

Lineage, genealogy and landscape: a high-resolution archaeological model for the emergence of supra-local society from early medieval England

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Abstract

This paper considers the socio-political implications of a series of closely spatially and temporally related early medieval cemeteries from England and how they might be read as charting the emergence of both individual communities and of collective supra-local society. The case study is from early post-Roman Britain in a region that during the 6th century AD became the historically documented Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent. Four distinct communities appropriated an earlier burial landscape, arguably by a process of negotiation, reflecting the formation of a small-scale, supra-local society based around a site of occasional gathering. A key notion is that periodic gathering and local stability could be core features of large-scale polity formation. Overall, a case is made for the long-term cohesion of a local territory, reliant on an ancient mode of social organization.

Keywords: lineage; genealogy; gathering; assembly; social complexity; supra-local society.

Introduction

Social complexity in past societies has long been a key concern of social science. The great anthropological syntheses of the later 20th century that sought to characterise apparent step changes in the 'advance' of humanity provided generations of archaeologists and anthropologists with a route map to complexity that became deeply entrenched in those disciplines and beyond (Fried 1967; Service 1962). Notions of unilinear track societal change, after having been rejected and recast in the mid 20th century for ultimately racist underpinnings, are, however, widely attested across time and space and now find a place again in explanations of human social evolution in different ways (Johnson and Earle 2000, 3).

Sea changes of perspective have thus occurred in archaeology and social anthropology with social scientists now attuned to the specificity of individual places and the sequences that they reveal and also to the idea that social complexity ranging from 'bands' to 'chiefdoms' can be a feature of societies of different kinds (hunter-gatherers, pastoralists and agriculturalists) once conceptualized in terms of a unilinear framework of human societal development (Arnold 1996). Recent archaeological findings reveal complex religious and social phenomena in the earlier stages of traditional period-based characterisations of human societies, for example in the Eurasian Mesolithic and Neolithic with spectacular discoveries such as the remarkable religious complex of Gobekli Tepe in Turkey and the so-called 'mega-sites' of the Tripolye culture of the Ukraine and (Dietrich et al. 2012; Menotti and Korvin-Piotrovskiy 2012). The multilineal perspective advocated by Johnson and Earle (2000, 6) thus finds broad applicability, including in terms of the period and region that form the focus of this paper, where different trajectories and models of social evolution occurred in spatial and temporal proximity to each other; this paper explores one possible avenue.

This paper presents a model for social aggregation in a period and region where centralized bureaucracy had recently collapsed, where changes in material culture, settlement and economy indicate a period of radical – if extended – change, and where new power structures and social hierarchies emerged. The 'transformation of the Roman world', the period between the 4th and 8th centuries AD in Europe bore witness to the formation of social and political groupings (secondary complex societies in anthropological terms) from local confederations to large-scale entities that can be described as kingdoms. While some groupings subsumed others, with varying degrees of the loss and gain of new social identities, a factor common to many is that their earliest stages comprised the fusion of individual communities to form supra-local ones.

This paper tackles supra-local identity formation in the context of an archaeological case study of cemetery evidence which, it is argued, provides one possible model for how this process occurred. The case study is drawn from the region that by the 6th century AD became the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent, a polity characterized by comparatively early evidence (in fact the earliest in England) for

legal culture (by AD 600) and for a political culture that – on the basis of written and archaeological evidence – appears to outstrip its neighbours with regard to its complexity during the primary phase of the emergence of kingdoms in England (Brooks 1989, 55). How and why did this happen? What were the mechanisms by which social groupings came about that resulted in a mode of social organisation capable of sustaining a large-scale polity?

Models for the emergence of the early medieval kingdoms in Britain are many and varied (Yorke 1990). While there is no current consensus about when and how these entities came about, it is possible to sum up the principal thrusts thus:

Model 1: Large regional territories, the remnants of late Roman civil administrative regions (*civitas*), formed the basis for regional polities (Baker 2006; Pearce 2003).

