UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Britain after Rome

Continuity or Divergence

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Abstract

This study examines the inability of historians to reach any consensus regarding Britain during the fifth and sixth century 'Dark Ages'. The first chapter examines how a preoccupation with myths of origin has affected the way in which historians have viewed written and archaeological sources since the twelfth century. It suggests that a reorientation of historians' current conception of Britain as a single nation, to instead, consider Britain as encompassing a number of smaller regions, will in future produce a more accurate depiction of 'Dark Age' Britain. The second chapter provides a case study of the economic activity of East Anglia during the fifth and sixth centuries, as a means of confronting and refuting the leading theory regarding the economic activity of Western Europe during this period. It concludes that East Anglia does not conform to the current theory that all economic activity in Britain ceased in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Contents

Introduction

The approximate two centuries between the relinquishing of Imperial Roman rule in Britain in 410 and the arrival of St. Augustine in 597 is considered by many historians to be the most challenging and obscure period in British history.[1] This obscurity is reflected in both the source material and in the historiographical discussion. Often referred to as the 'Dark Ages', Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries has left very little evidential material for posterity to examine.[2] What evidence is available is so problematic that incompatible historical perspectives have been able to co-exist. Michael Jones claims that the 'evidence is too thin to create an interpretive context significantly independent of the imagination of the individual historian.'[3] It is the intention of this study to confront this issue in the historiography and to suggest and demonstrate a means by which future historical endeavours may produce more judicious results.

The current historiography concerning Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries can be separated into two main schools of thought. While some variations do exist within these schools, two major opposing opinions can be seen to dominate the discussion. The first is the belief in the continuity of Romano-British culture and institutions into the fifth and sixth centuries. A. S. Esmonde-Cleary's *The Ending of Roman Britain* provides a strong statement of belief in this

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[1] John Myres, *The English Settlements: English Political and Social Life from the Collapse of Roman Rule to the Emergence of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1.

[2] Michael Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, (London: BBC Books, 2005), 10.

[3] Michael Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 6.

view; 'Even after the inception of the main phase of Anglo-Saxon migration in the middle of the fifth century [the decedents of the inhabitants of Roman Britain] remained numerically the overwhelming majority and in control of most of the richest land of the island.'[4] The second main thread of opinion is the belief in the cultural swamping of the native Britons by the Germanic Anglo-Saxons. Bryan Ward-Perkins, for example, claims that his examination of both literary and archaeological evidence from fifth and sixth century has suggested a dominating cultural inundation of the Britons by the Anglo-Saxons, resulting in the virtual disappearance of any trace of the Romano-British population.[5]

Neil Faulkner argues that these two opposing views are sustained and perpetuated by historians' inconsistent use of archaeological evidence and an 'inexcusable failure to define terms and measure evidence against clear categories.'[6] The first chapter of this study intends to examine the development of and use by historians of the two dominant forms of source material for fifth and sixth century Britain: the written sources and archaeology. Such an examination reveals an underlying preoccupation with the forming a coherent National history which has obscured evidence and perpetuated this debate. This study suggests that by confronting the modern tendency to view Britain as a single geographical and political unit, and instead considering the island to consist of smaller regional areas, as would have been more familiar to fifth and sixth century inhabitants, then some form of consensus between historians may be possible in the future.

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[4] A. S. Esmonde-Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*, (Maryland: Barnes and Noble, 1990), 162.

[5] Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become British?," *The English Historical Review* 115 (2000): 521.

[6] Neil Faulkner, "The Debate About the End: A Review of Evidence and Methods," *Archaeology* 159 (2002): 59-60.

The second chapter of this study intends to directly confront one of the most contentious subjects of historiographical discussions for fifth and sixth century Europe: the economy. Britain is often excluded from discussions of the economic situation in Western Europe during the centuries following the collapse of Roman authority. This is largely due to the accepted belief that the economy in Britain collapsed shortly after the evacuation of the Roman army. Through a case study of pottery production, coin circulation and exotica importation in East Anglia, however, this study shows that at least within one region of Britain such assumptions prove false.

One of the greatest limitations within the study of post-Roman Britain is the lack of written accounts by contemporaries in Britain. There are, however, contemporary accounts written by those living outside of Britain. Two such texts are Zosimus' *Historia Nova,* written in the latter half of the fifth century, and Constantius of Lyon's *Life of Saint Germanus of Auxerre*, composed between 475-480.[7] These accounts do, however, exhibit evidence of prejudice against the inhabitants of Britain, and caution ought to be used when considering the sentiments that they assert. These are not the only outside accounts which mention Britain during this period, but they are unique in that they specifically dedicate a section to explicitly discuss Britain, and are therefore particularly useful.[8]

In conjunction with these contemporary outsider works, written accounts by those in Britain during later centuries also helps to illuminate the undocumented post-Roman period. Gildas' *On the Ruin of Britain* and Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English people* are two

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[7] Zosimus, *Historia Nova: The Decline of Rome*, Trans. James Buchanan and Harold Davis, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), viii.; Constantius of Lyon, 'The Life of Saint Germanus of Auxerre', Trans. F. R. Hoare, in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saint's Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Thomas Noble and Thomas Head eds., (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2010), 77.

[8] For example, Procopius, 'Vandalic War', in *The History of the Wars*, Trans. H. B. Dewing, vol. III, (London: W. Heinemann, 1916), III.II.38.

key texts of this variety.[9] Gildas' account is of particular importance as it is not only one of the earliest accounts to be written within Britain, but it is also one of the few written by a Welsh-Breton.[10] In such late accounts, however, the lapse in time can often render errors in factual knowledge. This may often be overcome by a process of scrutinization of the texts' sources (if mentioned); by comparing the texts against other written accounts; and by comparing it against archaeological evidence.

As a means of supplementing written accounts, archaeological evidence can provide insight into aspects of post-Roman Britain which are not mentioned in the written sources, as well as confirming or challenging the evidence which is provided. One of the great limitations of archaeological evidence however, is the inclination to use singular or small finds to draw large conclusions about their historical significance.[11] P. H. Sawyer notes that 'archaeological arguments from negative evidence are especially dangerous', as not only can new excavations and fresh discoveries fill in the blanks on distribution maps, but the lack of discoveries may be attributed to later-generation soil disturbances, rather than evidence having been non-existent.[12] We are also restricted by the limited quantity of archaeological evidence that has been unearthed.

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[9] Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain,* trans. J. A. Giles, (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2010); Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Judith McClure and Roger Collins eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[10] Thomas D. O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticy and Date*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 1.

[11] Faulkner, "The Debate About the End", 59-60.

[12] P. H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, Second Edition, (London: Routledge, 1998), 81.

