Concluding remarks:
Some comparative observations

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The Freiburg Tagung provided an extraordinary insight into recent research on the transformations of the region of the Breisgau and of the territory round Konstanz at the end of the Roman period. As a scholar who has worked almost as much on the British as on continental history, I was struck repeatedly by the possibility of drawing comparison with work on late Roman and early medieval Britain.

Hadrian's Wall and its surrounding area was, of course, as much a part of the Roman *limes* as the Rhineland, upper reaches of the Danube and the *Agri Decumates*. Until relatively recently the last phases of the Wall forts and the subsequent development of the region were scarcely discussed: there was an assumption that with the (supposed) withdrawal of Roman troops by Constantine III in c. 406, the zone was largely abandoned. At the same time, the dominant model for the interpretation of the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms took for granted a substantial migration across the North Sea from North Germany and Jutland. These two models of abandonment and of invasion implied that the history of the northern provinces of Britannia, and indeed of Britannia as a whole, was very different from what is now being envisaged for south-west Germany.

Recent work, however, has allowed an interpretation of the end of Roman Britain and of the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which has very much more in common with *Alamannia* than was previously possible. First, the scale of the Anglo-Saxon migration has been questioned.[1] Moreover, even those who envisage large-scale migration have recognised that it must have occurred over a very considerable period, and that we are not dealing with one major invasion, Bede's *Adventus Saxonum*. The tales of Anglo-Saxon origins, in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the early 730s, in the *Historia Brittonum*, compiled in the British kingdom of Gwynedd (North Wales and Anglesey) in the late 820s, and in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle set down in Wessex in the early 890s, are all representatives of the genre of *Origo Gentis*, and tell us rather more about ideology at the time of composition than they say about the reality of the Anglo-Saxon invasion.[2] Besides, if we look at the northern part of the Roman province of Britannia, the region that would become Northumbria, there is the additional problem that there is no proper origin legend: even Bede, who spent all his life in the territory of the rivers Tyne and Wear, supplies no account of the coming of a group of Anglian invaders.

If we turn to the archaeology, we find that it does not support the traditional model of Anglo-Saxon invasion and the conquest (even annihilation) of the Britons. Rather the picture is a good deal closer to the picture that is now emerging from south-western Germany.

1   A useful summary of the debates is Catherine Hills, Origins of the English, London 2003.
2   Patrick Sims-Williams, The Settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle, in: Anglo-Saxon England 12 (1983), p. 1–41; Nicholas Higham, King Arthur. Myth-making and history, London 2002, p. 98–169.

Unfortunately until the late 1960s no Roman site in Britain was excavated in such a way as to reveal its immediately post-Roman history. The first major excavation to look carefully at the last phases of Roman occupation, and of what followed, was that of Phil Barker at Wroxeter, where there was major rebuilding in the fifth century that Barker tentatively suggested might be seen as reflecting supervision by a bishop.[3] Unfortunately Wroxeter did not survive as a bishopric into the Anglo-Saxon period, and therefore there is no comparison to be drawn between the British city and Konstanz. Even so, the excavation raised very important issues for an understanding of continuity beyond 406.

More important, if we are thinking about Hadrian's Wall in parallel to the Rhine-Danube *limes*,[4] is the subsequent excavation by Tony Wilmott at Birdoswald, one of the Wall forts (Latin name, *Banna*). The deliberate destruction of the Roman granaries, and construction of a massive timber hall on the site of one of them in the late- or immediately post-Roman period, together with the apparent continuing use of the western gate for defensive purposes, suggested that the fort was transformed from being a garrison centre within the Roman command to being the home of a warlord.[5]

As yet no other site on the Wall has revealed such clear evidence of political and social change, although wherever there has been modern archaeological investigation evidence of continuity after 406 has been apparent. Certainly there were some late- or post-Roman developments at Housesteads[6] and *Vindolanda*.[7] Perhaps the most suggestive site is that of the fort of *Arbeia*, at South Shields, at the mouth of the river Tyne. Here most of the excavations took place in the nineteenth century. In fact the Victorian archaeologists assumed that the fort was used in the early Anglo-Saxon period, and that it was only destroyed by the Vikings. During the twentieth century little attention was paid to this argument. More recently, however, Paul Bidwell has noted that there were Anglo-Saxon finds from the site. Equally important, he has identified a reference by the monks of Tynemouth across the river to *Urfa* as referring to *Arbeia*: indeed the philologists have confirmed that *Urfa* could be a deformed version of the name *Arbeia*.[8] What is particularly interesting is that the monks of Tynemouth remembered *Urfa* as the birthplace of a Northumbrian king (Oswine). The implications of this would seem to be that the Roman fort of *Arbeia* was used by Northumbrian royalty in the pre-Viking period. It is all the more interesting in that *Arbeia* is just across the Tyne from Tynemouth, which is attested as a royal burial site: it was adjacent to the finest harbour in the north of England, known now as the Jarrow Slake and in the pre-Viking period as the *portus Ecgfridi*. The Ecgfrith in question was the king who founded Jarrow, two miles away from *Arbeia*, on the other side of the Slake, in c.682, and he would also seem to have founded a nunnery, the *Minster Ecgfridi*, which was perhaps very close to the walls

