

# Recognizing and Moving on from a Failed Paradigm: The Case of Agricultural Landscapes in Anglo-Saxon England c. AD 400–800

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Published online: 28 November 2015  
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**Abstract** A central preoccupation for archaeologists is how and why material culture changes. One of the most intractable examples of this problem can be found between AD 400 and 800 in the enigmatic transformation of sub-Roman into Anglo-Saxon England. That example lies at the heart of this review, explored through the case of the agricultural economy. Although the ideas critically examined below relate specifically to early medieval England, they represent themes of universal interest: the role of migration in the transformation of material culture, politics, and economy in a post-imperial world, the significance of “core” and “periphery” in evolving polities, ethnogenesis as a strategy in kingdom building, property rights as a lens for investigating cultural change, and the relationship between hierarchical political structures and collective forms of governance. The first part of my argument proposes a structured response to paradigmatic stalemate by identifying and testing each underlying assumption, premise, and interpretative framework. The recognition of any fallacies, false premises, and flawed arguments might assist with an overall evaluation of the continuing utility of a discourse—whether it has life in it yet, or should be set aside. In either case, the recognition of its structure should enable arguments to be developed that do not lead into a disciplinary cul-de-sac, prevented by the orthodoxy from exploring new avenues for research. In the second part of the review, I deliberately adopt a starting point outside the limits of the current discourse. Freed from the confines of the conventional consensus, I experiment with an alternative “bottom-up” approach to change in early medieval England that contrasts with conventional “top-down” arguments. I focus in particular on how rights over agricultural property—especially collective rights—and

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the forms of governance implied by them may assist in illuminating the roles of tradition and transformation in effecting cultural change.

**Keywords** Anglo-Saxon · Landscape · Agriculture · Migration · Property rights · Governance

## Introduction

A central preoccupation for archaeologists is how and why material culture changes. One of the most intractable examples of this problem can be found between AD 400 and 800 in the enigmatic transformation of sub-Roman into Anglo-Saxon England. Roman administration was withdrawn from the country around 410; by 500, almost every imperial aspect of Romano-British material culture had disappeared: coins, urban markets, palatial rural estates. The characteristic artifacts of everyday life now had a greater affinity with north European traditions than with those of the Mediterranean; agricultural production shifted from a focus on arable to a focus on pastoral husbandry; and cultivators worked within a subsistence economy where previously they appear to have produced specialized crops for a market economy. That example lies at the heart of this review, explored through the case of the agricultural economy.

Interpretations of the past are inevitably hindered by our inability to experience it directly. The Lady of Shalott in Tennyson's eponymous poem could only see life beyond her castle in its reflections in her mirror; the tapestries she wove of those mirrored scenes were third-hand interpretations of that second-hand experience. The analogy is a reminder that, like the Lady of Shalott, we construct explanatory models from fragmentary, more or less opaque evidence refracted through the complexities of time, place, and process. Some of the conceptual frameworks that emerge from this process subsume so many of the preconceptions, premises, and arguments around which the scholarship of a problem is structured that they achieve paradigmatic status, offering a comprehensive discourse within which such problems are explained. The paradigm explaining the emergence of early medieval England has a particularly long history. During its evolution over the course of the last century and more, its fundamental conclusion has remained largely unchallenged: that incoming north European migrants and/or their descendants played a defining role in the almost complete disappearance of Romano-British culture, including its agricultural landscapes, and its replacement by Germanic institutions, artifacts, fields, and settlements.

Paradigms gain traction when they offer useful explanations of assemblages and other evidence. The utility of such normative models may, however, become problematic where significant disjunctions appear between them and new material or explanations. Those problems are exacerbated if discourses become so dominant and remain unchallenged for such long periods that it is forgotten that they are simply hypotheses that we hope provide a best fit for available evidence, and that they offer neither certain principles nor unchallengeable truths. This review is stimulated by the disjunction between the almost iconic status of the long-standing

paradigm explaining the emergence of early medieval England and new archaeological evidence.

Although the ideas I examine relate specifically to early medieval England, they represent themes of universal interest: the role of migration in the transformation of material culture, politics and economy in a post-imperial world, the significance of “core” and “periphery” in evolving polities, ethnogenesis as a strategy in kingdom building, property rights as a lens for investigating cultural change, and the relationship between hierarchical political structures and collective forms of governance.

The first part of my argument proposes a structured response to paradigmatic stalemate by identifying and testing each underlying assumption, premise, and interpretative framework. The recognition of any fallacies, false premises, and flawed arguments might assist with an overall evaluation of the continuing utility of a discourse—whether it has life in it yet, or should be set aside. In either case, the recognition of its structure should enable arguments to be developed that do not lead into a disciplinary cul-de-sac, prevented by the orthodoxy from exploring new avenues for research. As an unknown wit once remarked, “Learn from the mistakes of others. You can never live long enough to make them all yourself.” A careful analysis of the elements and structure of existing paradigms provides a roadmap to enable us to avoid known pitfalls and remove unnecessary boundaries to the kinds of questions that might be asked, despite the inevitability of making new mistakes and falling into new misconceptions.

In the second part of the review, I deliberately adopt a starting point outside the limits of the current discourse. Freed from the confines of the conventional consensus, my arguments experiment with an alternative “bottom-up” approach to change in early medieval England that contrasts with conventional “top-down” models. I focus in particular on how rights over agricultural property—especially collective rights—and the forms of governance implied by them may assist in illuminating the roles of tradition and transformation in effecting cultural change.

## Context and Definitions

My analysis of a paradigmatic straightjacket and suggestions for alternative approaches to it focuses in particular on the case of collectively managed agricultural landscapes across early medieval England. By 1200, medieval arable cultivation in many (but not all) areas was dominated by open fields that had two defining characteristics: they were subdivided between a number of cultivators, and there was unimpeded access from one holding to another within the field (Fig. 1). That combination of layout and patterns of tenure meant that the management of open fields depended on cooperation between cultivators, at a minimum to ensure access to holdings and to indemnify against damage to crops, and at most to agree to patterns of cropping and fallowing. Many nonarable areas also were subject to shared exploitation and collectively managed for similar reasons. There is general consensus that the origins of both can be found in the Anglo-Saxon period.

The choice of the agricultural landscape as the lens through which these ideas are explored is deliberate. In a predominantly agricultural economy, everyone within a



**Fig. 1** Medieval arable open-field system at Baggrave, Leicestershire. Each ridged unit originally represented a single unit of tenure, and tenure in each subsection of the field was distributed among a number of cultivators. Cultivators could move easily from one holding to another, and the field was thus “open” (Reproduced with permission, Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography, BLC57, 1972)

community has an interest in the organization and management of the productive landscape, whether as owner, tenant, or laborer. Agricultural and other boundaries are the physical representation of individual and community histories, often over long periods. For the individual, the ditches, hedges, banks, walls, and other boundaries around and within his property are not only the physical expression of his livelihood but also a mnemonic for personal history, wealth, status, social hierarchies, relations within household, kin, community, and polity, and proximity to centers of power, belief, and trade (see Boivin 2008; Dobres and Robb 2005; Robb 2010). For communities, agricultural and other boundaries represent political and administrative structures, patterns of local, regional, and wider exchange, and of social networks. The landscape provides visible prompts to oral histories of custom and practice in which property ownership, economic activity, and social hierarchy are recorded and explained in overlapping family histories, genealogies, land grants, myths, and customary practices. It follows from this that agricultural landscapes have the potential to reveal underlying social, political, and economic change over the *longue durée*.

The backstory to this review begins with the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43, followed by nearly four centuries of imperial administration. In many areas, an improved transport infrastructure, the introduction of a monetized market economy, and long periods of peaceful political administration were accompanied by an

expansion in agricultural activity and population, which may have reached between three and five million by the early fifth century (Millett 1990, pp. 181–186). Despite the emergence of urbanized towns and considerable commercial activity, the economy remained largely agricultural. The relatively dense distribution of rural settlements—often nucleated, never defended—whose inhabitants worked the land suggests stability in social relations. The question of the degree to which indigenous Britons absorbed imperial culture remains controversial. Apparently rapid adoption of Roman material culture can be seen, for example, in local production of Roman pottery styles or in the replacement of circular dwellings by rectangular houses. Some have regarded such changes as evidence of widespread Romanization, while others have pointed out that cultural behavior is about how artifacts are used, rather than their typology (e.g., Millett 1990; Pitts 2008). The people of Roman Britain, generally descended from its prehistoric inhabitants, tend nonetheless to be referred to as Romano-British.

The period that forms the focus of this review begins with the withdrawal of Roman administration from Britain in the early years, perhaps toward the end of the first decade, of the fifth century. By about 500, most towns had been abandoned, wheel-thrown pottery had been supplanted by locally handmade pottery of friable fabric, low denomination coinage had gone out of circulation, there had been a marked change in designs of personal effects, and there was a substantial shift from arable toward pastoral husbandry (see Esmonde Cleary 2011; Hills 2011). The paradigmatic view is that fifth and sixth century immigration led that considerable cultural transformation.

Because the earliest documentary sources refer to the principal groups of migrants as Angles and Saxons, and because their subsequent influence on British culture was believed to have been so wide-ranging, it has become convention to refer to the period between about AD 400 and 1066 as “Anglo-Saxon.” The meaning of the term is sometimes cultural, sometimes chronological, sometimes both.

The cultural identification of individuals or groups as “Anglo-Saxon” is problematic for three reasons. The first problem lies in the recognition that cultural identity is constructed by both individuals and groups; neither material culture, birth, nor language are necessarily indicators of identity (e.g., Goffart 2006; Hills 2011; Pohl 1997). The second reason is that, even if such ascription were possible, fifth- and sixth-century immigrants did not share a common background or even a common language: they came from different parts of northwest Europe with a wide range of cultural traditions (Pohl 1997, p. 25). The third problem is that the indigenous population of sub-Roman England is invisible within a period described as “Anglo-Saxon.” Recognition of these complexities has led to the widespread acceptance of the term “Germanic” in discussing northwest European influences on early medieval Britain; “late British” or “sub-Roman” has similarly been adopted to enable discussion of Romano-British influences (e.g., Geary 2002; Gillett 2006; Goffart 2006). Those distinctions are adopted below in relation only to material culture.

“Anglo-Saxon” also is commonly used as a chronological label. The period is conventionally subdivided into three: Early Anglo-Saxon taken to lie between 400

and 650; Middle Anglo-Saxon between 650 and 850; and Late Anglo-Saxon between 850 and 1066 (cf. Hall and Coles 1994, p. 122). That nomenclature is retained in this paper for ease of reference. It should not be read as having any cultural connotations. On the other hand, it is frequently used in that way in the scholarly literature to refer to individuals or groups living in England in this period who are supposed to have Germanic origins. That meaning is represented in the text with quote marks, thus “Anglo-Saxon.”

### The Evidence of the Landscape

The dominant discourse takes as its normative position the key role in the early medieval (and medieval) landscape of evolving Germanic culture in the origins and evolution of collective husbandry in which no late Romano-British influence can be discerned. The problem with this view is that, generally speaking, recent evidence indicates a reasonable degree of continuity in agricultural production from Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon. Where persistence of prehistoric and Romano-British field layouts into the Anglo-Saxon period was once both a rarity and an archaeological oddity, that position has been overturned over the past three decades (for detailed examples see Oosthuizen 2010, 2011a). To take just some instances, the “grid of ditched paddocks or closes” of a Roman villa estate at Barton Court (Oxon.) framed the Anglo-Saxon settlement there (Miles 1984, p. 14); a middle Anglo-Saxon settlement at Catholme (Staffs.) lay on “a parcel of Romano British farmland” (Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, p. 105); and Romano-British fields at Church Down and Catherington in Chalton (Hants.), Mucking and Havering (Essex), and Yarnton (Oxon.) continued to be cultivated into the seventh century (Bradley et al. 1999, p. 251; Cunliffe 1973, pp. 183–188; Gaimster and Bradley 2002, p. 242; Hamerow 1993, p. 94; Hey 2004, pp. 37–39; Yorke 1995, pp. 264–265). Across later Anglo-Saxon England, many existing field boundaries, of prehistoric or Roman origin, were simply adapted and modified in the evolution of medieval arable landscapes, at a minimum implying continuous recognition of their boundaries between the late fourth and late 10th centuries and at most continuous occupation. Such fields have been found from Wiltshire to Herefordshire and Staffordshire; across the midlands from Oxford to Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire; from Sussex to into Yorkshire across Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk (for detailed examples see Oosthuizen 2011a).

