# Continuity of Christian practices in Kent, c.410-597:

## a historical and archaeological review.

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With its wealth of Roman remains, its proximity to the Continent and its comparatively early historical documents, Kent may be considered as one of the brighter corners of Dark Age Britain. Yet this brightness is only relative. The story of the passage of Roman Kent to English kingdom resembles a thin soup, a mixture of ambiguity and cautious conjecture. New pieces of evidence have been dropped in now and then, and various flavours have been tried, but only the most general consensus has been reached as to what actually happened in Kent between the days of Emperor Honorius and Pope Gregory I.

The traditional narrative was one of mass migration, wherein the various newcomers, in the words of E T Leeds, 'descended in hordes on the shores of Britain,'[1] putting its inhabitants to fire and sword, a view ultimately derived from the impassioned rhetoric of Gildas in his *De Excidio Britanniae.* Thus Collingwood's classic narrative is also structured around conflict and invasion,[2] Evison's[3] and Stenton's[4] are the same, while Salway's revision of Collingwood and Alcock's studies both follow the same kind of route.[5] Morris's model for the period is lucid and

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[1]     Leeds, T E, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlers* (Oxford, 1913), 14.

[2]     Collingwood, R G, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1932).

[3]     Evison, Vera I, *The Fifth Century Invasions South of the Thames* (London, 1965).

[4]     Stenton, Sir F, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1971).

[5]     Salway, P, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981). Alcock's studies from the 50s to the 80s were groundbreaking in many ways, but he always retained the interests of a military historian. See Alcock, L, *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Britons and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1987).

insightful, but extremely historical and in focus.[6] In contrast, Frere uses the historical sources, particularly Gildas, with the utmost caution, but his framework for the end of Roman Britain remains essentially built around conquest.[7] Myres' five phases of Anglo-Saxon pottery made their way across Britain in the wake of mercenaries.[8]

In recent decades some scholars, particularly archaeologists, have attempted to stir the fifth century soup and create a new picture. New theories have tried to create an alternative story to that found in Gildas, and some have also stressed the extent of possible British survival in 'Anglo-Saxon' areas. Whereas Wallace-Hadrill dismisses in half a paragraph the possibility of British influence on the Anglo-Saxons,[9] others take a different view. Detsicas, in his study of the Cantiaci, implies that some Romano-British institutions may have survived the coming of the Jutes, if not for very long.[10] Esmond Cleary, meanwhile, argues that the British, having lost their Roman identity a generation earlier, 'accepted the political, linguistic and perhaps also religious systems of the incoming English.'[11] Higham agrees with this, assuring us that 'in adopting the material culture and language of the élite [the Britons] did no more than had the Gallic peasantry of the Roman period.'[12]

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[6] Morris, J, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650*, vol 1 (London, 1973).

[7] Frere, S S, *Britannia*, 3rd ed (London, 1987), 373-5.

[8] Myres, J N L, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford, 1969).

[9] Wallace-Hadrill, J M. *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), 22.

[10] Detsicas, Alec, *The Cantiaci* (Gloucester 1987), 184.

[11] Esmond Cleary, A S, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), 204.

[12] Higham, N, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), 229.

There has also been a swing towards the issue of British self-identity on the eve of the Germanic takeover. Michael Jones develops the notion of 'de-Romanisation', implying that it was this process that allowed the Anglo-Saxons to achieve such dominance, and he uses archaeological evidence to dismantle the old theories of massed Germanic migrations.[13] Faulkner's recent survey of Roman Britain gives the mixture another quick stir, this time adding a pinch of peasant warfare for good measure, but ends up with a similar flavour.[14] At the heart of the discussions centred on archaeological material is the issue of inferring ethnic identity from material remains, usually burials, and to what extent it is possible. Arnold makes this a central concern of his textbook on the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[15]

Esmond Cleary, frustrated at the difficulties of studying the period, has recently tried to drain the soup bowl ready for fresh, evidence-led research along well-defined 'axes of inquiry.'[16] I do not agree with his exclusion of the historical sources from his framework, which is perhaps too extreme an act of purism even for an emancipated handmaiden;[17] my choice of

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[13]    Jones, M E, *The End of Roman Britain* (New York, 1996).

[14]    Faulkner, N *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Gloucester, 2000).

[15]    Arnold, C J, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, 2nd edition (London, 1997).

