

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

Prosperity and Power in the Age of Bede and Beowulf

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IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR that in the seventh and eighth centuries much of the country which was to become England was exceptionally prosperous and that the roots of prosperity lay in the productiveness of the land. How far this could benefit kings is less clear. Initially, say in the years around 600, the answer was probably 'not much'. Kings could certainly exploit their rural subjects by demanding, for example, food rents, hospitality and service. But this 'economy of maintenance' made a much less dynamic contribution to royal power than what we might call a complementary 'economy of treasure': that is to say, the exploitation of the gold, silver and other rich goods derived from plunder, tribute and, to a lesser extent, from gift exchange. Rends and services allowed a king to mark time; treasure enabled him to go forward by attracting warriors, winning battles and laying new territory under tribute. Within our period, however, comes the beginnings of an important change as the expansion of international trade and the proliferation of the coinage create the conditions for a shift in balance, and for the first time the means become available to turn rural surpluses into something like treasure. That the movement of these two economies towards convergence increases the potentiality of kingship is part of what I want to argue.

The argument is grounded *au fond* on the evidence for rural wealth. The capacities of the British countryside can be seen, long before the age of Bede and Beowulf, in the age of Rome. Fourth-century Roman Britain

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could feed an army of perhaps 24,000 men, an urban population of perhaps 237,000, and produce additional grain surpluses for export and for feeding to pigs—that sure sign of rural affluence.¹ The same affluence is reflected in literary comment: in Strabo's first-century list of British exports—corn, cattle, gold, silver, iron, hides, slaves and dogs; in the observations of Strabo's contemporary, Pomponius Mela, on a Britain 'huge with fertile plains', its people 'rich . . . in herds and lands'; and in the statement of Constantius's panegyrist after the reconquest of 297 that Britain was 'a land that the state could ill afford to lose, so plentiful are its harvests, so numerous are the pasturelands in which it rejoices . . . so much wealth comes from its taxes'.² In all this there may be some hyperbole. Yet the literary evidence is consistent, consonant with that of archaeology, and extended for our later period by Bede. In the first chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History* Bede gave a description of Britain partly drawn from a *mélange* of earlier sources. But there is no known source for his views on Britain's natural wealth—an island 'rich in crops and trees', with 'good pasturage for cattle and beasts of burden', vines, salt springs and warm springs, abundant wildfowl, fish and shellfish. These remarks have sometimes been depreciated as ones subverted by ideological intentions: an account of a paradisaical land flowing with milk and honey before the sins of its inhabitants called in the invader.³ But this does not quite do justice. Any providential overlay was surely underpinned by Bede's own knowledge, set out as it is here, not in the past tense, but in the present.

For Bede's general sketch of his country's riches there is much particular support. It comes indirectly from the great trading ports known as wics and from the coinage, more directly from rural sites, and most directly from the relationship between all three. Four wics are known to us from excavation, one, Ipswich, seemingly founded about 600, and three—London, York and Hamwic—between about 650 and 700. The largest English settlements of the period, roughly forty to sixty hectares

¹ M. Millett, *The Romanization of Britain* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 131, 182, gives a range of 15,000 to 33,500 men for the size of the army and of 184,000 to 290,000 for the urban population. In both cases I have split the difference. For grain and pigs, see S. Frere, *Britannia*, 3rd edn. (1987), p. 272; and S. Applebaum, in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*. Vol. I. ii: *AD 43–1042* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 179, 187–8, 207.

² J. C. Mann and R. G. Penman (eds.), *Literary Sources for Roman Britain*, 2nd edn. (1985), pp. 12, 46; A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (1979), p. 75.

³ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), p. 15; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), p. 6; P. Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West* (1999), pp. 375–6.

in area, each was rather larger than, for example, the Roman *civitas* capital at Silchester. Hamwic's population was perhaps two to three thousand, London's possibly as high as five to ten thousand around the year 800.⁴ Although these places were manufacturing centres, their related *raison d'être* was international trade, based primarily on the export of goods from their rural hinterlands.

We can use the scale of the wics as a crude indicator of rural prosperity only if we bear in mind both our ignorance of their total numbers and our knowledge of their continental counterparts. It is very likely that there were more than those so far identified: places unrevealed by excavations, rarely if ever mentioned in written sources, and detectable if at all only by their names, coastal locations and later histories. Prime candidates here are Sandwich, Fordwich and Greenwich in Kent,⁵ Harwich in Essex and Dunwich in Suffolk.⁶ Other hinterlands may have been otherwise provided for. The wealthy but wic-less region of Lindsey, for example, was almost certainly served by beach markets along the Humber,⁷ so that any total view of England's foreign trade would have to take into account more than the wics alone. Developments across the Channel and the North Sea provide some interesting comparisons and contrasts. There the three main counterparts of the English wics were Quentovic, near Boulogne, and Dorestad and Domburg, at the mouth of the Rhine. Dorestad may have been the largest, with an area of about sixty hectares and a population estimated at 2,500,⁸ but it was probably not much larger than Hamwic and possibly smaller than London. In territories generally better documented than England, no other major wics emerge until we

⁴ The best short account of the wics is by D. A. Hinton, in D. M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*. Vol. I: 600–1540 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 218–22. For individual wics, see M. Lapidge *et al.* (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 255, 295–6, 426–7; R. L. Kemp, *Anglian Settlement at 46–54 Fishergate*, *The Archaeology of York: Anglian York 7/1* (York, 1996), pp. 66–7, 75–7. Silchester: Millett, *Romanization*, p. 153; London population: Keene, in *Cambridge Urban History*, i. 188.

⁵ J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (Chichester, 1984), pp. 17–22; J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (1986), p. 205.

⁶ J. Haslam, 'Dommoc and Dunwich: A Reappraisal', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* [hereafter *ASSAH*], 5 (1992), 41–5.

⁷ C. P. Loveluck, 'The Development of the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: Economy and Society "On Driffeld"', East Yorkshire, 400–750 AD', *ASSAH*, 9 (1996), 25–48, at 44; *id.*, 'A High-Status Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Flixborough, Lincolnshire', *Antiquity*, 72 (1998), 146–61, at 157–8; K. Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site: Middle Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire, A.D. 650–780', *Medieval Archaeology*, xlv (2000), 53–79, at 69.

⁸ W. A. van Es, 'Dorestad Centred', in J. C. Besteman *et al.* (eds.), *Medieval Archaeology in the Netherlands: Studies Presented to H. H. van Regteren Altena* (Assen/Maastricht, 1990), p. 176; Kemp, *Anglian Settlement*, p. 77.

reach Hedeby and Ribe in Denmark. The number of known English wics located on a relatively short stretch of coastline, from York round to Southampton, serving a relatively small land mass, contrasts strikingly with the rather smaller number identified across the water, and peripheral to a much larger area. If our ‘possibles’ were also taken into account, the contrast might be still greater.