Where fields were not continuously plowed, pollen evidence indicates little evidence of the woodland regeneration that would be expected on abandoned land; they seem instead to have been converted to pasture (Dark 2000, Chap. 5; Foard 2001; Murphy 1994, p. 37; Rackham 1986, p. 74). Palynological analysis of grasslands, too, indicates that most continued to be grazed not only across the Anglo-Saxon centuries but into the medieval period and sometimes later (Oosthuizen 2011b). The character of pasture on the Cheviot Hills (Northumberland) and on Bodmin Moor (Devon), for example, remained relatively unchanged from the late Iron Age until the mid-18th century (Davies and Dixon 2007, pp. 29, 38; Gearey et al. 2000, p. 506; Fig. 2). Similar continuities have been identified in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and the north of England (Davison 1990; Oosthuizen



**Fig. 2** Mungrisdale Common, Cumbria: The quality and character of rough common grazing on extensive upland pastures like these has deliberately been maintained through CPRRs since at least the late Iron Age (Copyright, Bill Boaden. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic License)

2006; Stoertz 1997). Such areas remained open *because* they were grazed, indicating the consistent presence of such large flocks and herds that woodland regrowth was largely prevented. The greatest perceptible alterations in land usage between about 400 and 700 seem to have been in the varying proportions of the land of each community that lay under grass or the plow at any time, rather than in changes to agricultural layout.

Continued use of prehistoric and Romano-British field systems across the Anglo-Saxon period was mirrored by continuities in techniques for managing crop production. Infield-outfield agriculture, the dominant form of arable cultivation for at least the preceding three millennia, remained the foremost method for growing crops across the fifth to 11th centuries and continued to be practiced in many parts of medieval Britain. The infield, intensively cultivated without a fallow period, requires annual manuring; the outfield supports a shifting pattern of cultivation, as limited areas are taken under the plow for short periods, being returned to pasture for up to 20 years to recover their fertility, while new areas are colonized in their place. There are significant indications that some prehistoric and Romano-British infields may have been structured as open fields—that is, subdivided between a number of cultivators (Fig. 3; for detailed examples, see Oosthuizen 2011a).

In summary, the landscape evidence suggests that the fields and pastures of late Roman Britain continued to be occupied and exploited through the early and middle



**Fig. 3** Iron Age (c. 500 BC–AD 100) open-field system at Hut Knowe, Scottish Borders. The open-field system was divided between a number of cultivators who could move easily between holdings; it was physically subdivided by narrow cultivation ridges called “cord rig” (Reproduced with permission, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments, Scotland)

Anglo-Saxon centuries largely within their existing boundaries and following traditional patterns of agricultural management that may have included collective cultivation. That conclusion offers a profound dysfunction with the paradigmatic view. How is the emergence of collective agriculture in the Anglo-Saxon landscape—and, by extension, the social relations it embodied—to be explained if it was not created from scratch between the fifth and seventh centuries? The answer to that question begins with a careful examination of the dominant paradigm.

## **The Paradigm: Its Historiography, Fallacies, False Premises**

### **Historiographical Review**

The foundations of modern explanations of the “Anglo-Saxon” origins of collectively managed agricultural landscapes were largely constructed by late 19th and early 20th century historians. Adjustments have been made to those foundations over time, but some elements of the original premises and structure persist in current models. The early discourse was useful and has continued to be so



for over a century. It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to explain more recent archaeological evidence for the origins and development of collective management of early Anglo-Saxon husbandry in these conventional terms. Far from setting up a straw man, the aim of the historiographical review is to make explicit each element of current explanations, to distinguish between those components that have been discarded or adjusted, and those that remain in play. The historiography briefly outlines the orthodoxy, its origins and development, before going on to discuss the fallacies, premises, and arguments around which it is structured.

The leading discourse for the origins and evolution of collective husbandry in the early medieval (and medieval) landscape was firmly established by late 19th and early 20th century historians, principally led by Maitland (1897) and later adopted by archaeologists. It explained collective organization as an introduction by first-generation migrants from northwest Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries following the collapse of Roman Britain. As outlined below, research in the last 30 to 40 years has modified that initial chronology to suggest that common property rights in many arable landscapes had their origins in the ninth or 10th centuries instead, in ideas that developed as Germanic culture evolved. That adaptive proposition does not, however, dispute the conclusion that collective forms of arable and pastoral husbandry were entirely “Anglo-Saxon” innovations.

Although the paradigm was challenged almost from the outset by scholars like Seebohm (1883) and Joliffe (1933)—each arguing for continuity from Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon in the layout of agricultural landscape—it rapidly achieved and maintained a monolithic status. Gray (1915, p. 418) argued that the extensive open-field systems of the English midlands were a direct introduction by “Anglo-Saxon” migrants. Twenty years later, Orwin and Orwin (1938, pp. 3, 23–24) asserted that open fields were “introduced into Britain by Germanic settlers.” By mid-century, Hoskins (1988, p. 45) could still confidently write that “Compact villages, of varying size, are to be found in all counties, dating for the most part from Anglo-Saxon times. Everywhere they were accompanied originally by the open-field system.” As late as the early 1970s, Stenton (1971, p. 15, my addition) was as sure that fields and settlements were laid out by “Anglo-Saxons” who “adhered to their own native [i.e., northwest European] traditions.” The consensus established by Maitland and his colleagues thus continued to prevail more than half a century after it had been established. The medieval, and by extension modern, agricultural landscape was, it was generally agreed, a post-Roman, northwest European, innovation.

Roman Britain seemed to disappear from the landscape: Roman coins vanished from circulation within a few decades of 400, there was widespread abandonment of Romano-British urban centers, some villa complexes fell into ruins, while wooden structures were erected at others on or beside the remains of their predecessors (Arnold 1988, pp. 42–43, 54–55, 68, 165; Hall 1987, p. 11; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, pp. 34, 73–76). The wetter conditions of a climatic downturn between AD 450 and 650 and several significant epidemics are believed to have exacerbated an already bad situation (Lamb 1985). The modern dominance of English, a language with significant Germanic roots, in field and place names in which only about ten British Celtic (Brittonic) loanwords survive, provides a living record in the

landscape of the displacement of Brittonic and Late Spoken Latin (see Gelling 1978, 1993; Schrijver 2014, p. 19; Ward-Perkins 2000). Interpretations of the history of the English landscape thus embodied the wider discourse.

Problems with the paradigm, however, were first influentially expressed in the mid-1960s in two papers by Thirsk (1964, 1966), who pointed out the paucity of evidence for an Anglo-Saxon origin for collectively managed open fields and suggesting instead that they emerged in the 11th or 12th centuries. Her work had a powerful effect on the debate. By 1973, a major study of open fields took the next step in concluding that “it can therefore no longer be claimed that in the fifth and sixth centuries the Anglo-Saxons brought with them to England a ready made and mature two- or three-field system” (Baker and Butlin 1973, pp. 624–625; see also Fox 1981). That work prepared the ground for archaeological results from Northamptonshire and Yorkshire (principally published in the 1980s and 1990s) that demonstrated that medieval open fields overlay middle Anglo-Saxon farmsteads and hamlets (Addyman 1964, p. 24; Hall 1995, pp. 129–130; Harvey 1985). It was assumed that the fields were coeval with the abandonment of the settlements they overlay and could therefore be dated to the ninth or 10th centuries. This adjustment rapidly formed a new orthodoxy, that large-scale open-field systems were laid out across substantial tracts of landscape, even whole parishes, from the ninth century onwards, cutting across and destroying existing prehistoric or Romano-British field boundaries (Hall 1995; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, p. 145; Taylor 2002). By the end of the last century, Hooke (1998, p. 106) declared: “the open fields, themselves, in some form, would have been present in many regions by the later Anglo-Saxon period” (see also Lewis et al. 1997, pp. 107–108). As recently as 2014, Harrington and Welch (2014, p. 67) still confidently asserted that “the association of open fields, plow lands, ridge and furrow and the mold-board plow with the later Anglo-Saxon period are well known” (for similar views see Hamerow 2012, p. 151; Loveluck 2013, p. 364).

The prevailing consensus was thus revised but not fundamentally reexamined. Open fields remained an “Anglo-Saxon” introduction—all that changed was the period of their origin, pushed forward into the ninth and 10th from the fifth and sixth centuries. No longer thought to have been a direct import from northwest Europe, they were concluded instead to be the result of the evolution of Germanic institutions. The paradigm continued explicitly to exclude any hint of prehistoric or Romano-British origin or influence in open field landscapes. In Northamptonshire, where fieldwork had been most intensive, “one looks [in vain] for many extensive systems of Roman or prehistoric fields that could convincingly be converted to a recognizable furlong pattern” (Hall 1981, p. 44; a furlong is a subdivision of an open field). Rackham (1986, p. 172) also considered that “there is not the slightest evidence that open fields existed in the Roman period.” And since, it was generally agreed, all aspects of open field layouts were introduced only in later Anglo-Saxon England, it followed that the systems of collective organization that underpinned them must be new, too.

## Fallacies Reviewed

The discourse described in the preceding section is based on four fallacies from which three critical premises are derived. Each fallacy was drawn from apparently irrefutable early documentary sources that described the rapid rise to dominance of bands of fifth and sixth century migrants, most of whom arrived from areas now located in modern Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Gildas, writing in the sixth century for instance, recorded that the incomers had by 446 “fixed their dreadful claws on the east side of the island” (Winterbottom 1978, p. 26). The Venerable Bede recounted in slightly more measured terms a century and a half later, c. 731, how “hordes” of Saxons, Angles, and Jutes “were granted lands in the eastern part of the island” in the early fifth century (Sherley-Price 1990, p. 62).

The first fallacy was the assumption that a relatively reliable chronological timeline could be constructed from such early medieval sources, despite the recognition that most did not offer an objective record of the fifth and sixth centuries but had some other objective in mind—sometimes polemical, sometimes myth-making, sometimes didactic (e.g., Dumville 1977; Geary 2002; Higham 1992, 1994). As Dumville (1985, p. 66) has observed of some, “This is dynastic history; it is not settlement history.” Archaeologists nonetheless adopted that “constructed historical narrative” since it provided them with an apparently reliable absolute timeframe for material evidence whose dating must otherwise be relative (Gerrard 2013, p. 18). As recent DNA research (discussed below) demonstrates, archaeological belief in the integrity of the chronology outlined in the early sources persists (Leslie et al. 2015).

The second fallacy was the uncritical adoption of the underlying narrative of the documentary accounts. They described widespread desertion of the countryside as a militarily weak indigenous population was killed or driven out by small, but formidable, groups of invaders. The logical conclusion of such desertion was that “the Anglo-Saxons” were able to lay out new open fields, common pastures, and nucleated settlements in an empty landscape, whose structures reflected their imported social hierarchies and political institutions. Recent scholarship has substantially discounted Romano-British desertion of the fifth and sixth century landscape, but the principle of the political primacy of Germanic individuals and institutions remains largely intact and is explored in more detail below.

The third fallacy was the acceptance of the view expressed in the early documentary evidence that post-Roman immigration into Britain was both new and on a scale substantial enough for “Anglo-Saxons” to replace late Romano-British populations in the landscape at large (e.g., Esmonde Cleary 1989). That fallacy begs questions about the numbers of early medieval immigrants against a continuous background of migratory flow into Britain since the last Ice Age, for whom assimilation was the norm (Eckardt et al. 2014; Hemer et al. 2013; Leslie et al. 2015; see discussion below). The question about what was special about post-Roman migration into Britain either in terms of numbers or in other terms still requires an answer. This is not to argue that it was not distinctive in any way; it is to say that that significance has yet to be defined and substantiated.

The fourth fallacy relates to the first documentary evidence for collective husbandry, in one of the late seventh century laws of King Ine of Wessex that set penalties for damage to crops or stock on collectively held land (Whitelock 1979, p. 403, paragraph 42). The four earliest Anglo-Saxon law codes, of which King Ine's were one, were compiled in the seventh century, and there is no similar regulation in the other three. Historians, forgetting the dictum that "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," assumed that the law was required because collective ownership had only just been introduced. Maitland (1897, p. 237) was sure that laws relating to collective cultivation in late seventh-century Wessex "may refer only to some newly settled and allotted districts" and could not possibly represent Romano-British or older traditions. It is possible that the historians were right that agricultural innovation and its legal regulation were both new in the late seventh century; but it is just as possible that the regulation was simply a normative repetition of long-standing customary law.

### False Premises Reviewed

From those four fallacies flow three premises that underpinned a normative conviction of the agricultural landscape's Germanic origins. Although two of those premises have been found wanting, the persistence of the third supports the model's continuing dominance. The premises were, *first*, that the population of Britain was still so low in the early fifth century that Germanic migrants found an underexploited, relatively empty landscape in which large tracts of virgin forest still awaited pioneer settlement. The *second* premise was that, in already-colonized areas, the existing Romano-British population was almost entirely annihilated and/or displaced by Germanic warrior incomers. The *third* premise was that a tightly focused group of bellicose immigrants were able to impose their own cultural traditions virtually wholesale, sweeping away sub-Roman fields and settlements together with the social relations, structures, and customs that they represented. They reproduced forms familiar to them from their northwest European homelands in newly laid out landscapes: nucleated settlements, collectively organized arable fields, and pastures exploited under common rights (e.g., Maitland 1897, p. 15).

