

## **The End of Roman Britain.**

### **( St Alban and the End of Roman Britain Part VI)**

As we have noted above, if our theory about St Alban is correct it must have some considerable implications for our understanding of the history of post-Roman Britain, especially as regards the question of regional and ethnic consciousness: a sense of identity with the island community as a whole: of 'being British', in fact. Professor Sims-Williams has drawn attention to the rather unique nature of the work of Gildas in its presentation of 'Britannia' not as 'the cardboard personification of classical writers but, next to God' as its 'most important moral agent'. He goes on to say that Gildas 'conveyed to posterity a strong sense of Britain's essential unity' (Sims-Williams 1983: 30). We might suspect that Gildas was not entirely unique in this sense but rather that he is reflecting a common perception of his time - even if this was mainly limited to the 'Romanised' elite to which he belonged. In fact 'subsequent Welsh ideology', with its central concept of 'Ynys Prydein', the 'Island of Britain', which professor Sims-Williams suggests is partly inherited from Gildas, might point to the same conclusion and we might see it (perhaps more feasibly) as an inheritance from the post-Roman period, in general. That period might, in fact, have anticipated the 'unforeseen future', to a degree greater than is often recognised, albeit it was certainly a 'false-start', and the characterisation of it by Gildas as one, actually of failure, catastrophe, and conflict is probably not far off the mark : an independent and successfully united Britain would be a long time in arriving.

But to what extent was the attempt made in this early period ? Our hypothesis must have further implications about the actual course of fifth century British history. These are only, it is true, implications or inferences, and there is a danger of some circularity of argument given some of the assumptions that our argument about Alban has been based on. Nevertheless, given that this is a period we know so little about, it might be justifiable to explore these further. Clearly our theory would suggest that there was some kind of attempt to create a degree of pan-British consciousness, probably in the interests of establishing some degree of pan-British hegemony by a ruling elite at Verulamium. It

might be worth making some kind of attempt to assess all the other indications that there might be, of the same kind of thing : that is, of, above all, an attempt to establish some kind of pan-British central authority. It might be correct to say that this kind of idea has been rather unfashionable since the excesses of the 'Empire of Arthur' type interpretations of the 70s : but on the other hand the extrapolation often made from the archaeological evidence - as indicating the rapid collapse of Roman era industries, the monetary economy, and 'urban life' - of more or less instant and complete political fragmentation is surely rather a crude one, too. Two good theoretical reasons for a retention of, or at least aspiration to restore, some degree of political unity, present themselves straight away: habit, acquired from several centuries of effectively unitary rule, and necessity, of a defensive variety, given the obvious threats to the Britons of the time.

We might start off, though, by reminding ourselves of the intermittent tendency that had already manifested itself for Britain to become an independant political unit, under Clodius Albinus around 200 and in a more permanent way, Carausius and Allectus, around 300. This was merely the expression of geography and temporary divisions amongst the Roman military and administrative elite but nevertheless there might have been some impact on native British consciousness. It is particularly interesting, anyway, that there was a coin to a Carausius II, minted some thirty years after the death of the first Carausius (e.g. Salway: 358). Constantine III was another general in the tradition of Clodius and Carausius whose British rebellion, like that of the former - as well as that of Magnus Maximus only twenty or so years earlier - developed into an ill-fated attempt on the Empire as a whole. But his example may not have been lost on the native Britons who, as we have seen, took things into their own hands and expelled his administration. Their aspirations may have been not too dissimilar to those of certain elements of the Gaulish aristocracy whose "increasingly intimate and hazardous involvment in politics", in their case, brought about their downfall (Matthews 1975: 313-5)..

The question is whether the successful British rebels inherited, or subsequently aspired to, the unitary administration they had displaced. Procopius's mention of British 'tyrants'<sup>1</sup> - in the plural - might as

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1 "However the Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain that remained

easily apply to successive ones as to contemporary and localised ones, but the existence of the latter need not conflict with the existence of a higher tier of authority - or at least an attempt to achieve or impose it - anyway. There are good reasons to think that the Britons did not inherit the Roman system 'intact' (e.g. Salway: 437-442), not least the collapse of the centralised economy, but had that been the case there would be little reason for the resort to religion to inspire a new sense of the identity and unity of Britain, in the way we have hypothesised, anyway. So what evidence do we have of any subsequent attempt to achieve a degree of political unity ?

Our only account of the period, that of Gildas, is a sketchy one from probably about a hundred years later. However, this work, interpreted in the easiest and most straightforward way, surely does suggest that there was some kind of attempt at a centralised British authority. The most natural assumption to make from it, I am arguing in other words, is that Gildas's 'tyrannus' ruled, or exercised some kind of control over, a substantial part - and the most important part - of the old province. There is no suggestion that the focus of Gildas is consistently on a particular region: for one thing he mentions (*De Excidio* 15, 19, 18) both the Northern walls and the Saxon shore forts of the South, but more important, the whole tenor of his work suggests its intended audience was the Britons as a whole and, in harmony with this, that it was about Britain as a whole (cf. Sims Williams 1983: 15-16; Wright 1984, especially 104).

It might be argued that Gildas displays some inevitable regional bias, and it has often been argued that he was writing from a 'Northern' perspective. That he came from the North is in fact what was consistently maintained by later tradition (*Vita Gildae* 1, in H. Williams 1899) and there is the possibility that this goes back to the date of the writing of the Life of St Samson since it is tempting to see the "librario quodam", 'who lived in a remote land in the North' (*Vita Samsonis* 2) as a reference to the author of the famous *liber*, the *De Excidio*. The Vita does seem to refer to at least one other famous sixth century churchman ("Uinniavus"), actually one who corresponded with Gildas (Dumville 1984a; O'Riain 1981: 298-9) about an important controversy of the times which also seems to feature in the Life (see

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from that time on under tyrants", *De Bello Vandalico* I, ii, 38.

Part V note 19). At the same time the Life does not make the significance of either Uinniavus, or the dispute, obvious: this is a work in which the original significance of the stories it tells, does, in many cases, seem to have become obscured and half-forgotten, which might explain why, if this was originally a reference to the author of the *Excidio*, it is not altogether obvious.

