Chapter 7
The archaeology of power and politics

So far, many aspects of settlement, population, religion and economy have been discussed within the context of the Thames Valley during the 1st millennium AD. Yet these did not operate in isolation but were closely bound up in systems of power and politics that varied extensively both over time and across the different parts of the valley. There were kings, chieftains, politicians, religious leaders and many other institutions of authority over time, interacting at varying levels and in varying ways both with each other and with the rest of the population. For much of this time, the geography of power was probably transient, associated with specific individuals; at other times power was located within specific centres across the region, some of which may be revealed by archaeological means. However, throughout much of the period in question it is extremely difficult to gain any real insight into the nature of power relations, especially when relying upon archaeological data alone. Literary sources, however biased and ephemeral they may have been, must therefore be utilised wherever possible in conjunction with archaeological, epigraphic and iconographic evidence so that some understanding may be gained. The interpretation of this evidence has often led to considerable academic dispute. This can sometimes lead to seemingly diametrically opposed viewpoints, all of which may be plausible to some degree, while new evidence may either confirm or alter opinions accordingly. Nonetheless, it is important to continue to analyse, debate and present new hypotheses so that we may be able to improve our understanding of the systems in which economies, settlements and people existed.

THE LATE IRON AGE

It is during the later Iron Age that for the first time in Britain we start to gain any understanding at all of the systems of power as they relate to specific people, and therefore to begin, however tentatively, to create political narratives for at least parts of the country. Julius Caesar's campaigns and eventual annexation of Gaul in 58-51 BC brought Rome into close contact with Britain for the first time, although trading routes had existed long before this, with Roman goods occurring across southern Britain. His two military expeditions to Britain in 55 and 54 BC may have had significant effects upon the political reality in parts of the island, although there is still much debate about the overall success of these campaigns (eg Creighton 2000; Braund 1996; Henig 2002). Some have speculated that Caesar had effectively conquered south-eastern Britain at this time (Creighton 2000, 216), while others such as Braund (1996) argued that the invasions were trivial affairs and hardly more than raids in military terms, although with deeper ideological impact in Rome. The reality is undoubtedly somewhere between the two, as there certainly are many noticeable changes in the archaeological record in south-eastern Britain from this time, including parts of the Thames Valley area (see below). This may have been in part because Britain now lay on the immediate frontier of the Roman empire, with all the increased economic and political contact that this would bring.

Kings and politics – the evidence from literature and coins (Figs 7.1-7.2)

As far as the political units of southern Britain are concerned, it is clear that even in Caesar's time large tribal entities certainly existed, probably developing in the later 2nd/early 1st century BC as elite groups emerged and disrupted the previous way of life (Creighton 2000, 216). Caesar's *Gallic Wars* provides a brief and highly polemical account of British society in the south-east during the mid 1st century BC, mentioning the names of kings, including Cassivellaunus, a man who apparently led a larger conglomeration of lesser tribal rulers against Caesar. Power was probably still very much localised in most areas, with many different smaller kings and chieftains, although we do begin to see two major political entities developing from this time, with the Thames Valley forming an approximate boundary between them. Classical literature such as the works of Strabo and Dio Cassius occasionally provides the names of British kings when their affairs coincided with imperial circles, but it is the coin evidence that has traditionally been used in the construction of Iron Age British dynasties (eg van Arsdell 1989). Although coinage had certainly been produced and been in circulation since at least the early 1st century BC, important changes occurred from around the time of Caesar's invasions. New coin types had a different range of imagery and now were often inscribed with the name of the presumed ruler and sometimes the place of mint. Many displayed clear Roman influences, including vine leaves and the emperor's portraiture, and some even included the title *Rex* or king (see below).

The distribution of these coins in southern Britain shows marked patterns which have been used by many to denote the extent and development of

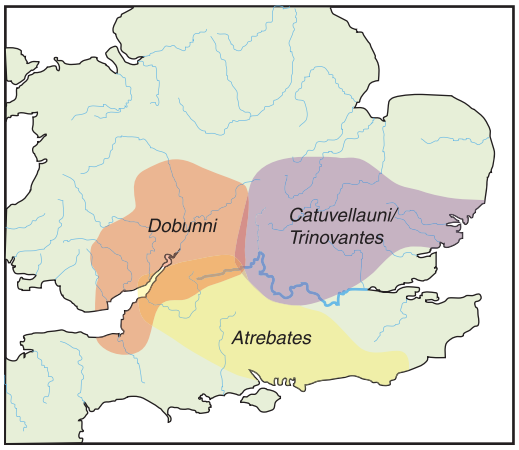


Fig. 7.1 Map of approximate distributions of three major Iron Age tribal coin groups in relation to the Thames

tribal boundaries (eg Allen 1960; Sellwood 1984; van Arsdell 1989, Fig. 7.1). The inherent dangers and problems of using coins for such purposes have been highlighted by Braund (1996, 68), in that they may actually tell us little of the real territorial parameters of the king's power. However, they do surely indicate the range of use and acceptability of such objects and thus provide some measure of the influence of the rulers.

Establishing dynastic chains from coinage is even more fraught with difficulty, although the clearest example of this approach lies within the power centre lying to the south of the Thames, an area traditionally ascribed to the Atrebates tribe. However, as with other British tribes, it is uncertain how far they would have been regarded as politically and culturally distinct units, especially in the 1st century BC, as the names given are derived from the later Roman civitates (see below). The earliest inscribed coins from this southern region are of Commios, who may have been the king mentioned by Caesar as fleeing to Britain after taking part in a rebellion in Gaul (although this is debated: Braund 1996, 72). The distribution of his coin series suggests that at the very least he had influence over large areas of central southern England, possibly including parts of the Thames Valley. He seems to have been succeeded by Tincomarus and Eppilus in the later 1st century BC, although it is uncertain if these two kings were contemporary. Eppilus certainly issued coins from Calleva (Silchester) and would undoubtedly have exerted influence over much of the Middle Thames region at this time. His reign is traditionally dated from *c* 10 BC to AD 10, and many of his coins are inscribed using the Latin prefix *Rex*, proclaiming him king of Calleva. This may indicate formal recognition of his position by Rome, in the same way as has been suggested for subsequent kings, Verica and Cunobelin (Braund 1996, 70). Tincomarus, who seems to have been controlling territory further south, also appears to have had close associations with Rome, with distinct changes occurring in his coins in the later 1st century BC, utilising more Roman inspired images. This could suggest that he had deliberately gained the patronage of Rome to bolster his own power and he is very likely to have been the same Tincomarus who at some time between 10 BC and AD 7 is recorded in the *Res Gestae* (32) as placing himself under the protection of Augustus, implying that his position had become very unstable at this time.

At around AD 10 in traditional dating, the Atrebates seem to have been unified under a man named Verica, whose rule is thought to have lasted for around 30 years and whose coins contained a wide repertoire of Roman imagery. However it is clear from the distribution pattern of these coins that his area of influence was decreasing at the expense of that of the Catuvellauni/Trinovantes, the other main tribal grouping based north of the Thames. Among the earliest widespread inscribed coins of this dynasty, dating to the later 1st century BC, were those of Tasciovanus, although it was under his son, Cunobelin, whose coin series spread across much of eastern England, that the influence of this tribal agglomeration was at its widest. Cunobelin ruled *c* AD 10–40, and his silver and bronze coins in particular adopted classical prototypes for many of their designs. It was undoubtedly under his overall reign that Catuvellaunian tribal influence spread further up the Thames Valley, at least as far as the Oxford region, and it seems that his brother Epaticcus took control of the Calleva region from the Atrebates in the late 30s AD, to be succeeded by Caratacus just prior to the Claudian invasion.

It therefore seems to have been the case – based mainly upon the evidence of coinage –that much of the lower and middle Thames region lay under the influence of both the Atrebates and the Catuvellauni, with perhaps the river itself acting as a boundary for long periods. Further west in the Upper Thames region, a different coin series predominates, that of the Dobunni. It is far more difficult to trace any dynastic associations among the rulers named on this coinage, but the earliest inscribed issues were those of Bodvoc and/or Corio, perhaps ruling different parts of Dobunnic territory simultaneously in the later 1st century BC (Fig. 7.2). Some coins of Bodvoc were the first to contain a bust on the obverse, and it has been suggested that this was perhaps influenced by coins of Tasciovanus, thus indicating some sort of political alignment with the north Thames kingdom (De Jersey http://athens.arch.ox.ac.uk/coins/). Other named rulers include Anted, Comux, Eisu, Catti and Inam (van Arsdell 1989, 272-83), although nothing is really known about the nature of any relationships and it remains uncertain if there ever was a large unified and distinct 'Dobunnic territory'. It is likely that the growing influence of their eastern neighbours in the early 1st century AD would have had an impact on at least the eastern

Fig. 7.2 Iron Age gold coin (stater) of the Dobunnic tribe minted by a ruler called BODVOC. From Ebrington, Glos.

part of Dobunnic territory and a literary source from the time of the invasion does suggest some degree of Catuvellaunian hegemony over them (Dio Cassius 60.20.2).

A major issue concerning all of the political narrative discussed above is the level to which actual warfare was endemic within late Iron Age society. It has long been the orthodox view that this period was full of dynastic struggle and constant warfare (eg Rankin 1996, 215), although more recently some such as Creighton (2000) have refuted this, arguing that post-Caesarean south-eastern Britain was essentially a pacified conquered nation with a number of client kingdoms. In actuality we know almost nothing about the real nature of power at this time, but the coinage alone suggests that major socio-political changes did occur from around the mid 1st century BC, at least in the upper echelons of society. It would seem too much to suggest that south-eastern Britain was actually a conquered land after Caesar's invasions, but it was certainly brought very much into Rome's sphere of influence from this time, becoming a conscious part of the Roman mindset as reflected in the literature. In turn many British leaders now started to use symbols of power along Roman lines, and Rome would surely have been very much in the forefront of their consciousness during the various political machinations. Actual warfare may well have been on a relatively minor scale, especially if Diodorus Siculus is to be believed when he stated that the various kings and potentates lived at peace for the most part (5.21.4). However, political intrigues and manoeuvrings are likely to have been rife and in this Rome must surely have played a large part. Furthermore, this was no one-way process, as Britain and Rome were both undergoing substantial changes during this period with the creation of new social and political realities.

The archaeology of power (Figs 7.3-7.5)

The archaeology of the Thames Valley offers some evidence to correlate with the socio-political changes suggested by literature and coins. This is especially evident in the Upper Thames region where a number of low-lying extensive ditched complexes start to appear, such as those at Dorchester Dyke Hills (Fig. 7.3), Cassington and Abingdon (see Chapter 3). At two of these 'enclosed oppida' sites, Dorchester and Abingdon, there is evidence for, or at least the suggestion of, activity from the latter part of the middle Iron Age, which in this region may be broadly defined as the 1st century BC. It has been suggested that these sites, along with a comparable example at Salmonsbury in the Windrush Valley further north, developed as result of the increase in regional trade at this time (Allen 2000, 22-6). Yet they are clearly also sites of some status and were undoubtedly centres of power within the developing tribal network, albeit still probably representing localised and largely independent entities, at least initially. The general range of finds from these sites is indicative of high status population centres, although not necessarily always the sole residences of the elite rulers themselves. It has been proposed, for example, that the late Iron Age farmstead at Barton Court Farm might have been the home of a local aristocrat associated with the nearby oppidum at Abingdon (ibid., 26). The range of finds from oppida in the Thames Valley include iron 'currency bars' (a form of trade iron), relatively high proportions of Iron Age coins and imported goods such as querns and pottery, which suggest a wide network of contacts across southern Britain and possibly beyond, although there are relatively few pre-conquest Roman imports in the area. One notable exception, although not an oppidum, lies further west within the Thames Valley at Ashton Keynes (Coe *et al.*

Fig. 7.3 Dorchester Dyke Hills

1991). Here, the discovery of a number of imported wine amphorae sherds (Dressel 1) in the late Iron Age phase of the site suggests that it was part of a high status distribution network. It has been argued that it functioned as an elite centre (Moore and Reece 2001, 23), although this is quite difficult to sustain just on the presence of such material. Further Dressel 1 amphorae sherds have recently been discovered in the nearby settlement at Latton Lands (Jane Timby pers. comm.), suggesting that the distribution of this type in the region may have been wider than previously thought.

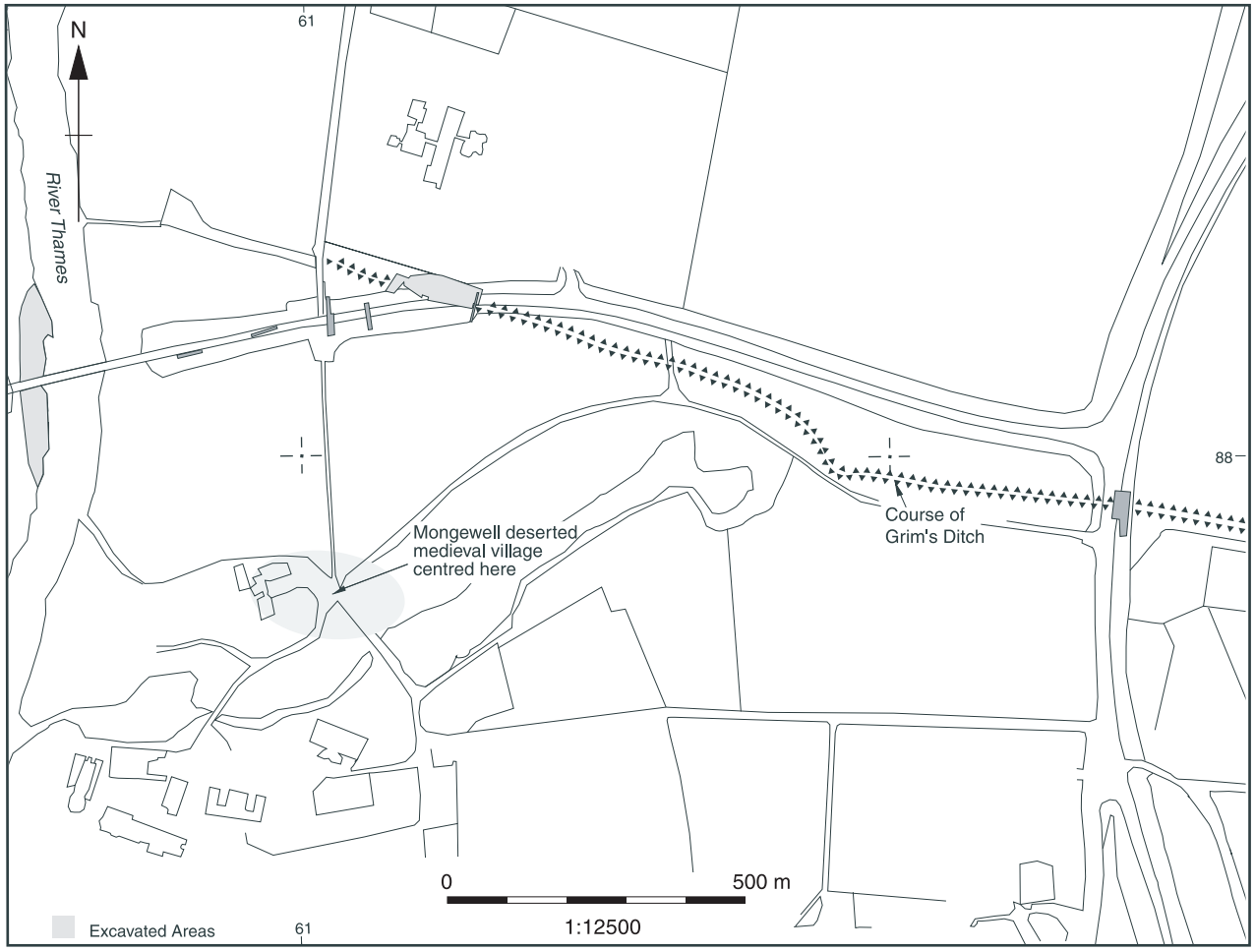
There is nothing along the Thames Valley further east that is directly comparable to the 'enclosed oppida' of the Upper Thames, although an extensive earthwork and an enclosure to the north-west of Maidenhead were of probable late Iron Age date and could plausibly have represented a site of similar character (Bowden *et al.* 1981-82). However, the nature of these features is far from clear and further excavation would be needed to ascertain any possible function.

More elaborate and often far larger linear ditched complexes also started to appear in the later Iron Age. In most cases these seem to appear later than the oppida discussed above, and presumably represent a development of this form of settlement. None of these so called 'territorial oppida' lay within the Thames Valley itself, but as presumed tribal centres a number of them will undoubtedly have had a profound influence on many of the settlements there. Just to the south of the middle Thames region, the oppidum of Calleva at Silchester was probably the tribal capital of the northern Atrebates, presumably being the main power base of rulers such as the self styled 'king of Calleva', Eppilus (see above). Excavations have revealed evidence of dense occupation on the site from about 25 BC, lying within an extensive series of defensive dykes. The material culture associated with this site provides firm indications of Roman influence, including evidence for writing in Latin (styli and graffiti), imported continental pottery and the consumption of oysters and other foods which were quite at odds with typical Iron Age practice in the region. By the early 1st century AD there were remains of streets at right-angles to each other, suggesting regular planning with rectangular plots and timber-framed buildings, and the settlement continued to develop in this form up to the mid-to-late 1st century AD when the Roman town was constructed (Fulford and Timby 2000).

Despite suggestions based upon coin evidence that there should be another oppidum to the west of London, none has yet been discovered (Bird 2004a, 29). The closest is near St Albans (Verlamion), which belonged to the Catuvellauni and may have exerted some degree of influence on the Thames Valley. Meanwhile further west in the heart of Dobunnic territory lay the extensive oppidum at Bagendon, north of Cirencester (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 49). This comprised a series of discontinuous dykes defining an area of approximately 200 ha, and although excavations have not been very comprehensive, they have uncovered evidence for coin production and high status occupation in the form of relatively large amounts of imported pottery. Bagendon is thought to have been established a few decades before the conquest and was thus later than other large oppida to the east, perhaps indicating

the later development of political centralisation in this region. Finally, the largest of all of these earthwork complexes – and the least well understood – is Grim's Ditch in north Oxfordshire, which is likely to have been late Iron Age (1st century AD) in date (Copeland 1988, 287). No major contemporary settlement has so far been discovered within the 13 km^2 circuit although the monumental efforts of creating such a network of ditches and banks, together with the proliferation of early Roman villas within it, does suggest it was a power centre of significant importance, perhaps connected with the Cassington enclosure a few kilometres to the south.