Each of these premises is fatally flawed. Although two have been discounted, and the discourse as a whole has shifted the introduction of collectively managed agricultural landscapes to the ninth and tenth centuries, the third premise continues to underpin arguments for a sufficient degree of cultural dominance by Germanic immigrants to discount the possibility of continuity with the Romano-British past in the emergence of collective husbandry in Anglo-Saxon England.

The first premise was that the existing Romano-British population was so small that the tiny, isolated settlements of early "Anglo-Saxon" colonists were laid out in a vast landscape of primeval woodland over which property rights and governance had yet to be established (see Vinogradoff 1908). That view has comprehensively been refuted by recent archaeological work demonstrating considerable population density and consequent intensive exploitation of the countryside from an early date. Late prehistoric Iron Age settlements in lowland England lay only around 1 km apart regardless of soil type; even on marginal uplands, there tended to be just 2 or

3 km between them (Taylor 1983, p. 64). Romano-British settlement was even more concentrated, often no more than 500 m apart on lower lying land; on the uplands, distances between settlements remained more or less the same as they had been half a millennium or more earlier, but the sizes of the settlements themselves had doubled or trebled (Taylor 1983, p. 83). Early medieval England was characterized by a well-populated, intensively exploited agricultural landscape of fields, pastures, and other resources (e.g., Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, pp. 78–79; Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (England) 1979, pp. xxxi–xlix; Taylor 1983, p. 83).

On the other hand, the second premise—that the immigrants were able to settle an empty landscape—might still hold if the existing population had been expelled or killed during the conquest leaving behind them an unoccupied country. The population of late Roman Britain may have stood at between three and five million (Millett 1990, p. 185). The range between the upper and lower limits of this estimate is substantial, and scholars have generally accepted the lower figure as a probable minimum without committing themselves to the higher number (see Hamerow 1997, p. 33; Pattison 2008, p. 2425). Were there sufficient numbers of migrants arriving in England each year across the fifth and sixth centuries to overwhelm a Romano-British population that stood in the low millions? There is general agreement that between about 600 and 1,000 northern European immigrants probably arrived each year across the fifth and sixth centuries (Gerrard 2013, p. 181; Pattison 2008, p. 2428). This suggests that perhaps around 200,000 people at most may have moved into England from northwest Europe over the 200 years that followed the withdrawal of Roman administration. At a rough ratio of around one northwest European to every 150,000 late Roman Britons by around AD 600, there were just too few “Anglo-Saxons” to make a substantial physical difference to the size of a local population that numbered in the low millions, even if the migrants were, to a man, subject to an insatiable bloodlust. Evidence for a high Romano-British population that substantially outnumbered Germanic immigrants, combined with evidence for intensive occupation of the landscape itself, meant that the second premise could no longer be supported.

The continued stability of the paradigm thus relies entirely on the third premise that took as its starting point the military strength and focus of migrant groups able to sweep away sub-Roman structures of governance, social relations, and customs by an energetic combination of Germanic conquest and innovation.

The third premise depends on two intersecting explanations for the destruction of sub-Roman society and economy and its replacement by Germanic institutions and landscapes. The first explanation proposes that the economic collapse that followed the withdrawal of Roman administration was compounded by significant climate change and plague. In the anarchy that followed, it suggests, all aspects of Romano-British governance, social structure, and social relations simply disappeared, leaving the way open for “the Anglo-Saxons” to impose social and political control. The most brilliant exposition of these arguments is that in Esmonde Cleary’s (1989), *The Ending of Roman Britain*. Late Romano-British cultivators were reduced to hand-to-mouth subsistence, subject to recurrent epidemics, their survival vulnerable to chaotic political conditions as rival warlords tussled for political control over the

smaller or larger areas within which they lived. In support of the thesis, historians and archaeologists have pointed to the swift disappearance from circulation of Roman coins, the abandonment of urban centers that had formerly been pivotal in underpinning exchange in the imperial economy, the proliferation of local, handmade pottery instead of the wheel-thrown wares transported across long distances from regional manufactories, and the decline of magnificent villa mansions into shabby decay or abandonment. Of these, the cessation of Roman coin imports is believed to have been the most damaging: specialized agricultural products could no longer be sold for cash in urban markets; access to imperial markets was lost; and landholders and tenants were forced into a highly localized, subsistence economy whose stresses eroded political stability. Thus, the argument suggests, even if the agricultural landscape were not depopulated, a wider economic, social, and political void provided the conditions in which Germanic warriors could impose their own leadership and imported political institutions (see Esmonde Cleary 2011).

In an innovative recent study, Gerrard (2013) has, however, convincingly challenged that explanation of systemic shock. Instead, he suggests that external factors such as climate change and plague occurred too late in the fifth century to have played any significant role in the destruction of late Roman Britain (Gerrard 2013, p. 80). An exploration of two further economic models fares no better. A “slide and bump” approach of unevenly paced decay, based on such evidence of technological decline as the replacement of stone by wooden buildings, of wheel-thrown by handmade pottery, and changes in the character of everyday artifacts, is as unsatisfactory. He argues instead that such judgments are teleological, based on modern consumerist values that may not have been relevant in a post-Roman context. A third economic explanation, that of a “soft landing,” is predicated on the loss in value of low denomination bronze and copper coins, as people were unable to convert their assets into cash (Gerrard 2013, p. 80). Gerrard (2013, pp. 98–99) proposes a quite different model, that the agricultural sector that dominated economic production throughout the first millennium AD was always largely unmonetized, even in the Roman period when money was readily available. If this were indeed the case, the presence or absence of coinage may not have had very much effect on it. The removal of tax and rent burdens from sub-Roman peasant producers may, indeed, have stimulated a substantially positive agricultural transformation, allowing farmers both to invest less labor in production and to retain a greater proportion of their surpluses, thereby improving rather than degrading standards of living (Gerrard 2013, p. 103). That conclusion receives some support from other research that demonstrates that higher denomination coins continued to be imported from Merovingia and Byzantium in the fifth and sixth centuries (albeit in small numbers), just as earlier coins had previously been imported from Rome; the low denomination coins most useful in the agricultural sector, on the other hand, were not reintroduced until the seventh century (Naismith 2013). It is possible, then, that the economic shifts of the fifth and sixth centuries may not have been as destructive for the general population of peasant cultivators as the paradigm demands.

The second explanation for the destruction of Romano-British society assumes the swift and almost complete replacement of existing social and political structures by those imported from northwest Europe. It depends on three propositions: that sub-Roman and “Anglo-Saxon” communities could be distinguished on the basis of differences in their material culture; that “Anglo-Saxon” artifacts were unimpeachably Germanic; and that the military cohesion of bellicose migrants enabled them to impose themselves across all British institutions. All three have come under scrutiny in the last 20 years.

The first proposition was that the distribution of “Anglo-Saxon” artifacts was reliably diagnostic of areas of primary Germanic settlement, perhaps even enabling archaeologists to identify the parts of northwest Europe from which different groups of migrants had originated (e.g., Arnold 1988, p. 165; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, p. 76). Mapping distributions of later artifacts would enable the unraveling of the process through which they colonized the remainder of the country. That is, the assumption was made that “Anglo-Saxon” artifacts were used only by “Anglo-Saxons.” It was on this basis, for example, that Fox (1923, p. 27) concluded that Cambridgeshire south of the fens had “become Anglo-Saxon” by 450. Two strands of research converged to breach such certainties. On the one hand, typological analysis of Anglo-Saxon artifacts indicated not only that it was impossible to identify particular Germanic traditions but that their blurred distributions made it “increasingly difficult...to continue to think about the 5th and 6th centuries in eastern Britain as consisting of highly-distinctive ethnic communities” (see Brather 2005; Lucy and Reynolds 2002, p. 10). That work supported the results of research on the demography of late Roman Britain discussed above. If sub-Roman Britain was largely populated by people of Romano-British descent, of whom Germanic migrants were just a tiny proportion, then it was reasonable to suggest that “few archaeologists would argue that all, or even the great majority, of the people who lived in ‘Anglo-Saxon houses’ were in fact Germanic immigrants or the direct descendants of immigrants” (Hamerow 1997, p. 33). That conclusion is given weight by the strontium analysis of the teeth of 19 individuals buried in a cemetery at Berinsfield (Oxon.) between about AD 450 and 550. The uncompromisingly Germanic grave goods buried with them appeared to provide clear evidence of an immigrant “Anglo-Saxon” community, yet analysis of their teeth showed that 15 of the 19 were local people; of the four outsiders, three had probably moved to Oxfordshire from elsewhere in Britain, and only one was certainly a European immigrant, perhaps from southwest Germany (Hughes et al. 2014, p. 90). The Berinsfield community appears to have been largely composed of late Romano-British people who rapidly adopted day-to-day artifacts made in new forms, materials, and styles. If most people in fifth and sixth century England were of Romano-British descent, then it seems that they were indistinguishable from the migrants in terms of their material culture; no inferences could be made about the cultural origins or background of individuals or communities on the basis of the artifacts they used or were buried with, a conclusion that explains the apparent absence of late Roman Britons in archaeological material.

The second proposition explaining the dominance of “Anglo-Saxon” culture lay in the supposed unyieldingly Germanic character of their artifacts. That is, even if

most people were late British, and even if it was difficult to identify the homelands of different groups of migrants from the things that they owned, it could still be argued that obdurate “Anglo-Saxon” resistance to any form of assimilation with a more adaptable late Romano-British population led to eventual Germanic dominance as the migrants stubbornly refused to use any artifacts or adopt any customs that were not “Anglo-Saxon.” That assertion is increasingly weakened by the revelation of Roman influences not only on Anglo-Saxon material culture but also on Germanic culture more widely (see Brather 2005). An example can be found in a small group of atypical early Anglo-Saxon textiles called three-shed twills. In the past, the twills were believed to represent a form of weaving invented as an expression of emergent “Anglo-Saxon” identity. More recent research suggests that late British looms would have been ideal for producing this kind of cloth, and that these twills were almost certainly woven by women who continued to use traditional Romano-British technologies and techniques to produce indigenous forms of cloth even though everything else about them was “English” (Owen-Crocker 2007). Similarly, the flamboyant loops and curves of Anglo-Saxon interlace work on brooches, stonework, and other artifacts represent a continuous, evolving stylistic tradition of prehistoric and Romano-British ornament (Laing 2007, p. 55). Rather than being entirely and inflexibly Germanic, early medieval artifacts appear instead to have been influenced by both late Roman and northwest European traditions.

The most incontrovertible signal of the “Anglo-Saxon” supremacy is the linguistic dominance of modern English. Little is known about the languages spoken in sub-Roman Britain. They are assumed to have included British Celtic (Brittonic) and Late Spoken Latin. Although Brittonic loanwords are rare in English place names, the number of Latin loanwords in English place names is striking, and Schrijver (2014, pp. 33–34, 48) has suggested that this indicates that Late Spoken Latin continued to be spoken well into the early medieval period. Furthermore, the considerable influence of British Celtic on English metasyntax has brought the latter closer to other Romance languages than any other Germanic language (Tristram 2007). More controversial is the suggestion that “a non-Latin, non-Brittonic, but possibly West Germanic language” may already have been spoken in eastern Britain during the late Iron Age, five or more centuries before the “Anglo-Saxon” *adventus* (Nash Briggs 2011, p. 99). The growing understanding of the persistence of British Celtic and Late Spoken Latin in early medieval England and their linguistic influence on Old English reopens debates about the cultural significance of the latter’s eventual dominance.

The third proposition, that “Anglo-Saxon” migrants arrived in England in tightly knit, highly disciplined, socially focused war bands, has gained some prominence. Historians, ethnographers, and archaeologists have considered both of its elements, that the migrants brought with them a monolithic Germanic culture and that they arrived in such specialist groups. They have concluded that there is no evidence of a cohesive culture among northwest European immigrants; they were unlikely to have spoken the same language, held the same traditions, remembered the same histories, or practiced the same religions (Geary 2002, p. 37; Gerrard 2013, p. 180; Goffart 2006, p. 93). Reynolds (1984), among others, has pointed out fundamental problems in using “ethnicity” as a label to distinguish between Germanic migrants and the



late Romano-British population. The concept is, she argues, “not merely morally repugnant in so far as it has been connected with ideas of a hierarchy of races: it is intellectually defective because it implies that cultural and political communities are in reality and in essence also communities of biological descent” (Reynolds 1984, p. 225). Its misapplication to Anglo-Saxon England lies in a misunderstanding of early medieval sources based on the retrospective application of modern notions of nationality to notions of “Anglo-Saxon” identity. References by Gildas and Bede to *gens* might, she suggests, more accurately be translated as “community” of one sort or another than as “the people of a nation” (Reynolds 2005, XI, pp. 22–25). There are doubts, then, about the degree to which supposedly “Anglo-Saxon” immigrants either perceived themselves as a coherent community or were themselves perceived in that way by others.

