Robert Lee Sharp

DEVIANT CHRISTIANITIES IN FOURTH TO SEVENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University
Budapest
May 2016

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by

Robert Lee Sharp

(The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary

Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Your Name**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to define the position of deviant Christianities in the narrative of early medieval Britain. By seeking to understand the transformation of the likes of Arianism and Pelagianism from movements that started as religious disputes within the Roman Empire, into indicators of separate identity in the post-Roman world, this study offers an insight into the political benefits of a deviation from the Nicene form of Christianity. The thesis uses a close analysis of the surviving textual evidence related to deviant Christianities, primarily the works of Gildas and Bede, to establish an argument for the presence of Arianism and Pelagianism in Britain. It also attempts to situate this analysis in relation to the recent scholarly debate concerning the extent to which Christianity endured in post-Roman Britain with a discussion and assessment of the archaeological evidence for Christianity in Britain before AD 597. The thesis targets an area that has been largely neglected by historical scholarship. Despite the limited number of sources and the problematic nature of those relevant sources that do survive, this thesis makes the argument that the impact of deviant Christianities on Britain between the fourth and seventh-centuries, is worthy of further consideration and most definitely, further investigation.

Acknowledgements

Unaccustomed as I am, on this auspicious occasion of thanking those who made this thesis possible, I must say I am indebted to a great number of wonderful people.

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Thank you for reading

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Introduction

According to the Venerable Bede, at some time before AD 590 and his subsequent election to the papacy, Gregory the Great encountered two Angle boys at a slave market in Rome and after enquiring where these children had come from he was informed by the slave trader that they were from "the island of Britain."[1] Gregory then proceeded to ask if the islanders of Britain were "Christians, or whether they were still ignorant heathens" to which he was answered "they are pagans."[2] Clearly Bede, who will be introduced at greater length later in this thesis, had a strong motive in presenting the mission of Augustine in 597 as the success story that converted the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from their heathen paganism to what was for him the true teaching of the Roman church. But this simplistic narrative fails to acknowledge a number of key points. It neglects the fact that a British church had previously been established under the Roman occupation of Britain and that this church survived independently in the west of Britain many centuries after the withdrawal of the Roman legions. It also seems highly probable that Bede would have been aware of Irish missionary work and the founding of the Abbey of Iona in 563, given his later praise of the Irish Church and its Christian past.[3]

The fact that the Roman church required a mission to be sent at all in 597 cannot be ignored. However, this thesis will consider the idea that Christianity had endured in Britain, even though its area of influence had diminished somewhat following the withdrawal of

[1] "quia de Brittania insula." Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.1 Quotations will be given according to the following editions: Latin text in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. Charles Plummer, in *the Perseus Digital Library*, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0135 (accessed April 25, 2016); English translation in Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 103.
[2] "Utrum idem insulani Christiani, an paganis adhuc erroribus essent inplicati." Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.1: *Historia Ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 103.
[3] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. V.23; "Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum"; *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 325.

Rome. If Christianity had survived in Britain then why was there a need for a Christian mission at the end of the sixth century? This thesis will analyse the surviving evidence and explore the argument that the Christianity that existed in Britain between the fourth and seventh centuries had deviated from the Christianity of Rome. One of the key questions at this point is if, as modern historical scholarship suggests, the Romano-British were not wiped out by the Anglo-Saxons and their religion survived, why then did the Roman church not know of or possibly not accept the continual existence of Christianity in Britain? The central point of this thesis comes in the form of another question, could the reason for this isolation of the British church be because it had deviated?

