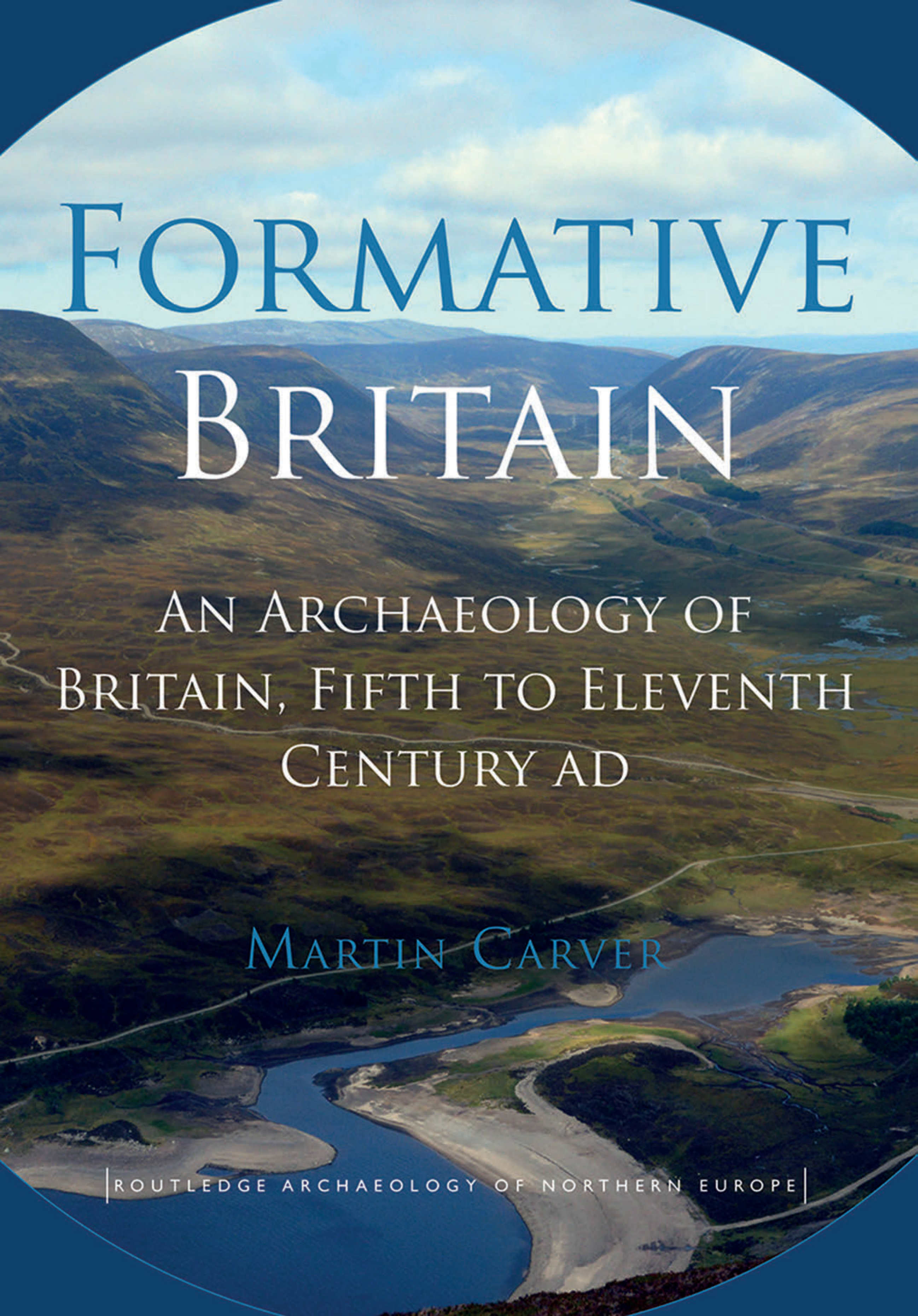

Formative Britain

An Archaeology of Britain, Fifth to Eleventh Century AD

Martin Carver

Routledge Archaeology of Northern Europe

Formative Britain

Formative Britain presents an account of the peoples occupying the island of Britain between 400 and 1100 AD, whose ideas continue to set the political agenda today. Forty years of new archaeological research has laid bare a hive of diverse and disputatious communities of Picts, Scots, Welsh, Cumbrian and Cornish Britons, Northumbrians, Angles and Saxons, who expressed their views of this world and the next in a thousand sites and monuments.

This highly illustrated volume is the first book that attempts to describe the experience of all levels of society over the whole island using archaeology alone. The story is drawn from the clothes, faces and biology of men and women, the images that survive in their poetry, the places they lived, the work they did, the ingenious celebrations of their graves and burial grounds, their decorated stone monuments and their diverse messages.

This ground-breaking account is aimed at students and archaeological researchers at all levels in the academic and commercial sectors. It will also inform relevant stakeholders and general readers alike of how the islands of Britain developed in the early medieval period. Many of the ideas forged in Britain's formative years underpin those of today as the UK seeks to find a consensus programme for its future.

Martin Carver was an army officer for 15 years, a freelance commercial archaeologist for 13 years and Professor of Archaeology at the University of York for 22 years, retiring in 2008. From 2002 until 2012 he was editor of the global archaeology journal *Antiquity*. He has researched post-Roman towns in Britain, France, Italy and Algeria and excavated large sites of the first millennium AD at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) and Portmahomack (north-east Scotland). He has produced numerous articles, lectures and broadcasts on the peoples of early Britain, and his latest books are *Sutton Hoo: Encounters with Early England*, *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts* and *Archaeological Investigation* (for Routledge).

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Martin Carver

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ADS:	*Archaeology Data Service* (York) http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/
AC:	*Aelfric's Colloquy* ed G N Garmonsway 1947 (London: Methuen).
ASC:	*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* trans and ed D Whitelock 1961 (London: Eyre & Spottiswood).
AY:	Addyman, P V (ed) *The Archaeology of York* fascicule series (York: Council for British Archaeology for The York Archaeological Trust.
Bede:	*Opera* trans B Colgrave. ed J McClure and RCollins 2008 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Beowulf:	trans and introduction by S Heaney 1999 (London: Faber).
Bible:	*The Bible designed to be read as literature* ed Ernest Sutherland Bates with an introduction by L Binyon 1944 (London: Heinemann).
BL:	British Library.
CCCC:	Corpus Christi College Cambridge.
CAR:	Complex Atlantic Roundhouse.
Corpus:	Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture I (Cramp 1984), II (Bailey and Cramp 1988), III (Lang 1991), IV (Tweddle 1995), V (Everson and Stocker 1999), VI (Lang 2001), VII (Cramp 2006), VIII (Coatsworth 2008), (IX Bailey 2010), X (Bryant 2012), XI (Preston and Okasha 2013), XII (Everson and Stocker 2015).
Fm:	Formative period, 1, 2, 3.
The Gododdin:	trans and ed K H Jackson 1969 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
HE:	*Historia Ecclesiastica* in Venerabilis Baedae *Opera Historica*; ed C Plummer 1969 [1896] (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
LC:	Life of St Columba.
Lives of the Saints:	(Brendan, Cuthbert, Wilfrid) trans J F Webb 1965 (London: Penguin).
The Mabinogion:	trans and ed G Jones and T Jones 1949 (London: Dent).
Sagas:	*The Sagas of Icelanders*, preface by J Smiley, introduction by R Kellog, various translators 2001 (London: Penguin).
SFB:	Sunken Featured Building.
Trioedd Ynys Prydein:	trans and ed R Bromwich 1961 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).

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Preface

The subject of this book is the island of Britain and what happened there between the 5th and the 11th century AD, from 1,600 to 900 years ago. This period has suffered unjustly from professionals and public alike, being accorded the ambiguous category of the ‘early middle ages’ and accorded a personality only by being ‘Dark’. The ‘Middle’ Ages refers to the long period that separates the glory of Rome from the glory of the renaissance (400–1600), but of course it was no tedious interval to those alive then. To some extent its latter centuries (from the 12th to the 16th) have been largely liberated from romantic cliché and now almost appear as a civilisation of their own. The earlier part, our period (the 5th to the 11th century), still has little more status than a pause within an interval, in which men and women waited inscrutably for more famous times. However, as I hope to show, far from being inscrutable, it was ambitious, intellectual, experimental, mobile and creative – an arena hosting a collision of ideas between deep prehistory and the Christian Roman Empire, a bubbling cauldron that would result in something new, different, remarkable and enduring. Never before, and seldom again, were the people of Britain exposed to such a startling variety of ideological programmes and the political freedom to choose and exercise them. The resulting debate, conducted with words, clothes, spears and monuments, gave us both the countries we still have and the convictions and prejudices that are still embedded in them. In that sense, the period was formative.

The picture to be painted here has emerged largely through archaeology, and in particular through the archaeology of the last 30 years. It is not a book that could have been written before, and if archaeological investigation is allowed to flourish in the next 30 it will soon be replaced and regarded as much an agenda as a synthesis. Archaeology in Britain has benefitted enormously both from the courageous funding of field research and from the rich harvest of large-scale investigations made possible by preventative projects in advance of development. This has shown us life and death at the human scale, as opposed to the small trenches and big theories of earlier explorations. It has brought many surprises, and the new story presented here is more the result of new discoveries than new theory. At the same time that the vista has been broadened by large-scale investigation, it has been deepened by science, especially the biological sciences and refined radiocarbon dating. In some cases, we can give the people we dig up a persona: not the vivid fame of the written record but access to the intimate experience of an individual.

The objective of the book is to discover what drove this early society into changing, distinguished here not so much as wars and chance but as the competing strategies of lordship, spirituality and wealth creation. Aspects of these forces are present in every century, and some would say they are always with us and always operate in uneasy union. However, the investigation presented here reveals them as competitive ideologies in which the pull of the past, the pressure of the neighbours and the gravitational field of the *zeitgeist* combine to privilege one and then the other and then the third, at different places and times. This process produced the monuments that remain, archaeology's long-term literature.

Space

A framework of space and time has been devised to be as neutral as possible. The island has been divided into seven 'natural' areas, which can sometimes also claim individual and collective identities that are familiar: Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, Celtic British, Scottish, Christian, non-Christian. However, ethnic and national labels can be misleading, mainly because they are artefacts of today defined at a distance and not necessarily realities of the past. Moreover, even when these attributes are appropriate they may vary with the passage of time, as languages and cultures mingle or divide. On the other hand it is irritating to read (and to write) 'the inhabitants of the south-east part of the mainland', when everyone knows you mean 'the English'. Accordingly, the seven regions, like most of us, have alternative names to be used as and when greater or lesser precision is required. The western part of modern Scotland is for most of this period just *Scotland*, in contrast to the north-east part, which is *Pictland*. *North-west England* is the area of modern England that runs from the Solway Firth to the Mersey. *Wales* is Wales. *South-west England* is the peninsula from Wiltshire to the Scilly Isles. *Northumbria* in the north-east runs from the Forth to the Humber. The area to the south of it, stretching from the Humber to the Channel and from the North Sea to Wales, is not culturally equivalent to England for most of our period, so is termed here *Southumbria*. I will use these words in italics as shorthand for geographical terms but will often fall to using 'north and west' as opposed to 'south and east' to describe larger cultural contrasts. If readers want to adjust these mentally to mean the traditional zones assigned to Celtic Britain and Anglo-Saxon England, I can't stop them. But it should be clear from the outset that we are in pursuit of more exciting quarries. The variegated personalities illustrated by the monumental zones are not merely rooted in landscape and language but are held to express more elusive qualities of culture and belief.

The smaller islands round Britain's shores are included, with a little inconsistency: for the present purpose, the northern and western isles, Man, Anglesey and Wight, are taken as part of Britain; the Channel Islands are not. Ireland is not treated jointly with Britain, as it sometimes has been in the past, mainly because its early medieval archaeology is relatively advanced in comparison with that of Britain, and has been the subject of a recent and exemplary overview.[1] But the Irish experience will be needed and cited at every stage. Britain is surrounded by four seas, separating it from important neighbours at no great distance by boat. Of these, Scandinavia, Ireland and the Rhineland exercised a powerful and continual influence, like three suns shining on a single planet. The archaeological narrative makes frequent trips to these places to help explain what is happening at home.

Time

The descriptor 'formative' has been borrowed from Mesoamerican archaeology, where it has been in service for generations as a successor to the archaic and a prelude to the 'Classic' period of the great Mayan centres. The origins of Mayan civilisation has been chronicled with ever increasing precision by tracking the establishment of agricultural, religious and social systems and the emergence of states[2]. Britain's formative follows rather than precedes the 'Classical' in Europe, but the term is still apt: here too religious, social and economic

Table 0.1 Formative periods in relation to other British and Continental time divisions. The Formative period as a whole is known as the early medieval ages, *Das Fruhmittelalterzeit*, *La haute Moyen Age*, *Altomedioevo*, *la Alta Edad Media*.

BRITAIN *400–1100*	*Formative 1* *400–675*	*Formative 2* *675–825*	*Formative 3* *825–1100*
South and east Britain 400–1066	*Early Anglo-Saxon* 600–675 *Conversion*	*Middle Saxon*	*Late Saxon/Anglo-Scandinavian*
North and west Britain 400–1050	*Late Iron Age/Early Historic*	*Early Historic*	800–1050 *Historic/Norse*
Ireland 400–1100	*Late Iron Age*	[400–800] *Early Christian*	800–980 *Viking*
France	481–687 *Merovingian*	687–751–840 *Carolingian*	840–1039 *Ottonian*
Scandinavia	*Migration*	*Merovingian*	*Viking*
Denmark	400–575	575–800	800–1050
Sweden	400–550	550–750 *Vendel*	750–1050
Norway	400–570	570–800	800–1000

forces formed new political structures, albeit on the ruins of empire. The time span of the British Formative is defined as the 5th to 11th century. The sequence of events is constructed from agreed dates, drawn from scientific measurement where possible and otherwise from the cultural framework worked out by generations of European scholars. For convenience, or as a shorthand to aid navigation, the Formative period as whole is divided into three: Period 1–5th to 7th century, Period 2–7th to 9th century and Period 3–9th to 11th century. As can be seen, they overlap, allowing a prudent cushion of vagueness between them. These period divisions emerge quite readily from the dated sequence, and by the end of the book it will be possible to propose more precise figures for the points of transition. One motive for devising this scheme is to resolve the confusion caused by having so many names for the segments of this part of European history, in many cases with names drawn from site types (e.g. Vendel), languages (e.g. p-Celtic) or principal events (migration) (see Table 0.1).

Scope

The material assembled here has been recovered by numerous researchers over several centuries. No one life is long enough to master the primary records of the archaeological sources, which are already vast and now multiplying faster than anyone can write. In this it is not (at all) like a history book in which sources held in common can be reduced to a manageable size by a magisterial synthesis. The output here consists of partial overviews, into which life is breathed by puffs of interpretation of greater or lesser plausibility. Many archaeologists, especially those in the early medieval period (and especially me), suffer from the unfortunate ailment known as *PGS* (premature generalisation syndrome). In some ways this is inevitable, since the period is markedly underdeveloped in comparison to most others, whether prehistoric, proto-historic or historic. The arbiters of academic excellence tend to make no distinction between one period and another, so we are driven to try and keep up by synthesising what we have so far. While the result is always premature, other disciplines like us to do this, since it treats their needs with courtesy and common sense. By contrast, those in the game sometimes regard attempts to reinterpret their findings and incorporate them in an overview as an intrusion into their personal fiefdom. I can't do much about this, having the broader audience in mind. Nevertheless, knowing that I should control PGS to a supportable itchy state, I have usually attempted to put data before overview, so that the reader is briefed before a new model is presented; which it is, to a greater or lesser degree of invention, in every chapter. To those whose work is omitted or its significance distorted I offer a blanket apology: selection was needed, the choice was mine, the loss is to the reader.

Structure

The narrative is delivered with the aid of a three-draw toolbox: each chapter is focused on a particular kind of evidence (artefacts, settlement, burial, sculpture, texts), inside each of which the reader follows a sequence of the three predefined periods (Fm 1, 2, 3); and within each of these, trends and responses are explored making use of the seven predefined regions. The Table included in this preface (Table 0.1) shows the framework.

The structure is designed to be as simple to navigate as possible, though it might not always seem like that. The first chapter, *Inheritance*, sets the scene by pointing out the varied character of the island's geography and the permanent affect that its soils and climate had on everyone living there. This has been highlighted expeditiously by a succession of geographers, and archaeologists, but ignored by most scholars since. It is worth restating, since the natural landscape is the silent force behind much of what happened. The other silent force is prehistory, which may act through actual memory, more than we may suppose, or from interaction with its monuments on the ground.

Four chapters follow, exploring four major aspects of existence coupled with four major ways of understanding them archaeologically: *Looking for personhood* is about the distinctions in human biology and appearance and how that appearance was embellished with clothing and ornament. This is the single most common and effective way in which people could express their times and be distinguished from each other. *Working from home* encompasses settlements of all sorts including villages, towns, ports and monasteries, their assets and idiosyncrasies. *Addressing eternity* investigates the contribution of cemeteries, their plans, their rites and rituals in the development of thinking about this world and the next. *Monumentality* is focused on standing stones and buildings, especially crosses and churches, which in many ways succeeded cemeteries as the principal form of abstract investment after Christianisation took hold. Illuminated manuscripts, argued to be monuments too, make a guest appearance here.

From these four sequences, a general narrative is composed, and explanations offered. There are plenty of gaps: many sites of the greatest importance are unpublished, some indeed still languishing in private cupboards. The invaluable *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* was not complete at the time of writing. However, it is never a good time to write a synthesis in which everything is included, and this book does not try. In general, a series of well-excavated, well-published multi-period examples opens each chapter and provides the framework for each study, while other more partial evidence feeds the developing case.

I am aware that arguments based on archaeology alone will be new to many and distasteful to some. Where are the verses and anecdotes and heroes of history? I am far from immune to the charms of the written record and celebrate them in Chapter 6 (*Materiality in words*), which is placed towards the end for several reasons. Firstly, the obvious one that I do not claim competence in the analysis of written texts and would rather not use them than abuse them. Secondly, I want to convince my readers that archaeology can tell its own story, supported by its own witnesses in periods that have no written words, or in periods that have plenty, or, as in this case, periods which have little, and obscure at that. Lastly, in the nature of things, early authors describe events that have already happened or they thought had happened or wished had happened, and their testimony is retrospective and ingenious. The use made of this material is, perhaps perversely, not as a source for history but as a source for archaeology: it is poetry's revelations of materiality that are sought and spotlit.

Overview

Robin Fleming was one of the first scholars to attempt an account of early medieval Britain as a whole, in an excellent book that makes vivid use of both archaeology and documents. But she delivers a rueful verdict on the period: 'so diverse were the experiences of people living through these years that no master narrative, no matter how compelling, does justice to the lives of those who experienced them'.[3] While I accept the wisdom of this judgement, the present book does attempt a master narrative summarised in its final chapter (Chapter 7) and drawn from the models devised in the others. The economic inequality between the Jurassic plain, broadly the area occupied in succession by the Romans and then the English, and the less fertile and less accessible broken land of the rest of the island pervades the whole of our period. If the 'English' area (the south and east) was naturally richer, it was also less in touch with its indigenous prehistory, primarily because it was dominated by immigrants who took several centuries to settle in. In *Formative 1*, the Southumbrians, who had all the best land, were arable farmers living in open villages served by communal cemeteries of cremations and inhumations furnished with grave goods of characteristic Germanic type. The rest of the island was populated by communities operating from small family forts and living off stock, especially cattle. Their burial places showed much continuity in form, location and practice with their prehistoric predecessors. They signposted their routes and holdings with erect stone pillars inscribed with personal names. None of the peoples, either in the north and west or the east and south, appear to have invested in monuments or performance that was overtly Christian, but their upper classes were in contact with each other and maintained their own, separated, overseas alliances.

Towards the end of Formative 1, in the early 7th century, a more socially stratified society advertises its arrival in the south and east in the form of monumental burial mounds dedicated to individual males and multi-purpose 'magnate farms'. By the mid-7th century, it is the turn of the women to be celebrated in richly furnished burials, suggesting a need to express their leadership in both proprietorial and religious affairs. By the beginning of Formative 2, and specifically about AD 675, England finally begins its archaeologically visible Christian conversion, a process intimately interwoven with British integration and the creation of rich estates and ever larger kingdoms.

By contrast, the inhabitants of the north and west, including Northumbria, were swept up in a revived Christianisation programme shared with Ireland, marked by multi-purpose monasteries, stone crosses and illuminated manuscripts. Well into Formative 2, in the mid-8th century, Northumbria leads the charge for the conversion of the rest of the island into a monastic nation, leaving a trail of markers, the Victory Crosses, strung out across the land. At the same time, the English in Southumbria enhance their opposing project of royal control with the creation of a set of dedicated international trading places, the *wics*. The difference in the political agendas of the south-east and the rest of the island during Formative 2 emerges ineluctably from the examination of clothes, settlement, burial and monumentality, and it highlights both the pivotal position of Northumbria and the anomalous character of the early English monastery.

These two parallel, and sometimes confronted, programmes, the one driven by religious fundamentalism and the other by centralised kingship, had little time to compromise or confront each other before both had to deal with the arrival of the Vikings: the Danish in the east and south and the Norse in the north and west. Archaeologically this initiates *Formative 3*. Alfred of Wessex in the south and Macbeth of Moray in the north confronted the Viking incursions separately in a hundred years of war. The Vikings did not unite them, however; rather, the English used the cessation of hostilities to invade and attempt to subdue the other occupants of the island, eventually defining the space of a kingdom equivalent to the England of the present day. Under the radar of this new regime, archaeology finds the surviving substrate of local cultures. The material traces left by the Vikings mark their trajectory from conquest to settlement and the adoption of a secularised version of Christianity, with local churches and hybrid sculptures. The older cultures represented by Scots and Picts, Northumbrians and Southumbrians, peoples of Cornwall and Britons in every part, persist alongside the ghosts of prehistoric beliefs, Roman regulation, micro-religions and early kingdoms. Force and ideology create new identities, but earlier identities never wholly go away, their cultural footprints never entirely erased.

Readers will see that the archaeological analysis undertaken here accepts the English as developing out of immigrant communities from areas of the Rhineland, north Germany, Denmark and Norway. They largely hold themselves apart until the later 6th century, when they blend increasingly, even in the east, with the indigenous Britons, leading to a second definition of the Anglo-Saxons as Anglo-British. A third definition comes from the assimilation of the Danish and Norse, resulting in a population that can be broadly described as Anglo- or Scotto-Scandinavian. As will be appreciated, the English are a heterogeneous people and by no means always the principal players in this island story, for a large part of which the peoples of the north, south, east and west were equally matched. Nevertheless, the English work at being culturally English and were still attempting to dominate the other inhabitants of the island when they were conquered by Continental Normans and our period ends. Maybe the essential foreignness of the English in Britain is an issue that has yet to be resolved today – but that is for others to say. What will be noticed here is that in economics, art, ideology, engineering, stockbreeding, food production and trade – in everything, in fact, apart from power politics, it is the integration of the English with the other inhabitants of the island that generated advances of great originality and permanent value.