Model 2: At a larger scale, Roman provincial organization provided the basis for the regional patterning observed in an early post-Roman Britain division with subsequent fragmentation into smaller units that then coalesced to form the regional kingdoms of early medieval England (White 2007; Halsall 2013).

Model 3: In the absence of residual Roman provincial administration, local confederations emerged during the 5th and 6th centuries that ultimately became conjoined in a linear-track process to form regional kingdoms (Bassett 1989; Scull 1993).

The complexities, caveats and nuances of each of these broad models are beyond the scope of this paper, but in general terms, discussions of the process of kingdom formation tend to take a generalizing perspective owing to the nature of the evidence to hand, often, but not exclusively, within an explanatory framework inspired by written evidence. Archaeological explanations of social change in early medieval Britain are by necessity based upon a careful piecing together of disparate evidence to reconstruct the formation and development of individual locales and their social organisation, but the discoveries considered in this paper present a case study of an altogether different kind.

This piece explores one of the possible trajectories noted above (Model 3) by means of a case study from Saltwood in Kent that allows for the first time a high-resolution reading of the development of a burial landscape with multiple cemeteries owing to the extraordinary scale of the archaeological intervention there (Riddler and Trevarthen 2006, 65). The process of social aggregation considered here was probably widespread, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of England in areas subject to the greatest degrees of Germanic cultural and social influence between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. While the historical geography of early medieval Kent may preserve a significant element of the Roman pattern (in the mould of Model 1 above), it is clear that by the 6th century AD Roman fashions and customs had been mostly replaced by Germanic ones with elite groups claiming Germanic descent (Yorke 1990, 26).

Previous excavations in the wider region have either concerned individual cemeteries, or excavations of sites in close proximity, but which are in the main old excavations with relatively poor records: Kentish burial archaeology of the early middle ages is intensively studied in comparison to most other regions of Britain and the details can be found in a number of studies (Richardson 2005; Brookes 2007; ASKED; Dickinson et al. 2011).

Communities coming together: the case of Saltwood, Kent

Excavations in advance of the laying of the high speed rail link (HS1) between the Channel Tunnel and London between 1997 and 2001 revealed spectacular discoveries with remains recovered from all of the traditionally defined archaeological periods. Among the most impressive finds were four closely spaced early medieval cemeteries dating to between the later 5th and 7th centuries AD at Saltwood, situated on a chalk ridge 7 km from the coast, with extensive views towards the English Channel to the south and set against the backdrop of the scarp slope of the North Downs to the north and east (**Figure 1**). The dramatic and highly visible setting, is made all the more distinctive by its proximity to a striking natural eminence known locally as Summerhouse Hill 1 km north-east of the site, whose massive, rounded form is the most imposing landmark in the locality (**Figure 2**). Full

details of all aspects of the Saltwood cemeteries and a detailed published summary can be found elsewhere (Riddler and Trevarthen 2006; Booth et al. 2011).

Of the four Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, three were established in direct relation to earlier Bronze Age round barrows that formed a linear cemetery laid east to west along the chalk ridge. The Bronze Age monuments evidently served as reference points for a network of local tracks and field boundaries laid out in the middle to late Iron Age and which still form elements of the pattern of roads and fields in the wider landscape (**Figure 3**).

The early medieval communities who started burying their dead at Saltwood, perhaps as early as the later 5th century AD, therefore chose a spot with excellent visibility, good local communications and with clear evidence of earlier burial activity. While the early medieval inhabitants of the area obviously had no idea about the age of the pre-existing mounds, as barrow-builders themselves they would have understood the 'message' of these features. The appropriation of prehistoric burial mounds by early medieval communities for the burial of their dead is widely attested in Britain (Williams 1997). Normally viewed as a strategy for establishing memorial and tenorial links to landscape (Shephard 1979), the Saltwood cemeteries add an unusual level of nuance to this line of interpretation.

