, and *Epitome*, and the *Liber Pontificalis*: Prosper's *Chronicle*, and several continental Chronicles. See Janet Bately, "World History in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: its Sources and its Separateness from the Old English Orosius," *ASE* 8 (1979), 177–94, at p. 178.
- 8 Barbara Yorke, "Fact or Fiction? The Written Evidence for the Fifth and Sixth Centuries AD," *ASSAH* 6 (1993), 45–50; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 3–4; Yorke, "The Representation of Early West Saxon History," in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature and History*, ed. Alice Jorgensen (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 141–59.

of history recording, but the limitations of its style seem to mean that it cannot reveal a narrative voice or collaborative purpose. While the annals are often used in conjunction with Bede (and many derive from Bede) and other sources to create modern narratives on early Anglo-Saxon history, these annals are actually the driest of the dry; no one would read them from start to finish for pleasure, and sixteen folios of brief notices could hardly have been interesting for a medieval audience either. Even in her important essay about *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles'* narrative mode, Cecily Clark largely skips the early annals, citing only two pre-9th-century entries in her evaluation of the "stylistic continuity" of "terse, timeless formulas";⁹ she nonetheless finds several examples of authorial interpretation in these annals by way of adjectives, adverbs or relative clauses. That even the terse and disconnected statements of the early annals contain elements of interpretation or point of view reveals that these annals are indeed worth evaluating in their own right and shows their thematic unity.

In her paper on the representation of early West Saxon history in these early annals, Barbara has shown how formulations from the Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode reflect contemporary Alfredian interest in the role of the *witan* in advising the king demonstrated in documents as diverse as Alfred's laws, the Alfred-Guthrum treaty, and Asser's Life, and which had ramifications on the succession of Alfred's sons Edward.¹⁰ Similarly, the failure to mention any West Saxon saints cannot be accidental.¹¹ While it is simple to see a narrative as determined by the elements which it in fact includes, in the case of *Chronicles*, the elements which are left out can be just as important. This ellipsis need not indicate an attempt to suppress information; just as the modern historian crafts a narrative based on the elements she deems relevant, so too will the *Chronicle* compilers have sifted through a vast body of oral and written evidence to determine what was relevant in the creation of the Common Stock annals.

To honour Barbara's interest in obscure annals and their ideological implications, this paper seeks to evaluate the selection and manipulation of the early annals in their context as an Alfredian court production. Studies of the Common Stock annals have drawn attention to exciting passages such as the 755 Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode or the Germanic *adventus*; however,

9 Cecily Clark, "The Narrative Mode of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle before the Conquest," in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 225–35, at p. 219

10 Yorke, "The Representation of Early West Saxon History," p. 143.

11 Yorke, "The Representation of Early West Saxon History," p. 156.

this chapter will look at how the early annals as a whole follow several main streams, presenting an ideologically unified narrative. They are not a haphazard assemblage of random historical data chosen due to time constraints or lack of information in the compilation process; they were put together with the same coherent purpose that can be seen in other Alfredian texts and translations. While the combination of history and mythology within these annals may jar with current views of history-writing or even contemporary continental conventions in annal-writing, as a whole they reflect Alfredian interests in succession, nation-building and exploration or creation of “English” identity.

Reflecting the same model as contemporary 9th-century annals, these early annals were selected from written and oral sources and inflated with semi-historical and mythological material in order to legitimize the line of Cerdic and bestow authority on Alfred and his descendants. While they do not present a smooth or engaging narrative, their selection and inclusion reflect the compilers’ interest in creating an Anglo-Saxon identity applicable to all English speakers in Britain. This identity is derived from Britannia’s place in the Roman Empire, the common ethnic identity grounded in the Germanic *adventus*, and the transformation of Britannia into England making use of Bedan conceptions of an inclusive English-Christian identity.¹² At the same time, this collective identity is more nuanced, and allows for individual local identities, according each kingdom heroic forefathers and genealogies. This forward-looking strategy allows individual local identities to continue while at the same time suggesting that they are in fact all related, or part of the same larger family. Every family must have a leader, and so it can be seen throughout the annals that the House of Cerdic, the rulers of Wessex, have an illustrious past and present, making them the pre-eminent branch of this Germanic family tree.

Ethnogenesis

The *Chronicle* annals are an important part of the ethnogenesis of the *Angelcynn* in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. The creation of a regional identity or ethnicity is of course not a biological reality, but rather a performance; identity is acted out in language, dress and customs.¹³ These practices would not be

12 Ryan Lavelle, “Places I’ll Remember? Reflections on Alfred, Asser and the Power of Memory in the West Saxon Landscape,” below, pp. 312–35.

13 Walter Pohl, “Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective,” in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 7–32, at p. 8.

markers in a vacuum, and identities are constructed in opposition to the other. Ethnicity is not an objective fact but rather results from subjective identification, and medieval ethnicity is generally formed in opposition to the stranger.¹⁴ Latin-barbarian discourse accompanied or justified the emergence of a barbarian *gens* into the Roman world; while our early texts “identify” outside ethnic groups (such as the Gauls or the Ostrogoths) in order to help Romans organise outsiders into discrete units,¹⁵ these labels can come to define the groups themselves. Similarly in the 9th century, Alfred was defining the group which would rule in opposition to the Viking newcomers;¹⁶ as a chronicler in his son Edward’s reign writes for the year of Alfred’s death, he “was king over all of the *Angelcynn* except for those under Danish dominion.”¹⁷ The Old English term *Angelcynn* probably derives from Gregory the Great’s Latin *gens Anglorum*, which Bede adopted in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*; while Gregory and others outside Britannia may simply not have understood the different identity groups included in this umbrella term, Bede certainly did, and sought to portray all the Anglo Saxons as God’s chosen people.¹⁸ With the exception of one Mercian charter, the term *Angelcynn* was propagated by Alfred’s court, and can be found in several of his circle’s translations.¹⁹ Alfred would have encountered the Latin *Angli* on his pilgrimage to Rome early in his life and continental scholars in his court would have been familiar with the concept, so the idea that all English speakers in Britain belonged to the same *gens* was hardly an innovation. However, it was not common currency in Old English or among Anglo-Saxon speakers, and distinct regional identities persisted until the Norman conquest. The categorisation of *pagani/dene* was a flexible marker as well, but in Alfred’s reign these terms were othered to provide a convenient counterpoint to the emerging Anglo-Saxon identity which Alfred sought to

14 Helmut Reimitz, “The Art of Truth: Historiography and Identity in the Frankish World,” in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini (Vienna, 2006), pp. 87–103, at p. 87.

15 Pohl, “Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles,” p. 10.

16 Roffey and Lavelle note that Frankish sources transition from the terms ‘pagans’ or ‘Northmen’ to ‘Danes’, where ‘Danes’ represent a locatable ethnic group who could be “treated with, dealt with, and ultimately brought to the will of the king.” Simon Roffey and Ryan Lavelle, “West Saxons and Danes: Negotiating Early Medieval Identities,” in *Danes in Wessex: the Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c.800–1100*, ed. Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey (Oxford, 2016), pp. 7–34, at pp. 9–12.

17 According to *ASC* A 900, Alfred “wæs cyning ofer eall Ongelcyn butan ðæm dæle þe under Dena onwalde wæs.” (All translations in this chapter are my own).

18 Sarah Foot, “The Making of Angelcynn: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest,” *TRHS* 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25–49, at pp. 43–45.

