

BEDE'S *ANGLI*: ANGLES OR ENGLISH?

MICHAEL RICHTER

Department of Medieval History
University College, Dublin 4

The Germanic settlement of Britain is described by Bede in a famous passage:

Advenerant autem de tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus, id est Saxonibus, Anglis, Iutis. De Iutarum origine sunt Cantuarii et Victuarii, hoc est ea gens, quae Vectam tenet insulam, et ea, quae usque hodie in provincia Occidentalium Saxonum Iutarum natio nominatur, posita contra ipsam insulam Vectam. De Saxonibus, id est ea regione quae nunc Antiquorum Saxonum cognominatur, venere Orientales Saxones, Meridiani Saxones, Occidui Saxones. Porro de Anglis, hoc est de illa patria, quae Angulus dicitur, et ab eo tempore usque hodie manere desertus inter provincias Iutarum et Saxonum perhibetur, Orientales Angli, Mediterranei Angli, Mercii, tota Nordanhymbrorum progenies, id est illarum gentium, quae ad Borem Humbri fluminis inhabitant, ceterique Anglorum populi sunt orti.¹

Thus three continental ethnic groups, Saxons, Angles and Jutes, had established themselves in Britain in eight or more political units, namely as the Kentish and Wightish people (Jutes), as the East Saxons, South Saxons and West Saxons (Saxons), as the East Angles, the South or Middle Angles, the Mercians, the Northumbrians and other people (Angles).

It is not the purpose of this study to analyse origins and settlement of the Germanic peoples in Britain, as has been done frequently. Instead, I wish to consider what these peoples called themselves in the seventh and eighth centuries, and how they were called by others. Ultimately, it will be a contribu-

¹ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I 15. Reference is to the edition of Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica* (2 vols, Oxford 1896). In what follows this work will be quoted as HE by book and chapter and, where useful, the page reference to Plummer's edition is given in parentheses.

tion to the history of 'English' as the common name for the peoples of Germanic descent in Britain. More narrowly, it will be an evaluation of the contribution of Bede to this development.

In the light of HE I 15 quoted above, it is important to ask what was the meaning of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*? *Gens*, according to our understanding of the early middle ages, is a politically organised society. Was Bede's History thus the history of one of the several *gentes* he mentioned in I 15 or, a little more generally, was the book to be an ecclesiastical history of the Angles rather than the Germanic peoples in Britain generally? This issue occupied Denis Bethell at the end of his life. It is, of course, of central importance to any evaluation of Bede's famous work, and it would not be the first time that the obvious has for long remained unnoticed. The answer to that question which is presented here as a tribute to a colleague and friend with whom I taught Bede for several years, will point in a direction *not* favoured by him, but I owe to him the inspiration to investigate the question, and shall hope to come up with results which will be of general interest to anybody studying Bede.

I shall try to show that Bede set out in his work to write the ecclesiastical history of all the Germanic peoples in Britain, not just that of the Angles. It will be shown however that in calling these peoples *Angli*, Bede was not in line with the conventions of his time according to which the more widely used term was 'Saxons'. It will thus become necessary to show the reasons for Bede's use of that term and the more long-term implications of them. This issue is all the more relevant in view of the fact that the terminology used by Bede eventually won the day.

GREGORY'S ANGELS

Of central importance to our question why Bede came to use the term *Angli* in HE is the background and initiation of pope Gregory I's mission to England. Bede's version of it should be compared with another account written in England.

Anonymous Life of Gregory the Great, ch. 9: Est igitur narratio fidelium, ante predictum eius pontificatum, Romam venisse quidam de nostra natione forma et crinibus candidati albis. Quos cum audisset venisse, iam dilexit vidisse eosque alme mentis intuitu sibi adscitos, recenti specie inconsue'ta suspensus et, quod maximum est, Deo intus admonente, cuius gentis fuissent, inquisivit. Quos quidam pulchros fuisse pueros dicunt et quidam vero crispas iuvenes et decros. Cumque responderent, 'Anguli dicuntur, illi de quibus sumus', ille dixit, 'Angeli Dei'. Deinde dixit, 'Rex gentis illius, quomodo nominatur?' Et dixerunt, 'Aelli'. Et ille ait, 'Alleluia. Laus enim Dei esse debet illic.' Tribus quoque illius nomen de qua erant proprie requisivit. Et dixerunt, 'Deire.' Et ille dixit, 'De ira Dei confugientes ad fidem.'

Bede, HE II 1: traditione maiorum ad nos usque perlata est ... Dicunt, quia die quadam cum, advenientibus nuper mercatoribus ... Gregorium ... vidisse inter alia pueros venales positos candidi corporis, ac venusti vultus, capillorum quoque forma egregia. Quos cum aspiceret, interrogavit, ut aiunt, de qua regione vel terra essent adlati. Dictumque est, quia de Brittaniam insula, cuius incolae talis essent aspectus. Rursus interrogavit, utrum idem insulani Christiani, an paganis adhuc erroribus essent implicati ... Rursus ergo interrogavit, quod esset vocabulum gentis illius. Responsum est quod Angli vocarentur. At ille: 'Bene', inquit, 'nam et angelicam habent faciem, et tales angelorum in caelis decet esse coheredes. Quod habet nomen ipsa provincia, de qua isti sunt adlati?' Responsum est, quod Deiri vocarentur idem provinciales. At ille: 'Bene', inquit, 'Deiri; de ira eruti, et ad misericordiam Christi vocati. Rex provinciae illius quomodo appellatur?' Responsum est, quod Aelli diceretur. At ille adludens ad nomen ait: 'Alleluia, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari'.