That only highly productive rural hinterlands could sustain so many and such comparatively large ports may seem a rather unrefined piece of reasoning. But it gains in persuasiveness from the coinage. The story here is now well defined: slow beginnings in the early seventh century, with a smallish number of gold coins struck in London and the south-east; the gradual switch to a silver sceatta currency from *c.*675, again at first largely confined to the south-east; a secondary phase of augmented sceatta production from *c.*710 to 740, when coinage spread rapidly and widely, up the east coast and into the midlands; contraction in the volume of the coinage under Offa, but still only to a relatively high level; then fluctuations in the ninth century, with an apparently downward trend in mint production from about 830. Most remarkable is the period of monetary ‘take-off’ in the first half of the eighth century. This was on a massive scale. The secondary sceattas were struck at some twenty to twenty-five English mints—a number unequalled before Ethelred’s reign—and they constitute the commonest single finds of any pre-Conquest coin series.⁹ Behind the millions that were minted lay an expanding supply of silver to northern Europe, from some unknown source, and a related expansion in international trade. As with the emergence of the wics, so with the currency, southern and eastern England moved to the same economic rhythm as the lands opposite. But here again England was to a degree exceptional. Large inflows of silver suggest a substantially favourable balance of trade, with exported goods being exchanged for bullion;¹⁰ and this a priori conclusion is confirmed by some of what we know about the origins and find spots of the coins themselves. For example, Frisian sceattas minted at Dorestad are by far the commonest type found in

⁹ D. M. Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, 3 vols. (1993–4), iii. 299, 315; P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*. Vol. I: *The Early Middle Ages (5th–10th Centuries)* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 168. For local examples of the preponderance of sceattas, see, e.g. P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1998), pp. 172–3, and A. Vince (ed.), *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London*. Vol. 2: *Finds and Environmental Evidence*, London and Middlesex Archaeological Soc., Special Paper 12 (1991), pp. 281–2.

¹⁰ P. Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 27–33, esp. p. 31; M. Blackburn, ‘Coin Circulation in Germany during the Early Middle Ages: The Evidence of Single-Finds’, in B. Kluge (ed.), *Fernhandel und Geldwirtschaft* (Sigmaringen, 1993), p. 44.

England, making up about 21 per cent of all sceatta finds; English sceattas, by contrast, turn up much more rarely in the Low Countries.¹¹ It looks as if England had more than its fair share of what Professor Metcalf has aptly termed ‘the prosperity of north-western Europe’.¹²

Promoting the rapid growth of both wics and coinage was the large-scale marketing of rural surpluses. The mechanisms which made this possible are still obscure. We cannot tell whether goods reached the ports chiefly by mercantile enterprise, the forwarding of surplus food-rents by kings, or the private initiatives of lords and peasants. Whatever the means, however, the commercial economy of the wics and the agrarian economies of their rural hinterlands interlocked, dispersing upcountry some of the wealth which trade generated. One mark of this is the wide rural distribution of the secondary sceattas. Another is the equally wide distribution of exotic goods. Some were imported from abroad, like the Mayen lava quernstones found at many inland settlements; others came from more local sources, like the Ipswich-ware pottery manufactured from about 650 to 850 at a leading wic, densely distributed in East Anglia, but also found much further afield at such far-flung settlements as Yarnton in Oxfordshire and Riby Cross Roads in Lincolnshire.¹³ More rarely, but with similar implications, rural sites also yield luxury goods, such as the glass claw-beakers found at West Stow in Suffolk and Mucking in Essex, and the enamelled escutcheon from a hanging-bowl discovered at Chalton in Hampshire. These may sometimes have arrived at their destinations aberrantly: for example, as dowries or plunder.¹⁴ But the extensive deposition

¹¹ Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, ii. 174; Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, p. 150.

¹² D. M. Metcalf, ‘The Prosperity of North-Western Europe in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries’, *Economic History Review* [hereafter *ECHR*], 2nd ser., xx (1967), 344–57.

¹³ J. Parkhouse, ‘The Distribution of Mayen Lava Quernstones in Early Medieval Northwestern Europe’, in *Papers of the ‘Medieval Europe Brugge 1997’ Conference*, vol. 3, p. 101; Lapidge *et al.* (eds.), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, p. 375; J. Newman, in M. Anderton (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia* (Glasgow, 1999), pp. 39–41; H. Hamerow, ‘Angles, Saxons and Anglo-Saxons: Rural Centres, Trade and Production’, *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 13 (1999), 189–205, at 197; K. Steedman, ‘Excavation of a Saxon Site at Riby Cross Roads, Lincolnshire’, *Archaeological Journal*, 15 (1994), 212–306, at 246–7.

¹⁴ S. West, *West Stow: The Anglo-Saxon Village*. Vol. I: *Text*, East Anglian Archaeology Report, No. 24 (1985), pp. 75–6; H. Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking*. Vol. 2: *The Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (1993), pp. 60, 159; P. V. Addyman and D. Leigh, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Village at Chalton, Hants: Second Interim Report’, *Medieval Archaeology*, xvii (1973), 1–25, at 17, 19; G. Astill, ‘Archaeology, Economics and Early Medieval Europe’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 4 (1985), 215–31, at 229; D. Hinton, *Archaeology, Economy and Society: England from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (1990), pp. 26–7; C. Scull, ‘Archaeology, Early Anglo-Saxon Society and the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms’, *ASSAH*, 6 (1993), 65–82, at 73.

of more workaday products like pottery argues more compellingly for ordinary commercial transactions. That rural opportunities for such transactions were growing at just this time has been shown by recent work on the so-called ‘productive sites’—places usually in open country, often unconnected to settlements, found throughout the east and south-east, from Yorkshire to the Isle of Wight, yielding concentrations of coins and metalwork, and generally interpreted as the locations for fairs and markets.¹⁵ If wics were the chief nodal points for international trade, the productive sites may have been their inland counterparts: participants in an integrated system of exchange which linked the rural settlements of eastern and southern England to the coastlands of the Continent.

What export commodities underpinned this vigorous system? Cloth, slaves and possibly hides are the usual suspects. Hides may well have been a major export, particularly, but not only, from Northumbria; the huge quantities of cattle bones found at Hamwic should alert us to other, southern, possibilities.¹⁶ As between cloth and slaves, cloth was almost certainly the more ubiquitous, valuable and easily sustained export. In Roman Britain priorities had differed. Although British woollens had figured in Diocletian’s price edict, demand from the army and the towns had promoted corn-growing as a primary agrarian activity. But with the end of Rome the whole balance of the economy is likely to have tilted away from arable towards pasture, not to be redressed while the number of rural producers was large and the number of non-rural consumers was small. This is in fact what archaeology suggests. From the brecklands of Norfolk to the chalk downs of Hampshire and Sussex and the hills and vales of Oxfordshire, there are post-Roman signs of reversion to pasture. When we move into the seventh and eighth centuries, virtually every excavated settlement reveals the debris of cloth-making—loom weights, spindle whorls, and so on—while barns and granaries seem to be correspondingly rare.¹⁷ It looks

¹⁵ For an excellent introduction, see Ulmschneider, ‘Settlement, Economy and the “Productive” Site’, 62–9.

¹⁶ J. R. Maddicott, ‘Two Frontier States: Northumbria and Wessex, c.650–750’, in J. R. Maddicott and D. M. Palliser (eds.), *The Medieval State: Essays Presented to James Campbell* (2000), pp. 33–4, 36–7; J. Bourdillon, in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 179–81; A. Vince, in J. Rackham (ed.), *Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England*, CBA Research Report 89 (1994), p. 117.