3   Roger WHITE and Philip BARKER, Wroxeter. Life and Death of a Roman City, Stroud 1998, p. 118–136.

4   See in general, The Late Roman Transition in the North. Papers from the Roman Archaeology Confernce, Durham 1999, ed. by Tony WILMOTT and Pete WILSON (British Archeaological Reports, British Series 299), Oxford 2000; Rob COLLINS and Lindsay ALLASON-JONES, Finds from the Frontier. Material culture in the 4th-5th centuries (Council for British Archaeology Research Report 162), London 2010.

5   Tony WILMOTT, Birdoswald Roman Fort. 1800 years on Hadrian's Wall, Stroud 2001, p. 113–126.

6   James CROW, Housesteads. A fort and garrison on Hadrian's Wall, Stroud 2004, p. 113–118.

7   Robin BIRLEY, Vindolanda. A Roman frontier fort on Hadrian's Wall, Stroud 2009, p. 169–172.

8   Paul BIDWELL and Stephen SPEAK, Excavations at South Shields Roman Fort, vol. 1, Newcastle upon Tyne 1994, p. 45–47.

of the Roman fort.[9] Although Yeavering and Bamburgh are traditionally regarded as the major royal centres of the northern part of the Northumbrian kingdom, the evidence for their significance only relates to a short chronological period: *Arbeia* might, therefore, have been the chief royal centre in the territory of the *Bernicii* for much of the seventh and eighth centuries.

The evidence from Birdoswald and *Arbeia* would seem to suggest that at least some of the forts of Hadrian's Wall continued to have a function in the post-Roman and early medieval period. Given the absence of any clear origin legend for Northumbria, it may be that we should reconsider the origins of at least the northern part of the Northumbrian kingdom: the so-called territory of the *Bernicii*. The name itself is interesting, being Celtic rather than Anglo-Saxon, which tends to confirm the idea that we are not dealing with a significant influx of invaders.[10] One possible model for the origins of the kingdom of the *Bernicii* is that it developed out of the military world of Hadrian's Wall.[11] An argument against this might seem to be that the kingdom, despite its original British name, was thought of as Anglian. An answer to this may lie in the military population of the Wall. It has, in fact, been argued that there had long been a significant 'Germanic' population in Britain, indeed that it had been present throughout the Roman period.[12] We can say with absolute confidence, from the evidence of inscriptions, that a significant element of the Roman army on the Wall was of Germanic extraction, being drawn particularly from the Rhineland. We also hear that Alamans were sent to defend Britain, although we do not know on which frontier they were placed.[13] Perhaps, then, the Germanic leaders of the *Bernicii* were not primarily incomers who arrived in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, but rather the descendents of Germanic troops settled in the frontier zone by successive generations of Roman emperors. Moreover, although the Roman army was supposedly withdrawn from Britain in c. 406, it is highly unlikely that the *limitanei*, as opposed to the *comitatenses*, were moved. Some developments in the Hadrian's Wall zone might then have been analogous to those in Breisgau and more generally the Rhine and Danube limes zone.