Throughout this study I will be mainly discussing two forms of Christianity that the historical sources infer were present in Britain from at least the fourth-century onwards: Pelagianism and Arianism. Both deviations placed a greater importance on the role of man in Christian theology and were arguably the most influential doctrinal controversies of the fourth-century. Though their status as doctrinal deviances was central to their origin and history, Arianism and Pelagianism as movements came to embody elements beyond Christian thought. From the offset the labels 'Arian' and 'Pelagian' were politically charged. This thesis will highlight the political importance of both Arianism and Pelagianism in fourth to seventh-century Britain and expose their value in the creation of a new identity for the post-Roman kingdoms of the early medieval period. Originally the so-called Arian heresy concerned a dispute within the church regarding the status of the Holy Trinity and in particular the son's relationship to the father. Arius (d. 337), was the man whose beliefs gave rise to the Arian controversy; at least in its fourth-century state. A letter dated c.320 that has been attributed to Arius, addressed to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, states that the son is "a perfect creature of God, but not like one of the creatures, a product, but not like one of the

things produced."[4] In essence Arius suggested that Christ held a divine status above the other creations of the Christian God but that ultimately as the son was created by god he could not be of the same status as god; a view which was clearly unacceptable to those Trinitarians who believed in the divine equality of the Holy Trinity.

However, it is not possible to define an 'Arian' as someone who followed the doctrines of Arius, as the Late Antique historian Ralph Mathisen writes, "the term Arian can cover many forms of Christian belief" and no person would have identified themselves as an "Arian," rather this designation was "imposed" upon them by their opponents.[5] I agree with Mathisen, any understanding of the beliefs of the "Arians" is largely reliant on Nicene Christian accounts and as these accounts are incredibly hostile to "Arians," their validity in revealing the actual beliefs of those people they were describing is tenuous at best.[6] The greatest opponent of Arianism in the fourth-century, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (298-373), labelled Arianism a heresy. For him, it suggested that Christ was a creature and as such "God was too high or idle to offer salvation himself" and that Christ had "no exact vision, understanding or knowledge of the father." [7] The *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* credits Athanasius as the promulgator of the "Arian" terminology and reinforces the idea that "Non-Nicene Christians were labelled as Arian, regardless of the substance of their theological positons."[8] From the offset "Arian" was a negative term, it implied an isolation from what the Nicenes considered to be orthodox and could be used as a term of denigration

[4] Arius cited in Richard P.C Hanson. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God, The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (London: T and T Clark, 1988), 7.
[5] For more on different groups who were categorised under the umbrella term "Arian," including a definition of the terms *homoi-ousians, homoians* and *anomoians*, see Ralph W. Mathisen, "Barbarian 'Arian' Clergy, Church Organisation, and Church Practices," in *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, ed. Guido. M Berndt and Roland Steinacher (Dorchester: Ashgate, 2014), 146.
[6] "Nicene" refers to believers of the Nicene Creed, first adopted at the Council of Nicaea 325 and subsequently re-affirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381. In essence the Nicene Creed was an attempt to establish conformity regarding the belief in and status of the Holy Trinity.
[7] Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians*, cited in Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.
[8] Lewis Ayres "Arius and Arianism." In *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History: The Early, Medieval, and Reformation Eras*, ed. Robert Bernedetto, (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 47.

against any religious opponent regardless of whether or not they actually followed the ideas of Arius.

Following the death of the Emperor Valens in 378, his successor, Emperor Theodosius I, suppressed Arianism and ensured the status of Nicene Christianity as the orthodox Christianity of the Roman Church.[9] Importantly, however, Arianism had already been accepted amongst the Goths and it subsequently spread among many of the other "Germanic" kingdoms that came to occupy the post-Roman west. Forms of Christianity that were referred to as Arianism endured even as late as the seventh century until the conversion of the "Arian" Lombard kings. In his survey of the migration period, Guy Halsall writes that Arianism appealed to the likes of the Goths, Burgundians and Vandals because by the late fourth century, adherence to Arianism acted as "a marker of non-Roman military identity."[10] In essence they used Arianism to mark a clear division between the religion of the "Germanic" elite and the larger Roman population.