The author

Seamus Heaney's introduction to his translation of *Beowulf* contains an encomium for the happy accident that brought together so many different kinds of language and of poetry to develop cheek by jowl in a pair of European offshore islands. He describes his excitement at discovering that the common Irish word *uisce* (water) appears in British river names (Usk) and of course in 'whisky':

> so in my mind the stream was suddenly turned into a kind of linguistic river of rivers issuing from a kind of Celto-British Land of Cockaigne, a riverrun of Finnegans Wake-speak pouring out of the cleft rock of some prepolitical, prelapsarian, urphilological Big Rock Candy Mountain – and all of this had a wonderfully sweetening effect on me. The Irish/English duality, the Celtic/Saxon antithesis were momentarily collapsed.

A similar moment accompanied his rediscovery of the old English word *thole* used by older Ulster people: 'they'll just have to learn to thole' remarked his aunt of some family that had suffered an unforeseen bereavement.[4] This is a moment I can share: as a 17-year-old I was enraptured to note that *thole* deployed by James Joyce in *Ulysses* ('thole and bring forth bairns') was also inscribed on the dinner plates at home '*Thole and Think on*' – the motto of my mother's Border family.

My early education was neither archaeological nor academic, but military. I was born into a principled but anachronistic family which expected me to know how to saddle a horse, shoot a duck, catch a trout and risk my life fighting people I did not know for reasons I was not told. At the time I was impressed (and later alarmed) to find that signing up for war on the vaguest of pretexts did nothing to diminish the adventure – rather the opposite. No one today should underestimate the incomprehensible, reprehensible, exhilaration of going into battle, or believe that it is confined to fundamentalists. It is this unspoken joy of trying one's hand against fate that makes young people so easy to manipulate for politically moronic ends.

At 18, I was also induced into the deep narcissism that dwells in regiments of the line: the dressing up and preening with blue serge, shiny metal badges with their symbolic animals, the skeuomorphic chain mail, the formal greetings, the long loud dinners, the drinking challenges aimed at the youngest subaltern least likely to achieve them, the pipes playing round and round the table, as the diners sank into an alcoholic stupor, sobbing silently at the pibroch; the burst of activity afterwards when the sofas were up-ended and all the officers fell upon each other in a wild game of rugby without a ball, heads were broken, blood flowed and hundreds of pounds worth of hand-stitched uniforms were torn into shreds and delivered in the morning to delighted tailors. It is likely that a resurrected Fergus, or Cú Chulainn, the companions of Maelgwyn or Raedwald or the young man buried in Sutton Hoo's Mound 17 would have found much that was familiar in a 20th-century British officers' Mess.

Genesis of the book

This book arose from a basic need to try and understand better a period that I have loved for 50 years – since I first read the *Problem of the Picts* in the military library at Celle in 1969 and bought Jackson's translation of the *Gododdin* at the Edinburgh festival in 1970. In effect my introduction to the early middle ages was via poetry. I took up archaeology after leaving the army in 1972 and soon realised not only that it had penetrative powers of its own but also that it happened out of doors; so, better than poetry in some ways. I was urged to write the book by colleagues in Scandinavia, frustrated at having no accessible overview of early medieval Britain and, in England, by fellow academics working in early medieval history and literature, looking for a description of how archaeology works. The consequence is that this is an archaeological book: I make no pretensions to write history. My hope is that real historians will write new history using such parts of it that they find convincing.

My dearest friends will know that I had set my heart on a vivid rollicking book in a bid to popularise the period, encourage more people to learn from it and see how it still steers events today. By using a rhetorical and reckless approach to the task I hoped to attract more readers other than those already embedded, readers who in real life are politicians, teachers, children and pensioners. But more than ever today there is a sceptical gap between the labour of reason and the primrose path of conjecture. If the gap is to be bridged, the foundations must be laid. So the hard work has to come first, and its outcome has to be a serious book full of verifiable detail.

Among those friends, Rosemary Cramp, Catherine Hills and Madeleine Hummler are those who have taught and guided me most. Drafts were read by Steve Driscoll, Nancy Edwards, Helen Geake, Catherine Hills and Madeleine Hummler, and I am most grateful to them. Nancy's astute assessment in particular resulted in a major reconstruction that has made the whole thesis easier to follow, if not necessarily easier to accept. As always, I owe a debt of gratitude to Cecily Spall for her astute critique and to our company, FAS Heritage, for the production of the illustrations. I offer special thanks to Matthew Gibbons, Molly Marler and other staff at Routledge for their guidance, patience and faith in the project; to Jo Tozer and Autumn Spalding for invaluable help in getting the book to press; and especially to Madeleine Hummler for more than 40 years of encyclopaedic insights and shared adventure.

Ellerton, York
1 August 2017

Notes

1 O'Sullivan et al. 2014a.
2 Willey and Phillips 1958, 144ff; Renfrew and Bahn 2008, 506–514.
3 Fleming 2010, 240.
4 Heaney 1999, xxiv, xxv.

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1 Inheritance

Landscapes and predecessors

Introduction

Britain and Ireland, two lands equally blessed with natural assets, are the largest members of an archipelago off the north-west edge of continental Europe that also includes smaller offshore islands in the south, west and north. The whole has been referred to as the 'British Isles', inaccurately since Ireland was never British.[1] This book is focussed on the island of Britain, as opposed to Britain and Ireland, mainly because a magnificent compendium on early medieval Ireland has just appeared, following a period of intense archaeological investigation.[2] The present survey has required frequent glances across the Irish Sea, and the two studies together will hopefully reveal something of that special power of difference that can inspire mutual admiration in close neighbours.

Since Britons also lived in Brittany, the term 'Great Britain' referred to its larger land mass, rather than its magnificent achievements on the world stage, a tenderly nurtured delusion.[3] The Britons themselves were a heterogeneous people, composed of several groups, including the Picts, the Welsh and the Britons of the south-west, seasoned by four centuries of immigration from the parts of the Roman empire, soon to be joined by the English in the south-east and by the Irish in west Wales and Scotland. Britain was already a mixed race in the 5th century, this being probably the basis for its ingenuity and resilience.

This chapter sets the scene for an exploration of Formative Britain by reviewing the legacy that its peoples inherited: the natural assets of the land and the seas and the relict landscape of the earlier inhabitants. We will find that terrestrial regions define themselves quite easily and that they are still with us; that their character was determined by nature and prehistory, and their experience in the Formative period was modulated by neighbours across the nearest sea, neighbours who were often immigrants and sometimes invaders; and that Britain, far from being a self-contained entity, was a frontier zone where vigorous cultures met.

The natural inheritance: the seas

Britain is surrounded by three seas, the North Sea, the Channel and the Irish Sea, plus the Atlantic Ocean, and these are divided into 14 inner 'sea-areas' surrounding Britain, all bearing names familiar to late-night listeners to the BBC shipping forecast (Figure 1.1). To get a feel for the seas, we can take an imaginary trip on the 30 m-long ship found in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, which had up to 40 oars and probably a sail.[4] Although small by yachting standards it remains the largest vessel known to early medieval Europe before the 11th century; it was open to the sky, had a simple steering oar (a 'steerboard' on the starboard (right-hand) side) and a freeboard (distance from the gunnel to the waterline amidships) of half a metre.

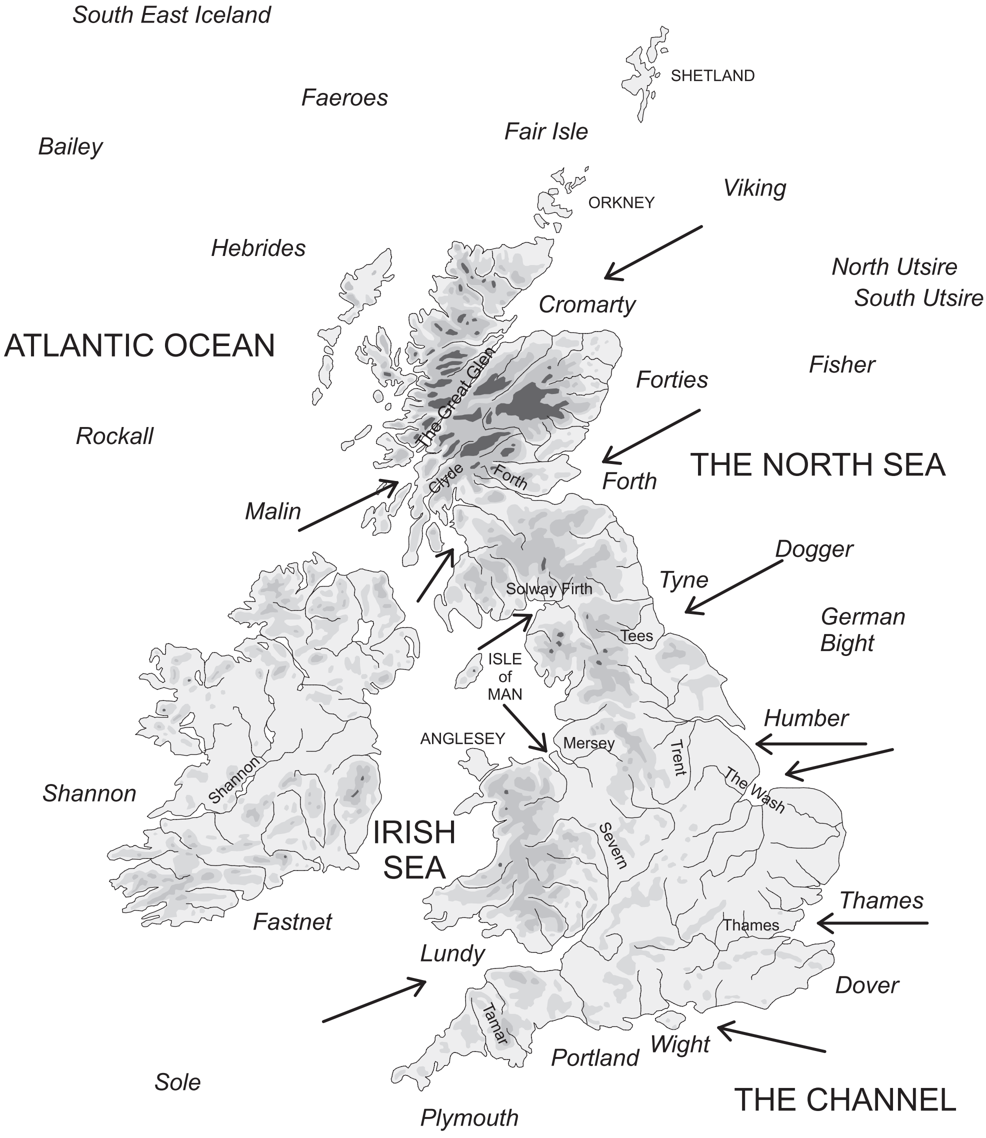
South East Iceland
SHETLAND
Faeroes
Fair Isle
Bailey
Viking
ORKNEY
Hebrides
North Utsire
South Utsire
Cromarty
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Fisher
Forties
The Great Glen
Rockall
THE NORTH SEA
Forth
Clyde
Forth
Malin
Dogger
Tyne
Solway Firth
German Bight
Tees
ISLE of MAN
Humber
ANGLESEY
Mersey
Trent
The Wash
Shannon
Shannon
IRISH SEA
Severn
Thames
Thames
Fastnet
Lundy
Dover
Tamar
Wight
Portland
Sole
THE CHANNEL
Plymouth

Figure 1.1 Britain and its neighbours with the location of sea areas (in italics), showing main rivers and principal points of entry.

(FAS Heritage)

Proposing a departure from Portmahomack in Easter Ross, we pass down the east coast of Britain, from north to south, through Cromarty, Forth, Tyne, Humber, Thames – all these names reporting the main gateways into the island via firths in the north and estuaries in the south. We take a right turn down the Channel through Dover, Wight, Portland and Plymouth, although only Southampton water, protected by the Isle of Wight, provides a well-protected entry point. Around the perilous cape of Land's End we head up the Irish Sea through sea areas Lundy, Irish Sea, Malin and Hebrides, passing the major gateways of the Severn, the Mersey, the Solway Firth and the Clyde, through the dense patterns of the western isles to the northern isles (Fair Isle) and round John O'Groats back to Cromarty. The outer sea areas report districts known to more adventurous, far-ranging mariners: Viking, Utsire, Forties, Fisher, Dogger, German Bight in the eastern sea; Fastnet, Shannon, Rockall in the west; Bailey, Faeroes and south-east Iceland in the north.

Wind and water

The politics and prosperity of the archipelago were contingent on how easy it was to travel by sea; and this in turn was dependent on a mariners' package comprised of the natural environment, the technology of boats and navigational skills. We know a little bit about each of these. Situated between the continent and the ocean, the natural forces of swell, current, tide and wind tend to create thoroughfares that differ with the time of year. In the North Sea, winds in spring favour the traveller from Scandinavia, and in autumn they blow them home[5] (Figure 1.2). But in winter, while winds theoretically favour northward travellers, the seas are dangerous. The strongest storm force winds (7–10) are recorded for the months of October to December, and they blow from the west, south-west (in the Channel) and north-west (in the north).[6] An open boat would be threatened by winds of Force 5 or more, so North Sea travellers did not generally put to sea after October. The early English sailors put to sea again in March, traditionally prompted by the arrival of a perennial spring visitor: 'the cuckoo calls, urging the heart onto the whales' road '.[7] The physical effects of these winds,

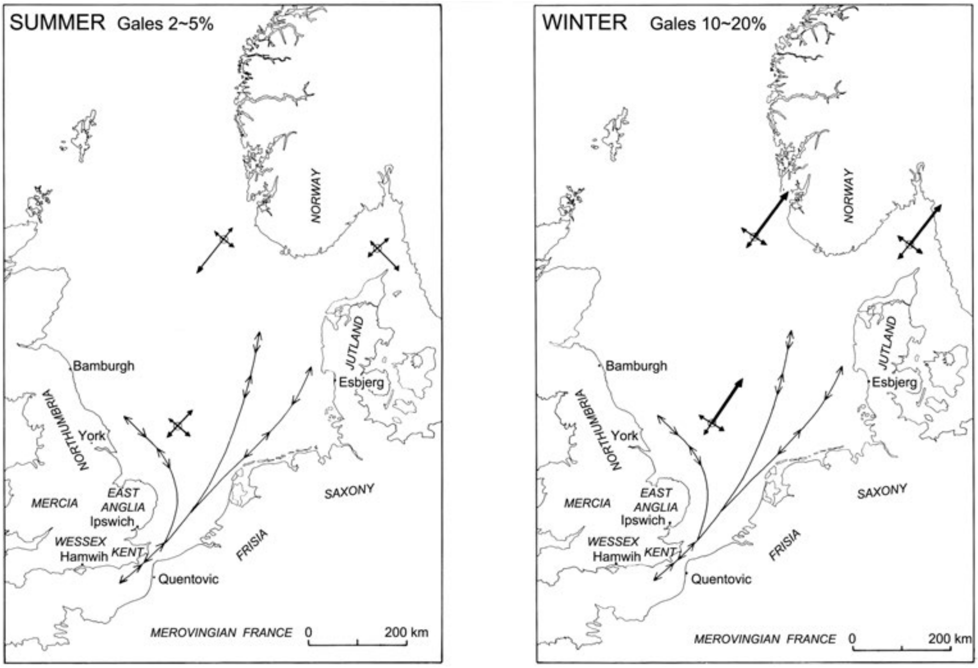
SUMMER Gales 2~5%
NORWAY
JUTLAND
Esbjerg
Bamburgh
NORTHUMBRIA
York
MERCIA
EAST ANGLIA
Ipswich
WESSEX
Hamwih
KENT
Quentovic
FRISIA
SAXONY
MEROVINGIAN FRANCE
0
200 km
WINTER Gales 10~20%
NORWAY
JUTLAND
Esbjerg
Bamburgh
NORTHUMBRIA
York
MERCIA
EAST ANGLIA
Ipswich
WESSEX
Hamwih
KENT
Quentovic
FRISIA
SAXONY
MEROVINGIAN FRANCE
0
200 km

Figure 1.2 Tide and currents (narrow lines) and seasonal prevailing winds in the North Sea.

(Carver 1990, Fig 15.2 © author)

Table 1.1 Beaufort Scale of wind speed, with effect on a sailing smack

Name of wind	*ON LAND*	*ON SEA*	*Speed of a FISHING SMACK*
0 Calm	Smoke rises vertically	Like a mirror	Becalmed
1 Light air	Smoke shows wind direction	Ripples	Just has steerage way
2 Light breeze	Wind felt on face	Small wavelets. Crests look glassy	Sails filled speed 1–2 kn
3 Gentle breeze	Leaves in motion	Crests begin to break	Smacks tilt at 3–4 kn
4 Moderate breeze	Raises dust	White horses fairly frequent	Carry all canvas with good list
5 Fresh breeze	Small trees sway	Moderate waves, some spray	Smacks shorten sail
6 Strong breeze	Whistling heard in wires	Large waves. White foam crests everywhere	Double reef in mainsail
7 Near gale	Whole trees in motion	Sea heaps up and white streaks show direction of the wind	Smacks lie-to or stay in in harbour
8 Gale	Twigs broken off trees	Long waves, spindrift, well-marked streaks	All smacks make for harbour
9 Strong gale	Chimney pots blown off	High waves topple, tumble and turn over. Spray may affect visibility	–
10 Storm	Trees uprooted	Very high waves; whole sea looks white; poor visibility	–

so pertinent to travel and survival in the early middle ages, are today summarised by the Beaufort scale (Table 1.1). The North Sea is thus a thoroughfare rather than a barrier, but it is a thoroughfare that favours Scandinavian traffic. The tidal currents are at their fiercest where canalised in the Straits of Dover. The North Atlantic Drift, a spin off from the Gulf Stream, brings warm surface water past the Iberian peninsula through the Irish Sea to the Orkneys, marking out an ancient thoroughfare that has carried people and ideas from the south to the north of Europe since the Neolithic.[8]

Navigation

Wind, tide and current thus conspire to keep mariners off the deep water in the winter months, and then favour northward travel in the Irish Sea and westward travel in the North Sea (but not of course exclusively, or all the time). The 'haven-finding arts' have many natural signals in our region.[9] The whole of Britain stands on the continental shelf, with a depth of surrounding water of less than 100 metres, with characteristic estuarine outflows of broken shell and sand that can be picked up on a plumb-line. The sun is lower at midday the further north you go, so a mark on the mast gives a crude measure of latitude. As modern coastal dwellers know, the winds feel different depending on their direction: cold and dry (from the north, a 'northerly'), cold and wet (an easterly), warm and wet (a westerly), warm and dry (a southerly). The coastline, as viewed from the sea, has a profile that mariners learn to recognise, and early medieval people used burial mounds and standing stones as seamarks to indicate the entrance to estuaries and firths.[10] It is said that the sea breaking on certain rock formations makes a characteristic sound that can be heard in fog or by listening for it on the gunnel. The edge of the continental shelf is where fish congregate, marked by a feeding frenzy when the herrings or mackerel are in: the sea is flecked with a wavy line of fish fragments and seen from a distance as a ribbon of diving birds. In the western seaways, birds are especially useful: the nightly rush of fulmars indicates the direction of land. Geese go north in spring to feed and nest, and can be seen, skein after skein, through the day and sensed by night from their reassuring yelps. Since they must eventually land, the geese lead the way from the Irish Sea to the northern isles and beyond, to St Kilda, Faeroes and Iceland. These were the escorts of the firmament that led the early Christian wanderers in leather boats to remote islands in mid-ocean.[11]

Types of boats

The third component of the mariners' package was the type of boat available, owed to tradition and (some) invention. Tradition dies hard in boat building, where experience and superstition maintain a stubborn alliance.[12] In the western sea, boats had been constructed since the Bronze Age (or before) from stitched leather stretched over a wickerwork frame and made watertight with butter; these were observed by Julius Caesar and still formed the template in the early middle ages as the Irish *curragh* and the Welsh coracle.[13] They were light and so could be the more easily carried over short necks of land separating seaways, using wagons.[14] These 'portages' cut journey times or avoided turbulent water.[15] The shorter distances between landfalls and the numerous islands favoured a type of pottering itinerary from cove to cove in inshore waters.[16]

As seen in rock art, Bronze Age boat builders in the eastern seas also used a skin-over-frame build, possibly inspired by seeing seals and whales. Dugouts, made of a single tree trunk hollowed out, are the ancestral craft of lake and river. In the later Iron Age, small boats of about 3 m in length used for burial have been excavated on the island of Bornholm (Dk) and at Snape in Suffolk (p. 400). These appear to have been one-man log-boats carved out of tree trunks, with a thin-walled boat-shaped profile.[17] The larger sea-going boats were built hull-first, a shell being made by tying planks together edge to edge with sinews or roots tightened by wedges (a 'sewn boat'). A frame to support the benches was then placed in this timber shell and lashed into place. The Bronze Age Ferriby boat which took people and cattle across the Humber estuary would appear to have been one of these. The Hjortspring boat deposited in a bog with a cargo of weapons c. 350 BC has a hull of sewn planks. It was reconstructed as the sea-going craft *Tilia*, which could cruise at 4.7 knots and 'charge' (the beach or another boat) at 7.6 kn and could travel 74 km in a day paddled by the same crew.[18] In later shells, the planks (strakes) were laid overlapping and held together with iron clench nails, and the frame fastened to the shell with iron bolts, so that the construction resembled an upside-down timber-framed roof. In the northern seas, well–preserved excavated boats appear to have provided an evolutionary sequence from edge-built to clinker-built, from sewn planks edge-on to overlapping planks fastened with iron clench nails.[19] This mention of their development is intended to show that water transport and sea crossings were no novelty in the early middle ages.

