THE FIGHT AT FINNSBURG

© David Ashford, 2026

Published by EQUIPAGE
c/o Rod Mengham
Jesus College, Cambridge, CB5 8BL

THE FIGHT AT FINNSBURG

A Reconstruction

David Ashford

2026

EQUIPAGE

FOR MY SISTER-SONS
ALEX & ELLIOT

THE STORY
BEHIND
THE VIKING GAME

“I don’t think we should kid ourselves. We haven’t *re-created* the past here. The past is gone. It can never be re-created. What we’ve done is *reconstruct* the part — or at least a version of the past. And I’m saying we can make a better version.”

— Dr. Henry Wu

“What about if we just superimpose this over a modern map?”

— Philippa Langley

“We use the complete DNA of a frog to fill in the *holes* and complete the *code*!”

— Mr. DNA

THE RUINS OF BRITAIN

A Prospectus

To murder one king, while a guest at his court, might be considered unfortunate, but to do so twice, in rapid succession, is a coincidence that cannot but provoke suspicion. King Vortigern should really have asked to see Hengest's résumé. In Laȝamon's *Brut*, an English verse rendering of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, we learn that Vortigern had suspicions, and questioned Hengest carefully concerning his religion. But, even as King Vortigern expresses his woe, on hearing this knight believed in "the Worst", not in Christ, he welcomes Hengest and his brother Horsa, as a weapon to wield against the Pictish invaders. Impressed by their success, Vortigern grants these mercenaries land in Britain. But Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* assures us that "their real intention was to subdue it", and that, having forged an alliance with the Picts, they sought to provoke a quarrel, "by demanding a greater supply of provisions".[1] In Nennius and Monmouth, Vortigern's sons launch an anti-immigrant pogrom in London, and drive Hengest to take refuge in Thanet, from whence he returns in force to extort a treaty. Inviting the British to a banquet in Winchester, Hengest orders his men to stab their hosts. And so Vortigern flees into the west, where he perishes miserably in a tower he has built, shortly after meeting Merlin the boy-wizard. All of this could have been avoided, had the King only thought to ask Hengest *why* he had left his previous position…

---

[1] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, ed. D. H. Farmer (London: Penguin, 1990), I:15, 62-63.

In the summary of a heroic-song performed by a bard in Hrothgar's Hall that appears in *Beowulf* and in a fragment of what would appear to be that same song, we learn that Hengest once accompanied Hnaef Halfdane, son of Hoc, on a winter visit to his sister, Hildeburh, wife of King Finn. During the visit Finn's *eaferum* (possibly his sons or nephews) launched a surprise attack on the hall where Hnaef and his men were lodged. Hnaef and a son of Finn were killed, and Hengest (apparently in charge) agreed to a truce with Finn. But Hengest harboured revenge in his heart, and when the weather permitted it, he returned in force. King Finn was slain in his own home, and Hildeburh taken home to the territories held by the Danes.

History would seem to have repeated itself! And it seems strange that historians, who are usually alert to *doublets* of this sort, and well aware of how they are produced, should have generated such a doublet themselves. Had the two stories occurred in the same manuscript, I have no doubt that modern scholars would be explaining that some nameless medieval clerk (unable to perceive that the stories described what had been one and the same event, or else unable or unwilling to synthesise the two into a synoptic narrative) had reconciled two traditions crudely but effectively by placing them in sequence. But in this case the doublet in Hengest's career has been generated not by medieval clerks but modern scholars. How is this possible?

The answer is simple: location. The incident with Vortigern, recorded in reputable historical sources such Gildas, Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, indisputably takes place in Kent, and is the *Adventus Saxonem* that marks the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of post-Roman Britain. The other episode involving Finn,

on the other hand, indisputably takes place in Friesland. But does it? This question can be resolved with a trip to the *Fries Museum* in Leeuwarden, where a magnificent time-lapse chart of the region will explain, in great detail, and beyond any reasonable doubt, that, at the time that the fight at Finnsburg is thought to have taken place (i.e. in the early fifth century, following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the so-called Migration Period), Friesland was *underwater*. Between the mid-third and mid-tenth centuries, the Frisian region was entirely depopulated, with traces of resettlement only emerging from the Carolingian era onwards.[2] The scientists came to this conclusion through extensive soil surveys — and have never thought to share this interesting finding with their Medievalist colleagues. Further investigation will reveal the part played by Dunkirk Transgressions 0-IIIb, a series of storm surges like the North Sea Flood of 1953, which led to the building of the Thames Barrier in London.[3]

> [That region] through which the Scaldis [Scheldt] flows with its meandering channels and which the Rhine embraces with its two arms, is hardly land at all. […] It is so thoroughly soaked and drenched with waters that not only where it is obviously marshy does it yield to pressure and engulf the foot which treads it, but even where it seems a little firmer it shakes when subjected to the tramp of feet and attests by a movement that it feels the weight from afar. Thus the fact is that this land swims on what underlies it and, suspended there, trembles so extensively that one might claim with

---

[2] See L. P. Louwe Kooijmans, "Archaeology and Coastal Change in the Netherlands", in Frederick Hugh Thompson (ed.), *Archaeology and Coastal Change* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1980), 106-133.

[3] See P. H. Nienhuis, *Environmental History of the Rhine-Meuse Delta: An ecological story on evolving human-environmental relations coping with climate change and sea-level rise* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2008).

> justification that such terrain existed to give soldiers practice in naval warfare. But neither the treacherous nature of the region nor the many refuges which were to be found in its forests could protect the barbarians from being compelled to give themselves up *en masse* to the control of your divinity, and with their wives and children and the rest of their swarm of relatives and chattels they crossed over to lands long since deserted in order to restore to cultivation through their servitude what they themselves, perhaps had once devastated by their plundering.[4]

Here *Panegyrici Latini VIII* records that the Frisii and the neighbouring Cheruscii had been evacuated from the Netherlands *en masse* by Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great, to be settled in Roman territory as *laeti* (i.e. farming communities, that supplied troops to the military) in the year 296. The displaced Frisians are known to have settled in Flanders and Kent: the distinctive fourth-century earthenware that is called *Terp Tritzum* (after a town south of Franeker Westergoo) having been found in these locations.[5] And "Saxon Shore" forts on the south and east coast of England (which appear to have been constructed to serve, not as military installations, but as depots to hold shipments of grain for the Roman armies on the German *limes*) played host to a large and disorganised civilian population from the year 290.[6] "Solid evidence for it being civilian was provided by the discovery of twenty-seven infant skeletons, which were buried throughout the third century",

---

[4] Panegyrici Latini: VIII, "Panegyric of Constantius", 8: 2-4. trans. C.WE.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 121.

[5] Danny Gerrets, "The Anglo-Frisian Relationship Seen from an Archaeological Point of View" in *Friesische Studien, NOWELE*, suppl. vol. 12, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins: 1995), 119-128.

[6] See B.W. Cunliffe, *Excavations at Portchester Castle. I: Roman, Society of Antiquaries Research Report, No. 32* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1975).

writes archaeologist Francis Pryor. “Other items, such as spinning and weaving equipment, attest to the presence of women. Women were in theory banned from Roman military facilities, relegated to the so-called *vici* (squatter-style informal settlements) outside the walls or ramparts. But at Porchester family life clearly thrived within the walls.”[7]

In fact, Saxon Shore forts appear to have served as what would now be described as a refugee camp or migrant holding centre. No coincidence, perhaps, that Kent and the Solent are the territories said to have been settled by Hengest’s Jutes in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. The Frisian *laeti* left traces further afield in Britain too: military units raised from these migrant communities served the Empire on the Wall, where a series of inscriptions in the forts at Housesteads (*Vercovicium*) and Binchester (*Vinovia*) testify to the presence of the *Cuneus Frisiorum* (Frisian cavalry unit), *Choros I Tungrorum* (Saxon infantry), and *Numerus Hnaudifridi*, “classifiable neither as legionaries auxiliaries nor as an ethnic unit”, but named, like many irregular units of this sort, after their commander.[8] Might Binchester be Finn’s Castra, and Hnaudifrid the inspiration for Hnaef? Unlike other Germanic auxiliaries, who might well have been withdrawn by the last of the Romans, *laeti* were entire communities, thoroughly Romanised and rooted for some centuries in provinces that they had farmed and defended with their lives. The *Cuneus Frisiorum* were not going anywhere, if they could help it, regardless as to whether Britannia remained within the Empire or not. To invert the assumptions with which we began: the Frisians in the Old

---

[7] Francis Pryor, *Britain A.D.* (London: Harper Perennial: 2004), 140.

[8] R. Southern, ‘The Numeri of the Roman Imperial Army’, *Britannia XX* (1989), 81-140.

English poem are a clear indication that the *Beowulf* poet believed, or at least wanted his readers to believe, that the incident he described took place in Kent.

But if the Anglo-Frisians were in Britain from 296, why is it that we have, for so long, believed that Hengest initiated the Anglo-Saxon invasions? The truth is that, prior to recent discoveries arising from archaeology and genetic science, our window onto this period of British history consisted of just two authoritative sources. *De Excidio Britanniae* (*The Ruins of Britain*) by the fifth-century Welsh monk Gildas "the Historian", and *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*) by the Venerable Bede, a seventh-century monk from the Kingdom of Northumbria. Bede does his best to supplement and make sense of the information provided by Gildas: he supplies the names Hengest, Horsa and Vortigern, and explains that Britain is settled by three Germanic peoples — Saxons, Angles and Jutes — but Gildas, in spite of the surname, is no Historian but a Prophet, and the historical information he imparts is presented in no linear sequence but in a delirious, visionary and invigorating hellfire sermon that will swoop on lucid details before circling back on a tangent for the next blistering attack: depredations of the Picts and Scots, who first appear in the Roman histories from the late-third century, are described in this history *before* we are told that the Emperor Severus built the Wall — and Gildas mistakenly states that this earth-work was the first great wall to be constructed across the island, and the stone-wall (i.e. Hadrian's Wall) the last. Crucially, it is no part of his stated objective to fill that which *we* perceive as a gap in the historical record: "Those evils only will I attempt to make public which the island has both suffered and inflicted on other and distant citizens, *in the times of the Roman*

Emperors", explains Gildas, in a passage that is clear with regard to his remit. "I shall do it, however, to the best of my ability, not so much by the aid of native writings or records or authors, inasmuch as these (if they ever existed) have been burnt by the fires of enemies, or carried far away in the ships which exiled my countrymen, and so are not at hand, but shall follow the account of *foreign writers*, which, because broken by many gaps, is far from clear."[9] As soon as it is understood that Gildas intends to write a prophetic denunciation of not post-Roman but Roman Britain, using only foreign (i.e. Roman) sources, and permits oneself to forget, for a moment, everything we *thought* Gildas was saying, it becomes possible to read his text with few difficulties as two parallel accounts placed in sequence (the break marked with "*Interea…*") of three and a half centuries of Roman rule: the great plague is Cyprian's Plague; the "superb tyrant" is the usurper Caraucius; the legendary Aurelius Ambrosius is the historically-attested Aurelius Ambrosius (Praetorian Prefect of Gaul 337-340); "Maximus" is Maxentius and/or Magnentius; the three incursions of Picts and Scots are the three incursions of Picts and Scots that culminated in the Great Conspiracy (367); the famous letter sent by the Britons to Agitius "*ter consuli"*, is addressed to Aeqitius in the third consulship of his imperial colleague Gratianus (374); the passage describing how Britons fled into exile overseas refers to the emigration to Brittany initiated by Magnus Maximus; and the battle of Mt. Badon, "almost the last great slaughter inflicted on the rascally crew", is thus General Stilicho's comprehensive victory over the Picts, Irish and Saxons in 398: that is to say, the *forty-fourth year* in the first lunisolar cycle of the Severan Calender used by the British Church at that time (Year Zero being

[9] Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* (*The Ruin of Britain*), I:4, trans. Hugh Williams (London: David Nutt: 1899), 19.