In similarity to Arianism, the form of Christianity labelled, Pelagianism, offered another deviance from the beliefs of the Nicenes. Pelagius (c350-418) was a monk and ascetic most probably born in Britain around the mid-fourth century.[11] He was attributed with the belief that "a person has a collaborative role to play in salvation" and that "each human being was not born with original sin corrupting one's nature."[12] Pelagius held the view that as humanity was not condemned by original sin and though divine grace is beneficial to humanity, it is not imperative to salvation, ultimately humanity has the free will to sin or to act in a righteous way. In addition to this view, Pelagian custom differed in comparison to

[9] For more on the history of Arianism in the fourth century up to the death of Valens see Hanson. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God.*
[10]Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376-568 AD* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 469.
[11] Roderick Rees Brinley, *Pelagius Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), xii
[12] Henri Rondet, "Grace." In *The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology,* ed. James R Ginther (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 76.

that of the Nicenes in that Pelagaius did not agree with infant baptism. The main criticism of Pelagianism from the Nicenes was that it placed too much emphasis on the power of man rather than god. Pelagius himself wrote that "just as by the example of Adam's disobedience many sinned, so also many are justified by Christ's obedience."[13] In this sense, humanity has the power to decide whether to emulate sinners like Adam or alternatively to follow the righteous example of Christ. Such an emphasis on a more personal religion seemingly would have removed a person's reliance on intermediaries and the need to worship in a church. In similarity to Athanasius's campaign against the Arians, the theologian and bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was arguably the greatest critic of Pelagius. The views of Pelagius were denounced at the Council of Carthage in 418 and Pelagius himself was excommunicated. This, however, in similarity to the history of Arianism, did not eradicate Pelagianism and, as this thesis shall discuss, Pelagianism endured in some regions until at least the seventh century. There are many similarities between the treatment and subsequent history of Arianism and Pelagianism and as Herren and Brown write, these forms of Christianity were not isolated from each other as "there is an Arian strain in Pelagianism."[14]

The description "deviant Christianities" was chosen as it is more neutral than the terminology more commonly used in the study of this topic. The word deviant has already been applied to an aspect of British history by Helen Geake who used the term "deviant burials" as a classification of Anglo-Saxon burials that appeared to be "non-normative," this term has since been accepted by many other archaeologists.[15] The use of the term traditionally applied to the views of Arius and Pelagius, "heresy," constrains the historian to repeat the same notions of bias that the original surviving sources from the period have. It

[13] Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century* (New York: Boydell Press, 2002), 100.
[14] Ibid., 52.
[15] H. Geake cited in Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35.

should be acknowledged that both Arianism and Pelagianism were not minor movements or merely disagreements between theologians but were actually the accepted religions of a large number of people. Many of the most powerful Germanic successors to the Roman Empire in the west including the Goths and the Vandals are deemed to have been Arian and Pelagianism had a large impact on Northern Africa.

The terms "orthodox" and "unorthodox" again imply too much about the doctrinal validity of the arguments of the two opposing sides. In these formative centuries for the early church it is difficult to argue that any degree of orthodoxy had really been established as beliefs were constantly being challenged and ecumenical councils were aplenty. "Deviant Christianity" as a term is not without its flaws. It does, however, lend itself to this type of investigation as it suggests that it was other Christians believing themselves to be orthodox who labelled those with alternative views as heretics. John Barclay summarised this notion in his discussion of deviance theory, writing that "what makes an act socially significant as deviant is not so much that it is *performed*, as that it is *reacted* to as deviant and the actor accordingly labelled."[16] The historian Jakob Balling also used the term "Deviant Christianity", though in relation to later Medieval movements including Waldensianism in the eleventh century and Wycliffism in the fourteenth century.[17] For him these movements "no longer belong to catholic Christianity because essential elements of that faith are thrown overboard."[18] As shall be demonstrated in chapter three, the Britons between the fourth and seventh centuries had either not accepted or had "thrown overboard" many key tenets of the religion of Rome. In contrast to its negative modern connotations, the word deviant in this

[16] John M. G. Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity," In *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, ed. David G. Horrell (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 293.
[17] Jakob Balling. *The Story of Christianity From Birth To Global Presence.* (Michigan: Wm. B.Eerdmans Publishing co, 2003), 180.
[18] Ibid., 180.

thesis will be used to denote a form of Christianity that had deviated from the Christianity that eventually became the norm, though not necessarily the correct form.