The most important internal evidence for Gildas's Northern location is perhaps the fact that Gildas (33.2) implies there was one British king, more powerful than Maelgwyn, who is only :

"cunctis PAENE Britanniae ducibus tam regno... quam status lineamento editiorem"

"higher than ALMOST all the generals of Britain, in your kingdom as in your physique"

Since none of the kings Gildas condemns appears mightier than Maelgwyn then where else could this other king's realm be but in the North (perhaps Rheged or Strathclyde ?) which is strangely ignored by Gildas. And why would Gildas not include this king in his general condemnation : except if he lived under his rule ? (so Thompson 1979). This is certainly not the only explanation of the facts (Sims-Williams 1983b: 3 ff.) but it seems much the simplest. The man who corresponded with "Vennianus auctor" and whose work is virtually the only one to have survived from the Britain of his era, seems most likely to have achieved high rank, or at least considerable prestige, within the British church. Even if his reputation within the church was consequent upon the publication of his work (and perhaps conversion to monasticism ?) he must have been a significant figure, for his long-pondered declaration to have the impact it evidently did. It is much easier to envisage such a figure, leading such a career, in a locality where he was not in a state of open conflict with the secular authority. The North is the one most significant area of (insular) British rule ignored by Gildas in his list of British rulers and this is a fact that quite independently cries out for an explanation. Both the analogy of Northumbria in the succeeding century and Brittonic tradition would suggest there was a powerful Brittonic kingdom in the North in Gildas's time, whilst it is easy to imagine that there was some rivalry between that kingdom and Gwynedd as there was later between Northumbria and Cadwallon's Gwynedd. Some such political situation

may lie behind the publication of the *Excidio*, with its attack on Maelgwyn and other Southern leaders, though it is probably unfair to label its (surely fundamentally sincere) author a “fearful prophet” (as Sims-Williams 1983: 3).

Another element of Gildas’s account (19.1), suggestive of a ‘Northern’ perspective is the fact that he refers to the Picts and the Scots as having “seized the whole extreme North of the island from its inhabitants right up to the wall”<sup>2</sup> (before overwhelming that obstacle too): this looks like a reference to their conquest of the Britons (of later Strathclyde, Gododdin and perhaps Northern Rheged) who lived North of the wall. It would be rather surprising, perhaps, if a Southern writer would bother to mention, or would show any awareness of, the Britons outside the old Roman Province: rather he would simply have concentrated on the overwhelming of the wall itself and the resultant devastation wreaked on the Britons to the South. The tradition from, say, Strathclyde, Gododdin or Rheged might, however, have preserved the memory of a period of Pictish domination<sup>3</sup> (of their territory North of the wall) that encouraged the inclusion of this extra detail. The

2 “...omnem aquilonalem extremamque terrae partem pro indigenis muro tenus capessunt”: it seems an extraordinary distortion of the sense to suggest that Gildas means ‘up to the wall’ from the South here (as Thompson 1979: 214). He goes on to describe fighting at a defended wall - “statuitur ad haec in edito arcis acies, segnis ad pugnam..etc” - : not surely defended from the North against the South. But Gildas’s description of the EXPANSION of the Picts may have been later misinterpreted as a reference to their first arrival. The crucial word, in this context, is perhaps “omnem”: previously the Picts had inhabited only part of the “aquilonalem extremam terrae partem”.

3 For the archaeological evidence that might correlate with a period of Pictish dominance in Southern Scotland see Thomas: 289: one might argue that the Galloway symbol-stone implies some more permanent Pictish presence than just a raid (contra Thomas: 290). Pictish expansion is also suggested by the legend of the migration of the Gododdin of Manau (*Historia Britonum* 62); Manau being located where one would naturally expect the most extreme Pictish pressure (thereby lending credence to the legend): with perhaps settlement en masse as well as the presence of a dominant elite. Clearly the Britons of the region rebounded from this disaster, establishing powerful kingdoms - some of which (Reged and Gododdin ?) may have expanded South - and overawing the Southern Picts sufficiently to encourage their conversion to Christianity (Bede, III.4).

'wall', itself, maintains a high profile in Gildas's account and one suspects that the simple fact that it will have been in his own time a spectacular sight, evocative of the Roman past will have encouraged this. The legends associated with it, that Gildas certainly knew, may represent the influence of local Northern tradition upon him again: it is significant that these legends included the lesser 'Antonine' wall as well as the spectacular Hadrian's, since the latter is much less likely to have been known to people unfamiliar with the region (*De Excidio* 15, 18; cf. Sims-Williams 1983: 15). In any case, if this is so, it was Northern tradition that led him to make his most obvious historical blunder. This, together with the fact that 'the wall' evidently became an established theme in his account, should hardly encourage us to take any particular reference to it too seriously.

Yet it has been interpreted as a serious geographical indicator in the context of the use of the term 'regio', by Gildas (Sims-Williams 1983: 18-20, following Thompson 1979). He uses this firstly as he describes the effects of an incursion over the 'high wall' (although it may be that the overwhelming of the wall is simply inseparable with, or symbolic of, the idea of a general British collapse, in Gildas's mind) and, secondly, as he describes the coming of the Saxons. It is not entirely clear that 'regio' is not just a synonym for 'insula' in these cases (19.4, 22.1; cf. Wright: 102 with note 4). Alternatively Gildas's use of the word may be so casual and imprecise that even he has no precise idea of what it encompasses. His second mention of the 'regio', in particular, is associated with potential, rather than actual, events and has every appearance of being a vague and generalised reference. In between his uses of the word Gildas (20.2, 21.1) has been referring to the British people in general and there is no reason to suspect, when he describes the Saxon revolt, that he is referring to a 'regio' in a sense that differentiates it from his generalised references to the island and people of Britain. The implication of Gildas's introductory summary (c.2) is that 'a council, an enemy much more savage than the first' has to do with 'the situation' ('de situ') of Britain in general. In any case two rather vague uses of the word 'regio' are a very slight foundation on which to build a theory about probably the most important episode in Gildas's account.

Along with the 'wall' the other apparent indicator of a Northern

context are the 'Picts'. It has been argued, on the basis of the fact that Gildas identifies the main enemy which the foederati were hired to defend the Britons against, as the Picts, (along with 'Scots' specifically from the 'North West') that the tyrannus must have been based in the North (and this has been seen as compatible with a 'regio' near the wall). This is, in fact, hardly a necessary conclusion, given the mobility of other fifth century invaders and marauders. The Picts will very likely have been capable of getting to wherever there was most booty to be had : and the richest part of the island will have been the South. Once again the high profile of the Picts, and their constant association with 'the wall' in particular (as well as the description of the Scots as coming from the North) may represent the influence of Northern tradition upon Gildas. But this may well have become conflated with traditions from elsewhere that reflected a historical reality in which roving bands of Picts and Scots had caused havoc throughout the ex-province. So Ammianus Marcellinus (XXVII.8) had described them ('ranging over a wide area causing much devastation') a century or so earlier: and we may doubt, for instance, that Germanus went to the far North, to encounter them.<sup>4</sup>

