Chapter 1

Power and Place in Europe in the Early Middle Ages

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Introduction

This book appears at an interesting time in the study of past societies. Concepts of empire, power relations and the nature of polity formations have been fundamentally challenged in recent years in ways that have led to a deep re-thinking of long-standing paradigms relating to social complexity in the social sciences.[1] That a large-scale entity (in this case the Roman Empire) fragmented into a multitude of small-scale territories (early medieval tribal regions and then kingdoms) remains the dominant paradigm, and new thinking is required to re-evaluate the processes at play across the 1st millennium AD. Regionalism and local scales of identity *within* the Roman Empire are now propounded, which allows for much greater continuity in local settings and which perhaps provides the basis for the territories and regions of early medieval Europe. In other words, the changes of organisational and administrative scale, long framed as a catastrophic collapse, must now be tempered by a more nuanced approach to local and regional societies where they are assessed on their own terms

[1] A. Covey, 'Empires and Imperialism', in A. Gardner, M. Lake and U. Sommer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeological Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-26.

rather than by comparison to the mega-scale concept of 'empire': scale of analysis is key to understanding transformation at all levels and in all contexts.[2]

It is also crucial to place the societal changes of the 4th and 5th centuries – and indeed the whole of the 1st millennium – in the context of a longer-term trajectory – to include at least the 3rd-century 'crisis' in the Empire and the ongoing difficulties which its expanse experienced in the 3rd century up to the emergence of a fully urbanised 12th-century Europe. Early medievalists tend often to follow convention and focus only upon the late 4th-century situation before considering what followed. A longer term view, however, allows a more nuanced perspective, one that places varying emphasis on different contexts of continuity and change and one which places certain phenomena – for example the rise of the villa – as exceptional 'blips' in the settlement hierarchy (this is particularly marked in Britain) rather than as the benchmark by which to chart the perceived slide of *Romanitas* into the *grubenhauser* of early medieval settlements.[3]

Since these critiques of ideas of 'empire', a further realisation prompted by archaeological discoveries has occurred in the social sciences, which requires a fundamental reassessment of the trajectory of complexity in human societies. While an evolutionary, linear track view has been dominant for so long, the discovery of sites such as the world's oldest cult-complex at Gobekli Teppe in Anatolia, which dates to before the emergence of farming,[4]

[2] See J. Escalona, 'The Early Middle Ages: A Scale-Based Approach', in J. Escalona and A. Reynolds (eds), *Scale and Scale Change in the Early Middle Ages: Exploring Landscape, Local Society and the World Beyond* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2010), pp. 9-32.

[3] An important new study of rural settlement in Roman Britain powerfully shows how the 'villa' is only one component of wide array of settlement types: A. Smith, M. Allen, T. Brindle and M. Fulford, *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* (London, Roman Society, 2016).

[4] O. Dietrich, M. Heun, J. Notroff and K. Schmidt, 'The role of cult and feasting in the emergence of Neolithic communities. New evidence from Gobekli Tepe, south-eastern Turkey', *Antiquity*, 86 (2012), 674-95.

and the so-called 'mega-sites' of the Eurasian Steppe, show that complex and large-scale schema arrived early in the human journey, at the Mesolithic/Neolithic interface and were not the result of step-by-step 'progress'.[5] These important shifts in knowledge and thinking are entirely relevant to the present volume as they provide a new framework for thinking about social complexity and the political organisation of power in the 1st millennium AD.

Each generation forms its own view of what came before, usually in ways that are deeply influenced by the social and political conditions of the day. Scholars of the 19th century to the later 20th century – in other words those who mapped out the intellectual framework which set the agenda for the contemporary study of the past – worked in a climate where the nation state formed the key point of reference and where the job of historians was to chart the perceived success of human civilisation in the creation of nations and in certain cases also the empires centred upon them.[6] These constructs still find powerful resonances in contemporary Europe, especially where popular notions of the cultural constitution of medieval, and indeed earlier, Europe find applications in current ideas of nationalism

[5] J. Chapman, M. Videiko, B. Gaydarska, N. Burdo, D. Hale, R. Villis, N. Swann, N. Thomas, P. Edwards, A. Blair, A. Hayes, M. Nebbia and V. Rud, 'The planning of the earliest European proto-towns: a new geophysical plan of the Trypillia mega-site of Nebelivka, Kirovograd Domain, Ukraine, Antiquity Project Pages: http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/chapman339/ accessed 11/09/2017.

[6] For a discussion of the 'purpose' of the study of human history over time, see D. Lord Smail, *On Deep History and The Brain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2008), especially Chapters 1, 2 and 3. C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

promoted in the political discourse of the far right[7] and in the context of the construction of deep-time identity by recently or newly emerging political entities.[8]

While the constitution of contemporary academic disciplines – archaeology, history, philology and so on – is also a largely 19th-century and later construct, Chris Wickham usefully reminds us that many of the themes and topics still pursued in historical disciplines are effectively those set out by those mid-19th to mid-20th century historians.[9]

Post-cold-war political instability in the European area has led to a questioning of notions of identity, while the mass movement (again) of populations across that space in the late 20th and early 21st centuries coincides with a revisionist movement in the humanities and social sciences which places behaviours such as disorder and migration centrally in debates about the nature of humanity, whereas previous scholarship – particularly in archaeology – had sought to dispel the possibility of migration as an agent of social change.[10] Ideas that centred upon nationalism and hard and fast social identities are now increasingly played down in the face of the impacts of developments in scientific methods; namely aDNA, strontium isotope studies and modern population genetics which are beginning to facilitate entirely new understandings of human movement, although not without manifold issues relating to methodology and interpretation.[11]

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[7] A. Gardner, 'Brexit, boundaries and imperial identities: a comparative view', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 17:1 (2017), 3-26.

[8] For an exemplary study in this vein, see J. Eagles, *Stephen the Great and Balkan Nationalism: Moldova and Eastern European History* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2013).

[9] Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 1-4.

[10] For a discussion of this, see D. Anthony, 'Migration in Archaeology: The Baby and the Bathwater', *American Anthropologist* (New Series), 92:4 (1990), 895-914.

[11] For the debate about the applicability of aDNA and strontium isotopes to understanding the scale, nature and chronological problems of population movements and admixtures in the 1st millenium AD, a detailed case study

The studies in this volume are therefore offered during an exciting period of shifting notions in the humanities and social sciences where new approaches – theoretical and methodological – combine with a strong desire to transgress period-based and geographical boundaries – as well as disciplinary ones – in an attempt to produce new understandings that emphasise the fluidity of human societies as well as their persistent robusticity, and where long-established models that emphasise top-down elite dominance[12] are tempered by persuasive arguments for the organisational and civil capacity of local societies – such a view is now prevalent in medieval studies as well as more widely.[13] The implications of this latter revision are particularly pertinent for students of later Roman and early medieval societies, where changes in the scale of social organisation often form a key element of discussion, with

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can be found in the 1st millennium AD English context see, for example, M. E. Weale, D. A. Weiss, R. F. Jager, N. Bradman and M. G. Thomas, '"Y" chromosome evidence for Anglo-Saxon mass migration', *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 19:7 (2002), 1008-21; C. Hills, *Origins of the English* (London, Duckworth, 2003), Chapter 4; H. Härke, 'Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis', *Medieval Archaeology*, 55 (2011), 1-28; R. Hedges, 'Anglo-Saxon Migration and the Molecular Evidence', in H. Hamerow, D. A. Hinton and S. Crawford (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 79-90; S. Leslie, B. Winney, G. Hellenthal, D. Davison, A. Boumertit, T. Day, K. Hutnik, E. C. Røyrvik, B. Cunliffe , The Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium 2, The International Multiple Sclerosis Genetics Consortium, D. J. Lawson, D. Falush, C. Freeman, M. Pirinen, S. Myers, M. Robinson, P. Donnelly and W. Bodmer, 'The fine-scale genetic structure of the British population', *Nature*, 519 (2015), 304-19; J. Kershaw and E. C. Røryvik, 'The "People of the British Isles Project" and Viking settlement in England', *Antiquity*, 90 (2016), 1670-80.

[12] Lord Smail, *On Deep History*, pp. 74-5.

[13] See, for example, W. Davies, 'Introduction: Community Definition and Community Formation in the Early Middle Ages – Some Questions', in W. Davies, G. Halsall and A. Reynolds (eds), *People and Space in the Middle Ages 300-1300* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2006), pp. 1-12 and the discussion in B. Routledge, *Archaeology and State Theory: Subjects and Objects of Power* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 19-27.

'empire' and 'kingdom' as fundamental points of reference: perhaps the ability of local groups to organise themselves facilitated the growth of the more stable early medieval kingdoms.

The impacts of these conceptual shifts upon understandings of power and place in Europe in the transformative epoch of the 1st millennium are profound and we hope that the studies presented here make a timely appearance. What was the directional flow of ideas and their transformation into a socio-political reality in both geographical and social-hierarchical senses? Of related interest and significance is a general move in scholarship away from an insular approach to a comparative one,[14] where various phenomena are increasingly juxtaposed both within and between regions and where the findings of social and cultural anthropology are drawn upon in ways that were almost unthinkable in 1st-millennium studies even thirty years ago.

No attempt is made in this volume to achieve geographical completeness across the European area and such an aim, however desirable, is difficult to achieve owing to the considerable disjuncture of scholarly interests, topical, theoretical and methodological. Indeed, it is difficult enough to identify Europe as a meaningful entity in geographical, historical or cultural terms.[15] Apart from the fact that there are marked variations in the quantity, variety and quality of written sources across Europe – and periods and places for

[14] C. Wickham, *Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham School of History, 1995), pp. 27-8; S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006); W. Pohl and V. Wieser (eds), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat - europäische Perspektiven*., (Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009).

[15] J. Graham-Campbell, 'Introduction', in J. Graham-Campbell with M. Valor (eds), *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe Volume 1: Eighth to Twelfth Centuries AD* (Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2007), pp. 13-18, at pp. 13-14.

which such sources either do not survive or which never existed – there are long-established differences in scholarly agenda, which serve on one hand to inhibit comparative studies, but which also provide stimulating opportunities for cross-fertilisation.[16] In this regard, both onomastic and archaeological studies also vary in intensity and focus according to region.

Southern Europe has long been pulled within the scholarly orbit of the Mediterranean and the Late Antique world. As a generalisation, written evidence in this region is rich in comparison with other areas of Europe, while Christianity thrived both immediately before and following the end of the Empire in the west. A long tradition of excavation and, until recently as distinct from other European regions, of large-scale field survey, provides a rich body of data for analysis. Despite the range and quality of excavated data, much remains to be understood about the early middle ages in southern Europe. In Italy, for example, debate continues about the chronology and circumstances of the transformation of the Roman pattern and hierarchy of settlement and the origin of the medieval one.[17] The contribution by Fentress and Goodson (Chapter 13) in this volume provides an important case study. The over-riding issue – at least in the former core regions of the Empire – is a much greater degree of continuity of central places and of concentrations of authority across the period in question, for example in the context of the urban *domus* of continental European bishops,[18] while in western Europe a much more limited – indeed almost extinct – urban culture found

[16] For a useful discussion of pan-European traditions in medieval archaeology, see H. Andersson, B. Scholckmann and M. S. Kristiansen, 'Medieval Archaeology at the Outset of the Third Millennium: Research and Teaching', in Graham-Campbell with Valor (eds), *Medieval Europe*, pp. 19-45.