There are certainly also some differences between Britain and south-west Germany. The development of Konstanz as an ecclesiastical centre has no good parallel in Northumbria. Originally there was only one bishopric for the whole of the kingdom: in so far as there was an episcopal centre it depended on the individual bishop. Aidan in the 630s and his immediate successors tended to be based in the island monastery of Lindisfarne. Wilfrid preferred York, which had, of course, been a major Roman centre – and York did come to be a fixed diocesan centre by the beginning of the eighth century: indeed it would appear to have been a centre of episcopal but not royal power.[14]

We unfortunately know very little about the precise situation of most British bishoprics, and there is nothing to indicate that Anglo-Saxon bishoprics were directly established in centres which had previously been used by the British Church. In the south of England, as

9   Ian Wood, Monasteries and the geography of power in the Age of Bede, in: Northern History 45, 1 (2008), p. 11–25, at p. 12, p. 19–20.
10   John T. Koch, The Gododdin of Aneurin. Text and context from Dark Age North Britain, Cardiff 1997, p. 216, n. 566.
11   Fred Orton, Ian Wood and Clare A. Lees, Fragments of History. Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments, Manchester 2007, p. 110–115.
12   Stephen Oppenheimer, The Origins of the British, London 2007.
13   Orton and Wood, Fragments of History (cf. fn. 11), p. 114.
14   David Rollason, Northumbria, 500–1100. Creation and destruction of a kingdom, Cambridge 2003, p. 202–208.

opposed to Northumbria, it is true that when Christianity was reintroduced in the late sixth and seventh centuries Roman and Frankish missionaries tended to establish their diocesan centres in old Roman cities: for example in Canterbury, Rochester, London, Winchester and Dorchester. The Burgundian Felix used a Roman fort as his diocesan centre in the kingdom of the East Saxons.[15] This concentration on Roman sites, however, seems to reflect papal policy rather than any continuity with the British past. Similarly, Wilfrid's decision to establish his diocesan centre in York is likely to reflect his reverence for Roman tradition, which he associated with the city of Rome and the papacy.

The placing of monasteries within Roman forts is also well attested in Anglo-Saxon England. The Saxon shore fort of Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex was taken over as a monastery by Cedd, and the Irishman Fursey was given *Cnobheresburg* (probably Burgh Castle, in Norfolk).[16] In Northumbria the best example of the placing of a monastery within a Roman fort is probably to be found at Bewcastle, very close to Birdoswald.[17] Although we have no clear information about the establishment of a monastery there, it would seem to be proven by the existence of a major sculptural monument, whose iconography and inscriptions are likely to indicate a monastic context. It was erected on the pavement of the *via principalis* of the Roman fort of *Fanum Cocidii*, directly opposite the bath house. The site of Bewcastle was clearly a numinous one: its Latin name, associating it with the Celtic god Cocidius, suggests that it has been a place of cult before the Roman period, and that the fort was an attempt to control that cult: the foundation of a monastery on the same site may well have been an attempt to eliminate its pagan connotations.

To this example we may add the evidence of Wilfrid's Northumbrian monasteries, at Hexham and Ripon. While not actually built within Roman urban sites, they were situated near to Roman settlements, and were certainly built out of reused Roman masonry. The same can be said of Jarrow, and also of the eighth-century church at Escomb, which was in all probability monastic, although nothing is known of the monastery to which it supposedly belonged.[18]

Strictly speaking the evidence from the Wall zone largely relates to forts rather than towns or cities. One needs to move some distance south to find evidence for truly urban life. The most obvious urban settlement is York, in the southern part of Northumbria: indeed in the region known as the province of the *Deiri*, which was distinct from the northern province of the *Bernicii*. The major archaeological excavation under the Minster in York in the 1960s certainly revealed some very interesting developments within the *principia* building in the late-Roman period, although, unfortunately, the chronology for those developments, and especially their end-date, remains unclear, with the excavator, Derek Phillips, and Martin Carver, who edited Phillips' report, coming to radically different conclusions.[19] From the large number of animal bones belonging to fifth-century contexts, however, it would seem that the York *principia* building was still in use after the traditional date of the end of Roman

15   Richard HOGGETT, Beyond Bede. The History and Archaeology of the East Anglian Missions, Norwich 2010, p. 6–7.
16   HOGGETT, Beyond Bede (cf. fn. 15).
17   ORTON and WOOD, Fragments of History (cf. fn. 11), p. 13–31.
18   Tim EASTON, Plundering the Past. Roman Stonework in Medieval Britain, Stroud 2000, p. 111–132, p. 146–147.
19   Derek PHILLIPS and Brenda HEYWOOD, Excavations at York Minster, vol. 1, From Roman Fortress to Norman Cathedral, London 1995.

Britain, but that it was being used for feasting rather than administration.[20] It could, there-
fore, indicate the sort of transformation noted already for Birdoswald: the emergence within
a dilapidated Roman landscape of a warlord.