It is important, despite all this, that many of the details of Gildas's account are highly credible - his story of a rebellion of 'foederati' after a dispute over 'annona' is entirely compatible with all we know about fifth century European history. It is, moreover, basic elements of the story, like this, which might easily have been remembered; it is much less likely, by comparison, as has been wisely recognised, that the relative dates and precise sequence of events will have been accurately remembered (any more than a precise geography) and we should probably not look to Gildas for that (particularly with regard to the 'Letter of Agidius/Aetius': cf. Sims-Williams 1983b: 14). He does, however, seem to provide the broad outline of a credible enough story. Naturally one is curious to know where this story came from: if it represents local Northern tradition it might conceivably have a restricted reference to the North alone. Yet this would conflict with what we have noted above about the focus of the work on Britain as a

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<sup>4</sup> Vita Germani XVII. Contra Sims-Williams 1983: 11 with note 45. They are represented as having joined forces with the Saxons: and we should not assume the Picts were any less mobile than them.

whole. We might, in fact, expect that the more reliable elements of his account will have reflected the memories of what was left of the Romanised elite: and Gildas actually does give us an indication that his information came specifically from elements of that elite that were now dispersed abroad. He says he is

“using not so much literary remains from this country (which, such as they were, are not now available, having been burnt by enemies or removed by our countrymen when they went into exile) as foreign tradition (‘transmarino relatione)’”<sup>5</sup>

His informants, then, would not have been concentrated in any particular region of Britain. What they would be most likely to have remembered would be the fate of the most important part of the province they had controlled, but subsequently abandoned : that is the most intensively Romanised lowlands of the South and East. It is inherently much less likely that the story of some relatively limited, unimportant, or peripheral, part of the island would be remembered, or the fate of the North alone.

However if we are right about Gildas’s Northern location (or primary perspective) then this may have been something that biased his version of traditions that came, for the most part, from elsewhere. If this is the case then it must be a critical consideration in any interpretation that we make of his account. We have noted above the unreliability of much of what may represent Northern tradition and in any case the conflation of this with a different set of traditions (in a less than discriminating way) may have resulted in a significant distortion of both. It might be that what we need to do is try to differentiate between the two originally separate traditions and in particular to identify those perhaps more reliable ones from elsewhere that Gildas has tended to conflate with those of his own Northern homeland. These are basically the elements that, added together, make up a coherent story about Britain as a whole. If, for instance, we remove the section about the toing and going of the Romans that has obviously been included to account for the two walls, then we are left

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<sup>5</sup> *De Excidio* 4.4. The fact that he refers to ‘relatione’ rather than ‘scriptis... ..scriptorum monumentis’ etc.. suggests he has something other in mind than the literary sources identifiable in his work : contra Sims-Williams 1983:24, but cf. his p.7.



with an account that is entirely credible in its broad outlines, describing the subjection of the Britons to devastating attacks from the Picts and Scots subsequent to the departure of the Romans, followed by their recovery (perhaps with the aid of foederati ?) before the next great disaster, in the form of the revolt of Saxon foederati, overcame them.

Crucial to Gildas's account of this second disaster is the man he calls the 'tyrannus superbus' ('proud tyrant'). In later accounts this figure appears under the name 'Vortigern': Gildas's designation has been seen as a kind of pun on the name 'Vortigern', to the literal meaning of which ('Ver-tigern' = 'high-ruler') it closely corresponds.<sup>6</sup> In any case it would take a very elaborate theory to suggest that Gildas's 'tyrannus' has been conflated with an originally separate figure called 'Vertigernos'. The very existence of the name, 'Vortigern', though, apparently not found in Gildas, implies this figure had a tradition, independent of the *De Excidio*. In fact the first mention of the name occurs in Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I,15) and judging by one of his spellings of the name, at least one of his sources for it was a Germanic one - most probably a Kentish one since that is where he got some closely related information from.<sup>7</sup> This immediately puts Vortigern in a Southern context and later sources show that (by then, at least) he did indeed play an important role in Southern, Kentish tradition.

This could conceivably represent some kind of conflation of the

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6 Jackson (1982: 30, 36) demonstrates that 'Vortigern' was a real name, rather than a title, but it remains hard to see its eminent 'appropriateness' as purely coincidental. One wonders whether Celtic names were always given at birth and not sometimes assumed on the basis of their appropriateness; or whether popular tradition, contemporary or subsequent (but pre-Gildas), might not have bestowed an appropriate name on a well-known figure, in the manner of a 'nickname' or, on the basis that he was an outstanding, 'superhuman', figure, perhaps in a way analogous to that by which deities received epithets (cf. our hypothesis about 'Hengist', below). Such epithets were often identical with personal names. The existence of 'Vortimer' (below with note 8) might suggest the name had a variant.

7 Bede, *HE* I, 5. In his earlier work, *De tempore Ratione*, he had 'Vertigernus' (an earlier form of the name) from a presumably different source. Dumville (1977: 163-40) argued that Gildas might actually have included the name 'Vortigerno' but it seems unlikely such an important name will have been dropped from MSs, much more likely it was added.

Gildas-derived tradition with an originally separate Germanic one (cf. Sims-Williams 1983b: 23) but it is important that Vortigern is, anyway, widespread and prominent as a legendary figure throughout the Brittonic world. He is associated with ‘Emrys’ (Gildas’s Ambrosius Aurelianus) and North Wales (*Historia Britonum* 40-42); with St Germanus (originally in the semi-learned form ‘Garmon’) and Powys (*Historia Britonum* 39, 47 and 32-5) where he is the founder figure of the local dynasty in one tradition (as recorded on the 9<sup>th</sup> c. Pillar of Eliseg; Bartrum 1966: 1-3 ); with Gloucester (*Historia Britonum* 49); with Gwrtheyrnion in mid-Wales that was named after him (and where once again he was the founder-figure of the dynasty : e.g. *Historia Britonum* 48-9); with Bradford-upon-Avon or another place in Wessex that was once named after him;<sup>8</sup> and, finally, with Brittany where he appears to have become a saint !<sup>9</sup> The ‘Vortimer’ of the *Historia Britonum* and *Triads* looks suspiciously like a doublet of ‘Vortigern’<sup>10</sup>:

8 William of Malmesbury (*De Gestis Regum Britanniae* 19) has ‘Wirtgernesburg’ as the site of a battle: perhaps the one at Bradford-upon-Avon (in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.a. 652) but cf. Sims-Williams: 1983b: 39. The place-name seems to suggest Vortigern’s name, in its Anglo-Saxon form, was familiar at a popular level in Anglo-Saxon society, showing, arguably, the survival of native tradition (amongst the Saxons themselves or Britons who came to speak, and therefore be, English) rather than the influence, purely, of a late and learned tradition.