354 A.D.).[10] When Bede quietly corrects Gildas, replacing Saxons with Angles ("Saxons *or* Angles"), he does so because, as pre-historian and geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer suggests in *Origins of the British*, he knew full well that "Saxons" had been living in the British Isles for centuries *before* the Romans left, being well-versed in histories relating to the Saxon Shore.[11] But Bede was labouring under the mis-apprehension that Gildas had written a (1) *linear* (2) *history* of (3) *post*-Roman Britain. In supplying his "correction", Bede in fact consolidated an erroneous reading of the older text that has persisted ever since.[12]

---

[10] Daniel McCarthy & Dáibhí Ó Cróinín were the first to posit that the puzzling reference to the "forty-fourth year" might refer to the 84-Year Easter Cycles, but they believed *mense* to be a reference to a lunar "month", and assumed that Gildas worked from a table that began in 438, rather than the correct starting-point in 354 (thereby identifying the date of the battle as *February* 482). But, given the context, *mense* can only be a garbled reference to a lunisolar "month" or "table" (*mensa* means either in Latin). Gildas is thus distinguishing the forty-fourth year as per the New Ordering (*ut novi orditur annus*), which is when the battle took place (398), from the forty-fourth year in the next lunisolar table (*mense iam uno emenso*): "With one *table* now elapsed, the forty-fourth is also that of my birth". In previous readings, *novi* has been regarded as a *crux*, bracketed from the rest, and translated (away) as "I know", rather than "new". But far from being obscure, Gildas could not have been more precise: the Battle of Badon was in 398, Gildas was born in 482; — each of these dates happen to be Year 44, in cycles one and two, respectively. On this reading, the third declension noun (*mense*) is a clerical error for a first declension noun (*mensa*). At some point, a scribe, ignorant of the long obsolete insular calendar (or determined to eradicate any reference to it, after its famous condemnation at the Synod of Whitby), quietly amended the grammar, and thereby materially altered the sense. The sentence would have originally read: *mensa iam una emensa*.

[11] See Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British* (London: Robinson: 2006), 364.

[12] Convinced that Gildas was writing post-Roman history, Bede was the first to supply a further (highly improbable) "correction", changing "Agitius" (C4th) to "Aetius" (C5th). It is not a little ironic that Bede's history of the English people should have been forever deranged by a failure to recognise the British Calendar he detested so much.

But prejudices have also played a part. The characterisation of the post-Roman era as a "Dark Age" speaks vividly to our assumption that a period with no written history must have been infinitely more horrific than an era that is relatively well documented, but this hardly stands up to scrutiny: military catastrophes on the gargantuan scale that Gildas describes could *only* have taken place under the "good" governance of Roman rule, when Britain was one of the most intensively militarised zones on the planet. Should we not rather assume that a period of *calm* ensued, following the departure of the Romans, as the islanders (no longer able to rely on foreign imports, and without the vast and complex logistics and international infrastructure that make military mobilisation possible, and with no great concentrations of wealth left, in any case, worth the looting) finally settled down to scrape a bare but honest living through *subsistence farming*, with war becoming a seasonal sport, practised between sowing and harvest? Such calm is exactly what has emerged from the latest archaeological research, which has emphasised the continuity of farming practices across the apparent chasm that marks the end of Roman rule:

> The point that arises from this is obvious, but needs making nonetheless. This diversity of land use shows an extra-ordinary degree of adaptation to contrasting landscapes and soil conditions, at precisely the time when Anglo-Saxon settlers are supposed to have been colonising the landscape [i.e. the C5th]. I believe it would have been impossible for large numbers of migrants to have adapted so fast and so thoroughly to such diverse conditions; if there actually were any incomers, they must have been few in number, and have settled within existing communities.[13]

[13] Pryor, 196.

That is Francis Pryor's conclusion to *Britain A.D.* (2004), following his extensive survey of the archaeological evidence of land-use in East Anglia during the era of transition from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England — and were we wiser we would surely have known this already. As the poet W.H. Auden observed toward the end of his career:

> From Archaeology
> one moral, at least, may be drawn,
> to wit, that all
>
> our school text-books lie.
> What they call History
> is nothing to vaunt of,
>
> being made, as it is,
> by the criminal in us:
> goodness is timeless.[14]

A moral sentiment with which I know Gildas "the Historian" would have heartily concurred. Indeed, this is surely the entire point he was seeking to convey in his Christian retrospective on the "horrible history" of Great Britain *under the Roman Emperors,* under imperial rule.

The truth has also been muddied by polemic. Bede had a compelling reason to play down the extent to which the English nation was a product of the corrupt and heretical late-Roman Britain denounced by Gildas; it suited his purpose to present his people as "noble savages", "fresh off the boat", or in Biblical terminology, Gentiles supplanting those sinful inhabitants of the Promised Land who,

---

[14] W.H. Auden, "Archaeology", *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 896-897.

though blessed with a knowledge of the Faith, had yet stubbornly refused to bear fruit: *not Angles but Angels!* said Pope Gregory the Great. Norman-Breton historian Geoffrey of Monmouth, on the other hand, had a vested interest in showing that the English people were invaders with no right to exist in their own land, in order to justify their genocide and enslavement, presenting a combative vision of British history, in which Bretons must forever be engaging in imperial wars, or else face the threat of foreign invasion: and his Arthurian "history" would indeed underpin later wars in Ireland, resistance to the Roman Church and Spanish Empire. The emergence of Romantic nationalism from the late eighteenth century obscured the picture with equally toxic prejudices: whether Scottish, English, Welsh or Irish, Scandinavian or German, Romantic nationalists want national purity, untainted by modernity and the internationality of empire. It suited Victorians in each of the Four Home Nations to believe that Britain was entirely Celtic *before* the Romans arrived and that the English only arrived *after* they had left. This *cordon sanitaire* permitted them to enjoy their preferred mythology untroubled by history: a Celtic Bronze Age, a Germanic Iron Age. One *might* read across the mythological literature of the two language families, but only provided one was seeking an even purer "Aryan" mythology in the misty way-back-when: if there were commonalities between, say, Irish myths and German myths, these were to be attributed to some ritual or incident prior to the divergence of the two language groups between 4,500 and 2,500 years ago, and on no account to the international Christian scribes recording such stories, or to the Imperial history that was the common heritage of both. There was no inclination to recognise that mythic parallels might possess a *historical basis* in a space of intersection and interaction. This in spite of the fact that each of these

national mythologies is quite clear on this one point: whether it be King Arthur in Iceland or Prince Amleth in Scotland, or Niall of the Nine Hostages in the Alps, or Ingeld of Britain in Ireland, everyone everywhere is always in everyone else's space, and this is not called the "Migration Period" for nothing.

Scandinavian scholars seized upon the *Beowulf* poem in the eighteenth century as a means of plugging gaps in their own national mythologies (just as the Germans would, in turn, appropriate Scandinavian mythology for the same reason the following century). The *Denes* were thus located by Danish scholars in Denmark, *Swiones* became Swedes, *Weder-Geats* became residents of, sequentially, Jutland, then Gotland, then Götaland. But each identification is fraught with difficulties and anachronisms, and there is just as much reason for identifying the three nations with groups based in Britain, Gaul and Germania: as we shall see, even Scandinavian sources place Hrothgar's *Denes* in Northumbria; the *Swiones* might be identified as Suebi on the very same etymological basis that they are identified as Swedes; and while *Weder-Geats* have proven impossible to map onto the Baltic, they present evident parallels with an ancient nation called the Batavi, based on an island at the mouth of the river Rhine (where Hygelac's body was displayed), who played a significant part in the Roman Occupation of Britain, having led the attack on the sacred oak groves of the British Druids in Anglesey, and then served for many centuries on the Wall (where archaeologists have found shrines to their god *Veteri*). The Batavians are the *Better-* / *Beadu-* / or the *Veteri- Chatti* (depending on how one chooses to derive the ethonym): the prefix *Þeder* being anything but some utterly meaningless epic-epithet meaning "Storm" or "Weather".

While it is correct to say that these three ancient nations had cousins (or cognates) in Scandinavia, the latter must be recognised as what language-teachers call "false friends". The identification of the three nations in *Beowulf* with modern nations in Scandinavia is made with such facility by modern scholars only because medieval poets and scribes had already adapted the stories (which circulated across Europe) to their local environment, in order to transform what was a shared imperial history into something that resonated with their national audiences. The wonder is that we have not expected to see Old English poets doing this too. Even if one believes the established narrative (i.e. that Anglo-Saxons arrive in post-Roman Britain in the mid-fifth century) how are we to account for the fact that *Beowulf* is supposedly set in the Baltic region during the sixth-century, after the Anglo-Saxons are thought to have departed? A migrant nation might tell stories about ancestors in the Old Country; they are far more likely to celebrate pioneers; but possess neither the knowledge nor the inclination to weave stories about those who never left and have not been seen since. Consider, for instance, "Offa of Angeln", mentioned briefly in *Beowulf*: in the *Vitae Duorum Offarum* [*Lives of the Two Offas*] possibly written by Matthew Paris in the mid-thirteenth century, or even earlier, Offa son of Vermund, who establishes the border at Fyfeldor, is not, as one might expect, from Denmark but from the city of Warwick in England. Either this is the correct location or else a legendary figure from the ancient English past has been naturalised. But given such a naturalisation is recorded in thirteenth-century England, why could it not have happened earlier?

The past is another country, and in this instance, the past we all thought that we knew is the *wrong* country. This reconstruction project will push back against a long-standing Scandinavian assimilation of *Beowulf* that, by transplanting the poem into a region devoid of either historical records or prehistoric archaeological sites that might support and enrich it, has only served to strip this ancient poem of any meaningful context. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that this dislocation of *Beowulf* has obscured the aesthetic integrity and political significance of the poem, which is often thought to comprise two wildly inconsistent and jarring elements: the *realpolitik* of warring Baltic tribes on one hand and fantastical Monsters which can have had no basis in a Scandinavian reality on the other. I will argue that mysteries in the poem, relating to Grendel, Grendel's Mother and the Dragon, can be accounted for as soon as the correct historical and geographical context of the poem is restored; that *Beowulf* can be seen to possess extraordinary unity and clarity of purpose, and that the text presents a profound and informed vision of late-Roman history.

