From Civilisation To Barbarism?
Western Britain in the Early Middle Ages

Week Ten:
Britons and Barbarians

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Part One: Barbarian Britons?

Key Points

Ethnic identity & geographical origin are not the same
Though ethnicity may incorporate notions of ‘homeland’ and correlate with location

Ethnic identity is not ‘biological’ / ‘genetic’
Though ethnicity often centres upon a sense of common origin / ancestry, and may incorporate notions of shared ‘blood’ / ‘race’

Ethnic identity is socially constructed
May be mutable, and at times irrelevant
Though is not ‘unreal’ or arbitrary
(And as a social identity, might relate to evolutionary ‘needs’)

‘National’ identity in the West C5–7
(nation: political & geographical, not biological)

Natione: ‘people’

• Interchangeable with gene (pl. genos) – ‘tribe’ and ethne – ‘people’

• Often ‘ethnic’ (= socially ascribed group...based on the expression of real or assumed shared culture and common descent) and centring upon elites

• Differs to modern understandings of ‘nation’ (‘Nation States’: politically organised territories, bound by borders, often speaking a common language)
Britain and the British

Prettania - ‘Pretanic Isles’
(Greek - Pytheas of Massilia, c 325-323 BC)

Procopius, History of the Wars III:
‘...Britain, which is outside the Pillars of Heracles’

Patrick: ‘genere nostro’

Gildas: Britons – cives (citizens / fellow countrymen)

Ch. 25. ...[Britons] took arms under Ambrosius Aurelianus of the Roman nation / last of the Romans

‘Britons’ also differentiated from ‘Romans’ elsewhere: e.g. chs. 5, 6, 7, 13, 17, 18, 19
‘Barbarian’ attacks on Britain

• *Chronica Gallica*: Saxon incursions (AD 410?) and conquest (c. AD 441?)

• *Vita Germanus*: British troops fight Picts and Saxons AD 429 & late 430s – early 440s

• Patrick’s *Confessio*: Irish raids

• *DEB 19*: As the Romans went back home, there eagerly emerged from the coracles...the foul hordes of Irish [*scotti* – ‘ raiders’] and Picts

Ch 20. [letter to consul Aetius, mid C5]...barbarians push us back to the sea, the sea pushes us back to the barbarians...

Ch. 92.3: *foederati*
Irish presence in Western Britain?

Or cultural exchange?

(Post-dates early – mid C5 raids)
Kingsholm, Gloucester

Buckle, Whiteway Farm, Cirencester

Not ‘Anglo-Saxon – SE Europe / S Russia
‘Saxon’ conquest of Britain

DEB Ch. 24. ...fire of vengeance...fed by the hands of our foes in the east...destroying the neighbouring towns and lands... dipped its red and savage tongue in the western ocean. In these assaults, therefore, not unlike that of the Assyrian upon Judea...

Foundation ‘myth’, important in Welsh (and later English) processes of *ethnogenesis* (the development of ethnic identity)
C5-7 Anglo-Saxon Burials and DNA

Mass migration and ‘ethnic cleansing’ - or Germanic elite control, and changing ‘native’ ‘fashions’ and identities (acculturation)? Or both?

Weapon burials: 29.5-82.4%

Immigrants: 10% of population? (With other factors Increasing figure to 20%?)
DNA ≠ ethnicity

Genetic (not social or cultural) relationships - similarities may suggest geographical origin

Analyses of modern Y-chromosome DNA:

• Immigration during the 1st millennium AD from Frisia, North Germany, and Denmark
• Regional differences – 24.4 to 100%
• Estimated 250,000 - 500,000 male immigrants

(Currently-unverified) mtDNA analysis: <20% female immigration = <100,000

Taking into consideration archaeological evidence: 100,000-200,000, over c. 100 years?
Isotope Analysis: geographical origin

Problems

- Generalising from small samples
- Sample may be of 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation or later immigrants

Indicates immigration (<17\% 1\textsuperscript{st} generation), significant ‘indigenous’ survival (60-70\%?), & inter-regional movement
Settlement, cultural change and identity
Place Names and Linguistic Change

• Presence of Britons in (Old) English-speaking areas – *w(e)alh*

• Bilingual Brittonic and Old English place names, e.g. River Windrush / Dikler

• Brittonic names continued to change after C9 – some up until C16

Booklet p. 4 & 7  

*Walh*- place names
**C5-7 Apartheid?**

British Enclaves alongside (and / or within) Anglo-Saxon controlled territories

Laws of King Ine of Wessex (AD 688-94):

six classes of ‘Welsh’

(23.3, 24.2, 32, 33, 46.1, 54.2, 74, 74.1)

Though some personal names (e.g. Cerdic, Cynric, and Caedwalla) suggest C7 elite inter-marriage

C8+ : construction of hybrid ‘English’ identity, formed by late C9 – aiding unification in opposition to Vikings
Group Exercise: Barbarian Britons?

Referring to notes taken during home study, and to Handout (Week 10B), answer the following questions:

1. What do the texts say about:
   i. Roman attitudes towards Britons
   ii. British attitudes towards Romans, Saxons, and Irish?

2. Discuss the extent to which the attitudes considered in Question 1 might contradict or correlate with changes in style and behaviour witnessed C5-7 in Western Britain