The diversity of migrants’ origins might not matter, of course, provided that those who arrived came in small groups of predominantly young men prepared to achieve status and wealth by violence, whether individually or by banding together with others of similar origin. In an innovative paper, Burmeister (2000) proposed a model based on Ravenstein’s (1885) classic work for the character and process of “Anglo-Saxon” migration that erodes the proposition of the military success of young men intent on political domination. Generally speaking, migrants tend to be highly adaptive to the local circumstances in which they settle, regardless of whether they arrive as individuals or in small groups. Some may assimilate completely and others may retain their own traditions to a greater or lesser degree, but the customs they bring with them tend to have a weak connection with the artifacts of daily life—that is, it is difficult to identify them in typologies (Burmeister 2000, pp. 541–542). That pattern appears to be confirmed by evidence from Roman Britain and from sites in early medieval Wales and England (Eckhardt et al. 2014; Hemer et al. 2013; Hughes et al. 2014). The proposition that most migration leads to assimilation suggests that further research is needed before the model of small groups of militarily specialist, consciously strategic, north Europeans intent on supplanting the existing leaders of late British polities can be confirmed (see Brugman 2011).

Arguments for assimilation also are indicated by DNA analysis. Just over a decade ago, two separate studies suggested that the modern British population “appears predominantly indigenous and, by some analyses, no more influenced by the continental invaders than is mainland Scotland” where there was little migration from northwest Europe in the early middle ages (Capelli et al. 2003, p. 982; see also Weale et al. 2002, p. 1009). The most recent DNA study appears to confirm the generality of those results. DNA across most of England is homogenous and reveals no evidence of pockets of Germanic settlement in eastern or central England or of “Celtic” populations in the west, even in areas like Wales and Cornwall where the latter might be expected (Leslie et al. 2015, pp. 310, 313–314). Although the authors conclude that around 10–20% of modern English DNA is derived from the “Anglo-Saxon” migrations, that conclusion must currently remain controversial (Leslie et al. 2015, supplementary note). A significant problem must be the ascription of migration events to particular periods based on what the paper’s authors believe to be a known chronological framework. That is, they observe a relatively recent

migration from northwest Europe, “accept” the record of the documentary evidence that there were substantial migrations from northwest Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries, and conclude on this basis that the DNA *is* a record of that migration (Leslie et al. 2015, p. 313). This is not to argue that the DNA does not show the Saxon migrations. It is to argue that whether or not it shows those particular migrations is yet to be proven. Otherwise, to paraphrase Gerrard’s (2013, p. 18) inimitably blunt conclusion, we cannot discount the possibility that “the historical tail is very much wagging the genetic dog.” These kinds of problems have contributed to the development of the first new explanations for the origins of “Anglo-Saxon” England.

### **The Paradigm: First Tentative New Models**

At present, the two most frequently discussed new models for explaining “Anglo-Saxon” origins are, first, the replacement through Germanic military conquest of the existing late Romano-British elite, and second, the conscious adoption by political leaders of narratives that would, in modern governmental jargon, support “community cohesion” in the new “Anglo-Saxon” order. The objectives of both models, however, are not very different from those of the original paradigm—the demonstration of the complete replacement of existing later Romano-British social, economic, and political structures by an entirely different “Anglo-Saxon” culture, impervious to external influence. Neither questions that underlying premise and each is discussed in turn below, together with a third approach based on structural analysis.

### **Political Takeover by an “Anglo-Saxon” Warrior Elite**

The earlier narrative has been revised in the last 20 years by a model that describes those who arrived in England as elite groups of warriors who achieved power through both diplomatic and military means (see Harrington and Welch 2014; Scull 1993; Yorke 1995, pp. 50–51). Since those at the top of the social hierarchy were of Germanic origin, it made sense for those of lower status who wished for continued patronage or who aspired to upward mobility to adopt Germanic language, customs, and material culture (see Barnwell 2003a, p. 5; Higham 1992, p. 233; Tristram 2007). The author of a recent study of the emergent “Anglo-Saxon” kingdom of South Sussex along the southern English coast concludes: “the archaeological record for the fifth and sixth centuries suggests a core area of Saxon military control in the east, and strong political and social affinities, if not alliances, with Kent” (Semple 2013, p. 18). The western part of the region remained British but had been absorbed into the south Saxon kingdom by the sixth century, although extensive woodland to the west and north separated that east Saxon “heartland” from other, similarly successful, Saxon political groupings in Wessex and the Thames Valley (Semple 2013, p. 18). The progress of the Saxon advance was as irresistible in Deira in the north of England. There, despite strong evidence for the assimilation of Germanic migrants within existing British communities, “an ‘English’ supremacy

and identity were adopted relatively quickly at the expense of British freedoms, and in the face of British resistance” (see Passmore and Waddington 2012, p. 310; Semple 2013, p. 27). That is, the accumulation of military and political power and wealth in the hands of a “barbarian” elite enabled them successfully to assume governance of “a collapsed complex society rapidly transforming to emulate its masters” (Brugman 2011, p. 41).

The first of three problems with the elite replacement model lies in its characterization of such elites as so parochially, so indefatigably Germanic in outlook that the only way in which lesser men could retain influence, possibly even their livelihoods, was by adopting the language, customs, and material culture of their leaders. That later Romano-British political leaders still defined themselves as “Roman,” regarding themselves as continuing the classical tradition, is hardly surprising. Gildas, writing in the mid-fifth century, listed many British kings with Latin names: Ambrosius Aurelianus in the fifth century, Aircol (Agricola) Llauhir around 500, and Gildas’ own contemporary, Constantine of Dumnonia (Winterbottom 1978, pp. 28, 29, 152). In contradiction of expectations to the contrary, it appears that “Anglo-Saxon” kings also positioned themselves as the heirs of Rome (Carver 1994, p. 2; Eaton 2001, p. 1). Even such apparently typical “Anglo-Saxon” artifacts as the royal regalia excavated at Sutton Hoo seem to have had some Roman antecedents, the sixth-century kings buried there using them to “dress up as Romans—claiming a right to rule as the spiritual descendants of the Roman emperors” (see also Carver 1994, p. 2; Newman 2002, p. 505). Seventh century Anglo-Saxon-designed landscapes, too, seem to have made deliberate references to their Roman antecedents: the earliest Christian kings of Kent and Deira were buried in the *porticus* of their principal minsters, and the monumental architecture of early Anglo-Saxon palaces may have been based on the forms and layouts of Roman villas (Gerrard 2013; Yorke 2013, p. 243). Henig (2004, p. 11) has gone so far as to suggest that as late as the seventh and eighth centuries England “can still be regarded as culturally late Roman” (see also Brather 2005). If elite replacement occurred, it requires a more nuanced and detailed approach.

There are two further problems with the model. The first has already been discussed, that most early Anglo-Saxon artifacts were found in the houses of people who were probably largely, if not entirely, of later Romano-British origin. If “few would now accept that the wearing of Germanic brooches was exclusively confined to people of Germanic origin,” then mapping distributions of early Anglo-Saxon artifacts reflect unexplained changing cultural tastes but not necessarily patterns of primary Germanic settlement (see Hughes et al. 2014; Lucy and Reynolds 2002, p. 10). This implies that the oppositional identification of Germanic and late Romano-British elites is increasingly problematic.

The second problem with the elite replacement model lies in that the most intimate signal of an individual’s identity: the personal names that flaunted the (at least partial) late Romano-British ancestry of high-status men from solidly “Anglo-Saxon” royal families who included *wealh* (“Briton”) as the second element in their names. Examples include Cenwealh (king of Wessex, died 672), Æðelwealh (king of the south Saxons, died c. 685), and Merewalh (died late seventh century) who was a sub-king of the Magonsæte, and Penwealh (a Mercian prince who was an

adult by 667) (Cameron 1978–1979, p. 5; Faulk 1975, p. 35; Gray 1911; Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England). And names of late Romano-British leaders could be as confusing. As late as 897, Wulfic—the leader of king Alfred’s elite troop of horses—was, despite his Old English name, a Brittonic-speaking sub-king from Wales (Ingram 1823). These men were among the most prominent both in and far beyond their communities. Their personal names were some of the most political statements they could make, identifying them immediately as members of one or another kin and cultural grouping, as did surnames in apartheid South Africa or Northern Ireland before the Good Friday Agreement. The inclusion of the *wealh* element in Old English personal names and the adoption of an Old English name by a British king suggests either that these distinctions meant little or nothing to such men or that they celebrated the fact that they represented both communities.

And finally, more work is needed to explain how such transitions in political control were implemented in practice. The administration of Roman Britain was based on a set of nested hierarchies, broadly speaking from *vicus*, a small local center, to *pagus*, the locality, to *civitas*, a region (often reproducing a prehistoric territory), to one of the two subprovinces into which Roman Britain was divided from the early third century, and then to the province of Britain itself. Weakness or loss of leadership after 400 at any one of those levels might not necessarily lead to general anarchy unless there was widespread collapse. It is feasible that local elites at the level of *vicus* and *pagus* could, by consensus or brute strength, absorb neighboring areas where there had been some failure of leadership. Two sets of evidence for continuity in political structure instead suggest a degree of stability in many places across all levels of local administration. The first concerns polities that continued to be considered British well into the seventh century, and the second the evidence of place names. Sub-Roman kingdoms led by British kings have been documented across Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries—best known are those like Dyfed, Powys, and Gwynedd in Wales, Dumnonia in the southwest, and Rheged in the northwest; others also survived in the supposed heartlands of “Anglo-Saxon” settlement in the east, in the kingdoms of Elmet, Lindsey, and even of East Anglia itself (e.g., Carver 1994; Green 2012; Tyler 2007). British control of lower-ranking regional polities is indicated in the *-sæte* suffix of such groups as the Summersæte in Somerset, Magonsæte in Herefordshire, Chilternsæte across the southern borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and the Grantasæte who controlled the Cam Valley (Hart 1971; Hoskins and Stamp 1963, pp. 7, 24; Oosthuizen 1998; Tyler 2007). At the most local level, Gelling (1967) has argued that a number of *vici* survived for long enough across the whole of southern England, including the east, for their names to become incorporated in modern place names. Taken as a whole, such evidence suggests a degree of stability from late Roman into early Anglo-Saxon England across the administrative hierarchy, variably manifested from one region to another.

The similar story told by the agricultural landscape has already been discussed. That is, there was at least a sufficient stability in political administration to allow most farmers, generally late Romano-British cultivators and their descendants, to continue to make a living from their land. Most Romano-British fields and pastures continued to be plowed or grazed throughout the Anglo-Saxon period by people

whose ancestry lay close to the land they cultivated. Some arable land was converted to pasture, but the relative paucity of evidence for woodland regeneration suggests that little was abandoned. Instead, the continuing openness of the landscape as a whole suggests that landowners and occupiers simply extended the size of their flocks and herds at the expense of arable cultivation. If many polities at a range of scales remained under later Romano-British control in the seventh century, and if Germanic leaders cannot be identified archaeologically, then explanations of political takeover by an “Anglo-Saxon” elite need better articulation.

This is not to argue either that the political transition of the fifth century was without turmoil, that there was no change, or that there is no merit in an elite replacement model. It does suggest that sufficient questions remain to make it premature to adopt this framework as an explanatory paradigm for the emergence of “Anglo-Saxon” England. No one has better articulated the problem than Gillett (2006, p. 243), who asked, “Was early Europe a collection of rival, ideologically motivated ‘ethnic’ communities; or is early medieval public life better imagined in terms of post Roman religious and governmental practices?” That question still requires an answer.

### **Deliberate Construction of a Pragmatically Hybrid Political Identity**

Gillett (2006, p. 245) has argued that military triumph would have been insufficient for “Anglo-Saxon” success without two related political stratagems: the deliberate creation of myths “of royal origins of a consciously-structured narrative sufficient to bind entire communities, and vehicles to perpetuate those myths.” That is, the second model suggests that across England, ethnogenesis was one of the primary objectives of early medieval kings, an indispensable underpinning to their hold on their kingdoms (Geary 2002; Goffart 2006). There seems to be general agreement that such ideologies, based on Germanic traditions, emerged in the seventh century to frame political narratives that could provide social and political coherence within each kingdom for migrant groups of disparate character and origins, and widely varied in language, personal appearance, dress and adornment, customs, and traditions (Gillett 2006, p. 244).