I begin in this chapbook with the "Fight at Finnsburg", offering a partial reconstruction of the poem, proceeding from the insight that two literary traditions concerning Hengest actually refer to one and the same sequence of events, and that the setting is territory occupied by the Frisians at that time (i.e. Kent). The historical basis for such traditions is more complicated: Gildas was referring to Caraucius and his settling of Frankish mercenaries on the south coast; Bede is most likely recalling an imperial crisis in the mid-fourth century, initiated by the usurper Magnentius, which possesses a number of striking parallels with the Hengest legend. Further details in Monmouth *et al* have crept in from the Gothic War of the mid-fifth century launched

by General Fritigern: and it is from the latter that information relating to the famine that sparks the revolt, treason of the long knives, and monarch burned alive inside a hut (perhaps even the name Vortigern itself) were taken. Bede evidently sought to add colour, solidity and (somewhat ironically) clarity to the bare bones of the history offered by Gildas, with a view to elevating his tale with "luminous details" that would resonate with the sublime world-history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

THE FIGHT AT FINNSBURG

There was song and stress, the similes gathered
for heroes of (*H*)*Elf-Dene & Hrothgar's bard*
greets that good with gamewood, often wreaked
after the meat and mead that mourn they should
Finn's (*sister-*) *sons such fear begat*
that heroic (*H*)*Elf-Dene, Hnaef of the Scyldings*
should in Freswael fall.

I.
The Casus Belli

And as swarms of these nations flowed together into the island
the population of adventurers began to grow so great,
even their advocates were terrified.
At that Vortegirnus said, “It is reported to me,
that the new King of Norewæȝe will fare hither
and the Denish King these Denes will seek,
and the King of Russia, swiftest of cavaliers,
and the King of Geatlond with force swathe strong
and the King of the Frisii.
And great unrest must result: therefore I commend
(and consider this the safest counsel)
that you retain *in curia* certain Picts
that might act as mediators between you *et ceteros*.
If it be true that they are beginning to rebel,
they will explore the machinations & schemes of their allies,
which you can then readily avoid.”
Behold an occult enemy’s occult betrayal!
Not advised that Constans might be saved
but because he knew Picts being a people easily swayed,
apt for every possible crime,
once drunk or driven to rage,
could therefore be moved with facility against the King,
to murder without compunction,
and, in that contingency,
he would be in position to seize control,
just as he had so often imagined.
Directly he sent messengers to Sceotlond,
invited III centuries of Peohtish soldiers,
and received into the family of the King,
mickle of Hengest’s kin [Aengus mac Og]
and Rowena his daughter his darling entered the hall,
bearing the *Quaich*, or “loving cup”, a golden bowl,
and cried unto the King: “Loverd King, wassail!
for thine coming me beoth hail.”
The King heard this, but knew not what she said,
so asked his knights, what it was the maid spake.
Then answered Keredic, knight mid the wisest:
“Hit is the wone in Saxe-londe
that friend saith to his friend
Leofve freond — weas hail.
and the other saith, *Drink hail,*

the ilke that holdeth that cup,
he drinketh drink up
and again when the cup is full,
thrice they will kiss.
These be the laws in Sexlond."
This heard Vortiger, all wary of evil,
& said in Bruttish, ne could he not in English:
"Maiden Rouwenne, drinc blutheliche thenne!"
The maid dronc up that wine, poured the other therein
and thrice him kissed,
and through this same game
that Lawe came to this lond.
"These also received donations of land from the Brittons
to inhabit among them,
(only as much land as a man might cover with a bull's hide)
— on condition:
ut hi pro patriae pace et salute
contra aduersarios militarent,
and this militia to be conferred the stipend incurred."
And approaching the *nauibus* with this hide in hand,
his *amicorum* wondered
some laughed,
but all believed he was out of his mind.
some argued,
Then he declared silence:
"*Sequimini, inquit, me optimi Saxones*,
et meum uobis amentia probabitis utilem!"
Then albeit doubting they followed their *Ducem*.
and of the hide he carved a thong,
swathe small, and swathe long,
and therewith encompassed a great deal of land;
and occupied that location with a *castra*,
named for that *nobilis fraus* — ÞONGCÆSTER.
[And it survives as the Wery Wall: 3 metres thick,
with polygonal external bastions,
likely topped with heavy artillery pieces,
constructed over the earlier fort,
on the northern side of Lancaster's Castle Hill,
circa CCCXXX Anno Domini.
"In the style of Saxon Shore Forts,
but irregular in shape, not following a classic plan;
the only known example of this type in north-west Britain."
— C.f. Richmond, 1953.]

And Hencgistus to Gorthigirnum said:
"*Ego sum pater tuus et consiliator tui,*
et noli praeterire consilium umquam,
quia non timebis te superari ab ullo homine neque ab ulla gente,
quia gens mea valida est.
Invitabo filium meum cum fratueli suo,
bellatores enim viri sunt,
ut dimicent contra Scottos,
et da illis regiones,
quae sunt in aquilone iutxta murum,
qui vocatur Guaul.
Then mid hawks and mid hounds
play at love in thy court
no threat need never thou trouble."
The worse was there full nigh
that in each game is well sly,
worse that ne did never good,
mourning for the king's mood
to have that maiden to wine.
"And if heo alle beoth heathene & thu alone Cristine,
nulleth heo thu habben for king navere long
then shalt thou forego this kingdom
and thy wretched soul sink to Hell.
Hast thu not then bought dearly the love of thy Bride?
Sépare-t'en, de quelque manière que ce soit,
Sinn Féin amháin,
and send all, or as many as you can, from the realm."
But that maid he would wed & brought her to his bed,
— so he gave her London
and Kent.
"And in the eastern part of the island
by order of the same king,
they took a location in hand,
quasi pro patria,
but in truth undertaken to expunge it."
as the hail that falleth,
forth wenden mid Octa
30,000 mid 300 ships
and mid Ebissa after come lithen
15,000 more mid another 50 & 100 ships,
and thereafter comen here
five & five, six by seven,
by ten, and by eleven,
þis lond so ful of heaþene hounds,

þat nes nan swa wise mon
no swa war witele
þat mihte to-daele
þa Cristine fra þa hæðene.
And those that he had received he honoured above all,
presenting them with diverse donations and
satisfied them with food and drink beyond measure,
so that they took him for a King,
and worshippers sang him through the streets, saying:
Dignus est Vortegirnus imperio!
Dignus est sceptro Britanniae!
Constans vero indignus!
"Thus the barbarians, admitted to the island,
succeeded in having provisions supplied them,
as if they were soldiers
about to encounter great hardships for kind entertainers."
And at that Vortegirnus strove to *donate* more and more,
that he might be more pleasing.
"For he did not, in the manner of tyrants,
present an allure to the vicious commons,
but strove to covet ardently whatsoever he saw was nearest honour;
to make his wealth public property;
to surpass all other men in bounty,
to forestall them in all offices of kindness;
to conquer envy by virtue: and to this end
imposed a poll-tax on the many (*gentibus servitus*)
to exceed his grandfather in his own munificence,
(for he showed himself so liberal,
he doubled the military's stipend
ut recenti largitatis consuetudine prisca).
And for the memory of his grandsire's prosperity
(which he recalled by his name),
and for the fact that, from his earliest childhood
(so dearling to all men)
he was not suffered even to step or stand on the ground,
but was continually cherished in people's laps & kissed,
Frode afterwards acquired his surname."
— Vertiger(n) from *Freoðe*, "Peace",
or *Fer(h)þ*, "heart, spirit, intellect",
plus *-gern*, "yearn"; or *-gar,* "spear";
Freoðegār, *Ferþigern,*
the "desire for peace", or a "spear of the spirit".
"For Frode's one desire was the spread of peace [*freoðe*]."
— But once having completely won their love

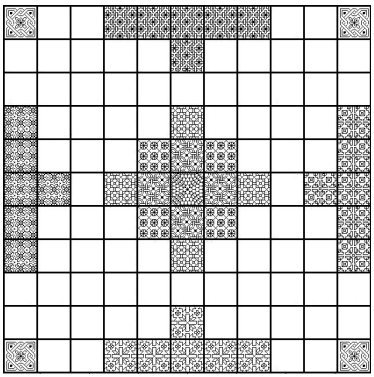
he had them all inebriated
and said he wished to depart from Britain
in order to perquire ampler possessions.
For he told them the little he had would not be sufficient
to donate stipends to 50 soldiers.
Then (*quasi tristis*) retreated to his house,
but in truth to leave them drinking there in the hall.
On seeing this, the Picts were unimaginably sorrowful,
convinced that what he said was true and
murmuring among themselves, they said:
"*Pro cubitalium membrorum quolibet*
indicem servitutis stipem quotannis
pendere cogerentur."
— Hanef struggled,
spirit troubled by their demands, their greed;
et cum pertinax amor patriae
mentem in dies oppressorum miseratione perfunderet,
he desired to give them his spirit *pro libertate civium*
rebellionis studium patefecit.
And began by demanding more abundant provisions,
to seek occasion for quarrel.
And famine & want came upon them,
as often to a people not yet well settled in a country.
And the princes & leaders who ruled them in place of kings,
[that is, Fritigern],
began to lament the plight of their army and begged
the Roman commanders to open a market.
But what will not the "*fulgorem reveri ab auro*"
compel men to assent?
Roman generals, swayed by avarice,
sold them at a high price not only the flesh of sheep and oxen,
but even the carcasses of dogs and unclean animals,
so that a slave would be bartered for a loaf of bread
or ten pounds of meat
And when their goods & chattels failed,
the greedy trader demanded their sons in return
for the necessities of life.
And the parents consented even to this,
in order to provide for the safety of their children,
arguing that it was better to lose liberty than life;
and indeed it is better that one be sold,
if he will be mercifully fed,
than that he should be kept free only to die.
"These provisions acquired did for a while,

clauserunt, as the saying is, *canis faucem*.
But they will be complaining, again,
that their monthly supplies are not
copiously contributed to them,
intentionally colouring their opportunities,
to declare that, if larger munificence is not piled upon them,
they will break the treaty & lay waste the whole of the island."
Nor were they slow to prosecute this threat in effect:
irrupting into the chamber they attacked Constans,
and having killed him
bore the head to Vortigirno.
And when Vortegirnus saw this, he erupted into tears,
quasi contristatus:
but never had he shaken before with greater joy.
And calling together the citizens of London
(for this happened therein)
ordered the predators bound,
bound & beheaded,
because they had presumed to commit such a crime:
forth iwenden eorles
forth iwenden beornes
forth iwenden biscopes
& tha boc-learned men
forth iwenden thaeines
forth iwenden sweines
alle Brutleoden
heo comen to Lunden,
and crowned the King's son, Vortimer.