Underneath the
Historiographical Debate

Historical discussions regarding the events of fifth and sixth century Britain have produced a profusion of theories and debates, but historians have managed to reach little consensus. Two distinct forms of source material constitute the main foundations upon which these theories have been based: written sources and archaeology. The following chapter aims to consider the development of and use by historians of these two forms of source material, as a means of explaining how their usage has perpetuated this debate and made impossible any unanimous agreement. The discussion will centre on two key areas. Firstly, how a veiled preoccupation with two myths of national origin has affected the interpretation and utilisation of written sources since the sixteenth century; and secondly, how an initial hesitancy of incorporating archaeological evidence, as well as an enduring preoccupation regarding national origin, has affected the utilisation and interpretation of archaeological evidence since the late-nineteenth century.

Like any historical study, this discussion is constrained by several factors. These restrictions include the organisational method, the timeframe of the histories being used, and the selectivity of the historiography. As the focus of this chapter is to consider the effect of developments in source interpretation upon historiographical discussions, this study will

adhere to a loose chronological organisation. While developments in source interpretation can be traced back as early as the twelfth century, a particular emphasis will be placed on the historical arguments of historians from the mid-nineteenth century, as this can be identified as the beginning of the modern academic discipline of historical writing. Lastly, due to the prolific nature of the historiography on this topic, it is not possible to include all works which discuss this period of history, this study therefore intends to utilise a broad selection of works which are representative of the major developments in the historiography.

The principal source material for historical accounts of post-Roman Britain prior to the twentieth century is written sources. In 1577, Raphael Holinshed was the first to compile together all known accounts of the post-Roman period into a single multi-volume Chronicle.[13] He introduces Gildas, Ninnius, Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the principal sources for events during this period, but also utilises English and Welsh poetry and legends, as well as Hagiography. His Chronicles are loosely organised by chronology order, and he includes all known sources despite these sources being at times conflicting and contradictory and regardless of his belief in their historical accuracy. Holinshed claims that this is because he is 'loth to omit anie thing that might increase the readers knowledge'.[14] Despite his willingness to incorporate all known accounts, Holinshed did include some commentary regarding the sources' credibility, noting in particular his reservations regarding the accuracy of the legend of King Arthur.[15] Although subsequent historians would turn away from presenting conflicting narratives as Holinshed had, instead selecting a single account in

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[13] Alison Taufer, *Holinshed's Chronicles*, (New York: Twayne, 1999), 22.

[14] Taufer, *Holinshed's*, 2.

[15] Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, vol. I, (London: Richard Taylor and co., 1807), 579.

order to present a unified narrative, it was the sources compiled by Holinshed which became

the foundation for historical narratives for the next few centuries.[16]

From the mid-nineteenth century, historical writers began to place a growing emphasis on a

more methodical and systematic construction of historical narratives, leading towards the

development of history as a modern academic discipline.[17] For the study of post-Roman

Britain, this development meant an attempt at a more objective source analysis of the limited

available written materials. John Lingard, in his *The History of England from the First*

invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688, provides a clear

example of a nineteenth century historian's desire for an objective approach to source

analysis;

> I have strictly adhered to the same rules to which I limited myself in the
> former editions; to admit no statement merely upon trust, to weigh with care
> the value of the authorities on which I rely, and to watch with jealousy the
> secret workings of my own personal feelings and prepossessions. Such
> vigilance is a matter of necessity to every writer of history, if he aspire to
> the praise of truthfulness and impartiality.[18]

Historians utilised the sources gathered by Holinshed, and attempted to judiciously examine

the texts as a means of establishing a verifiable chronological order of events of the fifth and

sixth centuries. Henry Hallam, for example, sought to establish a fuller understanding of the

period in question by investigating more than the traditional aspect of politics and war:

> It has been the object of every preceding chapter of this work, either to trace
> the civil revolutions of states during the period of the middle ages, or to
> investigate, with rather more minute attention, their political institutions.
> There remains a large tract to be explored … The philosophy of history
> embraces far more than the wars and treaties, the factions and cabals of
> common political narration; it extends to whatever illustrates the character

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[16] Taufer, Holinshed's, 2.

[17] Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838-1886*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24

[18] John Lingard, *The History of England from the First invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688*, (New York: O'Shea, 1860), xxviii.

of the human species in a particular period, to their reasonings and sentiments, their arts and industry.**[19]**

Despite claims of historical objectivity however, the writings of such authors exhibit an underlying preoccupation with two myths of national origin which have had a profound and lasting effect on historical perspectives of post-Roman Britain.

The first myth of national origin was the account of the legendary British leader Arthur. The origins of the story are found in the works of the ninth century monk Nennius and Welsh poetry, both of which were collected and collated by Holinshed.[20] These accounts were elaborated upon during the twelfth century through the literary licence of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who related a tale of bravery and kingly heroism.[21] His narrative had a particular political appeal, providing the Norman conquerors with a historical figure of comparable stature to the French Charlemagne.[22] Julia Crick shows how Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britannie* served as a popular historical source as well as fictional literature during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[23] The account gained widespread popularity, as the legend captured the imagination of many, with 217 known manuscript copies surviving today.[24] In his rendition of the account, Thomas Malory utilises the tale to praise the ancestor of the newly ascended Tudor monarch.[25] However connection between Arthur and the concept of monarchy lessened the tale's appeal during the political turmoil of the seventeenth

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[19] Henry Hallam, *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, vol. II, Seventh Edition, (Paris: Baudrey's European Library, 1840) 206.

[20] Holinshed, *Holinshed*, ix-xi.

[21] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The British History*, Trans. Aaron Thompson, (London: Rolf, 1748), 275-358.

[22] Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons*, (Montreal: Harvest House, 1982), 12-13.

[23] Julia Crick, *Historia Regum Britannie IV: Dissemination and Reception*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1991), 224.

[24] Julia Crick, *Historia Regum Britannie, III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1989), xv-xxii.

[25] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, (London: Macmillan and co., 1897), xxi-xxii.

century under the Stuarts.[26] From this period, criticism regarding the historical accuracy of the Arthurian legend, which had been evident in the work of Holinshed from an early date, became more frequent. William Camden, for example, contested the account as having little authority for learned men.[27] In 1754 however, David Hume, though not convinced that the whole literary tale held any strong historical truth, claimed that the account must still have some factual basis, he argued;

> This is that Arthur so much celebrated in the songs of Thaliessin, and the other British Bards, and whose military achievements have been blended with so many fables, as even to give occasion for entertaining a doubt of his real existence. But poets, though they disfigure the most certain history by their fictions, and use strange liberties with truth where they are the sole historians, as among the Britons, have commonly some foundation for their wildest exaggerations.[28]

Despite widespread criticism, the Arthurian tale maintained its popularity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a pseudo-historical literary tale. It greatly influenced the works of nineteenth century poets, such William Morris and Algernon Swinburne.[29]

For historians during the nineteenth century, the source material upon which the Arthurian account is based could not withstand their new objective source analysis. This raised questions, not concerning the factual basis of the account itself, but rather, whether the account was an indication of continued Romano-British culture and population. Charles Beard for example noted in 1906 that 'there has appeared an opposing view that the bulk of the English population is Celtic, and that the Romano-Celtic institutions persisted in spite of

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[26] Elisabeth Brewer and Beverly Taylor, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1800*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 34-35.