The use of the term "deviant" does of course imply a degree of variation or a move away from some other fixed or established form. For the purpose of this thesis, for the fourth and early fifth century, the deviance is largely in opposition and away from the views of the Nicenes. However from the latter half of the fifth century onwards I judge these forms of Christianity to have deviated not simply from the Nicene belief but also from the Church of Rome more completely. Thus the situation should be viewed not simply as a deviance within a Roman sphere of Christianity, it should also be recognised that the Christian religion of Britain, largely due to its subsequent isolation, though it remained a form of Christianity, became quite distinct from its counterpart in Rome. Whereas Arianism, for example, in the fourth century, was very much an internal issue within the church of the Roman Empire, with the fall of the Empire in the west, Arianism became a religion of non-Romans. In the fourth century Arianism was at times and under certain Emperors including Constantius II, not seen as deviant in the Roman Empire but rather was the religious norm and there still remained a possibility that it could become the established form of Christianity ahead of the Nicene belief. In contrast by the sixth-century Arianism was clearly seen by writers such as Gregory of Tours and Pope Gregory the Great as an external threat to the church of Rome and was a religion more closely associated with the successor kingdoms of Rome; something of a "barbarian" religion.

The terminology associated with this period, still used in modern scholarship as the result of an inability to deviate from established terms, is loaded with prejudice and bias from bygone ages. Although we do still use these outdated words, for want of better universally understood terms, we should acknowledge their implications. In this introduction I have already used the term "Germanic," a term that the historian Walter Goffart feels should be

"banished from all but linguistic discourse" in late antique studies as it is anachronistic and not descriptive of the variations of the peoples it is used to refer to.[19] The need to define these nations as distinctly Germanic owes a great deal to nineteenth-century German nationalism and, until relatively recently, nationalist ideologies have governed the scholarly reconstruction of the interaction between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. In similarity it is nearly impossible to conduct a study of Arianism and Pelagianism without using the word "heresy" but it is important to recognise the baggage that comes with this term.

Arianism and Pelagianism in the sixth century were of a completely different nature to the original views of Arius and Pelagius. According to Maurice Wiles, the form of Christianity labelled the "Arian heresy" was the "archetypal heresy" and so naturally anyone espousing a different view could quite easily be labelled an Arian regardless of their own actual belief.[20] There are sources written by Nicene authors which describe believers of Arianism as heretics or sometimes even as pagans, despite the fact that the author quite clearly knew that these Arians viewed themselves as Christians. Take for example, the work of the fifth-century Gallic Christian writer Salvian (c.400-490), *On the Government of God.* When referring to the Christianity of the Goths and in particular the translation of the Bible into the Gothic vernacular by Ulfilas, Salvian suggested that because the translation was so bad, the Goths were "heretics but unknowingly".[21] A deviant Christian saw their own version of Christianity as the orthodox one and would not have viewed themselves as a heretic. I will argue that acceptance of a deviant form of Christianity gave a group of people the opportunity to accept Christianity with all of its benefits, including divine kingship and monastic education, without accepting a subservient relationship under the Roman church.

[19] Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5.
[20] Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy.*
[21] Salvian, *De Gubernatione Dei* 5.2. 5-9 cited in Herren, and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity,* 46.

The necessity to study Arianism and Pelagianism in Britain in this period should not be deterred by the fact that there is a lack of first hand surviving sources written by Arians and Pelagians. This lack of sources in comparison with the abundance of surviving material concerning the Roman church in early Medieval Europe makes a study of deviant Christianity in this period all the more compelling as it has the potential to break the chains imposed on the subject by these dominant and biased sources.

Historiography

Current historiography tends to focus more on heresy in either Late Antiquity or the late medieval period and the split it caused in the Roman church. Yet the study of heresy (or preferably deviant Christianity) in the early medieval period is largely neglected. Though iconic 'heresies' such as Arianism and Pelagianism sprang up during the days of the late Roman Empire in the fourth century, these forms of Christianity were by no means extinguished even in the early seventh century.