The development of these substantial oppida across and around parts of the Thames Valley undoubtedly relates to the increased agglomeration of political units and centralisation of power at this time. The three territorial oppida just outside the



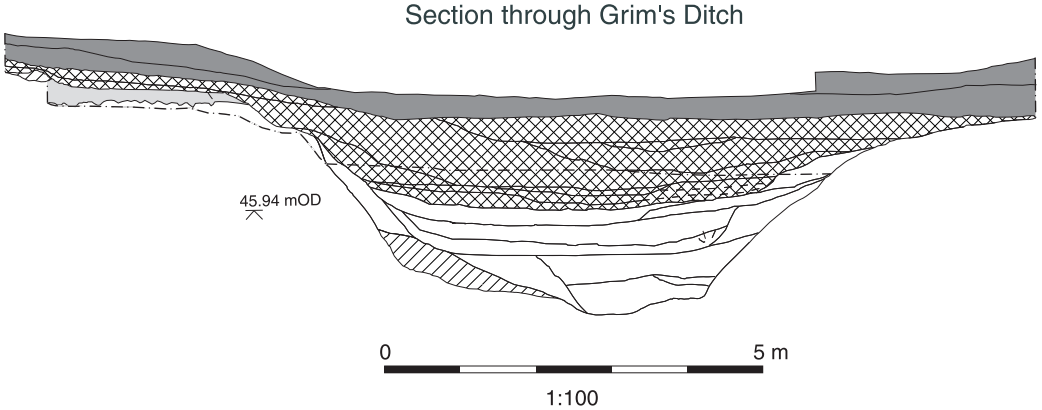


Fig. 7.4 Plan and section through South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch

valley are likely to have been major centres of the Atrebates, Dobunni and Catuvellauni, with each having a Roman *civitas* capital built above or very near to it (see below). The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch had quite a different developmental trajectory and the exact role and status of this site remains far less certain. It is almost certainly not a coincidence, however, that most of the high status defended settlements in the valley, including the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch, lay at or near to the boundaries of the three tribal groupings, as indicated by coin distributions. The specific locations of frontier zones in this Oxfordshire region have recently been discussed by Allen (2000, 27-32), who convincingly argued that the River Cherwell, a Thames tributary, was the firm dividing line between the Dobunni to the west and Catuvellauni to the east. Further south, the area around Abingdon, Dorchester and Wallingford is one where there is a much greater mix of coinage of all three tribes, indicating either that all coins were equally acceptable in this boundary zone or that the area of influence of certain tribes (presumably the Catuvellauni) expanded into the territories of the others. The South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch is a substantial linear feature dating to the late Iron Age which runs east from the Thames opposite Wallingford for over 10 km, and would have formed a considerable obstacle to movement along the eastern side of the Thames Valley (Cromarty *et al.*, 2006, Fig. 7.4). It has been suggested that it was built specifically in order to control movement along the valley, possibly representing an actual physical tribal boundary between the Catuvellauni and Atrebates (ibid.). Although there is no real way of knowing who actually constructed this earthwork, the fact that the bank is on the northern side of the ditch may suggest it was a Catuvellaunian territorial marker, built to halt any further encroachment north along the Thames by the Atrebates (ibid.). Sauer (1999; 2005b, 59) has further argued that it was one of the many such markers of this tribe in the region, with others including Aves Ditch and the Grim's Ditch to the north, the latter being suggested as a tribal enclave. Great care must be taken when attempting to interpret such archaeological features within perceived pseudo-historical political narratives, although in the case of the southern Grim's Ditch at least, it is supported by coin evidence, marking as it does the northernmost limit of Atrebatic coins in Oxfordshire (Allen 2000, 29; Fig. 7.5).

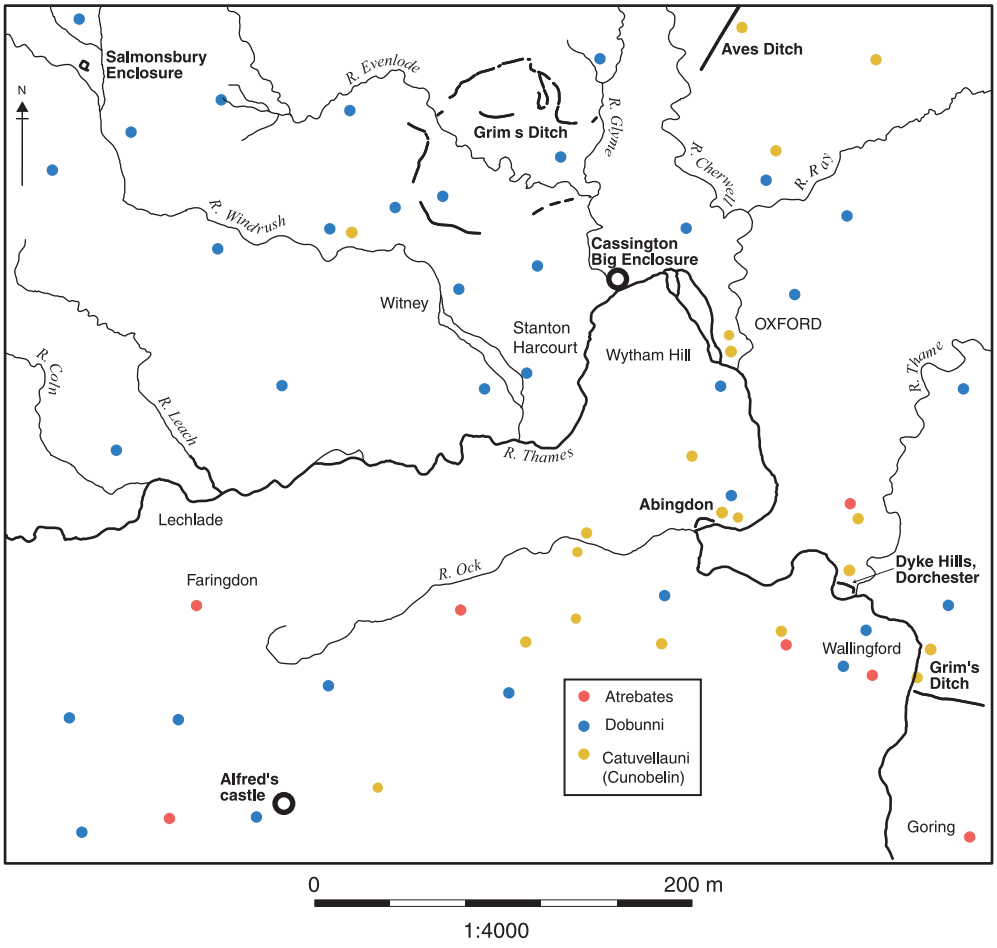


Fig. 7.5 Map of forts and linear dyke systems in Oxfordshire in relation to coin distribution

The analysis presented above could suggest that by the late Iron Age there were a number of extensive, distinct and largely unified tribal entities. However, although the coin distributions and the development of high status oppida do certainly indicate a growing sense of widespread tribal affiliation, most systems of power may still have been operating on quite a small scale, with significant levels of local autonomy. An increasingly hierarchical political structure was undoubtedly developing during the late Iron Age, but it was still operating within quite a heterogeneous landscape in terms of social and settlement organisation.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST AND CLIENT KINGDOMS (Fig. 7.6)

The political situation in both Britain and Rome leading up to the Claudian invasion of AD 43 has been the subject of much analysis and debate over the years. Britain seems to have remained in the mind of at least the upper echelons of Roman society, with most Augustan poets being firmly of the view that it remained an imperial military objective. There are many literary references to Augustus thinking about an invasion of Britain but it seems that diplomacy was the preferred tool, with various kings seeking audiences with him and giving/receiving gifts in a way that suggests the emperor had already become a dominant patron for many (Braund 1996, 79). This situation largely continued under Augustus's successors Tiberius and Caligula, who may both have personally known many of the outlying kings such as Cunobelin and Verica. Caligula's military expeditions along the Rhineland and abortive attempts at a British campaign would have provided good opportunities of personal contact for the British kings, and indeed we do know of a visit from one of Cunobelin's sons, Adminius, who seems to have been the victim of internal power struggles (Suetonius, Caligula 44.2).

All of this seemed to change between AD 40 and 43, when three significant events occurred: the death of Cunobelin, the assassination of Caligula and subsequent elevation of Claudius, and the apparent flight of a certain Berikos (who is equated with Verica) to seek aid in Rome. It is quite likely that Cunobelin's death will have created a power struggle for control of the largest kingdom in southern Britain, and the support of Rome, whose influence had been expanding for almost a century, would have been crucial for any successor. To this end it has been suggested, based upon the lack of any widespread coinage after Cunobelin, that there was an interregnum, which probably saw the intense lobbying of various contenders for the throne, including Verica (Creighton 2000, 220). Whether Verica went to the new emperor Claudius for reasons of political lobbying or because he was forced out by the sons of Cunobelin, Caratacus and Togodumnus, who had taken the opportunity to dramatically expand their territory at Atrebratic expense, the outcome was that Claudius had an excuse for direct military intervention in Britain in order to enhance and protect his own position.

Much has been written of the AD 43 invasion itself, and it is not the intention here to provide a full account of this event, except where it directly impinges upon the Thames Valley area. Although the traditional view of an invasion force landing at Richborough in Kent has recently been restated by Frere and Fulford (2001), most current academic opinion has tended to side with the view that the main thrust came up through central southern Britain from the Solent, with military bases established in Chichester and possibly at Silchester (Manley 2002; Henig 2002; Bird 2004a, 23). This was the territory of the Atrebates who seem to have been well-disposed to Rome, and there would therefore have been no need for any real military consolidation. After an initial battle traditionally thought to have been fought at the Medway but more recently argued as possibly being one of the Surrey Thames tributaries (Bird 2004a, 23), Aulus Plautius's forces are supposed to have halted at the Thames to await the arrival of Claudius. Bird has quite plausibly suggested this may have been at Staines, whose Latin name Pontibus means 'at the bridges', although apart from a 1st-century AD cavalry helmet (Fig. 7.6) there is nothing else from the town to suggest a military site (ibid., 25). On the opposite side of the river there is a possible early military fort, although this could relate to the aftermath of the Boudican revolt rather than the invasion itself (ibid.).

Elsewhere in the Thames Valley the invasion is equally invisible in an archaeological sense. At Alchester just to the north of the valley there is, however, evidence for a substantial and very early vexillation fortress, dating to just after the conquest in AD 44 or even AD 43 (Sauer 2002, 84), and it has been suggested that it may have assumed a key function in the conquest and administration of the south-east of Britain at this time (Sauer 2003, 95). An early conquest period fort is also possible at Dorchester, although this may belong to the aftermath of the Boudican revolt (Frere 1984, 105; see Chapter 3). Further west the earliest military establishments lay along the lines of newly constructed roads such as Akeman Street and it is argued that these would have acted more as frontier bases for pushing into unfriendly territory further north and west than to suppress the native population (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 55; Henig and Booth 2000, 37). Indeed it may well have been the case that much of the region of the Thames Valley became part of one or more client kingdoms, as was the case in other parts of Britain at this time.

One of the most well known of these client kingdoms was based in the south around the territory of the Atrebates. Henig has recently suggested that Verica himself may have been (re)installed initially as king, but in any case rule soon passed to a man named Togidubnus, who was probably

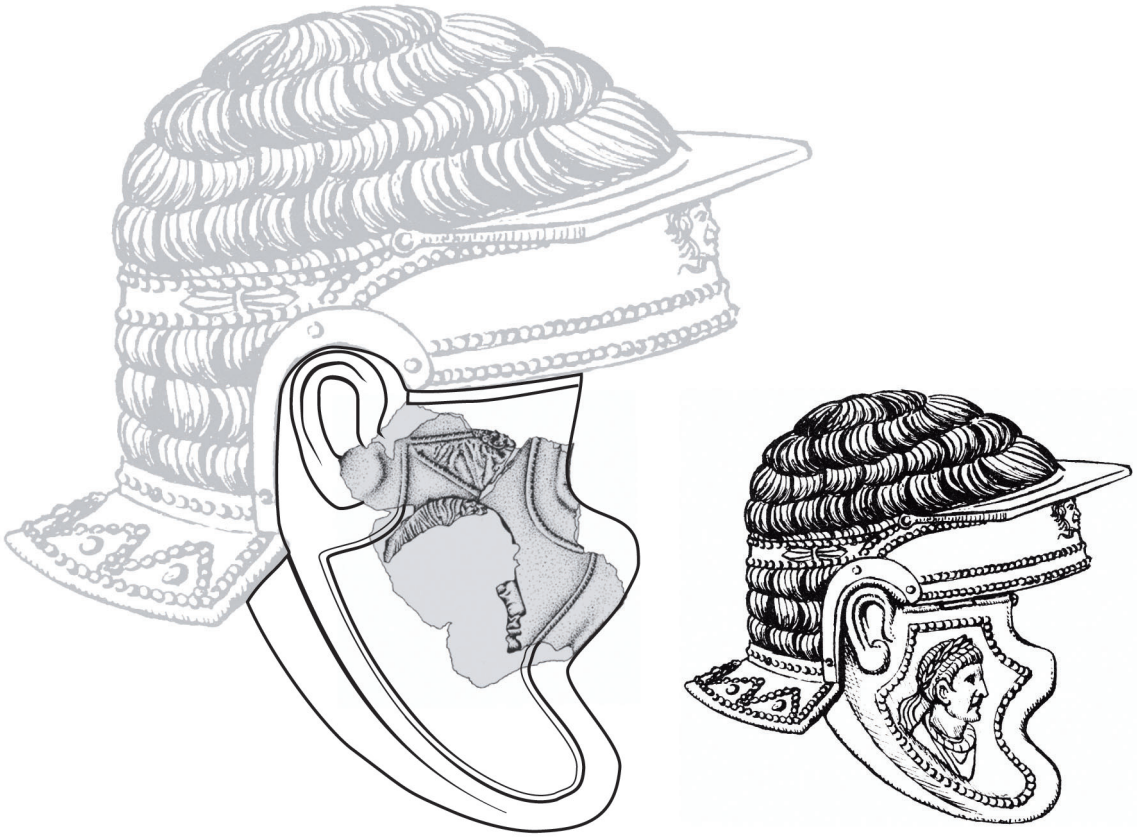


Fig. 7.6 Bronze-plated iron cheek piece of a cavalry helmet found at Staines and probably deposited in the 2nd century. It is drawn here as part of a helmet, the remainder being based on an almost complete helmet of very similar type found near Koblenz, Germany

descended from the old royal house. Although very little is known about Togidubnus, he is mentioned by Tacitus as a most faithful king (*Ag.* 14) and is recorded on a famous inscription from Chichester (RIB 91) as a great king of the Britons. Both the extent of the area under his control and length of his reign are uncertain, with estimates varying considerably. Most recent studies have argued that his territory covered much of south-eastern Britain including the Thames Valley and even as far west as Bath (Haselgrove 1984; Creighton 2000: Henig 2002), although much of this may have been the result of a territorial expansion granted after his possible involvement in the Boudican revolt of AD 61 (see below). Estimates for the end of his reign range from the post-Boudica Neronian period (AD 61-8; Barrett 1979, 241-2) to near the end of the 1st century AD (Henig 2002, 60).

The status of Dobunnic territory after the conquest is uncertain, but it is quite possible that at least part of it, including much of the Upper Thames Valley, also remained under semi-autonomous indigenous leadership for much of the early Roman period, with political power remaining in existing centres. Dio Cassius's account of the invasion stated that at this time a people he called Bodunni – almost certainly the Dobunni – had been ruled over by Caratacus and Togodumnus of the Catuvellauni, and the defeat of these gave a part of the Dobunni opportunity to come over to the Roman side (LX, 20). It would not be too unusual in this situation for most of Dobunnic territory to have subsequently become a client kingdom, based around Bagendon and then Corinium. A military fort was established at Leaholme (Cirencester) south of Bagendon between two and twelve years after the conquest (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 54), with the coin and ceramic evidence pointing to a date around AD 49/50. Relatively little is known about the Leaholme fort, although there are no indications that it was used wholly to suppress a hostile native power centre, and instead its establishment may have helped to bolster the power of the local elite, while perhaps also keeping them in check (ibid.). The exceptionally early villa at the site of The Ditches near Bagendon may have been the residence of one of these pro-Roman native elite, as the undesirable location of this villa suggests that the occupant(s) had personal or political associations with the pre-Roman native enclosure (Trow and James 1989, 85). This can be paralleled with the early military presence within the heart of Togidubnus's client kingdom at Fishbourne and Chichester in West Sussex, and may be seen as further evidence for a short-lived client kingdom in at least part of Dobunnic territory.

The early Roman fortress at Alchester in Oxfordshire lay on the approximate boundary between the Dobunni and the Catuvellauni and would thus undoubtedly have played a key role in negotiating power structures at this time. The fortress would have made it possible for the Roman military to keep an eye on the western Catuvellauni, while also protecting the eastern Dobunnic region, which was presumably the area that had been previously encroached upon by their eastern neighbours. It may also be significant that a small group of sites near Bicester which had probably lain in Catuvellaunian territory appear to terminate around the conquest period (Henig and Booth 2000, 106), while most of those in the Thames Valley further west show no signs of disruption at this time (see Chapter 3).

Large parts of southern Britain would most likely still have been incorporated within client kingdoms at the time of the revolt of Boudica in AD 60. This was a very significant episode in the early history of the province, although it does not show archaeologically in any of the Thames Valley settlements, with the exception of London where widespread destruction deposits date to this period, and there is also evidence for the possible desecration of a small cremation cemetery (*British Archaeol* 70, 2003). The location of the final defeat of Boudica is unknown, and although Henig has suggested that it may have lain in the Goring Gap, where the Thames Valley is at its narrowest (2002, 46), this is highly speculative. Although the event itself may not have directly affected most of the Thames Valley, its aftermath would surely have had great repercussions for the future organisation of power. Forts may have been established at Dorchester at this time (see above), while there is some evidence for reorganisation in the Leaholme fort, possibly involving a change of unit. As mentioned above, it has been suggested that after this time Togidubnus's client kingdom may have undergone significant expansion, incorporating all territory south of Akeman Street, presumably as a reward for help in the revolt, or at least for keeping out of it (Henig and Booth 2000, 38). Whether or not this was the case, or whether there was a continuation of the possible early Dobunnic kingdom in the Upper Thames region, it remains quite possible that most of the Thames Valley was semi-autonomous until the later 1st century AD, despite traditional assertions that the *Civitas Dobunnorum* for example was established in the early Flavian period (Wacher 1995). This is not to say, however, that there would not have been great social changes occurring, especially among certain members of the native elite who may have started to re-negotiate power and status along Roman lines. The construction of villas during the later 1st century AD centred upon pre-Roman power centres such as the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch is probably a fine example of such behaviour. Perring has argued that such distinct architectural and decorative arrangements were specifically designed to provide a setting for social behaviour that followed Roman practice (2002, 212).

It was also during the later 1st century, after the military presence had been withdrawn (*c* AD 75), that the main urban centre of Corinium was established. At Silchester, where there is no certain early military presence, the earlier oppidum seems to have continued to develop along Roman lines well into the post-conquest period. Although Silchester is most likely to have lain within Togidubnus's kingdom, official Roman involvement is suggested by the discovery of bricks stamped with the abbreviated name of the emperor Nero (AD 54-68). The early development of both towns is unclear. The initial programme of public building works began at Corinium in the later 1st century AD and would no doubt have taken many decades to complete. The process probably began earlier in the already developing urban centre of Silchester, and the first timber forum basilica, dating to *c* AD 85, possibly marked the transition from client kingdom to *civitas* (see below). There was no pre-Roman power centre at London that we are able to discern. Evidence begins soon after AD 43, although the exact nature of early Roman military activity, if indeed there was any, remains unclear (see Chapter 3). London developed at a rapid pace, being a substantial town by the time of the Boudican revolt in AD 60. It is unlikely to have been part of any client kingdom, but instead has been suggested (Wilkes 1996) as initially holding a somewhat anomalous status as a 'settlement of Roman citizens' (*conventus civium Romanorum*). In the 2nd century, possibly under the auspices of the emperor Hadrian, London may have been given a more official status with a municipal grant, which may in actuality have been more of a burden to many of its residents due to the financial obligations of municipal office (ibid., 30).

Although on a much smaller scale, the early development of Staines was also quite rapid, from its origins about AD 65-70 to a thriving small town in the latter part of the 1st century (Bird 2004a, 56). Its early status is difficult to establish, but there is no evidence of any official involvement or formal street planning. It is likely to have evolved along the main road to the important bridge, possibly for reasons of commerce. Whether or not it lay within Togidubnus's client kingdom at this time is uncertain.