9 Gould: III, 158-60, citing the *Cartulary of Quimperlé*. Even if this saint represents an originally separate figure he has evidently been associated (via his genealogy) with our king Vortigern, his homonym: thereby showing the strength of the latter’s tradition in Brittany. But note that ‘St Gurthiern’ was associated with the ‘Tamar’ in South West Britain, whence this cult may have reached Brittany : cf. the suggestion (note above) that the Vortigern tradition was known in Wiltshire (or, at least, Wessex). Cf. The ‘Foirtchern’ disciple of St Lomman, "a British Christian" in the Book of Armagh (Bieler: 166-9). The fact that he was a grandson of the "king of the Britons" suggests, at the very least, some kind of association with British kingship in Irish tradition. Vortimer (see below) was ‘Gwerthefyr Vendigeit’ (= ‘the Blessed’) in Welsh tradition..

10 *Historia Britonum*, 43-4, 48, Bromwich 1978: 88-96, 386-8. Even if the *Triads* represent a more ancient tradition (p. 388) this could have been about ‘Vortigern’, becoming ‘Vortimer’ only under the *Historia*’s influence. Bromwich notes (p. 388) the latter’s “surprising” absence elsewhere in early

if so this is perhaps to allow the hiving off of the positive elements of the Vortigern tradition (his prominent role in defending Britain against the Saxons) so that the purely negative image of him could go unchallenged. That Vortigern's tradition had a positive side is anyway suggested by the use of his name in dynastic genealogy and place names (not to mention his possible evolution into a saint): this positive tradition is clearly something independent of Gildas's wholly negative image of the 'tyrannus'. The nature of the tradition surrounding Vortigern, then, is wholly consistent with his having been a figure of pan-British significance, while the overall bias is more Southern than Northern. The tradition does not look as if it represents a localised Northern potentate, made famous by Gildas.

Another important element in Gildas's account is the 'council' with which the 'tyrannus' is associated: it has been claimed that this probably just refers to the normal council of advisers that any 'Dark Age' ruler will have had (Dumville 1984b: 70-1) but if so Gildas would surely not have made a point of referring to it in his introductory summary or have bothered to make the very specific mentions of it that he does (22-3):

"And they convened a council to decide the best and soundest way to counter the brutal and repeated invasions..... Then all the members of the council, together with the proud tyrant..."

Gildas will not have bothered to invent details except where they reinforced his moral message or, allied to this, enhanced the dramatic effect of his prose. The mention of the council does neither of these in any obvious way: rather it sounds like an essential part of the story, as known to Gildas. Likewise there is no obvious reason why the story of the 'council' should have entered the tradition anterior to its reporting by Gildas, unless it represents a genuine memory.

There is, on the other hand, a likely enough reason why a tyrannus will have needed to convene such a council: he will have needed to summon representatives from the widest possible area in order to encourage and/or extort from them the provisioning of the greatest possible quantity of 'annona' in order to support the biggest possible force of 'foederati' for the purpose of defence and quite possibly the maintenance of his own power-base, as well. That a British 'council'

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Welsh tradition.

(‘Concilium Britanniarum’) had existed early on in the Roman period has been demonstrated (Morris 1965; cf, Salway 501, 532-3) but more significant is the existence of a parallel institution in Gaul at roughly the same time (Matthews: 334), for what were probably, roughly the same reasons: with the weakening of central authority it was now more necessary to solicit the broadest possible support in order to get anything done. It may well have been the ultimate failure of the council to come up with the ‘annona’ that precipitated disaster. What is most significant for us, though, is that the tyrannus and his council were important enough, and their authority extensive enough, for the collapse of that authority to result in an island-wide disaster, of proportions that make it the most memorable catastrophe in Gildas’s whole calamity-ridden account. This does not make it look like a minor localised event.

The particular significance of our ‘Alban’ hypothesis, meanwhile, is not only that it suggests that there was some kind of attempt to foster a pan-British consciousness and so that, most likely, Gildas’s account represents one of an attempt to establish some kind of pan-British political entity but also that the most likely candidate for the centre from which that attempt will have been made, the base of the ‘tyrannus,’ will have been Verulamium, in the South. John Matthews (1975: 334) says of the Gallic council “Part of the function of the council was.. in 418 .....to focus the loyalties of the Gallic upper classes upon their new capital” (Arles) : it is easy to imagine that something similar might have been true of a British council and Verulamium. Of course certainty is hardly attainable in this context and the fact that Verulamium was the centre for the dominant cult of the period does not necessarily mean that any equivalent political dominance was not, say, usurped by some other centre before the time of the Saxon revolt. But that the centre of such a cult – one which in some sense represented a pan-British identity – should also have been the centre for a politically dominant ‘tyrannus’ seems much the most plausible hypothesis to go with, and we will consider the circumstantial evidence that might support it, below.

There is one further source that has been exploited to shed some light on the catastrophe, as Gildas describes it, of the Saxon revolt. This is

the Gaulish annal which represents essentially the only near-contemporary record from the continent about fifth century Britain subsequent to the final Roman administration (apart from Prosper and Constantius's notices about Germanus and the Pelagians): if we interpret Gildas's foederati revolt as an event of island-wide importance (and as catastrophic as he describes it) then the chances are very good that it will also have been this event that was the one and only British event to attract the notice of our Gaulish annalist. The annal might even give us the date of the event (this has been hotly contested) but it is probably most interesting for WHAT it actually reports: namely that Britain had "passed under the dominion of the Saxons".<sup>11</sup> It has been noticed that this seems to run counter to the archaeological and other evidence of only limited Anglo-Saxon settlement, in the East, by this time. If what actually happened involved a 'coup d'état' on the lines of the one later effected by the foederati leader, Odoacer, in Italy, however, then one might expect it to be reported in such a way. That presupposes the existence of some kind of significant central authority to replace. That that central authority did not long survive the 'coup', and that chaos ensued is what Gildas's account suggests and what the weakness of the British economy and disintegration of organised urban life as suggested by the archaeology, would adequately explain (as compared to the very different situation in Italy where the regime of Odoacer, or at least his successor, Theodoric, was able to prosper).

It seems likely that the alliance of forces from the Western part of the island that, one might guess, were led by Gildas's sole secular, heroic figure, 'Ambrosius Aurelianus', represented a very much looser kind of organisation, relying only on goodwill, defensive necessity and perhaps a shared 'Roman-Christian' ideology, to stave off those civil wars that by the time of Gildas had become something to deplore. It may well be that the other cult mentioned by Gildas - that of Aaron and Iulius - rose to prominence at this stage, and if so, its probable location at Caerleon, might imply that a leading role in the British 'revival' was played by the civitas of the Silures (cf. Thornhill 489-90). The other

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<sup>11</sup> "Britanniae usque ad hoc tempus variis cladibus eventibusque latae in dicionem Saxonem rediguntur" : *Chronica Minora*, ed.Mommsen, I,660. See Casey 1988; Burgess 1990.

important thing about the report of the Gallic chronicle is that it would fit best with a Saxon takeover in the South East since this is the area that is most likely to have been known about in Gaul. It would be a nice repetition of earlier history, in fact, if the centre of resistance moved to the area of the Silures from that of the Catuvellauni.