The introduction of the sail is more controversial; the Romans had filled the seas with sailing ships, so neither the eastern nor the western seafarers would have found them strange. On the other hand, the boats we have found (and they are very few) seem to have been unstable and vulnerable to side winds. *Edda* was a replica of the ship found in the Oseberg mound on the Oslo fjord, a burial attributed to Queen Åse, who died about 825. Like all ships of the Viking era and before it had no keel, and the side rudder (the steerboard on the starboard side) was liable to come out of the water when the ship listed (Figure 1.3). *Edda* was designed to

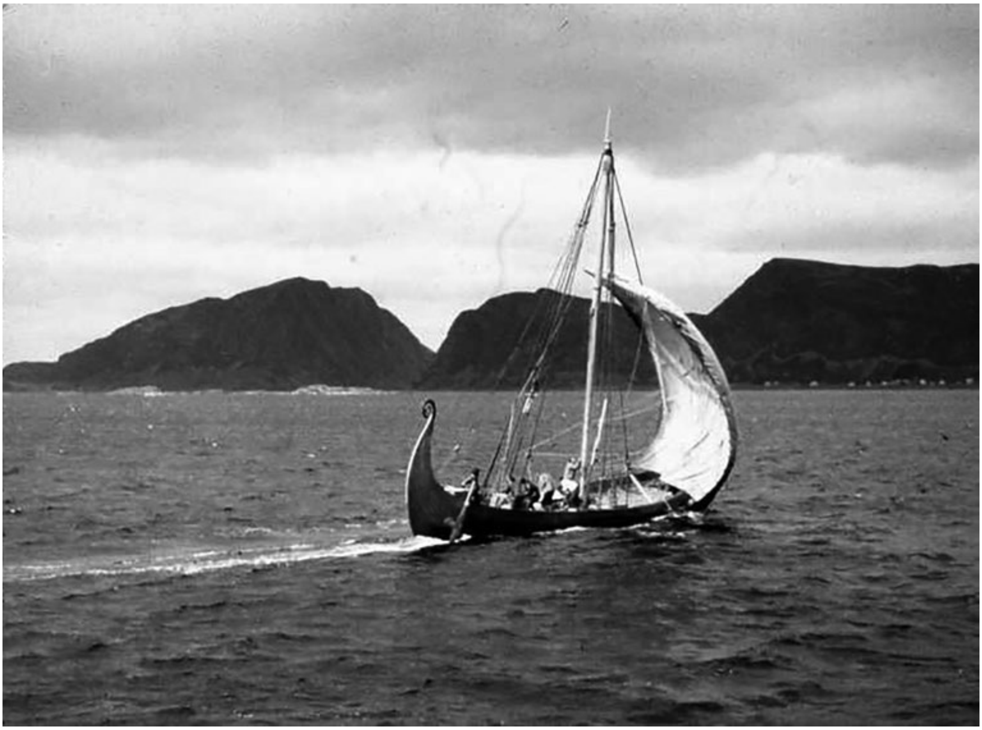

Figure 1.3 Edda, a replica of the Oseberg ship under sail, shortly before it capsized.
(Carver 1995b © author; photograph by B. Marden-Jones)

reveal aspects of performance under oars and under sail and to test the notion that a Viking ship could tack.[20] This research question was significant: if the Vikings could tack they had a wide choice of journeys, less restricted by wind and tide; they would need to row less and carry less crew and, by corollary, could carry more cargo. At the end of this line of reasoning is the social and economic implication that slaves could be replaced by a voluntary crew united by their mission. The performance of the *Edda* answered some questions with certainty, others less so. Under the use of oars it was sluggish, perhaps feasible on a lake or in a river but laborious at sea. As soon as the sail was erected, the ship took off like a rocket, running before the wind. The hull jumped, even aquaplaned, like a wind surfer; it also writhed, giving a live body to the carved beast's head at the prow and the snake's tail at the stern. Excitement was at a maximum, control below the mean. The Oseberg ship had featured two pairs of sockets bolted on to the inner gunnel forward, and a long pole with a forked end had been found in the burial. By fitting the base of the pole into one of the sockets and the fork onto the bottom corner of the square sail, it could be held out against the wind, making a belly that acted, or might have acted, like a jib, to allow a side wind to push the ship forward rather than pushing it over. The experiment was not entirely successful; after dipping the gunnel into the waves a few times, the ship capsized, throwing the crew into the water. There was snow on the hills and the water was freezing. Many Viking crews will have been less lucky then we were.[21]

Our experiment did not demonstrate whether the Vikings could or could not tack, only that it was challenging to a modern crew. There was a debate about whether the ship had carried too much sail, since the height of the mast had been calculated not by the Viking rule of thumb (the girth amidships) but by the angle of the stem and stern stays, as indicated by the angle of the iron fitting on the gunnel. However, detailed survival of the vessel could not compensate for the lost skill. The early days of sailing must have been rather like the early days of hang gliding, often fatal, until the knowledge had been built up on how the 'play' the ship. An 8th-century Gotland picture stone shows a network of sheets handled by several members of the crew suggesting that together they could cradle or spill the wind, taking advantage of light airs and absorbing the shock of sudden squalls. Human beings are depicted here as part of the rigging (Chapter 5, p. 566). It can be deduced that Viking ships were very fast before the wind, required high levels of skill to handle them and that a wrong move could be fatal. This experiment opened a window onto a sailing tradition that relied on long-term survivors hoarding their experience and teaching the young.

Ease of passage has an effect on journey times, and these in turn on the exercise of policy, war and size of profit. As a rule of thumb, a ship can make up to 80 miles a day under sail and 40 miles a day under oars. This compares with land times of about 30 miles a day on a horse and about 15 miles a day on foot or pulling a cart, depending on the state of the road (Figure 1.4).[22] Water provides the quicker surface for diplomacy, soldiers and cargos. But the sea is also capricious; even in high summer, storms can bring a trip to an untimely end. For this reason, it seems to be common sense that coastal voyages, using seamarks, were preferred to 'blue water' crossings, out of sight of land. We can imagine that the seabed is littered with the buried wreckage of innumerable light vessels that put to sea, or could not escape it in time. On the other hand, sailors know to avoid a lee shore, and it is better to ride out a storm at sea than head for land and risk ending up on the rocks. Given the conjectured skills of navigators and skippers, it is likely that the range and frequency of blue water crossings has been underestimated.[23] To make a landfall, the preferred method is to beach the boat or make an entry into a firth or estuary. These are the front doors to the island of Britain, but they may not open easily. A wind blowing towards the shore can carry a boat onto the rocks; one blowing the other way prevents you getting in. Once on the river, you must row against the current and, if timed wrong, against the tide. These variables form a vital part of the manual mariners carried in their heads, making a ship's captain an indispensable player in society, then as now.

For the first 200 years of our period, the evidence (such as it is) points to an immense amount of ad hoc and adventitious voyaging, with planning heavily dependent on local knowledge and even omens. On the east coast, which would become the province of the Anglo-Saxons, havens are few and far between. But in low-lying regions, like East Anglia, the foreshore is laced with creeks where a ship can float in and ground itself, departing again with the tide. Fairweather landings are possible on shingle beaches. Once in a river a boat can make its way inland and beach on mudflats along the tidal reach. But mudflats are not convenient for unloading cargos. This is only to say that while water is the best carrier, it is not an ubiquitous connector, and settlements probably mark favoured river routes, implying that routes determine settlement, not the other way round. Bede's (rather limited) world was no doubt determined at least in part by the ease of travel afforded by the North Sea coast and the rivers that it gave access to.[24]

Overseas contact

In the 6th century, imported amphorae and red slip plates showed that sea contact was evident between the eastern Mediterranean and the Irish Sea area. In the 7th century, a slightly enlarged Irish Sea was receiving domestic crockery from south-west France.[25] There were no natural obstacles preventing the ships carrying these cargos from heading up the Channel and round Kent and into the Thames – but they did not (Figure 1.5). In some readings, this

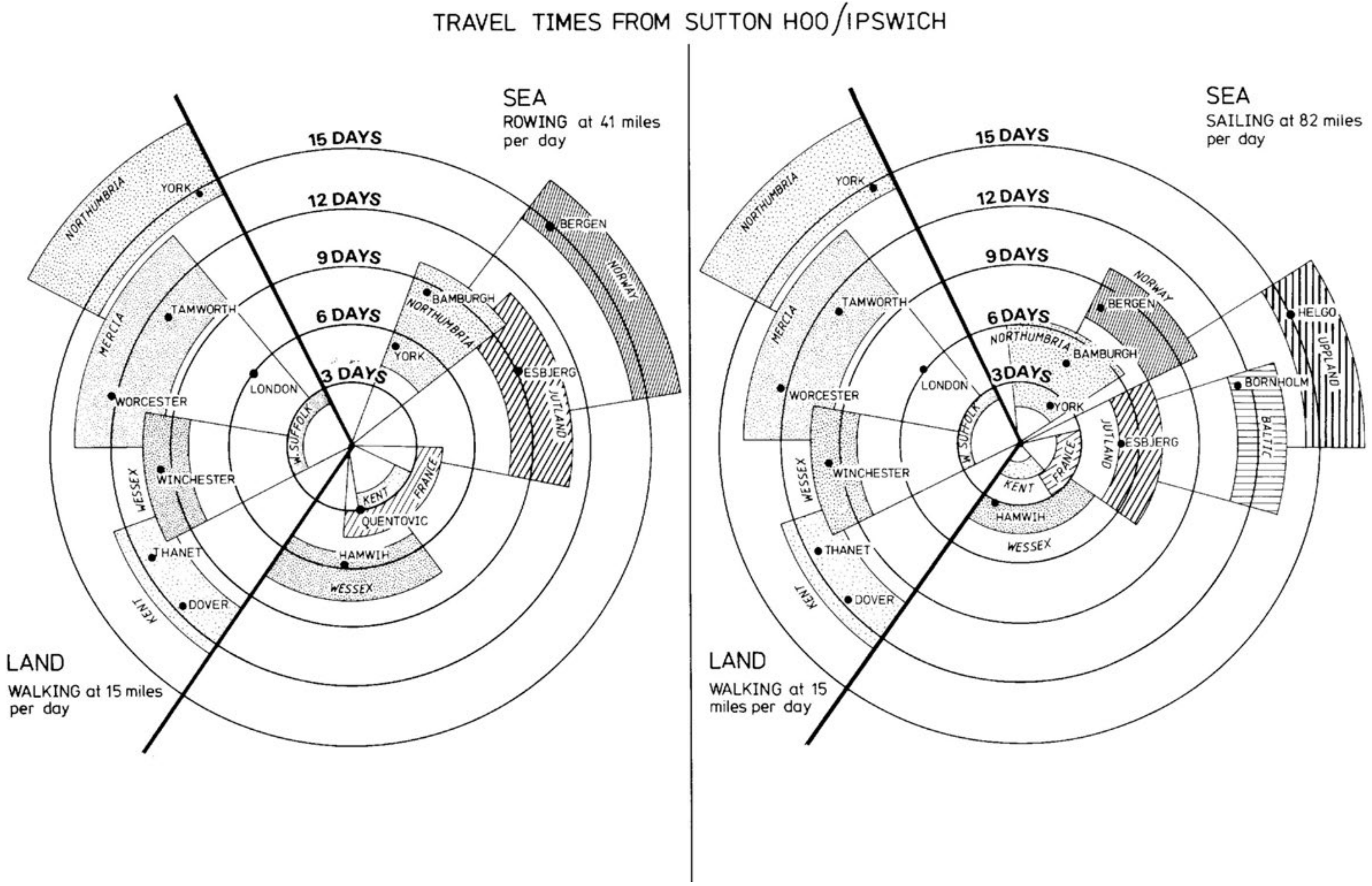
TRAVEL TIMES FROM SUTTON HOO/IPSWICH
SEA
ROWING at 41 miles per day
LAND
WALKING at 15 miles per day
15 DAYS
12 DAYS
9 DAYS
6 DAYS
3 DAYS
NORTHUMBRIA
YORK
MERCIA
TAMWORTH
WORCESTER
LONDON
W. SUFFOLK
WESSEX
WINCHESTER
KENT
THANET
DOVER
BERGEN
NORWAY
BAMBURGH
NORTHUMBRIA
YORK
ESBJERG
JUTLAND
KENT
FRANCE
QUENTOVIC
HAMWIH
WESSEX
SEA
SAILING at 82 miles per day
LAND
WALKING at 15 miles per day
15 DAYS
12 DAYS
9 DAYS
6 DAYS
3DAYS
NORTHUMBRIA
YORK
MERCIA
TAMWORTH
WORCESTER
LONDON
W. SUFFOLK
WESSEX
WINCHESTER
KENT
THANET
DOVER
NORWAY
BERGEN
NORTHUMBRIA
BAMBURGH
YORK
HELGO
UPPLAND
BORNHOLM
BALTIC
JUTLAND
ESBJERG
KENT
FRANCE
HAMWIH
WESSEX

Figure 1.4 Journey times by walking, rowing and sailing.

(Carver 1990, Fig 15.3. © author)

is because the rewards for 7th century merchants were greater in the Irish Sea, and in western Scotland in particular.[26] Others feel that France sufficiently answered English demand for prestigious goods.[27] However, an alternative viewpoint is that international contact and long-distance exchange are encouraged or restricted as much by ideological as by economic drivers. In the southern North Sea, pottery and metalwork found in graves indicates contact in East Anglia and Kent with north-west Germany in the 6th century, and in East Anglia, Humberside and Kent with north-west Germany, Demark, Norway and Frisia in the 8th. Placenames and ogham stones show that the Irish were occupying parts of west Wales and of western Scotland (assuming they were not already there). These would seem to signal changes in international allegiance rather than changes in maritime opportunity.

In the 5th–6th century, it can be surmised that several 'offshore polities' populated the Irish Sea, the Channel and the North Sea. These have yet to be systematically mapped but can be lined up for investigation: the Cornish-Munster, the Leinster-S Wales, the Anglesey-Man-N Britain, the Ulster-Dal Riada, the South-west British-Atlantic/Acquitaine and the English- Danish, English-German and English-French maritime hybrid communities.[28]

In the late 7th and 8th century the surge in monasticism and its consequent literary output lit up new lines of communication with France and the Mediterranean. Many of the contacts were not so much initiated by Christian alliances as enhanced by them, as can be seen by comparing the sources of the objects buried in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo with the sites of known scriptoria (Figure 1.6).[29] The journeys of enterprising British clerics increased in ambition during the 8th century. Willibald, a monk from Hampshire later to become bishop of Eichstätt, travelled across the Mediterranean to Syria in 720–3, stopping by the volcanic

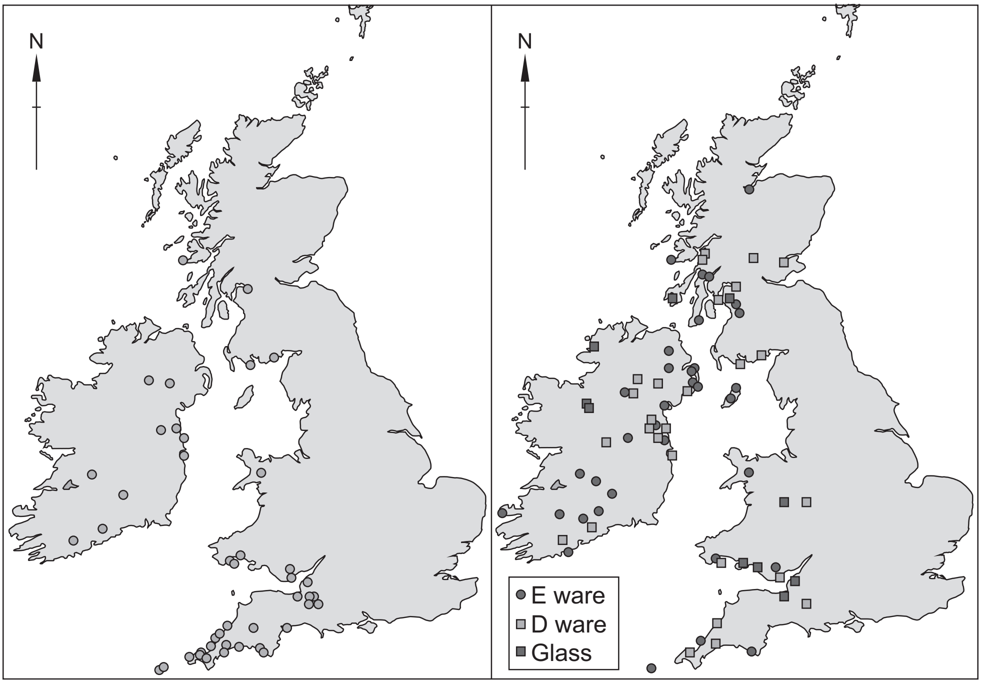

Figure 1.5 Destinations of pottery imported in the 6th century (left) and the 7th century (right).
(Carver and Loveluck 2013, Fig 6.7 after Campbell 2007; © authors)

Lipari Islands to collect pumice needed for smoothing parchment. While in Tyre he filled a calabash with balsam and succeeded in smuggling it through customs by disguising its scent with petroleum.[30] McCormick used this and other types of evidence to detect multiple lines of exchange and communication in a Mediterranean long thought to have been nearly deprived of traffic during the 7th–9th century.[31] Richard Morris' review of exotic objects found in Britain shows that, even if not economically engaged, the island was far from isolated. A pilgrim flask from Egypt was found on the seashore at Meols; Whithorn received glass and pottery from Tunisia, the Levant and Turkey. The monasteries themselves formed an internal network and were sited with a view to sea travel. By the 8th century, many points

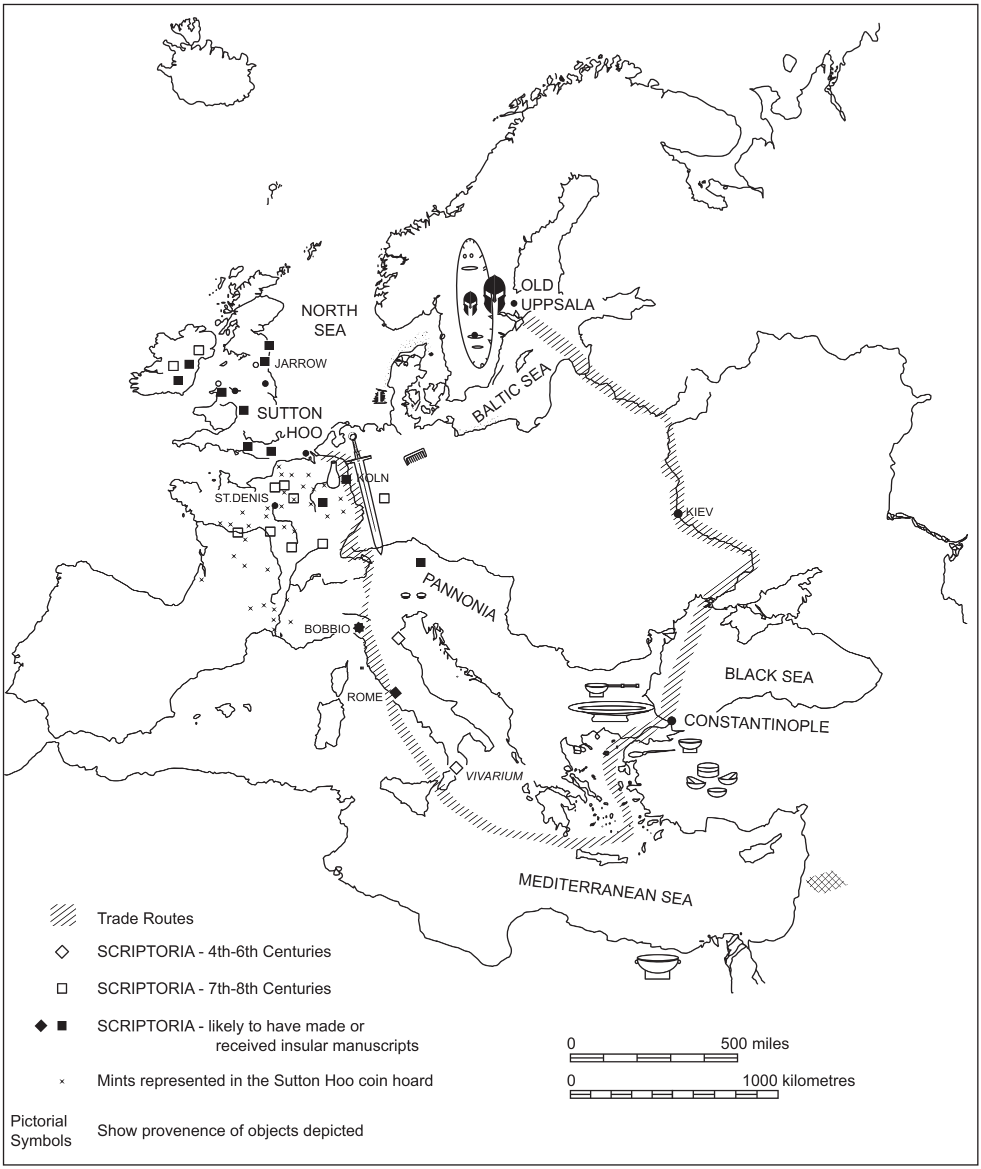
NORTH SEA
OLD UPPSALA
JARROW
SUTTON HOO
BALTIC SEA
KOLN
ST.DENIS
KIEV
PANNONIA
BOBBIO
ROME
BLACK SEA
CONSTANTINOPLE
VIVARIUM
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Trade Routes
◇ SCRIPTORIA - 4th-6th Centuries
□ SCRIPTORIA - 7th-8th Centuries
◆ ■ SCRIPTORIA - likely to have made or received insular manuscripts
× Mints represented in the Sutton Hoo coin hoard
Pictorial Symbols
Show provenence of objects depicted
0
500 miles
0
1000 kilometres

Figure 1.6 Provenance of objects found at Sutton Hoo.

(© Author)

of entry on the east coast were marked by a monastery. Once abroad the monasteries provided a staged itinerary with hostels, at least for those carrying references.[32] For non-urgent summer travel the approximate journey time from Canterbury to Rome was 7–8 weeks.[33]

The old Roman waterfronts did not suit the shallow draft vessels. Thus, Formative 2 mariners still used beaches and tides to land their cargoes: and a move towards the greater regulation of trade began to restrict the places where unloading was permitted, namely the *wics*. At *Lundenwic*, the 7th/8th century landing place was located on the Thames foreshore, remembered as The Strand. But by Formative 3, in the 9th and 10th century, the technology had adjusted to serve even tighter regulations and returned to the Roman prescription: heavy bottomed vessels were moored against robust timber waterfronts to discharge commodities on which tax was presumably payable. The beaches meanwhile became the preserve of fishermen and smugglers. Sea travel boldly expanded in this period. North Sea fishermen began risking their lives in deep sea fishing expeditions, the Vikings were discovering America and the travellers Ohthere and Wulfstan reported the reality of bringing furs from the Arctic Circle[34] (Figure 1.7). These reports were delivered to the court of Wessex, where in the 10th century the descendants of the seaborne Anglo-Saxon immigrants produced an idiosyncratic world map (Figure 1.8). But this was no navigational chart or commercial route-finder, such

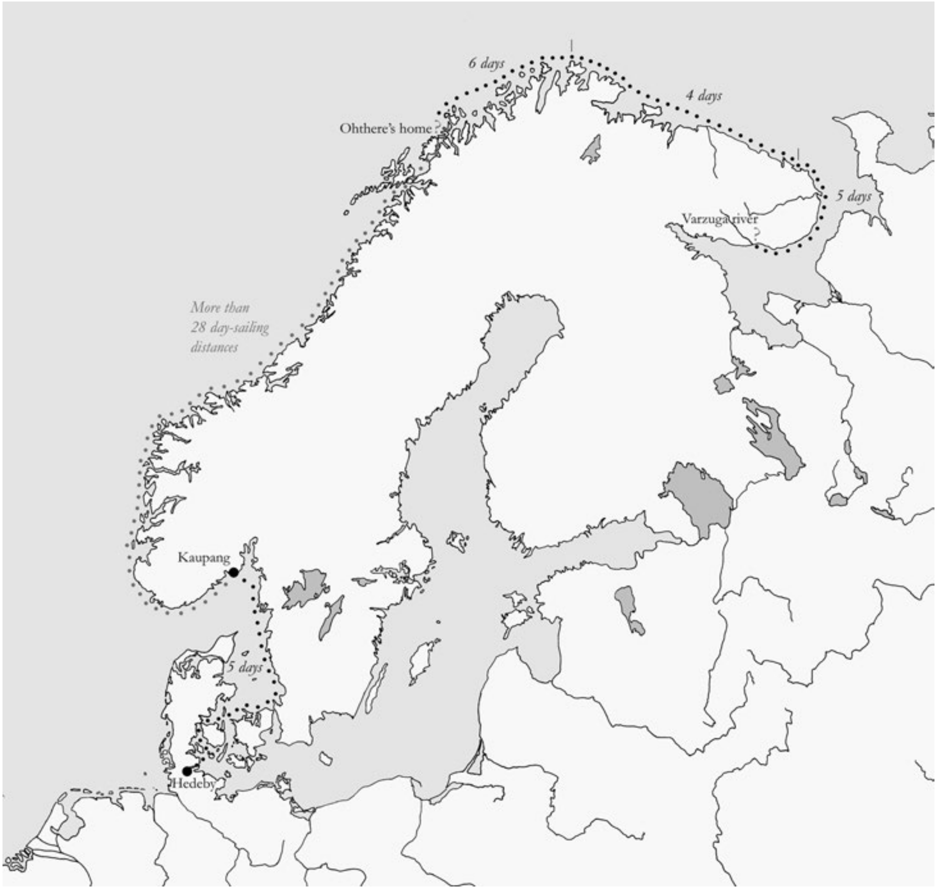

Figure 1.7 Ohthere (Danish *Ottar*) was a 9th century merchant living near Lofoten, north of the Arctic Circle. The map shows his journey times east and south by ship, as reported to the court of King Alfred around AD 900.