19 Foot, “Making of Angelcynn,” pp. 29–30 incl. n. 25.

curate.²⁰ By setting up a group *Angelcynn* identity locked in a struggle against first Britons and then Vikings, Alfred's circle was creating a blanket identity for all the previous Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and paving the way for an inclusive, assimilatory identity.

Of course, it is not enough for Alfred's court to simply assert that all Anglo Saxons had the same identity. For this to be successful, people must come to view themselves as *Angelcynn/gens Anglorum*. As John Hines points out, the "testing-ground for ethnicity lies in the field of social practice, a practice that is of course shaped by language and communication".²¹ While identities need not necessarily emerge out of opposition, the duality of Danish/heathen vs *Angelcynn*/Christian had been cemented by the Alfred-Guthrum treaty which created a border with ethnic identities assigned to each side; identities emerge out of the duality that was created by the "new regnal identity on the twin bases of territorial habitation, and, at higher social levels where men shared the king's *familiaritas*, on sworn commitments, practical fidelities and good lordship".²² The annals are part of the communication process taking place in the late 9th-century over the nature of the *gens Anglorum*, both as a group separate from the Romans, Britons or Vikings, and as a composite group of West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian, and potentially East Anglian and Northumbrian. Historical texts are not only a diagnostic of contemporary developments in how identity was understood, but also function as a communication intended to influence contemporary perception. As Helmuth Reimitz points out, Frankish histories and annals were the "media through which ethnic identities were devised and propagated"²³ and the same efforts can be seen with the Anglo Saxons.

While Alfred and his circle may have had a notion of an overarching identity to which they ascribed, Alfred's legitimacy was based on his rule as the king of Wessex, and other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had not been particularly eager to submit to West Saxon authority in the past. With the advent of the Vikings and the removal of all native dynasties except for Alfred's in Wessex after 878, and then with Alfred's conquest of London in 886 and his assumption of overlordship over Ealdorman Æthelred of the Mercians, Alfred was ruling at least nominally over all of non-Viking Britannia. The territorial division of *Angelcynn* to the south and west and the othered Vikings to the north and east in

20 Janet Nelson, "England And the Continent in the Ninth Century: II, the Vikings and Others," *TRHS* 6th ser., 13(2003), 1–28, at p. 27.

21 Pohl, "Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles," pp. 7–8.

22 Nelson, "England And The Continent in The Ninth Century: II," p. 27.

23 Reimitz, "The Art of Truth," p. 87.

the Alfred-Guthrum treaty promoted the development of shared identity in the southwest against a common foe. However, the seeds for absorbing these others were already laid; as Guthrum took on the West Saxon name Æthelstan with Alfred as his godfather at his baptism, implications of lordship obligations and Alfredian spiritual overlordship were already present in this division, and through this the opportunity for Viking-held regions to be subsumed into *Angelcynn* identity. In many senses, Wessex's star was on the rise, and while Alfred may not have had any plans to conquer Northumbria and create a unified polity,²⁴ he was thinking about future generations. *Angelcynn* identity was being created at Alfred's court, and formulated in such an inclusive way that it could come to encompass all of Britannia. While the identity is a construct, the coherent picture of 'the English' and an English nation of *Angelcynn* is created throughout these annals. I will therefore use the term 'Britannia' for the Roman province and the *Angelcynn* to signify the identity group which these chroniclers were hoping to create.

By taking an existing identity of *Angelcynn*, which had been promoted in Bede's history and could be applied to all Anglo-Saxon speakers and Christians, the annals adopt an existing discourse but transform it to fit to the current political reality of an island mostly conquered by Vikings. As the sole 'surviving' kingdom after the Viking conquests, Wessex's claim to primacy was therefore based on its nature as part of a larger ethnic group, the *Angelcynn*, but also its separateness and specialness as the most Christian and most Anglo Saxon of all. This identity was utilised by West Saxon successor kings to justify their rule over Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria. The ideas of Alfred's courtly circle were probably largely formulated under Alfred's direction, so when I refer to King Alfred's role in the composition of the annals, I mean as conceptual director rather than direct author, collator or scribe.²⁵

Though the early annals seldom provide us with great interpretative additions or substantial narratives, they were nonetheless selected from a larger body of historical data which was available to the compilers, including, among other texts, Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Orosius' *Historia adversos paganos*, all of which are substantial narrative sources.²⁶

24 George Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), Ch. 4.

25 David Pratt, "Problems of Authorship and Audience in the Writings of King Alfred the Great," in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 162–91, at pp. 171–74.

26 Janet Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Texts and Textual Relationships* (Reading, 1991); Kenneth Harrison, "Early Wessex Annals in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *EHR* 86 (1971), 527–33; David Dumville, "Some Aspects of Annalistic Writing at Canterbury in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries," *Peritia* 2 (1983), 23–57; Sarah Foot, "Finding the Meaning

The annals are not terse and spotty because of a dearth of information available to the compilers; they were selected from a vast body of historical writing and combined with genealogies, legendary and oral material to highlight elements that were important to the compilers. With some exceptions, the annals can broadly be sorted into three main themes: those which focus on the history of the Roman Empire, Christian history, the mythological and semi-historical accounts of the Germanic tribes' *adventus* and their subsequent development into kingdoms. Taken together, these themes are relevant to the message promoted in the later annals justifying Alfred's authority over the West Saxons,²⁷ but they expand the ethnic group included under the West Saxon kings' implicit authority. Britannia is cast as a nation which began with the Roman occupation and survived its fall, only to gain its own identity under the Germanic invaders, and whose identity and existence began with the Roman occupation. Its unity is emphasised alongside the moral and military right of the invaders. The just victory of these invaders can be seen in their conversion to Christianity, which is initiated by a direct request to Pope Gregory the Great, and in the strong ties to Rome which are maintained thereafter. While there are different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms with different histories, genealogies and identities, these early annals assert that they are nonetheless part of a greater, Christian whole, and that Wessex is most fit to rule them as the strongest, most aggressive, and most Christian kingdom.

The Roman Empire

Britannia's place in the history of the Roman world is firmly established from the very first annal, and throughout the annals important events from the Roman Empire are included, often explicitly in terms of how they relate to Britannia. Before the history of Britannia can really begin, its discovery by Julius Caesar and consequent entry into written memory are mentioned in an undated pre-annal before the year 1: "AER Cristes geflæscnesse .lx. wintra, Gaius Iulius se casere ærest Romana Bretenlond gesohte ⁊ Brettas mid gefeohte cnysede ⁊ hie oferswiþde ⁊ swa þeah ne meahhte þær rice gewinnan."²⁸ This firmly establishes Britannia in the developed world, and conceptually its history

of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles," in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (London, 2005), pp. 88–108.

27 Courtney Konshuh, "Fighting with a *lytle werode*: Alfred's Retinue in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *The Medieval Chronicle* 10 (2015), 95–117.

28 "Sixty years before the birth of Christ, Julius Gaius the emperor [Caesar] first sought out Britannia, and overcame the British with battle and conquered them, and nevertheless could not gain the kingdom."

begins with contact with the Roman Empire and the Christian era. Similarly, the annal for 46 establishes that Claudius “oþer Romana cyninga Bretene lond gesohte 7 þone mæstan dæl þæs ealondes on his gewald onfeng, 7 eac swelce Orcadus þa ealond Romana cynedome underþeodde.”²⁹ This annal expands the geographical area which the Romans conquered, giving precedence for future claims to insular unity; by this reckoning, the entire island of Britannia was administered as a unit, including as far north as the Viking base in Orkney. The annals then give accession dates for important emperors, especially in the first century AD, becoming sparser as regards the Empire and focusing rather on emperors who had significance for Britannia.