¹⁷ T. Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 58–9; M. Bell, in M. Aston *et al.* (eds.), *The Rural Settlements of Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 278; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Far Thrupp, 1994), pp. xxiii, 21–2, 25–7; Hamerow, ‘Angles, Saxons and Anglo-Saxons’, 201. If cloth-making was the overwhelmingly important rural industry, its dominance might help to explain the absence of evidence for other forms of specialised craft production, which Dr Hamerow finds ‘a puzzle’.

as if grain production had dwindled as sheep pastures expanded; and in an unurbanised society, where the king's farm probably weighed much less heavily than the earlier Roman *annona*, this is what we might expect.

But the ubiquity of rural cloth production in itself proves little. The same could be said about much of western Europe;¹⁸ and although the archaeological evidence may indicate that England produced an exceptional quantity of woollen cloth, creating surpluses for export, it was more probably its quality which was outstanding and which took it on to the export markets. The little clutch of textual references pointing in this direction are all well known: a St Bertin charter of 800 referring to the purchase of English cloth; Charlemagne's letter to Offa complaining about the length of English cloaks; and Notker's record of Charlemagne's displeasure at the Frisians' sale of short cloaks.¹⁹ Taken with Charlemagne's letter, this suggests that at least some of the famous *pallia fresonica*, the Frisian cloaks, were manufactured in England: a suggestion often scouted but one which remains plausible.²⁰ If the 'black stones' which Offa had asked for, and which Charlemagne seemingly considered exchanging for English cloaks, were in fact antique Roman marble columns, as has been plausibly suggested, then the likelihood of English cloaks being equivalent luxury products is greatly reinforced.²¹ In addition, we have a couple of eighth-century references to the dispatch of English cloaks to churchmen facing the cold winters of Germany.²² None of this amounts to much.

¹⁸ E. Carus-Wilson, in M. M. Postan and E. E. Rich (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*. Vol. II: *Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 363–5; R. Doehaerd, *The Early Middle Ages in the West* (Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 160–2.

¹⁹ *Diplomata Belgica ante Annum Millesimum Centesimum Scripta*, ed. M. Gysseling and A. C. F. Koch (Brussels, 1950), vol. i, p. 41; *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869–72), iii, 496–8; *Notker Balbulus Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, ed. H. F. Haefele, MGH SRG, NS, xii (Berlin, 1959), pp. 47–8; H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, 2nd edn. (1991), pp. 89–90.

²⁰ The case against is put most strongly by S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du haut moyen age*, 2 vols. (Lille, 1983), pp. 131–4, but it is by no means conclusive. Cf. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 87–90.

²¹ D. P. S. Peacock, 'Charlemagne's Black Stones: The Re-use of Roman Columns in Early Medieval Europe', *Antiquity*, 71 (1997), 709–15.

²² *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*, trans. and ed. C. H. Talbot (1954), pp. 128, 143. The second of these letters, from King Ethelbert of Kent, presents Boniface not only with two woollen cloaks but with a silver drinking cup lined with gold and weighing three and a half pounds. Like the possible association of Offa's cloaks with Roman columns, the association of Boniface's cloaks with an undoubted rich object suggests that both may have fallen into the same category of luxury goods. Cf. *English Historical Documents, c.500–1042* [hereafter *EHD*], ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn. (1979), no. 185.

On the other hand, although cloth was manufactured on the Continent, there are no references to its export to England; if the monks of St Bertin were buying from England, English cloth clearly provided them with something which they could not get locally; and Charlemagne's interest suggests that that 'something' was quality.

Quality in woollen cloth had two primary constituents: fineness in the diameter of the fibre, combined with pattern and colour. Some cloth discovered in England is quite exceptionally fine, notably woollens from the seventh-century princely burials at Sutton Hoo and Broomfield—so fine and shiny that they would have looked like silk. But these were not certainly native products and they may well have been imported from the near east. Luxury patterned twills, by contrast, are native, more widely found in burials, and perhaps in continuous descent from Roman weaving techniques.²³ As for colour, we have one tantalising and generally overlooked reference in Bede's description of Britain. In Britain, he says, 'there is a great abundance of whelks, from which a scarlet-coloured dye is made, a most beautiful red which neither fades through the heat of the sun nor exposure to rain; indeed the older it is the more beautiful it becomes'.²⁴ Bede here follows no known source and apparently writes from his own knowledge. He is referring to a dye obtained from shell-fish of the *purpura* family, certainly known in British waters, which gave its name to the dye 'purple'. This was often and actually, and confusingly, red.²⁵ What weight we should place on this passage is open to argument. Bede does not state what the dye was used for, but a comparable passage in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* shows that cloth is meant, and this is just what Bede's remarks about its imperviousness to sun and rain suggests.²⁶ They bring directly to mind the substance of Charlemagne's complaint that the short cloaks of the Frisians failed to protect him from

²³ E. Crowfoot, in R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 4 vols. (1975–83), I, i, pp. 412–57, esp. pp. 422–3, 442–4, 453–7; G. R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 184–5.

²⁴ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 15–16.

²⁵ The best brief survey of *purpura* and its uses is by J. H. Monro, 'The Medieval Scarlet and the Economics of Sartorial Splendour', in his *Textiles, Towns and Trade* (Aldershot, 1994) V, pp. 14–15; though he overlooks this reference. For an Irish site probably concerned with the manufacturing of dye from *purpura*, see F. Henry, 'A Wooden Hut on Inishkea North, Co. Mayo', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, lxxxii (1952), 163–78, at 164–6, 173–7. That *purpura* was not used in decorating manuscripts strengthens the grounds for associating Bede's reference with cloth: see R. Bruce-Mitford, in *Evangelium Quattuor Codex Lindisfarnensis*, 2 vols. (Lausanne, 1956–60), ii, 268–9.

²⁶ *Isidorii Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum, Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911), ii, Bk. xix. xxvii, 1–7.

wind and rain. As we shall see in a moment, rich cloth and clothing were among the most covetable commodities of the early medieval world. How much both pattern and colour contributed to their value is hinted at by Bede's further observation, in his *Life of Cuthbert*, that the monks of Lindisfarne spurned garments of 'varied or costly colouring' and were content with natural wool. If purple was used, what they rejected may have been costly indeed: Diocletian's price edict rated a pound of wool dyed in the best purple (admittedly unavailable in Britain) as equal in value to a pound of refined gold.²⁷

We can make a case, therefore, which teeters on the edge of carrying conviction, for the exceptional quantity and quality of English cloth and for its contribution to the export trade which brought in so much silver. Cloth in general almost certainly counted for more than that other vaunted export commodity, slaves. Textual references to the early English slave trade are well known. Beginning with Bede's famous story about the Deiran slave boys in the Roman market,²⁸ they are altogether much more numerous than those to the cloth trade. Yet slaves were predominantly the products of raids, frontier wars or, more rarely, judicial process, cloth of a geographically broader enterprise. Some of the richest areas in middle Saxon England were so militarily insignificant that slave sales can hardly account for their wealth. Lindsey, for example, was under Mercian domination from the late seventh century. But its productive sites, coins and metalwork all testify to a widely dispersed groundlevel prosperity, which in any case the elite activity of slaving is unlikely to have generated.²⁹ By contrast, the inferential evidence for large-scale cloth production in Lindsey is strong. It includes early settlements and multiple coin finds along the rich pastures of the Wolds, and the telling conjunction at one such settlement, Riby Cross Roads, of lava querns, Ipswich ware, spindle whorls, loom weights, and at least one Frisian sceatta.³⁰ If nothing more, it is at least suggestive that in the later middle ages Lindsey wool was

²⁷ *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 212–13; Monro, 'The Medieval Scarlet', p. 15.