The Anonymous Life of Gregory the Great has been known to the scholarly world for over a hundred years, and not much has been added to our knowledge of it since then, apart from a modern textual edition of it by Bertram Colgrave.¹ The work is believed to have been written at Whitby, perhaps in the second decade of the eighth century. The story I have given above from the Anonymous Life is, to the unprejudiced reader, substantially the same as the one told by Bede. Since Bede wrote his account later, and since he was in close touch with Whitby, it would be natural to assume that Bede used the Anonymous Life here.² This, however, is firmly denied by the one person who should know, the editor of the Anonymous Life and the man who cooperated in the latest edition of HE, Bertram Colgrave.³ Colgrave only admitted that the story originated independently of Bede.⁴ Bede's account is the later one, and it defies belief that his story, so similar, though with few

¹ Bertram Colgrave (ed), *The earliest life of Gregory the Great by an anonymous monk of Whitby* (Lawrence, Kansas 1968). Chapter 9 in this edition is on p 90. The earliest scholarly study of that work is by Paul Ewald, 'Die älteste Biographie Gregors I.', *Historische Aufsätze dem Andenken an Georg Waitz gewidmet* (Hanover 1886) 17-54. The only other lengthy discussion known to me is that by Dom Suso Brechter, *Die Quellen zur Angelsachsenmission Gregors des Grossen* (Münster 1941) 118-38.

² Thus also Ewald, 43.

³ So in the introduction to the edition: 'Bede most certainly did not know the Anonymous', 57; earlier in his article on this work in N. K. Chadwick (ed), *Celt and Saxon: studies in the early British border* (Cambridge 1963) 133-6; less categorically in Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (ed), *Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford 1969) 133 n 2.

⁴ Introduction to the edition, 56-9.

verbal parallels, was written independently of that of the Whitby Life.¹ In essence, the case is, though on a small scale, like that of the Lives of Cuthbert where Bede's account is based on an earlier and also anonymous Life, though his account was expanded and polished if not always improved.² I suggest thus that Bede was indebted to the Life of Gregory from Whitby.

Dom Suso Brechter was the last scholar who seriously discussed the Whitby Life, and he suggested that the story about the angels/Angles, 'this fable' as he calls it, originated in Northumbria, perhaps even with the author of the Anonymous Life³ (although he, like Bede, claimed to draw on oral tradition). My view is different, in fact quite close to the opinion expressed by Ehwald in 1886 who suggested a Roman origin of the story.⁴ I would go even further and say that the story comes from Gregory the Great himself, and that an episode very similar to that quoted above was behind Gregory's mission to the *Angli*. This suggestion is a by-product of our central concern which is this: pope Gregory initiated a conversion of the *Angli* though the *Angli/Angles* were not reached by his missionaries in his pontificate. I base my assertion on sources contemporary with the mission, the references to his enterprise in Gregory's own correspondence and other works as well as the account of the mission in the *Liber pontificalis*. To my knowledge all these scraps of evidence have never been considered together in this context. Let us begin with the *Liber pontificalis*.

It is generally assumed that the account of Gregory's pontificate in the *Liber pontificalis* was written shortly after that pope's death.⁵ It is a very brief biography which runs to only fourteen lines in the printed edition. In it the mission to the Angles is mentioned prominently:

Eodem tempore beatissimus Gregorius misit servos Dei Mellitum, Augustinum et Iohannem et alios plures cum eis monachos timentes Deum; misit eos in praedicationem ad gentem Angulorum ut eos converteret ad dominum Iesum Christum.⁶

¹ Plummer (ii 389) writes: 'When we consider how freely Bede often deals with his material, the fact that so many words can be traced is strong evidence that Bede had the Life before him'.

² Bertram Colgrave (ed), *Two lives of St Cuthbert* (Cambridge 1940, repr. New York 1969) 14: Bede, while obviously using the anonymous Life of Cuthbert, 'carefully ... avoided using the same words and phrases'.

³ Brechter, 127. He had previously written: 'So kann man nicht umhin, die ganze Erzählung als Legende zu bezeichnen' (126).⁴ Ehwald, 45.

⁵ See Brechter, 113f. According to Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: the life and times of Gregory the Great* (London 1980) 260, the appreciation of Gregory the Great was written in the pontificate of Honorius I (625-38).

⁶ L. Duchesne (ed), *Le Liber pontificalis*, 2nd ed., (3 vols, Paris 1981) i 312, iii 93.

It is also mentioned in an epitaph to Gregory in one line: 'Ad Christum Anglos convertit pietate magistra'. Bede quotes this epitaph in full.¹ Bede was familiar with Gregory's biography in the *Liber pontificalis*, but so was the Whitby Anonymous.² What they could get from this was that Gregory was remembered in Rome for his mission to the Angles. The significance of this has not, to my knowledge, been recognized.³ Hence it is advisable to treat of it in some detail.