The four burial areas are close to each other – the Western Cemetery 150 m to the west of the two central cemeteries and the Eastern Cemetery 150 m to the east. The different groups surely represent separate communities, a feature marked not only by their spatial relationships, but also by their funerary practices. Community cemeteries of the first three centuries of the early middle ages in England normally contain burials that, on the basis of the materials buried with them, appear to represent a scale of wealth which may be equated with social hierarchy, notwithstanding the well-established caveats of assuming a straightforward relationship between wealth and social rank (Ucko 1969).

The assemblages from each of the four cemeteries (see Riddler and Trevarthen 2006 for detailed analysis), strongly indicate ranking *within* each community, and that that the remains represent the burial places of four distinct groups with a broadly similar social structure. The organisation of the graves and

variation in their associated features reveal different customs that reinforce the distinct identity of the each community.

The Western Cemetery contained 59 graves, mostly oriented NW-SE, with a very few graves oriented N-S or thereabouts, dated to between the earlier 6th and later 7th centuries AD (**Figure 4**). The burials were focused on a substantial Bronze Age barrow, indicated by its surviving ring-ditch which measured c. 40m across. A number of burials lay within the curtilage of the Iron Age tracks that referenced the barrow, indicating that these routes were not then in use at this spot, at least for the passage of regular traffic. A row of graves radiated outwards from the south-western side of the barrow, whereas the rest of the burials lay over the south and east sides of the mound. A small group of early medieval graves within ring-ditches – indicating small mounds – lay to the east of the prehistoric mound.

The Eastern Cemetery comprised 17 graves spanning the 6th century AD scattered mainly across the south-western part of another Bronze Age mound, c. 40m across, although the mound must have been at least partly removed by an Iron Age track (a holloway) that cut across its south-eastern side (**Figure 5**). The graves were oriented broadly E-W.

The division between the two central cemeteries is an Iron Age trackway, ditched on either side, that runs N-S and was evidently open for free passage as no burials were found within its curtilage.

The West Central Cemetery contained 105 graves of mid- to late 6th to later 7th century date, focused on a Bronze Age barrow c. 30 m across on the basis of the diameter of its ring-ditch (**Figure 6**). In view of the relatively fine chronological resolution presented by Kentish material culture of the 5th to 7th centuries, the development of the burial ground can be charted with an unusual degree of confidence. The earliest burials (few in number) were cut into the southern side of the barrow. These were then succeeded by four remarkably rich graves (3 male and 1 female), more-or-less equally spaced (c.15m apart) on a N-S axis, with the northernmost grave placed just south of the centre of the Bronze Age barrow (**Figure 6**). The next of these wealthy graves to the south was surrounded by a substantial ring-ditch (and presumably a barrow) 15 m across, while the third grave in succession was ringed with posts in a circular setting c. 15m across. These special

graves attracted burials of a lesser, but still impressive, status, many surrounded by small ring-ditches c. 5m in diameter, implying the existence of small mounds. Certain of these lesser graves had direct physical relationships with the features associated with the richest burials and with each other, suggesting a conscious act of creating and displaying lineage, a matter considered further below. The complex then attracted further graves of varying status to judge by the associated finds.

The East Central Cemetery contained 36 graves of late 6th to late 7th century date (**Figure 6**). By contrast to the three other cemeteries, these burials were markedly less well furnished, with no high-status accoutrements. One grave contained a weapon and other objects were found with both men and women, which with the unfurnished graves suggest an internally ranked community, but one that chose either not to incorporate grave finds in the manner of their neighbours, or which was simply poorer. This cemetery also displays a highly distinctive, indeed unique, arrangement of its graves and is the only one not to use a pre-existing mound as a focus; likely a conscious decision as there was a further Bronze Age barrow – unused for early medieval burial – between this group and the Eastern Cemetery. Of the graves here, 12 are arranged in a N-S row set between flanking ditches that flare out to the south where a single grave set within a ring-ditch 8m in diameter is found. A curvilinear feature 10m further to the south completes the arrangement, which has the appearance of formal design and the creation of a ritual space. Other graves lay scattered along the eastern side of the central trackway.