²⁸ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 132–5; *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Colgrave (Lawrence, Kan., 1968), pp. 90–1.

²⁹ Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*, pp. 75–8, 174; Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site', 59–62.

³⁰ M. Blackburn, in A. Vince (ed.), *Pre-Viking Lindsey* (Lancoln, 1993), p. 83; Steedman, 'Riby Cross Roads', 247, 277–80, 282–3 (but note also the probable importance of cattle at this site, *ibid.*, 296); Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site', pp. 67–8; *ead.*, *Markets, Minsters and Metal Detectors: The Archaeology of Middle Saxon Lincolnshire and Hampshire Compared*, BAR British Ser. 307 (Oxford, 2000), pp. 23, 59, 77, 94, 146.

reckoned the third best in England, after the Welsh marches and Cotswolds.³¹

International trade was hardly a novelty in the age of Bede. There were beach markets before there were wics, and commercial imports of amber, for example, before those of lava quernstones.³² But the pace of economic growth between about 650 and 750 amounted to a quantitative change which was also qualitative. If these developments were partly common to the whole north-west European seaboard, local and English factors were also at work. Beyond the perdurable beatitudes of soil and climate, I would single out two: the existence of peace and the establishment of the church. To emphasise peace when wars dominate our sources may seem perverse. Yet consider some of the seventh- and eighth-century evidence for the internal stability which depended on peace: the wide inland distribution of Ipswich ware and lava querns; the transport of stone from Bath eighty miles across country for the mid-seventh-century building of the old minster at Winchester,³³ and the scarcity of coin hoards, those reliable barometers of troubled times. The few sceatta hoards from the coin-rich eighth century, and the total absence of coin hoards from Offa's reign and from Northumbria before the 790s, contrast strongly with the abundant hoards from the coin-poor 870s, when the Vikings were on the rampage.³⁴ Security seems to have been taken for granted: the wics lacked defences, rural settlements like West Heselton in Yorkshire lay similarly exposed, and fortifications are hard to find, at least in southern England before Offa.³⁵

³¹ Monro, *Textiles, Towns and Trade*, III, pp. 137, 146; IV, p. 213; V, p. 32. *Mutatis mutandis*, the wealth of East Anglia, another subordinate kingdom, could be explained in similar terms: *pro cloth, contra slaves*.

³² J. Hines, 'North Sea Trade and the Proto-Urban Sequence', *Archaeologia Polona*, 32 (1994), 7–26, at 15–16, 18.

³³ Anderton (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres*, p. 40; D. Tweddle et al., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*. Vol. IV: *South-East England* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 12, 103.

³⁴ M. A. S. Blackburn (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 293–4; D. M. Metcalf, 'How large was the Anglo-Saxon Currency?', *EcHR*, 2nd ser., xviii (1965), 475–82, at 476; J. Booth, 'Northumbrian Coinage and the Productive Site at South Newbold ("Sancton")', in H. Geake and J. Kenny (eds.), *Early Deira* (Oxford, 2000), p. 86. For a possible small hoard of Offa's pennies from Yorkshire, see D. Chick, 'Towards a Chronology for Offa's Coinage: An Interim Study', *The Yorkshire Numismatist*, 3 (1997), 47–64, at 52.

³⁵ J. Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 114, 282; Lapidge et al. (eds.), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, p. 191 (J. Blair: 'forts and fortifications are puzzlingly absent from both the written and the archaeological record of the early Anglo-Saxons'); A. Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c.500–1066* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 42.

In an age of wars all this may seem surprising. Yet wars were often frontier conflicts; and although the internal processes which saw the larger kingdoms swallowing the smaller were also largely military, war was probably rarely more than an occasional and small-scale threat to agriculture and exchange. The seventh-century consolidation of kingship, and the expansion of kingdoms, were forces as favourable to stability as to disorder. They already worked to limit violence through the absorption of borderlands, the developing controls emerging from overlordship and the king's peace,³⁶ and the king's own protective interest in the exploitation of his people. These perhaps were some of the preconditions for economic growth.

The church's contribution has been more widely recognised.³⁷ Here the key institutions were the monasteries. As consumers, centres of exchange, and focal points in an otherwise rather formless landscape, they filled some of the functions of towns.³⁸ But they also had two other important roles. In the first place, their bishops and abbots often presided over substantial agrarian enterprises, as great flockmasters and lords of the harvest. The early monks of Lindisfarne, Bede tells us, had no money but only cattle. Bishop Eadberht of Lindisfarne gave annually to the poor 'a tenth not only of his beasts but also of his corn and fruit and his garments'. The council of Chelsea laid down in 816 that when a bishop died every surviving bishop should give to the poor a tenth of his herds, flocks, sheep, pigs and provisions.³⁹ The entrepreneurial lordship which we can sense here was matched, in the second place, by productivity which was as much artisan as agrarian. Not only did the monasteries manufacture craft goods, like the millefiori found in Jarrow, Wearmouth and Whitby, but also in some cases cloth, quite possibly the high quality cloth hinted at in the export record. The disapproval voiced in the 747 council of Clovesho at 'the spinning and weaving of variously coloured clothing' in nunneries points to just this.⁴⁰ The styli, loom weights, and

³⁶ Cf. J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (2000), pp. 45–6; Wormald, *Legal Culture*, pp. 193–4; N. Higham, 'King Edwin of the Deira', in Geake and Kenny (eds.), *Early Deira*, p. 46.

³⁷ Much the best discussion is now Ulmschneider, *Markets, Minsters and Metal Detectors*, pp. 95–9.

³⁸ Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site', pp. 72–7; J. Blair, in Palliser (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, pp. 250–1.

³⁹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 310–11, 442–3; *Councils and Synods*, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 583.

⁴⁰ L. Webster and J. Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600–900* (1991), p. 145; *Councils and Synods*, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 369; J. Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert', in G. Bonner *et al.*, *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 14 and n. 74.

sceattas found at such monastic or supposedly monastic sites as Whitby, Barking and Flixborough, bring together monasticism, manufacturing and commerce in significant conjunction; and the 750-plus loom weights and 600 spindle whorls from Flixborough suggest production on an industrial scale, beyond the domestic needs alluded to in the Clovesho canons.⁴¹ A monastic workshop is a plausible source for Offa's exported cloaks, while the coastal and riverine location of many monasteries left them well placed for a maritime trade which supplemented the trade of the wics.