[16]    Esmond Cleary, S, 'The Roman to medieval transition' in S James and M Millett (eds), *Britons and Saxons: Advancing an Archaeological Agenda*, CBA Research Report 125 (York, 2001), 90-97.

[17]    C J Arnold used a similarly exclusive approach in his *Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984), for which he was soundly criticised (see Myres' review in *Britannia* 16, 334). Since then, he has outlined a good model for the complementary use of archaeological and historical sources which has also influenced my approach in this essay; see Arnold, C J, 'Territories and leadership: frameworks for the study of emergent polities in early Anglo-Saxon southern England' in S T Driscoll and M R Nieke (eds), *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 111-127.

the significant dates of 410 and 597 to bound the review is deliberate in this respect. In part, however, the form of this essay is inspired by his framework. My aim is to focus our attention on one aspect of the period which I believe is among the easiest to identify in the historical and archaeological evidence: the practice of Christianity. Christianity is only one thread in the theme of continuity of British (if not Romano-British) identity into the medieval period, which in turn is only one part of understanding the period as a whole. But it will be interesting to attempt an evidence-led inquiry into a comparatively small and well-defined question, in the equally small and well-defined area of Kent.

Before looking for evidence of continuity, it is best to define what we are looking for, and from what it is continuing. In other words, a brief look at the state of Christianity in late Roman Britain is called for. The evidence can be summarised as follows. There are historical sources which refer to bishops resident in major British cities during the fourth century, who are known to have attended several Continental councils between 314 and 160. St Ninian is thought to have been active in Northern Britain around 400, and the heretical monk Pelagius was a product of late fourth century Britain; Germanus was despatched from Gaul to Britain to combat his heresy in 429 and 447. Mawyer, examining 260 potentially Christian artefacts from Roman Britain, concludes that 70 are explicitly Christian.[18] There are some famous Christian mosaics and wall paintings from Roman Britain, notably at Lullingstone (Kent), and Hinton St. Mary (Dorset), that, along with several treasure hoards, attest the existence of a privileged class of fourth century Christian landowners. There are the remains of possible Roman-period churches at London, Colchester, St Alban's, Lincoln, Silchester, Wroxeter, Icklingham and

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[18]     Mawyer, C F, *Evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain. The Small Finds* (Oxford, 1995).

Richborough.

At present there is general agreement on the interpretation of this mass of evidence. Christianity was, according to this view, essentially an élite religion, with little influence among the rural communities. Higham puts it thus: 'The spread of Christianity in later Roman Britain probably owed more to its place in the Imperial system than to its inherent attractions to the bulk of the populace, most of whom remained pagan into the fifth century.'[19] Watts follows this view, highlighting the lack of a widespread parochial system, and the turbulence of the late fourth century that would have hindered the founding of such as system. She adds that British Christians may also have remained closer to their pagan roots than did populations closer to Rome.[20] Most recently, Faulkner agrees that there is plentiful evidence to suggest a well-establish urban episcopal network in the fourth century, and a Christian environment energetic enough to throw up a heretic like Pelagius,[21] but further than this he will not go. This general view is reinforced by Constantius's account of Germanus's 429 visit.

Now we are in a position to see what, if any, of this urban-based, episcopal, élite religion survived up to the arrival of Augustine. In terms of archaeology, I shall attempt to define the nature of material which can be taken as evidence for Christianity. Burials are perhaps the most obvious source of evidence, as it was here that the Christian identity was clearly expressed, and

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[19]     Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*, 214.

[20]     Watts, D, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London, 1998), 133-4. And even in Europe, the Church in later centuries had constant difficulties when it came to stamping out pagan practices amongst nominal (invariably rural) Christians. See T. Reuter, 'St Boniface and Europe', in T. Reuter (Ed.), *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St Boniface and the Church at Crediton* (Exeter, 1980), 76; Dutton, P E, *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (Ontario, 1993), 3.

[21]     Faulkner, *Decline and Fall of Roman Britain*, 118-9.

they are the most common form of evidence to be excavated. There are late Roman burial

grounds which are taken as Christian, either because of associated Christian finds or because

of a lack of goods and, sometimes, the presence of a west-east alignment. An absence of grave

goods and a west-east alignment are key signifiers of Christianity. In terms of buildings, I will

look for evidence of churches, which should follow a typical late-Roman plan for such

structures: rectangular, with an apsidal east end. Artefacts are an important source of

information, as they can explicitly express Christian identity through symbols and words. The

cross is one such symbol, as is the *Chi Rho* and fish emblem. Place-names are often cited by

archaeologists as they sometimes hint at the existence of an ancient community or feature which

is now invisible to archaeology, so I shall also examine this evidence.