We are extremely fortunate in having the Register of Gregory the Great preserved in full and it contains all the known correspondence of Gregory relating to that mission.⁴ The first relevant reference occurs in a letter, written in September 595 to the Gaulish presbyter Candidus, in which Gregory mentions *pueri Angli* who were still pagan.⁵ Equally important is a reference in a letter that Gregory wrote in July 598 to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, reporting proudly that on the preceding Christmas the missionaries whom he had sent to the *gens Anglorum in mundi angulo posita* had baptized there more than 10,000 people.⁶ Gregory obviously believed that his enterprise had started well. We must draw attention to *Anguli: in angulo* which lends itself well to the pun in *Anguli/angeli*: it occurs, as we have seen, in Gregory's correspondence, in the *Liber pontificalis* and in the Anonymous Life (*Anguli dicuntur*).⁷ Bede has *Angli*,⁸ the same form as occurs in the epitaph. If he believed he had to improve his source,⁹ the Anonymous Life, he – most likely involuntarily – also 'improved' on Gregory the Great, the pope he so much admired.

There is a further element. In his *Moralia in Job*, Gregory writes:

¹ HE II 1 (p 79). Plummer points out that fragments of that epitaph survived in Rome (see ii 72).

² Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 54. Bede's use of the *Liber pontificalis* was not known to Plummer. It is just possible that Bede got the information contained therein through the Whitby Anonymous.

³ Dom Brechter, *passim*, misses the significance of this point since he generally refers to the Germanic peoples in Britain as 'Angelsachsen'.

⁴ I refer to the Register of Gregory I as Reg and quote the letters according to the MGH edition by book and number.

⁵ Reg VI 10. This letter was not used by Bede and does not seem to have been known in England at his time of writing; cf. Brechter, 135.

⁶ Reg VIII 29. Bede did not know this letter. On the basis of it, it seems unlikely that Gregory at the time of writing this letter had had any personal feedback from his missionaries.

⁷ There are other references to *Anguli* in the Life of the Whitby Anonymous, p 94 (twice).

⁸ It should however be pointed out that Bede uses *angulus* in HE I 15 quoted above.

⁹ Colgrave (15) holds that in his revision of the Anonymous Life of Cuthbert, Bede did not always improve on his source.

ecce lingua Britanniae, quae nil aliud noverat, quam barbarum fremdere, jam dudum in divinis laudibus Hebraeum coepit Alleluia resonare.¹

The unprejudiced reader will connect this passage naturally with the story about *Aelli-Alleluia* in the Anonymous and Bede. Dom Suso Brechter, thorough as he was but under the impression that Gregory wrote the *Moralia* in Constantinople² before he became pope, had to reject its connection with the *anguli/angeli* account.³ The most recent editor of the *Moralia* maintains that this work was not completed before 600 or even 602,⁴ thus the reference to *Alleluia* in Britain can have been included any time after 598 after Gregory had heard about the successful initiation of the mission. The death of king Aelle of Deira c. 588 presents no serious chronological obstacle.

Thus we have, from Gregory himself, three elements of the story that set in motion his mission: pagan men, coming from the *Anguli*, and the *Alleluia* brought to them. I have failed to find the Deira-element in Gregory's work. But here one can be lenient. One should rather express satisfaction that three elements of the story have been transmitted independent of and prior to the account of the Whitby Anonymous. Surely the historian's craft does permit the strong suggestion that the story arose with Gregory. In the light of this, one further slight piece of evidence may be considered. In 601 Gregory wrote a letter (which Bede did not know) to Berta, the Kentish queen.⁵ In this letter he told her that the fame of her good deeds had reached not only Rome but even as far as Constantinople. He added that her religious inclinations not only gave joy to him but that they should also give joy to the angels in heaven.⁶ Read in isolation, this sounds innocuous enough; but it seems to be a very rare reference to angels in Gregory's correspondence.⁷ It may thus be taken as a further small scrap of additional evidence in support of the Gregorian origin of the *Anguli/angeli* story.

On the basis of our consideration that the story goes back to Gregory himself, it is now necessary to underline the full significance of the term *Angli* in Gregory's correspondence. Gregory may have intended to convert the *Angli*,

¹ PL 76, 411.

² Brechter, 137: 'vor 586'.

³ Brechter (137) does so in rather strong terms: 'ein Schulbeispiel, auf welche Abwege der Historiker gelangen kann, wenn er kritiklos mit vorgefasster Meinung arbeitet und seine Phantasie nicht zügelt'.

⁴ Marc Adriaen, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 143 (1979) v-vi; similarly R. Gillet in his edition of the *Moralia*, *Sources Chrétiennes* 32 bis (Paris 1975) 10.

⁵ Reg XI 35.

⁶ 'Unde sicut nobis de christianitatis vestrae solaciis laetitia facta est, ita quoque de perfecta operatione vestra angelis fiat gaudium in caelis.'