II.
The Fragment

"Not this: no dawn in the east, not here: no dragon flies,
not here, this hall: no gables burn.
Here flames are borne forward, flying things sing,
grey-hames howl & hammer the war-wood,
shield requites shaft now this shining moon
wavers under the welkin now woeful deeds
to fulfil this folk's infamous enmity, arise.
But awaken now, warriors mine,
stand fast, sharpen up,
move in formation, & mind your footing."
Many a marine then march to the doors
equipped for combat, comrades-in-arms
Sigeferð & Éaha, each drew their sword
and at the other door Ordláf and Gúþláf
and Hengest himself, held the rearguard.
Then Guthere gat Garulf stirred:
His life was dear to him and the thought
of forcing the halldoor was un-bearable
now that an enemy stood there, waiting.
But bellowed louder than all, undaunted
that dare-minded hero, *Who held that door*?
"Sigeferð is my name, first among Secgans,
acclaimed in my exile for combat, each evil
I have abided — and, as to the rest,
whatsoever it be ðyself seek in me if ðu will."
Then in the hall is the Welsh-slight sounded,
hollow shield shivered to pieces in the hand,
bone-helmets burst, the timbered hall shook
at that fight : and the first to fall was Garulf,
Gúðláf's son goes by good men supported
upon a bier earth-bound, ravens bore down,
swart & circling withstanding the light that
like fires upon Finsbury flared from swords.
Ask not I never worthier at war held
sixty soldiers never sold themselves
so dear for sweet mead as Hnaef's young men,
who fought five days, none forced back nor fell,
his henchmen hardy, they held that door,
but wounded, that war-hero, went at last:

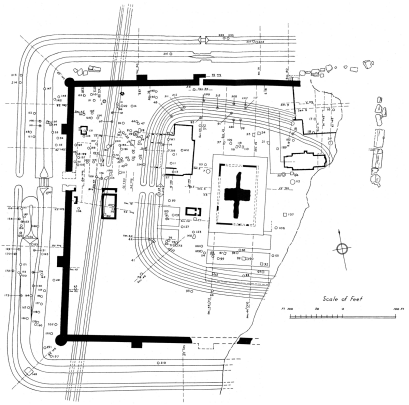
III.
Hnefatafl



from the inner redoubt to one of the corner-towers,
And this is the game of *Hnefatafl,* "Hnaef's Table"
[or, *How to fight your way out of a Roman castra*]:
If the Knave sees a clear escape route, he will call out
Raichi; if two open routes exist, he will call out *Tuicha*.
The attackers operate without a King, being 16 soldiers
in 4 phalanxes. The Knave being captured / hemmed in,
— this completes the battle, & the victor retains
the Vikings he has captured.
Then Hengest began to flee with his followers
— heo flew forth as the wind
heo flew forth into Kent & fought long:
~~A.D. 457~~. Her Hengest & Aesc fuhton with Brettas
in thaere stowe gecuden Crecganford
and thaer ofslogon IIII thusand wera
and tha Brettas tha forleton Centlond.
~~A.D. 455~~. Her Hengest & Horsa fuhton with Wyrtgeorne
in thaere stowe the is gecueden Aylesford
and his brothur Horsan man ofslog
and the son of the King, Katigern.
And funerary monuments were raised to these two *in memoriam* —
2,500 years earlier, in the late fourth century B.C.
the White Horse Stone, or Kentish Standard Stone,
and Kit's Coty House or Countless Stones,
positioned over the River Medway as it
cuts through the North Downs,
long barrows aligned on an east-west axis,

each with a stone chamber at the east end,
higher than most in Britain (at 10 feet tall)
and a stone facade, flanking the entrance;
— "these common architectural features
indicative of a strong regional cohesion,
with no direct parallel elsewhere
in the British Isles" [Wysocki et al, 2013],
but "reminiscent
of the megalithic tomb-shrine traditions
in continental Northern Europe" [Ashbee, 1999];
for "the plan behind the Medway Megaliths originated
in the area around the Low Countries" [Piggott, 1935].
That is, the "Hunebed Highway" in Drenthe,
running along the spine of *De Hondsrug* (the Hound's Back),
at the intersection of territory held by Cheruscian & Frisian tribes.
~~A.D. 465~~. Her Hengest and Aesc gefuhton with Walas
near Wippedes fleote
and there XII Wilisce aldormenn ofslogon
and hiera thegn an thaer wearth ofslaegen
tham was named Wipped.
And Hengest tholed with pain, but saw there
in the flood, an isle so fair
that is hight Thanet.
And the King's son Gwerthefyr the Blessed
exhorted those brave & warlike young men,
who attended him in his victories, to persist
courageously in defence of their country against all
hostile invasion.
And with wonderful greatness of mind,
commanded a brazen pyramid placed in the port
where the Saxons landed,
and his body when dead interned on the top of it:
That is the *Tetrapylon* or *Quadrifrons* (IIII-fronted Triumphal Arch)
built to commemorate the Emperor Claudius's Conquest of Britain,
surmounting the *quadrivium* (or crossroads)
in the centre of the "Chief Port of this Island",
confronting the Isle of Thanet at Ebbe's Fleet,
Rutupiae, Richborough ("the Roaming Rune").

IV.
The Episode



Hildeburh held not in high-regard
Eoten's troth, innocent, un-sinning,
lorn of her beloved in that play of the linden,
bairns and brothers; they were born to perish,
gear-wounded. þæt was a grief-stricken woman.
Nor unduly did Hoc's daughter,
mourn such making shift, since morning came,
permitting her to perceive, under the pink light
the magnitude of the murder, a man once held
the winner in this world, but war has swept all
favourites of Finn, few only excepted
þæt he may not on that meeting-stead
further the fighting to defeat Hengest,
nor *Wealafe* through wars bring forth
that thegn of the Dutch, so this Thing proposed:
þæt he retain [Ebbe's] *fleot* and they all the rest,
he the hall they the high-seat, þæt they half rule
amidst the Aiden, must appear at *offering* and
for fee (for)giving the Folkwalda's son would
everyday do unto the Denes due worship,
present unto Hengest his precious reward,
even so rich a ring for his heap,
battered gold as he in beer-hall
lavished upon their Frisian kin.
Then a treaty between II halves
fast *frioðuwære*, and no fighting
Finn affirms his fraternity with Hengest

þæt he would uphold the Witan's doom
on those *Wealafe* that no word no work
by any man there should break the pact
nor through malice ever try to amend it
butchered the boss but they'd obey him
leaderless now, since that was required;
& if any Frisian, with *frecan* talk, dared
harass them he'd hold that a hate-crime
& settle the issue with his sword's edge.
The oath was confirmed & shining gold
heaved from the hoard, *Herescyldinga,*
best battle-rings, on a bier laid
plain to perceive, upon that pyre it was,
sweating sark, swine all-gilded,
boar iron-hard, many an æþeling
wounds wasted, such in Wales fell.
Hie then Hildeburh to Hnæf's pyre
her self's son to set fast in that heat
bone-casket to burn & on bier dight
his arms on the axle women groaned
songs of sorrow, the soldier ascended
wafted to welkin on a Welsh bone-fire
howling before the hill the heads melt,
bruises burst then the blood out sprang
bodies foe-bitten & flames swallow all
greediest ghost. There, what war bereft
of two nations. Here, nothing unshaken.
Went then warriors their wicks to visit,
fallen their friends, Frysland to look on,
the home and the high-seat. Hengest yet
Welsh-stained, spent a winter with Finn
no fighting & felt himself far from home
knew that he might not upon mere drive
ring-steep ship; storm weltered the holm,
conquered with hurricanes winter locked
coasts in shackles of ice; until there came
spring to stronghold — as still it does yet
songbirds watch for the sale of wondrous
bright weather, then the Winter is shaken
from flowering field, adventures an exile
stranger from stronghold to seek revenge
long brooded upon… but sea-ways alone
promised the powers for that Parliament
he aimed to offer those Eotens and since

he never forgave a reckoning in the world
upon him *Hunlafing,* that gleaming sword,
blade to better the breast, he fastened and
this among Eotens an acknowledged edge.
Such *ferhðfrecan* Finn after received,
slighted by *Seaxes* at his self's home;
for Guðlaf & Oslaf hugged tight to hatred,
reported their sorrows on passing the seas
& pressed for payback: no place in *Ferhþ*
for wavering *Froðe*… So Finn was slain
the King in his court & the Queen taken:
Sceottish Shieldings to ships conveyed
everything installed by emperors of old
to be found in Finn's home [Winchester]
cunning clasps & crystals to the seaways
comported to her people this princely wife
and led her alone to the lands of the Denes.

V.
The Banquet of the Long Knives

"For now one Sguerðing [S(i)g(e)ferð-ing]
being equally moved by the afflictions of the civium,
dissimulato patriae malo;
pursued Hanef's war for liberty but
in an altogether more devious spirit.
Doubtful, this zeal, whether closer to virtue or vice,
but I certainly censure it as criminal,
because it is produced by an insidious desire to defect.
For though to secure *patriae libertatem* be of necessity evident,
it is not lawful to contend for this by craft and treachery.
For the King of this Island
perceiving he was unequal in force
(for the ships seemed to cover the sea),
approached [Sieg-]Frode, affecting surrender,
and not only began to flatter his greatness,
but also promised the Danes,
conquerors of nations,
submission of himself and his country;
proffering taxes, assessment, tribute, &c.
Finally, an hospitable invitation,
so ready and unconstrained a promise of everything,
so speedy a surrender of the enemy before fighting,
seldom made in good faith"
[*There was before the city a stadium or gymnasium:
in this concealed four companies of Celtae,
to attack and surround and kill every man by surprise*.]
"Frode pleased with the courtesy of the Briton
But Fritigern, thinking evil,
came to the feast with few followers,
and arranged a counter-ambuscade,
then with select men, lightly armed, went to banquet.
The hall decked with regal splendour,
it was covered all round with crimson hangings
of marvellous rich handiwork.
A curtain of purple dye adorned panelled walls.
The flooring was bestrewn with bright mantles,
that a man might fear to trample on.
Up above, the twinkle of lanterns, the gleam of lamps lit with oil;
and the censors poured forth fragrance,
sweet vapour laden with choicest perfume.
The whole place blocked with tables loaded with good things;

and the places for reclining decked with gold-embroidered couches;
the seats full of pillows.
And in the midst of the hall a great butt ready for refilling goblets,
enough for the huge revel to drink its fill.
Servants dressed in purple bore golden cups
pacing in ordered ranks.
The feast glittered with golden bowls,
laden with shining goblets,
studded with flashing jewels.
The natives took care to drink more sparingly than the guests;
for the latter felt safe
(and were tempted to make an orgie);
while the others, meditating treachery,
had lost all temptation to be drunken.
So the Danes took quantities of wine.
And the Britons, when they saw the Danes very drunk,
began gradually to slip away from the banquet,
and, leaving their guests in the hall,
made immense efforts to block the doors of the palace
by applying bars & all kinds of obstacles,
then to set fire to the house.
The Danes penned inside the hall, battered vainly at the doors;
but could not get out,
soon attempted to make a sally by assaulting the wall;
and the Britons,
on seeing it tottering under the stout attack of the Danes,
began to shove against it on their side,
and to prop the staggering pile
by the application of large blocks outside,
to prevent the wall being shattered
and releasing the prisoners.
But at last it yielded to the stronger hand of the Danes."
And while he was dining in the praetorium *he heard*
the dying cries of his ill-fated men,
for, by order of the general,
the soldiers were slaying his companions who were shut up
in another part of the house.
The loud cries of the dying
fell upon ears already suspicious.
Fritigern at once perceived the treacherous trick,
and with great courage
dashed quickly from the banqueting-hall,
and rescued his men from their threatening doom
inciting them to slay the Romans :

NIMIΨ IZYΛKΛ SIΓΓΛЄ !!!

— That is, *Take your seaxes*;
cultelli enim nostra lingua sabs,
a kind of crooked knives [i.e. not a *Seax*
but Danubian *Sica*] which each of the [Secgans]
then carried close in his pocket.
"Then Frode bade the trumpet strike in
to summon the band he had posted in ambush :
and these, roused by the note of the clanging bugle,
caught the enemy in their own trap:
[*They first selected the choicest of their men,*
both heavily armed and archers,
and fastened the doors of the stadium,
and having possessed themselves of the upper steps
inclosed on all sides,
threw darts at the soldiers therein.]
and fell upon the Britons standing by,
of whom, part Noblemen, part officers of the State,
expecting no such design,
they slew four hundred and sixty."
[*... After the event, Constantius wept,*
for it is said that from his 80,000, 30,000 fell,
and from those of Magnentius, his 36,000,
24,000 were destroyed.
... and the fortune of the Empire dashed.
... Vast forces of the Roman Empire cut off in that struggle
sufficient for procuring many triumphs and a lasting peace.
And Magnentius employed enchantments,
for a certain Magician
advised him to slaughter a maiden
to mix her blood with wine,
that the soldiers might drink it,
while she recited spells and invoked the demons.
... But not much later, near Lugdunum,
the soldiers surrounded his dwelling,
and caught in a place from which there was no escape,
he breathed his last in the 42nd month of imperium,
and the 50th year of his age,
his side pierced with a sword secretly supplied,
assisting the blow by pushing against a wall
(*as he was of immense size*),
spewing blood from the wound, his nostrils & mouth.]