To begin with burials, there are several large cemeteries in Kent which have been

extensively excavated, and which are thought to date from the fifth and sixth centuries. I have

examined six which consist mostly or entirely of west-east inhumations: two near Dover, two

in the Darent valley and two near the mouth of the Medway. At Buckland,[22] Lyminge,[23]

Orpington[24] and Darenth Park,[25] the burials were almost entirely west-east in orientation

(Orpington also included 19 cremations), and contained a great many grave goods. These four

sites were interpreted as pagan Anglo-Saxon burial grounds on the basis of these grave goods,

[22]     Evison, V, *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery* (London, 1987).

[23]     Warhurst, A, 'The Jutish cemetery at Lyminge' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 69 (1955), 1-40.

[24]     Tester, P J, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Orpington' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 83 (1968), 125-50.

[25]     Batchelor, D, 'Darenth Park Anglo-Saxon cemetery, Dartford' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 108 (1990), 35-72.

and were dated from the mid fifth to late sixth century (with Buckland continuing as a Christian cemetery into the eighth).

The earliest phase of Buckland was associated with a rectangular enclosure, which Evison suspects may have contained a building;[26] unfortunately it was not excavated, so its exact nature is unknown. At Lyminge, grave 39 yielded some interesting burial goods. The woman interred was wearing four low quality brooches, decorated with cross motifs. Warhurst points out similarities to non-Christian decorative motifs, favouring a pagan context for the brooches.[27] The only grave good recovered from these sites which was considered to be explicitly Christian was a late Roman glass bowl inscribed with a *Chi Rho*, from Darenth Park. Batchelor is of the opinion that this item was recovered from its original context and kept by a pagan Saxon regardless of its religious connotations,[28] and this illustrates the problems of inferring ethnicity and beliefs from burials: Batchelor's interpretation prevents the grave from becoming a Christian anomaly in an otherwise wholly pagan burial site, and thus does not raise new problems, but is not necessarily correct.

The burials at Holborough[29] were aligned west-east, and contained very few grave goods. Evison's conclusion was that they were Christian, dating from the late seventh century, from the last phase of an otherwise destroyed (and previously pagan) cemetery. The Christian interpretation was derived partially from an open-cross form buckle and another buckle with

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[26]     Evison, V, *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, 152.

[27]     Warhurst, *Archaeologia Cantiana* 69, 27.

[28]     Batchelor, *Archaeologia Cantiana* 108, 61-2.

[29]     Evison, V I, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Holborough, Kent' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 70: 84-141.

a fish design.[30] Nearby at Eccles[31] about 200 burials were excavated next to the site of a large Roman villa, almost all aligned west-east, and mostly without goods. The site was interpreted as seventh century Christian Anglo-Saxon.

Three of the cemeteries above are on the sites of former Roman villas, but none of them are interpreted as being Christian until after the seventh century Conversion. In fact, very few thoroughly excavated villas have produced evidence for Christianity even in the late fourth century, even if the site itself continued in use into the fifth. In Kent, villas that failed to produce a hint of Christianity are found at Orpington,[32] Keston,[33] and in the Darent Valley.[34] At Otford, the only evidence for Christianity is a fragment of wall plaster which may be part of a large *Chi Rho*.[35] At Lullingstone, the late Roman chapel fell into disuse in the early years of the fifth century and was not recovered: rather, a post-Conversion church was built directly upon the remains of a fourth century pagan temple and mausoleum, respecting its alignment. Meates suggests that this is an example of Augustine having a pagan site 'converted' to Christian use.[36] If this is the case, then memory of the early fourth century pagan temple outlasted memory of the late fourth century Christian chapel only yards away.

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[30]     *Ibid*, 152.

[31]     Shaw, Rachel, 'The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Eccles: a preliminary report' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 114, 165-88.

[32]     Philp, B, *The Roman Villa Site at Orpington, Kent* (Dover, 1996).

[33]     Philp, B et al, *The Roman Villa Site at Keston, Kent* (Dover, 1991).

[34]     Philp, B *Excavations in the Darent Valley, Kent* (Dover, 1984).

[35]     Meates, G W, 'Early Christianity in the Darent Valley' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 100 (1984), 57-64.

[36]     Meates, G W, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent* (Dover, 1979).