In terms of the relative sequencing of the burial plots, it is arguable that the Western Central Cemetery is the direct successor to the Eastern Cemetery (Riddler and Trevarthen 2006, 65), but this is impossible to prove. The proposition has also been made that together the four cemeteries represent only two communities (*ibid.*, 67), but this view rests on the idea that both central cemeteries represent one social group. That the two central cemeteries are separated by a trackway, and that their configuration is markedly different, instead indicates four communities overall, with three cemeteries in use at the time that burial there came to an end in the late 7th century.

The afterlife of a burial landscape

By the mid-11th century, the name of the burial locus at Saltwood was Heane, an apparently rather mundane toponym meaning 'enclosure', although etymologies meaning 'high' and 'mound' have also been proposed (Smith 1956, 215; Anderson 1939, 137-8; Wallenberg 1934, 366): all of these possible derivations fit the topography of the site. While the name Heane lacks any mythical qualities, it is clear from the Domesday Survey that the supra-local district (hundred) within which the cemeteries lay shared its name with the site, indicating that the meeting place of the district lay there too (Baker and Brookes 2015): the locale is named in the 19th century as Hayne Barn (tithe map) and Heane Wood Barn (Ordnance Survey maps). Names for early medieval assembly places often contain strongly memorializing and mythical elements (Baker in press) and it is possible that the place had other names too. By at least the 10th century in England, meetings of freemen in these districts took place on a four-weekly basis (Loyn 1984, 140-1), but assemblies of various kinds were held from at least the late 6th century in the Kentish kingdom. Kentish kings issued laws between c. AD 600 until AD 695, and it must be significant that the earliest English law code refers to the phenomenon of assemblies (Oliver 2002, 61, ch. 7). A link between multi-community ancestral burial and supra-local assembly is of great interest, but what evidence is there for use of the site between the cessation of burial c.700 and the Domesday Survey of 1086? Physical evidence for continuing activity at early medieval cemeteries once such communities had established new burial grounds during the 7th century – arguably as a function of the conversion to Christianity during that century (Hines and Bayliss 2013, 553) – is extremely rare.

At Saltwood, the archaeological investigations revealed both artefactual evidence and that of temporary occupation in the form of the digging of pits during the stripping of topsoil demonstrating periodic visiting of the site – although its intensity and rhythm is difficult to judge (Riddler and Trevarthen 2006, 67-8). Twenty sherds of 7th and 8th century pottery were found, mainly in the western part of the site, with 8 sherds of 9th to 11th century pottery recovered from the eastern part along with a few sherds of 11th to 12th century date. An iron knife of 9th-12th century date was also recovered. Of particular interest is the scatter of pits of 7th to 8th or 9th

century date, again mainly in the western part of the site, although also in the eastern part where several such features cut into graves of the Eastern Cemetery, including a pit containing a copper-alloy inlaid iron knife of 8th century or later date: pits are suggested as a feature of certain Scandinavian assembly sites (Odegaard in press).

Despite the large scale exposure of archaeological features at Saltwood, evidence for structures is limited to the finding of sunken-featured buildings (otherwise known as pit-houses or *grubenhäuser*), one at each end of the excavated area, with a third discovered in the vicinity decades earlier during the construction of a motorway (M20)(Riddler and Trevarthen 2006, 25-6). Given the nature of the evidence for temporary gathering at Saltwood provided by both its place-name and archaeology, it is possible to argue that the sunken-featured buildings were also occasionally used rather than having been components of a permanent settlement. Isolated buildings of this kind are common elsewhere, including examples associated with earlier burial mounds as at Mill Hill, Kent (also an early medieval cemetery) and North Marden, Sussex (Parfitt and Brugmann 1991; Drewett et al. 1986).