Many of the other annals seem at first to be a random selection of events and rulers of the Roman Empire, but these can in fact be related to their importance to Britannia;³⁰ most of the time, this relevance is made explicit. Severus’ reign is included under annal 189 because, as the annal relates, he built a wall in Britannia, a fact which the annalist probably took from Bede.³¹ It is logical, for example, that Emperor Augustus’ reign be mentioned, as his rule was particularly significant in the formation of the Roman Empire, of which Britannia became a part. The relevance of the fall of Rome in 410 (under annal 409) does not centre on the Roman empire, but rather on the importance of its fall to Britannia: “Her Gotan abrecon Romeburg, 7 næfre siþan Romane ne ricsodon on Bretone.”³² Thereafter, the Roman Empire is no longer significant for these annals, and is only mentioned again³³ when the Romans in Britannia gathered together all the gold they could find and buried it or took it with them when they left for Gaul.³⁴ The annal on the otherwise unimportant usurper Magnus

29 ASC A 46: “In this year, Claudius, the next Roman king sought the land of the Britons and received most of the island into his dominion, and even the island Orkney was subjected to Roman imperium.”

30 Or to Christianisation, see the next section, below.

31 It is possible that there was collaboration with the OE Bede translator, for while Bede’s Latin states that the island was divided by a wall which he explains was actually a rampart made of sod with wooden stakes placed atop it (Bede, *HE*, 1.5), both the Chronicle and the OE translation of Bede say that Britannia was “mid dice begyrde”, that is, “surrounded with a ditch”. Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Thomas Miller, EETS OS 95 (London, 1890), p.1.5.

32 “In this year the Goths sacked Rome, and the Romans have never ruled Britain since.”

33 Other than in annals added by later annalists—the F-scribe, for example, adds a number of details about Rome to the A-manuscript.

34 ASC A 418: “Her Romane gesomnodon al þa goldhord þe on Bretene wæron 7 sume on eorþan ahyddon þæt hie nænig mon siþþan findan ne meahthe 7 sume mid him on Gallia lēddon.”—“In this year the Romans gathered all the gold that was in Britannia and hid some of it in the earth so that no one would ever be able to find it afterwards, and some they brought to Gaul.” See Rory Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: the*

Maximus is probably drawn from Orosius,³⁵ though Gildas also mentions him as an example of the sins of the Britons;³⁶ it is unclear from which source this annal derives. The reason for his inclusion in the annals is clear: “he wæs on Bretenlonde geboren.”³⁷ His subsequent actions which led to civil war would have been well known from Orosius and are potentially included as a moral condemnation of the early Britons, further justifying their conquest by the Germanic tribes.

After the fall of the Roman Empire and the subsequent looting of Britannia, continental events are not mentioned again until the death of Charlemagne; while the annal 812 for 814 includes the years of Charlemagne's reign, he is labelled a *cyning* rather than *casere*. Julius Caesar is the only Roman emperor whose title of emperor was recognised as *casere*; the other emperors *feng to rice*, the standard *Chronicles* formula for accession, but their dominion over Britannia is therefore of limited degree.³⁸ Other than the popes who are mentioned in relation to this annal and who will be discussed below, there are no other continental events in the intervening years. Instead, the annals switch focus to centre entirely around the Germanic *adventus* in Britannia, battles against the Britons and subsequent infighting until Christianisation begins in annal 596.³⁹ Important events in the history of Christianity are intermingled among the Roman content; this follows the tradition of the apologetic histories of Lactantius, Eusebius and Orosius, and places Britannia within a Christian context from its apparent inception in 60 BC.

According to the outline provided in the annals, Britannia essentially came into existence when contact was made with Rome, and its early development was possible as a result of this. The civilisation which came from being a part of Roman society and contact to Christianity was possible only because Britannia was conquered and absorbed into the Roman Empire; while neither the Empire nor the Britons' Christianity lasted, contact with Rome provided a basis for the unity of Britannia and first contact to Christianity. Further annals

Southern English Kingdoms 757–865 (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 39–41. Note that silver and bronze were more common than gold in known Roman hoards; this annal probably uses “gold” in a literary context.

35 Both the OE Orosius and ASC A spell his name ‘Maximianus’. *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS SS 6 (London, 1980), VI.35.

36 Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978), Ch. 13.

37 ASC A 381: “He was born in Britannia.”

38 Even Claudius, for example, in annal 46 is termed a *cyng* and submits most of England to Roman *kingship* (“cynedom”).

39 Corrected (incorrectly) by hand 8 (MS F scribe) to 595.

provide a Christian narrative which begins before the *adventus* of the Anglo Saxons, emphasising the legitimacy of Britain within a Christian Roman Empire, before going on to show the Christianisation narratives of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The *adventus* annals meanwhile are concerned with the double duty of showing the related nature of the Germanic tribes, and also the natural leadership of one group in particular.

Germanic Adventus Annals

The *adventus* annals have long been recognised as being not entirely historical;⁴⁰ rather than explore the historical/archaeological accuracy which Barbara has covered in detail,⁴¹ this chapter will examine how the *adventus* annals are constructed to present a common vision of the Germanic tribes. Certain elements within the annals reveal that they were based on material that was manipulated considerably in order to line up with year numbers, such as the duplication of some annals or the creation of founding fathers whose identities are in fact derived from existing place-names (such as Port and Wihthgar).⁴² The combination of mythological arrival and conquest annals with the strategic inclusion of genealogies allow the annals as a whole to present all the kingdoms and sub-kingdoms of Britannia as important members of a larger family. They show the supremacy of the Germanic incomers over the native Britons, and they focus on the House of Wessex almost from the outset, showing the West Saxons to be the natural leaders of this group.

The first annal to describe the *adventus*, under the year 449, is a complex one, and contrasts with the entries immediately previous; there are only four annals in the original hand in manuscript A for the previous eighty years, and this after a complete lack of content for 200 years.⁴³ Following Bede's chronology,⁴⁴ the *adventus* is situated in the (Roman) context of the reigns of

40 Barbara points this out in many places. For an overview of the historiography on this see John-Henry Clay, "Adventus, Warfare and the Britons in the Development of West Saxon Identity," in *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian identities in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 169–213, at p. 172.

41 Barbara Yorke, "Anglo Saxon Origin Legends," in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, ed. Julia Barrow, Andrew Wareham, and Nicholas Brooks (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 15–30.

42 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 3, 27

43 Bately's hand 8 (the scribe of manuscript F) and hand 12 later filled in some content for these empty annals.

44 Nicolas Howe argued that Bede chose 449 as an arbitrary date to focus the migration myth: *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989), p. 57.

Martianus and Valentinus,⁴⁵ and it is emphasised that Hengest and Horsa were invited into Britannia by their king, Vortigern, in order to help the Britons.⁴⁶ The explicit reference to an invitation, translated directly from Bede⁴⁷ is an important legitimisation of the Anglo Saxons' right to be in Britannia in the first place, and a justification for the warfare that takes place thereafter alluded to in the same annal. Horsa and Hengest's landfall at Thanet, the same place St Augustine was to land, prefigures the later Christianisation that was to unite the Anglo Saxons.⁴⁸ After their very first battle and Horsa's death in the annal for 455, Hengest *feng to rice* along with his son Æsc.⁴⁹ By framing Hengest's succession with this formula, the original invasion is embedded in language which is used throughout the annals to indicate legitimate succession, and gives Horsa retroactive legitimacy. The annal is forward looking in that it prefigures Christianisation which will unify the Germanic peoples in Britannia, and it looks backward to the Roman Empire by placing these early rulers within the context of the Roman Empire, while solidly justifying their presence.