[17] See, for example, R. Francovich and R. Hodges, *Villa to Village: The Transformation of the Roman Countryside in Italy, c. 400-1000* (London, Duckworth, 2003), pp. 31-43, for a discussion of the chronological variation within and between regions in Italy and the difficulties of providing an over-arching model.

[18] M. C. Miller, *The Bishop's Palace: Architecture and Authority in Medieval Italy* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 49.

ecclesiastics much more closely tied to secular powers in the context of newly emerging kingdoms (see Wood, Chapter 12).[19]

In northern Europe, the Germanic societies there, many of which lay beyond the frontiers of the Empire until its transformation from the 4th century onwards, are often discussed as if they share widespread cultural unity, at least at the superficial level of 'barbarians', even though close study shows considerable differences between them.[20] Interestingly, scholarly neglect of the lesser-known 'barbarian' groups can be argued to be a function of their not having had either contemporary 'national' accounts written about them – like Gregory of Tours on the Franks – or their not having developed into medieval and later polities.[21]

Despite varying focus depending on region to the study of societies without the immediate jurisdiction of the Roman Empire, there has been much debate in recent years about interactions between the Empire and the Northern World. The over-riding conclusion is that societies to the north of the *Limes* were influenced to a much greater degree by the Empire than previously thought, and at a slightly later period perhaps also by Hunnic incursion into Western Europe during the 5th century.[22]

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[19] G. Schiebelreiter, 'Church Structure and Organisation', in P. Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History I, c. 500-c. 700* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 675-709, at pp. 675-6.

[20] See, for example, the range of 'extra-Empire' societies considered in F. Curta (ed.), *Neglected Barbarians* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2010); W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* (Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2002).

[21] F. Curta, 'Introduction', in Curta (ed.), *Neglected Barbarians*, pp. 1-11, at p. 2.

[22] See, for example, A. Rau, 'Where did the late empire end? Hacksilber and coins in continental and northern Barbaricum', in F. Hunter and K. Painter (eds), *Late Roman Silver: The Traprain Treasure in Context* (Edinburgh, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2013), pp. 339-57: there are many other relevant papers on this topic in this important volume. See also, L. Jørgensen, 'The Spoils of Victory – the North in the shadow of the

The concept of an Atlantic cultural zone that runs from the Iberian Peninsula, along the western and northern coast of France and into southwestern, western and northern Britain and Ireland, derives in large part from the construction of identities in 19th-century Europe and to a sense of cultural resistance to the dominating powers of the age.[23] There are, however, interesting archaeological commonalities across the Western British zone and other areas of the Atlantic seaboard. For example, the occupation of hillforts and a far lesser degree of Romanisation than in regions closer to the core of the Empire can be observed, although maritime connections rather than shared ethnicity provide a context for material cultural similarities, mainly in the form of imported Mediterranean ceramics.[24] Further research is required, however, to establish whether the kind of structured re-use of ancient monuments and the addition of new constructions to create locales of power as found in Ireland, Scotland

Roman Empire', in L. Jørgensen, B. Storgaard and L. Thomsen (eds), *The Spoils of Victory – the North in the shadow of the Roman Empire* (Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet, 2003), pp. 12-17 and B. Storgaard, 'Cosmopolitan aristocrats', in Jørgensen, Storgaard and Thomsen (eds), *The Spoils of Victory*, pp. 106-25; C. Hills, 'History and archaeology: the state of play in early medieval Europe', *Antiquity* 81 (2007), 191-200, 193; L. Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality - an Archaeology of Scandinavia 400-1000* (Routledge, London and New York, 2011), especially pp. 198-211.

[23] For a discussion of Iberia as a case study of this issue, see G. Ruiz Zapatero, 'Celts and Iberians: Ideological Manipulations in Spanish Archaeology', in P. Graves-Brown, S. Jones and C. Gamble (eds), *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: The Construction of European Communities* (London, Routledge, 2013), pp. 179-195 and for a European overview, see A. Fitzpatrick, 'Celtic' Iron Age Europe: the theoretical background', pp. 238-55 in the same volume,

[24] See, for example, the comprehensive reviews of ceramic and glass trade along the western European seaboard by E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD400-800* (York, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 157, 2007) and M. Duggan, *Links to Late Antiquity: Understanding Contacts on the Western Seaboard in the 5th to 7th centuries AD* (Unpublished University of Newcastle PhD, 2015).

and Wales, for example, and as discussed by Gleeson (Chapter 16) and Seaman (Chapter 15) in this volume, are a feature of the southern Atlantic seaboard too. Similarly, the presence and nature of assembly sites is a neglected topic beyond the far reaches of northern Europe, about which see below.

Much of the debate about power and place in Eastern Europe has taken place within a strongly 'culture-historical' framework as opposed to a Marxist one as is often presumed[25] and scholarship there has only in the last 15 years or so begun to be made available in the form of large-scale syntheses accessible to an English-speaking audience.[26] Many similarities can be observed between Eastern Europe, the Baltic regions and Western Europe in terms of the emergence and character of nodes of power – for example the reoccupation of hillforts and the re-emergence of towns – but a full comparative analysis remains to be achieved, at least between East and West.[27] Teichner (Chapter 14) shows in his Balkan contribution to this collection how a Roman centre continued to play a role as a centre of power, while other

[25] F. Curta 'Medieval archaeology in South-Eastern Europe', in R. L. Gilchrist and A Reynolds (eds), *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology, 1957-2007* (Leeds, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 30, 2009), 191-223.

[26] Excellent syntheses in English are becoming increasingly accessible via the series East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, with F. Curta and D. Zupka as general editors. See, for example, K. Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria: The Records of a Bygone Culture* (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2008) and A. Buko, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland* (Leiden and Boston, Brill 2008): these books usefully emphasise differences in approach to writing large-scale narrative, with the former concentrating on written evidence, the latter upon archaeology.

[27] There is a long tradition of comparing central places in northwestern Europe. See, for example, B. Hårdh and L. Larsson (eds), *Central places in the migration and Merovingian periods: Papers from the 52nd Sachsensymposium* (Stockholm, Uppåkrastudier, 2002) and A. Pantos and S. Semple (eds), *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2004).

societies in Eastern Europe, for example the 10th–11th-century Prussians, lacked nucleated power centres, yet had strongly fortified borders; a combination that proved robust in the face of external pressure.[28]

There are, in the light of what has already been said, many good reasons to draw these three macro-regions together, particularly for the insights that can be gained by taking a nuanced comparative approach to a clearly defined topical arena of enquiry, which is what we hope to achieve in the present book. While several large-scale syntheses have drawn northern, southern and eastern Europe together, they are necessarily broad in scope.[29] Although the papers in the book each concentrate on a particular region and draw directly on the individual authors' expertise in different disciplines, we have chosen to organise them in a way that we hope will build for the reader an overview of similarities and contrasts over time, place and subject matter. The papers in part I examine aspects of assembly and meeting places within whole regions, moving from Anglo-Saxon England to Scandinavian countries and on to Italy and Spain. The papers in part 2 provide more concentrated case studies of smaller districts, individual centres of power or sources of evidence. The subject matter

[28] P. Urbanczyk, 'The Lower Vistula Area as a "Region of Power" and its Continental Contacts', in M. De Jong, F. Theuws, with Van Rhijn (eds), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2001), p. 530. See also, A. Stieldorf, *Marken und Markgrafen. Studien zur Grenzsicherung durch die fränkisch-deutschen Herrscher* (Hannover, MGH Schriften 64, 2012).

[29] One of the first attempts at such a large-scale synthesis can be found in P. Dixon, *Barbarian Europe* (London, Elsevier-Phaidon, 1976). See also Graham-Campbell with Valor, *Medieval Europe*, while M. McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD300-900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Wickham, *Framing*, represent the most substantial modern overviews. Northwestern Europe is admirably surveyed from an archaeological perspective in C. P. Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, C. AD600-1150: A Comparative Archaeology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

comes from Francia, Kosovo, Frisia, Ireland, Western Britain and Anglo-Saxon England. In spite of differences in the sources, histories and social organisation of the regions studied, there are many striking commonalities in how distinctive places in the landscape were used to organise local communities or to assert control over them. The remainder of the Introduction aims to both consider the broader European context in which the studies can be placed and to indicate ways in which the papers enhance and develop previous work. Rather than providing a separate conclusion to the volume, we have chosen to incorporate examples discussed by our contributors into a wider consideration of how places of assemblies and of other significant enactments of power were essential components of societies throughout early medieval Europe.

Power and Place: Themes and Approaches

The period of time and region covered in this volume provide a context within which to explore the nature of societal transformations in various settings, of continuity, collapse, re-configuration, conquest, hegemony, emulation and so on. Indeed, the regions and topics covered by the 21 papers in this book touch in one way or another upon all of these situations.

This volume also explores the background, origins, development and practice of later Roman and early medieval social and political institutions from a European comparative perspective. It seeks to address questions of political participation, governance, and authority from the 3rd to the 11th centuries in Britain, Europe and the western Mediterranean, focussing on the chronology and landscape setting of political practices. In particular, the papers between them explore continuities, contrasts and parallels between governance and civil

organisation in Roman and post-Roman contexts, focussing upon the latter period. Contributions range across the social science disciplines, including history, historical linguistics, historical geography, anthropology and archaeology. The volume's approach is fundamentally different from that of David Rollason in his recent book *The Power of Place*.[30] While he has concentrated on the impressive results from the initiatives of rulers, this volume addresses a broader range of places in which power was enacted in a wider spectrum of societies.

The title of this book emphasises the intimate relationship that exists between the display and exercise of power and the locales where such manifestations are found. Over the past few decades much has been written on places as sites of meaning, whose significance was and is constructed.[31] Space, unstructured and unregulated, can be transformed into structured and regulated place, rich in meaning and bound up with the operation of power in a variety of ways, many of which are explored in the contributions to this volume. The regulation of space through the operation of law is central to the chapters on assemblies and legal proceedings, particularly those of Davies (Chapter 11) and Escalona (Chapter 10). The choice of sites for such gatherings was of course deliberate: the symbolic power of the places chosen was conveyed through their landscape context. Both topography and material remains endowed space with meaning, reinforcing expressions of contemporary power and conferring

[30] D. Rollason, *The Power of Place. Rulers and Their Palaces, Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016).