[27] William Camden, *Britannia: Or a Topographical Description of Great Britain and Irelands, together with the Adjacent Islands*, vol. I, Second Edition, Trans. Edmund Gibson, (London: Mary Matthews, 1722), 4-5.

[28] David Hume, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the revolution of 1688*, vol. I, (London: T. Allman, 1839), 29-30.

[29] Brewer and Taylor, *King Arthur*, 129.

the Anglo-Saxon conquest.'[30] Although Beard went on to note that 'This controversy had not led to any very definite results', claiming that 'It might as well be admitted that we can never know the numerical proportion of Celts and Teutons in the English nation for there are no data on which to base a conclusion', the theory has obtained a following during the nineteenth century.[31] Despite the persistent public admiration of the Arthurian Legend into the twentieth century, by the nineteenth century the tale had been superseded by an opposing myth of national origin.

The second myth of national origin emphasises the superiority of the Teutonic heritage of the English. The beginnings of the belief in Germanic superiority are found in the sixteenth century with the rise of interest in Anglo-Saxon institutions.[32] During the English Reformation, Henry VIII wished to dispel unwarranted papal claims of imperial authority and remove the Popes jurisdiction within the English Church.[33] In his book entitled *The Image of Both Churches* first published in 1547, John Bale stresses that the true origins of the English Church, which most truly embodied the spirit of Christ, were to be found in the foundations laid by Joseph of Arimathea, and brought to England by the Anglo-Saxons prior to the papal mission of St. Augustine.[34] This revelation compelled the English to revise their past, diminishing their Romano-British heritage and its association with the Pope, and instead asserting their heritage of pure Anglo-Saxon religious practices.[35] During the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century this interest in Germanic religious practices became

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[30] Charles Beard, *An Introduction to the English Historians*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921) 2.

[31] Beard, *English Historians*, 2.; Lloyd Laing and Jennifer Laing, *Celtic Britain and Ireland AD200-800: The Myth of the Dark Ages*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 15.

[32] Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976), 387.

[33] MacDougall, *Racial Myth,* 31-32.

[34] John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches: After the most wonderful and heavenly Revelation of Saint John the Evangelist*, (London: Thomas East, 1570), 833.

[35] MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, 35.

subordinate to a consideration of their political and legal institutions.[36] Tension between the monarchy and parliament during the reign of King James I saw the development of an association between antiquarians and the parliamentary opposition, who shared an interest in the Saxon origins of parliament and the continuity of English customs and laws.[37] They emphasised the antiquity of parliament, suggesting that its origins preceded and were superior to that of kings; viewing their Anglo-Saxon ancestors as a freedom-loving race who established representative institutions and a rudimentary democracy.[38] This Germanist approach has a foundation in the primary written documents, which, though they do not conceal the rudeness or brutality of the Germanic tribes, were utilised as an example of the individual independence and political liberty of the Anglo-Saxons.[39] This interest is also evident in the historical accounts written at the time. John Speed in his *History of Great Britaine* from 1614, for example, extolled the virtuous free governance of the Saxons;

> For the general government of their Countrie they ordained twelve
> Noblemen chosen from among others, for their worthiness and sufficiency :
> These in the time of peace rode their several circuits to see justice and
> customs observed, and they often of course at appointed times met together
> to consult and give order in public affairs and ever in time of warre one of
> these twelve was chosen to be King, and so to remain so long only as the
> warres lasted; and that being ended, his name and dignitie of King also
> ceased, becoming again as before.[40]

These inquires during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed for the development of a well-defined origin myth, which emphasised Anglo-Saxon ancestry, to be available to subsequent generations.

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[36] Horsman, "Racial Anglo-Saxonism", 388

[37] MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, 54-55.

[38] Ibid., 56.

[39] Ibid., 91-92.

[40] John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine under the Conquests of the Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans*, (London: John Beale, 1623), 204.

During the nineteenth century, the preoccupation with the Teutonic origins of the English

people continued, and developed into a discussion of racial superiority. An interest in

national identity, separateness, and uniqueness came to dominate European thought from the

latter eighteenth century, leading many to consider that race was a principal determinant of

personal character and social progress.[41] For the English, the racial superiority of their Anglo-

Saxon ancestors found a strong foundation in the ancient writings of Tacitus, who claimed:

'For my own part, I agree with those who think that the tribes of Germany are free from all

taint of intermarriages with foreign nations, and that they appear as distinct, unmixed race,

like none but themselves.' [42] This investment in the racial aspect of the Germanic origins of

the Anglo-Saxons is apparent in Jacob Abbott's *King Alfred of England: Makers of History,*

in which he notes that it was 'the mental and physical superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race

giving them with very few exceptions, everywhere and always the victory.'[43] This

preconception of the racial dominance of the Germanic peoples manifested itself in the

historiography of the latter nineteenth century as a theory of violent Anglo-Saxon migration

and racial swamping which effectively destroyed the native Britons.[44] This concept is

emphasised in a lecture by Edward Freeman who argued that:

> there is every reason to believe that the Celtic inhabitants of those parts of
> Britain which had become English at the end of the sixth century had been
> as nearly extirpated as a nation can be … we may feel sure that death,
> emigration, or personal slavery were the only alternatives which the
> vanquished found at the hands of our fathers.[45]

Although this theory was built largely on a preconception of ethnic origins, historians could

justify such claims through their newly established objective source analysis of the available

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[41] Horsman, "Racial Anglo-Saxonism", 395; MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, 89.

[42] Tacitus, "Concerning the Origin and Situation of the Germanics," in *The Agricola and Germany of Tacitus, and the Dialogue on Oratory,* Trans. Alfred John Church, (Lonson: Macmillan and co., 1885), 89.

[43] Jacob Abbott, *King Alfred of England: Makers of History*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1849), 52.

[44] Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?", *The English Historical Review*, 462 (2000), 518-520.