⁷ Since this article was written, the edition of Gregory's Register by Dag Norberg, *CCSL CXL* (Turnout 1982) and the concordance to this work have reached me. It can be seen from the concordance that *angeli* occurs only rarely in Gregory's correspondence.

but in fact he had not. His missionaries arrived in Kent, the area inhabited by the Jutes, and in his pontificate the missionaries made little impact outside Kent. The only reason for mentioning this is that Gregory believed that he had achieved what he set out to do. Gregory's Register contains in all twenty-nine letters referring to this mission.¹ In these letters, the only name given to the people to whom he sent his missionaries is *Angli*.²

It is perfectly understandable for Gregory to have used that name as long as he could not have known better, that is, before he had news from his missionaries in Britain. But he still used the same term after he had had news, and not only in his letter of 598 to Eulogius of Alexandria to whom this certainly would not have mattered,³ but also to the Kentish royal couple, when he styled Berta *regina Anglorum* and her husband Ethelbert *rex Anglorum*.⁴ There is every reason to believe that the king of Kent did not use this title but most likely styled himself *rex Cantuariorum*.⁵ There is equally reason to believe that Gregory was informed by his missionaries that they were not active among the *Angli*. It is all the more significant that he did not take note of that, presumably because this would have spoiled his story of the origin of the mission. Even in the last letter in this matter, written to abbot Mellitus *en route* to Kent in July 601, Gregory referred to the *causa Anglorum*.⁶

We may thus suggest that the term *Angli* used unspecifically for the Germanic peoples in Britain originated with pope Gregory the Great in connection with his setting in motion of the mission to them. The term may thus be called briefly the 'Gregorian nomenclature'. It was not, as we shall see now, the general nomenclature.

ANGLES OR SAXONS?

In trying to establish by what name(s) the Germanic peoples of Britain were known, it is advisable to compare the nomenclature employed by Bede with the evidence from other sources. While it is true that Bede is the single most important source for any study of Britain in the seventh and early eighth centuries, references from other sources though sparse will show that in this respect he is not representative.

Constantius, in his *Life of Germanus of Auxerre*, written towards the end

¹ References in Brechter, 5-6. This number does not include the *Reponsiones*.

² This is also noted by Brechter (34) who has counted 16 references.

³ Reg VIII 29. As pointed out above, this letter may have been written before Gregory had heard personally from his men.

⁴ Reg XI 35, XI 37. The latter of the two letters was incorporated by Bede, HE I 32.

⁵ This title is used by Bede, HE II 5 of Aethelbert, as well as by the Anonymous of Whitby ch. 12. It is also used of Eadbald, PL 80, 439 as well as, at the synod of Hatfield (680), of Hlothar, HE IV 15 (p 239).

⁶ Reg XI 56; HE I 30.

of the fifth century, calls the German peoples in Britain *Saxones*;¹ so does Gildas half a century later² as does Jonas of Bobbio before the middle of the seventh century.³ The same usage is found in the Life of Fursey, written in Gaul in the second half of the seventh century;⁴ in the anonymous Life of Cuthbert from the end of the seventh century;⁵ and in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*.⁶ With the exception of possibly the anonymous Life of Cuthbert, all these sources were written by people who were neither 'Saxons' nor 'Angles'.

It is all the more significant that there is evidence from among the Germanic peoples in Britain that refers to them as *Saxones*. Bede preserves a letter from pope Vitalian, written in 665, to Oswy, the Northumbrian king. In this letter the pope addresses Oswy as *rex Saxonum*.⁷ It is evident that this letter is a papal reply to a letter from Oswy, and one may take it that the title used by the pope is the same as that which Oswy used when writing to Rome, his 'self-manifestation'.⁸ It will come as less of a surprise that the king of the East Saxons, Caedwalla, who died in Rome in 688, was honoured there by an epitaph in which he is styled *rex Saxonum*.⁹ On the other hand, one surely can assume that the nomenclature used by Eddius in his Life of Wilfrid, written in the early eighth century, reflects the common usage of the time in the north of England: while the term commonly applied is *Brittannia*, on two occasions Eddius uses the term *Saxonia* for the area of Wilfrid's activity.¹⁰ Finally, abbot Hwaertbert of Monkwearmouth, writing to Rome between 715 and 731, refers to his land as *Saxonia*.¹¹ It is to be noticed that none of these sources refers to the Germanic inhabitants of Britain, including that area in which according to Bede Angles lived, as *Angli*.

In the light of these sources the evidence from the Irish annals and their derivatives, the *Annales Cambriae*, assumes a new importance. As is well

¹ MGH SRM 7 (1919-20), ch. 17 (p 263); ch. 18 (p 265).

² *De Excidio Britanniae*, ch. 23 (MGH AA 13 III 38).

³ Jonas II 17 (MGH SRG us 37, 268).

⁴ *Vita Fursei Abbatis Latiniacensis*, §6 (MGH SRM 4, 437) and see *Virtutes Fursei Abbatis Latiniacensis* (ibid., ch. 14, p 445).

⁵ B. Colgrave (ed), *Two lives of St Cuthbert* (Cambridge 1940, repr. New York 1969) IV 1 (p 110).

⁶ A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (ed), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London 1961) 8a, 9a, 19a, 103b, 112a, 123a. Adomnán was very familiar with the affairs of Northumbria, since Iona had played such an important part in the political as well as the ecclesiastical life of that region: see now Hermann Moisl, 'The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish in the seventh century', *Peritia* 2 (1983) 103-26. ⁷ HE III 29.

⁸ For the term see Herwig Wolfram, 'The shaping of the early medieval principality as a type of non-royal rulership', *Viator* 2 (1971) 33-4. ⁹ HE V 7.