The South East is, again, the region where, in general terms, one might most expect to find a regime that based its defence heavily on the employment of Germanic 'foederati', 'mercenaries', or 'allies': simply because it was best placed for any kind of contact with Germanic people. It may well have been the case that in the Western and Northern regions foederati were raised from the Picts, Scots and Britons beyond the Wall: hence, arguably, the Ogam stones of Dumnonia and Wales, the "Cunorix macus...." Stone of Viroconium (Wroxeter) in the West Midlands and the likely presence of a Gododdin warband in North Wales (note 3, above). In fact the archaeological evidence that might most easily be interpreted as representing early fifth century Germanic foederati comes overwhelmingly from the South East: perhaps best of all from Mucking in Essex, where a Germanic settlement, yielding very early material including late Roman military ware, seems to have been strategically sited on territory unoccupied by the Britons (Esmond Cleary: 97) to oversee and defend the Thames Estuary (Myers 130-2; Higham: 113, 172). Comparable early Germanic material comes from locations South of the Thames (Croydon, Mitcham, Orpington, Darent) which have been seen as representing foederati settlements strategically sited to defend London, perhaps as the Southern focus of Wheeler's "sub-Roman triangle" (so Dark: 89, 127).

More surprising is the evidence of comparable (Myers 101-2; Higham 169) early Germanic settlement at Dorchester-on-Thames, Abingdon and nearby places in the Upper Thames Valley (Astill 56-7; Esmond Cleary: 154, 193-6; Yorke 1995: 29-31; Myers 167-8; Higham: 114) which shows all the signs of having been initially sanctioned by a (sub-?)Romano-British authority but which clearly cannot represent foederati with a primary defensive role against Saxon sea-raiders. It has been noted, though (Higham: 172; Gelling: 806), that this is a strategic location on the borders of the 'tribal areas' of three major civitates – the Catuvellauni of Verulamium, the Dobunni

of Corinium (Cirencester) and the Atrebates of Calleva (Silchester). So a military force might well be located in this area to defend any of these in a not unlikely context of inter-civitas rivalry: but since the most comparable archaeological evidence comes from the Thames Estuary region, very credibly an area controlled by the Catuvellauni of Verulamium (and certainly not the other two) then the best guess might be that these represent foederati settled here by a regime based at Verulamium to defend its Western borders, or to overawe its Western neighbours. Of course this (and the maintenance of foederati on the East coast) might represent the continuation of a policy established by a Roman regime based at London but perhaps not secure in its control of the whole country (especially if it was, say, the illegitimate regime of Constantine III).

In this context it is particularly worthwhile noting that at Abingdon, at the original centre of that settlement (with evidence of early or mid Saxon structures, but going back to the Roman era) is a “Helenstow”, with a church dedicated to St Helen (recorded from the tenth century: Gelling: 438-9) representing a religious foundation – originally a nunnery – that very likely goes back to the 670s (Astill: 57, 67, 73-4)<sup>12</sup>. This matches the early churches dedicated to Helen at London and Colchester that we noted (in Chapter II, above) as very credibly within the orbit of a cult based at Verulamium – and within a Catuvellanian-dominated “sub-Roman triangle”. Furthermore there is some kind of loose correlation with the early presence of a cult of St Helen in York

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<sup>12</sup> The dedication might have been suggested by the finding of the “Black Cross” here (actually an open-work disc-headed pin, probably of the 8<sup>th</sup> c., judging by the surviving drawing) apparently in the tenth century (Lambrick: 26-34): since Helen was associated in legend with the finding of the True Cross. On the other hand the disc-headed pin might well owe its legendary significance (and interpretation as a representation of the cross) to the fact that St Helen – as connected with the legend of the Cross - was already associated with the place. At least one of the sources for the legend (Lambrick 68-9) does claim that there was a chapel to Helen here in very early times whilst referring to Christian relics from the British era (Lambrick : 33). This correlates with the archaeological evidence for an exceptional degree of Roman-to-Saxon continuity in the area: as, e.g., at nearby Frilford where early 5thc. Saxon burials appear in a late Roman cemetery, with Romano-Celtic temple: Yorke: 43; Lambrick: 30.

(see above, Parts II and V) in the sense that at both there is the suggestion of the association of the cult with the military activities of sub-Roman Britons. If we are thinking in terms of Christian continuity in the Upper Thames Region then there is some local evidence that might suggest that (Yorke 46-7) but one can easily envisage a cult in *el(v)*- persisting in pagan, rather than 'Christianised', form: we have already suggested that it was a cult which, in some sense, "transcended the ethno-linguistic divide", while this is an area of exceptional Romano-British-to-Saxon continuity (my note 12). Finally this Abingdon cult of St Helen makes more comprehensible our cult of Aldatus, interpreted as from Celtic *el-/al-*, at nearby Oxford (Part V, note 17).

Wheeler's 'Sub-Roman tri-angle', the relative lack of evidence of pagan Saxon settlement in the area around Verulamium, London and Colchester (as mentioned, above, in Part I) is another important piece of evidence to take into account. It might suggest that the core region of the tyrannus's domain survived the disasters of the early fifth century still relatively intact: most likely under Anglo-Saxon political domination but retaining its fundamental Romano-British character, organisation and population in a way parallel (though less in degree) to Frankish-dominated Gaul. This might explain why, by the sixth century, the centres of Anglo-Saxon settlement and power had built up all around it in Essex, Kent, Sussex and the Upper Thames but not in this central region, itself, where, perhaps, the remnants of a more Romano-British kind of organisation had finally decayed and degenerated to leave a power vacuum that the emergent Saxon Kingdoms would fight over.<sup>13</sup> It may be, though, that these kingdoms had inherited from the Sub-Roman Britons and the 'tyrannus' (perhaps via an earlier generation of more Romano-British-influenced Saxons) at least the ideal of British unity in the form of the tradition of regional 'imperium' that was (or became) associated with the title of 'Bretwalda', something that, significantly, seems initially to have been

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<sup>13</sup>We seem to have a record of Aethelbert and Ceawlin engaged in this kind of thing at the Battle of 'Wibbandun', Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s. a. 568. For the Chilterns as a region (near Verulamium) of exceptional British cultural survival, for the South East: see Davis 1982.



associated with only the Southern part of the island.<sup>14</sup>

An interpretation that locates the main base of the tyrannus at Verulamium has one further advantage: it allows some compatibility with the legendary tradition from Kent (*Historia Britonum* 31, 36-8, 43-6; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 449, 455, 456/7, 465, 473), that we have already mentioned in connection with 'Vortigern'. It has been well demonstrated that much of this tradition can be understood in terms of the conventions of Germanic 'origin-legend' and that the version of events that we have is rooted in oral legend from Kent, preserved in the interests of the local dynasty and their 'court propaganda' (Brooks 1989: 58-64 with further refs). This does not answer the question of whether these legends were ultimately based on some genuine memories (however distorted) of the events which also lie behind the tradition (preserved mainly by British émigrés ?) reported by Gildas: because if so then there must have been some connection between the latter and the settlement of Kent.