Successive tribes' arrivals are described in much the same way. They arrive (*Her cuom*) in Britannia (*Bretene* or *Bretenlond*), accompanying family members and the number of ships are listed (7 *his ii suna, mid iii scipum*), and the next clause describes a subsequent battle and victory over the locals (7 *þær ofslogon monige Wealas*), often giving a personal or place name. Conquering father-son and brother-pairs arriving in (often three) ships is a common feature in Indo-European foundation legends,⁵⁰ and would also evoke the story of Romulus and Remus, another link between the Anglo Saxons and Rome. The obsession with Germanic brother pairs in founding early kingdoms is what

45 Bede, *HE*, I.15.

46 ASC A 449: "Hengest 7 Horsa from Wyrtegeorne geleapade Bretta kyninge gesohton Bretene on þam stape þe is genemned Ypswinesfleot, ærest Brettum to fultume, ac hie eft on hie fuhton."—"Hengest and Horsa sought Britannia at the place that is named Ebbsfleet, invited by Vortigern, King of the British, first in order to help them, but later they fought against them."

47 Bede, *HE*, I.15: "Anglorum siue Saxonum gens, inuitata a rege praefato"—"the Anglian and Saxon gens, invited by the aforementioned king." The nominative participle construction (*inuitata a rege*) seems to have caused issues in the translation.

48 Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle," *ASE* 12 (1982), 1–41, at p. 29.

49 This is the standard formula used when a new king starts his reign and is used 42 times in the A MS to 900, usually with a genitive or dative specifying the kingdom (*to wessexna/miercena*/etc. *rice*, or *on Wessexum*) though sometimes, and only for non-West Saxons, the kingdom is implied by the direct juxtaposition of the previous king's death and the following king's accession (i.e. A 675 *Wulfhere forþferde 7 Æþelræd feng to rice*). Æsc succeeds to the kingdom again in annal 488 for an additional 24 years.

50 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 3.

Isabelle Réal refers to as a Germanic Christian ideal, which revolves around the “notion de fraternité spirituelle qui s’étend a l’ensemble des hommes”.⁵¹ The kin groups’ legitimacy over their conquests is emphasised, while the parallel structure of different kin-groups makes them seem part of a coherent whole. Naming the site of landfall and subsequent victories legitimises Anglo-Saxon dominion over those areas. The early *adventus* annals are a nod to or perhaps a trigger which would evoke oral mythology about the ruling families in southern England; at the same time, they anticipate the genealogies which will follow in later 6th- to 9th-century annals.

Despite the genealogical information which was apparently available for ruling families north of the Thames, only the *adventus* of dynasties south of the Thames are included,⁵² that is, those which had been subsumed into Wessex by the 9th-century compilation of these annals. Kent, Sussex, Wight and the Jutes of southern Hampshire all have *adventus* annals, and they are subordinated to Wessex shortly thereafter, either through bloodline, conquest, or erasure from the narrative. Stuf and Wihtgar, the brothers who arrived in annal 514, are revealed in 534 to be the nephews of Cerdic and Cynric, and they were given the Isle of Wight by Cerdic and Cynric, who had conquered it in 530. Stuf and Wihtgar are Jutes (or Goths?⁵³) in Asser, but West Saxons in the annals. It is unlikely that Wight was conquered before Cædwalla’s reign (685–88),⁵⁴ and while these annals may be based on genuine oral tradition, they have also clearly been adapted to show the importance of the West Saxon war-leaders from their very arrival. The importance of Kent cannot be overlooked—Horsa and Hengest were the first, and their successor Æsc followed Hengest as king in annal 488,⁵⁵ years before Cerdic and Cynric even arrived. However, Æsc does not appear again after this, nor does King Ælle of the South Saxons; instead the next 50 years of annals focus on Cerdic and Cynric and their kin. Silencing these narratives leaves the impression that the West Saxons were responsible

51 Isabelle Réal, “Représentations et pratiques des relations fraternelles dans la société franque du haut Moyen Âge (vie–ixe siècle),” in *Frères et sœurs: les liens adelphiques dans l’Occident antique et médiéval*, ed. Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet and Martine Yvernault (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 73–94, at p. 74.

52 Sims-Williams, “The Settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle,” p. 27.

53 Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge argue that Asser was probably confused about the difference between Goth and Jute, and that the purpose of this detail is to show that “Oslac was of ultimately Danish extraction.” *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 229, n. 8.

54 Yorke, “Anglo Saxon Origin Legends,” p. 19.

55 With the formula *feng to rice*: “Her Æsc feng to rice 7 was .xxiii. wintra Cantwara cyning.” —“In this year Æsc succeeded to the kingdom and was the king of the Kentish for 24 years.”

for conquering the Britons thereafter, and the implication is that the other founders were dependent on Wessex, giving the West Saxons ancestral claims to lands that were only to be conquered from the late 8th to the early 9th century.

The house of Wessex is celebrated especially from its arrival in Britannia in 495, and the line is followed from Cerdic and his son Cynric through to Alfred, highlighting Wessex's primacy in Britain over all of the lines which would lead the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The annal for Cerdic and Cynric's *adventus* in 495 outwardly follows the same model as the other *adventus* annals but adds crucial details which highlight the West Saxons' pre-eminence.⁵⁶ They are the only arrivals to have titles before they land, and the title *ealdorman* which they are given is a product of 7th- and 8th-century state-building which certainly did not exist in the 5th century. While other founders fought battles soon after arriving, it is emphasised that Cerdic and Cynric fought against the British the very same day.⁵⁷ Their status is established from the start, as is their ability to wage warfare. Nearly every Germanic character in these early annals fights with the British (and wins), but the West Saxon kings are the first to not only wage war against the Britons, but also against other Anglo Saxons. The West Saxons first attacked the Kentish in 568, Sussex in 607, and Mercia in 628, before any other internecine Anglo-Saxon conflict is mentioned.⁵⁸ When other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms war against each other, the aggressor is usually not named, and instead a passive construction is used.⁵⁹ The emphasis on Wessex's conquests and elision of conquests by others produces a narrative in which Wessex appears particularly formidable from their *adventus* in Britannia to contemporary times.

From its early place both in the Germanic *adventus* and in Christianisation from Rome, Kent enjoys a special prominence in the annals, but West Saxon legitimacy over Kent is more than implied in the early annals. Precedence is set in the mid-6th century when Ceawlin and Cutha of Wessex attacked King

56 ASC A 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."—"In this year, two ealdormen, Cerdic and his son Cynric, arrived in Britannia with 5 ships at the place which is called Cerdicesora, and on the same day fought with the Britons."

57 Interestingly, these details are not repeated in the duplicated entry of 514 suggesting there was debate on how to frame Cerdic and Cynric's arrival in one of the compilation stages.

58 The first conflicts in which a kingdom other than Wessex is the named aggressor are the in the late 7th century, in 675 and 676.

59 For example, when Penda and the Welsh kill King Eadwine of Northumbria, this is recorded with a passive construction, and the instigator of the violence is not made clear. ASC A 633: "Her Edwine wæs ofslægen"—"In this year Eadwine was killed."