And this is the story of King Finn & Fergus the Exile
in the *Táin Bó Flidais* (one of the preludes
to *Táin Bó Cúailnge*): "Then the men attack,
the people of the castle are overthrown and
the Ulstermen slay seven hundred warriors
there in the castle with Ailill Finn
and 30 of his sons;
and they laid waste the castle,
and take Flidais out of the castle with them,
and carry off the women of the castle into captivity;
and they take with them all the costly things
and treasures that were there, gold and silver,
and horns and drinking cups and keys and vats;
and they take what there was of garments of every colour,
and they take what there was of kine,
even a hundred milch-cows,
and 140 oxen, and 3,000 little cattle."
And this is the peace that was made:
that Gwyn [Finn] *ap Nudd*
and Gwythyr ["Victor"] *son of Greidawl* ["Arsonist"]
should fight for the maiden thenceforth
every first of May until the day of doom.
"*Cum ergo*, the deed of Suerting, far from honest,
neither is it expedient;
For it is nobler to attack openly him you meant to attack,
to exhibit hatred,
than to obscure under cloak of friendship a desire to do harm.
But whatever is begotten in iniquity is inglorious,
and the fruits thereof fast fading.
For even as that soul slippery concealing
insolent treachery by stealthy art,
so it is right that whatever is akin to guilt
should be frail and fleeting.
For guilt comes home to the author,
and rumour relates that such was the fate of the clan Svirting.
For those who resolved to surprise the King
under the pretence of a banquet
and burn him to death,
were seized by the same,
in a Mutually Assured Destruction."
Errätst du auch dieser Raben Geraun'?
Ní hansa. ("Not hard to tell.")
Sin fíor, said all;
it is the end of Fergus.

VI.
The Rotating Castle

α

And when Vortigern saw this horrible devastation,
that he had slain his sister's son by mistake,
he fled from his father into the wilderness,
and inhabited a valley magna between two mountains
in the northernmost part of Britain,
and there did penance the space of one year,
and lived in that place alone.
And there fashioned a small hut for himself,
and running water next to the hut,
and a great rock beside the riverbank,
and into that river he plunged his body every morning,
and on rising from the river laid on the rock and prayed.
And so a year passed.
And one day a certain shepherd came to him,
and seeing him sitting on the rock, incessantly praying,
asked him & said: "*Cur hic, fili, habitas*?"
and the young man responded: "*Meritum meum mihi fecit.*"
And made the shepherd swear that he would tell no one,
but the shepherd told his father's house all he had seen,
and said that the young man resembled the missing king.
To which the King said: "*Pergamus ad illum locum,*
ut uideamus illum laborantem, ut dixisti."
And proceeded to the place inhabited by the young man,
and saw him labouring there by the bank,
and he ran to his room and wept.
and his father asked him, saying:
"*O fili mi, cur facis hoc opus hic*?
Debes uenire mecum ad domum meam
et accipere regnum patris tui."
But the young man strongly denied it.
And said to his father: "*Ego faciam tibi monasterium*
et multitudinem monachorum."

β

And Vortigern summoned his magicians,
and began to build on Dinas Emrys [that is Ambresbury],
horns there blew, machines hewed,
five & twenty hundred machines,
and when the dyke was dug, they began on a wall
that fell in the night,
raised in the morning, it tumbled at night,
every day for a fortnight they raised it, and each night it fell.
So sent after sages,
to try incantations at cross-roads,
to try the truth with powerful crafts in the woods,
and was told that if the blood of a man-child that no father had bred
be mingled with the lime, that wall might stand to the world's end.
So sent forth knights into many a land,
and two went a way that lay right west,
and beside a burgh, in a broad way, at evening,
saw two boys punching each other & one said:
"*O homo sine patre, bonum non habebis!*"
And the mother affirmed her son had no mortal father,
so the boy was brought before Guorthigirnum King.
And the boy said: "*Cur viri tui me ad te detulerunt*?"
To which the King said: "*Ut interficiaris*
et sanguis tuus circa arcem istam aspergetur,
ut possit aedificari."
And the boy responded: "*Quis tibi monstravit*?"
And the King: "*Magi mei mihi dixere*."
And the boy to the mages said: "*Quid*
in pavimento istius loci est?"
And they were silent; none had the power to reveal it.
and he told them, "*Stagnum*
in medio pavimenti est."
And digging under the pavement, discovered a pool.
And the boy to magi said: "*Quid est in stagno*?"
And they were silent; for none had the power to reveal it.
And he told them: "*In medio eorum tentorium est*,"
And on draining the pool, they discovered the tent.
And the boy to the mages said: "*Quid in medio tentorii est*?"
And they were silent; none had the power to reveal it.
And he told them: "*Duo vasa sunt*
et sic invenietis."
So at the King's command, they opened the tent,
and discovered the vases.

And interrogating those mages further he asked them: "*Quid in vasis conclusis habetur*?"
And they could say nothing; for none had power to reveal it.
But he revealed it: "*Duo vermes in eo sunt, unus albus et unus rufus*."
And they opened the tent: and discovered two sleeping wyrms.
And the two wyrms began a struggle to expel the other,
thrusting at the other's body, to expel him from the tent,
and this happened three times,
and the red wyrm that appeared to be weaker proved to be strongest,
and expelled the white wyrm from the tent,
pursued him over the pool.
And the boy referred to the mages: "*Quid significat mirabile hoc signum quod factum est in tentorio*?
And when they said nothing, the boy responded: "*Regni tui figura tentorium est; duo vermes duo dracones sunt; vermis rufus draco tuus est et stagnum figura huius mundi est. at ille albus draco illius gentis, quae occupavit gentes et regiones plurimas in Brittannia, et paene a mari usque ad mare tenebunt, et postea gens nostra surget, et gentem Anglorum trans mare viriliter deiciet. tu tamen de ista arce vade, quia eam aedificare non potes, et multas provincias circumi, ut arcem tutam invenias, et ego hic manebo*."
And the King asked the young man: "*Quo nomine vocaris*?"
And he responded: "*Ambrosius vocor, id est, Embreis Guletic ipse videbatur*."
And the King said: "*De qua progenie ortus es*?"
And he: "*Unus est pater meus de consulibus Romanicae gentis*."
[My father was a consul of the Romans and this is my fortress.]

γ

At his command therefore, they bring severall sorts of engines,
addresse themselves to pulling it down.
Some ropes, some cables, some had made lathers ready,
that what they so much desired, might be effected,
but no-wise able to achieve their purpose. All of them tired,
Merlin breaks out into laughter, & provides his engines;
hardly to be believed it is,
with what facility he took them down:
[thirty-tree of the sixty uprights & lintels from the outer Sarsen ring,
two of the four Station Stones,
perhaps thirty-seven of as many as eighty Blue Stones,
the peripheral Heel Stone, & parts of the central Trilithon Horseshoe]
being taken down, he caused these to be carried
to the place where the slaughtered Princes lay interred,
the Monastery of Ambresbury, or Churchyard adjoyning it,
sited in the bottome of a deep vale by the river Avon's side.
When Aurelius had notice of it,
he sent messengers to all parts of Britain,
to summon the clergy and people together to the mount of Ambrius,
in order to celebrate with joy and honour
the erection of the monument.
And Aurelius placed the crown upon his head,
and with royal pomp celebrated the feast of Pentecost,
the solemnity whereof he continued the three following days.
As soon as he had settled these & other affairs in the kingdom,
he ordered the stones captured from the Irish
to be raised about the sepulchre
[containing the severed head & the silver hand
of St. Melorus, child martyr,
formerly Mars Nodens, a war-god repurposed
for this Cult of Relics,
and misremembered as Merlin],
then positioned in the same manner as in *mons Killaraus*.

VII.
Aurelius Ambrosius

Then fame took flight, brought to the island
the reputation of Aurelius, still in Armorica,
and timorous *Saxones* withdrew into Northumbria,
to reinforce their *civitates* & *oppida*,
for that *patria* was always open to refugees,
and provided protection, the proximity of Scotland
ever a source of distress to the citizens of Britain,
for this nation so terrible to inhabit, long since evacuated
was only now a receptacle open to Picts,
Scots, Denes, Norwegians, and the rest
that came to lay waste the island;
secure then in the affections of their *patria*,
they had turned their steps towards this place,
to secure an exit, as though to their own *castra*.
And when this was reported to Aurelius,
he assembled his army and advanced on the North,
passed over desolate regions, churches razed to the ground.
And Hengest marshalled an army of 200,000 men,
and marched to meet Aurelius upon the field of Maisbelli
[Mars Belatucadrus? Now Ballifield nr. Sheffield]:
hinc Britones,
hinc Saxones,
vulnerati moriuntur;
Aurelius exhorting *Christianos*,
Hengistus admonishing *paganos*.
But when Hengest saw his side was succumbing,
Britones prevailing through the grace of God,
he took flight, seeking the *oppidum Kaerconan*,
that is now known as *Cunegeburg* [Conisbrough],
— pursued by Aurelius
who compelled every man he passed on the way,
to choose either death or slavery.
And Hengest decided not to occupy the *castra*,
but reordered his forces into battalions, and turned to face Aurelius,
and the Saxons would have won in the end,
had not a cavalry unit of Armorican Welsh
forced them to change their ground, unable to re-group.
To that melee came Aldolf, Earl of Gloucester,
and found Hengest,
where he fought like a fiend and felled the Christians:

Aldolf his good sword drew,
and Hengest warped his shield before,
and else he had been for-lore,
for Aldolf smote thane shield that he shent it in two,
and Hengest leaped like a lion,
O viros prae ceteris pugnaces!
Then hewed they with swords,
the swipes were grim,
fire flew from the steel
and thunderous peals (*tonitrua!*) from those coruscations.
Long in doubt, the outcome of that duel:
sometimes Eldol prevailing and Hengistus losing;
sometimes Eldol losing and Hengistus prevailing.
But the Duke of Cornwall advanced with a phalanx,
and Aldolf grasped Hengest (distracted) by the hood of his cuirass,
and with immense strength,
hauled him towards Breton troops; their shields closed upon him.
Hot waves of joy to the max. *Excelsa voce*,
Aldolf said: "*Desiderium meum adimplevit Deus!*
prosternite viri obstantes Ambrones prosternite!
Vobiscum est in manu victoria!
vicistis enim devicto Hengisto!"
Here the Saxones took flight, wherever the impulse led them:
alii urbes, alii montana nemorosa, alii naves petebant
But Octa, the son of Hengist,
with the greater part of the multitude, retreated to York,
and Eosa, his cousin, to the city of Al Clud [Dumbarton],
and they garrisoned this with innumerable armies.
— After the event
the leaders were convoked and commanded
to decide what to do with Hengisto?
There Eldadus, Bishop of Gloucester,
brother of Eldol,
man of the highest prudence and religion,
perceiving Hengist stood before the King,
insisted the rest remain silent, and spoke after this manner:
"*Et si omnes istum liberare niterentur,*
ego eum in frusta conciderem.
Insequerer namque prophetam Samuelem,
qui, cum Agag, regem Amalec, in potestate tenuisset,
concidit illum in frusta dicens:
Sicut fecisti matres sine liberis,
sic faciam hodie matrem tuam sine liberis inter mulieres.
Sic igitur facite de isto qui alter Agag exstitit."