¹⁰ Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi*, MGH SRM 6, 214, 224.

¹¹ Bede, *Historia Abbatum* §19 (Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, i 383).

known, much work remains to be done on the ways in which these annals were compiled, how they are inter-related and perhaps revised in being copied into the manuscripts that have come down to us. When this is taken into account, it remains significant that in the entries relating to events in England in the seventh century, and particularly its northern part where according to Bede the Angles settled, almost invariably the term 'Saxons' is used.¹ The same pattern emerges for the eighth century, with the only difference that there are far fewer entries relating to England after 700.² This reflects the diminishing involvement of Irish people in general in the affairs of the neighbouring island. But it has to be taken into account that such involvement was extremely intense in the seventh century, and particularly between Northumbria and the north-east of Ireland, the area where the earlier versions of the Annals of Ulster were compiled. The political links between Northumbria and Iona extend from king Oswald (633-641) to king Aldfrith (685-704).³ Taken in conjunction with the evidence from the other sources, it appears that the Irish annals as well as Adomnán were in the mainstream of contemporary nomenclature in referring to the Germanic peoples in Britain as 'Saxons'.

The 'Gregorian nomenclature', *Angli*, does not appear in the sources written in England before the eighth century. Before showing how this 'Gregorian nomenclature' eventually became the dominant one, it may be pointed out that the reverence exhibited towards Gregory in the English church may be due ultimately to a popularisation of Gregory by Irish Christians in England, and particularly in Northumbria. While Gregory the Great's pontificate is now regarded as a major turning point in the evolution of the medieval church, it has been pointed out that in the century after his death his memory was not particularly cherished on the continent.⁴ Indeed, the admira-

¹ The following survey does not claim to be exhaustive. I have consulted AU, AI, CS, Tig. and *Annales Cambriae* (AC). Up to and including 700 there occur on three occasions terms other than 'Saxon': s.a. 597 *Angli* (a) with regard to the Gregorian mission: AU, AC (595); s.a. 664 on the death of king Oswald: *regis Anglicorum .i. Anglicus Sax interpretatur*, AI; *Bellum cocboy in quo osuuald rex nordorum et eoba rex merciorum corruerunt* AC; s.a. 700: *Ecberctus vir sanctus de gente Anglorum*, Tig.

² I have counted 24 entries to 'England' between 595 and 700 as against 14 between 701 and 800; in the latter period, there is only one reference to *Angli*: *Offa rex bonus Anglorum mortuus est*, AU. According to P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters* (London 1968), the title *rex Angl'* is not at all known before the second half of the eighth century, and then only (and rarely) for Offa (see no 110, 111, 132, 145). It may be that the reference in AU reflects the most modern nomenclature then in use by Offa.

³ For a fuller treatment see Moisl, *Peritia* 2 (1983) 103-36.

⁴ cf. P. A. B. Llewellyn, 'The Roman church in the seventh century: the legacy of Gregory I', *J Ecclesiast Hist* 25 (1974) 363-80.

tion shown for him by southern Irish Christians in the 630s, as evidenced by the letter of Cummean concerning the paschal controversy,¹ was altogether exceptional. In England, the first palpable signs of particular reverence for Gregory the Great can be detected in Whitby and finds expression in the first biography of Gregory ever written.² It is known that Whitby was a monastery under major Irish influence though it is still insufficiently recognized that Irish influence in general and southern Irish influence in particular remained strong in the Northumbrian church in the second half of the seventh century.³ We must now turn to what happened in England in the light of the reception of Gregory the Great from the early eighth century onwards.

Just as the Anonymous from Whitby precedes Bede in the story concerning the Angles-angels, so he also precedes him in using the term *Anguli* for the Germanic peoples in Britain.⁴ Bede was to do that much more fully, as indeed his work required. We shall not investigate his usage in every instance but it is worth pointing out the places where Bede altered the sources that he used and applied the 'Gregorian nomenclature'.

There is, first of all, the case of Gregory's letter to Aethelbert of Kent of 601. The content of the letter was taken by Bede with minimal changes. But the remark of Dom Brechter that Bede copied the Gregorian letters that he received without change is not tenable. In the Register, Gregory's letter to Aethelbert has the rubric: 'Gregorius Adilberto regi Anglorum'.⁵ Bede has the

¹ PL 87, 969-78, esp. 975B; and see M. Richter, 'Irland und Europa: die frühe Kirche', P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (ed), *Ireland and Europe: the early church* (Stuttgart 1984) 428. This point is further strengthened by Pádraig Ó Néill, 'Romani influences in seventh-century Hiberno-Latin literature', *ibid.* 280-90. The continued influence in Northumbria of Irish clerics from those parts of Ireland that had gone over to the Roman Easter after 630-40, and thus of the area where the *Romani* were prominent, has been demonstrated convincingly by Margaret Pepperdene, 'Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*: a new perspective', *Celtica* 4 (1958) 253-62.

² It should be mentioned, however, that Gregory is commemorated in the *Calendar of Willibrord* under 12 March: *sancti grigori rome*, ed. H. A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society 55 (London 1918) pl. III. This entry is in the original hand, thus from the first decade of the eighth century (*ibid.*, p x, xi). The word-form *grigori* betrays Hiberno-Latin influence. Obviously the whole background to the rise of the cult of Gregory the Great in these islands requires further investigation. For important considerations as regards the dating of Willibrord's *Calendar* see D. Ó Cróinín, 'Rathmelsigi, Willibrord and the earliest Echternach manuscripts', in this volume, pp 17ff.