That the two accounts represented the same events was an assumption, evidently made, by the time of Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I, 15; Brooks 58-60), and quite likely even by the time of Gildas, himself, since his reference (23.3) to the Saxons, "coming in three keels, as they call warships in their language" reflects a knowledge of Germanic tradition, apparently the one of Kent that was known to later Welsh tradition. We can bare in mind the Frankish associations of sixth century Kent and the possible Frankish associates of Gildas's émigré informants. It is relevant, meanwhile, that it was this Kentish story that was the model for other, later recorded, Anglo-Saxon origin legends (contra Brooks: 60) and that for this one alone is there a suggestion (via 'Hengist') of some kind of a connection with a wider context of heroic Germanic tale. While the late versions that we have will have been shaped to suit the royal court of Kent (and then reshaped in one case to suit the Welsh) the earlier genesis of the tale may

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<sup>14</sup>Bede, *HE* II,5. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub anno 827. Bede may have wanted to avoid giving any precedent for domination of Northumbria from the South: but all his earliest holders of 'imperium' were in the South (Sussex, the Gewissae, Kent, East Anglia) suggesting that any tradition of overlordship originated there.

have occurred in a wider context.<sup>15</sup> The possibility exists that it was in a Frankish context that the Germanic and British version of events first came together: if so this might have happened from quite early on, even actually from before the time of Gildas (as his knowledge of Germanic tradition might imply) so that we might almost be able to think of his and the (subsequently localised) Kentish version originating in a single source: or at least they may be representative of traditions that had been in contact from an early date (relevant here is the fact that Bede saw the name of Gildas's 'tyrannus' in a Germanic source, as noted above). The common ground between them, then, might well represent their shared origin in actual events rather than, exclusively, an effort to artificially fuse them together at some very late date.

Crucial to the Germanic tradition is the figure of 'Hengist'. His name looks like a corruption 'Ansehis', a generic term for Germanic gods and 'deified' founder-figures, that is found in the *Ravenna Cosmography* (of circa 700), applied to the Saxon conqueror of Britain. The name 'Ansehis' seems to have been reinterpreted as 'Hengist' under the influence of a pairing with 'Horsa' (Hengist means 'gelding', Horsa means 'horse') and a local version of well known Indo-European cult traditions (Turville-Petre 1953-7; Brooks: 59) involving a pair of gods like the Greek Dioscuri. The name 'ansehis' (perhaps for 'anschis') was associated with the Kentish dynasty under a different form, 'Oisc': giving the dynastic name 'Oiscings' and supposedly borne by the son of Hengist (Bede, *HE* II,5; *Historia Britonum* 58; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 456, 465, 473; Brooks: 59; Sims-Williams 1983b 22-3). But on the continent, judging by the *Cosmography*,<sup>16</sup> it was associated not with Kent in particular, so much, as with the Saxon conquest of Britain, in general. This might, just

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<sup>15</sup> Relevant here is the continental duplicate (Brooks: 63; Widukind of Corvey, *Res Gestae Saxonicae* I, 6-7) of the story of the treacherous massacre of the Britons (or Thuringians) by the Saxons, which seems to have been ultimately inspired by the association of the tribal name 'Saxones' with 'Seax', a knife, of a type short enough to suggest it could be easily hid.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Rivet: 205 : "...insula que dicitur Britania ubi olim gens Saxonum veniens ab antiqua Saxoniam cum principe suo Ansehis modo habitare videtur". For the *Cosmography* pp. 185-215. 'Ansehis' might be for 'Anschi' but cf. the 'Ansi' of Jordanes' *Getica* 78.

conceivably, stem from an ultimately Kentish source in which the Kentish ancestor-hero was promoted to the rank of leader of the Saxon invasion in general, but if so it must derive from an early stage in the evolution of the Kentish legend (before the 'anschis' as invasion-leader became 'Hengist', separate from the 'anschis', or 'Oisc' associated closely with the dynasty) so at the very least it takes the story of his role as leader of the invasion back to an earlier date - while it may well derive, rather, from traditions more widely current within the Germanic (and perhaps Gallo-Roman) world, of the kind also known to Gildas which we have referred to above, and of which the Kentish legend would represent a localised derivative.<sup>17</sup>

We do, in fact, have a further hint that such traditions were current in the Germanic world. The fact that the name Hengist - evidently, on the basis of its appropriate pairing with 'Horsa', a creation of Kentish legend - should also be found in a context of Germanic heroic tale, of very different origin (*Beowulf* 1063-1160; *Finnsburh Fragment* in Fry 1974), is curious; but less so if the sole figure so named, received that name at some stage in the oral evolution of the tale due to an enduring memory of his identity with the figure of Kentish tradition: and it is remarkable that his character as leader of a band of adventurers in Frisia suits what one might expect of a potential leader of federates so well (something surely not taken sufficiently into account by Turville-Petre 1953-7: 287) while his probable association with Jutes ties in

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<sup>17</sup> Sims Williams (1983b: 22, note 94) suggests that an English source for the name ansehis/anschis would have to be no later than the early 6th century but it may represent a continental Germanic dialect. If so it might represent a 'translation' which would suggest the involvement of a continental Germanic intermediary, at least: or perhaps that the story was indeed current on the continent. An "Oesa" occurs in the Bernician genealogy which might represent a parallel use of this name-for-deified-ancestor-figures, but might, also, reflect a memory of the same historic figure. 'Aescsburh' (now Uffington castle, Berkshire) and 'Aescsdune' (the Berkshire Downs) might contain a version of the name 'Oisc' (cf. the 'Aesc' who is Hengist's "son" in *HB* and the *Chronicle*): Gelling: 2-3. Given the name is found rarely outside the Kentish dynastic context this might represent a memory of the same outstanding semi-deified figure behind the Aesc, Oisc and Hengist (=Ansehis) of Kentish legend, indicating his fame in Britain was not limited to Kent: which might suggest his actual sphere of activity was not, either.

specifically with Kentish tradition.<sup>18</sup> Yet the tradition of *Beowulf* and the *Finnsburh Fragment* does not associate him with Kent or Britain so he does not look, there, like a merely secondary manifestation of a purely Kentish creation. Rather this Scandinavian-derived tradition looks like an independent one, albeit sufficiently in touch with a wider context of Germanic storytelling (at some stage in its oral evolution in Scandinavia or England) to be influenced in terms of the name it used (for a character who would have figured prominently in many of the numerous strands of tradition that would have made up that 'wider context'). The suggestion, in other words, is that behind Hengist lies a real man<sup>19</sup> who not only earned himself a place in the warlike tales of his native Scandinavia but was also celebrated in the foundation-legend of the Kentish kingdom: such a man, prominent in two different spheres, is rather more credibly one who did indeed play a prominent role, also, in the most crucial events of the Saxon invasion of Britain as the Ravenna Cosmography implies, than one who only played a local role, in Kent.