[45] Edward Freeman, "Teutonic Conquest in Gaul and Britain", *Four Oxford Lectures 1887: Fifty Years of European History Teutonic Conquest in Gaul and Britain*, (London: MacMillan and co., 1888), 74.

primary sources; thus, developing legitimacy for this theory that the Arthurian account could not obtain. The closest contemporary source, Gildas, for example, certainly suggests that such a population change as this occurred.[46] Although during the early twentieth century the emphasis on the theme of England's racial purity lost favour, particularly after World War One, the subsequent theory of cultural swamping has had a lasting effect on the historiographical discussion regarding the population levels of both the Anglo-Saxon incomers and the native Britons throughout the twentieth century.[47]

The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the use of a second form of source material, archaeology, which during the twentieth century would play a major role in the discourse on fifth and sixth century Britain. British Archaeology developed largely out of the established antiquarian movement during the mid-nineteenth century.[48] A rediscovered interest in classical antiquity during the sixteenth century had encouraged antiquarian interest in Romano-British ruins, such as Verulamium, Fishbourne Palace and London.[49] However, Philippa Levine argues antiquarianism remained largely of amateur status; she notes that 'many enthusiasts began work with much energy but little concrete knowledge of the subject.'[50] Reverend Bryan Faussett, for example, carried out excavations of over seven hundred graves between 1757 and 1777, during which time he hurriedly unearthed twenty-eight graves in a single day in order to avoid the commotion of spectators.[51] This haste resulted in the perfunctory recording of data, which became typical of excavations during this period. Furthermore, C. Arnold has notes that the preoccupation with cemeteries and grave

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[46] Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, Translated by J. A. Giles, (London: Dodo Press, 2010), II.25.

[47] MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, 120-121.

[48] Levine, *Amateur and the Professional*, 13.

[49] Jane-Rives Williams, "Historical Perceptions of post-Roman Britain: A Study", (MA Thesis: University of Louisville, 2001), 62.

[50] Levine, *Amateur and the Professional*, 23.

[51] C. J. Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 3.

goods up until the end of the nineteenth century has been a source of distortion of our understanding of the post-Roman period, as it has resulted in disregard for other forms of archaeological data. An issue which he claims has remained almost until the present day.[52] Although antiquarianism was extremely popular during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the undisciplined nature of the endeavour meant it could not be incorporated within the growing professionalization of historical studies. Lingard, for example, utilised only written sources for his new method of objective source analysis, despite being Vice President of the British Archaeological Association throughout the 1840s.[53]

Jane-Rives Williams asserts that 'The Victorian interest in using the past to develop a national legacy fitting Britain's position in the world' not only helped historical narratives to develop but also the field of archaeology to flourish.[54] During the latter part of the nineteenth century archaeology emerged as an autonomous practice, independent of its associations with antiquarianism, and consisting of skilled men with established communal standards of practice.[55] General Pitt Rivers, for example, pioneered excavation techniques through an understanding of the need to record the context of artefacts as well as the characteristics of the object itself.[56] This development led some historians to incorporate the newly available archaeological into their historical accounts, although written accounts remained the primary source material. For instance, John Green noted:

> I have largely availed myself of some resources which have been hitherto, I think, unduly neglected. Archaeological researches on the sites of villas and towns, or along the line of road or dyke, often furnish us with evidence even more trustworthy than that of written chronicle.[57]

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[52] Arnold, *An Archaeology*, 5.

[53] Levine, *Amateur and the Professional*, 29.

[54] Williams, "Historical Perceptions", 69.

[55] Levine, *Amateur and the Professional*, 35.

[56] Andrew Hayes, *Archaeology of the British Isles*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 14.

[57] John Richard Green, *The Making of England*, vol. I, Fourth Edition, (London: Macmillan and co., 1900), vii.

New Scientific techniques continued to improve excavation methods; techniques such as metal detectors, aerial photography and remote sensing.[58] Despite these improvements however, many historians still refused to incorporate archaeological data into their historical accounts even up until the first decades of the twentieth century. Sir Frank Stenton, for example, in his *Anglo-Saxon England*, places a distinct emphasis on a scholarly interpretation of the written sources, to the virtual exclusion of new archaeological material.[59] What little archaeological evidence Stenton does include, such as coin distribution, he labels as merely 'Sources of Incidental Information', and finds their information unreliable and quickly outdated.[60] A major archaeological discovery in 1938, however, changed many historians' perception of archaeological finds.

Excavations at Sutton Hoo in 1938 yielded an impressive Anglo-Saxon ship burial, which contained numerous artefacts of opulent wealth and lavish design.[61] Such a find had a major effect on the perception of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Although interest in the Germanic ethnic origins of the English had dwindled following World War I, the magnificence of the Anglo-Saxon artistry found at Sutton Hoo reinvigorated interest in Germanic cultural distinction. Previously, the Germanic peoples had been labelled an illiterate barbaric society, but the high quality artefacts found at Sutton Hoo stimulated a revision of this view.[62] It was hoped by many historians that the need for an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of the diverse materials found at Sutton Hoo, (which included archaeologists, art historians, economic historians, numismatics, literary studies, and folklore specialists), would also

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[58] Hayes, *Archaeology*, 16.

[59] Myres, *The English Settlements*, xix.

[60] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Third Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 708, I.

[61] Calvin Kendall and Peter Wells, eds., *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), ix.

[62] Angela Care Evens, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1994), 9.

stimulate the bridging between historians and archaeologists.[63] The event of World War II, however, meant that objects had to be removed and placed into storage and the excavation filled in, which hindered any immediate analysis of the data. Although evaluation and restoration of the ship burial was not resumed until 1947, interest in archaeological data by historians had already begun. Trelawney Reed, for example, laments the distinction between archaeology and history 'which assumes the almost menacing proportions of a cult, of divorcing Dark Age archaeology from Dark Age history. Why do our archaeologists consistently turn a deaf ear to history, our historians a blind eye to archaeology?'[64] Regrettably however, Reed's own analysis, while utilising archaeological evidence to supplement the written records, reaches conclusions typical of historians of the mid-twentieth century; that grave goods determined the individual's ethnic background, and therefore the ethnic background of the surrounding area.[65]

Although the publication of analytical results did not occur until 1975, by the time the Sutton Hoo analysis resumed in 1947, an interdisciplinary approach to examining fifth and sixth century Britain had already become more widespread.[66] George Sayles, for example, does not attempt to utilise archaeological data as a supplement to the written accounts as Reed had, but rather, to combine the two together successfully, claiming that 'sometimes, as in the case of the continental homes of the invaders, archaeology is the only adequate evidence we now

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[63] Kendall and Wells, *Voyage to the Other World*, ix.

[64] Trelawney Reed, *The Battle for Britain in the Fifth Century: An Essay in Dark Age History*, (London: Methuen and co., 1944), 37.

[65] Reed, *The Battle for Britain*, 12-15.