³ Margaret Pepperdene, *Celtica* 4 (1958) 253-62.

⁴ See the Whitby Anonymous, ch. 6 (p 82), ch. 12 and 13 (p 94), ch. 16 (p 98): *rex Uest-anglorum*; ch. 18 (p 102): *in quodam monasterio Dudranglorum*.

⁵ Reg XI 37. The apparatus criticus shows that this was indeed the prototype. Parallel to

following *intitulatio*: 'Domino gloriosissimo atque praecellentissimo filio Aedilbercto regi Anglorum Gregorius episcopus' (HE I 32). It is obvious that Bede embellished the *intitulatio* himself.¹ Here Bede 'improved' on Gregory. Contrary to what he must have known to be the title of the Kentish king, Bede preserved the 'Gregorian nomenclature'. He even used it when it was not necessary. Thus in the speech which he made up of Aethelbert discussing the question of the new religion with his nobles, Bede writes: 'non his possum ad sensum tribuere relictis eis, quae tanto tempore cum omni Anglorum gente servavi' (HE I 25). From the context it is clear that Aethelbert was speaking here only as king of the Kentish people.² Under the impact of the 'Gregorian nomenclature' this term would make sense.

There are two further items that need consideration here. The Anonymous Life of Cuthbert speaks of this man as being elected bishop 'ab Egfrido rege et episcopis Saxorum omnique senatu deposcenti, ad episcopatum nostrae aecclisiae Lindisfarnensium'.³ Bede, who wrote his prose Life of Cuthbert on the basis of this Anonymous Life, did not bring himself to call the northern part of Northumbria *Saxonia*.⁴ The second case is even clearer. The Life of Fursey the Irishman (died 648) was written in Gaul in the second half of the seventh century, perhaps not very long after the death of Fursey.⁵ The author is likely to have used the common nomenclature when he referred to Fursey's arrival from Ireland at the court of Sigebert: 'per Britannias in Saxoniam transvectus est, ubi honorifice a Siggibercto rege susceptus verbo Domini barbarum mitigabat cor'.⁶ Bede based his account of Fursey on this Life, yet in this sensitive passage he changed his source to the following: 'Qui cum ad provinciam Orientalium pervenisset Anglorum, susceptus est honorifice a rege prefato and et paucis cum fratribus per Brettones in provinciam Anglorum devenit, ibidem praedicans verbum, ut diximus'.⁷ The changes that Bede introduced here were dictated by his ideology that it was *Angli*,

this is the rubric to the letter to queen Berta, Reg XI 35: *Gregorius Bertae reginae Anglorum*.

¹ Reg XI 37, apparatus criticus. The term *gloriosus* is applied several times in Gregory's letter to Aethelbert, though not in the superlative; *praecellentissimus* does not occur.

² This against the argument that Bede names Aethelbert as the third of the seven 'over-kings' of the Germanic peoples as outlined in HE II 5.

³ Anonymous Life, IV 1 (Colgrave, 110).

⁴ Bede's Life of St Cuthbert, ed. Colgrave ch. 25: 'Dum ergo electus ad episcopatum vir Domini Cuthbertus' (p 238). In ch. 24 (p 236), Bede had referred to the *regnum Anglorum*.

⁵ MGH SRM 4; for the date of composition see *ibid.*, 425.

⁶ *ibid.*, 437. See also *Virtutes Fursei Abbatis Latiniacensis*, *ibid.*, ch. 14 (p 445): 'Et post spatium annorum contigit ei, ut revertetur in Saxoniam visitare proprios germanos'.

⁷ These passages occur in HE III 19.

not *Saxones*, who dominated the east and north of Britain. For people one and two generations earlier this distinction did not exist.

SAXONS AND OLD SAXONS

We should now turn to the term 'Old Saxons', a term that seems to have arisen in the context of the so-called English mission to the continent. Bede uses this term but it appears that it was coined before he wrote his History. The term itself gives a strong clue to the motivation of that mission. 'Old Saxons', used for the continental Germanic peoples, makes sense only if there existed another group known collectively by the term Saxons who logically should be known as 'New Saxons' but seem to have been known merely as 'Saxons'. Instead of speaking of the English mission among the Germans, we should more accurately and also more revealingly speak of the mission of the (insular) Saxons among the Old (continental) Saxons.¹ St Boniface expressed this phenomenon better than anybody of his lifetime when he wrote: 'ipsi solent dicere: 'De uno sanguine et de uno osse sumus''.²

Independent evidence of the use of the term 'Old Saxons' or the concept of it from the first half of the eighth century occurs in the correspondence of St Boniface, the English-born 'apostle of the Germans', or, to make the connection historically clearer, 'the Saxon missionary of the Old Saxons'. This evidence dates from after the completion of Bede's HE, but it may be mentioned that Bede does not refer to Boniface in it. In any case, we are dealing with an independent transmission. From the correspondence of Boniface, the following evidence emerges, in chronological order. A papal letter, formerly assigned to Gregory II, but since Tangl to Gregory III, written c. 738/9, has, in the correspondence of Boniface, the rubric 'Gregorius papa universo populo provincie Altsaxonum'.³ Secondly, Boniface, in a letter of 742 to pope Zacharias, refers to his native country as Saxony: 'ecclesia, in qua natus et nutritus fui, id est in transmarina Saxonia'.⁴ Thirdly, there is a letter by Boniface to king Aethelbald of Mercia, written in 746/7 in which, when recalling certain customs among the people whom he missionarised, he refers to that country as *Antiqua Saxonia*.⁵ It is very likely that the term *Altsaxones* used by pope Gregory reflects a usage common to Boniface him-

¹ cf. M. Richter, 'Der irische Hintergrund der angelsächsischen Mission', H. Löwe (ed), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter* (2 vols, Stuttgart 1982) i 122, 131.