On the matter of fifth or sixth century churches in Kent, the review is brief and concise: there are no known remains of such buildings, either newly built or kept in use from the fourth century. Either we have failed to recover/recognise them, they are archaeologically invisible, or they were not built at all.

In Copley's survey of fifth and sixth century place-names, Kent claims 46. Of these, 13 contain potentially British elements.[37] They largely refer to local rivers or geographical features, and only one may refer to Christianity - Eccles, derived from Welsh *eglwys* and ultimately from Latin *ecclesia*. The site of Eccles once had a Roman villa, as we have seen, and is associated with other Roman-period remains, including a major road.[38] Yet Copley is sceptical about inferring the presence of Christians from place-names,[39] and the example of Eccles is a case in point. There are only four examples from south-east England,[40] and this scarcity must mean that it was not used much, or it was generally discarded at an early date. Morris[41] makes the additional point that the English had their own specific word for a Christian church, *cirice*, which was used from the fourth century on the Continent and has survived in English to the present day. There are no fifth or sixth century place-names in Kent which contain the *cirice* element.

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[37] Copley, G, *Archaeology and Place-Names in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*, British Archaeological Report No. 147 (Oxford, 1986).

[38] Cameron, K, 'Eccles in English place-names' in M W Barley and R P C Hanson (eds), *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* (Leicester, 1968), 87-92.

[39] Copley, G, *Early Place-Names of the Anglian Regions of England*, British Archaeological Report No. 185 (Oxford, 1988), 3.

[40] The other three are Eccles in Norfolk, and Ecclesbourne and Ecclesden, both in Sussex.

[41] Morris, R, *The Church in British Archaeology*, British Archaeological Report No. 47 (Oxford, 1983), 45-6.

This brief survey demonstrates that there is very little archaeological or place-name evidence that Christian communities survived in Kent from the Roman period to the seventh century. There are no clearly Christian cemeteries which have been dated to before the Conversion, there is no evidence for churches or for Christian artefacts being produced, and place-name evidence is scarce. There are, however, problems with the evidence. If there were churches being built by isolated Kentish communities, they would almost certainly not have been built in stone, which immediately prejudices against their survival in the archaeological record - indeed, there are very few structures of any kind known from this period and area. Secondly, almost all thorough archaeological work has been in the river valleys, where Anglo-Saxon influence seems to have been greatest, and hardly any research has been committed on the upland areas of the Weald or Downs. Thirdly, there are the eternal problems of inferring ethnicity and other socio-religious factors from burial remains. If Watts[42] is right in her assertion that British Christianity was comparatively diluted with pagan elements, it is unclear how this would affect burial rites. Finally, archaeology relies upon a generalised, potentially circular theory of dating. Burials are dated according to their grave goods, so even if west-east burials without goods are found and designated Christian, they are automatically assumed to date from the post-Conversion period on this basis alone. This method also seems to prejudice the perception of evidence: it seems to me that Evison's open-work (supposedly Christian) buckle[43] bares only the slightest resemblance to a cross motif, whereas Warhurst's four 'pagan' brooches[44] are much more 'Christian' in appearance. By viewing the evidence through certain

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[42]     See above, note 20.

[43]     See above, note 30.

[44]     See above, note 27.

eyes, it is made to strengthen a pre-conceived model. These are hardly new problems, but an evidence-led enquiry requires that each of our assumptions are picked apart and addressed.

It now remains to examine the documentary sources for evidence of continued Christianity. The key source for this is Gildas. Bede, Procopius, Zozimus, the Anglo-Saxon and Gallic Choniclers, Prosper of Aquitaine and Nennius all mention Britain, but they are far removed by time or distance compared to Gildas. As discussed earlier, archaeologists and historians have tended to agree on a rough narrative of events: that some Germanic mercenaries were brought over the North Sea and given land in the south east, that the mercenaries rebelled and put to flight the British, and that there followed a prolonged period of wars that ended with a British victory and several decades of peace. The chronological construction of this sequence of events is the most commonly disputed element, but it is thought to run from the middle until the end of the fifth century. In an attempt to build a more stable framework, and acknowledging Bede's own rather forced and artificial dating model,[45] historians have shifted various parts of the story around. Thus Thompson proposes that Gildas was narrating a northern version of the Anglian invasion,[46] while Miller suggests that the plea to Rome for help came from the north, while Hengest's arrival was indeed in the south.[47] Chadwick Hawkes admits that while the sources do not lend themselves to confident interpretation, it could be that Hengest did indeed arrive in Kent, but that the *Adventus Saxonum* of Gildas was a separate event elsewhere in the

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[45]   Chadwick Hawkes, S, 'Anglo-Saxon Kent *c*.425-725' in P E Leach (ed), *Archaeology in Kent to AD 1500*, CBA Research Report No. 48 (York, 1982), 65-6.