(Drawing by Anton Englert. Bately and Englert 2007, Fig. 6. With permission from Vikingeskipmuseet, Roskilde)

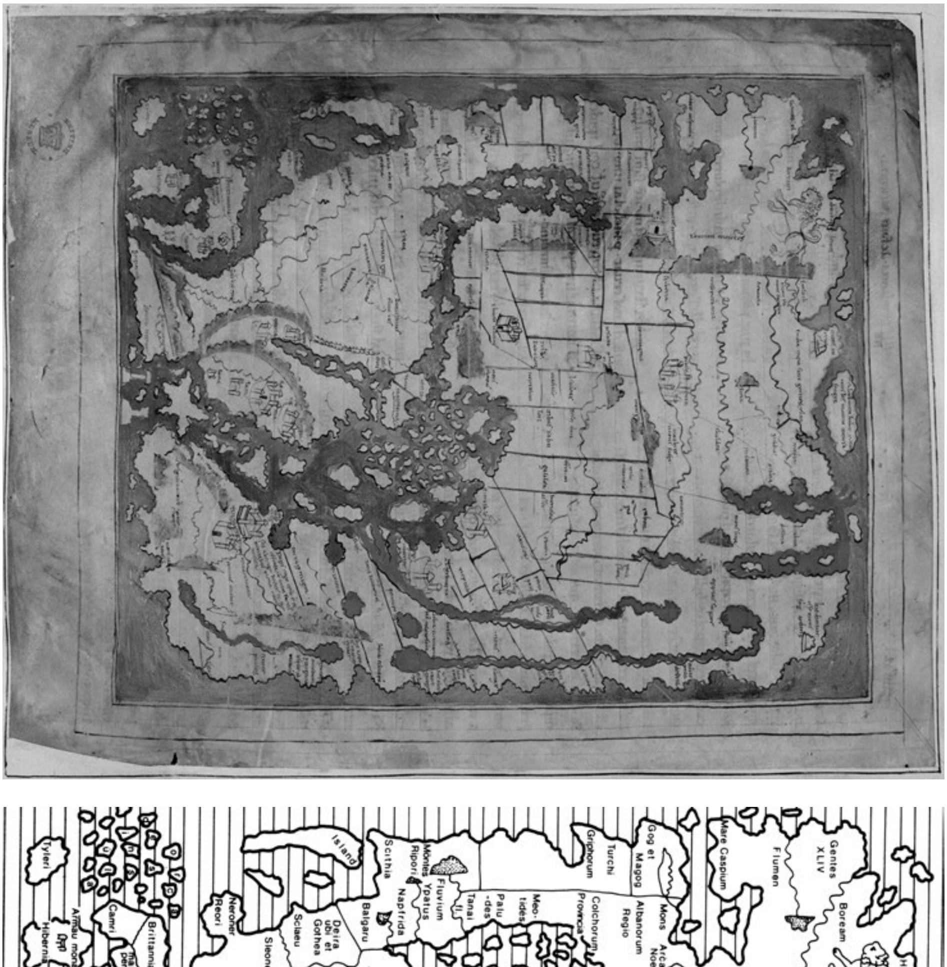
Tyleri
Hibernia
Armau monast
Brittannia
Camri
Lundonia
Wintonia
Cantia
Neroner
Reori
Scithia
Island
Montes Riporo
Ypatus
Fluvium Napfrida
Balgaru
Deira ubi et Gothea
Sciavu
Sleone
Tracia
Hunorum
Constantinopolim
Pannonia
Sardona
Dalmatia
Histria
Danubium Fluvium
Sud Brylias
Brigantia
Ispania Anterior
Verona
Pavia
Roma
Luca
Luna
Nap.
Athenense
Attica
Macedonia
Troia
Asia Minor
Ephesus
Cappadocia
Cilicia
Tharso Cilicia
Isauria
Bithinia
Mons Taurus
Vocusata Civitas
Antiochia
Turchi
Griphorum
Gog et Magog
Meotides
Palu-des
Tanai fl
Colchorum Provincia
Albanorum Regio
Mons Arca Noe
Armenie
Montes Armenie
Taurini Montes
Mare Caspium
Flumen
Gentes XLIV
Boream
Hic abundant Leones
Euclath
Mons Aureus
India in qua sunt Gentes XLIV
Taprobanea habet X civitates, bis in Anno metit fruges
Mons Farthou
Fison Flu
Aracusia
Mesopotamia
Hiberia
Babilonia
Ninive
Siria
Pisidia
Media
Chaldea
Euclenon
Arabia
Commagena
Cesarea Philippi
Mons Olympus
Neptaim
Masiale
Isacher
Tribus Zabulon
Tribus Dan
Zabulon
Galilea
Effraim
Mons Guiaga
Tribus Manaso
Dividus
Mons Moabite Fasga
Amonia
Ruben
Gad
Jericho
Asser
Ebron
Herusalem
Antoclea
Bethlem
Philistea
Mons Sina
Arabica Deserta
Egiptus Superior
Hic dicitur mons super ardens
Flum Nila
Ethiopica Deserta
Libia et Ethiopia
Mons Climax
Hic Ethiopes
Libia Oteraica
Lac Calearsin
Neptalim
Pentapolis
Alexandria
Egiptus Interior
Pentapolis
Libia Ethiopium
Lacus Salinarus
Bixacena
Sutes
Cartago Magna
Cartago
Mauritania
Fluvius Malva
Tingitana
Mons Circausis
VII Montes
Hispan
Dera
Mons Ispac
Cunocephales

Figure 1.8 (Top): The Anglo-Saxon world map and (Bottom): a transcription by David Hill.
(BL Cotton Tiberius BV, Part 1. f56v, image licensed by the British Library Board; Hill 1981, 3)

as was to be made in Norman Sicily. The 'world' in question was the world according to the Bible, not the mariner.[35] Jerusalem lay at its centre, lands were allocated to the twelve tribes of Israel, Norway was called 'Scithia' and a note above the Taurus Mountains declared 'here lions abound'. This 'mental map' was no doubt important to a court for which Rome was now the principal destination and scholarly Christian discourse the principal passport. The implication is that real seafaring was a separate, perhaps hereditary business powered by practical knowledge, seasoned with ancestral salt.

The implication is that wherever and whenever the sea provided a higher conductivity than the land, then coastal peoples looked to each other for trade, ideas, marriage and inheritance. But while wind and current, technology and experiment show us what was possible and advantageous, the actual use of maritime space was restricted by enmities or promoted by political alliances. The weather might inhibit travel around certain capes at certain times of year, but politics and religion were also forces that wrecked ships or prevented goods from reaching harbour. Then, as now, maritime highways were thoroughfares, except when ideology or politics made them into barriers.[36]

The island of Britain

Britain has the charm of an island and the variety of a continent: an island unites the destinies of those living on it, but Britain is large enough and made up of regions sufficiently distinct 'to have cradled nations of their own'.[37] Scotland, England and Wales derive initially from areas proscribed by nature: England on the Jurassic deposits has all the most fertile land, Scotland and Wales have the ancient geology and most of the rain. Britain's invaders, the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons, knew this well enough and chose to occupy the productive lowlands of the south-east. While politicians might agonise today about the uneven distribution of wealth between the kingdoms, it is not something that has just happened. We may move our industries, but we cannot move the rocks. Within the kingdoms are older regions, uplands, valleys, coastlands and sea areas, equally drawn by nature's pencil, which new formations may overlay but never wholly erase. Until new kinds of provender are invented, the south and east will always be richer, and the north and west always need subsidies. The tensions are destined to endure.

The ancient rocks of Scotland and Wales are the highest surviving parts of a land mass otherwise largely submerged. To their south and east lie the Jurassic deposits laid out like an extensive beach curved in arcs bounded by escarpments[38] (Figure 1.9). The geology generated the soils, which, together with the climate, determined the arable yield, in terms of the length of the growing season. This in turn favoured different emphases on the type of farming that was most productive. Scholarly appreciation of the immutable aspects of this land prompted Mackinder in the early 20th century to propose a simple division between an upland and a lowland zone, which were credited with differences in agricultural strategy: cattle and sheep on the hills, cereals on the plain.[39] Common sense requires that these regions have different innate productivity, and the sources of inequality can be assigned to them.[40]

The lowland zone has since been further divided into a western, central and eastern belt, partly based on its escarpments and partly on the variations in vegetation and the types of settlement that it inspired.[41] Early medieval references to woodland and the measurement of tree pollen from samples indicate the tripartite division, with a central belt curving down from The Wash having the least trees and most arable cultivation.[42] The areas are endorsed by an assessment of the degree of settlement dispersal, the central belt being that most disposed to nucleated villages.[43] The use of open field systems also marks out the same central

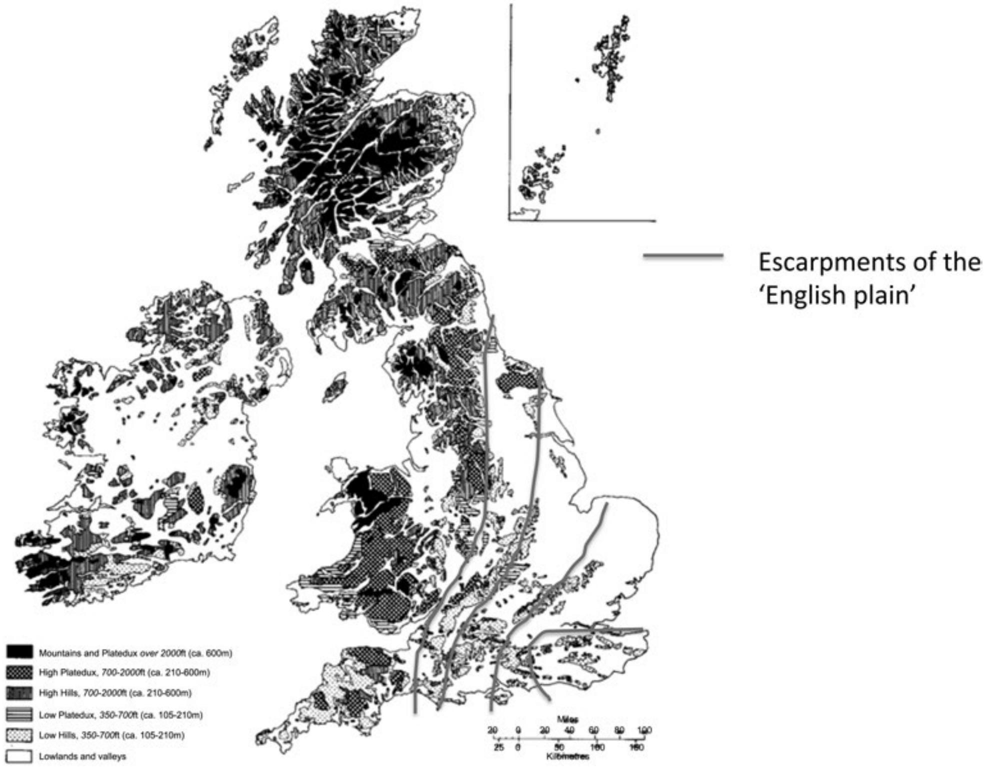
Escarpments of the 'English plain'
Mountains and Platedux over 2000ft (ca. 600m)
High Platedux, 700-2000ft (ca. 210-600m)
High Hills, 700-2000ft (ca. 210-600m)
Low Platedux, 350-700ft (ca. 105-210m)
Low Hills, 350-700ft (ca. 105-210m)
Lowlands and valleys
Miles
20 0 20 40 60 80 100
25 0 50 100 160
Kilometres

Figure 1.9 The Jurassic plain (or 'English Plain') and its escarpments.
(Ferriday 1955, Fig 72, superimposed on Wreford Watson and Sissons 1964, Fig 12)

belt in the later middle ages.[44] The settlement provinces and subprovinces defined in the 19th century also remember the same divisions.[45] The question naturally arises, how far back can we reliably trace this template of natural productivity? The coincidence with the distribution of 5th century Anglo-Saxon burial indicates the incomers were already aware of it.[46] The distribution of Roman villas suggests that Roman incomers realised that the most profitable places for factory farms was towards the warmer end of the central belt, as well as around the northern edge of the Weald (Figure 1.10).[47] In this analysis, the eastern and western belts of the lowland zone emerge as woodland, farmed in small enclosures or strip fields from dispersed settlements. In contrast, the central belt was farmed in open fields from nucleated settlements, with greatly increased productivity. This too may have originated in a version of strip cultivation, but by the 5th century, or more likely by the 4th or possibly even by the Iron Age, it was the breadbasket of Britain.

The central belt as mapped from these parameters stretches from Gloucestershire into Norfolk (apart from the Fens) and up to the Yorkshire Wolds.[48] The two wooded belts either side had little in common except, apparently, trees, and by the 20th century the west was

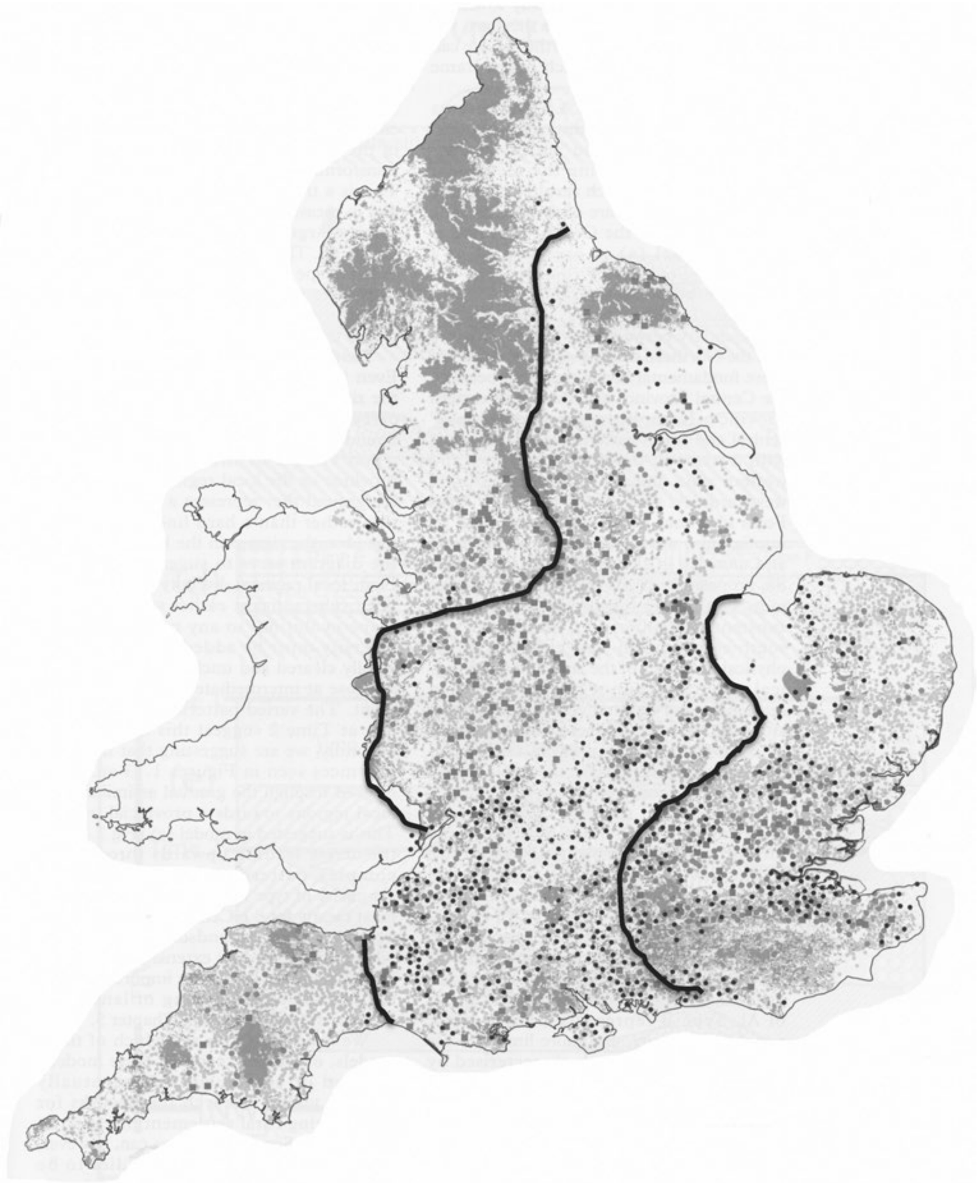

Figure 1.10 The Jurassic plain, showing the distribution of Roman villas and the presence of woodland, c. 730–1086 (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, Fig 3.11), overlaid with the zone of the open two- and three-field system (between the lines; Simmons 2001, Fig 4.3).

(Licensed by Historic England)

largely devoted to dairy and the east to arable.[49] Thus in the Formative period, the area settled by the English was divided into two: the central belt, highly productive for cereals and grazing, stretched from Gloucestershire to the Wolds beyond the Humber and the eastern belt that stood between this and the North Sea. Between them these regions included all the most productive land in Britain and all the putative Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, except Bernicia and part of Mercia.

Productivity

Three basic earners can be proposed for the lowland zone: grain on open fields, cattle and sheep on pasture and woodland management.[50] Banham and Faith detect a 'cerealisation' process: spelt and bread wheat are grown in the Roman period; early Saxon settlers grow emmer and einkorn, but the emphasis is on barley, as in prehistoric times. In Middle Saxon England, bread wheat returns with rye and oats, perhaps indicating 'the spread of Mediterranean practices under the influence of the church'.[51] In emmer, einkorn and spelt, the edible protein is bound into glumes ('hulled') and must be pounded to realise the grain. Bread wheat is 'free-threshing': threshing releases the grain from the chaff. A basic mode of production applies: plant, harvest, dry out if need be, separate the grain from the straw by cutting and threshing, grind and mill the grain to make flour, mix the flour with water to make dough. At this point it can be baked on a flat grill to make flat pizza-like flans (bannocks). Or the dough can be encouraged to ferment with yeast and so expanded to produce an aerated loaf which is less dense, easier to digest and can go further.[52] To make beer, a grain, e.g. barley, can be spread out on a flat surface in the warm where it will begin to sprout (malt). The germination can be halted by toasting (toasted malt), then ground, pounded and boiled in water (making ale). Flavoured with some hedgerow plants, such as hops, to offset the sweetness, it became beer. It was left to ferment and after a few days contained enough alcohol to act as a preservative while being suitable for children (small beer; now 'mild'). Other batches were allowed to rest and ferment on their way to becoming stronger brews suitable to fuel midwinter and springtime celebrations. Wheat straw and hay was fed to the animals as fodder.[53]

In the uplands, cattle are run on different ground depending on whether they are being weaned (on the hills), fattened (foothills) or used for dairy (on the plain), each stage requiring the cows to graze at lower altitudes on richer grass.[54] Cattle were especially prized because they were an unmatched source of vital commodities in large quantities: milk, butter, cheese, beef, blood and leather. The leather hides made not only shoes and jackets but belts, straps, bridles for horses, bags, coverings for tables, beds and shields, tankards, water bottles, wineskins, thongs to lash buildings and cladding for boats.[55] The more delicate skins of calves and sheep were used to make the pages of illuminated manuscripts.[56] In the highland zone, the hide was the principal medium of currency until the 12th century (p. 652). While sea fish were a rare commodity until Formative 3, salmon and trout were available in the highland zones and eel, pike bream, perch, tench and carp (of which pike and perch are the most edible) in the lowland zone.[57] Sea fish only became a significant part of the diet from the 9th century, not only in Britain but in northern Europe more generally. Research by James Barrett and others showed that in Orkney marine diets were first seen among men buried with Viking grave goods but increased for both men and women in unaccompanied (probably Christian) burials of the 10th and 11th centuries. By the 11th century, there was a rising export market for dried fish.[58]

The woods supported a wide range of essential foods and materials. The distribution of native species was lime in the lowlands and oak and hazel on the uplands, with pine and birch on the highest or most northerly land.[59] By Formative times most of the wild wood had been cleared or managed, surviving only in patches. Managed woodland was farmed, offering wood pasture or parkland and a harvest of coppiced and pollarded trees producing rods of willow (osiers) for making baskets and hazel (wattle) for making animal-proof fences and infilling timber-frame buildings. Meanwhile, pigs ate the fungi and nuts on the forest floor. Charcoal-burners baked wood in slow-burning clamps to produce the fuel for the metalworkers. The timber itself was the basis of most manufacture. Katherine Woods, who recorded the rural crafts in England between the wars, noted how woodland was cared for and cultivated to produce a prodigious variety of objects from the appropriate wood[60] (Table 1.2). At that time, baskets, hurdles, handles, wheels, oars, chairs, pulleys, bowls, brooms, cabinets, tent pegs, buildings and boats were still being fashioned from willow, hazel, oak, ash, beech, chestnut and yew, by the hands of perhaps the last generation with a direct line of descent to first-millennium craftsmen. Every wood had its own character and competence, some to be split (oak planks), some to be chiselled (elm wheel hubs), some to be spun on a lathe (beech

Table 1.2 Character and use of British timbers (after Woods 1949)

Wood	*Character*	*Use*
Oak	Hard, strong, durable, resistant to water; can split longitudinally; gnarled grain	Frame buildings, joists, floors, ships (planking), carvings
Elm	Hard, heavy, tough, durable, does not split easily; twisted grain	Wheel hubs, ship's keels, pulley blocks, mallets, water-pipes; bowls and chair legs on lathe
Ash	Hard, tough, specially flexible; with straight grain	Handles, hafts, shafts, oars, barrel hoops; pegged tools; hay rakes, ladders; scythe sneads
Alder	Soft, weak, perishable when dry; durable under water	Revetments; platters
Birch	Tough, moderately hard, fine grained; specially good for turning	Lathe-turned vessels and legs, furniture; Besom, brooms [twigs]; bark for making boats, writing
Beech	Soft, brittle, prone to warp and woodworm	Lathe-turned vessels and chair legs; hay rakes, ladders, tent pegs
Chestnut	Soft and open, easy to cleave, withstands weather	Posts, fencing; substitute for walnut and fruit woods in cabinet making
Willow	Soft and straight grained; shaves into thin strips and cultivates into wands or osiers	Basket making
Hazel	Only the young growths are usable	Baskets, thatching spars
Yew	Technically a softwood, but heartwood is hard, close-grained and flexible	Bows

bowls), some to be steamed and bent into shape (ash scythe handles or sneads). Trees, like animals, were still part of the world's mysterious and inexhaustible beneficence, consoling the mind as well as arming the hand.