The security of the countryside, and the economic vibrancy of a new church, thus helped to provide the insular stimulus to economic 'take-off'. But any maximum view of this development is subject to one large geographical qualification. Measured by wics, coin finds, metalwork and productive sites, England's wealth lay overwhelmingly in the south, the east and the east midlands, behind the great arc of coast stretching from the Humber to the Solent which confronted the country's overseas trading partners. Moving inland, the pattern of observable wealth fades, so that over much of the central midlands and virtually the whole of the west midlands and the west country, sceattas, lava querns and Ipswich ware are all absent.⁴² With the single and signal exception of Meols in Cheshire, find-spot for the only Frisian sceattas in the west, productive sites are entirely lacking.⁴³ Perhaps, but not certainly, the contrast here was merely between a wealthy and monetised economy in the east and a wealthy but unmonetised one in the west, with western produce draining out through London and the other wics without generating much visible

⁴¹ D. M. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1976), pp. 455–6; D. Hill and D. M. Metcalf (eds.), *Sceattas in England and on the Continent*, BAR British Ser., 128 (Oxford, 1984), p. 265; Backhouse and Webster (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 90, 94, 142–3, 145–6; K. MacGowan, 'Barking Abbey', *Current Archaeology*, 149 (1996), 172–9, at 172, 175; Loveluck, 'A High-Status Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Flixborough', 154, 156–7; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*, p. 182. Flixborough's monastic status has been challenged, but looks to me to be secure: see the arguments summarised in Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site', 58–9. For styli at productive/monastic sites, see Ulmschneider, *Markets, Minsters and Metal Detectors*, pp. 85–6. The high-status productive/monastic site at Brandon, Suffolk, has produced styli, sceattas and evidence for linen production: see R. D. Carr *et al.*, 'The Middle Saxon Settlement at Staunch Meadow, Brandon', *Antiquity*, 62 (1988), 371–7, at 375–6; and Backhouse and Webster (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 81–2, 86–7.

⁴² See the distribution maps for sceattas, lava querns and Ipswich ware in Hill and Metcalf (eds.), *Sceattas in England*, p. 35; Parkhouse, 'Distribution and Exchange of Mayen Lava Quernstones', 101; and Anderton (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres*, p. 40

⁴³ Hill and Metcalf (eds.), *Sceattas in England*, p. 256; D. Griffiths, 'The Maritime Economy of the Chester Region in the Anglo-Saxon Period', in P. Carrington (ed.), *"Where Deva Spreads Her Wizard Stream": Trade and the Port of Chester* (Chester, 1996), pp. 52–3.

return.⁴⁴ Northumbria was different again, maintaining a high quality coinage through the silver famine which affected the Southumbrian kingdoms in the mid-eighth century. Since this famine was common to all north-west Europe, the chances are that Northumbria's currency was maintained by silver from local sources, such as mines.⁴⁵ So the whole country was by no means an economic unit, and our export-led boom had effects which were widespread but also circumscribed.

How could kings exploit the internal resources of these increasingly wealthy kingdoms in order to sustain a more heroic 'economy of treasure'? This is a more difficult problem, where suggestions and possibilities sometimes have to stand in for answers. My initial formulation of a sharp divide between a 'maintenance' and a 'treasure' economy was perhaps too brash, for the two may always have overlapped. The king's farm, for example, may have generated surpluses for sale, as one late source suggests,⁴⁶ or even for export, allowing rulers to turn natural but perishable wealth into more durable bullion. Ine's famous definition of the farm due from ten hides, with its listing of honey, loaves, ale, cows, wethers, geese, hens, cheese, butter, salmon, fodder and eels, gives us a glimpse not only of the rich natural economy of late seventh-century Wessex (providing a sort of libretto for Bede's introductory score), but also of that economy's potential value for the king.⁴⁷ Or again, Professor Campbell has linked the rural obligation to maintain the king's horses, mentioned occasionally in charters, with the long-distance military expeditions mentioned by Bede.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Cf. D. M. Metcalf, 'The Monetary Economy of Ninth-Century England South of the Humber: A Topographical Analysis', in M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency and Alliances* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 197; and note John Blair on the trading interests of the bishops of Worcester in London and on the importance of the Thames as a 'highway': 'The Minsters of the Thames', in J. Blair and B. Golding (eds.), *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 16–17 and n. 38. The east–west contrast is borne out by a comparison between settlement sites, e.g. between Riby Cross Roads (Lincs. — many small finds) and Catholme (Staffs. — very few small finds): see Steedman, 'Riby Cross Roads', 298.

⁴⁵ D. M. Metcalf, 'Monetary Expansion and Recession: Interpreting the Distribution Pattern of Seventh- and Eighth-Century Coins', in J. Casey and R. Reece (eds.), *Coins and the Archaeologist*, BAR 4 (Oxford, 1974), pp. 210–11; id., *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, iii, 639; Blackburn, 'Coin Circulation in Germany', p. 44; Maddicott, 'Two Frontier States', pp. 29, 31–2; Booth, 'Northumbrian Coinage', pp. 84–7.

⁴⁶ The Axbridge chronicle, in P. Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar*, BAR British Ser., 65 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 10–11.

⁴⁷ Ine 70. 1: *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough (Cambridge, 1992), p. 59.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 96–7.

Here too primitive rights of maintenance and the means to acquire treasure were not so far apart.

One further link between the two economies was provided by cloth, and more particularly by clothing. At one level clothing was a utilitarian commodity which kings were expected to provide for their men. Louis the Pious distributed it annually to his household; Alfred listed it among the goods which a king needed to support his followers.⁴⁹ Rich clothing, however, was something apart. Distributed again by kings, and coveted by nobles, it often ranked alongside gold, silver and weapons as a sort of treasure, to be acquired as other treasure was acquired. 'Follow me', Gregory of Tours has King Theuderic say to his men before leading them off on a great raid into the Auvergne, 'and I will lead you into a country where you may find gold and silver as much as you desire, whence you may take cattle, slaves and clothing in abundance.'⁵⁰ We find a similar association in Queen Wealtheow's gifts to Beowulf: two armlets, a mantle and rings, and the finest of torques. 'Take pride in this jewel', she says to him, 'have joy of this mantle, drawn from our treasuries.'⁵¹ Like rings, fine clothing formed part of the heroic gift-giving culture of the hall.

The most desirable clothes were silks, and especially silk cloaks, like the 'extremely valuable' one which Alfred gave to Asser.⁵² But quality woollen cloth might also be prized. The fine woollens from Sutton Hoo were thought fit for a king, and Charlemagne's complaint that short cloaks were useless against wind and rain underlines one practical way in which wool might be superior to silk. Like fine weapons, fine woollens were both indicative of status and also highly functional. Unlike silks, they may have been relatively easy to get, at least in England and for kings. When Queen Iurminburg of Northumbria complained in the 670s that Wilfrid's 'countless army of followers' were 'arrayed in royal clothing',

⁴⁹ *Notker Balbulus*, ed. Haefele, pp. 91–2; *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 132.

⁵⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, 3. 11, ed. B. Krusch and B. Levison, MGH SRM, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1937–51), pp. 107–8; and T. Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 35 (1985), p. 79. For the general importance of rich clothing to the nobility, see Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert', pp. 9, 13–14.

⁵¹ *Beowulf*, ed. C. L. Wrenn (1953), ll. 1193–6, 1216–18. I have combined the translations of M. Alexander, *Beowulf* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 89, and J. R. Clarke Hall, *Beowulf and the Finnsburg Fragment*, revd. edn. (1950), p. 81. Cf. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 23.