[46]   Thompson, E A, 'Gildas and the history of Britain' in *Britannia* 10, (1979), 203-26.

[47]   M Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas' in *English Historical Review* 90 (1975), 241-61.

south east.[48]

When we consider that the basic details of the Anglo-Saxon arrival are so controversial, it is not surprising that the nature of the Anglo-Saxon takeover is even more obscure. Gildas's view is uncompromising. He writes of the Saxon onslaughts:

...All the major towns were laid low by th repeated battering of enemy rams; laid low, too, all the inhabitants - church leaders, priests and people alike, as the swords gleamed all around and the flames crackled.[49]

This was for a long time the accepted image of early cultural interaction between Britons and Saxons. The main point to make here regards Gildas's mention of *praepositi ecclesiae* and *sacerdotes.* He perceived the conquest of the Britons by the Saxon invaders in explicitly Biblical terms, a war of savage pagans against the misguided servants of Christ. His frequent quotations from Scripture demonstrate this:

'They have burned with fire your sanctuary on the ground, they have polluted the dwelling-place of your name.' And again: 'God, the heathen have come into your

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[48]    Chadwick Hawkes, 'Anglo-Saxon Kent,' 67.

[49]    Gildas, 'The Ruin of Britain' in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. M Winterbottom (London, 1978), 27; Ita ut cunctae columnae crebis arietibus, omnusque coloni cum praepositus ecclesiae, sum sacerdotibus ac populo, mucronibus undique micantibus, ac flammis crepitantibus, simul solo sternerentur. Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae. Ad Codicum Manuscriptorum Recensuit Josephus Stephenus*, Publications of the English Historical Society (London, 1838), I.24.

inheritance; they have desecrated your holy temple'; and the rest.[50]

Gildas had his own contemporary reasons for writing in this way. In order for this message to work, it has to be extreme both in its images and in its contrasts; thus we cannot be sure how far the sweep of Saxon iron and fire was taking place in fifth century Kent, and how far in Gildas's head.[51]

Another fragment of Gildas worth mentioning is his statement that some Britons remained in the country, in remote places where they were safer from the Saxons.[52] If this is based on historical fact, it has clear implications for the survival of Christian British communities in Kent. Procopius states in a slightly garbled fashion that many Britons uprooted and emigrated to Francia, but he does not tell us where they came from, when they left, or exactly who they were. It is clear that the urban populations suffered greatest, being virtually extinguished. As Watts puts it: 'Because the towns were early victims of the economic decline it is certain that the numbers of Christians were reduced as the population dispersed into the country.'[53] It seems quite likely that many Britons remained in lands taken over by the Saxons, especially given that the latter were almost certainly outnumbered many times over.

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[50] Gildas in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, 27; Incenderunt igni sanctuarium tuum, in terra polluerunt tabernaculum nominis tui. Et iterum divit: Deus, venerunt gentes in haereditatem tuam; polluerunt templum sanctum tuum, etc. Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.24.

[51] Higham, N J, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1994), 203.

[52] Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.25.

[53] Watts, *Religion in Roman Britain*, 135.

Bede's narrative for this period is largely derived from Gildas, with the polemic toned down but the details retained. He also adds an account of the visit of St Germanus of Auxerre on his two missions to combat the Pelagian heresy. Much has been made of this account and its source, the *Life* of St Germanus by Constantius.[54] It is crucial evidence for the survival of British Christianity after the end of Roman Britain, as it describes city authorities who apparently retained some of the garb of Roman authority, including Christianity. However, it also tells us much about the nature and limits of British Christianity. The people with whom Germanus debates seem to be members of the aristocratic élite, well educated and influential - they were also Pelagians, and the importance of Pelagianism in the British developments of this time is unclear; Morris believes that its political role was central in Britain's rejection of Roman authority.[55] The mass of the people, we are told, were in awe of Germanus's charisma and piety - so much so that many desired to be baptised. There are two mass baptisms mentioned, and it would seem therefore that the bulk of the rural population was not Christian. Indeed, the insecure foundations of Christianity led to Germanus's second visit, to combat the same problem all over again. It would seem that Christianity was indeed largely limited to the upper strata of fifth century British society.