At this point it seems appropriate to discuss the myriad of constraints and labels that historiography has placed on the historical narrative of the period. This is an age rarely defined with much positivity; in the fourteenth century, Petrarch wrote of an innate period of darkness between antiquity and his own age and is often credited with the creation of the concept of the Dark Ages. [22] In the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, scholars saw the classical past as being of integral importance to the present and the rejuvenation of classical ideals and learning as a righteous return to human progression. For these thinkers the centuries in-between were merely transitory "Middle Ages" of little importance and little progress, thus making the enlightened task of reigniting civilisation all the more worthwhile.

[22] John H. Arnold, *What Is Medieval History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 9.

A greater amount of academic study focuses on Arianism as a religious "heresy" in the fourth century and subjects such as the implications of the Council of Nicaea in 325 as opposed to Arianism from the fifth-century onwards.[23] This is largely due to the fact that there is a greater amount of surviving and relevant source material available concerning the Arian debate of the fourth century. Pelagianism has been studied more often for its theological implications than for its political ramifications. As some letters that are attributed to Pelagius have survived, most secondary literature tends to focus on the teachings of Pelagius and the events of his life, rather than the wider effects that Pelagianism had on the early medieval period.[24] There has been a strong interest in Pelagius the man and the heresiarch and this is to some extent also partly due to the great importance given to his most fervent critic, Augustine, by late antique historians.[25]

Concerning Pelagianism in Britain in particular, despite the fact that Pelagius was born in Britain sometime around the mid-fourth century, there is a debate as to whether Pelagianism actually had any impact on Britain whatsoever in the fourth century. Michael Jones suggested that the teachings of Pelagius had their most dramatic impact in the Mediterranean during Pelagius's life time and that there is no evidence to prove that Pelagius ever returned to his native Britain or indeed influenced fourth century Christianity in Britain.[26] In this view Pelagianism was not an issue in Britain until the mid-fifth century and the missions of St Germanus of Auxerre which I will discuss in further detail later in this

[23] The clearest example of this type of focus is Henry M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1908). This work ends with the chapter "the fall of Arianism" placed during the reign of Theodosius in the late fourth century, and does not consider post-Roman Arianism. For the most comprehensive study of the life of Arius, including his philosophy and theology see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Cambridge: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002). Wiles offers a study of Arianism over a longer period of time and traced its history through to Newton and eighteenth-century Arianism, however, the brunt of his work is once again focused on the fourth-century. Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*.

[24] For a compendium of the writings attributed to Pelagius see Roderick Rees Brinley, *Pelagius Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991).

[25] The most influential of which was Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). See also Peter Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," *Journal of Theological Studies* 14, no. 1 (1968): 93–114.

[26] Michael Jones. *The End of Roman Britain*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 183.

thesis. Herren and Brown offered the argument that the Pelagian view of Christianity was incredibly influential in the development of the British church. They acknowledge that there is too little information from fifth-century Britain to argue that "Pelagians were numerically in the majority or exercised control over the whole region".[27] But ultimately their viewpoint is that "the influence of Pelagianism in the British Isles throughout the period we are considering [fifth-tenth century] was substantial- indeed, 'defining'."[28]

Until recently there has been little on the non-religious aspects of Arianism in the early medieval west. However, a book published in 2014, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed,* a collection of essays with topics ranging from Ulfila and Gothic Arianism to Arianism in Africa, suggests that there is a renewed interest in the topic at least in continental European scholarship.[29] To the best of my knowledge, there is only one title in modern scholarship that specifically tries to deal with Arianism in Britain, aside from those concerning Isaac Newton and eighteenth-century British Arianism. Meritxell Perez Martinez's contribution to the aforementioned book, *Britain: Approaching Controversy on the Western Fringes of the Roman Empire* attempts to understand Arianism in a British context. In this article Martinez seeks to reveal the role of Arianism in Britain in the fourth century "through the evidence provided by its counterparts during the same years" and as such he focuses mainly on sources from Gaul and Hispania.[30] This is certainly a useful exercise and offers many possible comparisons between the state of the church in Britain and mainland Europe. However, Martinez's work once again is largely focused on the outcome of various church councils and does not go beyond the fourth century. Yitzhak Hen's