² M. Tangl (ed), *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH Epistolae Selectae I, Ep. 46 (p 75). Ironically, Boniface was not in a position to do much missionary work among the continental Saxons. For the latest account, where this point is made, see Eckehard Freise, 'Angelsächsische Missionare auf dem Kontinent', Wilhelm Kohl (ed), *Westfälische Geschichte* i (Düsseldorf 1983) 289 ff.

⁴ Ep. 50 (p 84).

³ Ep. 21 (p 35).

⁵ Ep. 73 (p 150).

self who was very conscious of the affinity between the Saxons in the British Isles and the Saxons on the continent.

This terminology was also known by Bede, but there are indications that he was not responsible for coining this term but merely made use of the term in common usage. This terminology occurs in the three chapters dealing with the beginning of the German mission.¹ Bede introduces the subject of Ecgbert's vocation to do missionary work on the continent in an ambiguous manner, for it is not clear whether the consciousness of the relationship between the continental Germans and the insular Germanic peoples applied already to Ecgbert or merely to Bede's own time. The crucial sentence is: 'quarum in Germania plurimas noverat [i.e. Ecgbert] esse nationes, a quibus Angli vel Saxones, qui nunc Britanniam incolunt, genus et originem duxisse noscuntur'.² Be that as it may, among the continental Germanic tribes whom he mentions immediately afterwards there occur the *Antiqui Saxones*.³ Surely Bede used in the sentence quoted above this very rare term *Angli vel Saxones* in order to bring out fully the relationship, even in name, between the insular and the continental Germans. In the following chapter, Bede relates the unhappy mission by the two Hewalds whom he names as 'de natione Anglorum'. They went for missionary work to the land of the Old Saxons ('venerunt ad provinciam Antiquorum Saxonum').⁴ In the same chapter there occurs Bede's famous statement about the lack of hereditary kings among the continental Saxons, when he writes: 'non enim habent regem Antiqui Saxones...'⁵ The Old Saxons are mentioned yet again, this time in connection with the missionary work of Switbert, quite incidentally, but showing that the term was a familiar one.⁶

Having demonstrated the familiarity of the term 'Old Saxons' in connection with the mission to the continent, we may now point out that the term occurs already in Bede's account of the arrival of the Germanic tribes in Britain: 'Advenerant autem de tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus, id est Saxonibus, Anglis, Iutis... De Saxonibus, id est ea regione, quae nunc Antiquorum Saxonum cognominantur, venere Orientales Saxones, Meridiani Saxones, Occidui Saxones'.⁷ We get clear evidence here of the transfer not only of people but also of their names to Britain, and consequently the eventual emergence of a distinguishing adjective: 'they are now also called Old Saxons' (we may add because the people in the island are called Saxons as well).

The evidence of this and the Boniface correspondence suggests that the

¹ HE V 9-11.

² HE V 9 (Plummer, 296).

³ *ibid.*

⁴ HE V 10 (Plummer, 299).

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ HE V 11 (Plummer, 302): 'Sed expugnatis non longo post tempore Boroctuaris a gente Antiquorum Saxonum...'

⁷ Quoted in full above p 99.

term 'Old Saxons' originated in Britain while these people continued for centuries afterwards to call themselves merely 'Saxons'. It is possible that the term 'Old Saxons' was first used at the time when the German mission began, thus in the last decade of the seventh century. Since this missionary activity continued intensively until the mid-eighth century, it is not surprising that this term should have been familiar to Bede who was living through most of that period.

The correspondence of St Boniface is interesting for another reason as well, for in it we find, outside Bede, the first major use of the term *gens Anglorum* for the Germanic peoples in Britain. This term occurs, for the first time, in the year of Bede's death, when Boniface asked for a copy of Augustine's questions to the pope and the pope's replies. He also enquired on that occasion when christian preachers were first sent by Gregory *ad gentem Anglorum*.¹ The term *gens Anglorum* is clearly Bedan, and it is used by Boniface on later occasions as well, namely when Boniface asked for more of Bede's works to be sent to him.²

It is possible to state that Boniface's knowledge of Gregory's *Responsiones* to Augustine came by way of Bede's Ecclesiastical History. As is well established now, these *Responsiones* are not Gregorian,³ and they were transmitted on the continent consistently with rubrics in which England is called *Saxonia*.⁴ As we have seen above, this term itself is a good indication that the rubric at least does not come from Gregory.⁵ The *Responsiones* occur, with *Saxonia* in the rubric, in the earliest library catalogue of St Gallen from the early ninth century.⁶ Interestingly, even the mid-eighth-century papacy only gradually went over to Bede's usage. So pope Zachary wrote to Boniface in 748 about the missionaries sent by Gregory 'in gente(m) Anglorum et Saxonum in Brittaniam insula'.⁷ When we find that pope Nicholas I more than a century later remembered Gregory the Great as the apostle *gentis Anglorum*,⁸ we may take it that the Bedan usage, shaped by Gregory's own writings, had found the way to Rome.⁹

There cannot, of course be a natural end to the subject of this article. Gradually, Gregory's usage, adopted, as is argued here, by Bede, and popularised

¹ Bonifatius, Ep. 33 (p 51f).