Surveys of wild plants were conducted during World War II in anticipation of starvation by siege. Members of my generation will recall nettle soup and be familiar with rosehip syrup, a sticky source of vitamin C, and chewy 'radio malt' eaten with a spoon. Marmite, from the dredging of brewers' barrels, is also a legacy from those days. Hedgerows offered numerous varieties of edible berry; the woods were full of fungus, a surprising number of species being safe to eat. Other surveys have broadened the range: 112 plant species have been recorded in Polish cooking since the 18th century, including two green vegetables and 15 species of fruit.[61]

Plants eaten or used in some way in the Formative period have been more directly recorded from archaeological excavations, most vividly from anaerobic sites where plant fibres were preserved as well as seeds. Species preserved in a 10th-century midden under Durham City included flax, blackberries, raspberries, sloes, plums, apple and fat hen (a precursor to the introduction of spinach from Asia). Plants thought to have been collected for their medical properties (being mentioned in herbals) included the opium poppy, yarrow, meadowsweet, self-heal, buttercup and wild radish.[62]

Agricultural strategies

The rural economy was adjusted to suit the natural properties of the land. Cattle herding and dairy products were the staple of the uplands, grain of the central lowlands and wood pasture of the east and west lowlands, but such simplification masks a number of significant and ingenious variants. Grain/sheep combinations suit acid sand, like Suffolk, where the crop is rotated between fields or strips and the sheep are folded on those that are lying fallow. In some areas, such as the Breckland, farming practice appears continuous with that of the Roman predecessors, perhaps because there was no other way of making the sandy soil work.

Farming in southern and eastern Britain experienced 'a general direction of travel': in Formative 1, farmsteads with small rectangular fields ploughed with an ard grew hulled cereals, emmer, einkorn and barley, but livestock was likely the principal resource. Animals, domestic or wild, were grazing in large numbers – sufficient to prevent Roman fields from re-afforesting. Formative 2 saw the reintroduction of free-threshing bread wheat and the expansion of arable land into heavier soils worked by ploughs with mould boards. The new fields were often strip cultivation, equitably allocated. Animals were now more closely associated with the settlements, so their dung could be collected to fertilise the fields. Oxen for drawing the plough were part of the livestock contingent. Cows and sheep were milked, and wool began its career as a cash commodity. Since this was a gradual process governed by opportunity, dispersed farmsteads and strip fields do not show a regional preference but survive where the evolutionary process stopped. In some places the process may have continued by the late formative into the highly organised, high-earning open-field farms served by nucleated settlements.[63]

The archaeological implication is that once we leave aside the inferences of later mapping, the forms of settlement and their agricultural landscapes are mostly still to be determined for the Formative period in every region of England, Scotland and Wales. While a confection of medieval evidence gives us a plan like Wheldrake, we are excavating in a period in which no settlement plan is complete, and the parts we have of one settlement rarely resemble any other[64] (Chapter 3). The benchmark for early medieval settlement in the western archipelago is now provided by Ireland, with 47,000 known sites, 900 of them excavated. In Britain, the number of comprehensible settlements is scarcely out of single figures.

Nevertheless, dated tree pollen does confirm the existence of a relatively treeless central belt by the 5th century, which persisted in a reduced area, including Norfolk and the Vale of York in the 6th to 9th centuries and expanded into the western belt in the 9th to 11th centuries.[65] In a sample area of southern England, some corroboration for these generalities of production has been recently obtained by analysing animal bone and charred grain recovered from excavations.[66] Cattle, sheep, pigs, wheat, oats, barley and rye occurred in most samples, but there were discernible trends: cattle did best on heavy soils in river valleys; sheep on chalk and limestone upland, pigs on Jurassic clay equated with woodland. Oats grew well in wet areas and dominated in the south-west: the one site examined had oats at 91%. Rye grew on heathland, barley on the chalk, while wheat dominated the boulder clay and Jurassic clay. Some chronological trends were observed: by Formative 3, cattle had declined as a proportion of livestock to 40% and wheat dominated the cereal output, leaving oats in the river valleys and barley on the chalk. The analysis went on to explore the later medieval assemblages in the same area, finding a good correlation with the regional and chronological patterns known from documents, so lending support to the interpretations of the early medieval period.[67] The sample area was confined to East Anglia, the Thames valley and the south-west of England, and variations were studied against surface geology: clays, chalk and limestone, river valleys, marsh.[68] Animal bone assemblages and charred grains provided the data, which was recovered from excavations (especially by commercial archaeology) up to 2013. The numbers of taxa from sites of each period were uneven: 67 livestock and 42 cereals in Formative 1; 15 livestock and 9 cereals in Formative 2 and 19 livestock and 17 cereals in Formative 3.[69]

Within these differing levels of confidence, it seems safe to suppose that a central belt of lowland England, including Norfolk and the Vale of York, offered the best arable in Britain, exploited by the Romans and then by the Angles who entered via The Wash; and it was in this zone that most progress had been made towards an open field system by the start of the middle ages. The implication is that during the Formative era there was a steady lifting from subsistence and mixed farming to the commodification of wheat as a taxable cash crop, something which perhaps had its impetus in the reforms of the 7th/8th century (pp. 16, 303n.). This general trend was favoured or restricted by the symbiotic relationships between livestock and crops and their underlying geology and topology. Farmers still exercised varied and appropriate strategies: wetlands were colonised with a range of open and enclosed fields and nucleated or dispersed settlements. This variety of initiatives on the same terrain 'can only be due to social agency'.[70]

The social forces created, or aligned with, different kinds of community, drawing another distinction between upland and lowland and also between the earlier and later part of the formative period. A herd of cows can be led to milking and back to pasture by a child with a stick; a flock of sheep can be managed by a child and a dog. Pigs look after themselves until they are slaughtered. Whatever the landscape and its resources, livestock husbandry is a much smarter choice for a small independent group than the cultivation of fields, making better use of a family and freeing up the adults to make artefacts or make trouble.[71] By contrast, arable enslaves. The sequence of settlement deduced at Witton (Norfolk) began as small-scale cultivation in Fm 1, which doubled in Fm 2 and again in Fm 3, presumably at the expense of pasture. One explanation might be that more grain was needed to meet obligations of tribute or tax. But the change in the livestock/arable balance might alternatively reflect an increase in the population, itself a result of farming success. At the least, the way the land was farmed implies a changing mood from Formative 1–3, in which a life of herding and hunting was gradually replaced with one of commodification of crops and land management, where production was maximised and profit monetarised. The distribution of soils and climate meant that this process was largely confined to England south of the Yorkshire Wolds, leaving the uplands of England, Scotland and Wales to maximise an animal-based economy and to hold on tight to the freedoms that went with it. The differences in the soils had a long legacy.[72]

Bread, meat, milk, butter, cheese, apples, hedgerow and woodland fruits, beer and cider were the staples on which early British communities were built, and were theoretically in reach of all. On these one could live well. If some fed on largely on dough and others on blood, neither party starved. Luxuries, principally wine and olive oil from the Mediterranean, were not needed and anyway available only to a few. Economists assume that people are eager for such things and led by demand. However, there is no necessary advantage of wine over beer and cider or oil over butter, and imports will have been driven, initially, by a strong political imperative associated first with Rome, then with Christianity (the rituals of which required them) and latterly (from the 8th century) with both. Thus, wine and oil are players in a different part of the story (Chapter 2–5).

Entry points

So Britain was, is, a heterogeneous space surrounded by three disconnected sets of neighbours – Scandinavian, Irish, French – across three seas – the North (or German) Sea, the Irish Sea and the Channel. One way of determining the way a map has come about over the *longue durée* is to start with the least moveable elements and build on them. In this case the least moveable are the mountains and the sea and, although these are not exactly static, the courses of the main rivers. This provides the stage setting, the template on which humans and animals can exercise their urge to move. The movement creates routes and the routes create settlements; the settlements develop regions.[73] This may be an odd principle to accept and will not be true always and everywhere, but it is implied at a primitive level: animals make routes to follow food, humans follow them; humans settle where animals gather or drink or routes cross; regions develop where settlements are strong. This groups the ‘natural’ explanations together without excluding the rogue effects of war, ethnicity and religion that can overpower them, at least momentarily. In this chapter we are exploring the chains of nature and so should be content to drift a little in the navigable streams and linger on the tracks, well aware that more furious chariots will bear down on us in later chapters.

In the early middle ages, all three seas could be easily crossed, as we have seen, with some natural advantage to the Scandinavians arriving at the east coast, and the shorter crossing points at the straits of Dover and the Irish North Channel marking thoroughfares where ferries still run. Winds and tides encouraged a clockwise periplus from Cornwall to east coast Ireland to the Hebrides and the Orkneys, and from Orkney down the east coast to Kent. This is not inescapable, but in an age of boats it would encourage interaction along each coast, in general pulling the Irish north and the Picts south. In an age of boats, travel along the east and west coasts and across to their nearest maritime neighbours is also more attractive and more practical than travel overland between the two coasts. This division of the island into two regions with their backs to each other facing different seas is accentuated by its topography, which essentially divides it into two, lengthways along a Pennine watershed that separates east-draining from west-draining rivers. Travellers coming to Britain by sea, even well-armed invaders, well-motivated monks or well-capitalised merchants, will have an incentive to develop their projects within the half they land in.

Rivers

The eastern half of this frontier zone is entered by a number of well-signed estuaries: Moray Firth, Tay, Forth, Tyne, Tees, Humber, Wash, Thames. In many cases the rivers will lead them far into the interior. On the western side the points of entry are fewer – Clyde, Solway, Lune, Ribble and Mersey – but include one of the most significant: the Avon-Severn. On the western seaboard the landing places are numerous: a sea of numerous opportunities, hard to control, regulate or restrict. For light boats, travel is eased by the large number of islands and the narrow isthmus where boats can be dragged across, providing a short cut (a portage) between laborious sea voyages. Some of those that saw most use have the place-name *Tarbat* (G. *tairbearht*; pull-across). With one exception all the *tarbats* are on the west side; the Great Glen provides a serious throughway from east to west, Inverness to Iona, saving weeks at sea.[74]

Travel by river must always have been the oldest and most reliable method of crossing land. Looking now at a weed-choked stream or muddy channel canalised by floodbanks and drained for irrigation, it is hard to imagine the extent of inland waterways that must have once covered Britain and their capacity for creating arterial highways and communities from those that shared them. In France, regions still proclaim shared valleys (*Seine et Oise*); in Britain this is masked by later attempts to unite territory around the towns that administered them. That does not prevent us from noticing the obvious importance of the Severn/Avon, the Thames valley, the Trent or the Tyne in the creation of communities in the Marches, the Midlands or Northumbria. In 'Why Wessex?' Andrew Sherratt showed how three rivers, each called Avon, provided a short cut between the Bristol Channel and the (French) Channel, with Stonehenge at its nodal point (Figure 1.11).[75] Similarly, Gordon Noble showed that the monumentally endowed Upper Clyde valley was a nodal high point connecting the Irish Sea via the Clyde, the Solway Firth via the Nith and the North Sea via the Tweed.[76] A river system irrigated early medieval society in more ways than one. If these 'natural' arteries that encourage trade and marriage are thwarted, then we have some specific impedance to search for and explain.

Trackways

> Quiet incest flourished where roads were bad.
>
> Laurie Lee[77]

Ancient natural tracks such as The Ridgeway have long been cited as part of a prehistoric infrastructure. They can certainly be brought into the service of the formative period where there is evidence for it, although mainly for foot and horse, and the river network, which required little organised upkeep for carriage, must surely take pride of place.[78] The

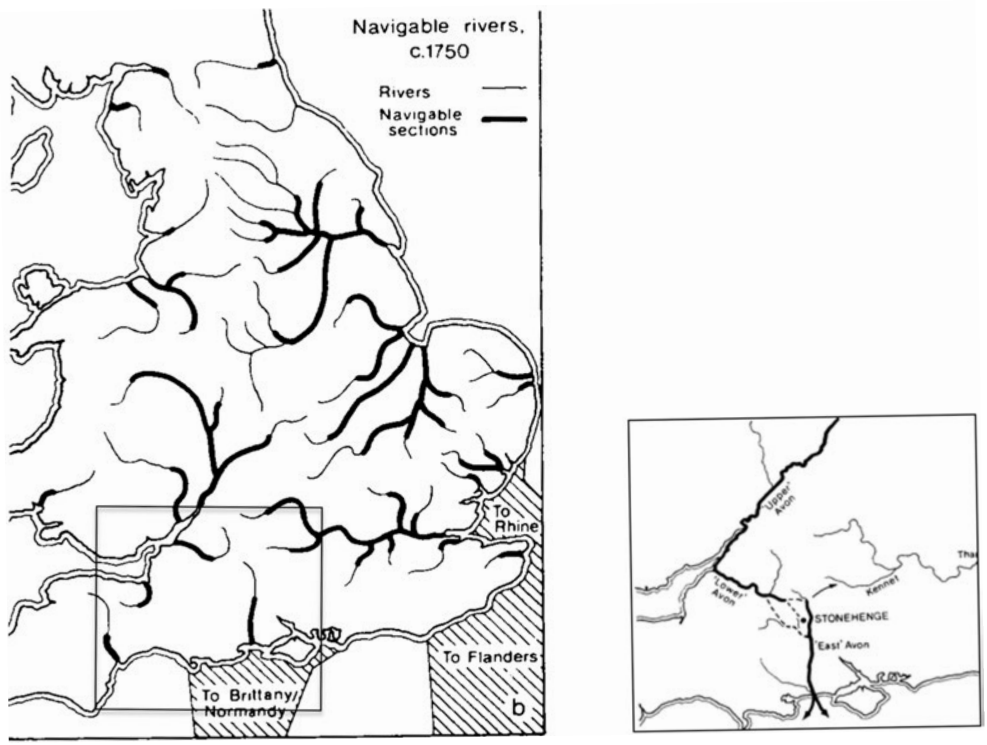

Figure 1.11 Navigable rivers and (Right) the Stonehenge shortcut.
(Sherratt 1996, Fig 2b, 3b; permission granted through RightsLink)

Romans used the rivers but also provided a road system, initially for the rapid movement of armies and scouts and latterly for the use of merchandise. In theory they could have neutralised the east/west divide but never quite managed it. The westward routes run out in Wales, the south-west and the north-west. Only in the east does the metalled road trickle on into Fife.

There were some level land routes connecting east and west, very few and so very important. One of these was bequeathed by the Romans themselves: Hadrian's Wall connecting Tynemouth to Solway. Others are prehistoric and well tried: the Loch Ness route runs along the Fault between the northern and eastern highlands, a sea passage from the Moray Firth to the River Ness, Loch Ness, Loch Lochy and sea-Loch Linnhe. In Columba's day, some portage would be needed between Loch Lochy at Invergarry and Fort Augustus on Loch Ness. When the Scots began to penetrate into eastern Scotland in the 6th/7th century, their principal routes appear to have been out of Argyll via Strathearn to Perth, via Loch Tay to Aberfeldy or from Mallaig via Lochaber, Loch Rannoch and Tummel into the Pictish heartland at Pitlochry (the 'road to the isles'). This pioneering route required a chain of fortified houses all the way. The Forth-Clyde route, now a twisted cable of railways, roads and motorways, was the main connection between the Britons of Strathclyde and those of *The Gododdin*; the rivers met at the Stirling gap.

South of the Peak district, the Trent runs round to join the Humber and Ouse north of Scunthorpe. The source of the Trent in Biddulph Moor, just north of Stoke on Trent, is only

5 miles south of the Dane/Weaver river that leads to the Mersey. This was the arterial route that connected Northumbria with Mercia and Mercia with the north-west British territories. This system was later all joined together as a navigable throughway for narrow boats linking the ports of Liverpool and Hull. The upper Trent, Warwickshire Avon and upper Thames lie relatively close together; if they do not facilitate travel, they do not inhibit it. In the south the barriers between east and west become the Severn and the foothills of Wales, the Mendips and Exmoor.

There have been a number of attempts to see ancient trackways in the maps of today, which may or may not be validated as relevant to the early middle ages by archaeology one day.[79] One of the more suggestive is the system of drove roads, whereby cattle were collected from the highlands to be sold off to the south. Using a combination of field survey, documentary references in the Edinburgh libraries and contact with some of the last drovers then living, A.R.B. Haldane compiled a map that showed drove roads from north and northwest (including the isles) converging on Inverness and Fort Augustus and thence threading through the Highlands east and west via strath and glen to converge on the Stirling Gap and unite at Falkirk ('The Falkirk Tryst'). This was the main exit from cattle country. The successive sites of the Falkirk Tryst were Polmont, Roughcastle and Stenhousemuir. From Falkirk a single delivery route ran over the Pentland Hills to Romannobridge, thence into England east to the Tyne or west via Carlisle.[80]

The drove roads as recorded belong to the 18th and 19th century and represent the apogee of a long history of cattle breeding, cattle trading and cattle raiding. Assuming that cattle, beef and hides represent the gilt-edged economy of the highland zone, the struggle was to gain control of the profit or at least not lose it all on the journey to the southern markets. An attempt at regulation in the 12th century under the Scottish king William the Lion included the branding of cattle, and the sale of beef was prohibited without the hide. When the trade enters the history books, we can see that the numbers are large: Exchequer Rolls for 1378 show the number of hides being exported as nearly 45,000. Henry VIII raided the Borders in 1544 and stole 10,386 cattle and over 12,000 sheep.[81] The cattle could be taxed where they had to pass over bridges at Linton in East Lothian or Auchendinny Bridge at Glencorse, the only direct passages between Edinburgh and the south.[82] It was also easy pickings for the border rievers over whose territory this mass of livestock had to pass.

These routes were mostly for professionals.[83] Droving provided highlanders with employment in the summer months, and the drovers, like their near contemporaries in the American west, had an interest in delivering the cattle to the buyer. They bought the cattle, 50 to a drover, at local *trysts* and needed to sell them at a profit to get their fee. Many an obstacle lay between, loss of condition en route, the relentless rustling and the vacillating price on arrival. Drovers, like cowboys, were licenced to carry arms to protect their herds, and like cowboys became the subjects of romance and admired for their legendary stoicism. A late 18th-century assessment by Sir John Sinclair, quoted by Haldane, illustrates the almost aboriginal impact that the cattle-herding highlander made on the gentrified intelligentsia of the day:

> he has felt from his early youth all the privations to which he can be exposed in almost any circumstance of war. He has been accustomed to scanty fare, to rude and often wet clothing, to cold and damp houses, to sleep often in the open air or in the most uncomfortable beds, to cross dangerous rivers, to march a number of miles without stopping and with but little nourishment and to be perpetually exposed to the attacks of a stormy

> atmosphere. A warrior, thus trained, suffers no inconvenience from what others would consider the greatest possible hardships, and has an evident superiority over the native of a delicious climate, bred to every indulgence of food, dress and habitation, and who is unaccustomed to marching and fatigue.[84]

The drovers are described as dressed in shaggy homespun tweeds with kilts showing bare thighs and half the leg. Their provisions consisted of oatmeal, onions, sheep's cheese and whisky; the cattle could also be bled and the blood mixed with onions and oatmeal to make a black pudding.

We now operate under the inky blanket of that raconteur of historic Scotland, Walter Scott, so it does not follow that the past can be seamlessly extrapolated backwards, so assuming that 'highlanders were always like this'; we shall see that they were better off in many ways a thousand years earlier. Nevertheless, a close association with cattle, the appreciation of cattle as a major source of wealth, the bleeding of cattle to make blood pudding, the long Scots miles and the ability to get through the night in the open on oatmeal and wake up with a plaid covered in dew or frost, these paint a picture both of intimate association with their land and of the differences prevailing between their land and that of the southerners.

Horses

The droveways also teach us that a multiplicity of routes could be known and leave little permanent mark on the landscape, in this case not even a string of settlements, since the cattle live outdoors. A map of the hosting of the clans, converging on Stirling, might follow similar routes without needing a single signpost. The signposts were in the memory. The options widen still further when the traveller was mounted on horse back, as many of the highland people of the formative period certainly were. If the hide boat and plank boat were the queens of the seaways, the horse was king of hill, dale and plain, opening up numerous short cuts over ridge and across col. An understanding of the beauty and movement of horses is most evident in Pictish Art, where they walk, trot and gallop across the landscape. Their size relative to riders and their long legs and delicate fetlocks show that these are not ponies but horses of perhaps 13–15 hands in stature (p. 397). We encounter horses in Anglo-Saxon art too, but very stylised, in the form of fighting stallions; and buried in Anglo-Saxon graves, where they are sturdy and robust. The horse was dressed up by the equestrian class with as much care as one of their own (Chapter 2, p. 99).

Other animals

The Picts also celebrated bulls, deer and dogs and depicted hunts and fights in which these were players. Man is a herd animal and has deep empathy with other herd animals led by alpha males: cattle, deer, wolves; their companionship explains how the officious and superstitious ways of small human groups could be made bearable, especially among the young. The Picts at least had byre-houses in which humans lived at one end and cattle or sheep the other (p. 212). The moods and poise of animals, their mating, births, milking, health and deaths for the common good were intimately interwoven with those of their human companions, creating relationships between mammals of emotional richness somewhat distant from that of a shopper taking a plastic packet from a supermarket fridge. One can see that Christian priests would have their work cut out weaning the unconverted, especially children, away from the companionship of their beloved calves and piglets and lambs and superseding it with the cerebral metaphor of the crib in which animals are displaced in importance by humans, divine or not. It may not be until the later formative period that children were successfully trained to accept Jesus as a lamb rather than lambs as divinity. By the 11th century, the teacher in Aelfric's colloquy asks the class: – *Why do you want to study?* – and they dutifully reply: *We don't want to end up like the brute beasts that think of nothing but grass and water*.[85] The real blessing is that, long before it knows about a religion, every child up to the present day continues to rediscover, unbidden, deep fellow-feelings for their animal companions.

Natural territories

There are 5,000 islands in the British/Irish archipelago, disposed over three seas. The nature of land and sea has dictated that the experiences offered will be different, north and south, east and west, in climate, in productivity, in ease of communication. Is this unfair to the occupants? Does it skew history? The answer is yes, but only if the expectation is of a united land with a single history, a political artifice that actually lay several centuries in the future for the formative people. Archaeologists as well as historians have, one might argue, started their history at the wrong end, with Britain as part of a united kingdom, selling its story to an enormous English-speaking diaspora in the American, Australian and other continents. But what if the differences *were* the story? What if the extraordinarily wide range of terrain and maritime spaces offered us a laboratory to examine how people, language, wheat and cattle can produce quite different, if complementary, results in contiguous territory? In this case the 'formative process' will be different in each case and may have a different outcome. As we will see, the 'state' is not to be the destiny of all parts of this island. To force them, and north-west Europe in general, into that mould is to miss the interest and perhaps enlightenment that lies in political experiment.

That is for future chapters to convince. An important task in this one is to propose, define, group, justify and name the natural areas of the British island that seem to have shared a common experience. This will always be risky because it will appear to be defining these areas by their current cultural and even demographic identity, the very thing we are trying to escape. For the regions on land, the first defining attribute must be natural: topography, productivity, communication and, as this chapter has tried to demonstrate, natural differences matter. In this case, the principal dividers are the mountains and the river drainage, things that naturally reinforce each other. The result is to divide the island into seven parts (Figure 1.12). These could be given some neutral names of geography, reflecting these divisions: The north-west of the island shares a broken hilly terrain, inundated by ancient seas, leaving numerous inlets and islands. The sea regime suggests that as well as including the Hebrides (the future 'Lordship of the Isles') it embraces the north coast and the isles of Orkney. We could include the Faeroes and Shetland too, since these are in the Gulf Stream corridor. This region thus runs from the isles to the Clyde, and for most of our period it is associated with the Scots and then the Norse. To the east lies the most fertile part of the Scottish peninsula, running in a north-south ribbon along the east coast, indented by Firths (Dornoch, Cromarty, Moray, Tay, Forth) and broad rivers attractive to salmon and trout. Wheat was grown as far north as the Dornoch Forth in the 7th century. This is Pictland, which endured throughout Formative 1 and 2 with one of the most distinctive, if short lived, cultural signals anywhere in Europe.