[27] Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 100.
[28] Ibid., 100.
[29] Guido Berndt, and Roland Steinacher, eds., *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed* (Dorchester: Ashgate, 2014).
[30] Meritxell Perez Martinez, "Britain: Approaching Controversy on the Western Fringes of the Roman Empire," in *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, ed.Guido Berndt and Roland Steinacher (Dorchester: Ashgate, 2014), 297.

forthcoming *Western Arianism: Politics and Religious Culture in the Early Medieval West* should prove to be highly insightful as it promises to discuss the political elements of Western Arianism, an area that certainly requires more consideration.[31]

There has been no previous suggestion that Arianism was present amongst the Anglo-Saxons aside from my own undergraduate dissertation.[32] As this current thesis will place more emphasis on the Britons, I will only briefly elaborate on my previous work here. Although in this previous study I was unable to prove the existence of Arianism amongst the Anglo-Saxons definitively, I was able to construct an argument that suggested that at the very least some form of deviant Christianity was probable amongst the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms prior to 597 and the Catholic mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great. I investigated the presence of Arianism among many of the post-Roman kingdoms with whom the Anglo-Saxons would have come into contact with; not least of all the Franks who in my opinion at least up to the conversion of Clovis in 507 were probably Arians.[33] Reconsidering some of my previous theories I have since realised that one should not be so confident in trying to understand Arianism, or Pelagianism for that matter, as having any strict set of identifiable features.

Methodology

Our main sources for Pelagianism and Arianism in Britain in the fourth to seventh centuries, Gildas and the Venerable Bede, are tainted with religious bias against the

[31] Yitzhak Hen, *Western Arianism*: *Politics and Religious Culture in the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
[32] "An Investigation into the Possible Presence of the Arian Heresy in Anglo-Saxon England in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries," BA second year Dissertation, University of Kent, 2010.
[33] This conclusion is based largely around information from the letters of Gregory of Tours that suggest Clovis married the Burgundian Clotilde in 493 whilst the Burgundians were still Arians, the sister of Clovis, Albofled, married the Arian king Theodoric, and the fact that before 496 Gregory says Clovis's sister Lanthechild was an Arian. In addition to Gregory, Avitus of Vienne also alludes to an attempted conversion of Clovis by Arians in his *Epistula*. For a detailed analysis of the Arianism of Clovis see Sharp, "An Investigation into the Possible Presence of the Arian Heresy," 12-14.

"heretics." This thesis will seek to analyse the evidence pertaining to deviant Christianity in these sources without taking their accounts and narratives at face value. A consideration of the reasons behind the selective approach to the history adopted by these authors is important to this study. But of almost equal importance to the information that these sources do tell us about deviant Christianity are the implications of the information that they may have chosen to omit. In sixth-century Britain there are no surviving texts written by Arians and the few texts that have come down to us from Arian authors from elsewhere generally date from the fourth and fifth centuries. Likewise those sources that deal with Pelagianism are usually continental sources that refer to the theological debate rather than what it meant to practice a deviant form of Christianity. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is a vital source for understanding the impact of the Pelagian heresy in Britain. Yet once again care must be taken in accepting Bede's account without hesitation as he wishes to embellish the achievements of the Gallic Bishop Germanus of Auxerre (378-448) who was charged with the duty of supressing Pelagianism in Britain. Bede was also writing in the eighth century and was therefore relying on other sources rather than his own personal experience to provide his narrative. The British monk Gildas, who was probably writing in the early sixth century is certainly more contemporary to the events of the period concerned in this thesis. However, his work runs essentially as a tirade against the faithless Britons and claims that the coming of the Saxons was ultimately a punishment from god. This can be useful as Gildas's account of what he believes to be "faithlessness", is for the historian, evidence of a probably Nicene Christian's views of what constituted heresy in Britain in the sixth century. But due to this source's fervent distaste for its subject, it needs to be analysed with caution and corroborated with archaeological sources and continental texts, where possible.