And so Eldol took a *gladium*,
and led him to the place of execution,
and, taking his head, he dispatched him to Hell.
But Aurelius, being in all things modest,
issued an order that he be buried,
and a barrow of earth raised over his body,
as per pagan custom,
and prayed for a soul
that will never know paradise.
And Octa conferred with Ebissa,
and emerged with the noblest of his adherents,
bare-foot and bearing about their necks great chains :
"*Victi sunt dii mei Deumque tuum regnare non haesito,*
qui tot nobiles ad te venire compellit.
Appolin & Tervagent, Woden & Mercurius,
Jupiter & Saturnus, Didon, Frea and Mamilon,
failed us tho we believe in them, for loathsome we be to the Lord.
Accipe ergo nos et catenam istam
et nisi misericordiam adhibueris,
habe nos ligatos
et ad quodlibet supplicium voluntarie paratos."
Then spake Aldadus (good bishop) and said:
"*Gabaonitae voluntarie venerunt*
ad filios Israel petentes misericordiam
et impetraverunt.
Erimus ergo Christiani peiores Iudaeis,
abnegantes misericordiam?
Misericordiam petunt:
misericordiam habeant.
Ample is the island of Britain
& many places deserted therein:
Foederatos itaque illos sinamus saltem deserta inhabitare
et nobis in sempiternum serviant."
Then the King accepted this sentence, and granted mercy.
And following Octa's example,
Eosa came with those who fled,
and was granted mercy,
together with nations bordering Scotland,
& the Saxons were recognised as *foederati*.

VIII.
The Burning Tower

"And I dreamed that we were being called by a voice that said:
Perge ad alium locum quem tibi uoluntas Dei preuidit.
And I answered with anger: Home to where?"
And not knowing an emperor lay hidden in so poor a hut,
they set fire to it, as is custom in dealing with a cruel foe.
And the King went to the door & he saw the hall burning.
and called to the two brothers [Hrothgar & Helgi] & said,
"*ok ferr þetta óskapliga í millum vár frænda,*
at hvárr skal vilja vera banamaðr annars."
And Helgi replied: — "*Engi má þér trúa,*
ok muntu okkr síðr svíkja en Hálfdan, föður minn?
Ok nú skaltu þess gjalda."
Fróði the King turned þen from the door,
hoping to hide in the forest,
he entered a passage under the earth (*terra aperta*)
but burned therein (*combusta!*) & his retinue with him,
quia non inventae sunt ullae reliquiae illorum,
thus he was cremated in royal splendour.
"Then I knew who was calling me: Home to Hell,
home to Hell…"
Direct judgment of God that he should be burned with fire
by the very men whom he perfidiously led astray,
when they sought the true faith,
turning them from the flame of love into the fires of hell.
tandem cor eius crepuit et defunctus est,
non cum laude.
Hic est finis Guorthigirni.
Thus took they the kingdom into their hands, and all the treasures
of Fróði the King, the sons of Halfdane:
Hrothgar a man *hýrr* and *hægr*,
and Helgi an *hermaðr mikill*,
Hroþgar went to serve in the north with the King in England,
(for his country's defence),
and married the King's daughter, Þealhþeoþ
["support of the Welsh"]
but Helgi ruled on their father's throne.
And King Hrothgar said:
"*Þú munt vera okkar meiri maðr,*
en fyrir þá sök,
at ek hefi staðfest mik í Norðimbralandi,
þá ann ek þér vel þessa ríkis,

er vit eigum báðir,
ef þú vilt miðla mér nokkuru lausafé.
Vil ek fá hringinn þann,
sem beztr gripr er í þinni eigu
ok vit vildum báðir eiga."
And Helgi said: "Thou shalt have the Ring."
Þa wæs Hroðgare heresped gyfen,
on winning the war his word was respected
this captain commanding on coming of age
an immense militia had in mind an offering
to raise up on high this Royal Hall
for a more magnificent mead-feast
than any offered ever famed of old
in order to redistribute riches there
to young and old all God had given
public properties & peons excepted.
Then wide I heard that work attract
many a man over this Middle Earth
to fashion a folk-stead first planned
long since labour swift & incessant
gave us that grand great-hall Heorot.

Freswael has attracted considerable scholarly discussion and is often translated as "slaughter", though one can detect a lingering uncertainty and dissatisfaction regarding this solution. With the new historical context that here proposed for the poem, the meaning of this word becomes immediately clear: this is indeed the word *Wales,* in addition to *welter* ("slaughter"): i.e. inhabitants of Frisian-Wales (on the same pattern as Cornwall). Later, we encounter the word *Wealaf*, a word rare in Old English literature, appearing only twice outside *Beowulf*: 'in Wulfstan it refers to survivors of the destruction and ravaging of the land (who acknowledge that this was a just retribution for their sins),' writes Tolkien; '[in] *Metres of Boethius* i 22-3 it occurs in a passage describing a defeat of Romans by Goths, the flight of Caesar, and the capture and pillage of Rome by Rædgod and Aleric: *Ne meahte þa seo wealaf wige forstandan Gotan mid guðe giomonna gestrion*.' Tolkien concludes that, 'This passage is decisive with regard to the sense of *wealaf* … laf, a remnant.' — But these survivors are not just any survivors; they are specifically Roman survivors. We can therefore refine the meaning further: *Wealaf* is all that is left of the Welsh (Romans) or wealthy (Romans) or commonweal (Roman), within the (Roman) Wall, after a "welter" (= dead Romans).

†††

Finn's Eaferum: Within this new framework for comparative mythology it becomes possible to see that King Finn in *Beowulf* might be the same figure as Finn MacCool in Irish myth ("son of Coel" = perhaps Clotinus Albinus or Claudius Gothicus), leader of a militia called the *Fianna*. *Eaferum* = sons or sister-sons. This reconstruction posits that, in the Latin histories, King Finn has been conflated with one or more of these sons, or sister-sons, to create a composite figure, Vortigern.

The name *Vortigern* is a mystery to modern readers, but this is a mystery generated entirely by the Romantic Nationalist compulsion to silo Celts and Germans into exclusive groups. Every effort has been made to identify a Celtic root for Vortigern, as he is thought to be the last British King before the advent of the 'Saxons or Angles', and so there have been torturous attempts to relate the name to the 'superb tyrant' that appears in Gildas. But it is obviously a Germanic name, consisting of *Freoðe* ("Peace") or *Fer*(*h*)*þ* ("heart, spirit, intellect") together with *-gern* ("yearn") or *-gar*, ("spear"). One finds the name in the work of Gothic historian Jordanes, *De Origine Actibusque Getarum* (*The Origin and Deeds of the Getae*), where Fritigern is the commander who launched the great rebellion of the Goths against Roman rule. In fact, it is possible that "Vortigern", was lifted from this source, the result of confusion between similar names and circumstances (a rebellion of Roman *foederati*), or because Bede, like many Medieval authors, sought wherever possible (contra to what is now considered good

practise) to weave his history from existing passages in authoritative sources, whether they were particularly close in fit or not. However that might be, there can be little doubt that the resemblance of the name Vortigern to that of Fritigern must account for the overlaying of the original history in Bede with details from Jordanes in Nennius, Monmouth, Saxo and Widukind. The famous Banquet of Knives, and burning of a King in a Tower (Frodo in Saxo, Vortigern in Monmouth) are lifted from Jordanes's Gothic History, having no place originally in the English history rehearsed by Bede; but this is a point to which we will return.

In the meantime, it will suffice to show that the same name, in the form *Frithgar*, appears in the royal genealogy provided in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles for the Kingdom of Wessex, which became the kernel for the new Kingdom of England in the ninth century. King Vortigern is thus an ancestor of the current British Royal Family:

> Cerdic was the father of Cynric,
> Cerdic was the son of Elesa,
> Elesa of Esla,
> Esla of Gewis,
> Gewis of Wye,
> Wye of Frewin,
> Frewin of Frithgar,
> Frithgar of Brand,
> Brand of Balday,
> Balday of Woden.

One can also find the name *Finn* in the royal genealogy for Northumbria, which picks up from the very point the Wessex genealogy leaves off (Woden):

> Woden of Freoþelaf,
> Freoþelaf of Friþulf,
> Friþulf of Finn,
> Finn of Godolf,
> Godolf of Geat.

This contains names that might also be construed as Vortigern, and it is indeed this sequence of names that appears in the garbled account of the Finn-Hengest story presented by the wonderfully unreliable Danish Historian Saxo Grammaticus. There a king called *Frodo* appears at the point currently occupied by Woden, being the son of *Fridlevus* (Freoþelaf). If the Finn of the poem is indeed one of the figures in these royal genealogies, his *eaferum* might be Friþulf or Freoþelaf, or most likely Frithgar. Monmouth names Vortigern's sons as Vortimer and Katigern. In this account, Vortigern outlives both, before being burned to death. This might not be the case in earlier poetic traditions: *Beowulf* clearly distinguishes between Finn and Froda (father of Ingeld).

†††

Hengest. The trick whereby Hengest secures his fortress in Lancaster might have its ultimate origin in Classical literature, in the story of how Dido outwitted King Larbas in order to found the city of Carthage. There is a similar story in Irish mythology, where Aengus Mac Og of the Tuatha de Danaan, claims Dagda is his father and demands the gift of a fairy mound from him. Might this be a memory of how Hengest [Aengus], here confused with the son of Hoc (= mac Og), was permitted to rebuild a fort on Castle Hill for the *théod* ("folk") of the Denes (= Tuatha de Danaan)?

The coincidence is worth exploring further, as it might lead us to question the most basic assumptions that we have held concerning Hengest the Jute, father of the English nation. As the Anglo-Saxonist Tom Shippey observes, 'The only Hengest who appears in the *PASE* website's (very substantial) list of recorded and real-life Anglo-Saxon names is the ancestor of King Aethelberht of Kent'. But *Angus* and its variants *Oíngus* (Old Irish), *Aengus* (Middle Irish) and *Aonghas* (Modern Irish) would long be royal names among the Irish and Scots. Indeed, there is a King Anguish of Ireland in the Arthurian stories. The earliest form of the name occurs in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, as *Oinogusius*, the name of a Pict king, whose name is recorded elsewhere as *Hungus*, *Onnust* and *Ungust*. According to historian Alex Woolf, the Gaelic form of the name was borrowed from Pictish, and is derived from the Celtic **Oinogustos*, possibly meaning "strong one" (though the root is uncertain, and Woolf's argument is based on the assumption that the Picts originally spoke a Celtic language). Was the Pictish name borrowed from Old English *Hengist* ("gelding", from proto-Germanic **hangistaz*, "stallion")? Or might Hengest "the Jute" actually be Irish, Scottish or Pictish? I suggest that, setting aside for a moment Bede's claim that Hengest was a Jute, the weight of the evidence points towards the latter startling alternative. "Gelding" has always struck me as a peculiar name for the founder of a Royal Dynasty: it puts one in mind of the derogatory twists that foreign names often acquire in Biblical Hebrew, in a process that American Modernist poet Louis Zukofsky called "homophonic translation." *Hengest* or "Gelding" is certainly a cruel but fitting moniker for Hengest in Monmouth's *History* and Layamon's *Brut*, where his dynastic ambitions are cut brutally short. In Monmouth's history, Hengest appears in the north-west, in connection with Lancaster, and it is to Scotland that he and his progeny retreat, after their power-grab in Kent is routed. Later claimed by the Kentish royal family as the founder of their dynasty, I would suggest that this looks very much like an attempt to fabricate a distinguished lineage on the part of a royal family with shallow roots in the area: seeking an impressive figure from an historical past, perhaps one despised by whatever regime the new royal family had displaced, it would make perfect sense for scribes of Kent to settle on Hengest, given the status that this personality had acquired as a direct result of Bede's misreading of Gildas.