From the Clyde to the Mersey is a coastal region of rolling hills and forests, with major inlets at the Clyde, the Solway and the Mersey. At its centre is the Lake District and Cumbria. We shall characterise this as mainly British territory, include the Isle of Man and name it north-west England, although it had a Norse personality in Fm 3. Two peninsulas define the southern part of Britain, Wales between the Mersey and the Severn, which has remained culturally British to this day, and the south-west peninsula comprising Cornwall, Devon and most of Somerset, which was also 'Welsh' (foreign) in the eyes of the incoming English until they conquered it in Formative 3. In the 5th to 8th century it would have been possible to ride from Lands End to John O'Groats without ever leaving Celtic-speaking areas, but the variants, especially Welsh, Pictish and Scottish, were not necessarily mutually comprehensible.

On the east coast, from the Forth to the Humber is another land of rolling hills, Lothian, Northumberland and County Durham, with entry points at the Forth, Tweed, Tyne, Tees and Humber. The northern part (Bernicia) is culturally British throughout most of our period, but the southern part (Yorkshire) experiences a strong English and then a Danish presence. English interest in the Vale of York and the slopes of the Wolds (i.e. Deira) appears early. So that although Northumbria as a whole shares more of its culture with the British regions to the north and west (pp. 369, 522), the English element, the 'tail in the Vale', is a long-lasting and determinant Germanic influence. Northumbria will be seen to vary in its cultural emphasis through time and from north to south as British, Anglo-British, English, Danish and Anglo-Danish gain the upper hand: a primary hybrid area, which fused, with brilliant results.

South of the Humber-Mersey, the east and south of Britain forms a single block of lowland, with the Jurassic soils divided into three sweeps by escarpments (p. 14). This is the English plain, with entry points at the Humber (Trent), Wash, Deben/Orwell, Thames and Hamble. As will be noted in the study that follows, the equation between language, culture and nature is by no means perfect, since people move, expand, conquer, impose control and adopt each other's expressions. For much of Formative 1, this zone, referred to as 'Southumbria', is composed of numerous communities derived from different places across the North Sea, with a British substrate that is occasionally evident. In Formative 2, it begins to coalesce as a cultural entity and adopt a version of Christianity, although one distinct from that of Northumbria.

These arbitrary regions are shown on the left of Figure 1.12, together with their order of citation in the chapters that follow; and on the right the likely focus of the kingdoms and communities, whose names we know better than their locations: (1) *Argyll and the Hebrides (Scotland)*, (2) *Firthlands and northern isles (Pictland)*, (3) *North-west England (Cumbria, Lancashire)*, (4) *Western peninsula (Wales)*, (5) *South-western peninsula (Devon and Cornwall)*, (6) *Tweed to Humber (Northumbria)*, (7) *Jurassic plain (Southumbria)*.

This brief tour through Britain's physical geography will seem like a statement of the obvious to many Britons, but even they may be unaware of the severe distinctions that nature has drawn in the wealth of the land and ease of communication, as between the territories of the east and south of the island on the one hand and the north and west on the other. It is clear that these differences cannot be laid at the door of ethnicity. If we knew nothing about Romans, Britons, Angles, Saxons or Scots, if there had been no change in demography or culture for the previous millennia, these distinctions of relative advantage would still obtain. Some of this is evident from the experience of prehistory, which will make frequent appearances in the next four chapters and in the second half of this one.

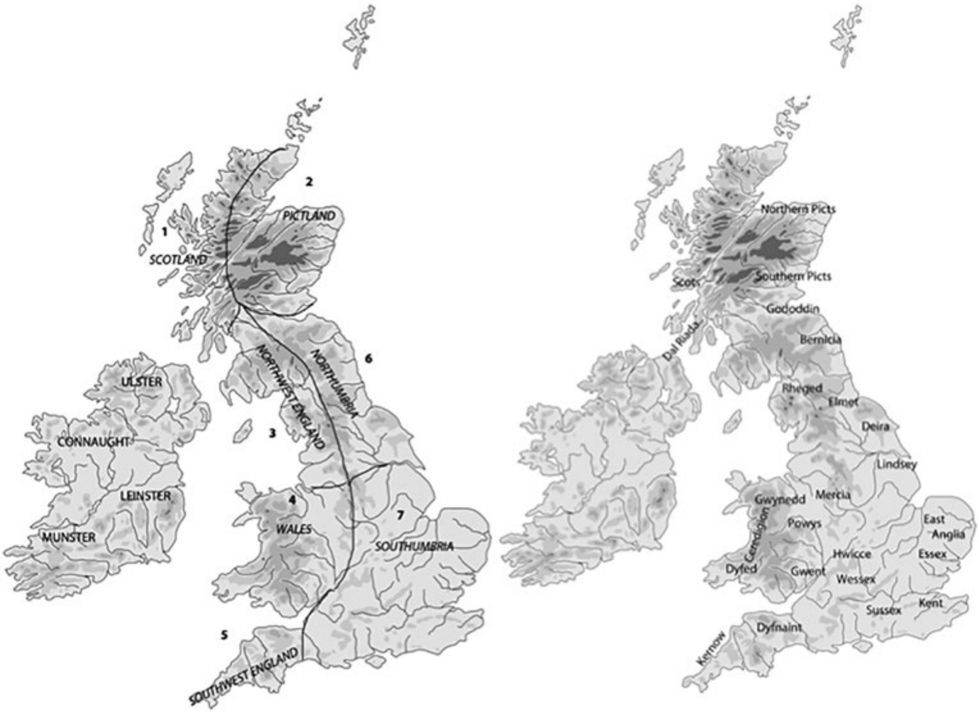
2
PICTLAND
1
SCOTLAND
NORTHWEST ENGLAND
NORTHUMBRIA
6
ULSTER
CONNAUGHT
3
LEINSTER
4
MUNSTER
WALES
7
SOUTHUMBRIA
5
SOUTHWEST ENGLAND
Northern Picts
Scots
Southern Picts
Gododdin
Dal Riada
Bernicia
Rheged
Elmet
Deira
Lindsey
Gwynedd
Mercia
Ceredigion
Powys
East Anglia
Essex
Dyfed
Gwent
Hwicce
Wessex
Sussex
Kent
Dyfnaint
Kernow

Figure 1.12 (Left) The seven regions used in this book, showing (numbered) their normal order of citation in Chapters 2–5. (Right) The focal areas of documented kingdoms.

(FAS Heritage)

The prehistoric inheritance

Just as the formative era was played out on the uneven platform provided by nature, so its players were guided and inhibited by the cultural geography left by the previous inhabitants. This inheritance, like any other, contained a variety of legacies, some expected, some baffling. The first millennium population of Britain was itself derived from diverse origins, some very ancient and static, others – like the Romans, Angles or Scots – rather more recent. These survived and were passed on in a number of properties that formative people could not see or touch or sometimes could not even sense: language, music, a sense of kin. Their traces are still more elusive for us but are thought to have left an imprint on the modern country – placenames, DNA, folk culture.[86] The archaeology of previous peoples is more tangible, and its rich material sequence shows where ideas, if not peoples, held sway at different times: Mesolithic shell mounds, Neolithic passage graves, Bronze Age standing stones, Iron Age forts, Roman roads. Although we do not know how much of this monumental furniture could still be seen by the inhabitants of the first millennium, we can be sure it was not less than we can see now. The relict pattern is a real pattern, reflecting earlier territories, earlier clusters of allegiance.

If prehistoric and Roman monuments are to play a role in the making of the formative period, we need to know how significant they were then felt to be. Understanding responses to prehistoric monumentality has made giant strides in recent years, showing that the different regions of Britain not only had different sets of surviving monuments but behaved differently towards them. A certain indifference is to be expected in the case of the recent arrivals; the English who buried their dead in barrows also buried them in natural mounds showing that they had no precise memory of the landscape. The Scots who held their medieval courts on top of burial mounds also sited their *comhdhail* on natural hills.[87]

These observations have tended, in our sceptical age, to replace the general concept of a continuous and sentient response to the landscape with a perception of the reuse of prehistoric monuments as simply a legitimation exercise, in which the users exploited ancient monuments for political purposes in their own day.[88] But these things are likely to have a graduated rather than a single meaning, as has the idea of continuity itself. While the use of megalithic sites may be little removed from the use of any other quirky natural feature, in other cases, even in England, we must suspect a basic ability to read its vocabulary, along the lines of 'these mounds are burials and those in them are ancestors of the land, even if not ancestors of ours'. These gradations can help explain why reactions to monuments vary from place to place and through time. In certain examples we are entitled to assume that major monuments such as Stonehenge or Knowth always had some meaning for those that came afterwards; indeed, it can hardly be otherwise, since people are not the mental equivalent of grazing cattle. Although 'the proponents of ritual continuity are forced to make imaginative leaps across impossibly long periods of prehistoric time', this is still mental continuity of a kind, and different from the exploitation of an alien heap of stones for political purposes.[89] A case can be made that stone circles retained a meaning that mattered to those that hosted them, even if the meaning is elusive and made no use of conventional archaeological knowledge. This will bear on the question of why early Christianities varied.

The case for responses that betray closer understanding becomes stronger when we consider the more recent monuments, not megalithic, but those belonging to the Iron Age. The numerous prehistoric forts distributed over British hills can be assumed to have formed part of the formative theatre, at some time and in some way. Some at least of these sites and the practices that went with them can be legitimately constituted as living memory. Living memory becomes still more widely acceptable in the case of the Roman inheritance, as huge as it was reusable. This inheritance was at its most dense in the area subsequently occupied by the English, so even if these Germanic speakers had not themselves migrated they would have been immersed in a landscape of towns, villas and roads they could hardly ignore. For immigrants, the first landscape they encountered was mainly one of Roman fossilised affluence. It would be a sharp English eye that privileged the traces of a prehistoric country over those of an abandoned Roman province. Added to this intimate daily association was the rising European clamour for the return of Christian imperial Rome. In England, Rome rather than prehistory provided the ancient wisdom to emulate or reject. Responding to the past was not a brief phenomenon of the first formative decades. People went on doing it. If the pagan English of Formative 1 buried their dead in Bronze Age barrows, by Formative 3 these barrows had been demonised as the entrance to hell, fit only for felons. While Christianity in Formative 2 naturally brought to England a new dose of Rome, it can be argued that Christianity in the western and northern regions still had their fingers entwined with their own prehistoric practice.

Ancient memory: the early prehistoric inheritance

By 'ancient memory' I do not mean to imply that early medieval people actually remembered the early prehistoric period, only that prehistory had already structured the territory of the islands in a way that the first millennium occupants could recognise. The Mesolithic period, 10,000 years previously, probably left nothing that could be seen above ground except shell mounds, but it is interesting that modern knowledge of the Mesolithic period marks out the area of Ulster as a significant zone.[90] This is a sign that post-Pleistocene communities were already etching their own use-patterns on the natural theatre and so feeding long-term demography. Cummings claims loyalties to successive landscapes of the Mesolithic and Neolithic that demonstrate continuity between them, with specific forms of monuments matched to particular landscapes.[91] These ideas encourage us to believe that monuments and territories build together in a non-random way that maps associations of people with similar world views.

As suggested by their survival, megaliths, that is, large stone monuments of the Neolithic, occupy a particular zone. They are confined to Ireland and the west and north of Britain, and their distribution should indicate more than the availability of rocks or the use of the Gulf Stream: common origins from migration via the Atlantic coast, a region of shared belief or some mixture of the two.[92] Within these generalities, tomb-territories have been mapped: Clyde and Court tombs mark an area spread between Argyll and Ulster, pre-echoing our Dal Riada.[93] The passage graves cluster in the southern Irish Sea, connecting eastern Ireland, west Wales and SW. Chambered tombs in east Wales and Cotswold-Severn area and Wedge tombs in SW Ireland create other territories recognisable in the first millennium, since they are today.[94] If the early churches of Ireland develop regional styles, and these regions echo those of the tomb-territories 4,000 years earlier, this need not be a coincidence to be shunned with an irritated *pshaw*, but neither must they become obsessions of deep time pseudo-links. A great deal has yet to be discovered from DNA about static and mobile patterns of descendance at the regional scale. The landscape can have a DNA of its own into which successive peoples are inserted.

The stone circles also have a limited distribution, being notably sparse in the 'English' area. These have their subdivisions too, such as the groups in north and south Ireland and the recumbent stone circles of Aberdeenshire. These do not have to pre-echo first millennium cultural zones, or indeed create them. However, to disregard prehistoric territories that could be still easily seen seems unnecessarily coy on our part and assigns an unjustified insensitivity to formative people. We are on more shifting ground when making use of artefacts. The distribution of carved stone balls, apparently Neolithic in date, pre-empts the later Pictland no less precisely than its symbol stones[95] (Figure 1.13). The mutually exclusive distributions of stone circles and grooved ware suggested an east-west divide to Barry Cunliffe.[96] A north-south cultural divide also appears in the 8th century BC, suggested by the distribution of Gundlingen swords (most in Ireland, Britain, France) versus continued deposition of votive bronzes (southerly part of Ireland, SW Wales, SW, Armorica).[97] The distribution in this latter region pre-empts the pillar habit of the 5th–7th-century Britons. Which causes what is matter for debate and for much more investigation. But the long reach of geography should not be too readily dismissed.

Taking a tour through the megalithic, Iron Age and Roman inherited landscapes, in that order, does not imply that formative people knew their relative antiquity, although it would be arrogant to assume that they knew nothing. At the least, we can allow that they theorised on the origin and meaning of prehistoric monuments much as we do. Their knowledge depended on their familiarity with the monuments in question, which in turn depended on how long they and their ancestors had lived alongside them. Some indication of first-millennium attitudes can be gained from evidence of subsequent frequentation, reoccupation and reuse. In Ireland, Neolithic tombs and Bronze Age standing stones were used to

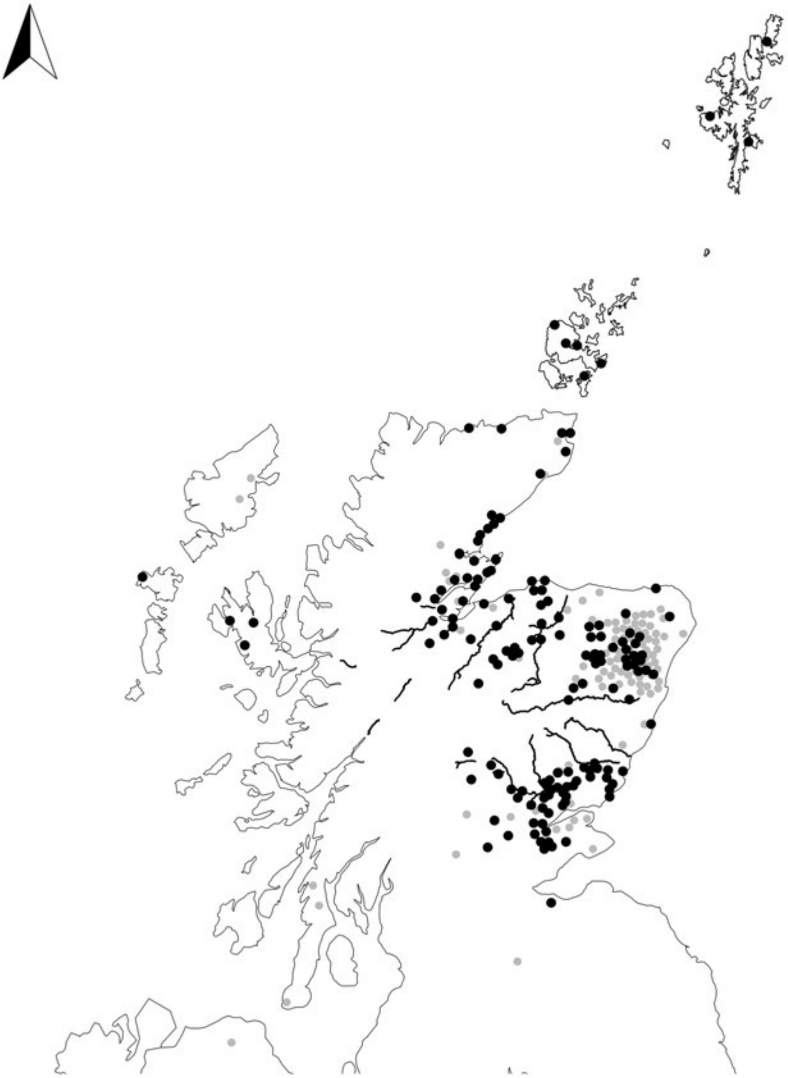

Figure 1.13 Distribution map of prehistoric ornamented carved stone balls (grey) and Pictish symbol stones (black).

(Author/FAS Heritage, drawing on Carver 1999; Edmonds 1992; Marshall 1977, 1983; McNeill and MacQueen 1996)

host early medieval burials. A cross was carved on the Findermore standing stone, a prehistoric monument located next to three ring barrows. Crosses were carved in the kerb stones of Neolithic passage grave at Lough Crew.[98] Knowth, a passage grave 85 m in diameter, was converted into a double-ditched ringfort in the 7th/8th century and used as a cemetery (Chapter 4, p. 438). The ditches were backfilled, incorporating a rich assemblage of early medieval animal bone.[99] In the 10th century the site was re-exploited as a settlement with 15 lozenge-shaped houses, nine souterrains and five metalworking areas. These three kinds of acknowledgement can indicate that the status of prehistory varied with time and politics. John Carey has made a good case that the type of Christianity that developed in Ireland in the 4th to 8th centuries was in close sympathy with the natural world and the ghostly residents of ancient monuments.[100] This line of reasoning is related not only to the reading of myth (Chapter 6) but the much later treatment of witches (relatively benign in Ireland in comparison to England).[101] Thus while crosses and burials at megalithic sites may relate one way of thinking with another, by the 10th century the colonisation of the site is more suggestive of topographical convenience.

In Scotland, early medieval Pictish symbols were etched onto stones belonging to prehistoric stone circles (Creichie) or standing stones (Edderton). The form of the standing stone monument was extensively borrowed into the Christian era, evolving into sophisticated forms such as the Irish high crosses, the Anglian Victory crosses and the Pictish cross slabs (Chapter 5). In the northern Borders, the 6th-century inscribed stone at Whitfield, Yarrow, is pre-empted by a prehistoric stone of similar form, a few hundred metres down the same valley (p. 501). The largest and most elaborate of the Christian standing stones are situated in the less Romanised areas, which suggests that it is the Bronze Age monuments, not the later Roman examples, which provided their basic potency. Exploitation of barrow sites was prevalent in Wales,[102] implying a 'British tradition of reuse with its roots in prehistoric practice'.[103] Here, the early medieval monuments may occasionally involve the actual reuse of a prehistoric standing stone, but proven instances are rare.[104]

In England, the practice of burying early medieval people in prehistoric monuments became widespread, although in the majority of cases the monument used was the Bronze Age barrow.[105] By contrast, Semple finds that 'examples of 5–7th century burials associated with standing stones or stone circles are . . . virtually non-existent',[106] although extant stone circles are themselves rare in the eastern 'English area', where such monuments may have been fashioned out of timber and were no longer visible. They are however present in Wiltshire, where the 80% of early medieval burials associated with prehistoric monuments mostly targetted round barrows. None was associated with Roman remains, and few were associated with standing stones or henges. In East Yorkshire 70% of the early medieval burials were positioned in relation to prehistoric monuments, with a majority on the southern slopes of the Wolds. In Sussex, 60% of the secondary burials were in round and long barrows. A fondness for barrow burial was manifested in two phases, one in the 5th/6th century AD and one in the 7th, when the inhabitants themselves built barrows *de novo*. This leaves open the question of what was intended by the choice. Sarah Semple's study suggests that there was more to it than gravediggers attracted by easy digging; there were 'perceptions' of the past. Although modern authors hasten to assure us that ethnicity was not relevant, the interpretation depends on how the burial party is tacitly identified. If these were 'Anglo-Saxons', then the argument that a burial rite has been imported has some substance.[107] Mounds were prevalent in the landscape of Jutland and north Germany, just as they are in the pages of *Beowulf*. However the immigrant community is deemed to be composed, Britons are also present in the community, and perhaps especially in Wiltshire, where the first documented kings of Wessex have British names. In this case, rather than importing a ritual, burial parties recognised barrows as ancestral resting places and added to them. In either event, the reuse of prehistoric monuments is thought to signal advanced levels of cognition.

This thesis is strengthened by the changing patterns of use. In Fm 1, there is secondary burial, mainly in round barrows. In Fm 2 the secondary association (where there is one) is with the more monumental barrows, but from the late 6th century to the late 7th the English (i.e. the Anglo-Britons in the English region) are building high status barrows of their own. From the 8th century to the 10th, the secondary burials are of quite a different type, namely victims who fell foul of new laws and were executed by hanging or decapitation. These have been interpreted as judicial punishment but with a strong element of Christian damnation.[108] These new perceptions of the prehistoric burial mound belong to the late formative period, when Christianity is exercising its power as an exclusive ideology:

> it can be no coincidence that in the same era that such monuments were becoming synonymous with demons and monsters and hellish connotations, they were put to new purpose as *cwealmstow* or killing places for the execution of felons, the display of their remains and the interment of their bodies.[109]

Of 27 known execution sites, 13 are associated with mounds or barrows of various date, eight with linear earthworks and three with hillforts.[110] Good examples of the changing attitude of English communities to the prehistoric mounds and their reflection of the contemporary zeitgeist are provided by the sequences at Wasperton (3rd–7th century) and Sutton Hoo (6th to 11th century) (Chapter 4).

Living memory: the Iron Age inheritance in Ireland

In the less Romanised areas of the isles there is likely to have been a stronger link of understanding between the early middle ages and the preceding Iron Age past. The next group of monuments, dating from the Iron Age, can claim a closer kind of association with their early medieval successors in Ireland and in west and north Britain than in England. One reason could be that the English, being post-Roman immigrants, had no particular association with the British Iron Age and little need to acknowledge it, in comparison with the more evident Roman inheritance. But another might be the lack of prominent hillforts in an area poorly furnished with steep hills. It is possible that even in the Romanised area there are sites in which early medieval people made direct reference to Iron Age predecessors, and if England were to experience the kind of large-scale investigation that the National Roads Authority gave to Ireland, it would open the door to discoveries of this kind.

The study has received a continuing impetus from Ireland's rich inheritance of stories that seem to refer to its own heroic Iron Age; this equation has been called into question (p. 605), but in combination with a 20th-century political imperative to equip the independent country with a richer past, the exploration of named sites has been irresistible.[111] The early 9th century, *Félire* named four great pagan royal cult centres and explained that they had been superseded by four great Christian monasteries: Tara by Armagh, Rathcrogan by Clonmacnoise, Ailem (Dún Ailinne) by Kildare and Emain Macha (Navan Fort) by Glendalough (Chapter 6, p. 606). Although there could hardly be a more attractive blueprint for the investigation of ideological change, there are two persistent problems. Firstly, the assumption that these are the only four candidates. Brian Lacey also cites Rath Bécc (Rathvilly) and finds three more cult high places and their hinterlands in Donegal.[112] Secondly, there is the difficulty of recognising the Irish Iron Age on the ground and distinguishing it from the preceding Bronze Age and succeeding early medieval cultures.[113] There are some candidates: a cluster of monuments in the area of Uisneach in County Westmeath included a ceremonial enclosure 50 m across of 5th/6th century date, which was then incorporated (while still visible) into a ringfort 90 m across in the 7th/8th century.[114] Teltown, County Meath, was documented as an assembly place of the Uí Néill kings during the festival of Lugnasad at least from the 6th century. Here there was an earthwork originally 100 m long, with radiocarbon dates in the 7th/5th century BC, the 7th/8th century AD and the 9th/10th century AD.[115] These examples constitute a manner of successive exploitations of a central place.