Æthelberht of Kent and apparently put him to flight in Kent (“hine in Cent gefliemdon”).⁶⁰ The phrasing of this annal is ambiguous, and while the Kentish were the aggressors at this time, with Ceawlin and Cutha defending Wessex and forcing Æthelberht to flee back to Kent, the Old English grammar leaves unclear whether the Kentish were put to flight *in* or *into* Kent. The annal therefore gives the impression that the West Saxons attacked and defeated the Kentish; because the annals also leave out Kentish overlordship over Wessex by the same King Æthelberht from 593, the annals give precedence for West Saxon control of Kent. Alfred’s grandfather Ecgberht may have been descended from the Kentish line,⁶¹ but there was also a need to show Kent to be dependent upon Wessex as Canterbury became the focal point of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. There was clearly some debate as to how the conquest of Jutish Wight by West Saxons was to be reconciled in West Saxon propaganda, but the late 9th-century assumption that Kent is a part of Wessex was common in many of these annals.⁶²

The kingdoms north of the Thames are brought into the annals either with their conversion to Christianity or through the legitimate succession of a king with the formula *feng to rice* and sometimes with a genealogy. Genealogies, which are never provided for the southern kingdoms⁶³ that were subsequently absorbed by Wessex, show all the Anglo-Saxon tribes to be descended from a single Germanic ancestor, Woden. This effectively depicts the kingdoms as one larger family, showing a given ruler’s descent from the original settlers or further back to Woden (or his father Frithuwulf). The first mention of a kingdom not occupied by Wessex in the 9th century is in the 547 annal for Ida, from whom the annals claim the royal line of Northumbria is descended.⁶⁴ Ida’s genealogy in this annal shows him to be descended from Woden and further carries his genealogy back to Geat; this first genealogy for Ida is the only one which extends beyond Woden besides Æthelwulf’s, which goes beyond Geat

60 ASC A 568: “Her Ceaulin 7 Cūpa gefuhton wīþ Eþelbryht 7 hine in Cent gefliemdon, 7 tuegen aldormen on Wibbandune ofslogon, Oslaf 7 Cnebban.”—“In this year Ceawling and Cutha fought with Æthelberht and put him to flight in(to?) Kent, and killed two ealdormen at *Wibbandun*, Oslaf and Cnebban.”

61 Though the annals do not promote this. Scharer, “The Writing of History at King Alfred’s Court,” pp. 184–85.

62 Simon Keynes, “The Control of Kent in the Ninth Century,” *EME* 2:2 (1993), 111–31.

63 Dorothy Whitelock, “The Old English Bede,” in her collection *From Bede to Alfred: Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History* (London, 1980), viii:57–90, at p. 74.

64 The annal is derived from Bede. ASC A 547: “Her Ida feng to rice, þonon Norþanhymbra cynecyn onwoc”—“In this year Ida succeeded to the kingship, from him arises the Northumbrian royal line.” The formula *feng to rice* is used to show his legitimacy. Probably he was actually king of Bernicia. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 74–75.

back to Adam. The East Saxons appear only after Gregory's mission of Christianisation had established itself in Kent in a conversion annal for 604, making both their conversion and entry into the narrative dependent on Kentish influence. Penda is the first Mercian king named, in 626, and his overlordship of Wessex is reduced to two mentions of having driven out Cenwalh in annals 645 and 658; it is not made clear who was ruling in Wessex during his absence. Military victories of other kingdoms or interesting facts such as King Ælle or Æthelberht's overlordship and Bedan status of *bretwalda* are not mentioned.⁶⁵ While the annals are careful to mention all of the kingdoms at one point or another, they generally do not describe other kingdoms' successes. The resulting narrative provides little more than a nod to other kingdoms, stories of which presumably would have been well known in the oral tradition these annals derive from, amidst Wessex's near-continuous victories. These nods are nonetheless important; no kingdom is completely elided, and potential readers/listeners would have found their own history as part of this collection.

While Cerdic and Cynric were not the first to arrive in Britannia, they were the most successful, as were their descendants, whose lineage is emphasised repeatedly as a legitimising factor.⁶⁶ The genealogies incorporated throughout the annals do not solely focus on Alfred's line, though they do promote Cerdic above all other Anglo-Saxon genealogies.⁶⁷ Wessex's supremacy over the other tribes is justified in part through their success in warfare against the Britons and other Anglo Saxons, while the genealogies additionally provide unifying ancestry tying the tribes together.

Themes within these early annals resonate with entries contemporary to Alfred, suggesting that they were compiled with these priorities in mind. In the 9th-century annals, Alfred's immediate family were also skilled war-leaders, and emphasis is placed on how the sibling-pair "Eþered cyning ⁊ Eþfred his broþur" fought together against the Vikings from 868 until Æthelred's death in 871, just as the initial pairs of the *adventus* had. Alfred's family efforts in general are detailed, including their involvement in Mercia against the Welsh in 853, cementing the West Saxons as a sort of older brother to the other kingdoms. The West Saxon conquests throughout the early annals prefigure King

65 The annal 827 for 829 lists all the *bretwalda* and appends Alfred's grandfather Ecgberht to that list.

66 David Dumville, "The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List and the Chronology of Early Wessex," *Peritia* 4 (1985), 21–66, at p. 23.

67 Scharer, "The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court," p. 178: "There is only one dynasty, that of Cerdic, which provided a continuous line of kings from the primordial arrival and struggle against the Britons, culminating in Alfred. Obviously the purpose of this myth making was to heighten Alfred's stature."

Ecgberht's conquests in the annals for 825 (s.a. 823) and 829 (s.a. 827) and the annals name him *bretwalda*. Wessex's strength in battle is important in the late 9th century when, as the annals depict it, only Alfred was able to successfully defend his kingdom and achieve victory over the Vikings.

Military victory alone was not sufficient justification for Wessex's pre-eminence in Britannia, however. The annals which describe Christianisation of the Germanic tribes further legitimise the West Saxon rulers, corresponding to the Alfredian political idea, evident in Gregory's dialogues and in the Old English Boethius, that good and just kings share God's authority.⁶⁸ Wessex was not the first kingdom to convert to Christianity, but it was more thoroughly Christianised, and did not suffer any regression as was the case in other kingdoms. Moreover, Wessex had already grown to envelop both Kent and Wight, whose Christianisation is detailed in the annals, showing Wessex's capacity to absorb other kingdoms as well as its spiritual superiority.

Christian History

The annals, while avoiding explicitly Christian interpretations or direct references to God's power on earth, nonetheless embed the history of Britannia within the history of Christianity. The format of annals, which uses the year of the incarnation, locates this history as a Christian text. While Bede had first used Anno Domini dates for his history,⁶⁹ the *Annales Regni Francorum* were the first secular history to use a Christian framework for the reckoning of time;⁷⁰ the *Chronicles* follows the model of the *Annales*, taking this a step further by beginning the history of England with the birth of Christ. While the first annal actually recounts the pre-Christian conquest of Britain by Caesar, the annal introduces this content in the context of annal (year) 1 with the retrospective "AER Cristes geflæscnesse .lx. wintra". The history therefore officially begins in the Christian world with the birth of Christ, with the birth of Britain when it enters the Roman world within a Christian frame. The genealogical prologue is also phrased in a similar manner, describing the advent of Cerdic and Cynric in 494 as "Py geare þe wæs agan fram cristes acennesse .cccc. wintra

68 *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De consolatioe philosophiae*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009), vol. 1, verse 17.