[31] The classic study is Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977). A useful recent summary of scholarship in this area in relation to medieval studies is offered by M. Boulton, 'Introduction: Place and Space', in M. Boulton, J. Hawkes, H. Stoner (eds), *Place and Space in the Medieval World* (London, Routledge, 2018), pp. xv–xxv.

on them legitimacy, as explored by Brookes (Chapter 3) in relation to elite reuse of a small number of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries as later meeting places, by Fentress and Goodson (Chapter 13) in relation to the continued use through the middle ages of the imperial site at Villamagna and by Roach (Chapter 4) in his examination of the choice of "stages" for the performance of royal power in 10th- and 11th-century England. Past and present sacral functions were bound up with the choice of areas outside early medieval churches in Italy for communal non-religious meetings as discussed in this book by Chavarria (Chapter 9). Wood (Chapter 12) shows how the influential early medieval monastic centre of Luxeuil, although promoted as being in a remote and desolate place, drew authority from being placed in a propserous Roman settlement.

While a site's visible past could be harnessed to serve the purposes of present power-holders, it could also be rebranded, through naming, in order to encourage a shared perception of that place's meaning. Functional names – those which refer explicitly to assembly or judicial practice, for example – do this, but so do names which refer to figures whose celebrity carries particular cultural resonances (Baker, Chapter 1). Endowing space with meaning through its precise (re)configuration – the physical arrangement of features and functions – is another form of branding, and is explored by Hobaek (Chapter 6), Iversen (Chapter 8), Ødegaard (Chapter 5), and by Jørgensen, Thomsen, and Jørgensen (Chapter 7). These chapters also illustrate the relationship between the development of individual places and changes in power structures: how increased elite power may result in spatial division of functions, for example, or indeed in the 'end' of place, with sites reverting to space, no longer endowed with social meaning.

A site's capacity to take on cultural significance depended, of course, upon natural resources and infrastructural connections, and Teichner's (Chapter 13) survey of the

"geostrategic" sites of the plain of Kosovo investigates the resources and connectivity needed for a place to become and remain powerful in this region.

An interesting perspective on this matter, and core to the topic, is that provided by Sack's influential study of human territoriality.[32] In his study, Sack determined three means by which individuals or groups achieved and maintained power over an area, all of which relate squarely to the exercise of power by association with place: 1) definition by area, although interestingly this can be determined by the presence of a powerful individual in a locality as much as by a fixed spatial entity; 2) communication via marker, sign or symbol; and 3), by enforcement.[33] The early middle ages presents an important case study of a period whereby emergent elites – or at least the successful ones – were tasked with controlling dominions of increasing extent. Early elites may have been able to rely upon physical presence alone (Sack's first point above), but physical markers of power, such as fortifications, frontiers and gallows may have been prompted by increasing geographical and social distance. There are interesting issues here, therefore, that relate to changing relationships between people, power and place and emerging social complexity. Blair's recent discussion of the evolving nature of places of power and the impacts upon those attempting to maintain it provides an interesting case study in the Anglo-Saxon context.[34]

The topics of assembly, periodic gatherings and the spatial organisation of power in the 1st millennium AD are currently undergoing a resurgence of interest in the scholarly

[32] R. D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its theory and history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[33] Sack, *Human Territoriality*, p. 16.

[34] J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018), see Chapter 3, pp. 103-38.

world, following earlier concerted studies.[35] Research into assembly sites and related phenomena in Europe is uneven; Scandinavia, Iceland, Britain and Ireland share between them, however, a long and distinguished historiography of the study of assembly sites and of administrative structures[36] and there has been recent historical interest in Continental Saxon assembly.[37] Social and theoretical interpretations relating to non-urban modes of social organisation are arguably further advanced in the Northern World than in the rest of Europe. Research in the north has tended to focus upon high status assembly (the Icelandic Althing, Tynwald, Isle of Man, Tara, Ireland, and Scone, Forteviot and Dunnadd, Scotland), or, in England, on individual sites with few local/regional case-studies,[38] until the Landscapes of

[35] A key volume in this topical area is De Jong and Theuws with Van Rhijn (eds), *Topographies of Power*, which contains 19 papers drawing upon a wide range of source materials and is one of the published outcomes of the important EU-funded Transformation of the Roman World project.

[36] Useful historiographies for different parts of Europe can be found in the various papers in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*.

[37] E. Goldberg, 'Popular revolt, dynastic politics and aristocratic factionalism in the early middle ages: the Saxon Stellinga reconsidered', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 467-501; I. Wood, 'Beyond Satraps and Ostriches: Political and Social Structures of the Saxons in the Early Carolingian Period', in D. H. Green and F. Siegmund (eds), *The Continental Saxons: From the Migration Period to the Tenth Century* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 271-97; C. Ehlers, 'Between Marklo and Merseberg: assemblies and their sites in Saxony from the beginnings of Christianization to the time of the Ottonian kings', *Journal of the North Atlantic* 8 (2015), 134-40.

[38] R. Adkins and M. Petchey, 'Secklow hundred mound and other meeting-places mounds in England', *Archaeological Journal*, 141 (1984), 246–51; S. Semple and A. Langlands, 'Swanborough Tump', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 94 (2004), 239-42; A. Meaney, 'Gazetteer of hundred and wapentake meeting-places of the Cambridge region', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 82 (1993), 67–92.

Governance Project started to bear fruits.[39] Understandings of administrative organisation in Southern Europe benefit from outstanding survivals of written and archaeological evidence, but which mainly relate to urban centres and monasteries.

While archaeological and place-name studies have undoubtedly added to our understandings of individual aspects of early medieval administrative structures, including assembly places, a comparative approach utilising both archaeological and place-name evidence across the European area is required to set these in relation to other social and administrative phenomena. An important step in this direction is the soon to be published Assembly Sites in the North Project,[40] although the geographical scale of enquiry must be extended in future and one of the principal aims of this volume is to encourage scholars in areas where such sites are understudied to engage with them. Central and southern European scholarship has yet to address fully the potential of such research, having focussed instead on the documented outcomes of major royal and ecclesiastical assemblies.[41] Although important case studies have indicated the fruitfulness of a landscape-based approach,[42] these are few

[39] See, for example, J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Governance at the Anglo-Scandinavian interface: hundredal organisation in the southern Danelaw', *Journal of the North Atlantic* (Special Issue), 5 (2013), 76–95 and J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Outside the gate: sub-urban legal practices in early medieval England', in A. Reynolds and K. P. Smith (eds), *The Archaeology of Legal Culture* (Abingdon: World Archaeology 45:5, 2013), 747-61.

[40] See, S. Semple and A. Sanmark, 'Assembly in North West Europe: Collective Concerns for Early Societies', *European Journal of Archaeology* 16:3 (2013), 518-42, for a preliminary account of this project.

[41] P. Barnwell and M. Mostert (eds), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2003).

[42] J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Identifying outdoor assembly sites in early medieval England', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 40:1 (2015), 3-21.

and far between[43] and normally driven by a focus on elite politics as described in written evidence.

Furthermore, there are deep-seated notions about what entities and phenomena constitute material manifestations of power, which can impact upon academic debate in unhelpful ways. This is nowhere more acutely relevant than in discussions of power that tackle the transformation of the Roman world and the emergence of the early medieval kingdoms of Europe. Both situations are relatively well understood in their fully developed forms, but the interface – for some a total collapse, for others a seamless process – between the two is less clearly mapped, particularly in regions where, for a period, written and material records appear to indicate a power vacuum. Is it possible to establish geographies of power that preceded and perhaps facilitated the development of large-scale power structures in medieval Europe?

Social control surely occupied elites just as centrally as campaigns of war, the latter of which, if successful, generated increasing responsibilities in the realm of the former. Fundamental to our theme is the matter of how power was materialised and it is important to make one key observation from the outset, perhaps an obvious one, which is that the relationship between social complexity and its material form is not as straightforward as some social anthropologists have suggested.[44] This is particularly true of post-Empire

[43] H. Härke, 'Cemeteries as Places of Power', in De Jong and Theuws, with Van Rhijn (eds), *Topographies of Power*, pp. 9-30; B. Effros, 'Monuments and Memory: Repossessing Ancient Remains in Early Medieval Gaul', in De Jong and Theuws, with Van Rhijn (eds), *Topographies of Power*, pp. 93-118.

[44] The most influential over-arching syntheses of the apparent classification of human societies produced by social anthropologists in the 20th century took a largely 'primitive' to 'complex' linear-track, evolutionary perspective. See, for example, E. Service, *Primitive Social Organisation: An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York, Random House, 1962) and M. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York, Random House, 1967).

societies in Europe that are largely judged by a perceived decline in their organisational, technical and cultural capability.[45] One historian suggests that one of the reasons why the study of history (as narrowly defined) has traditionally dealt with only the recent human past is because of the casting of the immediate post-Roman period as a virtual 'stand-in' for the deep-time palaeolithic era as a period when the clock timing the emergence of human 'civilisation' was reset.[46]

This Introduction moves on now to consider notions of power and place in later Roman and early medieval Europe under three sub-headings which relate to our collective interdisciplinary thrust: materialities and geographies of power (archaeology), vocabularies of power (place-names) and notions of law and its enactment (written sources).

Monumentality and Material Expressions of Power

While Leovigild, King of the Visigothic kingdoms of Hispania and Septimania (568–86), sought to build not just an aqueduct, but a new city at Reccopolis in the manner of the Romans, this kind of activity is absent in the northern world. None of the early Anglo-Saxon kings, for example, appears to have taken up residence in anything approaching Roman or Roman-style buildings (Scull Chapter 18). Instead they seem to have retained a strong Germanic culture, even long after the re-absorption of their realms into the Roman Catholic world. In Francia, a different picture emerges but, as has been noted by others, the adoption

[45] Francovich and Hodges, *Villa to Village*, p. 50 comment upon the apparent loss of knowledge relating to stone construction. This is a debatable notion, of course. It is possible to suggest that rendering trees and building early medieval timber halls requires far more skill than laying bricks.

[46] Lord Smail, *On Deep History*, Chapter 1, and p. 13.

or continuity of *Romanitas* is much more evident south of the Loire than to the north,[47] at least in the pre-Carolingian period. For some scholars, *Romanitas* was much desired by the 'successor' elites,[48] but surely explanations other than technological or ideological incapability lay behind the varying patterns of continuity and emulation of Roman practice by early medieval powers – in other words the extents to which they employed choice in their actions and to which they were guided by existing structures: Charlemagne and his sucessors clearly desired – and achieved – splendid *Romanitas*, most notably in the form of their palaces (e.g. Aachen, Frankfurt, Ingelheim, Paderborn) and in the wider realm of arts and culture,[49] but these were evocations and adaptations of the Roman past in support of very different early medieval power structures.

One example drawn from the Anglo-Saxon world underscores just how different material notions of power and place could be between the Roman, or at least classically-inspired, world and the early medieval. According to the preamble to the will of King Alfred the Great, for example, the king met with his brother Æthelred and 'the councilors of the

[47] For an excellent discussion of the role and nature of *Romanitas*, see G. Halsall, 'The Barbarian Invasions', in Fouracre (ed.), *Cambridge Medieval History I*, pp. 38-55.

[48] M. Carver, *The Birth of a Borough: An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2012), pp. 143-5.