The territorial context

The origin of hundreds, which formed the basis for local judicial organization by at least the 10th century in England, is much debated (Molyneaux 2015, 141-55). While many scholars propose that these units were regularized in the 10th century, there is a strong case that many of them find origins in a much earlier period of social confederation. Indeed, the case of Saltwood suggests the possibility that such a unit has 6th-century origins. It is a matter of further note that the Domesday Hundred of Heane contained three named communities: Hythe, Postling and Saltwood (**Figure 7**), the same number of communities burying their dead at Heane three-and-a-half centuries earlier if one accepts the argument made above. A higher order of territoriality in Kent – between the hundred and the kingdom – is that of the *lathe*, a territorial unit that at least in eastern Kent is convincingly argued to reflect the 6th and 7th century organisation of the kingdom (Brookes 2011; Dickinson 2012, 149): Saltwood and the Hundred of Heane lay within the ancient *lathe* of Lympne.

With a few exceptions, the archaeology of early medieval settlement in Kent

is very poorly understood, but the indications from place-names and excavations are that royal estate centres and monastic sites established in the 6th and 7th centuries have remained since that time as fixed points in the Kentish landscape. The well-documented and exceptionally well-excavated example of the royal centre and nunnery at Lyminge, only 4 km to the north of Saltwood provides the best known example of such a site (Thomas 2013). The chronology of lesser settlements remains to be established.

While much is made of the idea of fluid territoriality in the 5th to the 8th centuries in England (Davies and Vierck 1974, 228-9), the kingdom of Kent is the earliest region of England for which documents relating to the transfer and ownership of parcels of land survive. By the AD 670s, Kentish kings – who often ruled in pairs, each taking charge of either the eastern or western parts of the kingdom – were accommodating monasteries by granting them lands for their sustenance. In fact, the earliest known charter in original form is a document of AD679 issued by the Kentish King Hlothere recording that the land was to be held ‘according to the well-known boundaries demonstrated by myself and my officers’ (Sawyer 1968, Cat. No. 8; Kelly 2002, 31). While land charters did not begin to regularly record boundaries in detail before the 9th century, with the earliest such examples dated to the later 8th century, the AD 679 document shows – perhaps unsurprisingly – that local people and local officials knew exactly the limits of their lands in later 7th century Kent. Notions of the limits of one group’s area in relation to neighbours must have developed as a function of demographic factors and from a relatively early date and there is no good reason to dismiss the likelihood that the four communities who buried their dead there knew perfectly well the extent of their respective lands.

An archaeology of consensus and the creation of lineage?

Four distinct communities, each exhibiting social stratification and engaging with the same locale must have involved negotiation and, ultimately, consensus. This begs the question of whether the cemetery during the burial phase served as more than just a place of burial, in a similar vein to that suggested by Howard Williams (2002) for the large early medieval cremation cemeteries of eastern England. As the

ancestral focus for four communities, it seems likely that alongside the funerary activity the Saltwood locale served as a place for social interactions of other kinds, such as legal assemblies, economic transactions, social events and so on, as it appears to have done from the point that burial ceased. It is regretful that the preservation of human remains was too poor to enable osteological characterization of the population, which might have identified biological traits either shared among these groups or unique to them. Despite poor preservation of human remains, the disposition and furnishing of certain of the graves noted above has allowed a sequence of events to be set out and possible motivations can be suggested for the actions observed.

The initial choice of the locale for the construction of burial mounds in the Early Bronze Age is likely to have been inspired by a range of factors, including visibility from nearby settlements, visibility over a region, including the sea, or an attraction to pre-existing features. The draw for the early medieval inhabitants of the locale was probably multi-faceted, but by the time they began to interact with the location, Iron Age tracks channeled movement through the local landscape. The importance of these routes in terms of the location of the cemeteries should not be underestimated (Riddler and Trevarthen 2006, 66). The appropriation of Bronze Age mounds for three of the cemeteries is plausibly explained as a means of creating ties to land and inventing lineage, as noted above. In view of the quality of the Saltwood excavations, however, it has been shown that besides a direct physical association between certain early medieval burials and prehistoric mounds, successive early medieval burials can also be shown to exhibit direct physical association, a situation particularly clear in the West Central Cemetery, that might be explained as a physical reflection of lineage either real, created or perceived.