⁵² *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 97.

it is much more likely that the sort of multiple royal liveries seemingly implied were not precious imported silks but woollens.⁵³

Where might an English king have acquired such cloth? If one possible answer is 'from monasteries', another may be 'from his rural subjects'. The earliest insular example of clothing as a render in kind, of the sort common in the Carolingian polyptychs, appears to come from a Kentish charter of 825. Long before this, however, Ine's laws had laid down that 'the white cloth paid as rent (*gafolhwitel*) from every hide' should be worth six pence.⁵⁴ Here was a king interesting himself in woollen cloth and defining its render in terms of value: perhaps with an eye to household supplies or even to exports. Taken together with Charlemagne's assumption that Offa could regulate the export of cloaks, Ine's decree suggests a royal concern with cloth that we might not otherwise suspect. A further pointer in the same direction comes from Alcuin's admonitory letter home to King Aethelred of Northumbria in 793. Aethelred and his *optimates*, writes Alcuin, are dressing immoderately and excessively, and 'the princes' superfluity is poverty for the people'—as if extravagant clothing was somehow the product of a levy.⁵⁵ This whole picture contains more darkness than light. But England's likely reputation for rich cloth, the value set on such cloth by aristocratic society, and the interest of some kings in cloth production, all seem to suggest a link between rural surpluses and one sort of treasure which kings and nobles wanted.

But more often that link was indirect, deriving from the king's ability to tap the imported silver which was chiefly and ultimately the product of rural prosperity. This might be done three ways: through control of minting, control of currency (not quite the same thing),⁵⁶ and taxation. The basis for all three lay in the rapid expansion of the coinage from c.710 onwards. Kings had long been used to accumulating and dispensing bullion, and silver coinage was essentially only a form of bullion and therefore of treasure. But unlike most forms of treasure it was not primarily the product of plunder or gift exchange, and it circulated widely rather than being hoarded or restricted to an elite. Its free circulation created the

⁵³ *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), p. 49.

⁵⁴ *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, 3 vols. (1885–93), no. 384; Ine 44. 1, *Laws*, trans. Attenborough, p. 51. For cloth rents in Francia, see e.g. Doehaerd, *The Early Middle Ages*, p. 131.

⁵⁵ *Councils and Synods*, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 492–5; *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, no. 193. For a slightly different interpretation, see Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert', p. 14, n. 74.

⁵⁶ For the distinction, see Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, i. 17.

possibility of extracting it in an orderly way from merchants, peasants and artisans, and then using it as a king might use any other treasure: as a store of wealth, a gauge of status, and a means of reward. Unlike the produce which came in via the king's farm, it did not waste. Our difficulty is to know when and how this process of extracting for profit got under way. What follows is the merest sketch of a tentative answer.

Profit might arise in the first place from royal control of minting. This probably began early, with the first gold coinages, but a better evidenced case has been made by Professor Metcalf for royal control of the eighth-century sceatta coinage. Three sceatta issues—but only three among very many—are unimpeachably royal, bearing as they do the names of kings Aldfrith and Eadberht of Northumbria and Beonna of East Anglia. Other factors are more suggestive than determinative: the enormous scale of some issues, implying their public character; some designs possibly representing kings; and the concentration of some particular issues in particular kingdoms.⁵⁷ But these arguments fall well short of proof, and sceatta minting probably mixed royal initiatives with many private initiatives from lords and individual moneyers striking for their own profit, as in Merovingian Francia. With Offa the picture clears and minting becomes effectively the royal monopoly which it was to remain. What was now an undeniable royal interest in the coinage has usually been explained in terms of design and image, portraits and titles. But although ideology is the more visible part of the story, profit may have been the more important. Though we lack contemporary evidence, later and Carolingian practice suggests two possibilities here: the king's sale of dies to his moneyers; and the receipt by those delivering silver to the mint of less than they gave in.⁵⁸ In other words, the king took his cut. Without some such possibilities, royal interest in the coinage, from Offa's day onwards, becomes hard to explain.

Control of currency reached beyond control of minting. In practice, it meant the ability of rulers to exclude foreign coins from their lands.

⁵⁷ Hill and Metcalf (eds.), *Sceattas in England*, pp. 34–47; Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, i. 12–17, 21–2, 24–5, iii. 640. For a contrary view, see Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, pp. 158–9.

⁵⁸ S. Keynes and M. Blackburn, *Anglo-Saxon Coins: An Exhibition* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 7–8; C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Offa', in R. M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies Presented to F. M. Stenton* (1961), pp. 39–40, argues for the king's fiscal interest in the coinage, via payments from the moneyers, in the sceatta issues; cf. Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, iii. 640, for general agreement. The possible Carolingian precedent is particularly suggestive: see the capitulary of Pippin, 754–5, *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, ed. A. Boretius, i (MGH, Hanover, 1883), no. 13, c. 5, p. 32.

Before Offa's reign there is little sign that this was attempted, and imported Frisian sceattas circulated prolifically and at par alongside English issues and across the boundaries of kingdoms.⁵⁹ Under Offa this was to change. To judge from their rarity as finds, Carolingian and other foreign coins circulated hardly at all in late eighth-century England. Since the silver coinage itself was a witness to continuing trade, there must have been a deliberate and successfully implemented decision to exclude them.⁶⁰ Foreign merchants were presumably compelled to trade in English coin, allowing the king to charge for the exchange through his agent the moneyer—the king's cut again. Control could be exercised all the more effectively because minting was now confined to just a few places: within Offa's latterday dominions, to Canterbury, London, probably Ipswich and possibly Rochester, by contrast with the twenty-plus mints which had struck sceattas. The dominance among these of Canterbury, close to the Wantsum channel which provided the main landfall for continental shipping, confirms the role of foreign trade as the motor of the whole system.⁶¹

Converging under Offa, royal control of both minting and currency was maintained by his successors, for reasons which common sense and later practice would suggest were largely fiscal. To a similar end the same flow of both silver and goods could be tapped through the tolls which emerge at just this time. Here the vital preliminary step may have been the foundation of the wics, which allowed much foreign trade to be channelled through a few fixed points and so taxed the more easily. Our first sight of this new and significant conjunction of kings, wics and tolls comes with the laws of Kings Hlothere and Eadric of Kent, compiled about 680, which mention the activities in 'Lundenwic' of the king's 'wicgerefa' or 'wic-reeve', a figure glossed elsewhere as 'telonarius' or 'toll collector'.⁶² Tolls again levied in London, and also in other likely trading ports such as Sarre and Fordwich, dominate the little group of

⁵⁹ See the maps in Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, ii. 201–3. For circulation, *ibid.*, ii. 200, iii. 641, 648, and note the presence of Frisian sceattas in the Aston Rowant hoard, *ibid.*, ii. 196.

⁶⁰ R. H. M. Dolley and K. F. Morison, 'Finds of Carolingian Coins from Great Britain and Ireland', *British Numismatic Journal* [hereafter *BNJ*], xxxii (1963), 75–87, at 86; Metcalf, 'Monetary Expansion and Recession', p. 211; *id.*, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, i. 17.

⁶¹ Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, pp. 273–5; Metcalf, 'The Monetary Economy of Ninth-Century England', pp. 183–4.

⁶² Hlothere and Eadric, 16: *Laws*, trans. Attenborough, pp. 22–3; H. M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 232 and n. 1; M. D. Lobel (ed.), *The British Atlas of Historic Towns*. Vol. III: *The City of London from Prehistoric Times to c.1520* (Oxford, 1989), p. 25 and n. 49.

ten charters concerned with their remission, issued mainly by Aethelbald of Mercia in the 730s and 740s.⁶³ The desire for this privilege, from which the main beneficiaries were commercially minded English bishops and monasteries, implies that tolls weighed heavily, to the traders' loss and the king's gain; and the restriction of the surviving Mercian grants to Aethelbald's reign may suggest, as Dr Kelley puts it, 'that Offa and his successors were unwilling to compromise an important source of income'.⁶⁴ As with the coinage, so with tolls, we can dimly perceive Offa as a warlord conscious that plunder was by no means the sole route to profit.