[66] James Campbell, "The Impact of the Sutton-Hoo Discovery on the Study of Anglo-Saxon History", in *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, Calvin Kendall and Peter Wells, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), 80.

possess. Frequently it provides a brilliant vindication of the otherwise unsupported statements in our literary texts.'[67]

During the 1980s archaeological data became abundant but a lack of comprehensive national coordination and no central database restricted the availability of the data, resulting in the slow release of publications.[68] Williams claims that the 'Distribution and analysis of information became more of a problem than lack of data.'[69] Despite these limitations, however, the general acceptance by historians of archaeological data, led many scholars to utilise what available archaeological material they did have to validate prior beliefs. Historian Bryce Lyon notes that 'quantitatively there is vigorous research activity but much of it flows down the same old river-beds and displays a propensity to repeat and substantiate ideas long held.'[70] Historians, such Geoffrey Ashe and Leslie Alcock, for example, searched for archaeological evidence of King Arthur's existence, claiming the South Cadbury hill fort as the location of Arthur's Camelot.[71] Although such accounts regarding the existence of the man Arthur gained very little authority in historical discussions, the questions which resulted from the legend, that of continued Romano-British culture and population, gained a significant following. In 1973, John Morris wrote *Age of Arthur*, in which he incorporated archaeological evidence, place-name analysis, philology, as well as written records in order to show not only his interest in Arthurian lore, but also a continuation of Romano-British culture and population; 'The end of Roman Britain was immediately followed by the age of

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[67] George Sayles, The *Medieval Foundations of England*, Second Edition, (London: Methuen, 1966), 9.

[68] Williams, "Historical Perceptions", 93.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Bryce Lyon, "From Hengist and Horsa to Edward of Caernarvon: Recent Writing on English History," *in Changing Views on British History Essays on Historical Writing Since 1939*, Elizabeth Furber, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 57.

[71] Christopher Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons AD 400-600*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 179-180; Geoffrey Ashe et al., *The Quest for Arthurs Britain*, (St. Albans: Paladin, 1971), 147.

Arthur. It includes his own lifetime, and the rule of his successors until the English conquest, half a century after his death.'[72] The conflict between this theory of continued Romano-British culture and population and the Germanist theory of cultural swamping came to dominate historical discussions during the second half of the twentieth century. This is particularly evident in the mid-twentieth century debates regarding the number of native Romano-British and the number of Germanic settlers.

Opinion regarding the number of native Romano-British and the number of Germanic settlers has fluctuated significantly. Bryan Ward-Perkins notes that these 'widely different interpretations are possible because at the moment neither the archaeology nor the textual evidence can show how many Anglo-Saxons crossed the water to Britain, and what proportion of the population they constituted.'[73] Martin Millett, in his book *The Romanization of Britain,* draws attention to the issue concerning estimating the population size of Roman Britain and shows that past scholarship has estimated a range from half a million to six million peoples.[74] He states that this large variation in estimation is due to the methods for estimation having not been uniform, while his own 'systematic approach', which considers only what he believes to be reliable sources, provides an estimate of 3.7 million peoples.[75] Despite this attempt at estimating the population of Roman Britain, the approach does not take into account the cumulative effect of the military withdrawal or Germanic migrations at the beginning of the fifth century.

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[72] John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: History of the British Isles from 350 to 650*, (London: Pheonix Press, 2001), 508.

[73] Ward-Perkins, "Why did the Anglo-Saxons", 520.

[74] Martin Millett, *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 181-182.

[75] Millett, *The Romanization of Britain*, 181, 185.

In similar fashion to the population of native British, the number of Germanic incomers is fervently debated. The nineteenth century Germanist claims of cultural swamping by a large population of Germanic invaders continued into the latter twentieth century, championed by such scholars as Stenton who argue that the linguistic evidence 'points to English colonization on a scale which can have left little room for British survival'.[76] This view has been challenged by such historians as Peter Heather whose analysis of the population of invading Germanic peoples on the continent provide very low figures, only around 100,000 Germanic peoples.[77] Williams claims that this inability to reach a consensus is due to historians working within too narrow individualised frameworks which does not allow for the creation of a broader understanding of developments throughout Britain. She notes that 'Difficulties arise in that contemporary archaeologists work independently producing individualized results without reference to a broader cultural perspective and thus have no way to tie new evidence together into a comprehensive whole.'[78]

A preoccupation with two myths of national origin can be seen to have influenced how historians have interpreted both the written and archaeological sources during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time the two myths came to represent two contradictory explanations regarding the events in fifth and sixth century Britain. The tale of King Arthur came to represents the continuation of Romano-British culture and population, while the myth of British Teutonic heritage came to represent Germanic cultural domination. These myths provided historians with two frameworks for the events of fifth and sixth century Britain; while the limited nature of the evidence allowed historians to validly build upon these frameworks and advocate for either of these theories. One of the main ways in which

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[76] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Third Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 18.

[77] Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans 332-489*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 237.

[78] Williams, "Historical Perspectives", 96.

historians are able to utilise source material to produce these results, is through the extrapolation of archaeological data found within certain locals to represent the whole of Britain. This tendency stems from a Nationalist propensity displayed by historians of Britain since the twelfth century, which seeks to establish a unified narrative for the whole of the Island. This propensity can be identified as one of the leading causes for the inability of historians to reach a consensus concerning the events of fifth and sixth century Britain. It is hoped that by breaking down this National narrative to consider Britain in respect of smaller regional areas, as would have been more familiar to fifth and sixth century inhabitants, then some form of consensus between historians may be possible in the future. The case study in the following chapter, which focuses on the economy of East Anglia during the two centuries following the withdrawal of the Roman Army, is an example of how a regional study can produce results in opposition to the grand National narratives, but which arguable offerings a more accurate reflection of activity in this region during the fifth and sixth centuries.

Case Study: The Economy in East Anglia

Norman Pounds claims that 'Commerce during the centuries following the end of the Western Empire has been the subject of a more strenuous controversy than any other aspect of the period.'[79] This controversy revolves around a theory proposed by Henri Pirenne. Pirenne refuted all previous scholarship on the fifth and sixth century Western European economy, by claiming that the Roman mercantile economy continued throughout the Germanic invasions until the advent of Islam.[80] Pirenne's work stimulated a myriad of investigations and debates regarding the post-Roman economic situation throughout Europe. This chapter intends to discuss Pirenne's theory and confront one aspect of his thesis which has received little serious attention by historians: its disregard for the economic situation in Britain. Specifically it is the intention to provide a case study which examines economic activity in East Anglia as a means of showing that the region continued to show some level of commercial activity both locally and further abroad during the fifth and sixth centuries.

Trade and economic conditions are rarely an area of focus in medieval texts, and are often only mentioned incidentally through their association with other matters. For post-Roman Britain, whose written sources are already so limited, the quantity of written material which

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[79] N. J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, 69.

[80] Alfred F. Havighurst, *The Pirenne Thesis: Analysis, Criticism and Revision*, (Boston: Heath, 1958), ix.

discusses commercial matters is scarcely inadequate for the construction of an accurate understanding of the post-Roman economic condition. In light of this, the primary source material which has been utilised to discuss the commercial activity of East Anglia is largely archaeological evidence. Unfortunately, space constraints limit the ability of this study to provide an exhaustive examination of all aspects of commercial activity in East Anglia during the fifth and sixth centuries. Of particular regret is the forgoing of any discussion on any continued urban activity throughout the region, which is often associated with the perpetuation of economic activity. Instead, the study will focus on three main areas of commercial activity: potter production; coin circulation; and the importation of exotica.