[49] Among many studies, good illustrations of these points can be found in C. Stiegmann und M. Wenhoff (eds), *799 Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit. Karl der Große und Papst Leo III in Paderborn*, 2 vols (Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1999); E. Wamers, *Die Macht Des Silbers: Karolingische Schätze im Norden (Regensburg, Schnell and Steiner*, 2005); M. Wintergurst, *Franconofurd. Band 1. Die Befund der karolingisch-ottonischen Pfalz aus den Frankfurter Altstadtgrabungen* (Frankfurt am Main, Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt, 2007); M. Puhle und G. Köster (eds*), Otto der Große und das Römische Reich. Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter (Regensburg*, Schnell und Steiner, 2012).

West Saxons' to discuss the fate of the royal lands in the event of succession.[50] Rather than taking place in a grand residence, or in an open space in one of the multitude of Wessex's emerging central places,[51] this major gathering took place at *swinbeorg*, the 'hill or barrow of the pigs'. The lesson here, of course, is that gatherings of the highest import could – and did – take place at very unprepossessing locations, while careful analysis can sometimes reveal potential motivations for the selection of such sites for major gatherings.[52] Monumentality is not, it seems, a necessary feature for high-level political discourse, but the presence of important people is and this is an important feature in certain definitions of human territoriality.[53] It is therefore ironic that the first notional depiction of a Germanic assembly – a council of war – appears in a highly monumentalised context, on the Column of Marcus Aurelius of AD193 in Rome.[54]

Impressive elite residences are known throughout the early medieval world, those of the north – and in particular Scandinavia – display a richness in ritual configurations of structures and other elements such as monumental sculpture in ways found otherwise almost only in ecclesiastical contexts in Southern and Eastern Europe. Indeed, excavated elite secular residences are few and far between in Southern and Eastern Europe, where ecclesiastical high culture is much more evident in the built environment, with exceptions

[50] S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), p. 174, fn. 9; D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents Volume I, c. 500-1042* (London, Eyre and Spottiswode, 1955), p. 493, fn. 1.

[51] Although see Reynolds this volume for a 'minimal' view of 9th-century urbanism.

[52] See, for example, R. Lavelle, 'Why Grately? Reflections on Anglo-Saxon Kingship in a Hampshire Landscape', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 60 (2005), 154-69.

[53] Sack, *Human Territoriality*,,p. 19.

[54] M. Beckman, *The Column of Marcus Aurelius: The Genesis and Meaning of a Roman Imperial Monument* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2011).

such as the Carolingian palaces noted above and the outstanding 9th-century Asturian palace remains at Monte Naranco, near Oviedo.[55]

The site of Tissø considered by Jorgensen *et al*. (Chapter 7) and the landscapes of power discussed by Gleeson (Chapter 16) in this volume exemplify the kinds of complexes that characterise the Northern World. One must bear in mind, however, the role of monasteries and churches as locales for the expression of secular as well as religious power in regions where catholic and orthodox Christianity prevailed, as Wood (Chapter 12) indicates in his paper on Luxeuil. Secular and religious worlds, for so-long considered separately, are now fully appreciated as inextricably intertwined, at least from a social perspective if not an ideological one where the Roman Catholic church perceived its doctrine to pervade all aspects of life '…from bedchamber to battlefield and from churchyard to farmyard'.[56] This latter notion is an interesting one from a psychological perspective as it usefully reminds us that ideological power can extend to entirely non-monumental, non-elite environments into private space and thus the world of the individual whenever and wherever they may be. Returning to the notion of the blurring or overlapping of ecclesiastical and lay spheres of interaction, the paper by Chavarría (Chapter 9) in this volume shows how, in early medieval Italy at least, local churches could be a focus for 'meetings of a non-ecclesiastical character'.

[55] An important new study of elite power from the 1st to the 16th century in Europe is D. Rollason, *The Power of Place: Rulers and Their Palaces, Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016). For an exemplary reconstruction of the Carolingian and Ottonian palace at Frankfurt, see M. Wintergerst, *Franconofurd, Band 1, Die Befunde der karolingisch-ottonischen Pfalz aus den Frankfurter Altstadtgrabungen 1953-1993* (Frankfurt, Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt, 2007). P. De Palol and M. Hirmer, *Early Medieval Art in Spain* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 36-8, figs 17-19.

[56] J. M. H. Smith, 'Religion and Lay Society', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History II, c. 700-c. 900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 654-78, at p. 655

Materiality and power can also, of course, be expressed in other ways than architectural media. While the focus of this volume is very much on 'place', it is important to think about the relationship between material finds and places as they are of course intimately connected. A number of objects relating to the exercise of legal power are considered below (see Law). Portable statements of access to resources and control of prestige goods are a feature of the post-Roman, pre- and post-monetary economic world in regions both formerly within the Empire and without. The role of portable wealth as an expression of power, however, is much more immediately obvious in the archaeological record of communities that lay beyond the Empire, partly as a reflection of the paucity of the structural record both perceived and 'real'. An excellent case study is that of the Picts in Northern Britain, whose cultural coherence – at least as producers of art on various media – extends across the period of transition experienced by post-Empire societies further south and east. The Picts – whatever they represent as a cultural phenomenon – were keen consumers of Roman material culture, most dramatically illustrated by the stunning 5th-century hoard of vessels and other objects from the hillfort of Traprain Law in Scotland, but also revealed in much more localised contexts by the wide distribution of *Denarii* and Late Roman *siliquae*.[57] Traditionally, the focus has been on both the materials themselves and on their wider geographical patterns, but their find-spots too deserve attention as reflections of places of power.

Cemeteries of the second half of the 1st millennium also appear to have played an important role as locales of power (See Brookes, Chapter 2). They are known in all regions and frequently reveal impressive finds, with a few exceptions – such as northern Iberia where

[57] F. Hunter and K. Painter, '*Hacksilber* in the Late Roman and Early Medieval world – economics, frontier politics and imperial legacies', in N. Roymans, S. Heeren and W. De Clercq (eds), *Social Dynamics in the northwest Frontiers of the Late Roman Empire* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 81-96.

rock-cut cemeteries with eroded and/or robbed graves are widely known, but their locations are nevertheless important places of local power, perhaps as assembly places in certain cases.[58] An example that cuts across our period of interest can be found at Valsgärde in Sweden, where the well-known 6th-century boat-grave cemetery was preceded by cremation burials of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, with radiocarbon determinations of the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC,[59] and continued in use into the late Viking Age. Besides being a place of burial, it was evidently a location where local elites – perhaps subordinate in regional terms to those burying their dead at Old Uppsala close by – displayed their status by constructing monumental mortuary structures at a key location in the regional landscape. As Frans Hershend has discussed, the site lay on a road – itself apparently consciously routed up and over the hill upon which the burials lay, rather than taking an easier passage around the hill – and also on the boundary of a local territory.[60] Hershend's observations find strong resonances in other contexts, where power is materialised at the periphery of political regions as well as within them as means of signalling entry and exit points to jurisdictions of various kinds from the level of Empire and the phenomenal constructions of the *Limes* to the limits of

[58] For a discussion of scales of power and the role of local cemeteries, see Härke, 'Cemeteries as Places of Power'. See also, S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500-1000)', *Early Medieval Europe* 13:1 (2005), 1-42, at 11-13. A case study of a group of later 5th to 7th century cemeteries later recorded as an assembly site can be found at Saltwood, Kent in southeastern England: see, P. Booth, T. Champion, S. Foreman, P. Garwood, H. Glass, J. Munby and A. Reynolds, *On Track: The Archaeology of High Speed Section 1 in Kent* (Oxford and Salisbury, Oxford Wessex Archaeology, 2011), at pp. 366-7.

[59] J. Ljungkvist, 'Valsgärde – Development and change of a burial ground over 1300 years', in S. Norr (ed.), *Valsgärde Studies: the Place and its People, Past and Present* (Uppsala, Department of Archaeology and History, 2008), pp. 13-55 at p. 37.

[60] F. Herschend, 'Introduction', in Norr (ed.), *Valsgärde*, pp. 5-12, pp. 5-6.

early medieval kingdoms, which might have entry points marked by gallows[61] or movement controlled by linear earthworks, many of them with ideologically loaded names (there is a parallel here with the naming patterns of assembly sites discussed by Baker in Chapter 1).[62] Whilst Valsgärde is not documented as an assembly site, it possesses many of the features of such sites and prompts a consideration of how assemblies might be recognised in material terms (see Hobaek Chapter 6; Odegaard Chapter 5 and Iversen Chapter 8). At a different scale, the bounds of early medieval local estates – where the power of local communities to make their own decisions, perhaps influenced by long-established and widely understood custom – were evidently deemed suitable for the burial of suicides and other undesirables across the Northwestern and Eastern European area.[63]

The spatial organisation of social complexity and its physical manifestations remains a major theme in social anthropology. As noted above, the great generalising studies of social complexity[64] set out deeply influential schema against which material remains can be assessed, yet these are not well suited to the 4th to 11th centuries. A particular value of a comparative approach lies in the way that well-documented and archaeologically attested societies can provide templates for understanding shadowy places and regions, where written sources are scant. Material correlates for degrees of social organisation, along with place-name evidence for power structures, can be used to assemble a spatial picture and –

[61] A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 219. A. Reynolds, *The emergence of Anglo-Saxon judicial practice: the message of the gallows* (Aberdeen, Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 2009).

[62] A. Reynolds and A. Langlands, 'Social Identities on the Macro Scale: A Maximum View of Wansdyke', in W. Davies, G. Halsall and A. Reynolds (eds), *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300-1300* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2006), pp. 13-44.

[63] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial*, pp. 209-18.

[64] See note 25 above.

potentially – a procedural narrative for the depth and scale of social organisation within given societies. In addition, and with the benefit of detailed evidence from a range of sources where they exist, it is possible for certain regions of Europe during the period under investigation here to provide powerful comparative models.

Notions of nucleation equating to complexity are less than straightforward. Due to the strong influence of classical comparisons in terms of how the materiality of social complexity is understood, there is an overwhelming tendency to view societies that choose to organise themselves in alternative ways as somehow of a lower order of sophistication. The kinds of terms used by social anthropologists, for example 'middle range' and 'chiefdom-like', place societies so-labelled in a very particular rank order; one which is unhelpful in terms of the way that we characterise the societies of the 1st millennium. Both southern Wales and Frsia, considered in this volume by respectively Seaman (Chapter 15) and Knol (Chapter 17), are examples of places whose exact early medieval socio-political organisation is hard to define according to the commonly used categories. The tendency of archaeologists to internally rank societies according to settlement size and to link this directly to political centralisation has been criticised in other contexts[65] and has resonances with the period under consideration here. Scull (Chapter 18), for instance, in his paper considers the inter-relationship of a number of nodal sites in south-east Suffolk; functions underpinning local power structures were shared between these sites rather than concentrated in one hierarchical centre. The suggestion can be made that there are other measures by which one might assess social complexity, which move away from those based upon overt monumentality and socially pervasive organisational and administrative structures and which focus instead upon ideas of participation and localism. Among these characteristics we might place robusticity,

[65] P. Duffy, 'Site size hierarchy in middle-range societies', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 37 (2015), 85-99.

adaptivity, social embeddedness and the incorporation of tradition and custom into larger-scale forms of identity. In other words, the dispersed social systems found in particular in the northern and eastern worlds can be argued to represent a high degree of social complexity, but one that reflects a consciously different way of doing things. Dispersed social systems also require a high degree of physical movement from participants in such socio-political configurations,[66] and arguably a less 'feudal' mode of social organisation than that found in town and country in the late Roman world or in Europe in the 12th century. Even a large and powerful polity like that of the Ottonians depended on a programme of regular itineration by king and court within the different regions over which they claimed control.[67]

For Gordon Childe, that phenomenally talented student and interpreter of societal evolution writ large, the peak of social complexity could be gauged by means of its place on the road to urban formations.[68] Childe produced undeniably important work in this area, but his deeply influential notions require reappraisal in the setting of Europe in the 1st millennium AD.