69 Nicholas Brooks, *Bede and the English* (Jarrow, 1999), p. 3.

70 Rosamond McKitterick, "Constructing the Past in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Royal Frankish Annals," *TRHS* 6th ser., 7 (1997), 101–29, at pp. 110–13.

7.xciii. uuintra.”⁷¹ Despite possible allusions to divine power, such as the comet which precedes the Viking attack on Lindisfarne,⁷² the lack of any reference to God’s intervention makes this history a secular one but in its format and frame it is explicitly Christian. Christian history is woven into the annals in a similar way that elements of Roman history were, and Christian history in Britannia is embedded in this context adding further (Christian) legitimacy to the set of annals;⁷³ Christianisation becomes an important part of the identity of the Anglo Saxons.

Many of the early annals deal with important developments in early Christianity which were significant for the world, such as Herod’s persecution and death (annals 2 and 3), Christ’s baptism and death (annals 30 and 33), the deaths of important figures such as three of the four evangelists (annals 63 and 69), various popes and martyrs. This is perfectly in line with the main style of reporting in the temporal annals, which focus almost exclusively on the succession and deaths of kings and important battles. Other important events in Christian history are also included, such as the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 (under annal 71) and Christian missions to the Britons and Irish (annals 167 and 430). The annals select a very limited number of important early Christian figures, leaving out Mary mother of Jesus and many of the disciples.⁷⁴ The focus on leaders such as Christ, the evangelists, and even Herod as well as the sacking of Jerusalem prefigure the later annals’ focus on kings and conquest, while the transmission of Christianity to Britain and Ireland presages the Christianisation of the Germanic peoples which will fill the 7th-century annals.

Several annals make clear the place of a Christianised Britannia within the Roman Empire, naming a (fictional) Christian Briton as king: “To þam Lucius Bretene kyning sende stafas, bēd þæt he wære cristen gedon, ⁊ he þurhteah

71 “In the year that was 494 years after Christ’s birth.” This follows Orosius’ convention of dating years *ab urbe condita*, which Bede expanded for the fall of Rome to “anno milesimo CLXIII suae conditionis, ex quo tempore Romani in Brittania regnare cessarunt, post annos ferme quadringentos LXX ex qui Gaius Iulius Caesar eandem insulam adiit”—“1164 years since it was built, and Roman rule in Britain ended 470 years after Gaius Julius Caesar had come to the island.” Bede, *HE*, I.11.

72 The references to comets, eclipses, etc. show God’s presence in the world and may portend good or evil, but God’s agency is not explicitly named.

73 Continental chronicles do not make as much of an effort to record martyrdoms or the hallowing of bishops as the Common Stock.

74 Ben Snook, “Women in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle before AD 800,” in *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*, ed. Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (Newcastle, 2012), pp. 32–60, at p. 43.

þæt he bēd.”⁷⁵ An important aspect of this conversion, though not explicit in the annals, is that the conversion was ultimately unsuccessful; when Augustine met with the Britons in 603, he was entirely unimpressed with their broken-down traditions and refusal to accept his and Rome’s authority.⁷⁶ As Gildas tells us, “Christ’s precepts were received by the inhabitants without enthusiasm.”⁷⁷ The subsequent degradation of British Christianity should be taken as implied in this annal, and there are no further references to it. The Christianisation of the Germanic tribes is the more important narrative for this work, and will be detailed below. It is significant that Germanic Christianisation came not from the Britons who were already present when the Anglo Saxons arrived, and also not from Æthelberht’s Merovingian queen Bertha;⁷⁸ their Christianisation came directly from Rome, providing spiritual primacy over the Britons.

Many of the annals which seem to describe temporal Roman events may actually have been included because of their relevance to the development of Christianity. Why, for example, would the annals include the accession of Tiberius, but hardly any emperors from the second century? Gildas relates that Tiberius, during the spread of Christianity was one of the first emperors to persecute Christians,⁷⁹ a fact which the annals do not mention, but which would have been known to the compilers from Orosius, who also relates Tiberius’ initial inclination to support Christ’s inclusion in the pantheon.⁸⁰ The accessions of Vespasian and his son Titus are placed in annals directly before and after the annal which details Titus’ sacking of Jerusalem and slaying of 111,000 Jews,⁸¹ and Emperor Domitian’s “most cruel” Christian persecution was also known from Orosius.⁸² These annals are therefore important not only in

75 ASC A 167: “Lucius, king of the Britons sent messengers to [Pope Eleutherius], asking to be made Christian, and he [Eleutherius] carried out what was requested.” For the background to this myth, see Alan Smith, “Lucius of Britain: Alleged King and Church Founder,” *Folklore* 90 (1979), 29–36. This annal’s content derives from Bede, *HE*, I.4; Alfred’s circle or a 9th-century audience may not have been able to know that there was no Lucius.

76 Bede, *HE*, II.2.

77 Gildas, *Ruin of Britain*, ed. Winterbottom, Ch. 9: “licet ab incolis tepide suscepta sunt.”

78 Snook, “Women in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle before AD 800,” pp. 43–44.

79 Gildas, *Ruin of Britain*, ed. Winterbottom, Ch. 8.

80 Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. C. Zangemeister (Leipzig, 1889), VII.4 (Hereafter Orosius, *Libri VII*).

81 This is likely a miscopying from Orosius, who cites Josephus’ number of eleven hundred thousand (“undecies centena milia”), which was transcribed by the annalist as *.cxi þusen-da*. Orosius, *Libri VII*, VII.9, ASC A 71.

82 Orosius, *Libri VII*, VII.10: “... Christi Ecclesiam ... crudelissimae persecutionis edictis conuellere auderet” — “He dared to assault the Christian Church with edicts of most cruel persecution.” ASC A 83

documenting the history of the emperors, but in that they chronicle the difficulties of the Abrahamic peoples before Christianity arrived in England via Gregory the Great.

The tone of the annals which describe Christian events changes after the Germanic *adventus*, promoting the ideas around a common Christian Germanic identity propagated in Bede. While the Christianisation of the Britons initiated by Lucius was done almost impersonally (i.e., Lucius requested Christianisation, the Eleutherius “carried it out”), the annalists provide more details regarding Germanic Christianisation. In the annal for 596,⁸³ “Pope Gregory sent Augustine and many monks to Britannia, who preached the word of God to the English people.”⁸⁴ The erased annal for 604 relates that Essex was baptised under King Sæberht, that King Edwin was baptised with his people (Northumbria) in 627, that Eorpwald (East Anglia) was baptised in 632, that Middlesex was Christianised under Ealdorman Peada in 653, that Mercia became Christian when Penda died in 655, and that the people of Wight were first baptised in 661 when King Wulfhere of Mercia conquered Wight. Each kingdom has a single annal marking their conversion, except for Wessex. Bishop Birinus, the first bishop of Dorchester, brought baptism to Wessex in annal 634, baptised King Cynegils in 635 (with Oswald of Northumbria as his godfather), further baptised Cwichelm in 636, and also baptised Cynegils’ son Cuthred in 639, becoming his godfather. The next king to rule Wessex was Cenwalh, who built the first church in Winchester in 643 before being baptised three years later. The special attention devoted to Wessex here is obvious: four members of the West Saxon elite, all Cerdicings, were baptised, two of whom also receive mention in the genealogical preface where Cynegils is explicitly cited as the first king of Wessex to receive baptism.⁸⁵

While these annals highlight Wessex above the other kingdoms, at the same time they focus on unity. It is not insignificant that the annalist chose to report that Gregory sent Augustine not to Æthelberht, king of Kent, or to the Kentish people, but to the English people. While this is an almost direct translation

83 Erroneously corrected by hand 8 to 595.

84 ASC A 596: “Her Gregorius papa sende to Brytene Augustinum mid wel manegum muncum þa Godes word Engla ðeoda godspelledon.”