There are difficulties with this view. While it is true that early Anglo-Saxon genealogies are at first sight flagrantly Germanic, many are startlingly British in origin. The supposed founders of the “Anglo-Saxon” kingdom of Wessex, for example, were men with British rather than Germanic names—the two sixth-century kings, Cerdic and his successor Cynric (Dumville 1985). The interpolation of Woden into the genealogy of the kings of Wessex came later, as it did in those of, for example, the kings of Kent, Lindsey, Mercia, and Bernicia (Dumville 1977, pp. 80–81). Like Anglo-Saxon genealogies and other legitimating traditions that appear to emphasize Germanic roots, the landscapes tell a more complex story, in which prehistoric and Roman traditions were referenced both by late British kings and by their “Anglo-Saxon” successors (Geary 2002, p. 105). At Yeavinger, for instance, the palace complex appears to have been deliberately sited to make reference to prehistoric monuments such that “the selective reconstruction of

important monuments was really equivalent to the composition of prestigious but fictitious genealogies” (Bradley 1987, p. 15). Royal barrow burials at places like Sutton Hoo and Taplow referred to an ancient tradition practiced across Europe from the Neolithic onward (Yorke 2013, p. 243). As Geary (2002, p. 62) has noted, “Membership in a barbarian people depended more on willingness to identify with the traditions of that people—incarnated in its political leadership, that is, royal or aristocratic families, and its ability to contribute to that tradition, essentially through military service—than on biological descent, culture, language, or geographical origin.”

The possibility that existing cultural and political traditions could be adjusted to fit changing circumstance already provides a rich seam for research (e.g., Higham 2007). The recent scholarship discussed above, however, has unexpectedly undermined arguments that “Anglo-Saxon” ethnogenesis was led by immigrant elites and was intended to support their new political structures. On the other hand, the evidence also needs careful handling and modeling to avoid the fallacy of the “god of the gaps” in which some events and processes can reliably be attributed to evidence-based factors, while the origins of those that are inexplicable are attributed to an act of god (Coulson 1958, p. 41). That is, explanations of the origins of Anglo-Saxon England will need to avoid assigning apparently inexplicable anomalies to bins vaguely labeled “assimilation” and “transition.”

### **Structural Analysis of the Shift from Romano-British to “Anglo-Saxon”**

Gerrard (2013) has recently experimented with structural analysis of the functions of a state. Approaching the increasingly martial material culture of the fifth and sixth centuries from this perspective, he has adopted the proposition that implicit, institutionalized violence on the part of the state underpins all governance, guaranteeing the defensibility of law and custom and especially of property rights. When, he argues, direct Roman administration disappeared from Britain in the early fifth century so, too, did this aspect of statehood. The possibility that anarchy might follow if laws were not enforced may have stimulated the militarization of leadership as “indigenous elites adopted some elements of martial display” (Gerrard 2013, p. 276). Implicit in his argument is the suggestion of that fifth- and sixth-century kings and other political leaders gathered that institutionalized violence to themselves, to a greater or lesser degree (depending on their status in wider, regional political hierarchies), thereby assuring the general continuity and stability of sub-Roman governance. The unanswered question is, of course, who such leaders were, and whether defining them as “Romano-British” or “Anglo-Saxon” is still a useful distinction.

The argument so far, then, has indicated some of the difficulties with the paradigmatic view of models of catastrophic economic and political change in the fifth century and of the replacement of late Romano-British culture with a monolithic “Anglo-Saxon” identity under the direction of a Germanic military elite. Evidence for the rapid adoption by local people of new forms of material culture heavily influenced by northwest Europe may instead have been part of the indigenous evolution of a post-imperial, Romano-British society. The volume of

migration from northwest Europe into that world, and its role within it are still debatable.

## A New Direction for Research? Rights Over Property and the Forms of Governance Implied by Them

My argument thus far has outlined problems with the assumptions, premises, and explanatory models that take the paradigmatic view of the transformative agency of Germanic migrants in sub-Roman Britain. I now take a different, deliberately nonparadigmatic approach. I begin with the observation that there is, across all elements of the paradigm, a top-down view of political structures: cultural change is explained in terms of the influence of elites, their leadership, and their personal dominance in polities that, over time, became increasingly hierarchical and some of which eventually evolved into the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Loveluck 2013, p. 103). In the experimental arguments that follow, I explore the utility of a bottom-up approach and seek to identify the impact of the fifth and sixth centuries on the daily lives of peasant cultivators through their property rights in agricultural land, using economic models for the structure and governance of collective husbandry.

All aspects of a stable, sustainable, agricultural economy depend on property rights over land, arable and nonarable. Agricultural and other boundaries are a material record of the history of communities and individuals—landlords or occupiers, owners or tenants—generally over long periods, since they are time consuming to construct and difficult to remove. Access to and exercise of property rights enable an individual to make a living, offer the opportunity to generate a surplus or acquire goods, and create opportunities for personal interaction with elites through tribute, gift giving, or taxation. In Earle's (2000, p. 39) elegant aphorism, "Property materializes interpersonal relationships ... and built landscapes particularize social identities." By anchoring abstractions about social relations in the everyday realities of making a living, an investigation of agricultural property rights in early Anglo-Saxon England offers the possibility of a bottom-up perspective on post-imperial cultural change.

The antiquity of such rights is suggested by the earliest English laws and customs, which take their existence for granted (see Neilson 1920). Privately held property (what historians confusingly call "several") can be discerned in the earliest Anglo-Saxon legal documents. At the beginning of the seventh century, Æthelbert of Kent assumed that privately owned homesteads and estates were conventional components in the landscape of his kingdom (Whitelock 1979, pp. 391–394). Concepts of both private and collective rights over land are assumed in the later seventh century laws of Ine of Wessex, whose legislation included conditions limiting rights of redress to damage from stray cattle both within a *ceorl's* homestead (*worthig*) and on land that was held in common (Whitelock 1979, p. 403, paragraphs 40 and 42; see also Faith et al. 2007).

The usefulness of a property-rights approach to Anglo-Saxon England depends, however, on whether there were similar property rights in Roman Britain that may or may not have been affected by the post-imperial conditions of the fifth and sixth

centuries. If property rights of any kind were an “Anglo-Saxon” innovation, then the subject would not be worth exploring. Archaeologists assume, however, the existence of prehistoric and Romano-British rights in landed property. Individual Iron Age farmsteads and their associated fields are believed each to have been in the exclusive, private occupation of single family units; areas of grassland or moorland pasture are interpreted as subject to collective exploitation (e.g., Cunliffe 2010, pp. 251–257). A variation in the form of private property, based on limited inheritance rights over such landholdings among agnatic kin, appears to have been a prehistoric tradition that persisted into the early medieval period (Bullough 1969; Charles-Edwards 1972, 1997; Faith 1997, pp. 129–130; Gosden 1985; Kelly 1997, pp. 412–414; Rio 2006, p. 37). There seems to have been little disruption of private property rights in the Roman period (e.g., Millett 1990, p. 98). The accumulation of land into large estates by individuals of higher status appears to have gathered pace in the Roman period with the establishment of villa units. Since some Anglo-Saxon estates appear to have been the direct descendants of Roman or even prehistoric landed properties, some form of hereditary private tenure may reasonably be inferred to have existed at least throughout the millennium before AD 500 (e.g., Finberg 1955; Jones 1987; for a more skeptical view see Wickham 2005, pp. 347–348).

In the next section, I explore that proposition that the continuity or discontinuity of property rights in agricultural land between the fifth and the eighth centuries may offer an index of the degree of disruption to social relations in early medieval England.

### **The Impact of Migration on Property Rights: Possible Scenarios**

The dominant discourse explored at length above emphasizes the primary role of migration in cultural change at the expense of indigenous political evolution. Here I explore possible impacts on existing property rights of inward migration through four illustrative scenarios.

The first scenario takes the case violent short- or long-term conflict between incoming migrants and existing landowners, in which the latter are sooner or later dispossessed. Their existing rights of property become null, irrelevant, and invisible in the new order. The immigrants bring their own quite different conceptions and expectations of property rights, and the new property boundaries that they lay out give physical expression to this quite different worldview. Templeton (Pemb.) provides an example. Here, an early 12th century planned settlement was laid out by Flemish colonists brought in by the Norman kings to subdue south Wales. The incomers arrived in some numbers; land for their settlement was confiscated from its existing Welsh owners and allocated to them. The planned settlements they established, like that at Templeton, frequently cut across the grain of the older underlying fieldscape that is still visible beneath them (Kissock 1997). If similar displacement of Romano-British populations by northwest European immigrants had occurred in the fifth and sixth centuries, one would expect to find prehistoric and Romano-British property boundaries underlying, on a different alignment and



ignored by, those of the immediately post-Roman centuries, but this does not generally appear to have occurred.

A second scenario is that of migrant communities who create new layouts alongside older landscapes of existing settlements, rather than becoming assimilated into them. For example, although the plan of the principal streets of Ottoman Istanbul is more or less identical to that of Byzantine Constantinople that preceded it, there were significant differences in the character of new suburbs that grew up beyond the center. The earlier suburbs tended to have been laid out on a grid plan that has “remained largely intact from the Byzantine period to the present” (Kubat 1999, pp. 38–39). In the Ottoman city, suburban growth was essentially organic, accessed by roads whose “orientations and widths frequently changed and [on which] culs-de-sac were common” (Kubat 1999 p. 34, my addition). Similar examples can be found across southern Spain, where planned layouts of the Castilian conquest lie alongside the irregular lanes of the older Moorish cities to which they were attached. The implications for expectations of the Anglo-Saxon landscape are clear: one would expect to find settlements in which the morphology of an older settlement layout, whether organic or planned, contrasted with that of a newer extension to the settlement; or even in which the morphology of “Germanic” farms and hamlets contrasted with those of the existing Romano-British population. Neither pattern has, to the best of my knowledge, been observed.

A third scenario is based on Ravenstein’s (1885) respected analysis of the conventional process of peaceful migration and assimilation reflected in Charles-Edwards’ (2003, p. 24) remark that “settlement was not the same thing as political conquest.” Ravenstein (1885) demonstrated that migration usually has three stages. The first stage is characterized by the movement of individuals—traders, missionaries, or mercenaries. It is worth remembering in this context that by the fourth century such a large proportion of the Roman army was Germanic that between 10,000 and 40,000 such men may have served in Britain, some of whom may have been buried outside late Roman towns like Cambridge (Brather 2005; Gerrard 2013, p. 184; Pattison 2008, p. 2425; Taylor 1983, p. 111). Some of these travelers return to their places of origin. Others settle permanently in their new homes, forming foci for the second stage of migration—new arrivals who tend to go to places where they have existing family or other social connections leading to clustering of first-generation migrants. The third stage is characterized by the complete, or almost complete, assimilation of second- and third-generation migrants into the wider receiving community (Burmeister 2000, p. 549). Neither first nor subsequent generations of migrants initiate significant landscape change; existing social structures and relationships remain intact, simply absorbing the newcomers (Burmeister 2000; Ravenstein 1885). The impact on property boundaries can be seen in the example of around 150,000 Jews who moved to Britain over a few decades between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many settling in the east end of London. A comparison of a map showing the intensity of Jewish settlement in the streets around Petticoat Lane in 1899 with another of the same area in 1827 shows almost no change in the underlying geography of property boundaries in the area between the two dates (Cruchley 1827; Jewish Museum of London, ref. 2002, p. 25). Assimilation appears to have been the norm, too, in Roman Britain where

mobility was also prevalent (Eckhardt et al. 2014). It also may have been common in early medieval England, given the “coexistence and interaction” with which a heterogeneous community at Wasperton (Warwicks.)—indigenous, although its material culture appeared to be almost entirely Germanic—absorbed fifth century incomers (Carver et al. 2009, pp. 135, 140). In this scenario, relatively little change in landscape layout might be expected—something borne out by the landscape evidence outlined above.

The problem with each of these scenarios is that it is easily possible to hypothesize a fourth case in which there was almost total displacement of an existing population by incomers, but where there was no change to the boundaries of individual properties even where there was nonetheless a significant change in forms of property right and governance. That is, changes in property right and/or in governance might not necessarily show up in the landscape. One such example is the forced expulsion of German speakers from East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia in 1945, and the forced settlement in their, now empty, properties by Ukrainian-speaking Poles in 1945–1946 (Lowe 2012, pp. 221–224, 230–234). The systems of governance under which such properties were held had changed several times since 1939; Silesia, for example, had been part of Germany until 1945 and was included in Poland thereafter. This example is a salutary reminder that even complete displacement of one population by another and/or replacement of one form of governance by another may not necessarily be reflected in changes to the layout of the landscape.