Place-Names

The potential that the study of names brings to any discussion of the power of place is considerable, and can extend to areas not easily accessed through the archaeological and

[66] A. Reynolds, 'Judicial culture and social complexity: a general model from Anglo-Saxon England', in A. Reynolds and K. P. Smith (eds), *The Archaeology of Legal Culture* (Abingdon, Routledge, *World Archaeology* 45:5, 2013), pp. 699-713, at p. 707.

[67] J. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany c. 937-1075* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[68] V. G. Childe, 'The Urban Revolution', *Town Planning Review*, 21:1 (1950), 3-17.

written records. Early place-names evolved as short descriptions, sometimes arising in the speech of ordinary people, sometimes bestowed in the administrative language of those in positions of power. Very many medieval (and earlier) names survive, albeit altered in various ways, to the present day. Their ubiquity offers research opportunities not afforded by the written record, which until recently was a medium used by, and aimed at, those who held power. This record's focus is sharpest upon sites and areas important to politically or culturally dominant groups, and it is silent over many aspects of life and everyday places in the 1st millennium AD. Place-names, on the other hand, encode stories of possession and tenure, administration and dispute, resource and exploitation, abundance and scarcity, perception and belief across all corners of the land. Archaeological investigation is possible only where human activities have impacted upon the physical environment, but place-names may record the more physically intangible or ephemeral aspects of human experience, including manifestations of power not marked by monumentality or infrastructural complexity.

Unlocking the potential of place-names requires (at least) two things: name-forms preserved relatively close to the point at which the names came into existence, when they functioned as transparent labels, intelligible to their users; and the linguistic expertise required to 'read' these labels. Through consideration of these early name-forms, and the languages in which they were likely to have been given, etymologies – the word(s) which made up the names – can often be proposed. This detailed linguistic work forms the bedrock upon which interpretations of the precise application of those words must rest – without it, any further attempt to unlock the significance of the names is unsafe. Proceeding from such systematic historical-linguistic analysis, further interpretations are best suggested within an interdisciplinary context – insights from archaeology, landscape history, historical geography, and (where possible) documentary history and folkloric accounts are essential elements in the

process if the name's 'motivation' – why it came into existence – is to be suggested with any degree of confidence.

From place-names we learn of groups and individuals whose power extended or endured sufficiently for their names to become inextricably linked with territories and settlements.[69] Major groups gave their names to the regions in which they held sway; the dominions of less significant groups have been reconstructed partly on the basis of place-name evidence.[70] An individual's hold over, or association with, the places that bore his or her name usually remains in the realm of the hypothetical – we know nothing of Cod, whose Old English name is fossilised in Codsall ('Cod's nook of land'; Staffordshire), or of Wizzo, who gave his name to Wissembourg (Wizzo's fortified place'; Bas-Rhin, France).[71] Sometimes, however, the nature and extent of an individual's power can be pieced together by combining onomastic and written evidence: a surviving charter records the granting of *Heantune* 'high settlement' to Wulfrun in 985, and a century later the estate – Wolverhampton 'Wulfrun's *Heantune*' – bore her name; Blackmanstone (Kent) must surely be named from Blæcmann, lord there in 1066 according to Domesday Book.[72]

[69] The examples given in this section are mostly English or Scandinavian, which reflects both editorial expertise the focus of the relevant chapters in this volume, and the current state of place-name scholarship, but the points made apply more generally.

[70] It has been suggested, for example, that the territory of the Hæstingas, who gave their names to Hastings, stretched from Hastingford as far east as Hastingleigh in Kent; see V. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 285.

[71] Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary*, p. 148; P.-H. Billy, *Dictionnaire des noms de lieux de la France* (Paris, Editions Errance, 2011), p. 583.

[72] Further examples are given in M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd edn (Chichester, Phillimore, 1997), chapter 7.

A centralised power operating within a particular region or across regions may be detectable in recurrent name-types – groups of place-names which share a particular structure. The many compounds in *tūn* 'farm, estate' found in Shropshire (like Acton, Brockton, Norton, Weston, and so on) have been interpreted as, in origin, labels used by the administrators of a Mercian elite for composite parts of large estates.[73] These 'functional appellatives' may have replaced pre-English names in the wake of an administrative takeover, as the kingdom of Mercia extended its power westwards. Administrative renaming may also lie behind the *Huseby*-names of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The places so-named were strategically sited, centrally-placed to facilitate gatherings or with good access to transport routes, and the renaming process has been seen as reflecting the strategic absorption of estates into royal hands, the result of the extension of royal power over previously independent areas.[74] A royal connection is also suggested by the recurrent English place-name Kingston, which comprises the Old English elements *cyning* 'king' and *tūn*. The nature of the connection, however, has proven elusive, although it has at least been established for many Kingston-places. With the exception of Kingston upon Thames (Surrey) – head of its hundred and site of royal assemblies and coronations – these places are, in general, of low status, and some do not survive to the present-day as settlements. Kingston-places are not important royal manors. The siting of a high proportion (>75%) of Kingston-places at regular

[73] M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire: Part 1* (Nottingham, English Place-Name Society, 1990), pp. xiii–xiv.

[74] See B. Crawford, 'Houseby, Harray and Knarston in the west Mainland of Orkney: toponymic indicators of administrative authority?', in P. Gammeltoft and B. Jensen (eds), *Through the Looking-Glass. Festschrift in Honour of Gillian Fellows Jensen* (Copenhagen, C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 2006), pp. 21–44, at pp. 21–3. Crawford herself is cautious in attributing the same origin to the Orkney *Huseby*-names: they are 'toponymic indicators of administrative authority' (p. 42), but whether that authority is royal is left open.

intervals on major long-distance Roman roads or ancient routeways suggests that, perhaps like the *Huseby*-places, they were part of an elite system of control, an instrument in the exercise of royal power.[75] Such a possibility might also be considered for place-names whose first element is *ætheling*, denoting a prince of the royal house, but here the historical record suggests an alternative interpretation, that at least some of these were royal estates set aside for the use of the king's sons.[76]

It is worth stating the obvious too, that place-names provide more general linguistic evidence for the operation of power. The widespread replacement of one language for another within a landscape's toponymy, whether by imposition or accretion, reflects a particular set of power relations. The relative lack of surviving Brittonic and other pre-English place-names in England suggests that very significant numbers of Germanic speakers arrived in Britain in the post-Roman period.[77] This lack has also, however, been interpreted as reflecting a particular sociolinguistic context in which the language of a relatively small but very

[75] This is the conclusion of a comprehensive study by J. Bourne, *The Place-Name Kingston and Royal Power in Middle Anglo-Saxon England: Patterns, possibilities and purpose* (Oxford, British Archaeological Reports, 2017). See also C. Hough, 'The place-name Kingston and the laws of Æthelberht', *Studia Neophilologica* 69:1, (1997), 55–7; D. Probert, 'Towards a reassessment of "Kingston" place-names', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 40 (2008), 7–22.

[76] D. N. Parsons, 'Churls and athelings, kings and reeves: some reflections on place-names and early English society', in J. Carroll and D. N. Parsons (eds), *Perceptions of Place: twenty-first-century interpretations of English Place-Name Studies* (Nottingham, English Place-Name Society, 2013), pp. 43–74, at pp. 57–63.

[77] R. Coates, 'The significance of Celtic place-names in England', in M. Filppula, J. Klemola, and H. Pitkänen (eds), *The Celtic Roots of English* (Joensuu, University of Joensuu, 2001), pp. 47–84; R. Coates, 'Invisible Britons: the view from linguistics', in N. Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2007), pp. 172–9. For an overview of Brittonic place-names, see O. J. Padel, 'Brittonic place-names in England', in Carroll and Parsons (ed.), *Perceptions of Place*, pp. 1–39; a brief overview of parts of the debate is to be found at pp. 34–7.

powerful elite replaces the language of the majority because of its prestige, although this position is harder to defend. The cultural and political ascendency of English-speakers lies behind both interpretations, of course, although the basis of that ascendency is contested. A similar debate has been had over the significance of the large numbers of Scandinavian place-names in the midlands and the northern and eastern parts of England, although that debate has cooled in recent years with something like a consensus emerging that the evidence – particularly of place-names and of metalwork finds – points to significant numbers of incoming Scandinavian speakers.[78]

In recent years, however, it is in the study of assembly sites that the potential of place-names within a broader multi-disciplinary framework has been most fully explored, and it is in that capacity that they feature in this volume.[79] Place-names have in innumerable instances proven fundamental to the identification of meeting places. For periods and places poorly represented in the written record, place-names whose genesis is considerably earlier than

[78] See, for example, L. Abrams and D. N. Parsons, 'Place-names and the history of Scandinavian settlement in England', in J. Hines, A Lane, and M. Redknap (eds), *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference in Viking-Period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001* (Leeds, Maney, 2004), pp. 379–431; M. Townend, 'Scandinavian place-names in England', in Carroll and Parsons (eds), *Perceptions*, pp. 103–26; J. Kershaw and E. C. Røyrvik, 'The People of the British Isles and Viking settlement in England', *Antiquity*, 90 (2016), 1670–80..

[79] Both *The Assembly Project* (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/all/?mode=project&id=714>) and *Landscapes of Governance* (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/assembly >) integrate place-names with landscape and archaeological approaches. See also, though, work which deploys place-names as part of a full multi-disciplinary artillery to tackle early medieval systems of defence, see A. Reynolds and S. Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon civil defence in the Viking Age: a case-study of the Avebury region', in A. Reynolds and L. Webster (eds), *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World* (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2013), 561-606; J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* (Leiden, Brill, 2013).

their earliest attestation may offer the only surviving textual commentary. The assembly sites of early medieval Scandinavia, for example, are poorly recorded in the medieval texts describing the institutions which required them, but may be located, with caution, through the survival of names containing suggestive elements, foremost among them the element *thing* (see Hobaek Chapter 6).[80] This, the Old Norse (ON) word for assembly, is Common Germanic in origin and was in use in the medieval period across the Germanic-speaking world. Other terms are similarly suggestive. A number of Old English place-name elements imply sites for regular or significant gatherings, including *mæthel* 'speech, assembly', (*ge*)*mōt* 'meeting', *spēc* and *spell* both 'speech, discourse', all with Germanic cognates productive in place-names elsewhere. Irish words like *forrach*, *nás*, and *óenach*, all denoting assemblies, had a similar function in place-names.[81]

Names formed from these and similar elements are very often the only evidence to lead us to the sites of early gatherings, and their value cannot be underestimated, but it is not only those names that refer explicitly to assembly and discourse which are of use in identifying meeting places. The precision with which names were applied to places is

[80] The letters ð and þ have been replaced here and elsewhere in this volume with <th>.