85 ASC A Prefatory material: “Pa feng Cynegils Ceolwulfes broþur sunu to rice 7 ricsode .xxxi. wintra, 7 he onfeng ærest fulwihte Wesseaxna cyninga, 7 þa feng Cenwalh to 7 heold .xxxi. wintra, 7 se Cenwalh wæs Cynegiles sunu”—“Then Cynegils, Ceolwulf’s son’s brother succeeded to the kingdom and ruled for 31 years, and he received baptism first among the West Saxon kings, and then Cenwalh succeeded and held [the throne] for 31 years, and this Cenwalh was Cynegils’ son.” They are also explicitly linked to Cerdic in the previous line; “hiera cyn geþ to Cerdice”—“their line goes to Cerdic.”

from Bede,⁸⁶ the annalists otherwise make a point of stating precisely who was baptised, and these names were available in Bede and was presumably deliberately left out. The reference to Augustine's landing at Thanet refers back to Horsa and Hengest's arrival there, referring to the "divinely ordained purpose of migration."⁸⁷ While Wessex ruled Kent in the 9th century when these annals were compiled, Kent was a powerful kingdom in the late 6th century; the annal does not attempt to subsume Kent into Wessex but rather universalises the first act of Christianisation as something "English." While the role of the kingdom of Kent in Christianisation of the English is therefore elided, the nature of the initial Christianisation thereby becomes more inclusive. The death of Pope Gregory the Great is related in similarly inclusive terms: "Gregory died ten years after he had sent *us* baptism."⁸⁸ The use of the first person plural pronoun "us" refers to the Christianisation of all the English. This is the beginning of the Christianisation of the *gens Anglorum*, not just one group of them. While Wessex may be accorded a special place in their ranks, their Christian identity unifies the Anglo Saxons. The idea of a Christian *gens* is obviously derived from Bede's Christian history,⁸⁹ and was to prove a useful concept for the Alfredian construction of an inclusive Anglo-Saxon identity.

Despite the reliance on Bede for these annals, Christianity is first mentioned as reaching the "English" through Gregory's mission to Kent, and not through Northumbria. Northumbrian conversion is not left out, but textually it follows southern conversion, and the omission of any mention of Adomnan or the Irish missions is surely not an accident; rather, Northumbrian Christianisation is depicted as dependent upon Christianisation of Kent and under the primacy of Canterbury. The annal for 601 pre-emptively narrates Bishop Paulinus' later conversion of Edwin from 625, locating the conversion following the investiture of Augustine as Archbishop of Canterbury and Gregory's sending of further teachers to Britain.⁹⁰ Paulinus and Edwin's conversion therefore seem

86 Bede, *HE*, 1.23: "misit seruum Dei Augustinum et alios plures cum eo monachos timentes Dominum praedicare uerbum Dei genti Anglorum"—"[Gregory] sent Augustine, the servant of God, and many other monks with him, fearing God, to preach the word of God to the English people." Only "fearing God" has been left out in the OE translation.

87 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 64.

88 My italics. ASC A 606: "Her forþferde Gregorius ymb .x. gear þæs þe he us fulwiht sende."

89 Patrick Wormald, "Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the Gens Anglorum," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129.

90 ASC A 601: "Her sende Gregorius papa Agustino ærcebiscepe pallium in Bretene, 7 wel monige godcunde lareowas him to fultome; 7 Paulinus biscepe gehwerfde Edwine Norþhymbra cyning to fulwihte."—"In this year, Pope Gregory sent Archbishop Augustine

subordinate to the authority of Canterbury. As it is ambiguous whence Paulinus came or derived his authority, it could even be misunderstood that Paulinus was one of the teachers sent by Gregory. The annal for 625, the year Edwin was actually baptised according to Bede,⁹¹ further emphasises that Paulinus was raised as bishop of Northumbria by Archbishop Justus of Canterbury, making his authority directly dependent on Canterbury. Justus probably reached England in 601 and was one of the group sent by Pope Gregory in that annal. This is a useful tactic for Wessex; while Wessex was not converted until 634, Kent and therefore Canterbury were part of Wessex when the annals were being compiled, and the annals themselves work to legitimise this conquest. Northumbrian Christianity is therefore dependent upon Wessex for its authority. Indeed, upon the death of King Edwin, Paulinus “returned” (*huerf eft*) to Canterbury to become bishop of Rochester. Bishop Wilfrid’s expulsion by the Northumbrian king in 678 is also included, and without additional context, it seems as though Northumbria was going through difficulty in maintaining sanctioned Christianity. The implications throughout are both that Christianity in Northumbria was dependent on Canterbury from the beginning, which is patently incorrect, and also that the conversion of Northumbria was not as successful as in the south.

These factors together promote the authority of the See of Canterbury, while the annals otherwise seek to minimise ethnic distinction in terms of religiosity. The Christianisation of all groups is considered, and while Anglian or Northumbrian relevance in Christianisation is minimised in favour of West Saxon, all those of Germanic descent in Britannia are unified by their Christianity. Even in Bede there are distinctions between the different ethnic groups. According to Hines, “Saxons usually turn up for military victories, whereas the Angles are often mentioned in matters of religion.”⁹² The primacy of the Saxons in military matters is not minimised, but is shown to be part of the House of Cerdic’s better abilities; their overlordship over the group is thus justified. This applies to the English church, which was established quickly and thoroughly across Britannia, but most especially in Wessex. All would become Christian, but conversion happened first, and most completely, in the south.

While the importance of the Synod of Whitby in 664 and triumph of Roman Christianity over the Britons loomed large in Bede, the annals seem unaware of or uninterested in the Easter controversy, and instead mention the Council of

in Britain the pallium, and also very many educated teachers to support him; and Bishop Paulinus brought Edwin, King of the Northumbrians to baptism.”

91 Bede, *HE*, II.14.

92 Pohl, “Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles,” p. 19.

Hatfield, when Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury sought “Cristes gelaefan geryhtan.”⁹³ The “correction” refers to the heresy of monothelitism, and may be another jab at the British Church, which did not follow the “right” belief in Christ. This may also be the context for a possible annal on Pelagius’ heresy; annal 430 narrates Palladius’ Christianisation of the Irish under Pope Celestine’s orders. The annal looks like an almost direct translation from the Latin Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine: Prosper’s *Chronicle* associates Palladius with the combatting of the Pelagian heresy in Britain, which may further explain why this annal was included.⁹⁴ In either case, Anglo-Saxon Christianity as propagated by Gregory the Great is superior to the missions which were sent to the Irish and British before, and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s primacy is asserted.

The annals follow Bede in asserting a general identity of English Christians amongst the denizens of Britannia; Gregory sent baptism to “Engla þeode,” foreshadowing *Angelcynn*. However, while Bede preferred Roman Christianity to Celtic, the annals carefully adjust this preference to show the primacy of Canterbury and the Christianity adopted in Kent and Wessex. The annals’ emphasis on Rome, both as the centre of Empire and of later Christianisation, also links the West Saxons to Rome, both indirectly, through their early Christianisation, and directly, through Alfred and his father’s travels to Rome and Alfred’s ambiguous consecration by the pope in 853.⁹⁵ The *gens Anglorum* may have a common Christian identity, but the annals emphasise that it was Wessex that was most Christian first, and could be expected to safeguard Christianity in Britannia.