Overall the evidence suggests that while the conquest and its immediate aftermath appear to have made very little difference to the general pattern of occupation across the Thames Valley, significant socio-political changes were occurring in the early Roman period, at least amongst some of the elite. In a study of Romanisation in the Cotswold region, Clarke (1996) asserted that that there was relatively little social change among the elite around Cirencester, especially compared to the area around Gloucester where a *Colonia* was founded. However, although it is quite likely that the existing political structure remained largely

intact in southern Dobunnic territory until the later 1st century AD, the establishment of Corinium at this time would certainly have acted as a catalyst for significant social and political change in the region around it. Furthermore, it is likely that the direct military presence would have brought about some social change before this, as it would also have done around Alchester, Dorchester and Staines to the east. The development of Silchester as an urban centre is also likely to have acted as a stimulus for social change in the surrounding region.

THE THAMES VALLEY WITHIN THE ROMAN PROVINCE (Figs 7.7-7.8)

By the later 1st century AD all of southern Britain, including the Thames Valley, is likely to have been incorporated within the Roman province, with all the machinery of government and administration that went with it. Nevertheless it may still have taken some time for the effects of Roman political and economic hegemony to take hold across many areas, with the Upper Thames for example showing little widespread landscape and settlement development until the early 2nd century (see Chapter 3). The most significant changes at this time were in settlement development and status but these must surely have been paralleled by major social changes as well. The landscape of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD may have had its roots firmly in the earlier period, and indeed the basic pattern of power structure may not have been too dissimilar to that of the late Iron Age. Nevertheless, radical change was occurring, with many individuals and groups negotiating new social identities in order to operate within a region that had become an established part of the Roman Empire. Further east in the Middle Thames region there is a more varied chronological development, which suggests that any direct Roman political and economic influences are likely to have been more piecemeal. However, the rapid development of urban centres such as Silchester, Staines and London indicates that these changes began earlier than in the Upper Thames, where Corinium would not have been truly established as a city until the start of the 2nd century (see below).

Upon full incorporation into the Roman province, the Thames Valley would have lain within a number of different administrative units or *civitates*, which seem to have been based approximately on previous Iron Age tribal groups (Fig. 7.7). Thus most of the Upper Thames region was part of *civitas Dobunnorum* and much of the Middle Thames is likely to have been part of the *civitates* of the Atrebates and Catuvellauni, with the river Thames itself probably acting as a boundary between them. It has often been suggested that the Surrey part of the Thames Valley may have lain within the *civitas* of the Regni, which along with the Atrebates and Belgae was probably a sub-division of the earlier client kingdom. However, as Bird has recently stated (2004a, 31), this is most unlikely, based upon the evidence of our main source, the geographer Ptolemy, who suggests that the Atrebates and Cantiaci were neighbours, with the Regni located 'below' them.

The early Roman Empire was based on towns and the new *civitas* capitals, which had developed

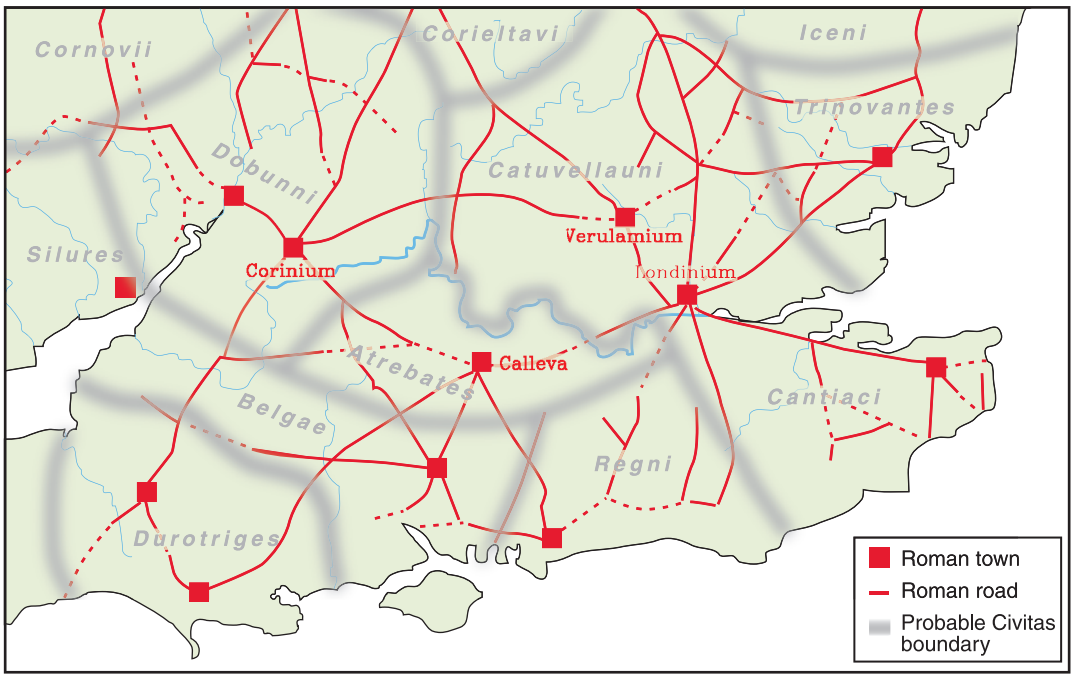


Fig. 7.7 Civitates of south-eastern Britain

from (or near to) pre-Roman tribal oppida, were the main administrative centres (see above and Chapter 3). Thus the capitals of those *civitates* which included the Thames Valley were at Corinium, Silchester and Verulamium. London, which did not have any known pre-Roman origins, has been suggested as being established by Roman traders from other provinces in order to exploit the opportunities in the newly formed province (Millet 1996, 34). As the Emperor's direct agent, the procurator of the province (who had financial responsibility) is most likely to have resided in London, and indeed the impressive tombstone of the procurator Classicianus from the 1st century AD was found here. This certainly suggests that the city was the 'financial capital' of the province from the earliest period, even if it may not have been the administrative centre at this time (Hassall 1996, 20). After the Boudican revolt, if not before, London is most likely to have become the provincial capital, and although there is no actual evidence for the governor himself living there prior to the 3rd century AD, there is for members of his staff (ibid.).

So if most of the Thames Valley formed part of three distinct *civitas* units, how would such administrative structures have functioned, and perhaps more importantly how are we to interpret this in the archaeological record? Roman society was essentially urban in nature, with towns being required for effective civil administration to function (Faulkner 2000, 27). Furthermore, participation in Roman civic life depended upon the provision of a forum basilica and ownership of urban property. In Dobunnic territory, therefore, it was probably not until the late 1st and early 2nd century AD that any members of the native elite would have actively participated in Roman state administration. Further east this would undoubtedly have occurred at an earlier date, with the forum basilicas at Silchester and Verulamium both being completed by AD 80-85, and the former town also being extensively reorganised at this time with a regular grid of streets. In all cases, it was probably only after such infrastructure had been put in place that the leading local landowners (*decuriones*) would have formed the administrative council (*ordo* or *curia*) of the newly formed *civitas*, with responsibility for public works and tax collection.

The smaller urban centres within the valley such as Dorchester and Staines would also no doubt have performed an administrative function of some kind. They may have acted as local centres, perhaps of *pagi*, the sub-districts within the *civitas*, with market functions and possibly even a role as tax collection centres. They are usually sited on major roadways, and may have had some association with the imperial post (*cursus publicus*), although no definite 'posting stations' (*mansiones* or *mutationes*) for the use of official travellers are yet known within any of the Thames Valley towns, with the possible exception of Southwark on the outskirts of London (Bird 2004a, 54). An indication of the potential importance of these small towns with regard to provincial administration comes from the inscription of the *beneficiarius consularis* from Dorchester (RIB 235; Fig. 7.8). This official, who had duties relating to military supplies and transport (for a recent summary of the functions of *beneficiarii*, with references, Rankov 1999, 27-29), was responsible to the provincial governor, and the fact that he set up an altar in the town suggests that it may have had some wider official function, at least for a while.

Amongst segments of the native population, there is likely to have been much greater scope for social and political advancement during the later 1st and especially 2nd centuries, taking advantage of new economic opportunities. However, prior to the mid to late 2nd century, there is very little evidence for particularly high status housing in any of the *civitas* capitals or the smaller urban centres and so the primary residences for these elite may still have been rural. This is possibly reflected in the increasing number of villas and other medium to high status dwellings (eg aisled buildings) in and around the Thames Valley from this period onwards, a similar phenomenon to that seen in Sussex after the client kingdom became part of the province (Rudling 1998, 51).

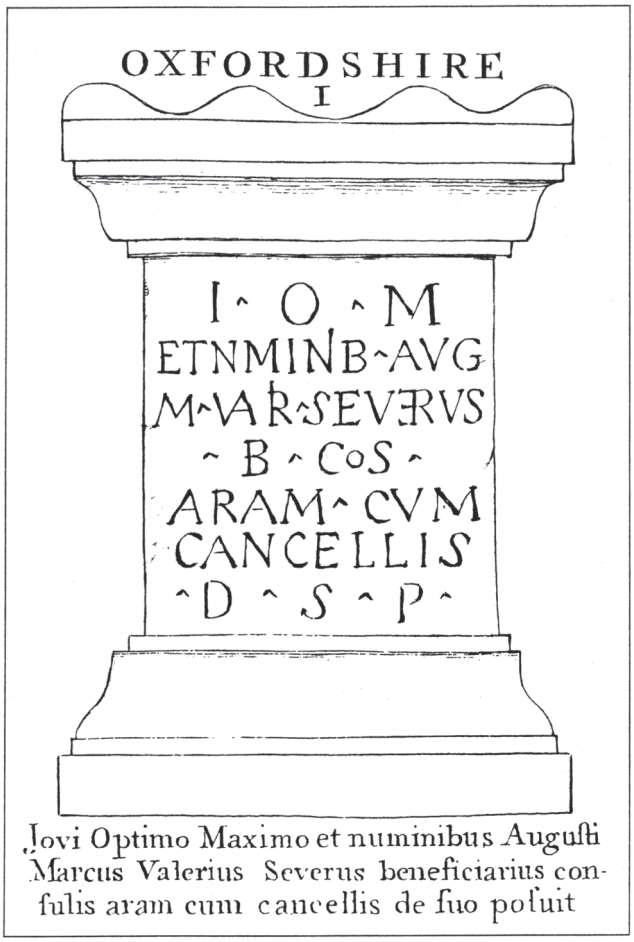


Fig. 7.8 Beneficiarius consularis altar from Dorchester

It is certainly not the case, however, that these 'native elite' were a single body, all acting in the same way, to the same ends. The key to understanding the huge variety in settlement form, function and development across the region is the realisation that power was ultimately based upon social and political dialogue between individuals. There are always many different ways of gaining and losing social and political influence in complex societies, and it is generally through some level of personal discourse that such change is brought about. It has been pointed out on a number of occasions that 'Rome ruled through people' (Grahame 1998, 4), with men such as Agricola having huge resources available to establish bonds of patronage and clientage amongst large numbers of people. In such ways social change could eventually permeate all levels of society to varying degrees and in varying forms.

The changes observed in settlement and landscape organisation across the Thames Valley during the 2nd century AD undoubtedly had some kind of connection with widespread developments in social, political and economic spheres. In the Upper Thames at least they probably occurred not too long after the *curia* had been established in the civitas capital at Corinium, and so may have been partly initiated by certain *decuriones*, operating from their newly built town houses and rural villas, perhaps to take advantage of the rapidly developing market economy. It has been suggested that a possible further stimulus for the comparatively rapid changes in this region may even have been provided by specific political initiatives, or at least the side-effects of them (Henig and Booth 2000, 110). Hadrian's visit to Britain in AD 122, for example, in addition to the more obvious structural legacies, would have had a profound social and political effect upon many aspects of life in Britain, especially among the elite classes. Although extremely tentative, it is possible to suggest that specific political initiatives associated with his visit may have created the circumstances by which the landscape in the Upper Thames Valley and elsewhere may have been more susceptible to change. Furthermore, the resources available to the emperor must have been vast, so that the network of patronage and clientage could have affected all aspects and levels of society. Black for example has interpreted the busts found at Lullingstone villa as representing ambitious local elite who may have entered imperial service upon Hadrian's visit (1994, 109).

THE LATER ROMAN PERIOD (Figs 7.9-7.10)

The political landscape of the Thames Valley did not remain static over the three hundred years or so that Britain was incorporated within the Roman Empire. In addition to the major imperial policies, there would have been numerous smaller scale political manoeuvrings that may have seen the rise and fall of differing groups and individuals. This could in turn have manifested itself archaeologically in the apparently variable fortunes of settlements, some of which, such as the villa at Roughground Farm, underwent expansion at certain times, while others, like Somerford Keynes, declined or were abandoned (see Chapter 3).

The Roman province of Britannia had been divided under the Emperor Severus in the early 3rd century AD, and in AD 260 became part of a breakaway 'Gallic Empire' when the Roman general Postumus rebelled against emperor Gallienus. Postumus was murdered by his troops in AD 268, but the Gallic Empire lasted under various rebel emperors until AD 274. One of these emperors was the poorly-known Domitianus, whose brief reign (probably in AD 271) had actually been in some doubt until the discovery of a coin bearing his name within a hoard found by a metal detectorist within the Thames Valley region at Chalgrove, Oxfordshire in April 2003 (Fig. 7.9).

It is generally accepted that towards the end of the 3rd century the emperor Diocletian put an end to the disastrous phase of Roman history known as the 'Imperial Crisis'; and that amongst his many political and administrative reforms the two provinces of Britannia Superior in the south and Britannia Inferior in the north were further divided into four or possibly five provinces. These formed the Diocese of Britain, which in turn lay within the Prefecture of the Gauls that also included Gaul, Spain and the north-west corner of Africa. The political environment of this period was quite different from that of earlier Roman times, with a marked increase in imperial bureaucracy created in order to

Fig. 7.9 Coin of Domitianus (c AD 271) found at Chalgrove in 2003

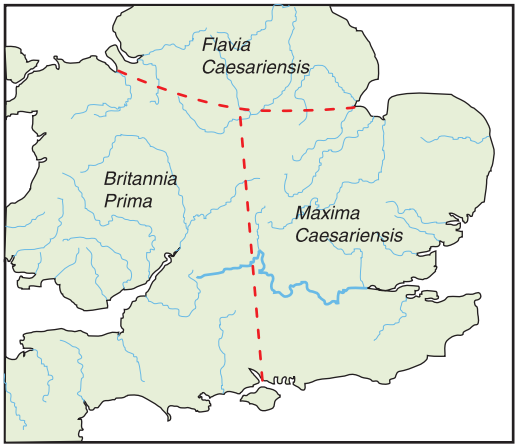


Fig. 7.10 Late Roman provinces in southern Britain

sustain such a wide system of regionality. The huge increase in administration led to the formation of a civil service and a division of power between the existing provincial governors, who now had a purely civil role, and new military commanders responsible for the army.

Within this new administrative system the Thames Valley itself was probably divided between Britannia Prima to the west and Maxima Caesariensis to the east, which was centred on London (Fig. 7.10). It is quite possible that the existing north-south civitas boundary between the Dobunni and Catuvellauni/Atrebates was used as the division between these two provinces, as there are some noticeable differences in the settlement patterns between the Upper and Middle Thames at this time (see Chapter 3 and below).

The area of the Upper Thames Valley has generally been regarded as belonging to the province of Britannia Prima, with Corinium being the capital (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 74; Faulkner 1998, 379). An inscription on the Jupiter column found at Corinium records a provincial civil governor, and although there is no epigraphic evidence for a high ranking late Roman military official in the region, the quantity of military finds at Corinium suggests that such a person may have resided there. The overall evidence from this city indicates a high level of prosperity throughout the 4th century, with the forum basilica complex being embellished and continuing in use, probably into the early 5th century. This is quite different from many other Romano-British cities such as Verulamium and Silchester, where the forum-basilica complexes generally fell into terminal decline in the early-mid 4th century, and as such could well be related to Corinium's elevated position as a provincial capital (Faulkner 1998, 379; see below).

The division between the traditional civil senatorial families, who were the main land-owning class, and the new imperial administrators, who were centred upon the army, the emperor and the court, seems to have become quite pronounced in the 4th century (Salway 1981, 347; Faulkner 2000). The power of the latter group was particularly strong in the eastern empire, and such 'grandees' have been suggested by Faulkner as also occupying an increasingly isolated position at the top of late Romano-British society (2000, 135-7). The small number of exceptional villas from just outside the Upper Thames Valley region such as Woodchester and North Leigh may well be seen as the residences of the elite, although these are perhaps more likely to have belonged to powerful traditional land-owning families rather than the new imperial aristocracy, who tended to be replaced regularly. Although there were far fewer villas in the Upper Thames itself, the significant embellishments at Roughground Farm, and the construction of more modest villas at Claydon Pike and Barton Court Farm, all occurred in the later 3rd and early 4th century AD. In some past studies, the construction and/or embellishment of villas in the late Roman period has been linked with the arrival of Gallic landowners (Branigan 1976, 47; Webster and Smith 1982, 65). However, there is no reason to suspect that this was the case, as the villas were part of wider developments in the region which included urban centres and lower status settlements.

In reality there is no way of knowing for sure who these villas belonged to, although in most cases a complete change in site ownership is perhaps unlikely. What the evidence does suggest is that most land was increasingly defined and controlled by the elite, operating from their villa estates. Furthermore, there was perhaps increasing centralisation, with larger estates incorporating a number of smaller holdings. The comparative lack of villas in much of the Upper Thames Valley need not preclude at least parts of this region from being incorporated into larger agricultural estates, even if the main estate centres lay some distance away. By the later Roman period it appears that most of the workers on villa agricultural estates were *coloni*, rather than slaves. These were essentially subsistence farmers who lived on and managed their own small plots of land, as sharecroppers. Although there is no direct evidence from the region, it may have been the case that the people who lived and worked at sites such as Farmoor and Old Shifford Farm were *coloni*, half-free workers who were tied to the land, operating within the wider estates of certain villa owners. This is not to say that there would not have been any surpluses produced at these sites for use by the occupants, as the imported goods and coins indicate at least local trading. There could also have remained wholly independent agricultural communities within the valley, although defining the difference between such sites in the archaeological record would be very difficult.

Overall, the evidence from the Upper Thames Valley is quite consistent in suggesting that there were widespread changes occurring in the land-

scape at the start of the late Roman period. The new provincial capital and other urban centres such as Dorchester were clearly flourishing and undoubtedly remained important centres of power. A series of newly constructed agricultural settlements joined existing sites, many of which were remodelled, and formed part of a well-organised landscape with pastureland and areas of arable crops linked by trackways and field ditches lined by hedges. A combination of increasing flood risk and the centralisation of larger estates probably led to other settlements being abandoned. In nearly all cases the developments seem to have taken place over a period of about 30 to 40 years from the late 3rd to early 4th century, and it is difficult not to see many of these changes as being at least partly associated with the establishment of Britannia Prima, and possible accompanying developments in the system of land control.