Useful though they are in stimulating us to think about what may actually have happened on the ground in early medieval England, each of these scenarios has an important, inherent weakness: each describes the impact of migration on *private* property rights. The origins and development of land units held under private property rights can, however, be unstable and unpredictable since they are particularly vulnerable to amalgamation or subdivision by sale or inheritance. Are there other property rights that may be more useful in charting the impact on agricultural holdings of the economic, political, and cultural changes of the early Anglo-Saxon period through archaeological evidence?

### **Rights Over Property: Definitions**

It is common to think of landed property as a defined, often physical, entity whether owned by an individual, a group of individuals, or a state. Legal historians, however, take a more nuanced approach, suggesting that we should instead think of property as bundles of rights that “help a man form those expectations which he can reasonably hold in his dealings with others. Those expectations find expression in the laws, customs, and mores of a society. An owner of property rights possesses the consent of fellowmen to allow him to act in particular ways” (Demsetz 1967, p. 347). That is, property rights are “socially recognised rights of action” (Alchian and Demsetz 1973, p. 17).

Property rights are usually exercised in one of three principal contexts: private, public, and common. Almost the only proposition that legal historians appear to agree on is that it is too difficult to be definitive about the characteristic forms. They

note that each is subject to innumerable conceptualizations of which many are vague and muddled. They are, all the same, unable to resist being drawn into making carefully worded definitions whose boundaries nonetheless remain rather fuzzy (e.g., Demsetz 1967; Hunt 1998; Östrom 1986; Stilz 2011). In brief (and acknowledging all the dangers attending brevity), property rights can roughly be divided into three categories.

*Private property rights* (what historians call “several”) are, generally speaking, vested in the exclusive, absolute control of an individual or a group behaving as an individual. Someone who owns rights of private property generally has exclusive rights of access to it and exclusive rights to control and exploit it, as well as to dispose of it as he wishes.

*Public property rights* are vested in a polity, and all members of the polity are entitled to use the property. Routes and open spaces tend to be the most commonly found examples of property subject to public rights. The polity is responsible for enforcement of rights of access and management, has rights to income from the property, and has the right to alienate any aspect of those rights to others, whether permanently or temporarily.

The central focus of this section of the paper, however, is a third form of property right—*rights of common property*. Rights of common property are vested in exclusive groups of co-owners who share equitable bundles of limited property rights to the exploitation of defined areas of (usually natural) resources like pasture, woodland, fishing waters, salt marsh, and so on (Östrom 1990). The ownership of the land (as opposed to its products) may be vested elsewhere. For example, common rights of pasture provide right-holders with a legal entitlement to exploit grazing within a specified area, even though the land over which they have pasture rights may itself be subject to other forms of property right. Common property rights are neither private nor public but share some of the characteristics of each (Hunt 1998, p. 11). They are *similar to* private property rights in that membership of the right-holding group is exclusive. They are *unlike* private property rights in that common rights in a natural resource are limited rather than absolute (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975, p. 714; Earle 2000, p. 51).

## Property Rights and Governance

There are significant structural implications inherent in all rights of property that follow from their legal status. Those implications are vividly exemplified in the right of recourse to justice by an individual if his property rights are breached—for example, if his access to his land is obstructed, if there is damage to his crops or animals, or if there is encroachment on his resources. In those cases, “an owner expects the community to prevent others from interfering with his actions, provided that these actions are not prohibited in the specifications of his rights” (Demsetz 1967, p. 347). That is, the security of an individual’s rights of property lies in his expectation that the community, or its representatives, will act to defend his rights on his behalf if they are infringed. The conclusion thus follows that property rights can exist only where there is governance, one of whose most significant purposes is

their regulation, maintenance, protection, and enforcement. It follows that if property rights can be demonstrated then governance must be implied.

Can specific forms of governance be inferred from specific forms of property right? In archaeological terms, there are substantial difficulties in extrapolating forms of political structure from private or public property rights in past nonliterate societies. Those difficulties take two forms. The first is the long-term unpredictability that a unit of private or of public property might survive intact over a long period. Such longevity is certainly possible but is not reliably predictable. Such landscapes are vulnerable to relatively rapid change through purchase and sale, amalgamation with other properties, inheritance, or subdivision between new owners. Nor may the persistence, removal, or adjustment of boundaries in the landscape necessarily be indicative of changes in governance. Such vicissitudes may simply be the result of unpredictable, idiosyncratic influences such as death, gift, marriage, sale, or a ruler's whim. The second problem in attempting to infer specific forms of governance from private or public property rights is that both forms can be found across a wide range of political structures: for example, in military, theocratic, and/or social hierarchies whose kings, warlords, religious leaders, clan chiefs, or dictators may be the sole repositories of powers of governance. In other circumstances, governance of private or public property rights may be vested in a corporate body: a town council or a parliament. The unpredictability of governance form in relation to private and public property rights, and the potential for unpredictable, dynamic landscape change inherent within them suggest that it may be difficult reliably to identify either private and public property rights, or the structures through which they were governed, by archaeological methods.

The same is not true of rights of common property, the structure and character of whose governance is generally predictable, since institutions holding and managing collective rights over property have the potential to endure in perpetuity; the longevity of the institution as a whole does not generally depend on the individual lifespans of its members. Common property rights and the institutions through which they are governed tend to be “enduring, selective, and stable in membership, conferring specific rights and duties, owning wealth as a group, administering discipline, having goals, being clearly identifiable as a group” (Hayden and Cannon 1982, p. 134). Common rights may thus, in contrast with private and public property rights, be good candidates for archaeological investigation if the landscapes on which they were exercised can be identified.

In the sections to follow, I focus on collective property rights and outline their characteristics and governance, review their historiography, evaluate current models for their interpretation in Anglo-Saxon England, suggest criteria for their identification in the landscape, and conclude with a discussion of the implications for the conventional paradigm and for new directions for research.

### **Common Property Rights: Their Characteristics and Their Governance**

Resources held under common property rights are governed within collective institutions called *common property regimes* (CPrRs) in which all common right-holders are equal members and in which they are expected to participate actively

(Östrom 1990). The objectives of CPrRs are to ensure a resource's long-term sustainability, the maximization of its output, and its equitable distribution among those with common property rights over it. Together they imply requirements for governance of access to common property rights, regulations for their day-to-day management, a graduated system of enforceable sanctions to ensure compliance, and formal mechanisms for resolving disputes. Östrom (1986) discussed CPrRs in terms of metastructures whose formulation is strikingly close to that articulated by Alchian and Demsetz (1973) cited above. She argued that the institutions through which commons are governed embody “commonly known” rules for behavior that are “used by a set of participants to order repetitive, interdependent relationships” (Östrom 1986, p. 5). Common property regimes, she suggested, establish a framework of prescriptive expectations that set generalized rather than detailed parameters to behavior. That is, they establish predictable, orderly limits within which collective rights of property may be exercised by stipulating those generalized actions or outcomes that must, may, and must not be aimed at or achieved (Östrom 1986, p. 6). Those holding rights of common are more likely to change the rules about who may be admitted to common rights than they are to change the principle that rights of common property belong to an exclusive, restricted group. The oral traditions of custom and practice through which such rights are exercised offer a flexible and pragmatic system for managing the detail of resource allocation, regulation, and management. They provide a good example over the *longue durée* of “systems of social behavior which provide a framework within which the individual can operate, safeguarding on the one hand the structure of the community, and thus its power to reproduce itself, while providing the individual with carefully circumscribed opportunities to engage in competitive display” (see Braudel 1981; Cunliffe 2010, p. 681).

Common property regimes generally have six identifying characteristics. First, common property rights are legal rights, enforceable by sanction. That legal status is of central importance since it predicates the establishment of the CPrR (Lu 2001, p. 428; Netting 1976; Östrom 1990, p. 90; Ruttan 1998). Second, access under CPrRs to a natural resource, whether small or large, is restricted to a known and exclusive group of right-holders under defined regulations. The number of common property rights is limited; that is, rights of common do not imply a free-for-all or an open resource. [Hardin's (1968) paper on “The tragedy of the commons” argued that areas under common rights would inevitably fail since exploitation for short-term individual self-interest would always outweigh collective ideals of long-term sustainability. That paper was based on a fallacy: the resources it defined were those held under public rights of property not common rights, and the paper was convincingly debunked by Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop in 1975.]

Third, metastructures underpinning a CPrR provide the broader flexibility and adaptability needed from time to time for CPrRs to adjust the detailed regulations governing their shared resource (Lu 2001, p. 428; Ruttan 1998, pp. 59, 62). Fourth, all aspects of governance, regulation, and exploitation are underpinned by principles of equity among right-holders regardless of their social status or rank (see Trawick 2001, p. 13). That principle of equity finds practical expression in the expectation that all right-holders will participate in decision making, that there will be regular

meetings of the group, and that decision making will be based on consensus across the group as a whole. The creation, amendment, or abolition of all regulations within the CPRR thus requires the assent of all right-holders (Östrom 1990, p. 38). The fifth characteristic is the embedding of a CPRR's general principles for access, governance, and regulation of a common resource in oral traditions of customs and practice, enabling groups of right-holders to avoid the regular, lengthy discussions required if the general principles needed to be agreed by consensus each year. And finally, the exploitation of CPRRs is governed by the principle of the “moral economy” that is made up of two elements: that common resources should be equitably distributed between right-holders, and once the subsistence needs of his household have been met, no right-holder should profit from a common right at the expense of other right-holders (Thompson 1971). By the time Östrom's book had been published in 1990, Reynolds (1984) had already provided well-documented historical examples of successful medieval CPRRs: the customary generality of English law codes, the protean character of custom, the presumption of collective consultation, decision making by consensus, and shared expectations of the character of customary law.

Although governance through CPRRs can reliably be inferred from the demonstration of common property rights, there is no evidence to suggest that the existence of CPRRs can necessarily be correlated with social systems based on social equity or lack of conflict (e.g., Östrom 1986, 1990; Reynolds 1984). Furthermore, Reynolds (1984) and others (e.g., Blanton and Fargher 2008; Fargher and Blanton 2007; Feinman et al. 2000) have soundly contradicted assumptions that collective political structures were a relatively unsophisticated evolutionary precursor of “developed” hierarchical polities and that any governance structure is exclusively hierarchical. Nor should collective governance be regarded as oppositional to hierarchical governance. Reynolds (1984, p. 1) demonstrated that sophisticated, equitable “horizontal” relationships between members of significant different status in early medieval CPRRs coexisted with, and were as important as, “vertical” connections between kings, their elites, and free peasants. Collective activity should rather be considered a “permanent, lawful, and necessary part of all government at every level” in Anglo-Saxon England (Reynolds 1984, p. 1).

Returning to the question of the impact of migration on existing property rights, if continuity in the structures of governance over collective rights of property from Romano-British into early medieval England could be demonstrated, then it seems most likely to indicate assimilation of migrants into existing structures of property ownership. A first alternative case of the complete replacement in a short period of time of all indigenous members in an existing CPRR by immigrants is a particularly complicated explanation; its success depends on the efficient transmission of all existing institutional knowledge, including such key elements as territorial boundaries and the complex specificities of what was and what was not allowed within the CPRR. A second alternative case of the end of all existing CPRRs and the establishment of new ones is a similarly complicated explanation. It depends on complete loss of all property rights including the cessation of all common rights, loss of all memory of CPRRs, and their re-emergence; that seems particularly unlikely where the same natural resource was exploited under common rights across

the first millennium AD. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it makes sense to adopt the more straightforward interpretation—that the rights of common property were characterized by continuity from the Roman into the early medieval period and that this indicates the assimilation of migrants into existing social and political frameworks. If that were the case, explanations of cultural change that depend on migration from northwest Europe as *the* triggering factor in the emergence of new forms of political governance that led to the emergence of the early “Anglo-Saxon” kingdoms between the fifth and seventh centuries could no longer be regarded as tenable.

### **Historiographical Review of Common Rights and Their Implications for the Conventional Paradigm**

By and large, American archaeologists have led research specifically focused on property rights. Early work by Earle (2000) on the emergence of private property rights in chiefdoms, for instance, was followed in Europe by Blair Gibson (2007). The turning point for archaeological work on common property rights, however, came with the publication of an edited volume by Hunt and Gilman in 1998. This work was followed by innovative subsequent research on collective action theory—undertaken most frequently in Mesoamerican contexts—especially on the role of public goods in encouraging cooperation in early societies, on comparative anthropologies of cooperation and competition as influences on social change, and on sociohistorical analyses of collective action crystallized around the agency of particular issues such as race, gender, and class (e.g., Carballo 2013; Carballo et al. 2014; Fargher 2009, 2010; Fargher et al. 2011).