Early medieval royal genealogies in England survive in a rather haphazard fashion and in diverse sources, but common features are evident and it possible to suggest that in the Saltwood evidence we can see a close parallel between the nature of a written source and the archaeological record. It is fundamental, of course, to recognize that the written genealogies were originally and largely orally transmitted, a feature borne out both by their incorporation of figures from an age long before writing (although they are continually added to), and by their extensive

use of alliterative names (Yorke 1990, 3-4). Can we see in the Saltwood cemeteries an early physical manifestation of genealogy? Did people go there to hear their folk genealogies being recited with reference to physical features? Can replicating burial features, such as the ring-ditches or the two plots of row-graves be read as 'alliterative archaeology' paralleling naming practices?

It is long established that early medieval genealogies are complicate: at the same time fact and fiction, but they were powerful socio-political tools (Sisam 1953; Dumville 1977). In general terms, the further one moves back in time from a lineage that might be independently documented – at least in part – one enters a 'grey area' where figures are shadowy and otherwise unknown. In the deeper reaches they become more fantastical and deep time ancestors, in some cases once regarded as deities, are often preceded by biblical figures. The past was manipulated to suit the socio-politico-ideological purposes of the day. Views about the chronology and role of genealogies range from their being of pre-Christian origin on account of their incorporation of pre-Christian deities later viewed as ancestors (Moisl 1981), a view countered by the notion of the deification of actual ancestors (euhemerism)(Brooks 1989, 60, n. 28) in a Christian context, to their having played a limited and largely post-Conversion role in the early medieval west (see Pohl 2016 for an insightful discussion). The Kentish evidence for royal pedigree, however, can be plausibly argued to incorporate pre-Christian material and to have been in existence as a genealogy prior to the converting mission of St Augustine in AD597 (Brooks 1989, 60). Comparative anthropology reveals the significance of lineal descent to the emergence of authority and leadership, but also that as lines of descent diverge over time large-scale social and political identities are preserved by perceived descent from a common mythical ancestor (Hallpike 1988, 228-31): a situation that is abundantly clear in Anglo-Saxon sources (Yorke 1990, 168). With regard to the medieval mindset, emphasizing connections with a mythical past 'confers reality' on people by providing them with a sense of order and place (Gurevic 1972, 98).

Were the Saltwood Bronze Age barrows perceived to contain mythical deep-time ancestors with the early medieval founders' graves eventually becoming the shadowy ones and the more recent graves charting a lineage that would have been within the purview of the elderly by the late 7th century (**Figure 8**)? We cannot be

certain, but the argument is persuasive and is supported more widely. Irish and Welsh written sources of the 9th century and after attest to the reciting of genealogy and lineage at assemblies and the celebration of the burial places of named heroes (Gwynne ed. 1906a; 1906b, poems 1 and 33; Jones 1967, 100). In a similar vein, figures drawn from early medieval documented genealogies were used to name linear earthwork frontiers, such as Offa's Dyke and Wansdyke; 'state' level constructions with highly ideologically charged toponyms (Reynolds and Langlands 2006).

Discussion

There are excellent discussions of the emergence of elite power in early medieval Britain based on cemetery evidence and artefact distributions, but these tend to focus on individual communities rather than confederations of communities (Carver 2005; Carver, Hills and Sheschkiewitz 2009). In this regard, the material presented here offers a unique opportunity to study social aggregation beyond the level of the individual community in remarkable detail.

Certain communities in early medieval Britain, mainly in the north and east, practiced cremation burial rather than inhumation and many of their burial sites are of such a scale that they must represent places utilized by multiple communities and surely by a process of negotiation (Lucy 1998; Williams 2002). By their very nature, however, cremation cemeteries cannot normally be read with the same degree of resolution as richly furnished inhumation cemeteries, with notable exceptions as at Spong Hill, Norfolk in eastern England (Hills and Lucy 2013). In the region of Kent, inhumation was predominantly practiced, often with cemeteries in close proximity to each other, a feature which has received detailed consideration at a regional scale. Pairings of cemeteries where chronological succession is apparent are a long known phenomenon, while groupings of contemporary cemeteries are also common, mainly in south-eastern England and particularly in eastern Kent (Dickinson 2012).