Our ignorance about a good deal nevertheless remains deep. For example, what form did tolls take? One of our charters, granted by Eadbert of Kent in the early 760s, mentions the royal right of pre-emption of merchandise, which suggests levies in kind. Here it gives a little support to Professor Hodges's hypothesis that the wics were royally controlled entry points for the luxury goods to which kings needed access.⁶⁵ But in Francia taxes on trade were among the earliest to be taken in money;⁶⁶ and given the prior possession of coin by importing merchants, before it flowed out to kings and rural suppliers, we might expect the same to be true in England. Whether tolls were also levied inland is another unknown. But again in Francia inland tolls, often levied at such 'choke points' as bridges and mountain passes, were commonplace. Bridge tolls indeed were so familiar as to have their own special term, 'pontaticum'⁶⁷—and it is at least worth wondering whether English royal reservation of bridgework as a communal obligation from the eighth century onwards may not have had as much to do with taxing trade as with moving armies. Our first English evidence for these inland tolls comes much later, with the Worcester charter of about 890 by which 'the wagon-shilling and the load-penny' on Droitwich salt were to go to the king 'as they have always done': a useful *terminus ante quem* both for

⁶³ S. Kelly, 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', *Early Medieval Europe*, i (1992), 3–28, at 3–5. For the possibility of earlier tolls at Kentish ports, see S. C. Hawkes, 'Anglo-Saxon Kent, c.425–725', in P. E. Leach (ed.), *Archaeology in Kent to AD 1500*, CBA Research Report 48 (1982), p. 76.

⁶⁴ Kelly, 'Trading Privileges', 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 16, and the works of R. Hodges there cited.

⁶⁶ R. Doehaerd, 'La richesse des Mérovingiens', in *Studi in onore di Gino Luzzatto*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1950), i. 34–6; Spufford, *Money and its Use*, pp. 48–9.

⁶⁷ Kelly, 'Trading Privileges', 17–18. A. J. Stoclet, *Immunes ab omni teloneo: Etude de diplomatique, de philologie et d'histoire sur l'exemption de tonlieux au haut Moyen Âge* (Brussels/Rome, 1999), p. 163.

inland tolls and tolls in money, but also a reminder of how long a history both may already have had.⁶⁸

A last and still more difficult question concerns the origins of direct taxation in money. When did kings start to tap directly into the cash value of rural surpluses by levying money from land? The conventional answer, and another *terminus ante quem*, is provided by the first known levying of geld by King Ethelred in 1012, seemingly at the rate of 12*d.* a hide.⁶⁹ Two factors in particular made this possible: a tried and tested assessment system, and a monetised economy. That both were much older than Ethelred's reign does nothing to prove that direct taxation itself was ancient, but it does at least suggest some possibilities.

The hide as a unit of assessment was very old indeed. It was used for assessing estates in the earliest, late seventh-century, charters, for assessing whole kingdoms in the Tribal Hidage, for assessing food rents in Ine's law, and for assessing military service in a Mercian charter of about 800.⁷⁰ When it first becomes visible in the sources, around 680, the economy is nothing like monetised. At this stage, and for a good while afterwards, barter and monetary exchange merge easily, and early monetary valuations point only deceptively to coin: they could as well mean bullion or goods or a mixture of all three.⁷¹ But by the early eighth century we are moving rapidly into an era of monetary usage which was to be perpetuated, despite apparent shortages of coin, through the ninth. The abundance of single finds, especially of sceattas, is itself good evidence for this, and the location of multiple finds shows just how far down society the use of silver coin had penetrated. Hamwic, an artisan community with no obvious elite, has produced more sceattas than any other single site; nor are they rare on rural

⁶⁸ *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, no. 99; Kelly, 'Trading Privileges', 17.

⁶⁹ That geld was first paid in 1012 is a deduction from the record of the Chronicle ('D' version) that it was abolished in 1051 'in the thirty-ninth year after it had been instituted': *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. D. Whitelock (1961), p. 116. The hidage rate is known only from post-Conquest sources. But given that the hide was used for a variety of other assessments under Ethelred, including a payment to the church in 1009 of a penny per hide, it seems highly likely that geld was levied in the same way. See M. K. Lawson, 'The Collection of Danegeld and Heregeld in the Reigns of Aethelred II and Cnut', *English Historical Review*, xcix (1984), 721–38, at 726; and S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Aethelred 'the Unready', 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 221 and n. 242.

⁷⁰ Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, p. xii; J. Campbell (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 58–60; Laws, trans. Attenborough, pp. 58–9; *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, no. 73; C. W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 60–1.

⁷¹ Cf. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, pp. 232–3; A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 31–6.

settlements.⁷² This was almost certainly a small-change currency, as Tacitus's words about the monetary preferences of the Germans might remind us: 'They also seek silver more than gold . . . because silver coins, more numerous, are easier to use when people are buying cheap and common goods.'⁷³ It must have been this 'convenience' factor which created what seems to have been almost a hunger for coin, detectable, for instance, in the mid-eighth-century circulation of debased coins alongside good ones. Here, rather unusually, bad money did not drive out good. To the use of coin there were geographical limits but no discernible popular resistance, as there was in Francia (at least with regard to new coin): rather the reverse.⁷⁴

But only at the very end of the eighth century and through the ninth does the documentary evidence begin to complement the earlier archaeological and numismatic material. In recording the widening usage of coin it starts to suggest that coinage could serve purposes which were at least akin to taxation. Two charters of c.790 and 863 record our earliest known commutation payments, giving monetary valuations to food rents and hospitality rights.⁷⁵ Another, of 857, settles the annual rent of 'a little estate' in London at 12*d*.⁷⁶ About 831 a pious donor arranges to give a hundred pence a year, seemingly from his estates, to the community at Christ Church, Canterbury.⁷⁷ Most significantly of all, the ceorls of Hurstbourne Priors in Hampshire, in the famous survey of c.900, are bound to pay their lord an annual rent of 40*d*. per hide.⁷⁸ Not only are

⁷² Hill and Metcalf (eds.), *Sceattas in England*, p. 27; D. M. Metcalf, 'The Coins', in P. Andrews (ed.), *Southampton Finds*. Vol. I: *The Coins and Pottery from Hamwic* (Southampton, 1988), p. 17; Blackburn (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History*, p. 12; P. Holdsworth, *Excavations at Melbourne Street, Southampton, 1971–76*, CBA Research Report 33 (1980), pp. 133–4; Palliser (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, i, p. 220. For sceattas at rural settlements, see e.g. Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking*, 2, pp. 86, 89; and J. D. Richards, 'What's so special about "Productive Sites"?' Middle Saxon Settlement in Northumbria', *ASSAH*, 10 (1999), 71–80, at 76.

⁷³ Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. J. B. Rives (Oxford, 1999), 5. 3, p. 79.