The late Iron Age central place would appear to have been a circular enclosure up to 50 m across with an adjacent mound: the Rath of Kings and Rath of the Synods at Tara were such enclosures;[116] more than 60 monuments are visible from the Rathcrogan mound (dated 4000 BC), which was succeeded by an early medieval ringfort with a souterrain inside;[117] at Navan a building of concentric wooden posts 40 m across was constructed in 95 BC;[118] at Dún Aillinne the excavators defined a timber circle 42 m in diameter;[119] and an isolated example was found on a road scheme at Lismullin, County Meath.[120] While none of these was directedly succeeded by churches, their form was moderated into the 7th century. Their true successors, as Oengus states, will have been the monastic foundations coming into force in the later 7th or early 8th century, although at new sites. But the continuous potency of a ritual site can be acknowledged in subtle ways. The deposition of early medieval brooches in wetland contexts at Knowth, Newgrange and Tara has been seen as a continuation of Iron Age votive practice.[121] Women are recorded as offering their jewellery on Christian altars as a successor ritual.[122] Betty O'Brien has shown how in Irish burial, Iron Age to early medieval ancestral continuity took precedence over the effects of Christian conversion.[123] A recent example has been excavated at Ardsallagh I (County Meath), where 30 inhumations of 5th–7th century date were laid in a penannular ring ditch containing cremations of the Bronze and Iron Ages.[124]

The Iron Age inheritance in Ireland may be elusive, but it shows certain repeating signs in the immediate pre-Christian period: large circular palisaded or banked enclosures, massive figure-of-eight constructions, burial grounds, often with Bronze Age or Neolithic predecessors, and some use at least up into the Roman Iron Age. In addition to being celebrated in early medieval literature (see Chapter 6), these sites survived as clusters of monuments and spaces evoking assemblies, musters, hostings, sporting events and a feeling of ancient and inherited centrality. They have yet to be excavated at a large scale, in comparison with the early first-millennium central places and cult sites of Scandinavia (see p. 284), but a similar role in a socially flat society dominated by spirituality can probably be envisaged. The rise to prominence of the fighting kings would follow in the post-Roman Formative 1, with another strong wind of spirituality ready to blow in thereafter.

In Britain

Analogous Iron Age references can be seen among the Scots, Picts and Welsh, if less strongly signalled. Dunadd is an early medieval fort with a prominent symbolic role overlooking the long-used prehistoric monumental centre at Kilmartin Glen. The Picts also built strongholds in the lee of former Iron Age hillforts (Chapter 3, 186). A first cult site has been identified at Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, where a tall palisade surrounds a timber hall and pits containing incinerated ox bone. Nine Class I symbol stones are associated with the valley leading to the site.[125] For some, these stones with their distinct geometric and animal symbols are inspired by Roman art.[126] For others, the Pictish forms are revivals of Iron Age art and the symbols themselves, featuring caricatures of Iron Age objects and an iconography of mainly local animals, have roots in the pre- Roman, pre-Pictish Iron Age, where they replace grave goods with their images.[127] Pictish long cist graves, some under mounds that may be round or square, begin before the arrival of Christianity and may even refer back to the shorter slab-sided burials that are Bronze Age in date.[128] Similar early medieval burial rites in Wales are unproven regarding their religious affiliation but often focus on prehistoric monuments. The use of stone linings, often rather peremptory, is also found sparsely scattered in the English region, where it has seen as commemorating Britons or aligned to British practice (Chapter 4, p. 330).

Inherited language

Bede reports five separate languages being spoken in Britain (in the 8th century): Old English, Old Irish, Welsh, Pictish and Latin.[129] The Latin-speaking Augustine required an interpreter, obtained among the Franks, to communicate with the English.[130] The Irish cleric Aidan used King Oswald as his interpreter when he arrived in Northumbria.[131] Agilbert, an Irish-speaking Frank, asked Wilfred to present the case for the Roman party to the English at the Synod of Whitby rather than use an interpreter, something that members of the Irish party had also found necessary.[132] Columba needed an interpreter to preach to the Picts and to convert two young men on Skye, who were presumably Picts at that date.[133] Welsh and Pictish are listed as two separate languages by Bede but are currently thought to represent two branches of p-Celtic on the basis of placenames, kings' names and ogham inscriptions.[134] There is still a persistent but unconsummated desire to give the Picts a more exotic origin, preferably one that is not Indo-European.[135] Recent analysis of the river names cited by Ptolemy found 41 to be of Celtic extraction, with the remaining six not Indo-European, all of them in north-east Scotland, which is 'indeed what one might expect on the far edge of an island on the far edge of Europe'.[136] According to Sims-Williams,

> There is nothing un-Celtic about the ogam inscriptions in Ireland or Wales, but Scotland is different. Though it is fashionable for scholars to ignore it, a non-Indo-European language does seem to be visible in the inscriptions of Scotland, which have never convincingly been interpreted as Celtic.[137]

However, as we will see, the archaeology of Pictland favours an interpretation, presenting a people who are close to its preceding Iron Age and remain artistically affiliated to the other enduring British areas in Strathclyde, Wales and south-west Cornwall.[138]

Jackson's classic analysis of the British languages concluded that, in spite of the laboured discussion of religious matters between the peoples, there was very little permanent linguistic cross-fertilisation. His famous river map is held to show the relabeling of the landscape by the English immigrants in the 5th and 6th century. Going from east to west, in his Area I Brittonic names are confined to major rivers; in Area II, more small rivers retain their British names, especially between Tees and Tyne. In Area III, Brittonic names are common including those of mere streams; this area corresponds to the later expansion of the English in the 7th and 8th century, in which renaming was no longer an imperative. Area IV (Cornwall and Wales) has only British names, implying the use of Brittonic speech until the Norman conquest or later.[139]

The presence of Britons in the 'English' zones is not thereby linguistically excluded, since physical cross-fertilisation is likely. Placenames suggest surviving British enclaves in Bernicia, the Pennines, the North York Moors, the Chilterns, the heath and forests of West Sussex and Essex, and in the Fens.[140] Intermarriage, including at the highest level, as in Wessex and Lindsey, led to the naming of children in both languages.[141] This is likely to have increased as hostility eased and differences blurred in the third century of English occupation (see Chapter 4). But British seems to have had no effect on English, and vice versa.[142]

According to Jackson, Latin remained a formulaic language, kept at arms' length by all insular parties. He reports that there is no evidence for the survival of spoken Latin in the lowland regions once the [Roman] army had gone and the Saxons had come, but equally, 'no-one suggests that Latin was widely spoken in the Highland zone'.[143] The English borrowed many words from Latin but virtually none from British – a paradoxical situation explained as a lack of common interests,[144] although it also endorses the argument for an apartheid (Chapter 2). The verdict would seem to be that the languages of Britain remained distinct, but that did not inhibit intermarriage, trade, religious debate and the contest of arms. In each of these, the passions of shared experience could potentially generate creative new forms of expression: this is certainly what happened in the realm of material culture. Language, like landscape, does not by itself change quickly and may not change for long. In this sense, the peoples of Britain still spoke their Iron Age languages throughout the Formative period and still remember some of them today.

Religious practice (and other relics)

A number of early medieval practices traditionally thought to be Christian, or at least Roman imports, are betraying signs of origins within the Iron Age or some even older inheritance. Votive deposits are clearly part of the Irish, British and Scandinavian pre-Roman world. Wet places are preferred, but caves and mounds also provide portals to the underworld. Regarded as points of access were lakes, wells, groves, hills and tumuli and the royal stronghold; but not the sea, so far as we know.[145] Finds of weapons in rivers is seen as emulation of the practice in early medieval Britain, and particularly impressive is the long-term magnetism of the River Witham in Lincolnshire, where votive deposits seem to have moved from the river to the monastery as late as the 13th century.[146] The cult of relics has been long claimed as a Roman import but was already recognised as 'not specifically Christian' by Charles Doherty.[147] New work has found examples of the hoarding of body parts in the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, as at Cladh Hallan in South Uist, where skeletons, some composite, were kept in a bog and reburied in a house after an interval of 500 years.[148] The relationship to ancestor cults is self-evident, and a transfer of attention from the curation of revered ancestors to heroes and then saints is to be expected. The use of relics recorded in the early medieval period included the curing of ailments by touching, their perambulation to bring rain or ward off disaster, the winning of battles by ensuring the remains of a saint/hero was on hand to give advice and stiffen backbone.[149] It would be eccentric to regard this ethos as a Mediterranean import, and it sits uneasily within contemporary Christian doctrine as outlined by Bede.[150] A less tortuous argument would cite the role of Christian relics as evidence for the survival of a previous non-Christian anthropologically validated belief system.[151]

The visiting of relics or of holy places was also probably a legacy of prehistory. The routes traced in the Dingle peninsular are prehistoric in origin but emerge in the early middle ages as routes favoured by pilgrims.[152] Andrew Sherratt's 'Avon route', which provided a short cut from the Bristol Channel to the south coast, had Stonehenge as its pivotal point and stopping place, seen in its most recent interpretations as a centre for Neolithic and Bronze Age worship and healing.[153] Gordon Noble mapped henge-based itineraries for Dunragit and Kilmartin Glen and defined an Upper Clyde monumental cluster that provide a pivotal landmark for a route from Clydeside to the south coast and east coast via the Nith and Tweed respectively. He also noted that henge monuments cluster along the same routes as the modern main roads.[154] Here the henge monuments, the river routes and the sacred are packaged in a travellers' formula that combines a sense of geographical, cultural and spiritual direction that pilgrims of all faiths and none would recognise today. Whatever the specious explanations of early medieval and later commentators, neither preacher nor audience could escape the thud of the prehistoric heartbeat.

Other deep roots are suspected to lie behind early medieval religious schisms. The conflict of practice between the western and eastern churches that came to a head at the Synod of Whitby had a geographical distribution that echoed the east-west divides of prehistoric monuments. The Synod focussed on the form of the tonsure worn by monks and the date of the Spring Festival (Easter). The Roman tonsure (in the form of a dinner plate) was contrasted with the Celtic tonsure, where the hair was shaven forward of a line drawn from ear to ear, exposing the bare forehead of the thinker. This is claimed as the form of haircut worn by the druids and thus an inheritance from the Iron Age.[155] Differing opinions on the date of Easter are also distributed geographically as an echo of prehistoric monuments, in this case stone circles (see p. 28). The two modes of calculation are usually explained by different scholarly access to Mediterranean sources, each imported at different times into Ireland and Britain respectively. That may be so, but this would hardly explain the geographical division in an age of high clerical mobility. At the 664 Synod, Aidan, champion of the Celtic cause, remarked: ‘The Easter customs which I observe were taught me by my superiors, who sent me here as a bishop; and *all our forefathers*, men beloved of God, are known to have observed these customs’.[156] Admittedly *omnes patres nostri* – could mean church fathers rather than forefathers, and Colman was unlikely to bring forward an argument based on prehistoric rituals at a church synod. More appropriately to the meeting, he claimed authority from St John the Apostle and Anatolius. His adversary Wilfrid retorted that the Columban church followed neither John nor Anatolius and that ‘the only people who stupidly contend against the whole world are these Scots and their partners in obstinacy the Picts and the Britons, who inhabit only a portion of these, the two uttermost islands of the ocean’.[157]

A similarly intemperate attitude to the relevance of prehistory prevails among some Christians and early medieval scholars today. Our archaeological instruments of inference are weaker and less precise but entitled to be tabled. It is no longer controversial that stone circles had a calendrical function and were used to calculate pivotal moments of the year, of which the onset of spring is the most valuable.[158] There is a case for expecting similar structures to imply similar calculations, whatever they were. A current expert, Clive Ruggles rightly urges us to reason carefully and not give way to eager guessing and imaginative leaps. Nevertheless, he finds consistency of usage among the constructors of the recumbent stone circles of NE Scotland and the axial stone circles of SW Ireland, both of whom aligned their monuments with lunar events.[159] Many years separate the period of construction of stone circles and the Synod of Whitby. But these stones nevertheless stood then in the landscape, because they still do. If the arguments of archaeology are at all valid then there is a *prima facie* case that the areas with stone circles were accustomed in the first millennium AD, as in the fourth millennium BC, to calculate the date of their spring festival using a local method rather than one imported from the Mediterranean.[160]

British and Irish contact with Rome and the Mediterranean through the 5th/6th century is evident from imported pottery (above). The red plates, some with Christian symbols stamped upon them, and the amphorae, containing wine and olive oil, suggest a package designed to support the Christian project in opposition to the pagan English, in whose territory none have been found. This should imply a targeted intellectual contact, and the wine and olive oil were no doubt accompanied by sacred texts in Latin and Greek, together with early Christian art, advanced iconography and ideas. If so, the showing is weak; the imports are few, and in the

5th–6th centuries the few signs of Christianity are of the Old Testament, Davidian mentality, and the monumentality less devoted to saints than heroes or kings (Chapter 6, p. 602). However, this route from the Mediterranean via the Pillars of Hercules, Biscay, Brittany and Finisterre into the Irish Sea was already old by the Roman period.

Formative 2 sings a different song, led by Gospel books from Rome and pottery imported from neighbouring Aquitaine. While the message of the New Testament is now clear, its materiality expressed in vellum and stone is novel and home-grown. The Christian fundamentalist phase might frequently refer to Rome, but the British and Irish areas of the islands had their own driving force, couched in their own idiosyncratic style (see especially Chapters 4 and 5).

Living memory 2: the Roman inheritance

The Anglo-Saxons and their residual Britons claimed the lion's share of the territory colonised by Rome and took note of the extensive road network, the ordered fields, the villae, the temples and the forts that punctuated the land they were farming.[161] Nevertheless there are few signs of the exploitation by the 5th/6th-century English of Roman infrastructure either in town or country. In the aftermath of the campaign that made claims for continuity at Wroxeter (p. 263), the upper levels of villa sites have been examined minutely, and every urban excavation in former Roman towns, now numbering in the thousands, has been trowelled, brushed and sieved in the search for post-Roman continuity. But in spite of this diligent peering, the evidence remains as exiguous as it was 30 years ago: a water pipe in Colchester, sunken-featured huts in Canterbury, a burial by the gate at Winchester. Even in the imperial heartlands of Italy, continuity in the 5th/6th century has been hard to demonstrate, although easy to infer, for example in the survival of a street plan or a sewer. Large-scale studies such as Verona, Brescia and Crypta Balbi in Rome make it clear that major social changes are under way after the 6th century and that the new prescription had neither the resources nor the political will to continue with the old. The incidence of Christian burials within the former infrastructure is widespread, in the amphitheatres, in the rooms of houses and public buildings.[162] In Northumbria the excavations under York Minster were decisive: 250 interventions and thousands of tons of archaeological strata failed to deliver any convincing activity, even burial, between the 4th century and the 7th.[163] By contrast, in the west country and Wales the use of Roman temple sites continued into the 5th and even the 6th century. Striking evidence comes from Uley, where a temple complex serving the cult of Mercury in the Roman period was refurbished for devotees in the 5th century and superseded by a plausible if ephemeral Christian church, basilica and baptistery on the same site in the 6th/7th century.[164] Roman monuments, as well as prehistoric, provided foci for burials in Wales in the 5th–7th centuries, for example at Capel Eithin (Chapter 4, p. 312).

The 7th/8th century, our Formative 2, presents a very different picture. Roman establishments are the targets of the new Christian *Romanitas*. While Sarah Semple found no convincing deliberate association of a church or a Christian burial with a recognised *prehistoric* monument in the English region, Tyler Bell identified 250 medieval churches in association with *Roman* buildings.[165] Some of the earliest surviving ecclesiastical sites (Burgh castle, Bradwell on Sea, Escomb) are built at former Roman sites, and often out of recycled Roman materials. Seventh-century cemeteries took advantage of ex-Roman sites, either deliberately or by virtue of a favoured position, as Westhampnett (p. 305) and Lowbury Hill, where a male of over 45 years old was buried with sword, spear, knife, sugarloaf shield boss, shears, comb, bronze and iron buckles and a bronze hanging bowl. The burial stood next to a Roman temple and was covered by a mound, as if in deliberate reversion to earlier non-Roman ancestors. The burial was located near the junction of the Ridgeway, Icknield Way and the Roman road to Dorchester and had the best views in the area.[166] At the same time, although driven by a different ideological impetus, the towns reawoke, and their diocesan function was established or restored at York, Canterbury, Winchester and Gloucester, corroborated by dated archaeological features. In this later phase, female adornment also drank from the Mediterranean spring.[167]

In Formative 3, the 100-year-long Viking wars affected both islands and took their toll of both their wealth and their will to pursue the intellectual conquest of Europe. England and Scotland both won their battles, against Danes and Norse respectively, but still arguably succumbed to the Viking argument. When institutionalised uncompromising Christian orthodoxy revived in 10th-century England, it did so again under the Roman banner. In sum, the 5th-century end of empire seems to have been followed by a 200-year 'rest from Rome', followed by at least two moments of renaissance, in the 7th century and the 10th, both re-seeking the ethos of Rome in technology and politics. The latter episode also introduced something of Rome's ruthless military rule.[168]

Living memory 3: the German inheritance

The long discussion about how far the south-east side of Britain (aka England) was Germanised in the 5th/6th century has currently settled on the opinion of 'quite a lot'. Current researches have convinced all but the most obdurate that the massive language shift from British to English, the high-profile burial rites, the shunning of Roman towns, the new clothing, accoutrements, weapons, life style and gods, together with the lack of a detectable hierarchy, imply a large number of immigrants of both sexes into 5th- and 6th-century England from areas in modern Denmark, north Germany, Holland and Norway.[169] The degree to which Germanic practice came in with the migrants is a big topic to be explored in each of our reviews of material culture: in appearance (Chapter 2) it seems likely that a considerable amount of symbolism, belief and self-regard came in with the migrants and was expressed on the pots and brooches, swords and by the burial rites themselves (Chapter 4). The contribution of Germanic building techniques and styles to Anglo-Saxon settlement is debated (Chapter 3); there was certainly some. In stone monuments the Germanic signature is not marked, and it was some time before the idea of sculpture was adopted in the Anglo-Saxon region (in Formative 3: Chapter 5). To pre-empt the broader argument, it will be proposed here that differences in speech and culture were strong for the first two centuries of English and Irish occupation but began to blend in the 7th and 8th century. In the 9th–11th centuries, the triumph of the English language ensured that the Germanic inheritance remained powerful, not only in the areas where the Anglo-Saxons first settled but in the territories they conquered. While the archaeology is less vocal, there is enough in buildings and in art to recognise a 'Late Saxon' signature which is neither Roman, Viking nor British.

Attitudes to the past: FM 1, 2, 3

As we have seen, the 'royal cult centres' of Ireland had been retrospectively reduced to four in 9th-century literature, when their demise was recorded (p. 32). The archaeological evidence suggests that such central places were more numerous in the Iron Age and still active in the 7th/8th century, when they were redeveloped as ringworks (Uisneach, Teltown, Tara) or giant figure-of-eight structures (Dún Aillinne, Navan). These are not yet firmly labelled as princely centres, cult centres or Christian cult centres. The large crop of 'cemetery settlements' harvested by NRA archaeology showed the majority to have no churches and to be neither certainly pagan nor certainly Christian. This suggests that these were communities with family cemeteries that adapted to their own version of godliness.[170] At this time the continuity between Iron Age and early medieval burial practice was marked, although in neither case indicating allegiance to a recognisable creed.[171] It is not impossible therefore that the figure-of-eight structures provided cult centres for those of a non-Christian persuasion. Early investment in Irish megalithic monuments in the 5th/6th century gave way to exploitation in the 7th/8th century, plausibly as feasting sites. During the 8th–10th centuries, burial began to migrate to communal cemeteries as 'a more extreme social hierarchy took hold'.[172] When in the 10th century the old centres, such as Knowth, were reused for settlement, it can be argued that their spiritual residue had worn thin.

The uses of prehistoric barrows in the English region changes gradually: secondary burial in the 5th/6th century, purpose-built mounds in the late 6th century, small at first and integrated with the communal cemeteries (Spong Hill, Wasperton) but gradually growing larger and proclaiming an independent and dominant identity (Sutton Hoo, Swallowcliffe Down, Taplow). The excision of the mound from its ancestral roots began in the 8th century. It remained a place of entry to the other world, but the other world was now hell. By the 10th century the mounds had become places of execution, where those guilty of anti-Christian behaviour were both hanged and damned.[173] That this was not simply a dismissive rejection of an unknown past is shown at Sutton Hoo, where the apparatus of execution was set up on or beside mounds that had been constructed for East Anglian kings only a generation before. The throttled dissidents were dumped in graves that ringed a mound, the occupant of which was probably well known to those condemned to the gallows.[174] Nevertheless, the occurrence of an execution burial at Stonehenge, as well as at barrows, hillforts and linear earthworks, shows a broader awareness of the vocabulary of landscape.[175]

Where ideas came from

It will already be apparent that in the story about to unfold, dominant families and political groups can take their cue from a wide range of sources, some nearby, some far away, some recent, some long ago, some only theorised fossils in the landscape. If we take the case of Western monasticism, there is a wide spectrum of sources from home and abroad from which this particular version of a new ideology was constructed (Chapter 3, p. 207). Certain beliefs and principles remain anchored to the soil; others are exotic and adopted; others are invented in the excitement of the new ideas. In the case of immigrants, some practices and images come in with them and are gradually relinquished unless ideologically revived. Others were acquired on marriage to locals, others proved politically prudent. In this kind of deconstruction, the contribution of prehistory is likely to be elusive but no less powerful for that.

It is a major premise of this book that the intellectual allegiance of the formative peoples vacillated and that it can be detected archaeologically. The basic theory is that high-profile sites, monuments and objects have received 'added investment' and so are more likely to carry political messages for public consumption. The messages themselves are deduced from the references made by the material culture. Plenty of examples will be encountered in the pages that follow, but here are four that can act as 'overture and beginners'.[176] At the site of Wasperton (Wa), burial began in the 3rd century AD. The women were buried with neck rings, the men with studded boots. An incoming late 5th-century group was buried in cremation urns. In the mid-6th century, a few inhumations were laid on adjacent prehistoric barrows; in the late 6th century, a few purpose-built barrows joined them. All these different burial rites were enacted within the same location, an abandoned Roman agricultural enclosure. One part of this enclosure was maintained a discrete area for W–E graves without grave goods, from the 4th to 7th century. This was a community that continued from the Roman period to the 7th century, respecting each other's graves but performing different rites. Apart from the apparently Christian enclave, the allegiance shown was to the Roman empire (3rd–5th century), to Germanic rites (5th/6th century), to British traditions (5th/6th century), to the prehistoric landscape (mid-6th century) and finally to the new leadership cult of late 6th- and early 7th-century Britain (Chapter 4, p. 324).

The new cult, or its heightened expression, was dramatically displayed at Sutton Hoo, where a 6th-century family cemetery was superseded in the early 7th century by a short-lived cluster of high-ranking mound burials that made references to Frankish horse burial, Scandinavian ship burial and (in its grave goods) to north Britain and Rome. This episode was followed in the 8th to 10th centuries by a reuse of the cemetery as a place of execution by hanging. Here the signals describe the progress of a local aristocracy from local lords to pagan kings to Christian kings with a penchant for punishing deviance (Chapter 4, p. 331).