Two archaeologists have led work on the identification of collective property rights in British archaeological contexts. Fleming’s (1998) reconstruction of commons on Swaledale is made up of equal parts archaeological and historical material, but his discussion of the details of their governance depends solely on documentary evidence. On the other hand, his (2008) work on Bronze Age Dartmoor (Devon) asked explicit questions about property rights. In a detailed study of the landscape, he established that systems of fields and the houses that were dispersed among them were probably occupied by extended households in small aggregated communities; it is possible that each individual farm was privately held, but it was clear that much cultivation was undertaken either collectively or, at least, cooperatively (Fleming 2008, pp. 84–90). Each small community seems have had access to areas of open, shared pasture, and other nonarable resources (Fleming 2008, p. 133). This was a sophisticated conclusion, since it modeled a society in which collective governance of shared resources operated alongside private property rights governed through conventional social and political hierarchies (Fleming 2008, p. 156). Herring (2008, p. 86) has recently explored similar ideas in his work on Bronze Age commons; his conclusion that pastures “were probably subject to [collective] controls on livestock numbers and against trespassers” once more implied the presence of CPRs.

British archaeologists have for many years, however, generally been content to assume the existence of prehistoric and Romano-British common property rights

(discussed below). It is commonplace to invoke collective grazing by prehistoric and Romano-British communities to explain “empty zones”: areas of long-standing nonarable usage, devoid of almost any archaeological evidence, and usually separated by earthwork boundaries from contemporary fields and settlements. Fleming (1971, pp. 156–161) described Neolithic and Bronze Age “summer grazing lands [on Dartmoor] for cattle and sheep from different territories” (see Fleming 2008, p. 91); Parker-Pearson (2009, p. 120) discussed the “traditional grazing grounds” of communities who brought their flocks and herds across substantial distances to the chalk downs of Bronze Age Wessex. McOmish et al. (2002, p. 64) have suggested that the purpose of Old Ditch West—a late Bronze or early Iron Age earthwork on Salisbury Plain (Wilts.)—may have been to differentiate between individually owned property and “land to the north which was a shared resource, possibly common land.” Crawford (1928, p. 154) designated areas without archaeological remains as “prehistoric grazing grounds” like those beyond an Iron Age settlement and its fields at Woolbury Fields (Hants.). Prehistoric dykes on the Yorkshire Wolds separate “empty” areas identified as pasture at places like Wetwang Slack and Rudston from extensive Iron Age fields and farms on the slopes below (Stoertz 1997, pp. 69–82). Romano-British communities may similarly have shared common grazing at Charlton Down (Wilts.) (McOmish et al. 2002, pp. 102–103). Such “empty zones” have been recognized across England from uplands like Exmoor and the Cheviots; the chalk downs of southern England; on marsh, fen, and floodplain from Somerset Levels and the East Anglian fens to the major English rivers; and on clay plateaux from the Cotswolds (Northamptonshire, Suffolk) to the Yorkshire Wolds (see Oosthuizen 2013b, pp. 19–48 for detailed examples).

Despite the archaeological work discussed above, there is some divergence in opinion over whether there was any persistence of prehistoric common (as opposed to private) property rights into Roman Britain. Millett (1990, pp. 96–97, 197–199, 201) has argued that collective rights over defined units of land might already have become more restricted before the Roman invasion of the mid-first century AD. Gerrard (2013, p. 143) has recently taken that argument further, suggesting that all rights of collective property were eliminated in Britain in AD 43 by the imposition of Roman law that required a complete reallocation of rural property rights. The Roman administration, he argues, treated all land as private property that could be bought and sold (Gerrard 2013, p. 143). Those opinions stand in fairly direct contradiction to conventional scholarly opinion (see Davies 1978, pp. 7–20; Reynolds 1984, p. 326). Stevens (1966, p. 108) suggested that “it was Roman practice not to force its own laws on its subjects,” a view with which Winkler (1992, p. 111, note 6, my addition) has concurred, suggesting that “the legitimacy of local [prehistoric] custom” including that governing rights in property “was recognised in Roman imperial *constitutiones*.” Most scholars agree that imperial legal traditions in Roman provinces provided a normative, flexible structure within which existing forms of rights over land could be managed and incrementally adapted—a question of doing things in traditionally accepted, expected ways rather than under a formal set of new rules. That is, property rights in Roman Britain continued to be governed under long-standing prehistoric customary traditions influenced by Roman law,



itself “more adaptable and less absolute than was traditionally thought” (Rio 2006, p. 37). If this were indeed the case, it would be reasonable to expect continuity under Roman administration of those prehistoric collective rights over natural resources that archaeologists tend to take for granted and of the CPRs that governed them (see Oosthuizen 2011b).

Other archaeologists have focused instead on *symptoms* of governance but have not taken the next step of asking the wider question about what they imply for the governance structures and rights of property of which they are an indication, despite Reynolds’ (1984, p. 259) prescient conclusion that collective governance over natural resources was so central to early medieval society that “land and people were assumed to be one.” They have in particular directed research on early medieval assembly sites of different kinds—political, military and religious—but without exploring the structural implications of such sites for governance in the period. Barnwell (2003b, p. 3), for instance, examined collective assemblies that characteristically met in open public places, made decisions by consensus, and collectively consulted, legislated, and adjudicated “for the common good.” Although Semple (2004, p. 137) has questioned if “assembly was part of the process of governance,” suggesting that assemblies were instead experimental forms of early medieval governance, that view is unlikely to be accepted by historians. Keynes (2013, p. 30) speaks for most in taking the view that open-air assemblies under the leadership of the king were commonplace long before they were first recorded in the late sixth century (see also Roach 2013). Similar assemblies were recorded in early medieval Wales, where the “elders of the country” sat on land disputes under the chairmanship of the king, and also have been identified at Yeavering (Northumberland) and in Kent in the early seventh century (Charles-Edwards 2004, p. 99; Williams 2013, p. 5). By concentrating on individual aspects of governance without broadening their view to include governance itself, archaeologists have missed the opportunity to ask the kinds of questions familiar to legal historians: “What is the structure of property rights” in Anglo-Saxon England? “What consequences for social interaction flow from a particular structure of property rights?” (Alchian and Demsetz 1973, p. 17). And what forms of governance are implied by different forms of property rights?

### **The Paradigm, Its Problems, and Model for the Origins of Early Medieval Common Rights**

Historians interested in wider issues of collective governance, generally unaware of archaeological “empty zones,” have concluded that CPRs were introduced during the period of the “Anglo-Saxon” migrations in the fifth and sixth centuries. Neilson (1920, p. xlix), the first modern scholar to focus on rights of common, observed that, although rights of intercommon on pasture were obviously influenced by local and regional geography, they “also corresponded, in some cases at least, with ancient administrative arrangements” that had existed “time out of mind,” and whose “origin ... goes back to the early days of settlement.” Homans (1953, p. 39) agreed: “the customs of countrymen ... are primary and early, probably as old as the Anglo-Saxon invasions,” as did Hoskins and Stamp (1963, p. 6) who, in one of the few

studies of common lands, also concluded that such rights were “of vast antiquity.” Miller (1969, p. 13), on the basis of his study of the medieval abbey and bishopric of Ely, took a similar position that the Isle “retained a good deal of coherence as a social unit—partly due, perhaps, to the complex of intercommoning rights shared by its inhabitants ... as a social unit it has characteristics which may indicate considerable antiquity.” Their consensus is that rights of common probably had an “Anglo-Saxon” origin.

That conclusion led in turn to useful research proposing models for the origins of early medieval governance and political organization. Neilson (1920, p. li) was the first to suggest that early “Anglo-Saxon” regional identity was based on collective rights and practices relating to nonarable resources rather than on lordship or kingship. Her argument was based on instances where all freemen were entitled to rights of common in the natural resources within a defined territory, as, for example, all seventh-century Kentish freemen had rights of common in the Weald. Davies and Vierck (1974, p. 224) took the same view more than half a century later, suggesting that “it is groups and associations of people that form the raw material of early political development, not the carving up of territory.” That view continues to underpin the academic consensus (e.g., Davies 1978, p. 14; Faith 1997, pp. 2, 147; Lewis et al. 1997, p. 184). Fowler (2002, p. 224, my addition) concluded that for “much of the [first millennium AD] it seems that pasture was defined as much by the right to feed animals over certain areas of land as by definitions of land itself,” and as recently as Roberts (2008) asserted (p. 166, my addition) that “at first [commons] were shared by the whole territory of the shire, but were gradually appropriated to individual parishes or townships. The question is not of the presence of manors or estates in early Anglo-Saxon times, but of the *emergence* of rights in land and rights over land” (see also Hamerow 2002, p. 129). As property rights and structures for their governance were established over an empty landscape, so—the paradigm suggests—the polities and territories were formed that gradually coalesced into the hierarchical structures of the middle Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

### Problems with the Paradigmatic View

The paradigmatic view of an “Anglo-Saxon” origin for collective governance of common property rights is subject to three problems. The first is that if—as archaeologists assume—collective governance was practiced in prehistoric and Roman Britain, then it is unlikely to have been an “Anglo-Saxon” innovation. The persistence of CPRs as a form of collective governance across long periods of time indicates that, when archaeologists concluded that prehistoric and Roman grazing had been under collective governance, it was a real possibility not only that their inferences may have been accurate but also that there may have been institutional continuity of at least some of those CPRs into the Anglo-Saxon period. That proposition has already been identified by Winkler (1992, p. 112, note 13) who suggested that the paucity of identifiably Roman elements in early medieval English laws, especially those of Wales and Ireland, means that “many of [the latter] may have antedated the Roman conquest of Britain and persisted in Roman Britain as local customs.” If that possibility were to be admitted, then it follows that it must be

unlikely that “Anglo-Saxon” migrants replaced all aspects of Romano-British social relations in the organization of agricultural production. That is, there may instead be room for two linked hypotheses that contradict the conventional paradigm. First, many early medieval CPrRs, including their conceptualizations of rights of common property, originated not in the Anglo-Saxon but in the prehistoric period. Second, there was active continuity in the collective governance through CPrRs of an unknown number of natural resources from prehistoric into Anglo-Saxon England.

The second problem is that historians based their conclusions on the proposition that the earliest documentary evidence of rights to common pasture, in the laws of King Ine of Wessex, also records the introduction of those rights, a fallacy dealt with above (Whitelock 1979, pp. 403–404). It is possible that Ine had developed a new law code, but it is just as possible that the law simply reiterated an existing normative position as successive law codes generally do. The evidence suggests the latter position. To take just two of many examples, the Weald was intercommoned under ancient common rights by early medieval freemen from both Kent and Sussex, despite the emergence of those separate kingdoms by the end of the sixth century (Neilson 1928, pp. 3–7, 34); Jones (1987, pp. 29–30) has suggested that the history of rights of common grazing belonging to the early medieval region of Burghshire (Yorks.) originated not in the Roman period but perhaps in the Iron Age. That is, in each case, rights of common long predated the formulation of Ine’s laws.

A third problem is that two further aspects of such territorial rights support the alternative proposition that they were already very old by AD 600. The first is the universality across Britain with which they are understood and applied. If CPrRs were introduced by “Anglo-Saxon” migrants, they are not restricted to those regions in which they are supposed to have settled, nor did they find a unified country in which such rights may already have emerged in the early decades after AD 400. The subdivision of the island among many early polities long predated the Roman invasions of AD 43; that multiplicity could be found in prehistoric Britain, in the subprovincial units of the Roman period, in the fragmented political conditions of the sub-Roman period, and in the earliest Anglo-Saxon polities. The second aspect of early common property rights that makes it difficult to view them as an “Anglo-Saxon” introduction is the similar universality with which the criterion for access to common land was applied across the British Isles: the entitlement of all freemen from Wales to Northumbria and Kent to rights of common property as a corollary of their rights to an arable holding sufficient to support their extended households (Kelly 1997, p. 407; also Gosden 1985; Oosthuizen 2011b, 2013b, pp. 160–162). In early medieval Wales, every freeman (*bonheddig*) had a right of common grazing on the pastures of his clan, just as, in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland (and, perhaps, long before) common land was held by the kin group (*túath*) such that incursions on it by strangers were offenses against the group as a whole, and every freeman within the kin group had a right to share in its exploitation (Davies 1982, p. 63; Jones 1981, pp. 202, 207; Kelly 1997, pp. 406–407, 447, 656; Trench 1975, p. 26). This was a social structure in which participation in CPrRs over nonarable resources was a potent symbol not only of membership of a polity but also of each right-holder’s free status and its

concomitant rights and responsibilities. That is, both within areas settled by early medieval migrants and in areas where they never penetrated, both individually held arable holdings and collective property rights in nonarable resources were not only an essential part of each household's economy but also signaled the status and political identity of those who held them. The contradictions between the evidence and the position that common rights were an "Anglo-Saxon" innovation suggest that it is at least possible that CPRs were already a traditional form of governance in early medieval England, inherited from a prehistoric and Romano-British past.