93 ASC A 680: He wanted “to correct the belief in Christ.”

94 Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, “Who was Palladius, ‘First Bishop of the Irish’?”, *Peritia* 14 (2000), 205–37, at pp. 207–08, citing Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon* in *Prosperi Tironis epitoma chronicon*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi 9:1 (Berlin, 1892), p. 473. According to Prosper, “Ad Scottos in Christum credentes ordinatus a Papa Caelestinus Palladius primus episcopus mittitur.” The annal is a precise translation with difference only in word order (which can be explained by the requirements of OE grammar): ASC A 430 “Her Paladius se biscep wæs onsended to Scottum þæt he hiera geleafan trymede from Celestino þam papan.”—“In this year Bishop Palladius was sent to the Irish by Pope Celestine in order to establish their faith.” The word *primus* is left out—this is probably not an accident, as attention is paid throughout that the first (*ærest*) event of significance occurs in Wessex throughout the Common Stock.

95 ASC A 853: “he hine to cynninge gehalgode 7 hiene him to biscepsuna nam”—“[Pope Leo IV] hallowed [Alfred] as king and took him as his spiritual son [godson?].” See Janet Nelson, “The Problem of King Alfred’s Royal Anointing,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 18 (1967), 145–63; Michael Lapidge, “Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Athelstan,” *ASE* 9 (1980), 61–89, at pp. 79–80.

While the Anglo Saxons in general deserve their primacy over the Britons due to their Christianity, the Cerdicings in particular proved their piety in their many journeys to Rome and direct descent from Noah's son Scef. In this same way, the Anglo-Saxon primacy over the Vikings is also assured through the Christian heritage; Alfred's ability to finally neutralise the main Viking threat to Wessex in 878 required military victory but was assured only by baptising Guthrum and his followers at Wedmore.⁹⁶

Creation of an English Identity

The early annals do not tell a 'story', terse or otherwise, as we expect from later *Chronicle* entries, and while the Germanic *adventus* annals come closest to presenting a narrative, even these would not make for interesting reading in a single sitting. However, all the annals contribute to the themes of legitimisation of the Anglo Saxons over the Britons and Vikings, and the primacy of the House of Wessex over the Anglo Saxons. Additionally, they prefigure and strengthen the "interesting" annals which depict the rise of Ecgberht, Æthelwulf, and finally Alfred and his wars against the Vikings. While this group identity was not immediately useful, by the 890s King Alfred had either annexed Mercia or had become the senior partner, with Ealdorman Æthelweard of Mercia signing charters under Alfred and marrying his eldest daughter. By the 910s at the latest, the latest possible date for the writing of MS A, King Edward had embarked upon his wars of conquest in East Anglia, and the *Chronicle* entries for his reign depict this as a liberation of Anglo Saxons from Viking terror. Regardless of whose reign the Common Stock was compiled for, the expansion of Wessex into other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was already a reality. For the narrative of liberation and subsequent rule by Wessex to be successful, a general Anglo-Saxon identity would help ease such conquest.

This assimilation was also open to accepting Vikings under West Saxon overlordship. When Guthrum accepted baptism as Æthelstan, he in effect became a sub-king under Alfred, just as Alfred was directly subordinate to the Roman pope after his baptism in Rome in 853. The implication that Scandinavian traders had accepted Alfred as king is also present within the Old English Orosius translation, in which one of them addresses Alfred as *hlaforð*.⁹⁷ The inclusion of Scef/Woden in the genealogies as well as references to

96 ASC A 878.

97 *Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, XIII.29: "Oththere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge ..."—"Oththere said to his lord, King Alfred ..."

Geatish/Scandinavian relatives imply a shared heritage between the Angelcynn and Scandinavian brethren. Like the Britons, who were elided from the history of Britannia after their conquest by the Germanic groups, Vikings were given the option of adopting Anglo-Saxon identity.

The place of Alfred at the pinnacle of this group is of course mostly to be found in the annals from his reign, but the foreshadowing of the earlier Common Stock annals cannot be coincidence. Alfred and his brother King Æthelred fight together, just as the founding brothers of each tribe did in the 5th century, just as Romulus and Remus did. Alfred's anointing in Rome and the alms he sends there in the 880s reflect the gift of Christianisation which was given directly from Rome and firmly ground him as a Christian king following the Roman model. Alfred's bravery in battle and the loyalty of his retinue is emphasised just as the military superiority of the Germanic tribes and especially the Cerdicings was. He secured the submission of each shire independently in 878 before defeating Guthrum, and then legitimately secured overlordship of part of Mercia much as the tribes conquered the Britons. The legitimisation of Alfred here is done along very similar lines to the legitimisation of his supposed ancestors and that of Britain as a part of the Roman and Christian world. And importantly, this legitimation was as useful to Alfred, who had unexpectedly become king only after the death of all his brothers, as it would to his son Edward, who faced a rebellion from a cousin which could not have been entirely unexpected.⁹⁸

While the early Common Stock annals may not have functioned as a narrative which could be read (aloud?)⁹⁹ in the same way as later annals, particularly those for 871–78 or 892–96, they are important as pieces of a larger puzzle. Many of these annals are brief reminders of a larger story which could be found in Bede or Orosius,¹⁰⁰ or perhaps in oral tradition. They function rather as reminders of Britannia's place in the world and the development of the *Angelcynn*, and could even have been intended as triggers which would remind a reader of the larger history to which they belong.

98 Alfred's will (S 1507) seems to deliberately dispossess Æthelwold. Ryan Lavelle, "The Politics of Rebellion: the Ætheling Æthelwold and West Saxon Royal Succession, 899–902," in *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: the Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, ed. Patricia Skinner (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 51–80, at 57–60.

99 Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Indiana, 2004), p. 5.

100 The full stories could have been made available via the OE translations of these texts, which were not necessarily being produced at Alfred's court but were certainly available at Edward's.

This brings us to their conception and compilation. Clearly these annals were deliberately selected and constructed to present a unified view of the past. Nor does this perspective appear foreign to the works of Alfred's courtly circle; it unfolds in annal form. It shows the development of Britannia from an insignificant part of the Roman Empire to a nation-state of its own, which in the face of the annals of the 880s depicting the fall of the Carolingian empire, could even be construed as presenting England as a possible future contender to lead the enlightened western world. It intermingles the story of the Roman Empire with an unbroken history which connects the *Angelcynn* to Christianity, emphasising their unity in their Christian belief. Finally, it cements the position of the English over the British and the primacy of Wessex among all the English. These points taken together are a vigorous inscription of Alfred's authority as ruler of an expanding kingdom or empire, which included, in the 890s, Wessex, Wight, Sussex, Kent, Cornwall, London and overlordship over parts of Mercia. Alfred's descendants can be seen to further expand their interests into East Anglia and eventually Northumbria; the seeds for this ambition are planted already in these early annals, which attempt to create a unified English and Christian identity, and then justify the superiority of the West Saxons, giving precedence for West Saxon rule by attributing the first West Saxon overlordship of all Britannia to Alfred's grandfather Ecgberht in the 827 annal for 829. The Common Stock annals work to emphasise and strengthen the message of West Saxon supremacy and Alfredian legitimacy found so clearly in the late 9th-century annals; they are further evidence of ongoing compilation in order to meet the expanding goals of Alfred and his son Edward in their creation of an English identity.

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