The situation throughout much of the Middle Thames Valley, at least in terms of urban development, was quite different, and this must be in part a reflection of the divergent socio-political circumstances. Unlike Corinium to the west, which seems to have been elevated to provincial capital status, the civitas capitals of Verulamium and Silchester do exhibit distinct signs of decline in the later Roman period, especially in terms of civic amenities and buildings relating to the use of power (ie forum basilica complexes). This may be related to the political decline of such regional centres, with power instead being more centralised through the main concentration of imperial bureaucracy in London. However, in London itself there is extensive evidence for increasing dilapidation and abandonment, with the systematic demolition of some major public buildings early in the 4th century (Blagg 1996, 46). Nevertheless, the city remained the financial centre for the whole Diocese, at times minting coins, in addition to being capital of one of the four provinces. Furthermore, its undoubted close links with the Empire's central administration would have ensured that significant levels of prosperity were maintained, although society seems to have been increasingly hierarchical, with a few very wealthy houses probably belonging to the upper echelons. Religion would also have played an important role in power relations during the 4th century, with an increasingly influential Christian hierarchy becoming more integrated into imperial affairs. The identification of a massive masonry basilica building in London as a possible cathedral belonging to the latter half of the 4th century is particularly significant, although the building has also been interpreted as a granary (Sankey 1998; Hassall 2000, 60; Haynes 2000, 94).

The general processes of urban decline and partial abandonment in the late Roman period also seem to have occurred in the much smaller centre at Staines, although the evidence here is quite sparse (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, the overall impression is that there was a genuine difference in the development of urban sites between those lying within Britannia Prima and those within Maxima Caesariensis. As the Diocesan capital London was technically the superior city in terms of status, and it may have been that the imperial entourage that was based here ensured a slightly different distribution of power. Most of the more traditional native landowning families who would have made up the *civitas* councils may now have found themselves with increased levels of financial burden, but decreased levels of real power with which to compensate. As such there would have been an increase in civic breakdown as power was concentrated in smaller numbers of 'super elite', many of whom may well have been derived from other parts of the Empire.

Although to some extent similar patterns probably occurred in the western province as well, their effect would seem to have been far less extreme. Political and economic centralisation may well have been a growing phenomenon, but there is evidence from villas and townhouses to suggest that most of the traditional landowning elite maintained much of their power and continued to flourish until at least the latter decades of the 4th century. This does of course rely upon there being a direct relationship between the physical condition of elite residences and the power of their owners, an assumption which is not unreasonable in a 4th-century context. However, with the social and economic upheavals of the early 5th century this can no longer be valid and so the continuing power of the elite is much more difficult to distinguish, at least in an architectural sense. There may well have been a shift in emphasis at this time towards individual power being expressed through portable objects rather than the built environment (see below).

THE EARLY SAXON PERIOD

The 5th century

The withdrawal of the Roman army and imperial administration from Britain in the early 5th century was to prove permanent, although we can only speculate whether the contemporary inhabitants of the Thames Valley would have perceived it as the decisive and final break it was, in the event, to be. The balance of current evidence suggests that by (or during) this period the population of the study area had considerably declined, although environmental evidence shows that farming continued at a reduced level in some places (see Chapters 2, 4 and 6).

The nature of power in the 5th century is very unclear. It is likely that high status Britons remained in the Thames Valley for some time as local rulers, the 'tyrants' of the written sources, perhaps living a sub-Iron Age lifestyle mixed with half-forgotten Romanitas (Blair 1994, 3). Certainly, the break-up of centralised authority and administration along with

economic collapse in the early 5th century, would have ensured that the position of most Romano-British elite would very quickly have become quite unstable. Yet it is likely that some British communities in parts of the Thames Valley at least, most notably in the urban centres of Dorchester and Corinium, remained reasonably strong for some time into the 5th and perhaps early 6th centuries, and may have retained some elements of Romano-British administration. Accounts of the visit (or visits) of St Germanus, probably to Verulamium, in the second quarter of the 5th century suggest that there was substantial survival of civil and ecclesiastical authority in some areas of the country at this time, and there is no reason to suspect that this did not include parts of the Thames Valley.

Dorchester was almost certainly one such sub-Roman enclave, although the proximity of early Saxon communities suggests that the nature of power relations may have been quite different from that which existed along the valley further west and east (see below). In the furthest reaches of the Upper Thames at Cirencester (Roman Corinium) there is demonstrable evidence for continued and relatively thriving occupation right up until the end of the period for which there is reliable dating evidence at the end of the 4th century AD, and probably beyond (see Chapter 3, above). It seems quite possible that the late Roman elite may have continued to govern much of the surrounding Cotswolds and Upper Thames region from here for some time. To the east of Dorchester in the Middle Thames region there is also a comparative lack of Anglo-Saxon settlement until the 6th century and it is quite possible that much of this area was still under the influence of the town at Silchester at this time. A 5th-century community is well attested at this town (see Chapter 3), although as its population declined, its influence is likely to have waned quite rapidly. Hines (2004) has recently argued that an extant sub-Roman social and economic infrastructure also existed in parts of Berkshire and Surrey towards London, before it was taken over by early Anglo-Saxons as a going concern. It is debatable how much of the Roman administration survived in this region after the early 5th century, as late Roman settlement is not thought to have been particularly vibrant, at least in urban environments (see Chapter 3). Yet place-name evidence does suggest the persistence of British communities, and these must have interacted with the incoming settlers who may have quickly exerted their social and political dominance (Bird 2004a, 173). As with the Upper Thames, the extent of immigration as opposed to cultural assimilation remains uncertain, although at least one site seems to indicate the latter. The late Roman site at Waylands Nursery in Wraysbury, Berkshire, continued without a break into the late 5th century, when it is suggested that the native British population adopted continental building styles and changed pastoral emphasis from sheep to cattle (Pine 2003, 137; see Chapter 3).

British and Anglo-Saxon power relations

The Thames Valley has some of the earliest evidence for the presence of Anglo-Saxon people, datable to the early 5th century (see Chapters 3 and 4, above). Enormous archaeological debate has been generated by the small number of objects of this period found in the region, particularly those associated with the burials at Dorchester Dyke Hills and Minchin Recreation Ground (see Chapter 4 above). However, the numbers of individuals evident in the archaeological record remain very small, and their relationship with the local British population is essentially a matter of speculation. It seems most likely that the study area at this time remained under the control of reduced numbers of Romano-British, with power structures becoming increasingly fragmented, localised and competitive (see above).

Although our evidence for Germanic settlers in the study area in the early 5th century is minimal, there are a number of aspects of the evidence we have that may be particularly significant (see also Poulton 1987 for a discussion of these issues in the context of the evidence from Surrey). The first is the apparent connection between the earliest sites, places that had been important in the late Iron Age and Roman periods, and the river system. Many of the earliest sites lie close to the Thames and near to major confluences. This has been interpreted as indicative of an early river-based settlement pattern, which may well be broadly true, but there are exceptions. The potentially early cemetery at Minster Lovell is at some distance from the river, although the dating here is less secure than at other sites (Dickinson 1976 I, 404). The cemetery at West Hendred, however, contained an applied brooch of early 5th-century date and was located on the Berkshire Downs, at a considerable distance from the river (Hamerow 1993b). The significance of this remains unclear, but it should alert us to the possibility that our understanding of the earliest settlement patterns is distorted by the preponderance of excavated evidence from the valley itself.

Most of the earliest datable burials are those of women (Dickinson 1976 I, 401) (or in the case of Berinsfield Grave 64, a baby), and the places where they were buried developed as communal cemeteries in the later 5th and 6th centuries. This preponderance of women undoubtedly reflects the fact that brooches are amongst the most readily datable of grave goods. However, it is unlikely that women (and impossible that babies) would have travelled to England alone, so we must assume that they are a sign of the presence of male and female relatives who are less obvious to us in the burial record. This suggests that small groups of Germanic people were arriving at a limited number of places in the study area in the first half of the 5th century. It is by no means impossible, especially given the close connection between these early burial sites and significant Romano-British centres, that some of these were men brought over to fight for local

'tyrants' in the study area. Some of them may have had connections with the Roman army, and it has been noted across southern Britain that some of the earliest Saxon elite population may have used symbols of late imperial Roman power such as chip carved metalwork and belt sets to legitimise their hegemony over surrounding populations (Hamerow 1999, 25). Indeed, the strong evidence for early Saxon occupation in the Berinsfield area, and the likelihood of some form of continuing 5th-century occupation of the nearby town of Dorchester, argues strongly for a mutually advantageous arrangement rather than a relationship of outright hostility. While it cannot be proved archaeologically, it is at least as likely that a group of Saxons were settled by consent on property nearby under the control of the town and its leadership, as that they seized it by force, or came upon it empty and abandoned by the British. The argument that the earliest Saxons in the area were mercenaries has been very influential, and is considered in more detail in Chapter 4 above. However, the balance of present opinion is that while this remains plausible, it should not be seen as the only possible explanation for the presence of a small number of Germanic people in the study area at the time.

The *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* of the British priest Gildas, probably writing around the middle of the 6th century, is the chief source of written information for this period. Gildas was clearly living in a society in which power had become concentrated in the hands of numerous local kings or 'tyrants' (see Campbell (ed.) 1982, 16-26 and Salway 1993, 307-355 for accessible surveys of the controversial written sources for the period). He tells us that one such 'tyrant', named Vortigern, had imported Saxons to defend 'the east side of the country' against 'the people from the north', and that they had later rebelled against him. Gildas's account was subsequently followed and augmented by Bede and the compilers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and presents a picture of conflict between the British and the Germanic invaders throughout the second half of the 5th century, culminating in a battle won by the British (at the unidentified *Mons Badonicus*) around the turn of the 6th century, which had been followed by 44 years of peace. All the principal written sources suggest that the Anglo-Saxons established themselves in eastern and southern England by a process of warfare and conquest, in which most of the Romano-British inhabitants were killed, driven out or enslaved.

There are, however, very many problems with these sources and few historians or archaeologists today would accept the simple invasion stories they present. The reality is likely to have been far more complex, and probably too complex to admit of clear-cut explanations. Conflict seems to have been endemic at many levels in 5th- and 6th-century society. Poetry and legend celebrated the martial exploits of heroes rather than the more mundane achievements of farmers, and it is probably by these means that much information was initially preserved, introducing an obvious bias into our view of the period. Nevertheless, more reliable, and slightly later, sources suggest that feuding and the winning of spoils, livestock, slaves and tribute by warfare and raiding was a way of life for the leaders of the early Anglo-Saxons, and for the kings of the British as well. Undoubtedly there was much conflict, but it is probably anachronistic to envisage this as a struggle for control of England between British and Germanic forces united on the grounds of common ethnicity. The 5th- to 6th-century burial of a man with a spear in his chest at Harwell, for example, may be relevant (see Chapter 4, above). By the 7th century, written sources show that there was conflict between different 'Germanic' groups, and even occasional alliances between Anglo-Saxons and British. It may be the case that in the 5th and 6th centuries too there were constantly shifting pragmatic alliances, battles for territory (and the tribute it paid), but also many instances in which disparate groups of newcomers lived peacefully amongst the native population. There is, for example, no evidence that early Anglo-Saxon settlements were defended. Nor, at present, do we have any identification in the archaeological record of the region of violent destruction of settlements in the form, for example, of the burning of buildings or the slaughter of very old and very young inhabitants who would have had no value as slaves and whose remains we might expect occasionally to find left on the settlement sites themselves rather than carefully buried. The finds from the settlements suggest that their inhabitants were for the most part engaged in farming, spinning, weaving and craftwork, even if, as the cemeteries suggest, a large proportion of 5th- and 6th-century men carried arms. Similarly the populations of the cemeteries suggest the presence of family groups, old, young, male and female, many of whom could have little or no capacity for fighting.

The consolidation of Anglo-Saxon settlement: the late 5th and 6th centuries

Cemetery and settlement evidence for the second half of the 5th century and the 6th century suggests that Anglo-Saxon influence and culture was spreading widely through the study area. Tania Dickinson notes that the number of sites with 6th-century burials is almost double that of the 5th century, implying that considerable expansion was taking place. She suggests that much of this was an increase in population in already-settled areas, and a spread of settlement from already established nuclei (1976 I, 427-9). This may mean that people were moving into the region in significant numbers, although it is likely also to reflect what Chris Scull has called 'a threshold of archaeological visibility' (1993, 71). The main concentration was still around the Ock and Thame confluences, with a third large cemetery coming into use at Long Wittenham. Here,

settlement sites which may originate as early as the mid 5th century onwards are also evident, at Sutton Courtenay, Berinsfield Mount Farm, Barton Court Farm and Radley Barrow Hills. Elsewhere, the evidence of burials suggests the presence of settlements, albeit perhaps few in number, in most of the Upper Thames tributary valleys, at Wallingford, and at all the major confluences. In the 6th century we see more evidence for a Saxon presence in the Cirencester area, on the Berkshire Downs, and in the Thame and Lambourn valleys. Evidence for the Middle Thames is much scarcer. Several recent large-area investigations in the region have found very little sign of settlement of this period, which suggests that this may be a reflection of reality and not simply the result of limited excavation. Here, as upstream, there is a strong association between settlement and the river system. Cemetery or limited settlement evidence suggests that a number of major confluence sites were occupied, at Pangbourne, Reading and Wraysbury, and other sites have been identified in the Colne Valley, in the Shepperton area, at Sonning, Cookham, probably at Bray and Old Windsor, and at Kingston (see Chapter 3, above). A spread of cemeteries is evident just beyond the study area on the North Downs in Surrey, which John Hines has argued is likely to represent a Saxon takeover of the London hinterland from the late 5th century onwards (2004; see above).

One of the effects of the increase in archaeological understanding of the region has been to demonstrate that Saxon influence was widespread in the area long before the dates at which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records battles of conquest. The Chronicle tells us that after a battle at *Biedcanford* in 571 Cuthwulf (see below) captured Limbury, Aylesbury, Bensington (Benson) and Eynsham. Subsequently in 577 Ceawlin (see below) is said to have defeated and killed the British kings Conmail, Condidan and Farinmail at the battle of Dyrham and to have taken Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath. However, grave goods show that there had been a Saxon presence in the Thame and Upper Thames valleys for up to a hundred years (Dickinson 1976 I, 435-7). What the Chronicle accounts are thought to be showing us is the process by which Ceawlin and his kin took control of the region at this time, but quite possibly by warfare against other Saxon leaders in the area, as well as against the British.

Socio-political hierarchy in early Anglo-Saxon communities

It is generally thought that the late Iron Age-Roman transition involved the adoption and adaptation by the incoming Roman authorities of existing political structures, territories and hierarchies within a wider administrative framework (see above). The situation 400 years later was very different. However hostile or peaceful Anglo-Saxon immigration may have been, there was no wholesale organised 'invasion' with specific imperial objectives. Settlement is likely to have been undertaken by numerous groups acting essentially independently of each other, and initially at least apparently on a small scale. Furthermore, the breakdown of Roman civil and military authority in the early 5th century ensured that, except in a few places such as Dorchester, Silchester, Cirencester and possibly parts of the London hinterland (see above), there is unlikely to have been any widespread political hierarchy left to be adopted by the Germanic settlers.

Very little is known about the political organisation of early Anglo-Saxon England. Such evidence as is available from written sources suggests that the kindred was the basic group in society, determining personal status, giving access to land and guaranteeing personal safety (Härke 1997, 137). There was not the fixed administrative machinery at this time to create large scale political entities, with power instead being more transient, largely resting with individuals within the clan, whose positions could change over time (see below). Later written sources may hint at the struggles for power and supremacy at this time, although it is to archaeology that we must turn to gain any understanding at all of the socio-political nature of these earliest territorial holdings. In particular, the loose and shifting structure of many early Saxon settlements may reflect landholdings occupied by several generations of the same family (or families), servants and slaves. The position of an individual within the family and the kindred was based on age, gender, marital status and perhaps seniority of line of descent, and is likely to be reflected in grave good assemblages (see Chapters 4 and 5 above). But these were very different to the 'princely burials' of the 7th century (see below), and indicate social stratification within, rather than between, family-based communities. New socio-political hierarchies were certainly developing at this time, but this was not yet a socially stratified society with hereditary aristocracy and a permanent upper class (Blair 1994, 29).

Power at a wider level, ultimately to develop into kingship, as Barbara Yorke puts it 'had its origins in warleadership' (1990, 157). Although we know nothing about them from archaeological sources, it is likely that the earliest leaders of the Anglo-Saxons in the study area would have been those who could exercise most influence through force of arms, both on their own account and through the services of those they could lead as a warband and reward with the spoils of their campaigns. It seems likely that there would have been leaders amongst initial groups of migrants, and senior lines of descent within individual families. However, as later sources show, in an age when power was personal it could easily be lost, and competition between family members and between the leaders of different family groups is likely to have created a very unstable situation. Chris Scull has commented, in the context of East Anglian evidence, that the

archaeology of the later 5th and 6th centuries is consistent with a model of peer competition and competitive exclusion between the leaders of roughly-equal, internally-ranked groups (1993, 77). Exceptionally powerful individuals at this time were clearly able to extend their influence over a wider region (see below). Chris Scull also draws attention to the importance of external contacts (ibid., 76); a leader's security and status were undoubtedly greatly enhanced by having powerful friends, relatives and allies elsewhere and, through them, perhaps access to prestigious imported goods.

Evidence for the evolution of kingship from the late 6th century (Fig 7.11)

A number of sites between Drayton and Dorchester in the Upper Thames Valley are the clearest potential case study for a developing centre of power in the region. Just to the north of the small town of Dorchester was the cemetery at Berinsfield, which contains some of the earliest datable burials in the study area. Across the river to the west, another large cemetery was established around the middle of the 5th century at Long Wittenham. Cropmarks suggest the presence of an associated settlement nearby, including what appear to be four large hall buildings, although this is currently not confirmed by excavation (see Chapter 3, above; Figs 3.23, 3.25, 3.26). Sonia Hawkes and Tania Dickinson have drawn attention to the exceptionally high number of weapon burials in this cemetery (Hawkes 1986, 89), in which nearly three quarters (72.8%) of men and young men were buried with weapons, compared with a national average of 48% (see Chapter 4). Sonia Hawkes suggested that this 'military' emphasis, together with the presence of a number of high-status objects in the cemetery, could point to this being an early power centre. The cemetery at Berinsfield also has a high rate of weapon burial, with 70% of male graves containing spears and/or shields. Could this area have been the home of a large and locally powerful kindred whose leading members were able to exert increasing influence over the region, and ultimately emerge as kings? Is it even possible that their influence in the region dated back to the early 5th century, to men brought over as mercenaries to defend the late Roman town? The significance of the Long Wittenham site is reinforced by the existence of a second large settlement complex just 6 km to the west, between the villages of Drayton and Sutton Courtenay. This site, which is also described in detail in Chapter 3, above, seems to have originated by the middle of the 5th century, and appears to have been a large settlement. A second group of regularly laid-out and very large hall buildings is evident in cropmarks just to the south, and associated finds suggest high-status occupation in the vicinity in the late 6th and early 7th century.

We know from written sources that the people who lived in the Upper Thames Valley during the 6th century were called the Gewisse, the meaning of which is obscure but could possibly have been something along the lines of 'the Trusties' (Blair 1994, 37). A century later, they became known as the West Saxons (see Chapter 4, above). The first reliably attested king of the Gewisse is a man called Ceawlin, who is clearly associated with the Upper Thames Valley, and who is likely to have reigned during the 580s (Yorke 1990, 133, table 15). He was mentioned by Bede as the second overlord of the southern kingdoms, and according to the West Saxon genealogical lists, he was closely descended from the reputed founders of the West Saxon dynasty, Cerdic and Cynric. Written sources relating to Cerdic and Cynric are extremely problematical, but it may be reasonable to see Cerdic as a genuine historical character establishing his position in the Upper Thames Valley perhaps some time in the 530s (Yorke 1990, 132). One particularly interesting observation about this family (who are known to historians as 'the C-dynasty' because of the consistent use of names beginning with the letter) is that some members, including Cerdic and possibly Ceawlin, have names that appear to contain British elements (Blair 1994, 34 and note 113; Yorke 1990, 138-9).