⁷⁴ Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, i, 114, iii. 613, 620, 641; M. M. Archibald, 'The Coinage of Beonna in the Light of the Middle Harling Hoard', *BNJ*, 55 (1985), 11–54, at 16–17; P. Grierson, 'Money and Coinage under Charlemagne', in his *Dark-Age Numismatics* (1979), XVIII, pp. 509, 535; M. Blackburn, 'Money and Coinage', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. Vol. II: *c.700–900* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 548.

⁷⁵ *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, nos. 271, 507; Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, p. 242.

⁷⁶ *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, no. 92.

⁷⁷ *Select Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. F. E. Harmer (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 8–9, 44.

⁷⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1939), pp. 206–7, firmly dated and validated by H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Churls of Hurstbourne', *Lucerna* (1964), pp. 131–43, and further discussed in R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (1997), p. 77. Dr Faith points out that the word 'hiwisc', translated as 'hide', can also mean 'household', but Robertson, p. 456, shows that here it is likely to mean 'hide'.

estates producing cash, but for the first time we can see cash rents being raised on a hidage basis. To the levying of taxes on hidated land may have been no great step.

Whether that step had been taken by the end of the ninth century remains no more than an alluring possibility. Our continental information is clearer and may be important for England too. Perhaps in 860, certainly in 866 and 877, Charles the Bald had levied taxes on the assessment unit of the manse in order to buy off the Vikings: for example, in 866 at 6 *denarii* per free manse and 3 per servile manse. The tax appears to have been collected by magnates from their estates for delivery to the king. So far as we know, it was the first time for many years that direct taxation had been attempted.⁷⁹ Professor Campbell has pointed to the resemblances between Charles's levies and the later *geld*.⁸⁰ But there could just conceivably have been a more immediate parallel, perhaps even a borrowing. Between 865 and 876 at least seven payments *in toto* were made to the Vikings by Kentishmen, West Saxons, Mercians and East Angles.⁸¹ They were given in bullion—the Vikings would hardly have been satisfied with anything less—and they marked the first known occasion for something like national levies. Our scanty evidence suggests that some money was raised by bishops selling or leasing their lands,⁸² and one wonders whether they filled the same ministerial role as the tax-collecting magnates of Francia. Whether the hide was used we do not know; though we are near enough in time to the Hurstbourne survey, levying money from hidated land for a private lord, and to the Burghal Hidage, levying men from hidated land for the Crown, to make the possibility quite a strong one.

Alfred's reign, where we have now arrived, is our natural terminus. Part of Alfred's income was certainly in cash and it is almost as certain

⁷⁹ *The Annals of St Bertin*, trans. J. L. Nelson (Manchester, 1991), pp. 92, 130, 200 and notes; E. Joranson, *The Danegeld in France* (Rock Island, Ill., 1923), pp. 49–54, 62–78, 97–100; P. Grierson, 'The "Gratia Dei Rex" Coinage of Charles the Bald', in M. T. Gibson and J. L. Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, 2nd edn. (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 60–4; Spufford, *Money and its Use*, pp. 62–3.

⁸⁰ Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, p. 160. Cf. F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), p. 518, who made the same point.

⁸¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 45 (865, Kent; 866, East Anglia), 46 (868, Mercia), 47 (871, West Saxons; 872, Mercians; 873, Mercians); *The Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (1962), pp. 40 (872, Mercians), 41 (876, West Saxons). Cf. *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 16, 244–5.

⁸² *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, no. 565; *EHD*, ed. Whitelock, no. 94; discussed by S. Keynes 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and his Sons', *English Historical Review*, cix (1994), p. 1137 and n. 4, and by R. Abels, *Alfred the Great* (Harlow, 1998), p. 140 and n. 41.

that he was spending it as earlier kings had spent their treasure. The elaborate apportionment of what Asser calls his *census*, his profits from tributes, tolls, rents and taxes, argues for revenues that could easily be divided; while the portion assigned to the king's 'fighting men . . . and noble thegns' suggests payments in coin which are tentatively supported by the evidence of Alfred's will.⁸³ Our terminus is, of course, no more than another *terminus ante quem*, and it may well be that earlier kings had been similarly placed. Bishop Wilfrid's biographer tells us that Ebroin, mayor of the Neustrian palace in the 670s, had promised the king of the Frisians a bushel of gold *solidi* for Wilfrid's capture or killing;⁸⁴ and it would be surprising indeed if Offa, for example, had not commanded bushels, if not of gold *solidi*, then of his own silver pennies.

Whenever it may have happened, the emergence of money as treasure in the course of the eighth or the ninth centuries was the product of rapid economic growth. For parts of the Roman Empire, and again for medieval England, it has been argued that it was the demand for taxes and rents in cash which helped to induce marketing and interregional trade.⁸⁵ In middle Saxon England the converse was probably true. A prosperous and increasingly monetised trading economy made possible taxation in its widest sense: certainly levies in kind and tolls, very probably profits from coinage, possibly cash levies from land. Kingship was both initiator and beneficiary here. Consolidated and organised kingdoms, declining in numbers but rising in power, helped to provide a generator for the wealth which kings could also exploit. The pivot of change was the introduction and rapid spread of money—'some lasting thing', wrote John Locke, 'that men might keep without spoiling and that by mutual consent men would take in exchange for the truly useful but perishable supports of life'.⁸⁶ In putting kings in the way of accumulating bullion systematically, beyond the merely random possibilities of plunder and gift exchange, money may have made the England of Alfred, his successors, and conceivably his predecessors, more like the third-century Britain

⁸³ *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 106–7. The arguments for Alfred's access to large supplies of coin are set out at greater length in J. R. Maddicott, 'Debate: Trade, Industry and the Wealth of King Alfred', *Past and Present*, 135 (1993), 164–88, at 171–3.

⁸⁴ *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. Colgrave, pp. 52–3.

⁸⁵ K. Greene, 'Technological Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World: M. I. Finley Reconsidered', *ECHR*, liii (2000), 29–59, at 49; C. Dyer, 'Peasants and Coins: The Uses of Money in the Middle Ages', *BNJ*, 67 (1997), 30–47, at 42.

⁸⁶ J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), Second Treatise, §47, pp. 318–19.

of Constantius: 'a land that the state could ill afford to lose, so plentiful are its harvests, so numerous are the pasturelands in which it rejoices . . . so much wealth comes from its taxes'.⁸⁷ The fuelling of state power by rural productivity may have made its own uncovenanted contribution to that recovery of *Romanitas* which provided one of the roots of early English kingship.

⁸⁷ Above, p. 50.

To Beowulf now the glory was given, and Grendel thence death-sick his den in the dark moor sought, noisome abode: he knew too well that here was the last of life, an end of his days on earth. " To all the Danes by that bloody battle the boon had come. From ravage had rescued the roving stranger Hrothgar's hall; the hardy and wise one had purged it anew. Moreover, Beowulf defeating Grendel in the battle and returning with the weapon and the head as a token is a reference to the encounter of David against Goliath. King Hrothgar is portrayed in several situations recognizing the will of God and offering his acknowledgment of the Christian faith. Beowulf expresses a blend of the Pagan concept of fatalism and the Christian construct of God's favor and will. The poem entails constructs both of a capricious entity or force whose interactions with men are not linked to their worthiness, and of a munificent Christian divinity that bestows guidance and grace to the earnest (Tietjen 161).