### **"Core" and "Periphery" as a Model for Explaining the Origins of Common Property Rights**

Both archaeologists and historians have, however, tended to explain the origins of "Anglo-Saxon" governance rather loosely in terms of ill-defined expanding control across the early medieval period from a "core" area containing settlement and arable fields over a surrounding uncultivated and unclaimed "periphery" (e.g., Davies and Vierck 1974, p. 224; Faith 1997, p. 133; Finberg 1972, pp. 403ff; Ford 1987; Harrington and Welch 2014, p. 5; Hooke 1998, p. 144; Hoskins and Stamp 1963, p. 7; Lewis et al. 1997, p. 184; Neilson 1920, p. xl, 1928, p. 4; Rackham 2004, p. 45). The cores were areas over which there was strong political control and clear rights of private property; they formed the nuclei of the larger and smaller fifth- and sixth-century polities that coalesced or agglomerated in the seventh century into one or another of the early "Anglo-Saxon" kingdoms. Beyond were peripheral zones—mostly nonarable in character—where property rights were weak or nonexistent. In the process of political development between the fifth and seventh centuries, property rights over the periphery became increasingly clearly defined, whether through peaceful expansion or through conflict, until eventually territorial boundaries were established across them. In central England, for example, "a common characteristic of these minor folk regions seems to have been the presence of a 'heartland' area which was relatively well-developed at an early period and a complementary region which was often less developed but valued as a region of hunting and pastoral activity and which may initially have served as a region of summer pasture" (Hooke 1992, p. 48). In other places, "people in neighbouring settlements came to have arrangements over grazing rights and commoning which can only have worked through the recognition of the rights of certain groups to certain places. They also retained long-distance transhumance routes to distant woodland and pasture which are a strikingly enduring feature of early land units" (Faith 1997, p. 133). As territories expanded in the sixth and seventh centuries, resource entitlement in peripheral zones became more restricted. Previously unlimited grazing in wood pastures, for example, became confined to members of territorial units the size of modern counties, perhaps connected through kinship or membership of clans. From the seventh to the 12th centuries AD, as these areas themselves fragmented through subdivision, access to common pastures became increasingly limited. In some places, peasants retained rights to graze their beasts on commons or intercommons distant or administratively detached from their own vills, but more usually, as commons themselves were subdivided between emerging

manors and communities, rights over them were gradually restricted to free members of the community within the township or parish within which the pasture now lay (see Corcos 2002, p. 127; Ford 1987, p. 148; Hooke 1981, p. 48; Jones and Page 2006, pp. 63, 141; Lewis et al. 1997, p. 59; Maitland 1897, pp. 143, 202, 352–355; Rackham 2004, p. 45).

A central problem with the model is its lack of clarity in definitions of the forms of property right envisaged in relation to the periphery. Those rights might hypothetically take two forms. First, it might be hypothesized that there were no rights of property over the peripheral zones. That is, there were null or public property rights in pastoral and other nonarable resources of these areas. Kin and other groups competed for dominance over them from their distant settlement cores until the periphery had been absorbed by the territory of one or another, or had been divided between a number of them. The second possibility is that those with holdings in core settlements had rights of common in peripheral zones but such rights were inferior in defensibility to the rights of private property that characterized the areas of core settlement.

In the first case, how might peripheral zones originate over which there were no rights of property, over which there could be a territorial free-for-all? The model is implicitly premised on the relative emptiness of large tracts of the early Anglo-Saxon landscape. That is, it assumes that there was so much land available per capita that there was as yet no requirement for any form of resource allocation between groups or individuals. In essence, this is a demographic argument, that there were insufficient people to exploit the pastoral or arable possibilities of the landscape. In fact, as discussed above, the English landscape had been continuously exploited since prehistory by a population large enough to occupy the landscape fully and whose early Anglo-Saxon flocks of sheep and herds of cattle were of a sufficient scale to prevent woodland regeneration as arable cultivation gave way to pastoral husbandry between the fifth and seventh centuries. This suggests that there can have been few peripheral areas in early medieval England where there were no, or so few, people that property rights were nonexistent and common rights could “gradually emerge.”

The alternative proposition defines the periphery in terms of common rights, but where such rights were “weak” in their defensibility compared with private property rights in the core. That hypothesis is problematic, too, because common rights in a resource cannot exist without defined physical boundaries to that resource or without legal, enforceable rights of exploitation in it, owned by an exclusive, defined group who govern their rights through a CPR. Common property rights are not diffuse or vague; they are specific rights defensible in law, and their governance involves the day-to-day management of resources to ensure their exclusivity to right-holders, right-holders’ rights of access to them, equity of exploitation between commoners, and the long-term sustainability of the resource. In other words, if peripheral areas were subject to common rights, they could not have been areas over which property rights were ill defined, fluid, and competitive.

Finally, the core/periphery model assumes that the value of a resource to a community decreases with distance from a supposed settlement core. There are two difficulties with this proposition. The first problem is that it is difficult to think of

any group that would not defend its legal rights to its territory however distant those parts might be from centers of settlement or power. Indeed, the division of “empty zones” between territories from the Neolithic period onward together with evidence for transhumance suggests the corollary that, within each territory, shared rights of access to grazing were sufficiently valued from an early period to require legal definition (Oosthuizen 2011b). The second objection is that pastoral resources were at least as important as arable cultivation in the early Anglo-Saxon agricultural economy. Woods, wood pasture, marshes, and rough grazing were likely to lie at a distance from settlement that is unlikely to have diminished their value to those with legal rights to their exploitation for whom they represented an important aspect of their subsistence.

### Common Property Regimes as a Model for Explaining Early Medieval England

If collective property rights in the early medieval landscape can be located in the wider context of the *longue durée* of the preceding two to four millennia, it may be easier to distinguish between what was inherited and what was new between the mid-seventh and late ninth centuries in the collective management of arable and nonarable resources (Braudel 1981). The diagnostic characteristics of CPRs can be found in archaeological landscapes (for detailed examples see Oosthuizen 2013a). The boundaries of prehistoric and Roman pastures are often marked by definitive earthworks, many that continued to be used in the Anglo-Saxon period (Hamerow 2002, p. 124). The areas within them, apparently grazed (since there is no evidence of arable cultivation), were not subdivided into smaller units that might be apportioned between households, suggesting that the flocks and herds were collectively managed on them. (Hefting—the exploitation of cattle and sheep’s natural territorial instincts to confine them to one or another section of open pasture—is nonetheless a form of grazing exploited under rights of common.) That implies that graziers needed collectively to manage the outer boundaries of the pasture, govern rights of access, regulate seasonal access to the area to ensure its equitable exploitation, manage disputes, and so on. Substantial prehistoric gatherings are well evidenced archaeologically, timed to coincide with the arrival and/or departure of the animals when disputes about rights to grazing and ownership of stock were most likely to occur (see Darvill 1996, pp. 30–31; Jones 2007; Lock 2007; Pryor 2002, p. 20). In the Neolithic they were frequently associated with earthworks like the causewayed camps at Hambledon Hill (Dorset), Walbury (Berks.), Norbury (Glos.), and Ivinghoe Beacon (Herts.), whose ditches and other features were regularly refurbished (Cunliffe 2010, pp. 379–382; Mercer 2009; Payne et al. 2006, p. 156; Fig. 4). In the Iron Age, they were associated with massive middens, the remains of vast feasts, culled from “an intensity of sheep farming rivaling, perhaps, even that of the post-medieval period” and which furnished the menu (McOmish et al. 2002, pp. 60, 73; see also Sharples 2010, pp. 52, 308). Seasonal meetings on pasture of large groups of people continued to be held at such places in the Anglo-Saxon and, sometimes, even the medieval centuries (Hamerow 2002, p. 124; Oosthuizen 2011b). Repeated recutting of ditches and



**Fig. 4** Bronze and Iron Age defenses at Hambleton Hill, Dorset, encircle the remains of Neolithic causewayed enclosures that overlooked substantial pastures below. In autumn, when transhumant flocks and herds were rounded up for the return journey, seasonal gatherings were held within the enclosures whose earthworks were periodically refurbished, even where they had become so degraded that they would barely have been visible to the naked eye and could only have been identified by oral tradition (Mercer 2009; reproduced with permission, Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography, CFN66, 1978)

consistent patterns of feasting behavior suggest that such seasonal meetings took places within long-lived governance structures based on long-lasting custom and practice preserved in oral tradition. Together, these characteristics come close to satisfying the criteria for the existence of CPrRs.

No one would suggest that every Anglo-Saxon or medieval pasture or common had been managed continuously under a CPrR for the previous two millennia. Some prehistoric areas of grazing were doubtless lost to other forms of agricultural exploitation over time, the regeneration of woodland, or rights of severalty; in other places, new commons may have developed. Although the detail of a *particular* right of common or rights governing a *specific* pasture might change, CPrRs nonetheless presented generalized and flexible structures for the collective governance of nonarable resources in a nonliterate society. It is significant in this context that the landscape evidence discussed above largely demonstrates long-term continuities in the layout of fields and pastures from the fourth to the ninth centuries. Archaeological evidence (discussed above) is beginning to suggest assimilation of migrants in sub-Roman Britain rather than conquest. Together they may indicate long-term continuities in landholdings and governance from the fourth century onward.

If CPrRs were an ancient and universal form of governance in early medieval England, if eligibility for participation in CPrRs depended on satisfying criteria

based on kinship and status, if attendance and participation in CPrRs was an integral aspect of early medieval identity, and if the earliest “Anglo-Saxon” polities were structured around territorial rights vested in kin, then CPrRs may have provided a stable, traditional model for structuring the governance of emergent polities in the fifth and sixth centuries into which migrants were assimilated. The political history of sub-Roman Britain suggests that the vertical structures of political hierarchies were consistently present in most places through most of the four centuries following the withdrawal of Roman administration. Collective governance, with its emphasis on horizontal decision making, was a complement, not a threat, to the growing power base of the kingdom builders. It offered a traditional form of collective governance, based on assemblies that emphasized participation and consensus, in which all free landholders had the opportunity to connect with political leaders and their elites through reciprocal gift giving, renders in kind and in labor, and in which their own status was recognized and affirmed. Harnessing the collective structures of the CPrR to political expression in the assemblies of emergent states may have given the political leaders of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries another kind of opportunity to “dress up as Romans” whether or not the tradition was in fact “Roman” (Newman 2002, p. 505).

My argument does not suggest that there was stasis either in the agricultural landscape or in social, political, and economic structures of early Anglo-Saxon England; that is self-evidently not the case. My aim is to point out difficulties inherent in the prevailing paradigm that the changes of the period were principally the result either of immigration by Germanic military elites or of the development of Germanic culture led by their descendants, with little or no contribution from the indigenous population or its traditions.

Since the prevailing discourse does not allow for any substantial continuity or influence from late Romano-British on early medieval culture, new research is only just beginning to discuss the validity of perceived problems in identifying existing early medieval inhabitants of Britain in the archaeological record, of earlier dismissal of the possibility of assimilation, of the identity of early medieval leaders if there are no obvious cultural markers for them, or how to account for rapid changes in material culture if migration was not a factor. In short, a new explanatory framework is required that will reopen not only questions about the process of migration and assimilation but also make us think more widely about the roles of tradition and innovation in effecting cultural change in a post-imperial society in which extrinsic factors such as climate change, epidemic, and migration are unlikely to have been new. The development of more sophisticated explanations for the intertwined contributions of tradition and transformation, of which agricultural property rights is simply an example, presents an enticing prospect.

## Conclusion

Three interlinked arguments have been explored here through the study of the early Anglo-Saxon agricultural landscape. They adopt the well-known position that understanding the impact of cultural change on individuals, examined here through



their property rights over fields and pastures, may illuminate both the process and extent of wider political, social, and economic transformations. They suggest that it may be difficult to model how processes unfolded or institutions evolved, to consider the interplay and relative influence of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, unless there is greater certainty both about which institutions and ideas that were inherited from the past, which were genuinely new, and which represented a combination of each.

For these reasons, I argue, there needs to be continuous, precise, and critical examination of the assumptions, premises, models, and frameworks that make up explanatory paradigms, especially of those whose long-term acceptance has made them almost unchallengeable. Whether earlier arguments are still useful in their entirety, in part, or not at all, scholarship could not have progressed without them. New explanations are as provisional and limited in their own utility. Transparency in the structure of orthodox arguments and conclusions allows new evidence to be examined, enabling us “to clear our mind of preconceptions, to work forwards from the beginning, and to examine the admittedly inadequate evidence as it comes” (Finberg 1972, p. 401).

**Acknowledgments** I am grateful to Dr. Gary Feinman, Dr. Sarah Semple, and the anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful to Dr. Sam Newton for the reference to work by Dr. Nash Briggs, and to Mr. Christopher Taylor and Dr. Caitlin Green for discussing some of the ideas expressed here with me. The paper has been improved by their contributions, but mistakes, misconceptions, and infelicities remain my own.

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