Despite this heavy reliance on sources that were hostile to deviant Christianity, it is important to try to acknowledge and understand the perspective of the people who were

labelled heretics. I propose that historians of the post-Roman/early medieval West should research this field with the ideas of Natalie Zemon-Davis and the cultural history movement in mind. Zemon-Davis writes that history should be "decentred" and that rather than focusing purely on grand narratives, it is important to study topics in their own right in order to place them within a global context. Zemon-Davis supports the concept of studying microhistory and advocates "the refusal to privilege a single path or geographical location as the model for assessing historical chance."[34] This is perfectly relevant to the period and the central issues discussed in this thesis. The lack of sources written by deviant Christians in Britain should not deter an attempt to write a history of deviant Christianity. The fact is that there is some direct evidence for their existence in addition to a fair amount of suggestive indirect material and this demands that at the very least the presence of deviant Christianity is acknowledged in the historiography of the British Isles. Culture is so diverse and individual to each group of people (if not each individual) and the perception of which culture is superior to another is defined entirely through the eye of the historian. Although the Nicenes were eventually triumphant in establishing their form of Christianity and dominating the surviving sources, the influence of deviant Christianity in the early Middle Ages should be considered.

In addition to the written texts, though indeed it is difficult to distinguish archaeological finds with Christian connotations as being definitively orthodox or heretical, archaeology can in some cases support or contradict the written sources. Archaeology in this thesis will not be used to distinguish between deviant or Nicene Christian objects as this is almost impossible to achieve through material culture alone. Rather it will be used to assess the extent of the survival of Christianity in Britain after the withdrawal of Rome and before the mission of Augustine in 597. In chapter four I will offer an assessment of some of the

[34] Natalie Zemon-Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World," *History and Theory* 50 (2011): 194.

current archaeological scholarship related to this topic and will offer commentary on how this research may be used for further study in relation to deviant Christianity.

I acknowledge the fact that it is almost impossible to prove anything definitively in the period in focus as the sources are so scanty. As such this thesis will act as an investigation and exploration of possibilities rather than a definite argument for the importance of deviant Christianity in early Medieval Britain. Those sources that we do have, do, however, make explicit references to the presence of Arianism and Pelagianism in Britain between the fourth and seventh-centuries. Henceforth the purpose of this thesis is to ensure that in addition to the faith of the Roman church and Anglo-Saxon pagan beliefs, deviant Christianities are at the very least acknowledged as part of the religious history of Britain between the fourth and seventh centuries.

Chapter 2 – Post-Roman-Britain

In order to investigate the extent to which deviant Christianies influenced post-Roman Britain, it is necessary to establish some key points about Britain in this period. Before analysing Bede and Gildas, in this chapter I will assess current historical theories and comment on the degree to which any modern model can truly provide an accurate perception of this period of upheaval and change. There are a multitude of debates concerning these tumultuous centuries. How far had the inhabitants of Britain been truly "Romanised"?[35] To what extent did the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms share any sense of common identity?[36] The identity labels that would eventually come to define the people of Wales and England predate the migration of the Anglo-Saxons in that they represent ingrained notions of "Roman" and "Germanic" heritage for the Britons and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms respectively. At the same time, the coalescence of a number of different peoples in a migration process that lasted over several centuries inevitably led to the transformation and creation of new identities. During the period of migration that this thesis focuses on, a single political unit of Anglo-Saxon England did not exist and although the British kingdoms under their mutual subjugation by Rome had to an extent been unified, by the late fifth century, the Britons appear to have reverted back to regional kingdoms and identities. The main difficulty that the ambiguity over the extent of Romanisation of the Britons and the extent of the Anglo-Saxon migrations brings is that it makes judging the extent to which there was any sense of religious

[35] On the one hand the likes of Kenneth R.Dark, *From Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300-800*. (Leicester: Continuum International Publishing, 1994) argue for continuation and the survival of a highly Romanised Britain after 410. On the other hand Jones. *The End of Roman Britain* suggests that the Britons had never embraced Roman culture and thus it was a rejection rather than a conquest that ensured Roman Britain did not endure.