Whether these people were associated with the high status sites and cemeteries in the Dorchester area can only be speculation, but the likelihood is perhaps reinforced by the fact that the same family appear in written sources to have been closely associated with the area in the early 7th century. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Ceawlin was succeeded by the sons of his brother Cutha (probably the Cuthwulf who fought the battle of *Biedcanford* in 571), and then by the son of one or the other of them, a man called Cynegils, who reigned from 611-42 (Yorke 1990, 135). Around the year 635, Cynegils was baptised as a Christian by St Birinus and gave him the old Roman town for the seat of his bishopric. This must have meant that Cynegils in some sense had ownership of the town, and it strongly implies that he had a major residence nearby. The village of Benson, to the south of Dorchester, is later identified as the most valuable royal manor in Oxfordshire, and it may be that this was its location. However, recent excavations here

Fig. 7.11 (opposite) Kentish connections: Grave 67 from Watchfield (1) purse containing a set of balance scales and weights with (2) the runic inscription hariboki/hæriboki Wusa*; (3) a continental-type buckle from the same grave; (4) Berinsfield Grave 102, a Kentish shield-on-tongue buckle; (5) Lechlade Grave 17, a Kentish-style disc brooch; Kentish-style composite disc brooches from Milton (6) AM 1836.59, (7) V&A M.109-1939. Objects reproduced at actual size*

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have revealed nothing suggestive of high-status occupation at this period, and it is perhaps more likely on present evidence that Benson developed as a royal residence once the Mercians had take control of the area (see below).

One of the sources of strength of Ceawlin's family may have been connections with the powerful kingdom of Kent, which had close links with the Franks on the continent, and was a principal gateway for imported goods (Fig. 7.11). Finds of sets of balances and weights are known from a small number of sites in the Upper Thames Valley (see Chapter 6, above), and Chris Scull has suggested that they may have been used for the weighing of gold and bullion. They are commoner in Kent, and their presence at these sites in the Upper Thames may be evidence of important places in the vicinity where there were people with Kentish links (see Chapter 6; Scull 1990). Perhaps the most remarkable find of this group is the set of balances and weights from the cemetery at Watchfield (Scull 1992), contained in a purse inscribed with runes reading *hariboki/hæriboki wusa*. This has been interpreted as meaning the army accounts (*hereboc*) of a man called Wusa, probably one of the very common shortened names favoured by the early Anglo-Saxons (as, for example, in Cutha/Cuthwulf). This is the earliest runic inscription known from the area, and it may be quite plausible that such a man could have had administrative or jurisdictional responsibilities by the end of the 6th century (ibid., 267). Other finds in the area also point to links with Kent in the 6th and early 7th century. Buckles likely to have been acquired through Kentish connections have been found at Berinsfield, Watchfield (with the balance set, above), at Long Wittenham and at Fairford. Kentish composite disc brooches were found at Milton, in the vicinity of the high-status site at Sutton Courtenay/Drayton (Hawkes 1986, 83, 89), and a Kentish-style disc brooch was found at Lechlade, Butler's Field. Many of the grave goods associated with the 'princely' burials of the region (see below) were clearly imports, and Sonia Hawkes has suggested that some may have been 'diplomatic gifts' from Kent (1986, 90). Bronze bowls and glass beakers found in cemeteries in the project area are also likely to have come via this route, and the presence of Kentish or imported objects as far upstream as Lechlade and Fairford suggests that the early Saxon communities here were integrated into the same networks.

The Dorchester area provides the only evidence yet known in the region for a royal centre of the early Saxon period. Elsewhere, evidence for early Anglo-Saxon communities and their leaders remains elusive. We have no information about the Middle Thames Valley at this time, and the area may well have been a peripheral one, between the spheres of influence of the Gewisse, the East Saxons and possibly the peoples of what was to become Middle Anglia. The suggestion that it may have remained under British influence for some time has been noted above. Downstream, settlement and cemetery evidence is evident in Surrey from the mid 5th century (see above), and suggests the presence and influence in the area of people with a material culture comparable to that found in the Upper Thames Valley and other areas of 'Saxon' settlement. Unfortunately we have no information from documentary sources prior to the 660s to put any names to them (see Hines 2004). The Old English name for Surrey, *Supre-ge*, means 'southern district' and this has often been taken to mean that the area was defined in relation (or subordination) to Middle Saxon (Middlesex) territory on the north of the Thames (ibid., 90). However, *Supre-ge* may equally have implied a region that had formed part of the southern hinterland of Roman London, taken over as an established territory by Saxons from the middle of the 5th century (ibid., 99; Poulton 1987, 221 and n 44).

'Princely' burials (Figs 7.12-7.15)

The emergence of identifiable kings in the written record in the late 6th and early 7th century is matched by the appearance of high-status barrow burials at striking locations within the study area and elsewhere. A small number of these have been excavated; numerous others can be identified in the landscape and from placename evidence, although in the absence of excavation there is no certainty of an Anglo-Saxon rather than a prehistoric date. The richness of the grave goods at these barrow sites has led to their characterisation as 'princely' burials. It seems likely that the people who were commemorated in this way were indeed kings, or leading members of their communities, although none of them can be certainly identified with any known individuals (Hawkes 1986, 89-91; Blair 1994, 30-31; 45-9).

In 1847 a number of burials were found during extensions to the bishop's palace in the village of Cuddesdon, Oxon (Fig. 7.12). The site is located on the south side of a spur of high ground overlooking the river Thame, with extensive views towards the Chilterns and the Thames Valley. The contemporary description states that several skeletons were found, arranged in a circle, their heads outwards, and lying on their faces with their legs crossed. Several objects were found nearby, described as two swords, two squat blue glass bowls, a bronze bucket of 'Coptic' type, imported from the east Mediterranean, a fragment of gilt bronze set with garnets, and a late medieval ring. All the finds were subsequently lost, with the exception of a single blue glass bowl that has been acquired by the Ashmolean Museum. Tania Dickinson re-excavated and re-published the site (1974) and has argued that the contemporary description of the burials, and the quality of the finds, is strongly suggestive of a primary high-status burial or cremation in a barrow, surrounded by burials around its edge. The way in which the

secondary burials had been deposited suggests that they may have been slaves or captives sacrificed at the funeral, and if this is so, it provides a chilling insight into the nature of early Saxon kingship. It remains possible, however, that they were not directly associated with the primary burial, but were later burials of execution victims which are often found at elevated sites and in association with barrows. The primary burial is datable to the late 6th or early 7th century, and Sonia Hawkes comments that the glass bowls and Coptic bronze bucket are very likely to have come via Kent (1986, 90). The name Cuddesdon is derived from *Cuthenes dune*, or 'Cuthwine's hill' and it seems likely that the individual buried here could have been a leading member of the family of Ceawlin and Cynegils (Blair 1994, 31). Sonia Hawkes suggested that the burial was likely to have been that of Cuthwulf or Cuthwine, both recorded by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as close associates of Ceawlin (1986, 90), although it is unlikely that this could ever be proved. Cuthwulf and Cuthwine have been identified by Barbara Yorke as probably the brother and son of Ceawlin respectively (1990, 134 table 16).

Asthall Barrow stands on a prominent ridge in West Oxfordshire overlooking the Thames and Windrush valleys. At the time of its excavation in the 1920s it was some 12 ft (3.66 m) high and 16 m in diameter. A layer of ash from a cremation was found spread across an area some 6 m in diameter on the ground surface inside the barrow; charred timber and postholes were also found in the vicinity. Tania Dickinson and George Speake have suggested that these remains probably indicate an *in situ* funeral pyre built on a series of wooden supports, subsequently covered by a large earth mound (Dickinson 1976 II 35-7; Dickinson and Speake 1992). The cremated bone comprised both human remains and those of a horse and a sheep. The grave goods survive in a very fragmentary state (Fig. 7.13) but originally included a large number of vessels, amongst which were a Byzantine cast copper-alloy bowl, drinking horns, bottles or cups, a silver bowl or cup, a Merovingian wheel-made pottery bottle and two other hand-made pots. Other grave goods comprised a set of gaming pieces and an antler die, a suite of probable copper-alloy strap fittings and numerous silver studs, rivets and discs.

Fig. 7.12 Princely burials: a blue glass bowl from Cuddesdon

The presence of gaming pieces and animal bone suggests affinities with Anglian and Scandinavian burial rites. The site is datable to the first half of the 7th century, and most commentators agree that it is likely to be the burial of a Mercian leader, and is probably to be associated with the earliest phase of Mercian expansion into the Thames Valley (see below). There are numerous other barrows in the vicinity and some of them may also have been constructed or re-used in the Anglo-Saxon period, although this remains unproven archaeologically.

The richest barrow burial known in the study area to date, possibly second only to Sutton Hoo in its magnificence, was excavated at Taplow, Bucks, in 1882 (Fig. 7.14). The mound, some 5 m high, sits upon a projecting spur of the Burnham Plateau on the east bank of the Thames, and from its elevation of *c* 65 m OD overlooks the river and its valley floor. Antiquarian investigation of the mound, most inexpertly carried out in 1883, created several collapses of earth that caused extensive damage to the burial. The objects from the grave were transferred to the British Museum, but the damage they had sustained left them so shattered that work on reconstruction and conservation of the majority has only been possible with modern techniques, and remains in progress at the time of writing. A description of the burial and grave goods was published by Helen Geake (1997, 146), and we are most grateful to Leslie Webster for kindly supplying

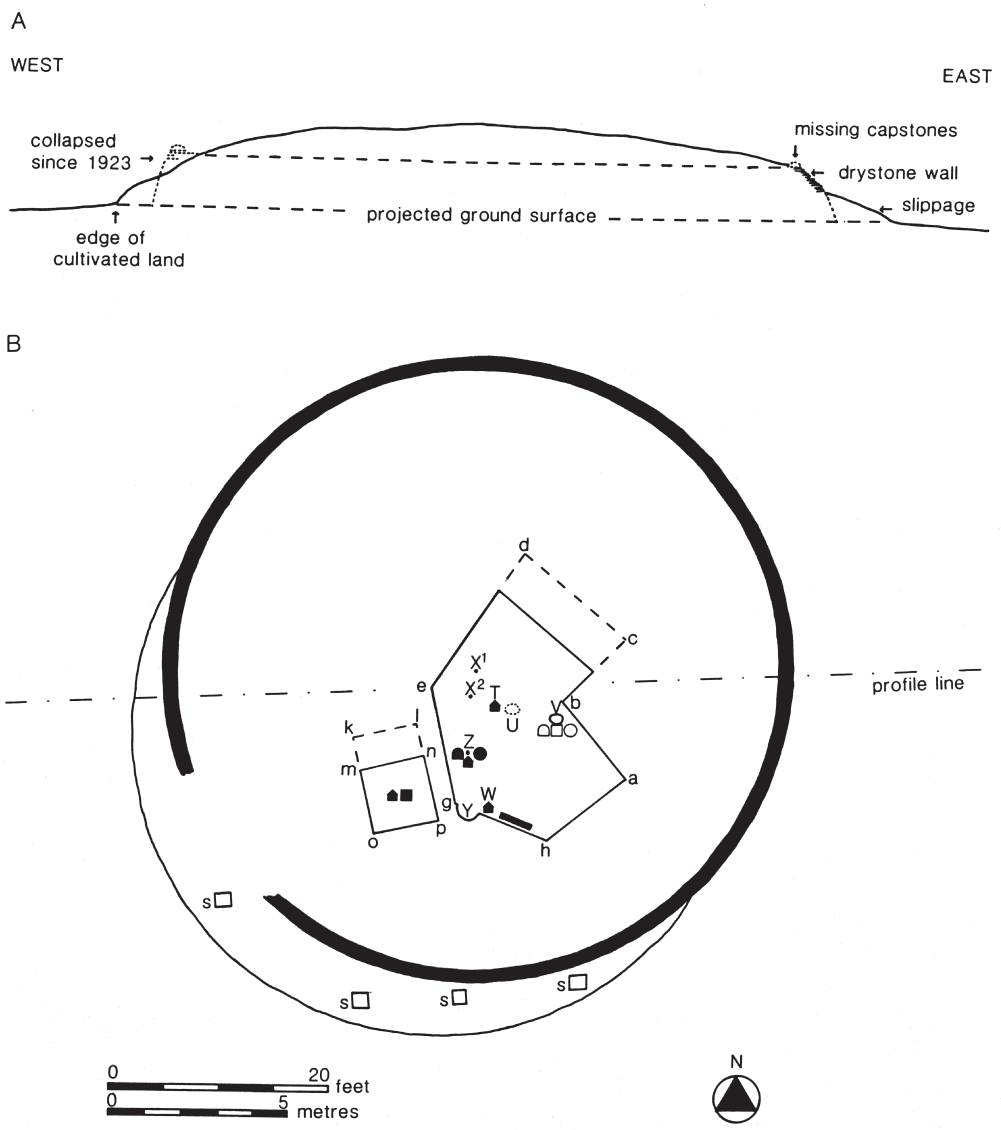
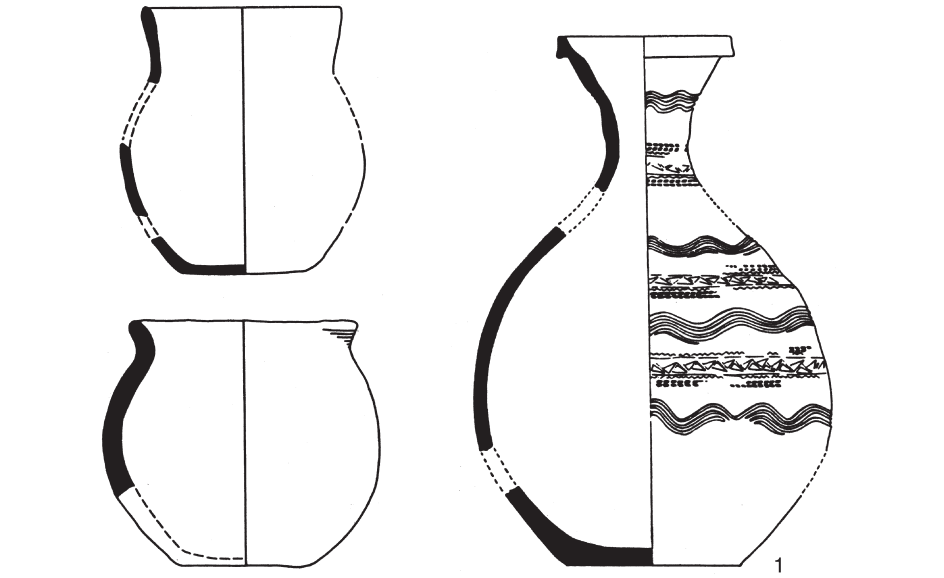


Fig. 7.13 (above and opposite) Princely burials: Asthall Barrow. The mound and selected grave goods as reconstructed from archive evidence by Tania Dickinson and George Speake (1992). (Above) profile and plan of the burial mound. (Opposite) grave goods: (1) left to right, two handmade pots and a Merovingian pottery bottle, (2) reconstruction of a Byzantine cast metal bowl incorporating extant fragments, (3) copper alloy mount and five fragments of copper alloy repoussé foil with reconstruction of decoration



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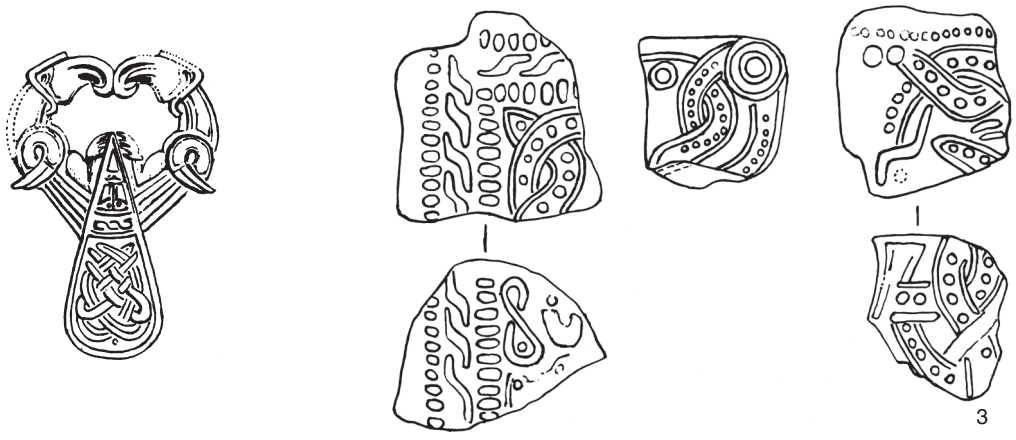

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Fig. 7.14 Princely burials: Taplow. (Background) an original plan from the excavations. Grave goods (clockwise from top): four glass claw beakers, two gold-sheeted clasps, detail of the silver-gilt mount of a drinking horn, a set of bone gaming pieces, the gold and garnet belt buckle

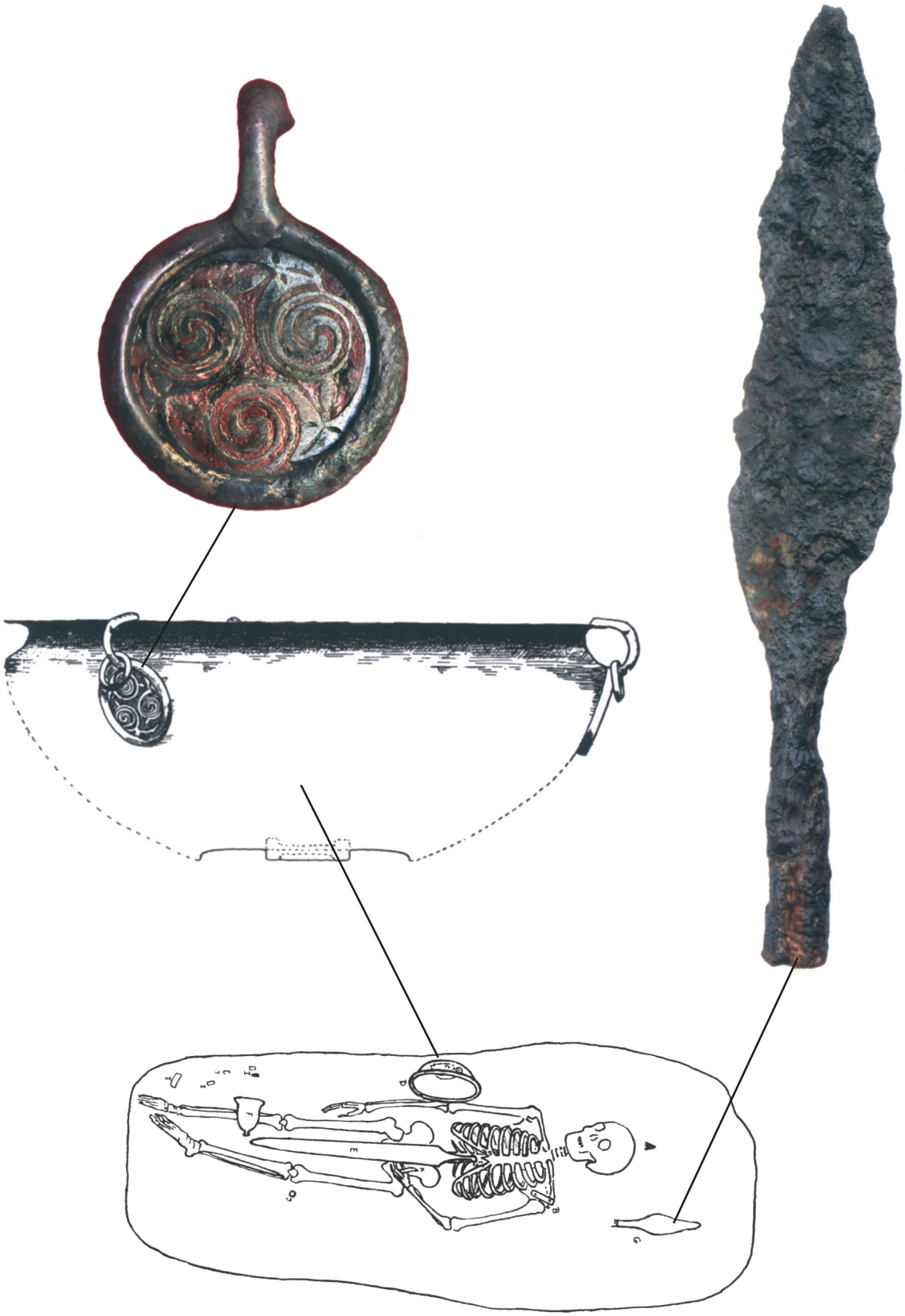


Fig. 7.15 Princely burials: Lowbury Hill. (Above left) reconstruction of a bronze hanging bowl with detail of an enamelled escutcheon. (Above right) the spearhead with traces of enamelling. (Below) the grave plan

more detailed information from her own research and lectures, which forms the basis of the present account. (A lecture by Leslie Webster on the Taplow burial has been published in abbreviated form in the 2002 *Saxon* newsletter of the Sutton Hoo Society.)