Bede's statement that Hengest is a Jute (i.e. from Jutland) has caused no end of head-aches for modern scholars who long struggled to reconcile this fact with the description of the fight at Finnsberg in the Fragment & the Episode in *Beowulf*. There, Hengest is fighting people with a similar sounding name to Jutes: the *Eotens*, a word that refers elsewhere in Old English literature to giants. J.R.R. Tolkien was the first to put forward the ingenious solution that *Eoten* should be read as "Jutes" (in Norse, *Eoten* is *Jotun*), and that there must therefore be 'Jutes on both sides'. But if we accept that Hengist was Irish, Scottish or Pictish a simpler solution presents itself: there are Jutes on one side only, and these are the Anglo-Frisians in the poem (from the coastal regions of Jutland and the northern Netherlands, before they were resettled by the Roman Empire in Kent and Flanders, following cataclysmic flooding of their homeland in the late third century).

If Hengest is at odds with the Eotens (i.e. Jutes), this is because he is something different and apart from the Anglo-Frisians who have supported Finn up to that point. Given the likely Pictish origin of the name Hengest, I suspect his army might be a doublet of the ill-fated Picts who have appeared in Monmouth already, and with whom Hengest is said to strike a deal later. Manipulated into supporting the usurper's claim to the throne, they are soon betrayed, and attacked by a mob in London: — precisely what then happens to Hengest. If Hengest is a Pict, this would resolve one of the many cruxes in modern translations of *Beowulf:* — how to translate the word *Sceottend* when one can have no recourse to the two obvious cognates, Scottish and Scythian.

†††

Finnsburg. According to Monmouth, the uprising initiated by Vortigern's sons began with a surprise attack in London: 'Forth iwenden eorles / forth iwenden beornes / forth iwenden biscopes / & tha boc-learned men / forth iwenden thaeines / forth iwenden sweines / alle Brutleoden / heo comen to Lunden.' And so, if we seek to identify Finn's Burg, it is therefore to the City of London we should turn. And here the obscure fortress (not to be found in Frisia) is labelled quite clearly on the map, albeit hard to locate and a puzzle to antiquarians. But the solution is simple: "Finsbury" is the forgotten name of the Roman Fort on the north-east side of the City, the toponym slowly drifting north, untethered long since from what once it signified, the square fortress represented by the *Hnefatafl* ("Hnaef's Table").

†††

Sceottend. Here, again, one runs up against a wall reared by modern prejudice. Disregarding everything that every post-Roman authority has to say concerning the origin of the Picts, and for reasons that will not bear scrutiny, the Picts are now widely assumed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Great Britain, possibly Celtic, perhaps even pre-Indo-European, and most likely bearing the name of the island they inhabited: the ethonym *Pict* being

invariably connected to the unrelated toponym *Britain*, on the grounds that *Pict* refers to the *pictures* which adorned their bodies (correct) and that this must refer to the woad (incorrect) with which ancient Britons painted their bodies, meaning that *Britain* shares the same root as the word *Pict* and thus means "Painted Isles". I am trying to be fair, but it is hard to explain the logic here, as there isn't any: — just a series of *non sequiturs*, stacked hypotheses and questionable assumptions.

Every post-Roman historian in the British Isles assures us that Picts arrived relatively late in Great Britain (too late to give the island their name), and that they came from Scythia. Not Scandinavia, as some modern scholars perplexed by this information suggest: presumably on the grounds that Scythia seems so far away — and apparently unaware that tens of thousands of Sarmatian Scythians had been sent to serve in the north of the island, shortly before Severus exterminated the original inhabitants of Caledonia. Locations the Sarmatians are known to have served in Britain include *Deva* (Chester) and *Bremetennacum Veteranorum* (Ribchester): 66 miles and 55 miles, respectively, from the Saxon-shore fort at Lancaster where, according to legend, Hengest first established himself.

Scythians were famous for their tattoos. These can reasonably be described as "pictures", and *paiϑah-, Scythian for "decoration" and "adornment", featured prominently in their personal names: for example, *Spargarpeithes* and *Ariapeithes*. I have no doubt that this is where the late 3rd-century Latin word *Picti* originates. Twin equestrian-gods were integral to Scythian religions, and this might explain Hengest and Horsa (outliers in Germanic paganism) and the Pict Z-rod symbol (with its twin circles), which can now be recognised as a Sarmatian *targa*, a royal brand.

Various implications follow from this. To deal with just one here: the first component in the toponym *Britain* is therefore not to be traced to the same root as *Picti*, as is always suggested, but is more likely to derive from proto-Celtic **ɸriyos* or proto-Germanic **frijaz*, both sharing a root in PIE **preyH-*, ["dear", "free"], from which *Frigg*, *Bridget, Frey*, *Frisian*, *free*, *friend*, *Friday*, *property* and *propriety* have descended. Alternatively, it might be traced to Proto-Celtic **brigos* ["power", "worth"]: the root of the ethonym *Brigantes* and cognate with Latin *fortis* ["strong", "powerful"] and Sanskrit *bṛhat*, ["mighty, strong"]. If the latter etymology is correct, one could say that *Britain* has the same name as India (*Bhārat* in Hindi) and that India's national epic, *Mahabharata*, might be literally translated as *Great Britain*.

†††

Denes. Perhaps a reference to the Otadini, the name of a late Roman tribal confederacy between the Antonine and Hadrian's Wall, which survives in the toponym *Edinburgh*. Modern scholars invariably supply an initial V (which appears in none of the Classical sources) on the grounds that this

must be the *Goddodin* spoken of in the Welsh poem. I tentatively suggest that the word *Dene* might derive from a mysterious suffix meaning "-land" that appears in toponyms on the north-east Atlantic seaboard. This suffix is traced by contemporary linguists to the Celtic root **tan* or **tain* ("country", "territory"), or else to a combination of Basque suffix **-eta* and Latin root **nia*. The first of these etymologies was actually first mooted by Edmund Spenser in his *View on the Present State of Ireland* (1596), where he notes that *Britannia* is of a piece with *Mauritania*, *Lusitania*, *Aquitaine*, etc., and speculates that the term must 1) mean "land", 2) be derived from the same root as Irish *Tanist*, and 3) might itself be the root of the names *Dane* and *Denmark*. This passage accounts for Thomas Chatterton's perplexing note (to a translation purportedly from "Old Saxon") wherein he claims a word he translates as "Dane" actually appears, in the manuscript, not with the D that he has supplied but rather with a T.

Alternatively, perhaps the Anglo-Saxon *Dene* derives from some corruption of Latin *Domnus* ("Lord"), of the sort which gave us Old French, Spanish, Italian and English *Dan* and *Don*, or is from a now forgotten late Latin word for the recipient of a *donation* — i.e. the Roman soldiers at the fee-giving ceremonies that remained important in Anglo-Saxon culture. Interestingly, this is one of the etymologies sometimes supplied for the *Tuatha de Danaan* in Irish mythology: "people of the gift". (This etymology might find incidental support in the fact that pagan sacrificial pits in England are called *dene-holes*.) My historical framework goes a long way toward explaining why the Irish *Tuatha de Danaan* might have been called "people of the gift" (if this etymology is correct): and this is the case for other etymologies sometimes advanced to explain the *Tuatha de Danaan* too. For instance, the theory that the name might refer to the original homeland of this people on the Danube, or means "people of the Goddess Dana". The New Historical Framework offers a fresh rationale on a firm historical basis for these ideas: from Marcus Aurelius onwards, nations on the *Donaulimes* supplied a constant flow of Roman troops into Britain, and many of the Emperors too, twenty being Illyriciani, to the extent that historians refer to the late Empire as the Danubian Dominate. The deity worshipped by the Illyrians was *Dea Dardanica*, and this was the patron-goddess of the House of Constantius at Naissus (modern-day Niš, Serbia), before Constantine's conversion to Christianity. I would argue that the case for the *Tuatha de Danaan* being a folk-memory of the occupying Romans is strong. The *Lebor Gabála* ("Book of Invasions") is evidently derived from the legendary history of Nennius, with two distinct traditions at once confused (in a doublet that multiplies the number of invasions) and naturalised, so the action is restricted to Ireland. Once this is understood, the two invasions of the *Tuatha de Danaan* can immediately be recognised as the Julian and Claudian invasions of Britain, with the first group, in each case, burning their ships on arrival (a distinctive and unusual procedure, which can ultimately be traced back to the historical account in Tacitus).

I should briefly explain that in the new historical framework the term *Dane* is exported rather than imported: taken from Britain to Denmark following the emigration (rather than the immigration) of Anglo-Frisians from the east of the island, as a result of the disintegrating security situation. While this must seem a surprising conclusion, recent archaeology reveals an influx of Roman influence into Jutland and Scandinavia, and the written histories of the era tend to corroborate such an idea. "The island of Brittia is inhabited by three very numerous nations", writes the Byzantine historian Procopius (c. 550 A.D.) "and the names of these nations are Angili, Frissones and Brittones, and so great is the population of these nations that every year they emigrate thence in large companies with their women and children and go to the land of the Franks." Likewise, in Widukind, the Saxons are said to come from Britain to Saxony, rather than vice-versa, as one might expect. I suspect that these Saxon and Frisian emigrants (or the Heruli, whose flight into the north, from the Roman Empire, Procopius records elsewhere), were the founders of the archaeological site recently rediscovered at Lejre, and that either these pioneers, or later Anglo-Saxon Christian missionaries, are the vector for the transmission of dynastic histories that would later become an integral part of the Scandinavian identity.