Gildas's reference (25.2) to the Saxon rebels having 'gone home' is compatible with the idea that the Kentish kingdom originated with rebellious foederati retreating to their original base. Eastern Kent is not unrealistic as an original settlement area for 'federates' employed by a 'tyrannus' based at Verulamium, who may have wanted to keep them both at 'arm's length' and in a position to ward off other, more hostile, Germans as well as any other (imperial ?) interference from the continent. One could perhaps think in terms of the tyrannus bowing to the inevitable Germanic pressure on his Eastern seaboard, by giving a group of them Kent (or part thereof) but making a virtue of necessity by using it as a bribe to enlist their services against other enemies and

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<sup>18</sup> The 'Eotena', in the *Beowulf* Episode may be Jutes or 'giants': Fry: 13-15. We should be aware that Jutes might have become 'giants' in oral transmission (and vice-versa): hence, possibly, the incorrect forms of the word. The merest whiff of Jutes in association with Hengist is suggestive.

<sup>19</sup> For the likelihood that divine names in foundation legends - like 'ansehis', 'gautaz', 'merovech' - represented real people: Moisl 1981: especially 221-2, 226. See there also for memories of actual historical events and persons preserved by Germanic oral tradition and cf. the *Nibelungenlied*, which has reference, ultimately, to an actual event of the Migration period.

to support his own regime. It is true that Gildas suggests that foederati were used mainly for defence against the Picts, for which purpose Kent would not seem a likely base, but the area of settlement of the 'federates' need not have been identical to that of their operation whilst we have suggested, above, that bands of Picts and other marauders may have been active all over the island. Furthermore "Hengist" and the settlers of Kent may well have represented the most recent and least assimilated group of federates employed by the tyrannus (hence perhaps their leadership of any 'revolt'<sup>20</sup>) and had defense against the Picts been, in fact, mainly the role of an earlier wave of federates that would be a distinction very likely to be lost in Gildas.

On the other hand if the association of Hengist, or the 'Ansehis', with the foundation of Kent, represents only the subsequent appropriation of the legend of a great leader by the storytellers (and fabricators of the origin legend) of Kent, then, all the same, that legend must have been sufficiently meaningful to them as to make the involvement of the Kentish settlers in the events in which the 'Ansehis' played a prominent part, highly likely. In the final analysis any interpretation that accepts any kind of link between Gildas's account

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<sup>20</sup>It is true that the distinctive archaeology of Kent (Myers: 115 ff.; Higham 177) - together with the memory of a struggle for survival against their Eastern neighbours that seems to be embodied in the Kentish traditions that underly the accounts in the *Historia Britonum* and *Chronicle* - might suggest that the Kentishmen represent a separate group of invaders who simply took over Kent and then defended their conquest: but it would not be so easy to explain, in that case, why their leading ancestor figure was identified as the leader of the Saxon revolt. It is also possible to view their separate identity (as a later group of less-assimilated foederati) as providing a rationale for why it was they who were responsible for initiating the Saxon revolt. In the ensuing disintegration of the hegemony of the tyrannus they will have ended up in conflict with the people occupying the 'sub-Roman triangle' region: where the (earlier-arrived, more Romano-British influenced) foederati who had previously served the tyrannus perhaps managed to retain control of the core of his domains. Other areas, especially the Eastern midlands South to the Upper Thames, will now have been open to relatively uncontrolled Germanic settlement and these post-revolt invaders will account for the vast bulk of the archaeological evidence for 5<sup>th</sup> c. Germanic settlement.

and the legends associated with Kent must allow a Southern context to the former.

Altogether, then, we might make the claim that the existence of a regime based at Verulamium but exerting some kind of control over at least most of the South East and very likely a much larger area, before being taken over by the Saxons, would be an interpretation that fits the available evidence best. The precise extent of the region controlled or dominated by the tyrannus is obviously very difficult to estimate. That his sphere of influence (or that of a regime based at Verulamium which the ‘tyrannus/Vortigern’ came to represent) was, in some sense and at some stage, wider than just this ‘sub-Roman triangle’ area of the South East is at least hinted at by the range of his subsequent reputation as indicated above. It is significant that there is a bias towards the East in terms of those Welsh kingdoms that feature Vortigern actually in their dynastic genealogies: because this suggests there was some correlation between the positive elements of his subsequent tradition (clearly not derived from Gildas) and the regions (accessible to the Welsh) to which his actual sphere of influence might most feasibly have extended. As we have seen, Welsh tradition associates him with the genealogies of Powys, Gwerthernion and, associated with the latter, Gloucester, on the Welsh borders.

The Gwerthernion/Gloucester genealogy was also the one that featured “Eltat map Eldoc” while we have noted the cult of St Aldate at Gloucester<sup>21</sup> (see Part V, with note ). Likewise we have noted the association of ‘Benlli’ and names in ‘El-’ with Powys. There might be some suggestion here of an association between Vortigern and our

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<sup>21</sup> The record in *HB* (66) that Ambrosius, some time (the dates are unreliable) after the “regno Guorthigirni”, fought a ‘Guitolin’ (< Vitalinus) – given as the son of “Gloiu” in the genealogy - may have no historical value but if Ambrosius was connected with Gwent (see above and Thornhill: 489-90) then Gloucester would be a likely enough centre for an important rival (whose defeat would have been an important early step in a career that culminated in Ambrosius’s dominance over all the Britons of the West ??). It might be significant that Guitolin is closer in the genealogy to ‘Gloiu’, than Vortigern: his connection with Gloucester may be more fundamental. It is true that his name (duplicated as ‘Guitaul’ in the genealogy) alliterates slightly suspiciously with ‘Guorthigirn and Gloiu’ but this part of *HB* does seem to preserve some genuine early traditions from, or about, pre-Saxon Gloucester.

el-/elv-/Alban cult that would fit in with our hypothesis that both were associated with a regime based at Verulamium (but the influence of which might have been felt as far as the borders of Wales). This is difficult to demonstrate due to the widespread distribution, anyway, of our cult-related names in *el-* (often due to assimilation of *elv-* < *albio* to localised cults in *el-/al-*) but we might be able to detect a rather close relationship between the two in a Powys context.