The burial is datable to the early 7th century, and perhaps to within its first decade. The body of the dead man had been laid in a massive burial chamber lined with oak planks, and buried with the head to the east. He had been dressed in a tunic trimmed with gold braid, with a massive gold and garnet buckle at the waist, and a sword at his right side. He was probably also wearing a red cloak with a pair of shoulder clasps. Further weapons included sets of three shields, four spears and two Frankish angons. The burial is notable for the large number of vessels associated with feasting and drinking, including a large cauldron, glass claw beakers, five or six silver-mounted drinking horns and silver and bronze mounted wooden cups. A lyre, antler gaming pieces and a wooden games board hint at the entertainments of the hall. Recent excavations have confirmed that the barrow was adjacent to a late Bronze Age and Iron Age multivallate hillfort (OA 2004b; OA 2005a; Allen *et al*. forthcoming). The defensive ditches were still partially open at the time of the burial, and the site was clearly occupied in the early to mid Saxon period (see Chapter 3, above), although the relationship between the burial and the occupation is not currently understood. The individual buried under the mound is unknown. Taplow contains a personal name element *Taeppa*, but this cannot be associated with anyone known from written sources. However, Leslie Webster draws attention to the Kentish origins and affinities of a large number of the grave goods, including particularly the gold buckle and clasps. She suggests that *Taeppa* may well have been a sub-king of the powerful kingdom of Kent, his prominent burial mound sited to watch over or confront the West Saxon enemy at what may once have been the boundary between their spheres of influence.

During the mid to late 7th century an adult male was buried in a barrow specially constructed for the purpose on top of Lowbury Hill, on the west side of the Thames in Berkshire (Fig. 7.15). This had earlier been a Romano-British religious site of some significance (see above). The grave was orientated south-north, with a ledge at the foot (north) end, and the grave goods included a sword, shield and spear, a knife, shears, a pursemount or strike-a-light, two buckles, a bone comb, and a bronze hanging bowl with a bronze hook. Both the spear and the escutcheon discs of the hanging bowl had been enamelled. The hanging bowl with its enamelled escutcheons is a very fine example of a well-known type of Celtic metalwork. The green, red and yellow enamelling on the spearhead adds to the impression that this grave shows an interesting fusion between native British and Saxon cultures in the Middle Thames region (Atkinson 1916, 15-23; Dickinson 1976 Vol II 176-7 (site 100); Swanton 1973; Fulford and Rippon 1994; FAMOS 2004, 17).

THE MID TO LATE SAXON PERIOD
(Figs 7.16-7.17)

The Mercians

In the event, the Upper Thames Valley kingdom of the Gewisse was to prove short-lived. By *c* 660, the bishopric had been transferred from Dorchester to Winchester, and thereafter the Gewisse directed their attention to the conquest of territory in the south and south-west of England, which was to become the heartland of the later kingdom of Wessex. Over the course of the next 200 years, the study area lay on the frontier between the competing kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. Land north of the Thames was divided between a number of Mercian-controlled provinces. The kingdom of the Hwicce probably evolved during the reign of Penda (died 655), and seems to have extended as far south as the Thames Valley in eastern Gloucestershire. The area of this kingdom was probably preserved by the late medieval boundary of the dioceses of Worcester and Gloucester combined (Bassett 1989, 6). The province of the Middle Saxons (Middlesex) in the east may have been carved by the Mercian kings out of the kingdom of Essex in the late 7th century, to form a hinterland for the developing emporium of London (*Lundenwic*) (Dumville 1989, 134). In between was the large and diverse province known as Middle Anglia, which is also evident as a distinct unit from the mid 7th century onwards. It seems likely, from the later history of the dioceses of Leicester and Dorchester, that the territory of Middle Anglia extended from the east midlands along the Thame Valley as far as the Thames at Dorchester and Benson (Blair 1994, 50-52 and fig. 39; Dumville 1989, 134). The large province of the *Cilternsaete* is mentioned in the Tribal Hidage (see below), and the name implies a group occupying the Chiltern Hills and the north bank of the Thames along the Chiltern dip slope (Blair 1994, 52). The *Cilternsaete* never occur again as a recognisable political unit, but John Blair has suggested that written sources relating to minister patronage in the area might imply the existence of a large sub-kingdom covering south Buckinghamshire, south-east Berkshire and Surrey, ruled by the family of the sub-king Frithuwold who granted land for the minster at Chertsey in the 670s (1989, 106-7; see also below).

South of the Thames, the historical evidence suggests that the situation was more unstable, with control of north Wiltshire, much of Berkshire, and Surrey passing back and forth between the kings of Mercia and Wessex on numerous occasions. Surrey, for example, is known to have passed under Mercian control in the late 660s or early 670s, and with it the richly endowed minster at Chertsey.

Explicit evidence for this period of Mercian domination is very slight in the archaeological record and its significance has probably been underplayed in archaeological interpretation in the region. Mercian control of the emporium of *Lundenwic* is particularly significant for our understanding of patterns of trade in the valley (see Chapter 6, above), and the chronology of Mercian involvement in the area is summarised below. Fuller accounts can be found in Yorke 1990, 100-127, and Blair 1994, 42-92.

The Mercians, whose power base was in the Trent Valley and the area around Tamworth and Lichfield, benefited from a sequence of outstandingly able rulers. Five individuals in particular enjoyed long and successful reigns, and each achieved significant, and in some cases durable, extensions of Mercian power in southern England: Penda (died 655), Wulfhere (658-75), Æthelbald (716-57), Offa (757-96) and Coenwulf (796-821) (Yorke 1990, 103 table 12). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that Penda fought against Cynegils of the Gewisse at Cirencester in 628, and drove Cynegils's son and successor Cenwalh into temporary exile after Cenwalh unwisely repudiated his daughter, whom according to Bede he had previously married. Penda's son and successor Wulfhere was ravaging Ashdown (the Berkshire Downs) in 661, and had extended his influence as far south as Surrey and London by 665. He appears as overlord of Surrey in an important charter of 672 x 4, in which Frithuwold, described as his sub-king, made a grant of land for the minster at Chertsey (Blair 1989, 97); significantly, Wulfhere ratified this charter while in residence at Thame. After the death of Wulfhere, two strong kings of the West Saxons, Cædwalla (686-8) and Ine (688-726) seem to have held Mercian power in check in southern England. The West Saxons may have regained temporary control of land in the lower Thames and south Berkshire; however, the Thames corridor itself must have been highly unstable and is likely to have been under Mercian domination for much of the time (Blair 1994, 54-5). Æthelbald seems quickly to have re-established Mercian authority over much of the area, and in 731 his contemporary Bede noted that all the kingdoms south of the Humber were subject to him. He appears certainly to have regained control of London and Middlesex by the 730s, although written sources suggest that conflict between Mercia and Wessex for control of the Thames Valley continued sporadically throughout the 8th century. In the mid 8th century, the West Saxons appear to have regained control of the area after a battle at *Beorhford* (Burford), dated to 752. Subsequently, however, Offa defeated the West Saxon king Cynewulf at Benson in 779, and took control of a number of places, including Cookham (Blair 1994, 55). The fortunes of the minster of Cookham, which seems to have passed from Mercian to West Saxon control, and back again, on perhaps more than one occasion well illustrates what must have been the common experience of much of the study area at this time (see Chapter 5, above). Mercian dominance of the Thames Valley was maintained under Offa's successor, Coenwulf, but during the 9th century the West Saxons took control of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Essex. Berkshire finally came under West Saxon control through a negotiated marriage agreement in the mid 9th century, although remaining under the authority of its Mercian Ealdorman.

During the 7th century, both the Mercian and the West Saxon kings ruled through a number of subordinate 'sub-kings'. Often, although not invariably, sub-kings would be close male relatives of the ruler, and the assignment to them of substantial territories may in part have been designed to contain dynastic rivalries. In other cases, sub-kings were the native rulers of subordinated provinces. Perhaps analogous to this was the royal practice of establishing close female relatives at the head of minsters endowed with estates that were in some cases so large that they equalled the hidage assessments of some of the smaller tribal groupings in the Tribal Hidage (see below). During the 8th century many small semi-independent provinces appear to have been more closely absorbed into the kingdom of Mercia, and the sub-kingdoms disappear, to be replaced by ealdormanries (Yorke 1990, 113); a similar development can be observed in contemporary Wessex (ibid., 146).

A document known as the Tribal Hidage, possibly although not certainly a Mercian tribute list of the period *c* 635-80 (Dumville 1989, 132-3), may provide a unique insight into the range of peoples and provinces being absorbed by the early expansion of Mercia. Some can probably be equated with the study area. To this can be added evidence from placenames and rare charter references, and John Blair (1994, 35-7, 50-52, fig. 33) discusses a number of groups that may be identifiable with parts of the study area (Fig. 7.16). The best attested are the Hwicce (see above) who appear to have controlled the area around Cirencester from the early 7th century until the middle of the 8th century, and whose name survives in the modern Wychwood. The Færpingas may have been based around Charlbury, the Garingas around Goring, the Readingas at Reading, and the better-recorded Sunningas at Sonning (ibid., 35). It is also possible that the old name of Benson, *Banesinga* (see below), preserves the memory of another early group (Holmes 1999, 36). The Cilternsæte refers to people who lived in the Chilterns, while the name of Hormer hundred, the loop of the Thames between Abingdon and Cumnor, may be linked with a reference in a 10th-century charter to *Horninga mære*, or the Hornings' boundary (Blair 1994, 35). Names containing the elements *sæte* and *ware* are thought to refer to the dwellers in a particular area, and there is some evidence to suggest that early elements of this kind may have been based on river valley territories (Hooke 1997, 74). The *ingas* type place names, as in Sonning and Reading, are still thought likely to

represent group settlements incorporating a personal name (*Readingas* being, for example, the people of Reada), but it is now believed that they relate to secondary colonisation, rather than to primary settlements established by the first groups of incoming Germanic migrants (ibid., 70).

It has been noted above that explicit archaeological evidence for the presence of Mercians in the Thames Valley is very limited. During this period the main centres of the kings of Mercia and Wessex were far away, and power in the Thames Valley is likely to have been exercised chiefly through locally based sub-kings and ealdormen and probably also through the abbots and abbesses of minsters. Documentary evidence, however, shows that the kings themselves were present at royal vills from time to time. We have very little information about the potential royal centres of this period (see Chapter 3, above). However, coin finds suggest that the high status site at Drayton/Sutton Courtenay continued to have a significant role as a trading centre in the period *c* 710-30, and possibly from as early as 690 (see Chapter 6, above). Interestingly, this can be compared with evidence from written sources for the same period. Abingdon Abbey preserved a purported grant by Æthelbald from the period 727x736, in which the king confirms earlier grants to the minster (Kelly 2000, 22-7 no. 5). Much of this document is a later fabrication, but it preserves what was probably an original and very interesting witness list. The

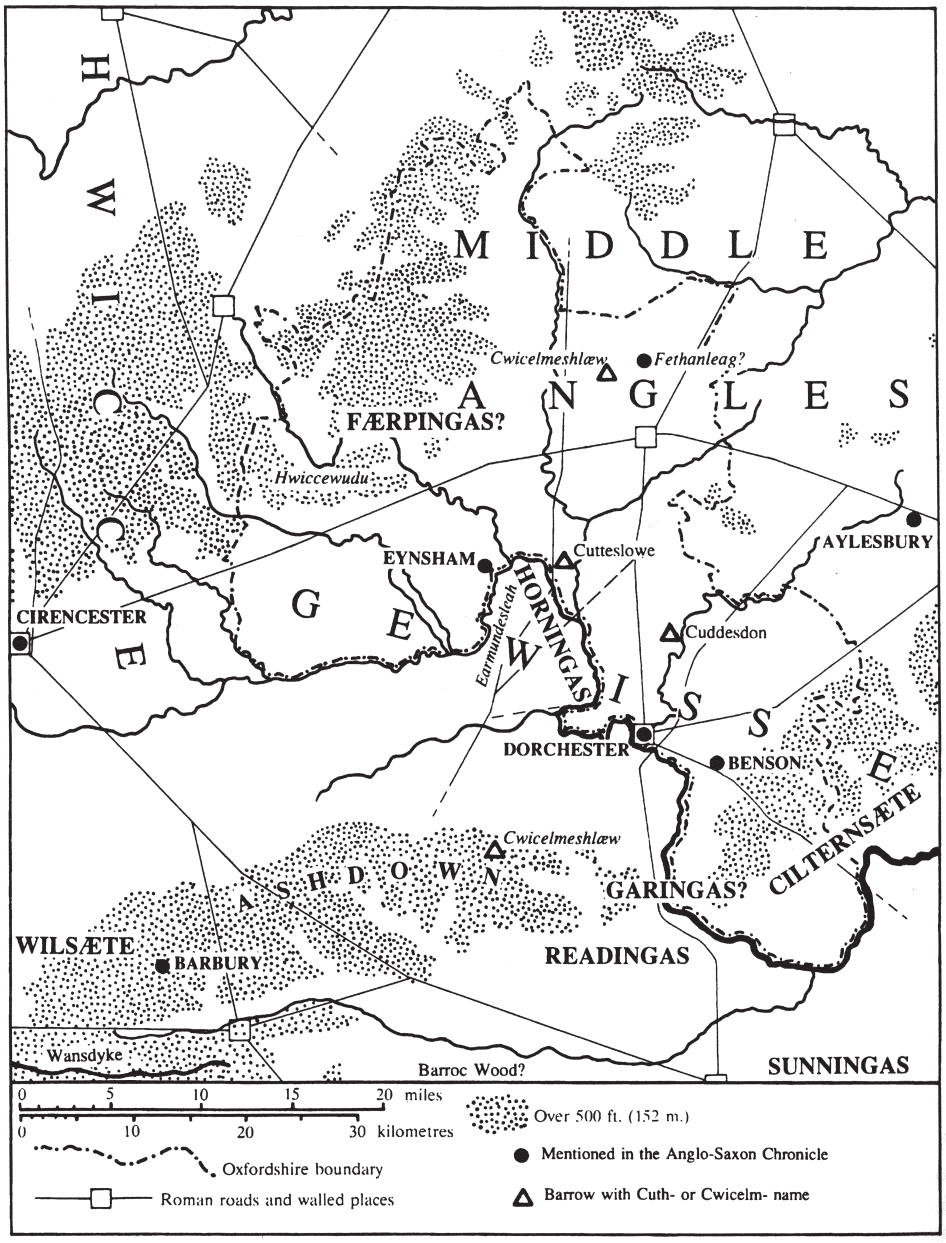


Fig. 7.16 Kingdoms and peoples of the Upper Thames Valley in the 7th century

witnesses include the bishop of Winchester, and Forthhere, bishop of the West Saxon diocese of Sherborne, whose subscription adds the detail *in Banesinga uilla*, an earlier form of the name Benson. Susan Kelly has suggested that it appears to derive from a period of rapprochement between the two kingdoms that included a joint expedition against the Welsh. She adds that the kings may well have met at Benson, on the border between their different spheres of influence (ibid., 26).

This is probably the earliest reliable reference to the existence of the royal vill at Benson, which was the most valuable royal manor in Oxfordshire at the time of Domesday Book, and the fact that it appears to have remained stable as a royal centre throughout this time now looks highly exceptional (John Blair pers. comm.). Arguably its location on the north bank of the Thames at the foot of the Thame Valley would have made it a more attractive location for the Mercian kings than the old site at Drayton/Sutton Courtenay across the river. It was also well sited for control of the south-west Chiltern region, and a route across the Chilterns that is known to have existed in Roman times (see Chapter 3, above), and which was certainly important in the later medieval period. This would have given access to the Middle Thames, and beyond to London. The royal manor is later known to have controlled much, if not all, the territory within this great loop of the Thames (Holmes 1999, 19 and figs 2.4, 2.8). From around the year 752, the area may temporarily have been under West Saxon control, but it was retaken by Offa in 779. The site of the royal vill at Benson has not been identified by excavation, although tradition locates 'Offa's Palace' at Medlars Bank, near to the existing church of St Helen (see Holmes 1999, 32-4). Here, a ditch and bank forming a rectangular enclosure are recorded as having being destroyed during 19th- and early 20th-century development. The best evidence for its nature comes from the account of Thomas Hearne, written in 1716, who referred to traces of a ditch here, and to a tradition of the finding of large quantities of bone, spears and bridles nearby.

The second royal centre for which we have archaeological evidence in the study area was at Old Windsor, where it seems likely that a pre-existing estate centre was reorganised to cater for a large household around the turn of the 9th century. Unfortunately the excavations have never been published, and information about this site remains very limited (see Chapter 3 above for a summary). A further important royal estate centre is likely to have been developing at Kingston during the 9th century, although at present there is very little archaeological evidence for its form and location (see Chapter 3 above).

A number of minsters were founded during this period along the Thames (see Chapter 5, above), and this may have been motivated by strategic considerations as well as by personal piety. The river crossing at Oxford was developed during the mid Saxon period, with the construction of a timber bridge and the heightening of alluvial islands to form a causeway, and the dating of this suggests that it could well have been a Mercian initiative (see Chapter 5, above; Dodd (ed.) 2003, 15). It is clear that during the 8th century Mercian kings were attaching conditions to grants of land, which included participating in the building of bridges and fortresses and supplying troops to the army when required (Wormald 1982, 123). Disputes between Æthelbald and the church in the 740s show that minsters were not exempt from royal and public service, and it is possible that the construction of a bridge, and even fortifications, at Oxford could have been a duty imposed on a minster there. Elsewhere, we can at present only speculate about how far the excavated settlement sites of the period were affected by changes in political control.