†††

Sigeferth. In the *History* of Saxo Grammaticus it is Svirting (= the Sigeferð that appears in the Finsbury Fragment or his sons) who avenges H(a)naef: 'being equally moved by the afflictions of the *civium*, he pursues Hanef's war for liberty, but in an altogether more devious spirit', inviting King Frodo to a feast then massacring his assembled enemies. *Svirting* appears in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies compiled by Nennius as *Sguerthing*, King of Deira, and it is indeed in Northumbria that we find traces of the legendary Sigeferth and his Secgans literally inscribed on the Roman Wall: *Segedunum* (Wallsend) and *Vercovicium* (Housesteads), where the *Cuneus Frisiorum* and the *Numerus Hnaudifridi* were based, not far from *Vinovia* (Binchester). Were one to find such a constellation of such resonant names on inscriptions or manuscripts relating to Scandinavia it's not hard to imagine what the scholarly reaction would be: we would be told this was, beyond any reasonable doubt, the location for the actions described in the poems. No such certainty is possible within the New Historical Framework, in which the Fight at Finnsburg is keyed to historical and legendary events said to have taken place elsewhere. Nennius and Monmouth both situate the Feast of Knives in Winchester. Saxo Grammaticus places one iteration of the story in Saxony, another in Britain. Widukind's *History of the Saxons* also locates the atrocity in Saxony. Roman sources relating the three distinct historical events upon which the Fight at Finnsburg is likely to have been based place the action variously in London (Caraucius and his Franks), Gaul (Magnentius, his Illyrians and Celtae), and near Adrianople (Fritigern and his Goths). It's possible too, that the Germanic legends are being informed, or rather deformed, by memories of a much earlier imperial power struggle in the second century, when Severus [Siegferth?] defeated Clodius Albinus

[Finn?] at the battle of Lugdunum [Lyons] in 197 A.D. “After viewing the body of Albinus and feasting his eyes upon it to the full, while giving full rein to his tongue as well, [Severus] ordered all but the head to be cast away, but sent the head to Rome to be exposed on a pole”, remembers Cassius Dio, adding, “this action showed clearly that he possessed none of the qualities of a good ruler…”

This section of my reconstruction combines passages from most of these sources, with quotations from Latin histories italicised. Note the confusion of *Ferhþ* and *Freoðe*. Sigeferð (*Ferhþ*) is a near metathesis of Siegfried (Freoðe), the hero of the *Nibelunglied* said to hail from a Roman fortress at Xanten on the Rhine. No mere wolf, this is *the* Roman Wolf, *Volsung* being Old English *Waelsing* (“Welshling”).

†††

Fergus. I conclude this section with passages relating to Gwynn ap Nudd from the *Mabinogion,* and to King Finn and Fergus from the *Tain bo Flidais*, that bear an obvious resemblance to the events in *Beowulf*. After avenging himself upon King Finn, Fergus the Exile provoked the marital jealousy of his rival and host King Conchobar, and was stabbed in the back while bathing in a pool; a fate that will recall the German legend of Siegfried. The name *Fergus* derives from Celtic **Wirogustus* (“virility” + “gusto”), *Sigeferth* from proto-Germanic **ferhuz* (“body”, “life”, “oak-tree”), and while similar in sound and meaning, these two have different Proto-Indo-European roots. If Fergus and Sigeferth are indeed derived from the one same historical figure the similarity of the names would therefore be the result of *homophonic* rather than *cognate* translation. This is particularly evident in the case of the name *Conchobar*, where the results are not so happy, and the direction of travel is therefore much clearer: while Celtic scholars interpret Conchobar’s name via Old Irish as “Dog-Lover”, we are in a position to perceive an obvious parallel here with the Burgundian King Gunter or Gundahar, i.e. *Kunja-Hari*, “Royal-Warrior”. The first element *Kunja-* appears in names such as Cynewulf and Humbert, and presumably in the word *Hunebedden*, the Dutch name for long barrows in Drenthe in the Netherlands. If Old English (rather than Norse) did indeed act as the carrier for this story into Old Irish, the “B” in the name Conchobar might suggest that *Huneferth* was Gunter’s equivalent in the Old English mythology, and this would account for the bad odour surrounding the character called *Hunferth* in Hrothgar’s Hall. (Beowulf accuses him of murdering his own brother.) Invariably printed as *Un-ferth* in modern editions of the poem, contemporary scholars are evidently quite mistaken to insist that the initial “H” is an error on the part of the scribe, or else introduced purely in order to meet the requirements of an alliterative line. I cannot refrain from observing that *Mr. Un-Peace* should always have seemed improbable in an Old English poem. This is *Beowulf* not Bunyan. In fact, I would suggest that modern scholars are here guilty of precisely the sort of scribal error or

liberty which they point to in this particular passage: in effecting a so-called correction they have actually hardwired an error into the text.

†††

Aurelius Ambrosius. So much ink has been spilled on the mystery presented by Aurelius Ambrosius, last of the Romans, but this figure in Gildas offers no difficulty, once the latter is read with our adjusted chronology in mind. We are now looking for an historical figure who achieved a victory over the Saxons not in the late 5th century, but in the early 4th century, when the Saxon menace in the Channel was at its height, and, as soon as that is understood, it is obvious that the semi-mythical Aurelius Ambrosius is none other than the historically attested Aurelius Ambrosius, who served as the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul (*praefecti praetorio Galliarum*) between 337 and 340 for Emperor Constantine II, who had entrusted him with wresting control over the Channel from Saxon pirates.

The historically-attested Aurelius Ambrosius is thought to have been the father of St. Ambrose of Milan. It is therefore perhaps significant that a bishop of the new faith should feature in the legend that grew up around this military leader. In fact, Eldol / Adolf, Earl of Gloucester, brother of Eldadus, Bishop of Gloucester, in Monmouth / Layamon, has a name similar to that of an historically attested British bishop of precisely the period that we are investigating: *Adelphius* was the Bishop of a colony called *Londinensium* (often thought to be Gloucester), one of three Bishops from Britain to attend the Council of Arles in 314 A.D. — the others being Eborius Bishop of York (Roman *Eboracum*, Anglo-Saxon *Eoforwic*) and Restitutus Bishop of London. *Adelphius* is Greek, but might be easily be mistaken by English-speakers like Layamon for the familiar Germanic name *Adolphus*.

Note that King Ongentheow of the Sylfings in *Beowulf* is killed by two brothers called Eofor (Boar) and Wulf (Wolf): might these two brothers be Eborious (Ivor) Bishop of York, and Adolphus [Aethel-wulf] Bishop of the colony of *Londinensium*? Might the defeat of Ongentheow in *Beowulf* have been conflated by Geoffrey of Monmouth with the originally quite separate history of Hengest (on account of the similarity of the names?). If Eofor and Wulf are indeed the British Bishops who attended the Council of Arles, the fact that these "brothers" are surnamed *Wonreding* ("Crooked Counsel") might speak volumes about the religious beliefs of the forebears of the Anglo-Saxons in Roman Britain; for the Council of Arles was where the Nicene Creed was formulated, prior to its adoption at the Council of Nicea in 325.

†††

The Burning Tower. In Monmouth, King Vortigern is killed by two avenging brothers, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon. The story has evidently been appropriated from the Old English: in *Beowulf*, Halfdane is identified

as father of Heorogar and Hrothgar, and in the *Saga of Hrolf Kraki* we read that Hroar (Hrothgar) and Helgi (Halga) begin their careers by seeking their father's killer (called Frodo) and burning him to death in his own house. This presents too great a similarity to the horrific end of the British Vortigern to be dismissed as a coincidence (and, incidentally, lends weight to the proposal that the first element in Vortigern's name is indeed Frodo). Once this is grasped one can better appreciate the artistry of the bard who rehearses the song of Finn and Hengest in Hrothgar's Hall: not random, nor merely thematically appropriate, this bloody history is an integral part of the story, serving precisely the same purpose here as Odysseus' tales of his adventures up-to-that-point in the *Odyssey*. I blend the Danish, Norse, British, English and Gothic histories with the Latin histories in the synoptic poem that closes this creative reconstruction.

Note the Norse account states that Hrothgar lived in Northumberland, and married the King's (British) daughter. To be quite clear: even Scandi-centric sagas insist that this part of the story took place in the British Isles. Indeed, *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* explicitly states that Hrothgar (Hroar) not only lived but eventually died (murdered) in Northumberland. And it is not Hrothgar but Hrothulf his nephew who is said to have built the palace at Hleidargard (Lejre). Given this is the case, why do modern scholars persist in identifying Lejre in Denmark as Hrothgar's Heorot? Such is the distorting effect that *received opinion* can have upon even the most intelligent of specialists in any field; logic buckling under the weight of centuries of accumulated prejudice. Insisting that we must situate the action of *Beowulf* in the Baltic (only because they themselves have been so determined to read it through Scandinavian analogues), modern scholars proceed to ignore everything those Scandinavian sources tell us about Hrothgar's Hall (in Britain) and Hrothulf's Hleidargard (Lejre in Demark). But Saxo's History and the Sagas are perfectly unambiguous on this score:

$$\text{Heorot} \neq \text{Lejre}.$$

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Editions & Translations Consulted

ENGLISH

Beowulf, trans., M. Alexander (London: Penguin, 1973).
Beowulf, trans. H. D. Chickering, Jr. (N.Y.: Random House 2006).
Beowulf, trans. S. Heaney (London: Faber & Faber, 1999).
Beowulf, trans. Edwin Morgan (Berkeley: UCP, 1964).
Beowulf, trans. W. Morris (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910).
Beowulf, trans. T. Shippey, ed. L. Neidorf (London: Uppsala Books, 2023).
Beowulf, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2016).
Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto: UTP, 2008).
Laȝamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brooke & R.F. Leslie (Oxford: OUP, 1963).
William Morris, *Sigurd the Volsung* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1893).

IRISH

Early Irish Myths and Sagas, trans. Jeffrey Gantz (London: Penguin, 1981).
Heroic Romances of Ireland, trans. A.H. Leahy, trans. (London: Nutt, 1906).
The Táin (*Bó Cúailnge*), trans. Ciaran Carson (London: Penguin, 2008).

GERMAN

The Nibelungenlied, trans. A.T. Hattor (London, Penguin, 1965).
Richard Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Penguin, 2018).

GREEK

Libanus, *Selected Orations*, trans. A.F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: HUP, 1969).
Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: HUP, 1914).
Joannes Zonaras, *The History of Zonarus: from Alexander Severus to the death of Theodosius the Great*, trans. Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2009).
Zozimus, *The New History*, trans. Anon. (Pittsburgh: Serif Press, 2021).

LATIN

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, eds. R.E. Latham and D.H. Farmer (London: Penguin, 1990).

Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Lombards*, trans. William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1907).
Eutropius, *Abridgement of Roman History*, trans. John Selby Watson (London: George Bell and Sons, 1886).
Gildas, *De Exidio Britanniae*, trans. H. Williams (London: Nutt, 1899).
Saxo Grammaticus, *The Danish History, Books I-IX*, trans Oliver Elton (London: D. Nutt, 1894).
Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, trans. Peter Fisher, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996).
Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, trans. Charles C. Mierow (Princeton: PUP, 1908).
Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966).
Nennius, *The History of the Britons*, trans. J.A. Giles, Six Old English Chronicles (London: H.G. Bohn, 1848).
Notitia Dignitatum, ed. Otto Seeck (Berlin: Weidmann, 1876)
Panegyrici Latini, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, trans. C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers (Berkeley: UCP, 1994).
Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974).
Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus*, trans. Thomas M. Banchich (Buffalo, NY: Canisius College, 2018).
Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*, trans. Bernard S. Bachrach & David S. Bachrach (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

SCANDINAVIAN

Saga of Didrik of Bern, trans. I. Cumpstey (Cumbria: Skaldi Press, 2017).
Saga of King Hrolf Kraki, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin, 1998).
The Saga of the Volsungs, trans. Jesse L. Byock, (London: Penguin, 1990).
Snorri Sturlson, *Prose Edda*, trans. J. L. Byock (London: Penguin, 2005).
Snorri Sturlson, *Ynglinga Saga*, trans. S. Laing (London: Elliot Stock 1893).

WELSH

The Mabinogion, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2008).