[81] For *thing*-names, see, for example, the following: for 'Scandinavian' Scotland, B. E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1987), pp. 206–10; for the Isle of Man, T. Darvill, 'Tynwald Hill and the "things" of power', in Pantos and Semple, *Assembly Places*, pp. 217–32; for a discussion of the names in relation to administrative units in Iceland, Svavar Sigmundsson, 'Navne på de administrative inddelinger I Island', in his *Nefmingar* (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2009), pp. 303–18, esp. 303–7). J. Udolph's discussion of *thing*-names across Germany, the Low Countries, England, and Scandinavia treats – in brief – *mæthel* and its relatives (*Namenkundliche Studien zum Germanenproblem* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 587–601); for discusses of the Old English assembly-place terms, see A. Pantos, '"*In medle oðde an þinge*": the Old English vocabulary of assembly', in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*, pp. 181–201, esp. pp. 192–7.

evidenced in fine-grained use of landscape terminology, often testable on the ground in locations which have not undergone extensive urbanisation.[82] It seems safe to assume that a similar level of care was taken with terms for artificial structures and settlements, although often the more ephemeral nature of some of these does not allow for ground-truthing.[83] This precise usage may lead to the identification of exact locations of gatherings, where they are named in documents – in England, the hundreds and wapentakes of Domesday Book, for example, are often named from their meeting-places,[84] but later administrative documents

[82] M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, Dent, 1986), refined in M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, Shaun Tyas, 2000).

[83] A recent single-element study of the element *thorp* strongly supports such a hypothesis; P. Cullen, R. Jones, and D. N. Parsons, *Thorps in a Changing Landscape* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011); see also R. Jones and S. Semple, 'Making sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England', in R. Jones, and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 1–15, at pp. 4–8.

[84] Olof Anderson's seminal work on hundred-names suggests potential locations for a number of hundredal meeting-places, occasionally drawing on the earlier work of Gomme; O. S. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names*, 3 vols (Lund, Gleerup, 1934–9); G. L. Gomme, *Primitive Folk-Moots; of Open-Air Assemblies in Britain* (London, Sampson Low, 1880). Anderson's work has since been supplemented, notably by A. Meaney, 'Gazetteer of Hundred and Wapentake Meetings Places of the Cambridge Region', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 82 (1994), 67–92, and A. Pantos, 'Assembly-places in the Anglo-Saxon period: Aspects of form and location', 3 vols (unpubl DPhil, University of Oxford, 2002); see also K. Dietz, 'Die Englischen Hundertschaftsnamen', in E Eichler *et al.* (eds), *Völkernamen – Ländernamen – Landschaftsnamen: Protokoll der gleichnamigen Tagung im Herbst 2003 in Leipzig* (Leipzig, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004), pp. 53–128. Studies of individual sites are numerous, but examples include: D. Nail, 'The meeting-place of Copthorne Hundred', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 62 (1965), 44–53; Adkins and Petchey, 'Secklow Hundred Mound'; M. Hesse, 'The Anglo-Saxon bounds of Littlebury', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 83 (1994), 129–39. The county surveys of the English Place-Name Society (1924–) provide a number of identifications of meeting places at various administrative levels. For a particularly pleasing example, where the wapentake-name, Lawress 'coppice of Law-Ulf', occurs as a lost field-name within

which record not only hundredal but also more local sites are also valuable resources. The features referred to in these names sometimes survive. Known meeting-place names are characterised by their reference to certain types of feature and landscape – mounds, stones, trees, earthworks, and identifiable points on routeways – fords, crossroads and the like. Their distinctiveness, which allowed early medieval individuals to locate the designated gathering sites, also allows their identification a thousand years or more later. This precise identification of sites in turn permits the possibility of assessing their characteristics: their location with respect to routeway infrastructure, how they are topographically 'sign-posted', and how they command attention (and thereby communicate authority) through proximity to imposing natural or artificial features – at the same time as offering a practical outdoor 'auditorium' within a landscape setting which could meet the needs of large numbers of people who needed to be housed, fed and watered, and whose animals required the same.[85]

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the parish of Reepham 'reeve's homestead'; see K. Cameron and J. Insley, *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire: Part 7* (Nottingham, English Place-Name Society, 2010), p. 80; the coincidence of two terms denoting administrators is highly suggestive, to say the least. Identifying meeting-sites at other administrative levels is dependent upon place-name evidence to an even greater extent – see, for example, L. Mallet, S. Reddish, J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Gaunt, 'Community Archaeology at Thynghowe, Birklands, Sherwood Forest', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 116 (2012), 53–71. The Leverhulme Trust-funded Landscapes of Governance project team is collating, adding to, and refining the corpus of known meeting-place sites in Anglo-Saxon England. In a Scandinavian context, for an example of a *herrað* ('hundred') meeting-place identification through its place-name, see S. Brink, 'Legal assemblies and judicial structure in early Scandinavia', in Barnwell and Mostert (eds), *Political Assemblies*, pp. 61–72. Toponymic evidence is used to identify a supposed Viking meeting-place in Normandy in E. Ridel and J. Renaud, 'Le Tingland: l'emplacement d'un thing en Normandie?', *Nouvelle Revue d'Onomastique*, 35–6 (2000), 303–6.

[85] Baker and Brookes, 'Identifying outdoor assembly sites', 12 ff.

These primary practical considerations are often allied with what must be interpreted as a desire for symbolic resonance.[86] Identifying precise locations through place-names reveals their coincidence with prehistoric monuments or pagan burial sites – such venues must have been chosen deliberately for their powerful association (see Brookes Chapter 2). Where this sort of material and landscape evidence is lacking, the names themselves can sometimes provide clues to these less tangible ways in which assembly-sites connoted power and authority to those who used them. Some indicate a site's sacral or supernatural associations – references to heathen deities feature in the names of meeting places, as do words for heathen shrines or temples.[87] Additionally, appeals to past glories could be made onomastically – a significant number of the personal names which appear as the first elements of meeting place-names have regal, saintly or heroic-mythical connotations, redolent of a particular take on a communal past (see Baker Chapter 1).

Where there has been detailed investigation of meeting places identified from onomastic or documentary evidence, the results have often indicated multiple sites of significance, aside from that suggested by features of the 'main' place-name.[88] Minor names (those of fields and minor landscape features) may suggest that different types of administrative business took place in different locations, or to the movement of the assembly

[86] A. Pantos, 'The location and form of Anglo-Saxon assembly-places: some "moot points"', in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*, pp. 155–80, at pp. 170–5.

[87] Anderson, *English Hundred Names*, vol. III, p. 162; S. Brink, 'Legal assembly sites in early Scandinavia', in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*, pp. 205–16, at pp. 210, 213; S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 175; Baker and Brookes, 'Identifying Outdoor Assembly Sites', p. 16.

[88] Pantos, 'The location'; Brink sketches the characteristics – 'structural criteria' – of Viking Age *thing*-sites in Scandinavia in 'Legal Assembly Sites'.

from one location to another close by. They may also point to associated activities – leisure and marketing, for example, and religious practices.[89]

The functions of these locations, endowed with practical resources and symbolic significance as they were, were tied to the units whose judicial, fiscal, and legislative business their assemblies were convened to administer. The units they served were parts of governmental frameworks from multiple points in time. The network of assembly sites detectable today is best viewed as a palimpsest, multiple overwritings of arrangements which may in some instances have stretched back for generations. These earlier arrangements may sometimes be glimpsed through careful examination of name-type, location, and supporting documentary and archaeological evidence, including the boundaries of administrative units recorded considerably later.[90] Regional differences may be detected and (ir)regular patterns interrogated for what they might reveal about the exercise of power at different times and in different places. The role of place-names is central here not only for locating meeting places but for the contribution they make to such analyses. Regularity in meeting-place name-type may match uniformity of site-type and regularity in the geographical layout, fiscal value or configuration of administrative units, for example. This may reinforce an impression of planned administrative arrangements imposed from above, rather than a more piecemeal system which had evolved over time (as with the recurrent name-compounds discussed above). The sorts of places which gave their names to administrative units is also revealing – those whose importance is not readily decipherable from (later) written texts or

[89] J. Baker, 'The toponymy of communal activity: Anglo-saxon assembly sites and their functions', in J. Tort and I. Donada (eds), *Els noms en la vida quotidiana.: Actes del XXIV Congrés Internacional d'ICOS sobre Ciències Onomàstiques* (Annex. Secció 7, 2014), pp. 1498–1509.

[90] Baker and Brookes, 'Identifying Outdoor Assembly Sites'.

archaeological evidence may suggest the survival of earlier governmental structures within the more securely attested arrangements (see Reynolds Chapter 20).

Law

Law was one of the major ways through which power could be demonstrated and asserted in the early middle ages, though it also had the potential to curb abuses of the mighty. As the ultimate guarantor of law the king had a means of control of his most powerful subjects who in turn might have dominant interests in the courts of the districts subject to them. Even in the lowest level of community gatherings *boni homines*, freemen of good standing, who were the repositories and interpreters of local custom, might enjoy a certain power and influence. At all levels courts seem to have been almost exclusively all-male gatherings, and women wishing to pursue a case normally had to do so through a male proxy, though they could have a role as oath-helpers or witnesses. Although codified law might be a significant prop of royal power and help to define the identity of *gentes*, much law as it was practised was customary and subject to negotiation. Its aim, at all levels, was not so much punishment of offenders, but settlement of disputes through consensus to avoid the escalation of violence.[91] The places where law was enacted were therefore places of power, but in the early middle ages these were not usually dedicated lawcourts of the type that would be found in later centuries. Royal justice could be sought wherever the king might be at any particular time, and local landowners, especially churches, might also expect those seeking justice to come to them. But much of what might be classified as legal activity did not take place at sessions just convened for that purpose, but as part of the varied business of early medieval assemblies at

[91] W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the largely open-air assembly sites which were the arenas for many facets of power politics and display.