The Saltwood cemeteries, three of which were established arguably prior to the emergence of explicit kings and kingdoms, may provide a model to illustrate the process by which these latter entities came to prominence. The exceptionally

wealthy graves of the late 6th- to mid- 7th centuries found in the West Central Cemetery belong to the period when ruling elites became established, while the latest burials at Saltwood were of people who inhabited a world where the earliest land charters were drawn up and where laws were written down. Elite settlements, as at Lyminge, became an additional focus of social organization alongside assembly sites, if indeed cemeteries served such a function during the 6th century. The earliest phases of the Saltwood sequence thus reveal one possible pathway to complexity in this crucially formative but elusive period of English history as a reflection of social fusion before kings.

While a forthcoming analysis (Brookes in press) suggests that cemeteries of the 5th to 7th centuries in Kent and in Norfolk in eastern England tend not to correlate with later meeting-places, a number of explicit relationships between early medieval cemeteries and Domesday assembly sites is known in England. The model presented here is suggested as a possible trajectory for at least those sites, while bearing in mind that universal explanations for developments in social complexity in early medieval Britain cannot be applied and marked variations are apparent, not just between polities, but within them, down to the level of neighbouring communities.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper has presented a model for social aggregation in early medieval England that emphasizes the importance of local stability and the capacity of local people to organise themselves as providing ideal conditions for the growth of medium and large scale political units. Traditional accounts emphasise warfare, top-down imposition and elite agency as the motors behind polity formation, but the Saltwood evidence can be suggested to represent the civil capacity of local societies during the earliest phase of post-Roman Britain.

If the relative size and developmental sequences of the Saltwood cemeteries can be read as a measure of the comparative success of the individual groups who buried their dead there, then the longevity of the sequences and the (communally) collective use of the space there suggests that the conditions for social aggregation

and the emergence of elites relied not on coercion (in the vein of the classic interpretation of Fried), but that elites could only succeed if sufficient self-interest (in the context of protection, promotion and access to prestige goods) provided the critical social mass necessary to underpin an elite group by means of allegiance. In other words, while certain families became more powerful than others, the stable and supportive nature of social groups at the local level was fundamental to the formation of what became kingdoms.

Temporary gathering, it is argued, was a fundamental corollary of supra-local group formation and social organization from the migration period until after the 11th century. It is of particular interest that a form of social organization of a kind that might be considered 'archaic' proved robust and persistent. If the parallelism between genealogy and archaeology drawn here can be accepted, then it reveals the transition 'from memory to written record'.¹

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¹ This phrase is taken from the title of Michael Clanchy's classic 1979 volume: Clanchy, M. J. 1979 *From Memory to Written Record*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

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Captions

Figure 1 The location of the Saltwood cemeteries in south-eastern England and in the early Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Kent (prepared by Barney Harris)

Figure 2 Summerhouse Hill as viewed from the site of the Saltwood cemeteries (Wikimedia Commons/Alfred Gay 18 February 2008 Public Domain)

Figure 3 The Saltwood excavation area plotted onto the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1877) showing the long term continuity of late prehistoric features in the modern landscape (Wessex Oxford Archaeology)

Figure 4 The Western Cemetery at Saltwood (Wessex Oxford Archaeology)

Figure 5 The Eastern Cemetery at Saltwood (Wessex Oxford Archaeology)

Figure 6 The West and East Central Cemeteries at Saltwood (Wessex Oxford Archaeology)

Figure 7 The Domesday Hundred of Heane (prepared by Barney Harris)

Figure 8 Schematic representation of the parallelism between genealogy (oral and written) and archaeology (prepared by Barney Harris)