Alfred Havighurst claims that up to the nineteenth century historians viewed the past as being divided into three distinct periods: Ancient, Medieval and Modern. This categorisation remained until Henri Pirenne 'upset the tranquillity of the historian's world', by confronting these periodisations in order to examine the relationship between the ancient Roman world and the Medieval world of first Europe.[81] Traditionally, the cultural and economic institutions of the Roman Empire are believed to have rapidly disintegrated, and then disappeared, in Western Europe after Roman authority ended during the fifth century. For instance, Cecil Delisle Burns contends that in 400 the system of production and distribution of the Roman Empire was dependent on the organisation of the major cities (Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople and Carthage) whose populations depended upon the food, clothing, raw materials, and exotica which was sourced from all corners of the Empire. By 600, she believes that this system had completely disappeared; the cities and towns were in ruins and trade via both land and sea had completely ceased, leaving Western Europe an essentially

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[81] Havighurst, *The Pirenne Thesis*, ix.

agricultural economy with limited local trade.[82] However, in 1895 Pirenne began developing a theory, later labelled the Pirenne Thesis, which would drastically alter this established view of Western Europe.[83]

The foundational investigation of Pirenne's thesis is a survey of the economic development of Europe from the fifth century. Pirenne claims that it would be a 'decided mistake to imagine that the arrival of the Germanic tribes had as a result the substitution of a purely agricultural economy and a general stagnation in trade for urban life and commercial activity.'[84] His study focuses on two main areas of interest; the survival of cities, claiming that the 'supposed dislike of the barbarians for towns is an admitted fable to which reality has given the lie'; and also on the commercial activity between these towns, which is seen to be orientated towards the Mediterranean basin.[85] Pirenne concluded that the Roman World in the West, economically, culturally and even in some sense politically, continued throughout the German invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries.[86]

During his investigations into the economic activity of the North Sea, Pirenne claims that maritime and commercial activity is evident on a greater scale than anywhere else on the continent[87]. He notes in particular that the ports of 'Quentovic and Duurstede, on the shores of the North Sea, was sustained by the export traffic from far-off Marseilles.'[88] Despite these inquiries into the Northern reaches of Europe, Pirenne's thesis does not extend to include

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[82] Cecil Delisle Burns, *The First Europe: A Study of the Establishment of Medieval Christendom, A.D. 400-800*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947), 28-29.

[83] Havighurst, *The Pirenne Thesis*, ix.

[84] Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, Trans. Frank D. Halsey, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), 11.

[85] Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, 11.

[86] Alfred F. Havighurst, *The Pirenne Thesis: Analysis, Criticism and Revision*, (Boston: Heath, 1958), ix.

[87] Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, Trans. Ivy Clegg, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), 21.

[88] Pirenne, *Economic and Social*, 21; Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, 18.

Britain. He stipulates that 'There was no profound transformation [throughout Western Europe] except in Britain. There the Emperor and the civilization of the Empire had disappeared. Nothing remained of the old tradition … with all the consequences which this entails in law, morality and the economy.'[89] Although Pirenne's thesis has prompted significant discussion, subsequent scholars examining this period from the same 'international standpoint' have also continued to neglect Britain on the grounds that its history is unique from the rest of Europe.[90] H. Moss, for example, echoes Pirenne's exclusion of Britain, claiming that 'Britain is also, at this time, removed from the main course of western European history, and its special problems will not be entered upon here.'[91] However, neither Pirenne nor Moss provide any evidence to support these allegations regarding Britain, and their claims must therefore be considered to be based on preconceived assumptions.

This dismissal of any significant economic activity in Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries is not, however, unique to historians who are concerned with Europe-wide changes. Many historians examining Britain specifically likewise view the Island's economy during this period as having almost completely disappeared. Neil Faulkner for example, claims that one of the defining features of the Roman Empire was its specific economic structure:

> The Roman Empire constituted a 'Military supply' economy, in which state tax collection and arms expenditure, oiled by state supply of coin (the 'tax-pay cycle'), pump-primed the entire economy. This created a powerful two-tiered economy. A primary economy of local subsistence production continued, but it was overlain by a secondary economy of production,

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[89] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 140-141.

[90] Pirenne, *Economic and Social History,* xi.

[91] H. St. L. B. Moss, "Revisions in Economic History: VI. The Economic Consequences of the Barbarian Invasions," *The Economic History Review* 7, (1937): 210.

exchange and distribution through regional, provincial and imperial marketing networks.[92]

Faulkner's study goes on to provide a quantitative analysis of fifteen hundred buildings at seventeen urban sites; seventy-eight random country villas; and a wide range of known coin deposits, which are all dispersed throughout Britain. Through his analysis of this data Faulkner concludes that:

> after A.D. 400, Britain ceased to be part of the Roman 'world system', such that the Roman dynamic of centralized state control and military imperialism, of an economy geared to military supply, and of a specific way of exploiting land and labour, no longer operated on the island.[93]

In a similar fashion, Timothy Potter and Catherine Johns give insights into the British market economy through a quantitative investigation of British pottery, revealing that after 410 all major production ceased and did not resume again until the twelfth century.[94] However, this tendency in the latter twentieth century to quantify and extrapolate data across all of Britain, or as Potter and Johns put it 'setting a site within the context of its broader landscape', has the potential to obscure and overlook minor regional variations which may not conform to these wider trends.[95]

The inclination of historians to provide a narrative which discusses Britain as a single entity conforms to the modern nation-building tendencies discussed in the previous chapter. Even historians who advocate for the continuation of Romano-British culture into the fifth and sixth centuries, whose theory is threatened by such conclusions as these, do not dispute the methods being utilised, but rather claim that the issue lies in the absence of archaeological

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[92] Neil Faulkner, "The Debate about the End: A Review of Evidence and Methods", *Archaeological Journal* 159 (2002): 64.

[93] Faulkner, "The Debate about the End", 74.

[94] Timothy Potter and Catherine Johns, *Roman Britain*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 9.

[95] Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 9.

traces of the limited material culture of the Britons.[96] It is suggest that such a method has allowed for an unrealistically broad interpretation which concurs with the superficial assumptions made by historians viewing Western Europe from an international standpoint.