All settled communities required fora for communal decisions concerning agricultural practices as well as for solving local law and order issues (see Oosthuizen Chapter 21). We should therefore not be surprised to discover many similarities between different parts of early medieval Europe in the most basic community arrangements for the settlement of disputes. The long running debate about whether the Frankish *mallus* had late Roman or Germanic origins may be misconceived as there may have been much common ground between the two traditions.[92] In many areas of France, Italy and Spain courts continued to meet in former Roman towns for much of the early middle ages, but legal custom that operated within them evolved to meet changing circumstances. Local, customary courts make a limited appearance in written records, and we are particularly ill-informed about late Roman arrangements. Some indications may come from the earliest records in the 9th-century cartulary of Redon in Brittany which contain rare references to dispute settlement among the *plebes*, the village communities. Arguably many facets of the courts of the *plebes* had evolved from practices of the late Roman world. In the Redon records local freemen of good standing collectively acted as impartial witnesses and local judges under the presidency

[92] A. C. Murray, 'From Roman to Frankish Gaul: *Centenarii* and *Centenae* in the administration of the Merovingian kingdom', *Traditio*, 44 (1988), 59-100; P. Barnwell, 'The early Frankish *mallus*; its nature, participants and practice', in A. Pantos and S. Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*, pp. 233-46; V. Epps and C. H. F. Meyer, *Recht und Konsens im Frühen Mittelalter*, Vorträge und Forschungen Band 82 (Ostfilden, Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2017) .

of the *machtiern*, who was usually a minor locally-based nobleman, to settle deputes according to local custom.[93]

The *plebs* can be seen as the equivalent of the Frankish *centena*, a subdivision of the *pagus* into which the former *civitates* of the Roman world were divided and which often survived in various forms in the early medieval world.[94] Courts can be expected at all these different levels of organisation. It is likely that behind Roman arrangements there were older 'Celtic' ones. Ireland, which was never part of the Roman empire, had its own complex legal system with – unusually in early medieval Europe – a professional class of lawyers. Conversion obliged members of this group to provide a concordance between native and Christian law, and resulted in the rich, but difficult to interpret, compilations of Irish laws that were made from the 7th century onwards.[95] Christianity, with its traditions of Old Testament law being used to guide people towards what were deemed correct forms of behaviour, introduced a new moral imperative to early medieval law-making.

It may be informative that what may be the earliest known allusion to a *thing*, a term that was widely used in German-speaking areas in the early middle ages to designate a court or assembly, comes from a Roman context. Around AD 150 a Frisian legion based at the fort of Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall dedicated an altar with the following inscription:

Deo Marti Thingso et duabus Alaesiagis Bede and Fimmilena

[93] W. Davies, 'People and places in dispute in ninth-century Brittany', in Davies and Fouracre (eds), *Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 65-84.

[94] Murray, 'Roman to Frankish Gaul'.

[95] R. Sharpe, 'Dispute settlement in medieval Ireland; a preliminary enquiry', in Davies and Fouracre (eds), *Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 169-90.

> 'To the god Mars Thingsus and the two *Alaesiagi* (?most venerated ones) Beda and Fimmilena'[96]

Mars, perhaps having taken over the role of a Germanic equivalent, seems to be evoked here, and on another similar altar, as protector of the *thing*, aided by two goddesses. Although the Frisian legion would have been subject to Roman army discipline, the implication may be that some of its internal policing was decided by an adaptation of the Frisians' own traditions of *thing* assembly. There is a widespread distribution of place-names with *thing* in western and northern Germanic areas, and in Scandinavia it has proved possible to reconstruct many of the districts that they served.[97] In Francia the preferred term was *methel*, a term also found alongside *thing* in the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws. Germanic *thing* appear occasionally in written sources. The description in the 9th or 10th century *Vita Lebuini Antiqua* is particularly informative about an assembly held at Marklo in Saxony in the mid-8th century where the Saxons initially refused permission for Lebuin to preach to them. Although the historicity of the account can be questioned, it nevertheless can be seen as written by someone who understood the workings of Saxon assemblies.[98] The *Vita* describes Marklo as an annual meeting of representatives from the assemblies of lesser districts. It specifically refers to its business including confirmation of laws and judgment of cases. Anskar was brought to a

[96] R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1993) pp. 5-6, 203.

[97] S. Brink, 'Legal assemblies and judicial structure in early Scandinavia', in Barnwell and Mostert (eds), *Political Assemblies*, pp. 61-72; Iversen, this volume.

[98] M. Springer, 'Was Lebuins Lebensbeschreibung über die Verfassung Sachsens wirklich sagt oder warum man sich mit einselnen Wörter beschäftigen muß' *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 12 (1999), 223-39; I. N. Wood, *The Missionary Life. Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400–1050* (Harlow, Pearson Education, 2001), pp. 115-16; Ehlers, 'Between Marklo and Merseburg'.

comparable *thing* on Birka again so that it could be decided whether he had permission to preach, though in this case the description does not refer to the assembly's legal functions.[99]

In Francia, and other former provinces of the Roman world, Germanic kings were able to take over, or revive, surviving facets of the Roman imperial state including ultimate headship of the judiciary.[100] In some other areas of Europe kings had to create or recreate comparable positions for themselves, and the 7th-century lawcodes of the kings of Kent enable us to see this process underway in Anglo-Saxon England. The mere act of codification of a kingdom's laws, like the production of coinage (Naismith Chapter 19), helped enshrine the authority of the king, but in the Kentish lawcodes we can see unfolding the actual spread of royal control into local courts. The earliest lawcode of King Æthelbert (d. 616×8) makes arrangements for his own immediate followers, including the newly installed Christian clergy, and confirms existing practice in which the payment of compensation to injured parties and aggrieved kin forms a considerable element. The king does, however, undertake to protect the 'peace' of the assembly.[101] The laws of his great-grandson and great-great grandson, Hlothere and Eadric, some 75 years later, show much more concern with regulating legal procedure, including fines (presumably to the king or his representative) for failure to give sureties or submit to arbitration.[102] In the reign of Eadric's brother Wihtred (690–725) there is a new emphasis on punishments for certain crimes without reference to compensation to injured parties, especially for infringements of Christian commandments.[103] There seems

[99] Brink, 'Legal assemblies', pp. 68–72.

[100] Barnwell and Mostert (eds), *Political Assemblies, passim*.

[101] L. Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 52-81; T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017).

[102] Oliver *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 117–33

[103] Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 147–63.

to be a new emphasis on law moving from the top down to supplement, or in some cases, to replace the customary judgments of peers. Once again Christianity plays an important element in introducing the concept of punishment within the law to enforce its definition of correct forms of behaviour. It also reinforced the position of the king who could support the law with force if necessary. The terms *thing* and *methel* are replaced in the Kentish lawcodes by a new term for legal assembly, the *gemot*, perhaps to mark these changes.[104] In his lawcode Wihtred begins by asserting that his new laws are not his personal decision, but those of his own *gemot* of leading men, and thus themselves arrived at through consensus.[105] Nevertheless over the course of the century the Kentish kings had succeeded in inserting their own legal powers as king into older customary processes, and had established their rights to judge and punish. Frankish kings asserted similar rights as they expanded control into formerly independent Germanic provinces as Charlemagne did, for instance, through his codification and restatement of the laws of the Saxons.[106] Anglo-Saxon kings in the 10th century can be seen as doing a comparable building upon older foundations through the courts of the hundreds and shires that have often been seen as fundamental to the late Anglo-Saxon 'state'.[107]

While lawcodes give glimpses of the different levels of courts and assemblies within a province, most of the detailed accounts of actual cases concern the elite, often involving royal

[104] Pantos, '"*In medle oððe an þinge*"' pp. 181-4.

[105] Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 152–3.

[106] M. Springer, 'Location in Space and Time', in Green and Siegmund, (eds), *Continental Saxons*, pp. 11-36, at 18-20.

[107] P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law from Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume 1: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 93-134; G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, University Press, 2015), pp. 141-94; Lambert, *Law and Order* for a revisionist interpretation.

judgments. In many former areas of the Roman empire, including Francia, Italy and Spain, written records of such judgments, often referred to as *placita*, were made. In compiling them recourse was made to the use of set forms, many of which are to be found in surviving *formulae*.[108] Adherence to the correct forms was all-important as any errors could be grounds for challenging the authenticity of the records. This can lead to problems in interpretation as desire to get an acceptable written account of judgments might lead to distortion of what actually occurred (Davies Chapter 11). Exceptionally important cases might be recorded in chronicles or other histories, and these can give valuable insights into the operation of power in the early medieval world. Legal judgments against powerful subjects often needed to allow for face-saving and compromise rather than exemplary punishment; in fact, one intention may have been to avoid having recourse to the full force of the law. The aim, for the wise king, was to restore balance and harmony rather than to initiate vendettas.[109] Hence the deployment of ritual punishments at the Ottonian courts.[110] Otto I, for instance, punished Eberhard of Franconia and his followers for an attack on a Saxon vassal by making each carry a dog publicly for a considerable distance.[111] By submitting to this penalty Eberhard and his associates acknowledged their wrongdoing through a public humiliation, but this was followed by reconciliation with the ruler, sealed by his bestowal of gifts. Although deployment of such rituals has often been seen as a distinctive feature of Ottonian rule,

[108] Davies and Fouracre (eds), *Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 207–14.

[109] T. Reuter, *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 193–216.

[110] G. Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter: Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt, Primus, 1997).

[111] Reuter, *Medieval Polities*, p. 134.

comparable instances can be found in other times and places, for instance, in 10th-century Anglo-Saxon England,[112] and no doubt had their parallels in lower levels of society as well.

The most vivid records of law in action in a non-royal context are provided by the Icelandic sagas. Although at one level fictional, the sagas undoubtedly dealt with real people and events, and at the very least drew on practices at the time when they were written. Iceland was divided into quarters, each containing several local *thing*, supplemented by a whole island assembly at Thingvellir, the Althing where unresolved cases could be adjudicated.[113] Confrontations at the Althing, as parties struggled to reach consensus, provide some of the most memorable set-pieces of the sagas. They also vividly evoke the long and often difficult journeys from the quarters to Thingvellir, and the temporary booths in which the attendees lived for the duration of the assembly. The more powerful men, through promises or intimidation, tried to ensure their client-farmers or *thing*-men provided the necessary support. Discussion, deals and alliances were struck as those involved in disputes went round the booths trying to sway opinion or make new allies. We also see the procedures of the court and the attempt by rival sides to manipulate them to their advantage. Above all the sagas reveal some of the limitations of law operating through assemblies alone. It could be argued that the failure to prevent the calamitous feud of Njal's saga (which seems to be based on actual events) resulted because different participants could not agree upon the interpretation of the law.[114] With no royal power to back up the attempts of the law-speaker to provide mediation in the period before acceptance of the suzerainty of the Norwegian king

[112] J. Barrow, 'Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 127-50; L. Roach, 'Penance, submission and *deditio:* religious influences on dispute settlement in later Anglo-Saxon England, 871-1066', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 41 (2012), 343-7.

[113] J. Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (Harmondsworth, Penguin books, 2001), pp. 171–83.

[114] R. Avis, 'Conflict, co-operation and consensus in the law of Njáls saga', *Quaestio Insularis*, 12, 85-108.