One of the most enigmatic sites to have been excavated in the study area was found at Dorney, on the Buckinghamshire bank of the Thames at the foot of the Chilterns. The site was recorded in advance of gravel extraction and the creation of the Jubilee River flood alleviation channel in the late 1990s (Foreman *et al*. 2002). Here, excavations along the roughly 1 km length of the scheme identified over 100 large pits datable to the mid Saxon period backfilled with cess, animal and plant remains, and a quite exceptional range of artefacts (Fig. 7.17; see also Chapter 6, above). No evidence for any associated buildings or settlement infrastructure was seen anywhere within the excavated area, and the survival of both later medieval and earlier (Bronze Age and Roman) archaeology suggests that this cannot be the result of truncation. Amongst the finds was a range of textile equipment, combs, four decorative hair or dress pins in copper alloy, ironwork, and iron slag and some melted copper alloy and lead waste suggesting that metalworking was being carried out on the site. Worked stone included some 13 kg of Niedermendig lava from 45 pits, including a large fragment of a rotary quern, a small millstone of Triassic sandstone that may have come from Germany, and fragments of Greensand from Surrey. One or two of the seven whetstones may have been imported from the continent. The pottery assemblage was dominated by the local handmade chaff-tempered and quartz-tempered fabrics. However, in addition there was one of the largest assemblages of imported pottery known outside the *wics*, including a variety of sand-tempered, wheel-thrown North French wares, and three sherds of Tating ware from the Rhineland (see Fig. 6.46); there were also three sherds of the regionally imported Ipswich ware (Blinkhorn 2002b, 35). Three fragments of Anglo-Saxon glass were also recovered, comprising the rim of a green-tinted palm cup, a fragment of a mould-blown vessel and a rim fragment from a palm cup or funnel beaker decorated with horizontal white marvered trails ((see Fig. 6.47; Cropper 2002, 44). The animal bone assemblage was consistent with a consumer rather

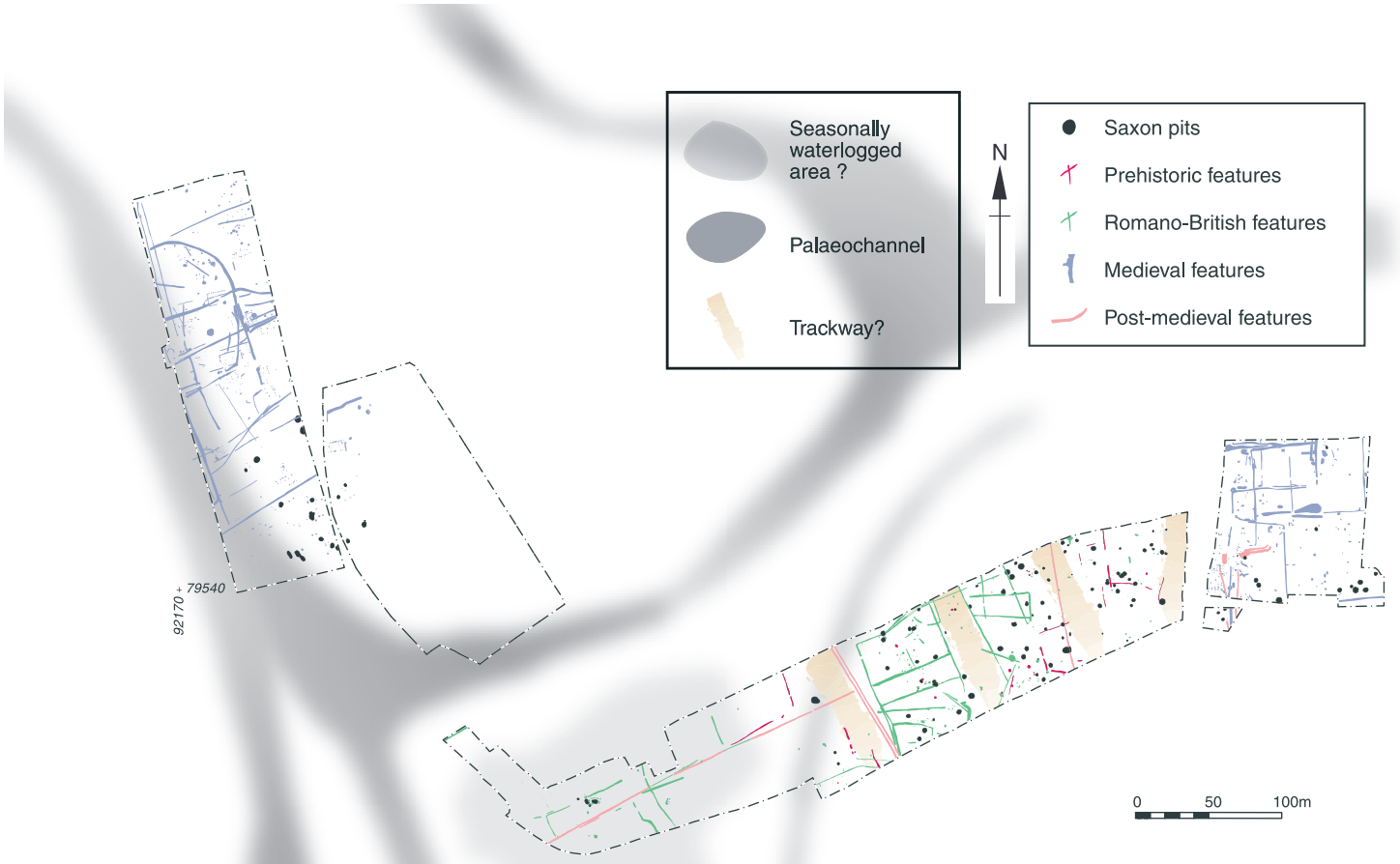
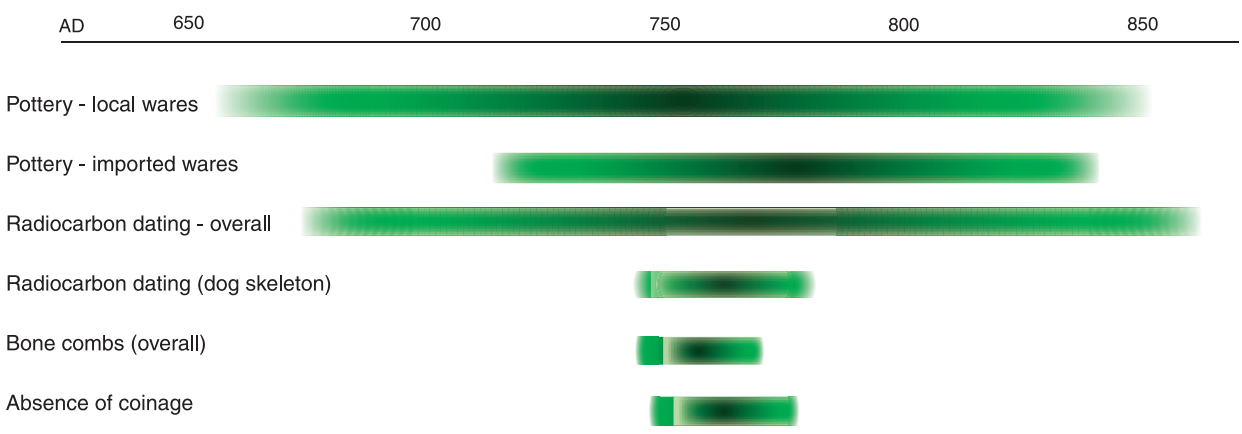


Fig. 7.17 The possible meeting site at Dorney, Bucks: lefthand page, plan of the site (above) and reconstruction (below); righthand page (above and centre) mid Saxon pits under excavation, (below) chart showing chronological range of dating evidence from the site


AD
650
700
750
800
850
Pottery - local wares
Pottery - imported wares
Radiocarbon dating - overall
Radiocarbon dating (dog skeleton)
Bone combs (overall)
Absence of coinage

than a producer site, with an emphasis on animals of prime age for culling for meat. Plant remains comprised a wide range of cereal remains, dominated by wheat and barley, with the presence of chaff and weeds suggesting that crop processing was taking place on the site or nearby. Flax seeds and large quantities of flax capsule fragments suggest that flax was also being processed at the site.

At a broad level, all the finds would be consistent with a mid Saxon, 7th- to 9th-century date, but the presence of rarer, especially imported, artefacts, suggests that this can be narrowed quite considerably. Most of the material from the site could fit quite happily into the period *c* 740-780, and the range of possible dates provided by different categories of evidence is illustrated in Figure 7.17 (Foreman *et al*. 2002, 61). The potentially narrow date-range of the site, together with the lack of evidence for buildings, has inclined the excavators to interpret this as the site of a temporary meeting or fair. The absence of coins might imply that it is less likely to have been a fair, but it is noted that very little coin may have been in circulation during the period *c* 740-80 (ibid., 69-70). However, a strong possibility remains that this was the site of a meeting, possibly secular, or possibly religious, in an accessible riverside location on the border of Mercian and West Saxon territory. The site could have been used on one occasion only, or intermittently over a number of years. The presence of the exceptionally rare Tating ware pottery (also known from Old Windsor), the glass vessels and inlaid metalwork suggests the presence of high-status individuals, perhaps living in tents, and attended by servants and slaves. Whether such people brought craftsmen with them, or whether an element of trading accompanied such a meeting, remains unclear. The imports in general are very likely to reflect the proximity of the site to the emporium at *Lundenwic*.

The Vikings (Figs 7.18-7.19)

Intermittent Viking raids are reported in England from the end of the 8th century, but the main impact on the Thames region is likely to have begun around 870 with the arrival in the area of the 'great army' (Fig. 7.18). By 867, the Vikings had taken control of the kingdom of Northumbria and by 869 they had defeated the East Angles (Yorke 1990, 66, 97). The urgent need to present a strong front against the Vikings may already have led to compromise between the Mercians and the West Saxons, who reached agreement over the status of Berkshire in the 850s. The great army's occupation of the royal vill at Reading in the winter of 870-71 amounted to what John Blair suggests was an invasion of Wessex (1994, 94), although it was resisted, and the Vikings were successfully bought off. They turned their attention to Mercia, and by 874 they had expelled its last independent king and occupied its eastern provinces (Yorke 1990, 123). A further Viking onslaught against Wessex in 878 met with defeat at the hands of Alfred, and a peace treaty was drawn up establishing a division of territory. In the following year, it appears that the Mercians reached a separate agreement with the Vikings, by then encamped at Cirencester. As a result of this agreement, the Vikings left Mercia to settle in East Anglia, and the king they had installed over the western provinces, Ceolwulf II, was replaced. His successor, Æthelred, seems to have had the status of an ealdorman rather than a king, and he was to become the son-in-law and close ally of King Alfred (Blair 1994, 96-7). The Mercians may quite quickly have regained control of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Middlesex, and Æthelred, under Alfred's overlordship, was in control of London in 886. During the early 10th century much of this area was to pass into the control of the kings of Wessex as they extended their rule into the former Viking and Mercian territories of the midlands.

There is limited direct archaeological evidence for the presence of Vikings in the project area, the most convincing being the burials from Reading, and from Play Hatch, Sonning (see Chapter 5, above). Indirectly, however, the Viking invasion was to have a very significant effect on the later development of the region, since it led to the creation of a number of fortifications to act as centres of defence for the people of the surrounding area. The creation of a network of defended sites throughout southern England is generally attributed to King Alfred, and the policy, which appears ultimately to have been very successful, was extended into Mercia by his son and successor, Edward, and by his Mercian allies, his daughter Æthelflæd and her husband Æthelred (see above). A memorandum dating from Edward's reign, known as the Burghal Hidage, lists 33 *burhs*, or places of varying kinds that had been supplied with fortifications in order to serve as defended centres against the Vikings for the surrounding countryside. The siting of the *burhs* was clearly undertaken with a view to controlling strategic points, and a number were established along the Thames itself, including Cricklade, Oxford, Wallingford and Sashes (an island in the river at Cookham) within the study area. All four were sited at what were probably important crossing points of the river, and Oxford and Wallingford were subsequently to develop into the two main towns of the region in the late Saxon period (see Chapter 3, above). Each *burh* was assigned a number of hides, presumably based on the estates of the surrounding countryside. One man per hide was to be supplied for the defence of the *burh*. The system was based on the calculation that the walls could be defended by four men for each pole (5.5 yards), giving 16 men to an acre's breath (22 yards). The Burghal Hidage tells us the number of hides assigned for each *burh*, and the length of each defensive circuit can, in theory, be

calculated from this information. Wallingford was one of the three largest *burhs*, with an assessment of 2400 hides; Cricklade was assigned 1500 and Sashes 1000; Oxford's assessment was probably 1500, although the text of the Burghal Hidage is uncertain at this point (see Munby 'The eastern extension' in Dodd (ed.) 2003, 24-5). Cricklade, Oxford and Wallingford were laid out with rectilinear defences consisting of large earthen ramparts with timber or stone facings, external ditches, a grid of internal streets, and (although not certainly at Wallingford) an intramural street or walkway around the interior of the defensive circuit (Fig. 7.19). There is good evidence to suggest that the main street axes incorporated existing routeways leading to the Thames crossings, which were subsequently diverted through the *burh*. There is little archaeological evidence to suggest whether the Thames *burhs* were ever needed for their intended purpose.

Documentary sources suggest that Viking raids on monasteries brought about the near destruction of the English church, although it is likely that these

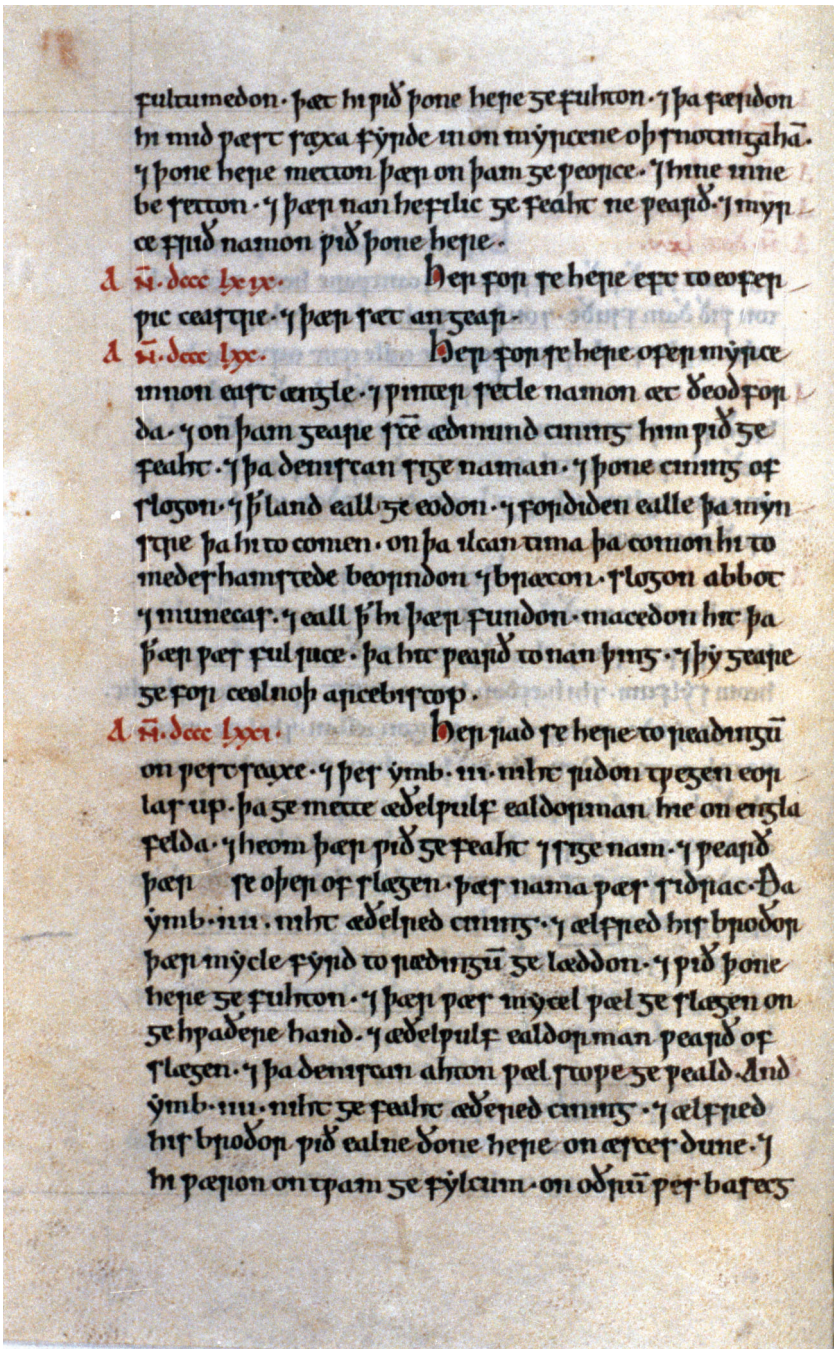


Fig. 7.18 The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the arrival of the Viking army at Reading, and subsequent battles with the English led by King Æthelred and his brother Alfred (Bodl. Lib. MS Laud Misc 636 fol. 30 v)

Fig. 7.19 The rampart and ditch at Wallingford. (Above) the northern defences, looking east, October 2006. The surviving rampart is on the right of the picture, with the ditch in front. (Below) the ditch filled with frozen water

accounts are exaggerated, and that other factors contributed to the decline of mid Saxon monasticism. There is good documentary evidence that Chertsey suffered at least one, if not two raids, and the medieval monks of Abingdon Abbey claimed that the old minster there had been destroyed by Viking attacks. However, this is an area where archaeological evidence may be particularly useful as a counterbalance to the bias of documentary sources. The 9th-century minster at Cirencester, with its magnificent church, for example, clearly survived the Viking encampment of 879. Elsewhere, excavations at Oxford and Eynsham have not revealed any evidence of attack or abandonment, and most of the minsters of the study area appear to have been functioning in the late 9th or 10th century (see Chapter 5 above for the minsters in this period).

The Thames Valley in the late Saxon period

National and local government (Figs 7.20-7.23)

With the defeat of the Vikings, the West Saxons emerged as the only surviving Anglo-Saxon royal dynasty. Under a succession of energetic and able rulers, they had extended their authority over most of the country by the middle of the 10th century, and adopted the style of kings of England. The older divisions between Wessex, Mercia and the territories ceded to the Vikings (known as the Danelaw) persisted in law and administration, however, and in the late Saxon period the Thames marked the recognised boundary between these different groups. The people of Fairford, Lechlade, Eynsham, Oxford and Dorchester were in Mercia, while those of Cricklade, Abingdon, Wallingford, Reading, Cookham, and Windsor were in Wessex, and the people of Taplow and Dorney were on the fringes of the Danelaw (Fig. 7.20). The Thames also marked an important ecclesiastical boundary, between the sees of Worcester, Dorchester and London to the north, and Ramsbury and Winchester to the south (Fig. 7.20). The itineraries of the kings of England from Æthelred (975-1016) to Edward the Confessor show a new and marked bias towards the Thames Valley (Hill 1984, maps 162-3, 167-9). This must reflect the importance of the area as a convenient (and perhaps 'neutral') region for the assembling of national courts and councils. Oxford's prominence as a centre for royal councils in the early 11th century is likely to owe much to its location at the intersection of these various units of administration.

As a national system of government evolved over the course of the 10th and 11th centuries, people would have found themselves assigned to a number of units of local administration that were systematically introduced across the country. The smallest of these was the tithing, a group of notionally 10 households, mutually responsible for peace-keeping and law enforcement. The intermediate level was that of the hundred (notionally one hundred hides). In origin, many of the hundreds (known as wapentakes in the Danelaw) will have incorporated long-standing territorial units, although the first explicit mention of the hundred as the basic unit of local government comes in an Ordinance of King Edgar (957-975; Reynolds 1999, 75-6). By the 11th century the jurisdiction of groups of hundreds had become based at important local manors, mostly those of the king and major ecclesiastical landowners (Blair 1994, 108 and fig. 62). As well as the administration of justice and the collection of revenue, the hundred system also had a significant communal element involving popular assemblies, dispute-settlement and peace-keeping (ibid.). All free men of the hundred were in theory expected to attend its four-weekly meetings, which were generally held at open air sites, often at landmarks such as trees, barrows, standing stones, bridges, fords and crossroads.