² See esp. Ep. 73-76 (p 151-59).

³ M. Deanesly and P. Grosjean, 'The Canterbury edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to St Augustine', *J Ecclesiast Hist* 10 (1959) 1-49

⁴ Brechter, 31.

⁵ See above, p 109.

⁶ P. Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz* i (Munich 1918) 79.

⁷ Bonifatius, Ep. 80 (p 172).

⁸ MGH Epistolae 7 (1919-28), no. 99 (p 572 and 590), from 866.

⁹ It is, of course, conceivable that Nicholas was influenced either by the *Liber pontificalis* (*ad gentem Anglorum*) or by Gregory's Register.

with the spread of his works, was commonly accepted. Thus the 'Saxons' became the 'English'. I merely wish to show how, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the two terms co-existed on the continent.

The Life of Gregory of Utrecht, a pupil of St Boniface who must have been aware of Boniface's sense of nationality, was written by Liudger in the late eighth century. In it, the West Saxon Boniface, a Saxon if ever there was one, is called 'de Britannia et gente Anglorum'.¹ Here *Angli* surely means 'English'. More complex is the case of Alcuin who was, after all, from Northumbria and thus could be termed an Angle. However, at Charlemagne's court he was known as 'the Saxon'.² In his correspondence Alcuin himself frequently uses *Britannia* for England,³ once *Saxonia*⁴ while the people are generally referred to as *Angli*;⁵ the term *Antiqui Saxones* for the continental Saxons is also attested.⁶

We may finally mention the earliest continental Life of Gregory the Great, written by John the Deacon in the first half of the ninth century⁷ and based on the Whitby Anonymous⁸ as well as on Bede.⁹ John refers to the English on five occasions as 'Saxons';¹⁰ unlike either Gregory or Bede, but like the Whitby Anonymous, he refers to Ethelbert of Kent as *rex Cantuariorum*.¹¹ John's biography may not be of great historical significance, but it shows neatly how the continental notion of the Germanic peoples in Britain as 'Saxons' was gradually changed, largely due to Bede's Ecclesiastical History, to *Angli*, 'English'.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said that Bede's *Angli* were not the Angles but the English. While he was not responsible for coining this term, but instead adopted what Pope Gregory had created on the basis of a misunderstanding, it must be recognized that Bede was largely responsible for popularising this term.¹²

¹ MGH SS 15/1, 66; see also 73 and 75 (twice). On this work see now Matthias Werner, *Adelsfamilien im Umkreis der frühen Karolinger: die Verwandtschaft Irminas von Oeren und Adelas von Pfalzel* (Sigmaringen 1982) passim.

² Einhart, *Vita Karoli Magni*, MGH SRG us 25 (1911) ch. 25: 'Alcoinum, item diaconem, de Britannia Saxonici generis'.

³ MGH Epistolae 4 (1895), index, s.v.

⁴ Ep. 3 (p 20).

⁵ Ep. 3 (p 20); 61 (p 105); 82 (p 125); 101 (p 147); 122 (p 179); 123 (p 181); 129 (p 191) etc.

⁶ Ep. 7 (p 32).

⁷ PL 75.61-108.

⁸ see esp. II 41 (col. 103).

⁹ see II 33, II 37 (col. 99, 100).

¹⁰ PL 75, col. 61, 99, 100, 102, 107.

¹¹ II 35 (col. 100).

¹² This against F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd ed., Oxford 1971) 10-11: 'Bede was reflecting the common opinion of his time'. But see the interesting remarks by H. M. Chadwick, *The origin of the English nation* (Cambridge 1907) 54-9, where many of our

It may also be said that the Celtic peoples in referring to their Germanic neighbours on the island as 'Saxons' were for centuries in the mainstream of European developments. They never abandoned this terminology, but on the continent, 'Saxon' was gradually replaced by 'English'. It may well be that part of the explanation for this is that Bede's works did not make an impact on the Irish or Welsh comparable to the one they made on the English and continentals. The term 'Anglo-Saxon' has some historical justification;¹ it might have become more common as a contrast to the 'Old Saxons' if Bede, with the help of Gregory the Great, had not provided an alternative.²

points are mentioned in passing. Note also his reference to Procopius using the term *Angli* (55).

¹ See Kemp Malone, 'Anglo-Saxon: a semantic study', *Rev Engl Stud* 5 (1929) 173-85.

² Some of the points discussed in this article are briefly mentioned, in a different context, by Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, the *bretwaldas* and the origins of the *gens Anglorum*', *Ideal and reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon society: studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, with Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford 1983) 99-128, esp. 120-23. That article appeared after the completion of my own.