– and behind some of the sagas may be promotion of that union – violence and escalating feud were the results. *Mutatis mutandis* the Icelandic sagas can be seen as providing a guide to how assembly politics worked in other areas without, or on the margins, of a centralised kingship.[115]

The division of law areas into groups of three or four subsidiary units with linked central and local meeting places is a pattern that can be found in many different periods and places (as many essays in this volume illustrate). But unlike Iceland which was delimited by its geography, in many areas of Europe organisation of law districts and their assembly places could be subject to change as the result of shifts in political alignments. English kings of the 10th century sought to consolidate their control of the whole country by regularising the holding of courts. Lawcodes decree that shire courts were to meet twice a year, borough courts three times a year and those of the subdivisions of the shire, the hundreds, every four weeks.[116] Royal officials would oversee business, and the option of direct royal intervention, especially in matters involving elites, was always there. However, other records suggest that the practice was more complex and less regular than the lawcodes proscribed. In some areas there were further subdivisions, probably of some antiquity, between the shires and their individual hundreds. Hundreds could be of varying size, in spite of their name which was probably taken from that of the comparable Frankish unit the *centena* (which itself may have been Roman in origin).[117] Not all of them consisted of geographically contiguous blocks of land, for some had been brought together because they had the same estate owner, especially

[115] M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 118-24.

[116] H. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500-1087* (London, Edward Arnold, 1994), pp. 131–53; Molyneaux, *Formation of the Kingdom*, pp. 141-55.

[117] Murray, 'Roman to Frankish Gaul'.

if this was a powerful church. Some hundreds were districts with a well-established identity stretching back into the early Anglo-Saxon past at the very least, while others may have been recent creations, especially in certain Midland areas, that disrupted older ties.

In Scandinavia as well it would appear that the development of kingship involved regularisation and centralisation of more diverse patterns of local assembly, as well as the introduction of oversight though the ruler's own officials (Iversen Chapter 8; Odegaard Chapter 5). As a result the locations of assembly sites, where legal matters might be decided, themselves could be subject to change.[118] The result can be a bewildering array of assembly sites which can be difficult to place in a relative chronology or to equate with specific organisational units. Such complexities have been found in many different countries where attempts have been made to identify and quantify assembly sites, as many papers in the volume suggest. As provinces grew and contracted, changes in geographical scale might require shifts in the location of nodal points.

The Icelandic sagas also give a feel for the physical environment in which law was pursued at the Althing in the two weeks in Midsummer when the best weather and longest days could be expected. For in the middle ages there was usually no alternative but for a large gathering to meet in the open air. Only the Carolingians and Ottonians had palaces inspired by Roman models which might be large enough to house a large indoor assembly at sites like Aachen, Ingelheim and Paderborn.[119] Even rulers of these areas often held assemblies at open air sites, like their counterparts in England and elsewhere, where tents provided temporary

[118] A. Sanmark, 'Assembly organisation and state formation. A case study of assembly sites in Viking and Medieval Södermanland, Sweden', *Medieval Archaeology*, 53 (2009), 205-41.

[119] G. Eggenstein, G, Börste, N, Zöller, H and E. Zahn-Biemüller(eds) 2008, *Eine Welt in Bewegung. Unterwegs zu Zentren des frühen Mittelalters* (Paderborn, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008); F. Pohle (ed), *Karl, Charlemagne der Grosse. Orte der Macht* (Aachen, Sandstein Verlag, 2014), 104–325.

accommodation.[120] However, royal judgments on individual cases could be made anywhere. King Alfred made his decision in the case of the nobleman-thief Helmstan in his chamber in the royal vill of Wardour while he was washing his hands.[121] Such a judgment would then have been formally announced at relevant hundred and shire assemblies. Charters indicate that legal disputes might be settled within churches, for instance in Spain and Francia, especially in cases in which a church or churchmen were involved (Davies Chapter 11; Escalona Chapter 10). As most surviving charters are for cases in which churches had an interest and were preserved in ecclesiastical archives resolution in church properties may be unduly well-represented.

There were though practical reasons why meeting in a church, or incorporation of a church in a meeting site, made sense for it would contain relics to support the oath-giving that was an essential part of early medieval legal practice. Portable reliquaries could have been used at other assembly sites. No doubt other religious beings had provided similar sanctification in non-Christian societies as is suggested by the Housesteads altars, and the association of assembly and cult sites in Scandinavia.[122] Thingvellir seems originally to have been under the protection of Thor, and after conversion a church was built at the site.[123] Significant burials are a feature of many Germanic pre-conversion assembly sites, and there

[120] L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England871-978; Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013); Roach, 'Meetings of the *Witan* in Anglo-Saxon England: Royal assemblies 871–978', and his chapter in this volume.

[121] N. Brooks, 'The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaf and Anglo-Saxon law in practice', in S. Baxter, C. E. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. Pelteret (eds), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009), pp. 301–18.

[122] S. Brink, 'Legal assembly sites in early Scandinavia', in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places*, pp. 205–16.

[123] A. Bell, *Þingvellir: Archaeology of the Althing* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2010).

are possible continuities with the hearing of legal cases in churches or their cemeteries (Brookes Chapter 2). A case involving a dead person might utilise their burial place in the absence of the person themselves. A law of King Ine of Wessex, for instance, refers to vouching for warranty at a dead man's grave – that is swearing a legal claim to ownership of goods or an estate received from him.[124]

Adherence to correct legal procedure was another means by which the tensions of the assembly could be kept under control. In Scandinavia the marking out of the inner area of the *thing* site where ritual behaviour had to be observed, and weapons could not be taken, is described in sagas and may be represented in stone-settings at some surviving sites.[125] In the Frankish *mallus* the *festuca* or staff was an important prop through which compliance or dissent could be symbolised.[126] A staff of a whale bone excavated from a Frisian terp and engraved with the words 'choose a witness Tuda' may be a *festuca* (Knol Chapter 17). Another find of a wooden sword engraved 'oath messenger' may have been used to summon witnesses to an assembly to give oaths.[127] In guaranteeing the neutrality of an assembly important respect for its presiding officer was of paramount importance. The role of the law-speaker in objectively conducting affairs and reaching judgment is made clear in the Icelandic sagas, and must have been underpinned by delivering his views from the law-speaker's mound at Thingvellir. Mounds at other assembly sites are likely to have had similar roles as places where judgements could be clearly announced. The fact that some mounds

[124] F. L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1922), pp. 52–5.

[125] Brink, 'Legal assembly sites'.

[126] Barnwell, 'Frankish *mallus*', pp. 241-2

[127] E. Kramer, I. Stoumann and A. Greg (eds), *Kings of the North Sea, AD 250-850* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear Museums, 2000), p. 155.

were prehistoric burial mounds and/or, like *Cwichelmeshlaew*, associated with past kings or heroes, could have added an additional layer of solemnity and respect (Baker Chapter 1). The impressive physical setting of many of the open air assembly sites may also have helped reinforce the sanctity of the legal process. Thingvellir can be seen as a particularly notable example, with the earliest assemblies probably meeting on the narrow peninsula of Spöngin between two water-filled fissures.[128] Assemblies where legal judgments were made were places of power in their own right, but respect for the law was aided by enactment at places that had their own powerful presence in the landscape.

An Interdisciplinary Future: A New Research Agenda for Understanding Power and Place in Europe in the 1st Millennium AD

A truly interdisciplinary approach to a region on the scale of Europe first requires a triangulation of current research themes and questions across the region and across the various modes of disciplinary enquiry. What are the current key research questions in the Baltic area when compared to those of south-eastern Europe, or those of the Iberian peninsula in the light of those of Scandinavia or non-Germanic places such as Ireland and Wales? What are the comparative strengths and imbalances in scholarly interests and the current body of knowledge? What methodological contrasts and comparisons can be observed across Europe in terms of the ways in which the scholarly resource is generated, curated and accessible? What differences in emphasis can be found across the region in terms of school-level and university education about the 1st Millennium? To a degree, some of these issues are considered earlier on in this introduction, but a useful way forward might be to actively

[128] Bell, *Þingvellir*.

attempt to map the situations just described so that new research can be designed on the basis of an evidenced based approach rather than being determined by the many and varied academic traditions found across the region.

We set out below a thematic agenda for future research in the field of power and place, which promotes a fully integrated interdisciplinary approach and which we hope might provide scholars with some new research directions in European 1st-millennium studies, but also further afield in other periods and places. These themes were given to our contributors to consider, and they have sought to address them in their papers, where appropriate.

Theme 1 The development and chronology of civil organisation and authority in the European landscape in the first millennium AD

- Late Roman and early medieval administrative frameworks - What form did Late Roman/early medieval civil administration take in the landscape? Did Roman systems influence early medieval political landscapes? Do relationships exist between Roman provinces, *pagi*, and courts, and administrative divisions of the medieval period?
- Law in action - How did Roman and medieval law work; what were the powers and duties of provincial administrators, magistrates, kings, councils, and civilian representatives; what were the limits of individual/group rights and state power? How were courts held; what procedures existed to bring people to justice?
- Language and procedure of assembly - What terminology is found in inscriptions, texts and place-names relating to legal procedures? How can written sources illuminate the relationships between law, moral conduct, and social status? What symbolism and imagery is used in written and pictorial sources? What was the nature of rhetoric and oratory in the Roman and early medieval world?

Theme 2 Places, political landscapes and human experience

- Places of assembly: location, form and chronological changes - Where were Roman and early medieval assemblies held; what did these places look like? What changes can be observed in role and function of assembly sites between the Roman, early medieval and later medieval periods. What relationships existed between Roman courts, early medieval things and moots, medieval manorial and parish courts?
- Participation and topography - What was the range of meeting-place types and meeting-place functions (legal, governmental, commercial, military, social, competitive)? Can meeting-places be characterised by their landscape placements (e.g. relationships with monuments and landforms, communications, landscape simulacra)? How are assembly sites monumentalised/conceptualised/architecturally embellished?
- Relationships between civility, community, economy and law - How did communities express themselves and can different levels of political participation be observed? What relationships exist with settlement/social patterns, 'civil' monuments? Do assembly sites exist in contested landscapes, central/liminal places?

Theme 3 Identifying and Defining Political Landscapes: methods and problems

- Archaeological approaches – How can Roman and medieval assembly sites be identified and characterised archaeologically? What fieldwork techniques are relevant? What is the contribution of numismatics, metal detector activity, and place-name research?
- Place-name studies – What can a toponymic approach reveal about the origin and the physical and social evolution of assembly sites? Can different phases of naming be

identified and to what extent can different types of assembly place-name shed light on changing practices?

Concluding remarks

Ultimately, we hope that this volume will have impacts in terms of new approaches to the understanding of social and administrative complexity, with resonances beyond the European area and in other chronological settings. Models of state formation are mainly based on studies of 'pristine' societies or, in post-Roman contexts, by comparison with the Classical world. Our approach considers the second half of the 1st millennium in its own right as a distinctive and innovative socio-political environment with important cross-cultural and cross-chronological implications for the study of other largely non-urban, yet highly organised, societies. Although the papers cover several different past societies what unites them is the interrelationship of 'power and place'. Power might be in the hands of a particular regime, often in the early middle ages reinforced by military might, but it needed to be enacted at specific places. New regimes might create their own new spaces, but more often than not in the early middle ages places were selected which already had their own powerful associations whether because they had been used by, or recalled, earlier regimes, or because, or in addition, they were physically or symbolically arresting. Thus, in spite of the many differences in the histories or source material of the societies covered by the volume, they share the phenomenon of the need to select places in which to manifest power on different scales, and arguably this need to inscribe power on the landscape provides many unexpected commonalities between the varied regimes of early medieval Europe.