To our hypothesised variant for Vortigern, ‘Vortimer’, we might add another, ‘Cattegirn’ (from ‘Catu-tigernos’, ‘battle-lord’). In the *Historia Britonum* (48-9) a Pascent is the son of Vortigern, while in the *Harleian Genealogies* (27, Bartrum: 10) a Pascent is son of Cattegirn. Though these are separate genealogies they are clearly based on the same ultimate tradition: a tradition that associates together the names Pascent, Vortigern and Cattegirn (in various ways: thus in *HB* 48 Cattegirn is a brother of Pascent whilst the Pillar of Eliseg associates Pascent with Vortigern). Then again, on the Eliseg pillar a Britu is the son of ‘Guorthigirn’ while in *HG* 23 a Britu is the son of Cattegirn. One might, then, interpret the name ‘Cadell’ (appropriate to the father of Cattegirn in *HG* 22, 23 and 27 and featured in the Benlli-Germanus story as the founder of the Powys dynasty) as another of the Powys genealogy *el-* names (alongside ‘Eli’ and ‘Eliud’<sup>22</sup>) prefixed with the

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<sup>22</sup> *Harleian Genealogies* 27 (Bartrum: 10): “...Elitet map Guilauc map Eli map Eliud map Cincen map Brocmail ..” : cf. the ‘Eltat map Eldoc’ of Gwerthernion and the ‘Eliud’ in the clearly non-historical part of the Dyfed genealogy. These *El-* names would seem to represent the historical part of the Powys genealogy, though, since they occur after Brocmail, who appears in Bede, II,2. Bede describes “a certain Brocmail” as present at the battle of Chester to protect the British monks of Bangor Iscoed from “the swords of the barbarians”, but, in the event, failing to do this and fleeing instead. It is conceivable that this rather curious tale originates in the reputation of Brocmail as the protector of his Christian devotees: i.e. that he was a cult-figure (cf, perhaps, Brocc-anus/Brychan, eponym of Brecon) of some kind who was ‘euheumerised’ in a confused story of the battle which Bede was dependant upon. The *Annales Cambriae* (s.a. 613) record the death of “Selim fillii Cinan” at the battle: that the grandfather of ‘Selim’ should also have been at the battle, with a special role to protect monks, is possible but not likely. The ‘death of Selim’ might represent ‘the defeat of Powys-as-represented-by-Selim’: if Selim was another Powys cult-hero/ancestor-figure (in *HG* 27 a “Selemaun” occurs at the head of the dynasty; there was a

same *cad-*, from *catu-*, element as we find in our Cat-tigern variant for Vor-tigern (the Cat- of Cat-tigern is not lenited to Cad- due to the geminate). A name derived in this way, in this context, may or may not have become assimilated to an already existing name 'Cadell', or similar. We would then have parallel variants in *cad-* of both 'Vortigern' and our *el-* cult-name: both applicable to a reputed founder of the dynasty (on the Eliseg pillar and in *HB*, respectively) and demonstrating, therefore, both their importance and the close relationship between the two, in Powys tradition. 'Cadell' could also be seen as representing (in *HB*) a positive manifestation of our *el-* (< *elv* < *albio*) cult, to match Benlli as a negative one (see Part V); in a typical context of 'multiplying cult-name derivatives'.

This would reinforce both our suggested link between Vortigern the tyrannus and our cult of Albion/Albios (both with their base at Verulamium ?) and the idea that their sphere of influence at one time extended to Powys and the Eastern borders of Wales.<sup>22</sup> One might also suspect that the presence of the Helen < Alban cult at York (see Chapters II, V, above) represents the influence of the Verulamium tyrannus in the North: on a parallel basis to the way we suggested our Upper Thames Helen < Alban cult did. The apparent early Christianisation of the Britons beyond the Wall might be easiest to understand in the context of the dominance at some stage (following the repulse or absorption of Pictish invaders ?) of the Romanised-Christian Britons to the South: albeit that dominance may have been more cultural than political. Of course other explanations for these facts exist and one can only outline tentative possibilities: nevertheless it is probably not wrong to hypothesise quite dramatic and fast changing political developments (like the the rise of a tyrannus to an impressive but transient apogee of insular dominance) in the turbulent

saint Selyf/Solomon in Cornwall). In any case the *Annales* are not necessarily a reliable source while neither is the 'Taliesin' poem about 'Kynan Garwyn mab Brocfael' (Ifor Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin*, 1987, p.1): so it is not entirely certain that the genealogy of Powys is reliable any further back than the evidently famous Eliseg (and his father) whose El- name - and the names of his descendants - typically echo those of the primary cult-heros of Powys.

<sup>22</sup> Beyond that Wales may have been dominated by the Irish in the early part of the fifth century: the Irish sphere of dominance very likely extended well beyond that of their well attested settlement.



era that followed the Roman withdrawal.

A region very likely excluded from a Verulamium hegemony might have been East Anglia: on the basis of its geography (then almost an island), and the early<sup>23</sup> Anglo-Saxon remains at Venta Icenorum (Myers: 98-100; qualified by Esmond Cleary: 189, Higham: 175): suggesting - at an early stage - either a Germanic take-over or a regime that needed the support of 'federates' to preserve its independence. This is combined with its absence from any of the traditions about the Saxon 'adventus' in marked contrast to Kent, the other region most exposed to early settlement. This might suggest East Anglia was politically isolated from the crucial events that determined the fate of most of the island, although the preservation of the tradition in Kent may have been encouraged by contact with the continent.

Of course even such a region might have accepted in some way the 'overlordship' of the tyrannus at the height of his power. It is likely anyway that the KIND of power he exercised was becoming less like the absolute control of a Roman governor and more like the 'overlordship', or tribute-relationships that characterised the ensuing Dark Ages. Yet the importance of the 'Council' in the story known to Gildas suggests there was a degree of voluntary delegation of power by the civitates (albeit under pressure of dire necessity) at some stage. One can scarcely doubt that the 'voluntary' element was increasingly supplemented (and subverted) by the use of brute force (especially in the shape of the barbarian mercenaries, employed by the tyrannus) but nevertheless the impulse towards a confederate unity was paralleled by a quasi-national pan-British ideology that is evident in Gildas (reinforced there by years more of anti-Saxon Struggle) and of which the cult of Alban/Albion was the most significant expression.

My intention, of course, has been to show how an examination of that cult can help us understand this darkest period of British history, though it is also my hope that it will have cast an interesting new light on the evolution of my island nation, in general.

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<sup>23</sup> But of significantly different type (including cremations) to the very earliest material from Mucking, Dorchester etc...: Higham 172 ff.

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