At Portmahomack in the north-east of Scotland an equally sophisticated transition was recorded over the same period. In the 6th/7th century the place was a burial ground associated with a high-ranking equestrian family who left us a gilt bronze disc very similar to that worn by the horse at Sutton Hoo. In the late 7th century, the site was reorganised as a monastery, with workshops making vellum and church plate and erecting stone grave markers and cross slabs 3 m high. The cultural markers were Pictish in their symbols but insular in their art, with references primarily to Ireland and Northumbria but also to the British west. Between AD 780–810 (in radiocarbon years), the monastic workshops were burnt down and stone monuments were broken up and laid as hardcore and drain linings. Metalsmiths were soon in business, using the techniques previously applied to make chalices and patens to make belt buckles, pins and weights (to regulate trading). This phase lasted until the 10th century, by which time the Moray Firth had become a war zone between Norse and Scots (p. 148).

My fourth example, Stafford, was also created in a war zone, the wars of Aethelflaed of Mercia against the Vikings. As Alfred's daughter she was well aware of the ethos that drove the family not only to keep the Danes out of Wessex but, in a planned counter-attack, to clear them from Anglo-British regions in the north. This campaign was modelled on the Roman invasion of Britain. Aethelflaed and her husband, Ethelred, and brother Edward built rectangular forts. Aethelflaed initiated an industry at Stafford making Roman-style pots, and mistakes were punished by beheading (Chapter 3, p. 269).

This may seem a motley group to introduce the great variety of early medieval material we have, but these were all sites that carry the imprint of their ideology. Here the references are made to local prehistoric, Germanic, pagan, Roman and Christian inheritance. A reader might comment, 'That is not entirely unexpected.' This would be just, but archaeology is offering a little more than that: it is saying what allegiance, which intellectual current is being signalled where. Because the way people thought is a compendium of messages delivered by settlement, burial, objects and symbolic language, disentangling it is not straightforward, but disentangle it we must if the past is going to make sense. For the present, we have four examples where characterisation is reasonably clear; for the future we are about to plunge into the thickets of meaning left by every type of cultural material.

It is not accidental that the word ideological has popped up from time, since in my view it is the principal game-changer of the first millennium. That is, the influence of the environment, of resources, of disease, plague, even of violence is of minor consequence compared with the upheaval caused by the imposition of new ideas claiming a universal mandate. Individual visions, happily, are always with us, and we can hopefully encounter them in every site and work of art. Ideology by contrast is the blanket application of a single group of ideas and the closure of the mind against every alternative. This is Europe's curse, and it begins in the formative period. Archaeology often gives us a clue on where these ideas come from, or where they were last seen in action. From this we can enter the heads of our protagonists and learn something of what was driving their actions at that time and place and how they expressed it in material terms.

The seven regions as cultural areas

The seven 'natural' regions match reasonably well to the pattern of their diverse inheritance. The present Celtic areas – Scotland, Pictland, Cumbria, Wales and the SW – all retain prehistoric patterns that have some currency in the formative period, although not always manifested with equal strength. As in Ireland, there is continuity in the form of burial in Wales and Pictland and some attention given to henges. All areas embrace the standing stone as an emblem of shared values and recolonise prehistoric foci to a greater or lesser extent (Forteviot, Kilmartin, Cumbria, Wales, SW). Claims have been made here that early Christian fetishes – the cult of relics, the tonsure and the date of Easter – are derived from prehistoric practice and that the variation in the Christian mode seen in the different regions reflects variations in previous prehistoric worship. It is in Ireland that the shared prehistoric experience and the changing attitudes to its legacy are most evident.

The area of England that maps onto the Jurassic plain is distinct from the remaining regions in prehistoric times and distinct in its response to prehistoric monuments, the greater focus being on Bronze Age earth barrows. This region also harboured the majority of the Roman inheritance in its territory but took a few hundred years to acknowledge it in its own monumental agenda. It was after the English embraced a 7th-century Roman version of the Christian project and a special relationship was contrived with Rome that the inhabitants began to signal ownership of Roman remains, and prehistoric monuments were rebranded as gateways to doom.

Northumbria, which has a strong personality in formative and in modern territory, is a less perfect fit with its inheritance, because the characteristics of the English plain reach north of the Humber into the plain of York from the beginning of our period. One possibility would be to extend 'England' accordingly; another would be to accept the 'Anglo-British' tag.[177] From the 5th century until the arrival of the Vikings in the 9th, it is sensible to agree that northern England east of the Pennines and south of the Forth is a frontier zone populated by British, Anglian or Anglo-British kingdoms, and thereafter it becomes partly Anglo-Danish. A similar hybridisation sequence will be noted in north-east Scotland, where a Pictish region became Picto-Scottish and then Scotto-Norse as successive invaders altered the balance of power.

The premise offered is that each of the seven natural regions were also sufficiently distinct culturally, at least in regards to their inheritance, as to act as characters in our island story. They were reflected in the fuzzy borders of the known Iron Age territories and the Roman dioceses (Figure 1.14), and the same zones glimmer with faintly different colours in their language zones, religious affiliations and even in the games children played in the school playgrounds up to the 20th century (Chapter 7, p. 668). Other more subtle territories were signalled by pottery types, house types, styles of stone crosses and forms of churches, and we will see whether these can be justly cited as ‘intellectual territories’[178] (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). It would be expected that association will be signalled in a wide spectrum of different colours and intensities, from a weak but persistent local glow from prehistory to the strong lights of newly imported peoples and arts. These latter need not map directly on to the territories of the *longue durée*, but our regions can serve as points of reference with which to compare them. In this respect the regions are arbitrary but firmly defined, lines on a map over which spill the trends of successive ages.

The structure of the book

As proposed in the preface, this book attempts to construct a narrative of the 5th to 11th century in Britain. It will be an archaeological narrative constructed from four general categories of archaeological evidence: objects (Chapter 2), settlements (Chapter 3), burials (Chapter 4) and stone monuments (Chapter 5), each enlivened with imaginative and probably injudicious interpretations. The task is to investigate the evidence in each category for the whole island over three periods (Table 0.1, p. xxiv).

The geographic structure is largely result of the considerations of the inherited natural and prehistoric character outlined in this chapter, which suggested the seven regions sketched in Figure 1.12. For each investigation, the evidence is reviewed by period; and within each

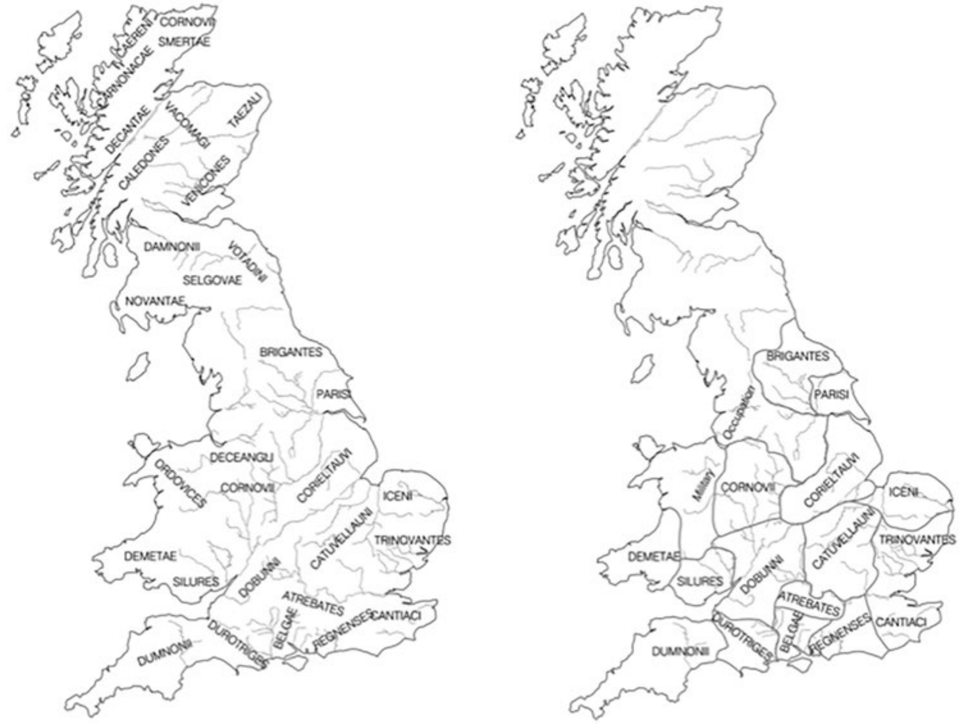
CORNOVII
SMERTAE
CAERENI
CARNONACAE
DECANTAE
VACOMAGI
TAEZALI
CALEDONES
VENICONES
DAMNONII
VOTADINI
SELGOVAE
NOVANTAE
BRIGANTES
PARISI
DECEANGLI
ORDOVICES
CORNOVII
CORIELTAUVI
ICENI
TRINOVANTES
CATUVELLAUNI
DEMETAE
SILURES
DOBUNNI
ATREBATES
REGNENSES
CANTIACI
BELGAE
DUROTRIGES
DUMNONII
BRIGANTES
PARISI
Occupation
Military
CORNOVII
CORIELTAUVI
ICENI
CATUVELLAUNI
TRINOVANTES
DEMETAE
SILURES
DOBUNNI
ATREBATES
BELGAE
REGNENSES
CANTIACI
DUROTRIGES
DUMNONII

Figure 1.14 Iron Age (left) and Roman territories (right).

(FAS Heritage)

period the itinerary through the seven regions starts at the top left of the island, in 'Scotland', then goes east to 'Pictland' and then south to 'NW England' and thence to Wales and SW. Then it returns to the north to visit Northumbria and lastly returns south to the territories of south-east England, which are referred here as 'Southumbria'.

This system of citation has the advantage of a routine but has also to allow for the considerable variations and gaps in the evidence. So whereas Southumbria has no sculpture to speak off before Fm 3, its Fm 1 cemetery evidence is so rich that it has to be reported in four sub-periods. Similarly, settlement evidence is sparse in Fm 1 Pictland and in all three periods in Wales. These gaps and bulges will be addressed in their turn. Because Ireland and Scandinavia are so much part of our story, we will often visit them too, so as to have a haversack of comparative materials when the British material has been organised for comparison. In the case of the settlements and cemeteries, multi-period sites provide a particular asset, one that is responsible for most of the narrative framework of the book as a whole. So Chapters 3, 4 and 5 begin with a Field Trip taking a close look at a handful of these fieldwork projects that were ground-breaking in every sense.

One result of these discoveries is to reveal a set of drivers – leadership, spirituality and wealth creation, which operate in every period and region but at different levels of intensity. These differences of emphasis give each period its flavour. In Fm 1 leadership and land ownership in various forms generate signs of governance and control. In Fm 2 spirituality rises to the level of fundamentalist religion, embraced by the British and Anglo-British regions but less so in England. In Fm 3, wealth creation takes centre stage, initially under the Vikings, expressed as bullion, manufacture and trade and latterly as coinage syphoned into the treasure chests of the military and clerical overlords. A theme of the book is that these differences through time represent the outcome of conflicts between ideologies rather than good weather or good luck, even if these varied too. The thesis unrolled here suggests that it is these conflicts that characterised the Roman-Medieval transition and generated its material culture. Chapter 7 presents the narrative derived from archaeology in a form that is designed to aid its deployment by historians, at least of those parts they find acceptable or enlightening. A final coda invites the reader to appreciate, hopefully with curiosity mingled with affection, the legacy of the Formative period, its adventure, experiment, broad deep thinking, poetry, closeness to nature and the inspiration it can still give to individuals who feel themselves shackled by the universalisms of our own millennium.

Notes

1 It was declared an English possession by Henry VIII in 1542, subsequent colonisation being long resisted especially in Northern Ireland, a territory definitively settled by the English after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. On the formation of the independent Irish state (now republic) in 1922, the six counties of Northern Ireland opted out, becoming part of the UK. Peace between north and south was eventually achieved in 1999 at a time when both Britain and Ireland were part of the EU. At the time of writing, archaeology operated in Ireland largely without borders.

2 O'Sullivan et al. 2014a. This survey covered the whole island of Ireland.

3 Coined by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *History of the Kings of Britain* c. 1136. While the history itself is unreliable, there were Britons in Brittany at the time it was written.

4 Evans 1975.

5 Taylor 1956, 18; easterly and north-easterly winds driving across the Norway sea towards Iceland and Shetland 'could be counted on with the greatest certainty early in the sailing season in late April and May'; Taylor 1956, 75; McGrail 1998, 260; Carver 1990; Carver 2014b.

6 Based on modern data from Admiralty Pilots 1979/82, 1973, 1983, Admiralty Chart of the North Sea (HMSO, 1979); see Carver 1990, Fig 15.2; Lamb and Fryendahl 1991, 25–27.

7 Marcus 1980, 101; McGrail 1998, 259–260, citing the Old English poem *The Seafarer* line 62–63.

8 Cunliffe 2001, 558.

9 Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor's *Haven-Finding Art* (1956) remains the classic work for early navigation.

10 Taylor 1956, 31.

11 The Voyage of St Brendan in *Lives of the saints*, 55; Taylor 1956, 76–77; Carver 1990; Binns 1980; Tim Severin (1978) describes a successful experimental voyage in a leather boat from the Irish Sea to Iceland.

12 Westerdahl 2008: 'Maritime societies and individuals develop cosmologies and rituals, not only strategies for sustenance, which to them are supposed to be as necessary for survival.'

13 Miles 2005, 86 summarises recent evidence for Bronze Age sea travel around Britain.

14 Marcus 1980, 5–7; the sea-going curragh, the latest descendant of the hide craft, is deemed much more seaworthy than a logboat.

15 McCullough 2000; Phillips 2006; Westerdahl 2006.

16 Eileen Wilkes (2007) identifies 40 Iron Age landing places on the south coast indicated by favourable tides, shelter from winds, seamarks, beaching points and access to rivers. Ewan Campbell (1991, 2007) mapped the distribution of Fm 1 post-Roman imports and felt (1996, 79) that 5th–7th century exchange systems used a number of short journeys and successive cargos, as described in Neil Munro's *Tales of Para Handy*. See also Wooding (1996); Campbell and Bowles 2009 for Byzantine connections.

17 Crumlin-Pedersen 1991c; Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001.

18 Crumlin-Pedersen and Trakadas 2003, 239.

19 Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, 65–94.

20 Crumlin-Pedersen 1997.

21 Carver 1995b.

22 Carver 1990; Bill 2008; the 'Sea Stallion from Glendalough, a reconstructed Viking ship based on Skudelev 2 could make 11 knots (20km/h) under sail in a fresh wind and 5 knots (10km/h) under oars. It took three days to sail from Jutland to England' (Viking Ship Museum 2007, 63).

23 Taylor 1956, 4, comments that historians have invented 'coastwise creep' not believing in navigation, but that actually the last thing a mariner wants is a lee shore.

24 Morris 1989, 11.

25 Campbell 1991; Doyle 2009; Kelly 2010. With the pottery came glass, probably from south-west France (Campbell 2000, 42). Different types of glass reached the English areas from the Rhineland (Evison 2000, 90–91). The most easterly British find of pottery imported from the Mediterranean is probably Bantham in Devon, where imported amphorae of the 5th/6th century (LRA1) were found in association with a hearth and stake holes (Reed et al. 2011).

26 Ewan Campbell (1996, 87–88) argues that trade was attracted to western Scotland in the 6th to 7th century because it was further along the road to coordinated kingship than other parts of Britain or Ireland.

27 Wickham 2005, 809, 815.

28 Barry Cunliffe discerned several maritime communities indicated by the use of similar coarsewares opposite each other either side of The Channel during the Iron Age (5th to 1st century BC): the south-east with the Belgic area, the centre south with the Seine, the south-west with Brittany (Cunliffe 2013, 315, 331, 335).

29 Carver 1986a.

30 Levison 1946, 44; Jenkins 1949, 68.

31 McCormick 2001. Compare Bowden and Hodges 2012.

32 Levison 1946, 39.

33 Morris 2004, 2, 4, 5, 13.

34 Bately and Englert 2007; Englert and Trakadas 2009.

35 BL Cott. Tib. B.V f56v; Hill 1981, 3; Barber 2006, 4–8; Foys 2007, 120; Carver 2014b, 34. The map is thought to derive from a Roman original copied in the 9th century and modified in the 11th century – to reflect Archbishop Sigeric's journey to Rome in 990 via Pavia, Verona and Lucca.

36 Westerdahl 1992, 2005; Crumlin-Pedersen 1991a; for English waters see Carver and Loveluck 2013; Carver 2014b.

37 Wreford Watson 1964, 1.
38 Ferriday 1955, 173, Fig 72.
39 Mackinder 1915, 33; Fox 1952.
40 A similar division is apparent in the soils of Ireland, where poorly drained soils dominate the north and west, and the more fertile soils chiefly in the south-east. The latter maps the distribution of Anglo-Norman boroughs (Mitchell and Ryan 1998, 308–310, Figs 154, 155).
41 What follows makes use of studies by Ferriday 1955; Wreford Watson and Sissons 1964; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002; Rippon et al. 2014.
42 Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, Fig 3.11; Rippon et al. 2014, Figs 4.1, 4.2.
43 Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, Fig 1.2.
44 Simmons 2001, Fig 4.3.
45 Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, Fig 1.4.
46 Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, Fig 3.9. EngLaID is a project currently attempting to map early medieval settlement density using archaeological evidence (Green et al. 2017). It does not reflect these zones (which refer to agricultural strategies rather than population).
47 Allen et al. 2016.
48 Simmons 2001, 83; Rackham 2000, 174–176.
49 Ferriday 1955, Fig 116.
50 Rackham 2000.
51 Banham and Faith 2014, 33, 269.
52 Yeast is present in the air or in fermented wine or beer.
53 Hay loses one third of its protein due to fermentation in the rick, but drying in kilns gives a winter feed 50% richer in protein then cereal grains. Storage of freshly cut grass in shallow pits makes a silage (fermented feed) with a protein value twice that of hay (Ferriday 1955, 295–296).
54 Ferriday 1955, 291–292.
55 Kelly 2000, 54–55.
56 Parchment in the north was generally termed vellum from Latin *vitellus* calf. In the south, sheepskin was more commonly used for mss.
57 Simmons 2001, 101.
58 Barrett and Richards 2004; Barrett 2008; Barrett et al. 1999, 2000, 2004.
59 Rackham 2000, 70.
60 Katherine Seymour Woods was born in Oxford in 1887 and published her invaluable book in 1949.
61 For example: *Rumex acetosa* leaves for soups and *Oxalis acetosella* as a children's snack; 15 folk species of fruits and seeds (*Crataegus* spp., *Corylus avellana*, *Fagus sylvatica*, *Fragaria vesca*, *Malus domestica*, *Prunus spinosa*, *Pyrus* spp., *Rosa canina*, *Rubus idaeus*, *Rubus* sect. *Rubus, Sambucus nigra, Vaccinium myrtillus, V. oxycoccos, V. uliginosum, V. vitis-idaea*) and four taxa used for seasoning or as preservatives (*Armoracia rusticana* root and leaves, *Carum carvi* seeds, *Juniperus communis* pseudo-fruits and *Quercus* spp. leaves) (Łuczaj and Szymański 2007).
62 Alison Donaldson in Carver 1979, 56–58.
63 Banham and Faith are less sanguine than Roberts and Wrathmell that it did so within the Formative period. Rather, the central belt defined earlier (p. 13) represents evidence of the middle ages: Banham and Faith p. 284: 'Evidence for early open field zone influenced by the evidence for open-field system at its fullest extent, often based on enclosure awards'; and p. 295: 'if open field farming as seen in English local records from the thirteenth century onwards was not yet in operation, the elements were available – the crops, the tools, the techniques – which allowed its development after the Conquest'.
64 Banham and Faith 2014, Fig 12.3 for Wheldrake village, strip fields and ings.
65 Rippon et al. 2014, Fig 4.
66 Rippon et al. 2014.
67 Rippon et al. 2014, 243.
68 Rippon et al. 2014, Fig 3.
69 Rippon et al. 2014, 218, 231–232. However, the Fm 1 sites included some Fm 2, since they were dated 5th–7th or 5th to 9th. Thus, only broad-brush conclusions have been cited here from a very detailed study.
70 Rippon et al. 2014, 242; also Banham and Faith 2014, 291.
71 Banham and Faith 2014, 294.

72 This is a distant echo of the zig-zag beginnings of agriculture, where hunted animals are herded, then impounded and fed wild cereals, then cereals are cultivated to keep the herds to hand; and as the population increases cereal production is required not only to make beer but to be fed to humans too in solid form. This powered the 12,000-year old congregational site of Göbeckli Tepe in Turkey (Dietrich et al. 2012). Another assembly place of similar date has been found at Wadi Faynan in Jordan (Mithen et al. 2011).
73 Sherratt 1996.
74 Westerdahl 2006. The east coast exception is Tarbat Ness in Easter Ross.
75 Sherratt 1996, 214.
76 Noble 2007.
77 *Guardian* 15 May 1997.
78 Pelteret 2009.
79 E.g. Taylor 1979.
80 Haldane 1997.
81 Haldane 1997, 7.
82 Haldane 1997, 14.
83 The 13th-century map of Scotland by Matthew Paris labels the regions of the north and west as ‘marshy and impassable, fit for cattle and shepherds’.
84 Haldane 1997, 21.
85 *Aelfric's colloquy*, 226–251.
86 The basis for the arguments in this book is archaeological. Only some minor and general use is made of the specialist discipline of toponymy (placenames) for linguistic mapping. See Gelling 1978 for an introduction.
87 O'Grady 2014, 107.
88 Bradley 1987 was a seminal article.
89 Bradley 1987, 15, 1993, 117.
90 Cunliffe 2013, 119, Fig 4.13.
91 Cummings 2009, 187–196.
92 Henderson 2007, 299–302.
93 Mitchell and Ryan 1998, 166; Cummings 2009, 86.
94 Mitchell and Ryan 1998, 195; Cummings (2009, 193–194) links the passage graves under the generic title of dolmens and shows they are sited by a mobile maritime community that wishes to reproduce similar views for their dead.
95 Marshall 1977, 55, 1983; Edmonds 1992.
96 Cunliffe 2013, 195, Fig 6.12.
97 Cunliffe 2013, 298, Fig 9.5.
98 Swift 2000, 31; Herity 1995, 297.
99 McCormick and Murray 2007.
100 Carey 1999.
101 Hutton 2011a.
102 James 1992; Petts 2002a.
103 Petts 2009, 88–89.
104 Petts 2002b.
105 Semple 2013, 14.
106 Semple 2013, 110.
107 Thäte 2007.
108 Semple 2013; Reynolds 2009; Carver 2002a.
109 Semple 2013, 190.
110 Semple 2013, 197.
111 Waddell 1998, 2005, 2011.
112 Lacey 2011.
113 Mitchell and Ryan 1998, 237–245; Waddell 1998, 2011, 194.
114 Uisneach lies at the meeting point of the four ancient provinces of Ireland. Schot 2006, 2011, 87.
115 Waddell 2011, 195–198.
116 Newman 1997, 225–230; Newman 2011.
117 Waddell et al. 2009, 197. This was the legendary site of Queen Maeve and the rival bulls of the Cattle Raid of Cooley (Chapter 6, p. 603).