The division of kingdoms into shires for administrative and fiscal purposes had its origins in Wessex, where Berkshire and Wiltshire were in existence by the late 8th or 9th century (John 1982, 172; Blair 1994, 102). The shires of the midlands appear to have been created essentially during the first decades of the 11th century, and have all the appearance of a comprehensive administrative act in which symmetrical 100-hide hundreds were gathered into groups of 12 to make up the new shires, with centrally placed shire towns (Blair 1994, 102-3; Reynolds 1999, 75). Within the study area, the shires of Gloucester, Oxford and Buckingham are all likely to have been defined as part of this process. The administrative and legal functions of the shires were increasingly centralised at the shire towns, which would have included Oxford and Wallingford within the study area. Archaeological evidence suggests that by the early 11th century Oxford probably looked very impressive, with its stone-fronted rampart giving the appearance of a wall, and its north (landward) gate, at least, flanked by the still-standing tower of St Michael at the Northgate (Fig. 7.21). The shire court met twice yearly, and was the chief assembly of local magnates and thegns who dealt with a wide range of business including geld, military service and other royal transactions (Blair 1994, 107). In the 11th century the shire court was generally presided over by the ealdorman or earl and the bishop, with the king's representative (the sheriff) and representatives of other magnates also present. John Blair cites an example of those attending an Oxford shire court of 1050-2, who included Bishop Ulf of Dorchester, Earl Leofric of Mercia with his household troops, the abbots and communities of Abingdon and Eynsham, thirteen thegns, the portreeve of Oxford, the earl's reeve, and 'all the townsmen' (ibid.). One remarkable find from this period is an ivory seal matrix of *c* 1040, found in Wallingford (Blair 1994, 154; Fig. 7.22). The seal is inscribed 'the seal of Godwine the *minister*'. John Blair has suggested that this could have been the seal of a Godwine known to have been portreeve of Oxford in the period 1050-52, perhaps

lost on a visit to the neighbouring town (ibid.).

One aspect of late Saxon local government that has been receiving increasing archaeological attention in recent years is the administration of justice and the evidence for it in the form of execution sites and the burial grounds of the victims. A cemetery of this kind, recently discovered at Staines, is considered in detail in Figure 7.23 .

Land ownership

In the mid and late Saxon period, power was increasingly to be associated with the ownership of land. The largest estates remained in the hands of the king and the church. Within the study area royal estates are identifiable at Bampton, Headington and Benson (Blair 1994, 108); Reading, Cookham and Old Windsor (Astill 1978 fig. 2); and Kingston (Blair

Fig. 7.20 Administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries in the study area in the late Saxon period (after Hill 1984, maps 174 and 241)

1991, 20). The estates of bishops and monasteries were also large. The bishop of Dorchester, for example, had an estate of three hundreds (Blair 1994, 109), and the bishop of Ramsbury held a large manor at Sonning. Westminster Abbey held the large and rich manor of Staines, and Abingdon Abbey owned the whole of Hormer Hundred. However, from the 9th century onwards, large royal and church estates (particularly those of the old minsters) were increasingly broken up into smaller estates, often created for the maintenance and reward of royal officials and favourites. John Blair (1994, 110-11) describes this process in action at Bampton, where estates were granted by Æthelred to his scribe Ælfwine in 984, and by Edward the Confessor to his household chaplain Leofric. Around Brize Norton (the north *tun* of Bampton) were holdings for 15 royal servants or 'thegns' and one for the king's goldsmith Theodoric (ibid.). A small estate might come to acquire the name of its

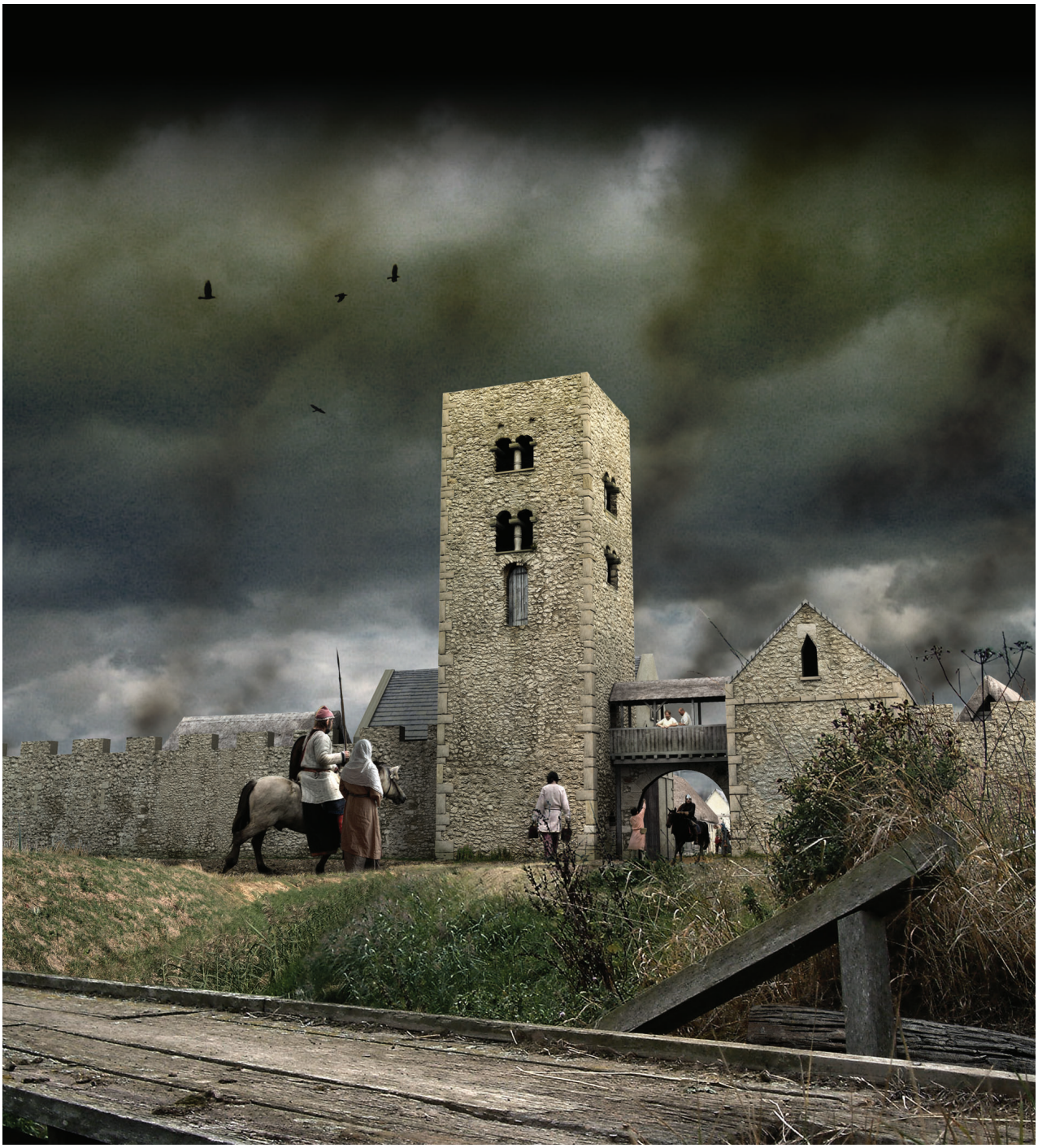


Fig. 7.21 Artist's reconstruction of the North Gate of Oxford as it may have looked on the eve of the Norman Conquest

Fig. 7.22 The ivory seal of Godwine the minister (Wallingford c 1040)

holder, as at Woolstone in the Vale of White Horse, one of a large number of estates held by the 10th-century landowner Wulfric Cufing (Hooke 1987, 130; see also below).

Estates of this type were held by a class of people of the status of 'thegn'. Service at court, and increasingly service as a royal representative in the towns and the countryside, was a characteristic (although not essential) element of thegnly status (Loyn 1962, 215-17), and the leading servants of bishops and abbots could also be referred to as thegns. Five hides came to be regarded as the minimum holding of a thegn (ibid.), and although thegnly status was heritable, it could also be earned. An 11th-century compilation known as *Geðyncðo* lays down economic qualifications for thegnly status: 'If a ceorl prospered, that he possessed fully five hides of his own, a church and kitchen, a bell and a castle-gate, a seat, special office in the king's hall, then was he henceforth entitled to the rights of a thegn'. A merchant who crossed the sea three times at his own expense was also said to be worthy of thegnly status (ibid., 217). The importance of this document for archaeologists lies in the description it gives of the types of buildings and structures that might be expected at the residence of a thegn. The assumption that the thegn would have his own church is particularly significant. Many of these private estate churches emerge in the 12th century as the parish churches of their locality, with the estate itself gaining a formal administrative identity as the parish. The close connection between the thegn's residence, his church and his estate is one of the key factors in our understanding of the evolution of late Saxon estates into medieval manors and villages.

The Yarnton estate: land and power in practice?

The value of land, at least to those below the highest ranks of the aristocracy, lay not so much in control of territory as in the right to its produce. The excavated settlement at Yarnton (and the contemporary settlements at Cassington and Worton) were probably part of a large estate granted to the minster at nearby Eynsham, possibly in the early 8th century (Hardy *et al*. 2003, 9; see also Chapters 3 and 6 above for Yarnton, and Chapter 5, above, for Eynsham). Prior to the foundation of the minster, these farmsteads were probably contributing produce for relatively intermittent renders due to a peripatetic king and his household. Afterwards, if they had become part of a minster estate, they would have found themselves involved in the regular provisioning of a resident ecclesiastical community only 2-3 miles upriver. By the late 7th century, the laws of Ine suggest that there was a fixed rate at which *feorm* was charged for the support of the kings of Wessex (Faith 1997, 38). Whether renders owed to a minster such as Eynsham would have been at a similar level is unclear, but the range of produce specified is of great interest. Ine required, from every 10 hides, '10 vats of honey, 300 loaves, 12 ambers of Welsh ale, 30 ambers of clear ale, 2 full grown cows or 10 wethers, 10 geese, 20 hens, 10 cheeses, a full amber of butter, 5 salmon, 20 pounds in weight of fodder and 100 eels' (ibid.). Was 8th-century Yarnton producing loaves, cows, butter and cheese, geese, hens and ale for the minster as well as for its own needs? Was it the need to produce more surplus to supply the minster that stimulated a revival of hay production in the period cal AD 650-850 – or was this even an

innovation associated with the minster itself? Is the appearance of a granary and a fowlhouse at the site at this time a sign of the need to store larger quantities of grain, and produce more poultry, than before?

Yarnton's later history suggests that it did not remain an estate of Eynsham minster throughout the mid and late Saxon period, but is very likely to have been granted away by the king of Mercia to other individuals. Another probable Eynsham holding, Water Eaton, was granted as a 5 hide estate by king Burgred of Mercia to the bishop of Worcester in 864 (Hardy *et al*. 2003, 3), and Yarnton's fate was probably very similar. Is the name of a 9th- or 10th-century owner of the estate preserved in the name of Yarnton ('Earda's *tun*'; Hey 2004, 23), as the name of the 10th-century landowner Wulfric Cufing is preserved in the name of his large estate at Woolstone ('Wulfric's *tun*', now the parishes of Woolstone and Uffington; Kelly 2000, clxxvi)? What sort of person might Earda have been? We should not necessarily assume that he was a farmer. Wulfric Cufing was a man of considerable wealth, a systematic accumulator of local property; by the middle of the 10th century he owned 15 estates, many of them around the Berkshire Downs. He was no doubt well known in the area, and 'Wulfric's *tun*' must have had a contemporary resonance that is not obvious to us today. It is only the lucky preservation of information about his landholdings in the records of Abingdon Abbey that enables us to form such a clear picture of him, but was he exceptional? Did a similarly energetic and ambitious individual acquire Yarnton in the late Saxon period? It is notable that the evidence for arable intensification is more widespread in Phase 3, in the late 8th and 9th centuries. Could the spread of cultivation onto the clay soils, the adoption of mouldboard ploughing, and evidence perhaps for declining soil fertility be related to increased production at an estate newly transferred to the ownership of a royal favourite or a bishop? Does the reorganisation of the estate at this time, and the construction of the new hall inside a ditched enclosure, have anything to do with the possible arrival of a new owner? We might also speculate whether the appearance of the small cemetery in the 9th century had anything to do with a change of ownership, and whether the seax and enamelled stud found at the site preserve for us a memory of the military obligations of a man of this rank, and his taste for the contemporary fashion of metalwork in Viking and Irish styles.

At the time of the refoundation of Eynsham Abbey, in 1005 (see Chapter 5, above), Yarnton (an estate of 10 hides) was held by a man called Godwine, about whom we have a little information. Godwine gave the estate to his cousin, Ealdorman Æthelmær, for the new abbey, and received land at Chesterton (Oxon) and Studley (Warwicks) in return. If Godwine was the cousin of Ealdorman Æthelmær, he must himself have been a man of some status; Æthelmær was Ealdorman of the western shires of Wessex, a man of royal kin, who had been close to King Æthelred until the fall from favour that prompted his refoundation of the abbey at Eynsham. Susan Kelly has recently suggested that Godwine could have been the son of Ælfheah, Ealdorman of central Wessex, who died in 971 (for Godwine, Yarnton and the possible family connection, see Kelly 2000, clxxxiii-cxci and map 3). Ælfheah's family was also of very high rank, and several family members held office as Ealdormen in Mercia and central Wessex during the mid to late 10th century. They owned extensive local estates, especially south of the Thames in Berkshire. Whether or not the Yarnton Godwine was a member of this family, the charter evidence suggests that the estate was in the hands of people of considerable social and political status, and Godwine probably had a reeve undertaking the day to day management there. The archaeological evidence shows us that another phase of reorganisation had taken place at Yarnton in the 10th century (see Chapter 3). The mid Saxon farmstead was abandoned, and seven small enclosures were laid out on the site. Arable was now focused on fields in the northern part of the township, and the houses of the inhabitants had also shifted northwards, perhaps to the site of the present village church (Hey 2004, 51-2). Who was responsible for this reorganisation? Did the spread of ideas about new methods of cultivation owe anything to the influence of landowners like Wulfric Cufing and Godwine? Such people, and their chief servants, belonged to a small and tightly-knit group of landowning families in control of numerous estates, who must have had both the incentive and the opportunity to transfer profitable ideas from one place to another.

The return of the Vikings

The turbulent politics of the late 10th and early 11th century have left some traces in the archaeological record. During the reign of Æthelred, England suffered a renewed and sustained campaign of Viking attacks, culminating in the defeat of the old West Saxon royal house and the accession of the Danish Viking Cnut, who reigned as king of England from 1016 to 1035. Excavations at Cricklade revealed evidence suggesting that the defences of the old Alfredian *burh* had been partially refurbished during the early 11th century (see Chapter 3, above). The eastern half of late Saxon Oxford has long been thought on topographical grounds to represent a later extension to a smaller original *burh*, and it has been suggested that the defended area might have been extended during the Danish campaigns of the reign of Æthelred. However, this remains unproven archae-

Fig. 7.23 (overleaf)
Feature: The execution cemetery at Staines

AN EXECUTION CEMETERY

Above left: *Burial 277 was laid prone in its grave, and had been decapitated prior to burial, the head being placed next to the pelvis (looking south-east). Prone and decapitated burials both imply a particular fear of the dead*
Above right: *42-54 London Road, Staines, Surrey: plan of the execution cemetery*

Excavations at London Rd, Staines in 1999 revealed 26 graves containing the complete or fragmented remains of 30 skeletons, and a further probable grave with no surviving human remains (Hayman and Reynolds forthcoming; see Fig. 5.32 for location). It is thought that the cemetery extends for an unknown distance beyond the area of the excavation.

At least 16 of the burials appear to have been execution victims, and the remainder may also have been, although there is no conclusive evidence. The predominant orientation of bodies was west-east, although a number were buried on a south-north alignment and there was generally little evidence for formal alignment. The graves were shallow, and in some cases cramped. There were no grave goods and there were two instances of double burials and one triple interment. Most of the bodies were supine, although there were five prone burials and other individuals buried on their side. Six individuals had been buried with their hands tied, and two others appeared to have had their ankles tied. Six had been decapitated; this, together with prone burial, is thought to be a sign of special fear of the dead. The age and sex profile of burials is far from normal and 13 of 20 assignable adults were males, with only one definite female. The group also contained a high proportion of young adults and late adolescents.

AT STAINES

These features are paralleled at a number of other sites (Reynolds 1998), and all are clearly the burial grounds of people executed by hanging and/or decapitation. Radiocarbon dates from Staines point to its use between the 8th and 12th centuries, which agrees with a varied range of evidence from other sites. Many of these sites, like the present one, seem to be deliberately sited on or near to boundaries. Clearly, therefore, the edge of a territory was thought to be the appropriate place for the execution and burial of criminals condemned to death by the increasingly ferocious late Saxon laws. A similar location was often chosen for pagan Saxon cemeteries, and so it is no surprise that some execution sites, including, for example, those in Surrey at Guildown (Lowther 1931) and Ashtead (Poulton 1989; Hayman 1992), overlie earlier burial grounds. Whether late Saxon people considered that the heathen associations of the earlier cemeteries made them suitable resting places for criminals – who by definition were outside the Christian faith – is far less certain. At Guildown and elsewhere the presence of barrows may have been the attraction, with other monumental features, such as the Roman ditches and banks at Staines, providing the attraction to a specific point elsewhere.

The execution site is, in fact, over 1 km from where the association of the manor house, minster church, and a substantial settlement on Binbury island clearly point to a later Saxon central place of some importance (see Chapter 5, above). Reynolds (in Hayman and Reynolds 2005) has argued that from the 7th century onwards, organised judicial machinery lay at the heart of maintaining royal power, leading to the close association of execution sites with burhs, and the very strong possibility that Staines should be regarded as such. This, in turn, may indicate that the 46 burgesses of Staines identified in Domesday Book were resident there, rather than in the manor's London property (as suggested by Maitland 1897, 181), within a settlement that was larger and more important than has hitherto been appreciated.

Above: *An illustration from an 11th-century illuminated manuscript, showing an Anglo-Saxon king presiding over the witan (BL Cotton Claudius BIV, f. 59)*

Below right: *Grave 411 contained A, a supine burial with hands tied behind the back, whose limbs were both under and over those of B, buried on its side (looking south)*

Facing page left: *Grave 413 contained burial A, with its right hand placed over the pelvis of B, and its left hand over the pelvis of C (looking south-east). The occupants of both this grave and grave 411 are arranged in a sexually suggestive fashion, perhaps indicating that these people were convicted of sexual deviancy*

ologically. Viking horsegear found on an island in the river Cherwell close to the east gate of Oxford may derive from burials of Danes living around the Cherwell crossing (see Chapter 5, above). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and a charter relating to St Frideswide's minster, record that in 1002 Æthelred issued an edict ordering the slaughter of all Danes living in the country who, he said, had sprung up 'like cockle amongst the wheat'. The Danes of Oxford sought refuge in St Frideswide's church, only to perish when the church was burnt down by the pursuing mob. In reprisal, Swein Forkbeard, leader of the Danish invasion army, burnt Oxford in 1009. Numerous excavations in the city centre have uncovered layers of burning that appear to be datable to the early 11th century, and it is possible, although it cannot be proved, that this was the result of the 1009 attack. More peaceful relations between the English and Danish population of the study area are suggested by the increasing popularity of St Neot's ware, wheelthrown pottery that is found throughout the region and was probably imported from a Danelaw source in the east Midlands.