Gildas was clearly literate, writing for a Latin-speaking audience; furthermore, his writing suggests that he had undergone some form of traditionally-derived Latin education, perhaps on the Continent like St Patrick.[56] The eleventh century *Life of St Cadoc* alludes to a

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[54] In translation, see Constantius in Hoare, F R, *The Western Fathers* (New York, 1954).

[55] Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, 71-2.

[56] Chadwick, N K, 'Introduction' in N K Chadwick, K Hughes, C Brooke and K Jackson (eds), *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), 1-28;

Welsh tradition of a *famosus rethoricus* coming to Wales from Rome during the sixth century in order to teach the British correct Latin,[57] and Faustus of Riez went in the opposite direction in the early fifth century.[58] Although these sources are very late, the British church was certainly not entirely isolated during this earlier period, although certain aspects of its liturgy and customs do seem to have later become archaic compared to Continental practices.[59]

Meens[60] has argued that elements of the British church survived in Kent until the arrival of Augustine, and that they were deliberately written out of history by the Venerable Bede, whose antipathy towards the British church is clear in his *Ecclesiastical History*.[61] Meens examines closely Pope Gregory's replies to some queries of Augustine concerning matters of ritual purity. Some of Augustine's questions were regarding menstruation and childbirth, issues which Meens argues were anachronistic to Gregory's world. Attempting to define the source of these questions, Meens rules out pagan Anglo-Saxon culture or sixth century Gaul; the latter was concerned with some matters of ritual purity, but only regarding sexual activity at certain times of the liturgical year, not childbirth or menstruation. He concludes that the most probable

Lapidge, M, 'Gildas's education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain' in M Lapidge and D Dumville (eds), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), 47-8.

[57] Chadwick in *Studies in the Early British Church*, 7.

[58] Lapidge in *Gildas: New Approaches*, 47.

[59] For the palaeographical evidence, see Brown, J, 'The oldest Irish manuscripts and their late Antique background' in J Bately, M P Brown and J Roberts (eds), *A Palaeographer's View* (London, 1993), 221-2.

[60] Meens, B, 'A background to St Augustine's mission to Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), 5-17.

[61] Brooks, N, 'Canterbury, Rome and the construction of English identity' in J M H Smith (ed), *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald A Bullough* (Leiden, 2000), 221-246.

origin was the British church, which was concerned with precisely these matters.[62]

If Meens is correct, and Augustine did encounter practising Christians in late sixth century Kent who were descended from the Christian church of late Roman Britain, then the implications for this topic are vast. There are, however, problems with his evidence: he uses a variety of British sources from the sixth to eighth centuries to support his argument, yet the only sources which discuss the specific ritual matters of childbirth and menstruation are the later ones. The sources pre-dating the Augustinian mission do not mention them, and there is no real reason therefore to suppose that the influence of the British church was any more likely the cause of Augustine's concerns than the Frankish church, which is known to have had influence in Kent at the time through Ethelbert's Christian Frankish wife and her bishop Liudhard.[63]

I have attempted to sift through the lumps and fragments of evidence for the existence in fifth and sixth century Kent of some form of Christianity. Although the material is tantalising, I do not believe it to be sufficient to state that there were British (or converted Anglo-Saxon) Christians living in Kent at this time. It is true that the problems of evidence survival make things worse for us, as always: the archaeological material is biased and limited, and truly contemporary historical sources are non-existent. There are added problems of the interpretation of the archaeological evidence, most particularly dating, and our inability to positively identify a Christian even if we should one. Also, it must be remembered that Meens is not necessarily wrong in his argument, even if the evidence is not watertight.

Lt-Col G W Meates was one of the giants of Kentish archaeology in his day. 'People do not seem to realise,' he wrote in 1984, shortly before his death, 'that the history of Christian

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[62]     Meens in *Anglo-Saxon England* 23, 14.

[63]     Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 105.

worship begins [in the Darent valley] and has been practically continuous from the last decades of the fourth century to the present day.'[64] I have tried to illustrate that the evidence as it stands requires us to disagree with such a statement. For the time being, our broader theories of Germanic-British interaction from the mid fifth to late sixth centuries must assume that Christianity had a negligible or non-existent presence in Kent.

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[64]     Meates in *Archaeologia Cantiaca* 100, 59.

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