During Later Roman occupation, from around 314, the East Anglian region was a part of the Roman province *Britannia Caesarensis,* which had its capital at Londinium.[97] Of particular significance in the region was a network of three coastal forts: Brandunum (Brancaster), Burgh Castle and Walton Castle. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a late-Roman document detailing the Empire's military and administrative organisation, names the coastal forts the *Litus Saxonicum* (Saxon shore), suggesting that their construction was for defence against invading Saxons.[98] Recently, however, a study by John Cotterill has contested this assumption. Cotterill shows that the forts were constructed between c. 275-285, while the *Litus Saxonicum* command may not have come into effect until 390 at the earliest.[99] During the interim, Cotterill demonstrates that coastal forts served 'two major functions, the supply of stores and materials and the transportation of troops'.[100] The forts therefore acted as fortified ports for commercial activity. This is particularly evident in the bone assemblages found at Burgh Castle and Brancaster. Large numbers of animals were butchered and salted on site, ready for transportation; while the antler fragments suggest that tools were also manufactured for trade there.[101] During Roman occupation, therefore, the East Anglian region can be seen to have been a major centre of commercial activity.

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[96] James Campbell, "The Lost Centuries: 400-600", in *The Anglo-Saxons*, James Campbell et al., (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 27.

[97] Stephen Johnson, *Later Roman Britain*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), 5.

[98] William Fairly ed., *Extracts from the Notitia Dignitatum*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 21.

[99] John Cotterill, "Saxon Raiding and the role of the Late Roman Coastal Forts of Britain," *Britannia* 24 (1993): 232-235.

[100] Cotterill, "Saxon Raiding," 236.

[101] Stephen Johnson, *East Anglian Archaeology: Burgh Castle, Excavations by Charles Green 1958-61*, (Norfolk: Norfolk Archaeological Unit, 1983), 108-11.

As Potter and Johns have shown, diminishing pottery production during the fifth and sixth centuries is often cited as evidence for the collapse of the entire British economy. East Anglian pottery production also shows evidence of decline during the fifth century. A reduction in the number of pottery production sites throughout East Anglia suggests that the high level of manufacturing known during the Roman occupation was not continued on the same scale during the fifth century.[102] This reduction in pottery production however, is not unique to the fifth century. Cotterill shows that during the mid-third century a reorganisation and reduction of garrisons on the northern frontier resulted in a decline in imports from the east coast supply route, particularly of ceramics.[103] Ken Dark argues that this evident decline in pottery manufacturing in the fifth century should not be taken to necessarily constitute a decline in commerce more generally. He notes that such a decline could be representative of changing tastes, as one particular producer or product gained notable favour; or as interests in other materials, such as glass, leather or metal increased.[104]

While the scale of pottery production declined during the fifth century, it did not completely disappear, but appears to have become more localised within the region. Two groups of stamped pottery, the Sancton-Baston group, and the Illington-Lackford group, are distributed in notable patterns around areas in which cremation is the prevalent burial rite.[105] The Illington-Lackford group in particular shows interesting distribution patterns. This type of pottery is found in fifteen per cent of settlements and in four per cent of cemeteries in East Anglia.[106] This suggests that it was manufactured for both domestic and funerary use. Two

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[102] Paul Tyres, *Roman Pottery in Britain*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1996), 78.

[103] Cotterill, "Saxon Raiding," 236.

[104] Ken Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2002), 54.

[105] Arnold, *An Archaeology*, 76-79.

[106] Ibid, 78-79.

types of clay are used to construct the Illington-Lackford pottery, one sandy and the other silty. While the silty pots are retained mostly in the Illington region, the sandy pots are more frequently distributed into the neighbouring regions.[107] This suggests that a distinction was made between which pots were for personal use and which were to be traded. Dark notes that the manufacturing site of the Illington-Lackford pottery was likely in West-Stow where unused clay surrounded by a ditch was found along with antler stamps bearing comparable motifs.[108] Thus it is evident that not all commercial pottery production sites closed down at beginning of the fifth century. A kiln site at Harrold, for example, which produced notable shell tempered ware, was determined to have continued production well into the fifth century, although the exact date of the end of production was not able to be ascertained.[109]

The end of the monetary economy is often seen as a major contributing factor in the breakdown of the British economy. After the evacuation of the Roman Army in 410, the importation of newly minted imperial coin into Britain ceased. This is particularly evident in the excavations of the fort sites, which reveal neither newly minted coins, nor occupation during the second quarter of the fifth century.[110] The halt in the importation of new coins, however, does not necessarily indicate the discontinuance of a monetary system. It is possible that already circulating coinage may have accompanied the last new Roman coins entering into Britain. In fact, R. Collingwood and John Myres suggest that large amounts of old coinage were indeed shipped into East Anglia.[111] There is also a prospect that old coinage continued to be circulated much later than their issue dates. The 'Patching Coin Hoard',

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[107] Arnold, *An Archaeology*, 79.

[108] Dark, *Britain and the End*, 88.

[109] A. Brown, "A Romano-British Shell-Gritted Pottery Manufacturing Site at Harrold, Bedfordshire", *Bedfordshire Archaeology* 21 (1994): 17-107.

[110] Ken Dark, "A Sub-roman Defence of Hadrians Wall", *Britannia* 23 (1992): 111.

[111] R. G. Collingwood and John Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 300.

which is the latest coin hoard of this period found in Britain dating from after 461, contains

coins of Constantius II and Constans (which date from as early as 337), and also Continental

Visigothic coins of Marjorian and Libius Severus (which date from 460-461).[112] This hoard

suggests not only that the coinage is likely to have continued in circulation for a long time

after its issue dates, but also that some form of contact with the continent occurred during the

latter half of the fifth century. Another major coin hoard found in East Anglia is that of the

'Hoxne Treasure'. It contains 14,780 coins which were all minted in the fifty year period

between 358 and 408. At least eighty per cent of the silver *siliquae* have been clipped, a

practice against imperial law, which suggests that it occurred after the breakdown of Roman

authority in Britain.[113] Claims that the circulation of coins stopped during the fifth century are

often based on the notion that coins are absent from fifth and sixth century graves. However,

in response Dark counters that coins have in fact been discovered in over fourteen different

cemeteries throughout East Anglia, although he admits that it is unclear whether these derive

from coin circulation or from scavenging.[114]

The exotica found within East Anglia provides strong evidence for continued continental

trade throughout the fifth and sixth century. Dark catalogues some of the exotica found in

significant numbers throughout the East Anglian region including; 'amethyst and amber

beads, ivory rings, cowrie shells, crystal balls and beads, and Frankish pottery and glass

vessels'.[115] He also notes that 'Byzantine copper alloy bowls ('Coptic Bowls') were also

imported, and although there was no direct trade with Byzantine world, more than 50

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[112] Sally White, "The Patching Hoard", *Medieval Archaeology* 42 (1998): 90-91.

[113] Roger Bland and Catherine Johns, *The Hoxne Treasure: An Illustrated Introduction,* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 13-18.

[114] Ken Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800,* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 214-215.

[115] Dark, *Britain and the End*, 95.