The presence of animal bones, indicating changing use within Roman towns and settle-
ments, has been noted in archaeological sites from throughout England. The most recent set
of excavations to show this are those at Binchester, midway between York and Hadrian's
Wall (and indeed the Roman site closest to the Anglo-Saxon church at Escomb, already
mentioned).[21] It would seem that the towns of Roman Britain were not abandoned when
imperial rule ended, even if many, or all, of the buildings fell into decay, but rather that they
came to have social and economic functions other than those for which they were originally
intended: although it should also be noted that the origins of the shift towards these new
functions are already apparent in the late-Roman period.

The kingdom of the *Deiri*, which centred on York and the land to the north of the Roman
city, may well have had rather different origins from that of the *Bernicii*. Certainly there is
greater archaeological evidence for the presence of incomers, with a group of significant
Anglian cemetery sites in the Humber area – the long fjord running towards York from the
North Sea.[22] Nevertheless, the name *Deiri*, like *Bernicii*, is Celtic. Moreover stable isotope
analysis from the cemetery at West Heslerton, on the river Derwent to the north of York,
does not support the idea of an overwhelming population change: the sample considered
suggested that 60% of the population had originated locally, 20% had come from across the
North Sea, but, very remarkably, the final 20% suggested internal migration, from west of
the Pennines.[23] In the case of West Heslerton migration within Britain was as important as
migration across the North Sea.

Moreover, there may be one other reason for thinking that the kingdom of the *Deiri* de-
veloped at least in part out of the Roman past. To the north of York, in the heartland of the
Deiri, lies the village of Hovingham, which itself is the centre of an area which boasted a
significant cluster of seventh-century monasteries, identified from the written sources and
from the presence of high-quality stone sculpture. Further, those monasteries for which we
have written evidence are known to have been royal foundations. This would seem then to
have been an area dominated by the Northumbrian royal dynasty.[24]

In this context Hovingham itself, which boasts one of the finest pieces of early Anglo-
Saxon sculpture would seem significant. It lies at the end of a long road, still known as the
Street, which runs from the Roman military centre of Malton.[25] Finds in the eighteenth
century showed that under the present country house (Hovingham Hall) there are the re-
mains of a very substantial Roman villa, with mosaics of high quality. Recent air photogra-
phy reveals that the villa was set in a large elaborate garden. It has reasonably been inferred
that this was the official residence of the functionary or officer who was in command of
Malton, or was perhaps the provincial governor. The place name, Hovingham, has usually

20   Adam Rogers, Late Roman Towns in Britain. Rethinking Change and Decline, Cambridge
     2011, p. 163–165.
21   Iain Ferris, The Beautiful Rooms are Empty. Excavations at Binchester Roman Fort, County
     Durham 1976–1981 and 1986–1991, Durham 2010, vol. 1, p. 92–95, vol. 2, p. 553–556.
22   Bruce N. Eagles, The Anglo-Saxon settlement of Humberside (British Archaeological Re-
     ports, British Series 68), Oxford 1979, 2 vols.
23   Paul Budd, Andrew Millard, Carolyn Chenery, Sam Lucy and Charlotte Roberts, Investi-
     gating Population Movement by Stable Isotope Analysis: a report from Britain, in: Antiquity
     299 (2004), p. 127–141, at p. 135–136.
24   Wood, Monasteries (cf. fn. 9), p. 16–18.
25   Richard Morris, Churches in the Landscape, London 1989, p. 122.

been explained as being derived from an unidentified leader called Hofa, and thus as the 'HAM of Hofa's people'. Equally likely, however, is the derivation from the Germanic *Hof*, which would suggest that this was a centre of power.[26] Perhaps, then, the kingdom of the *Deiri*, like that of the *Bernicii*, emerged out of the remnants of the Roman military command structure, dominated not by the commanders of the elite *comitatenses*, but by the leaders of the remaining *limitanei*, enhanced, perhaps, in the case of the *Deiri*, with Germanic federates recruited in the fifth century, whose presence is well attested by Gildas.

This reading of the northern parts of the Roman province of *Britannia*, suggests a set of developments rather closer to those implied by the recent work in south-western Germany presented at the Freiburg conference, than did the old model of Anglo-Saxon invasion and British collapse. It is, of course, hypothetical, because we lack contemporary written documentation from both regions. The similarities do, nevertheless, raise the possibility that comparative work on the two regions might help to develop a rather different model for transformation in the *limes* area in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries than the pattern of collapse that used to be envisaged.

26   Wood, Monasteries (cf. fn. 9), p. 18.