Byzantine coins reached eastern Britain.'[116] The discovery at Sutton Hoo in particular

produced an abundance of rich material, which is believed to indicate 'conspicuous

consumption by a powerful lord.'[117] J. Huggett believes that 'the quality and unique nature of

some of the contents of Sutton Hoo mound I may represent gift exchange between the East

Anglian and Frankish leaders', suggesting some form of long-distance exchange with the

continent.

Outside of the major concentrated finds, like that of Sutton Hoo, distribution patterns of

scattered objects become evident. Amethyst beads, glass-ware, crystal balls, wheel-thrown

pots, Coptic bowls and gold coins are found in their greatest concentration in Kent, and show

a scattered distribution northward with smaller clustered sites evident in East Anglia.[118] Such

a pattern implies that the artefacts were imported into Kent and then distributed northward.

However, Ivory rings and amber beads reveal a different pattern. A study by Huggett reveals

that certain artefacts found primarily in Kent can be distinguished from those found in East

Anglia by examination of the routes by which they entered Britain. Huggett shows that

wheel-thrown pottery which originated in Northern France is found mostly in Kent, while

other pottery originating from Rhineland kilns is more abundant in East Anglia. This suggests

that two mutually exclusive trade routes developed; artefacts from northern France entered

Britain through Kent, while objects originating from the Rhineland entered via East

Anglia.[119] The distribution pattern of ivory rings in particular is an excellent example of this

pattern. John Myres and Barbara Green show that continental ivory is found in its greatest

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[116] Dark, *Britain and the End*, 95.

[117] Edward Schoenfeld and Jana Schulman, "Sutton Hoo: An Economic Assessment", in *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, Calvin Kendall and Peter Wells, ed., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), 19.

[118] S. E. Rigold, "The Sutton Hoo Coins in the Light of the Contemporary Background of Coinage in England", in *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial,* R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford ed., *vol. 1,* (London, British Museum Publications, 1975), 653-677; J. W. Huggett "Imported Grave Goods and the Early Anglo-Saxon Economy", *Medieval Archaeology* 32, (1988): 76.

[119] Huggett "Imported Grave Goods", 91.

concentration in the Rhineland, and appear to have entered Britain through East Anglia, as suggested by the heavy concentration of ivory rings at Lackford and Illington.[120] The presence of these trade routes into East Anglia, provides evidence of continued long-distance trade with the continent, well into the fifth and sixth centuries.

Alternative theories regarding the possible exchange methods which brought the materials into Britain and distributed them throughout different regions have been advanced. Huggett, for example, considers the possibility of 'barter, gift exchange, marriage, warfare, alliance, diplomatic gifts, tribute, redistribution, peripatetic traders, prestige goods exchange, regularized long distance trade and market exchange' as different possible methods of exchange.[121] It is not inconceivable that different objects exchanged hands in a variety of different ways at different times. However, a belief that gift exchange and tribute were a method by which material exchanged hands does not necessitate the exclusion of local and long-distance trade networks. Of particular significance are a number of weights and balances found in several sixth century cemeteries around East Anglia, which suggest that traders or merchants were in operation.[122]

The Pirenne thesis has stimulated much discussion and debate regarding the economic situation in Western Europe during the fifth and sixth centuries. His theory chooses to exclude any discussion of economic activity in Britain during this period, based on the assumption that nothing of the Roman economic system remained in Britian. This assumption has received little serious critique by subsequent scholars, who instead often reinforce this belief. A case study into the economic activities of East Anglia, however, suggests otherwise.

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[120] John Myres and Barbara Green, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall, Norfolk,* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1973), 101.

[121] Huggett "Imported Grave Goods", 89.

[122] Dark, *Britain and the End*, 96.

Large-scale pottery manufacturing may have ceased during the fifth century, but localised pottery production continued, and some ceramic importation from the continent also occurred. East Anglian archaeology also suggests that coin circulation may have continued at least until the second half of the fifth century, if not longer. The clipping of coins also indicates the continued value of coins after the Roman evacuation, suggesting the possibility of a sustained monetary system. Lastly, the importation of exotica via a direct trade route into East Anglia is the strongest indication of continued long-distance trade.

Conclusion

Fifth and sixth century Britain is a 'Dark Age' in terms of the quantity of available source material for the period. The period has received vast attention by historians, but little consensus has been reached between them. Despite nineteenth century historians' desire for a method of objective source analysis, a preoccupation with two myths of origin can be seen to have influenced how subsequent historians have interpreted the sources. Beginning in the twelfth century, the origin myth of King Arthur developed from a popular literary tale which provided the Norman conquerors with a commanding historical ancestor, into a theory of continued Romano-British culture and population by the late nineteenth century. The origin myth of Teutonic heritage developed from a sixteenth century emphasis on the superiority of the Germanic religious and political institutions, into an interest in the unique and superior nature of the British national character during the eighteenth century. These myths of origin greatly affected the historiography during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as historians chose to emphasis and select evidence which supported one of the two national origin myths.

The development of archaeology from the antiquarian movement during the nineteenth century had the potential to provide historians with new avenues of primary source material. However, an initial scepticism of antiquarianism's methods of excavation and recording of data, meant historians were hesitant to integrate archaeological evidence within their historical accounts. Historians did not truly begin to accept the potential of archaeology as a source material until after the excavation of Sutton Hoo in 1939. This hesitancy has had a

major impact on the historical accounts of fifth and sixth century Britain as, despite an abundance of archaeological work, a lack of national coordination restricted the availability of archaeological data for historians to utilise. Furthermore, what archaeological evidence has been incorporated into historians' accounts has often been as means of validating preconceived beliefs of national origin. One means, by which this is achieved, is through the extrapolation of archaeological evidence found in isolated areas to represent the whole of Britain. This tendency, which stems from a Nationalist propensity to conceive Britain in its entirety, has obscured any evidence of regional diversity within Britain, and can be seen as a leading cause of Historians' inability to reach a consensus.

This study has suggested that by removing the inclination to construct a National narrative, and to instead consider Britain in respect to smaller regional areas, a more accurate picture of the region in the fifth and sixth centuries is possible. A case study of the economic activity in East Anglia during the fifth and sixth centuries is example of such a regional study. It reveals that, in opposition to the leading theories regarding the economic activity of Western Europe during this period, East Anglia shows evidence of both local and long-distance trade. An examination of pottery production in the region reveals that while large-scale pottery manufacturing ceased at the beginning of the fifth century, localised pottery production and distribution, and continental importation of pottery continued into the sixth century. Coin circulation in the regional also appears to have continued at least until the second half of the fifth century. The importation of exotica through a direct East Anglian trade route with the Rhineland is also a strong indication of continued long-distance trade. It is not therefore the obscurity of the source material which causes fifth and sixth century Britain to be a continual source of disagreement and contention between historians, but rather it is historians'

preoccupation with a desire to provide Britain with a cohesive National narrative to the neglect of smaller regional variations.

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