[36] The diversity of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is clearly shown in Barbara Yorke excellent overview, Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England (London: Routledge, 1997)

conformity for both the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons respectively extremely difficult. If the Britons were Romanised to a minimal extent then it could be expected that Roman attempts to establish religious orthodoxy in the fourth-century would have had minimal impact on the Britons. Likewise if the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms did not have religious unity, then a far greater diversity in terms of varied religious beliefs can have been expected.

It is integral to acknowledge that the notion of an "English" people did not exist until arguably the ninth century and the reign of King Alfred. Though Bede wrote a history of an "English people" in 731, he was writing at a time when many kingdoms were vying to establish hegemony over the territory that would become England.[37] Bede mentions periods when both the Kingdom of Kent and his homeland, the Kingdom of Northumbria, held a degree of overlordship over the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. However, this rule was based on tribute and diplomatic superiority rather than a direct power stemming from a centralised "English" monarch. Even during the reign of King Alfred in the ninth century, the English nation as we understand it today did not exist; much of the country remained divided and a large chunk of it was ruled by the Viking Danelaw. Similarly, the people who we refer to as Britons, who had supposedly been unified under the rule of the Romans in Britain, split into a number of different kingdoms in Wales and the southern lowlands of Scotland. Guy Halsall describes the fifth-century process of transformation for the Britons "at the empire's demise" as similar to the "failed state" of twentieth-century Yugoslavia.[38] He suggests that there was a return to a pre-Roman tribal system of rule and subsequently infers that Britannia had not been a thoroughly Romanised province. Thus in addition to the lack of sources written by deviant Christians, this lack of political cohesion in the fifth and sixth centuries means that

[37] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).
[38] Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: Facts and Fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),100.

even when we do have evidence for deviant Christianity, for the most part it cannot be used to draw any universal conclusions for Britain.

In addition to this, Bryan Ward-Perkins points out that neither the Britons nor the Romans feature prominently in modern England's perception of its own national heritage. He demonstrates how this is largely due to the mentality and attitudes towards a non-Anglo-Saxon, British past espoused in the nineteenth century.[39] Ward-Perkins quotes Edward Freeman, writing in 1869, that "it has turned out much better in the end that our forefathers did thus kill or drive all the people whom they found in the land…[since otherwise] I cannot think that we should ever have been so great and free a people as we have been for many ages".[40] This sentiment is strange to the modern reader and the image it presents of Anglo-Saxon superiority over the supposedly inferior Celtic peoples highlights the author's lack of impartiality.

Modern migration period scholarship no longer accepts this model of slaughter and invasion and acknowledges that whilst violence and warfare undoubtedly occurred, assimilation and interaction also took place.[41] Although many nineteenth-century theories have been removed from our history, I would argue that modern scholarship has not yet made the most of the removal of this shackle. If the Britons were not systematically wiped out of Eastern Britain, though the Anglo-Saxon elite came to dominate society, it is important to consider what influence those remaining Britons would have had on the culture and the religious make up of Britain between the fourth and the seventh century. In particular for this thesis, if the Britons were Christianised in the late-Roman period and they were not wiped out

[39] Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?" *English Historical Review* 115, no. 462 (2000): 513–33.
[40] Edward Augustus Freeman, *Old English History for Children* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1869). Cited in Ward-Perkins, "Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?:" 158.
[41] See again Dark, *From Civitas to Kingdom* and Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur*, pp 87-101 and 157-183 in particular the chapter "Continuity or Collapse" which offers a good overview on current academic thought regarding the end of Roman Britain and "The Dark Matter of Arthur" in which Halsall offers a reinterpretation of the traditional narrative.

in Eastern England in the Anglo-Saxon period, why does history neglect the influence that British Christianity might have had on Anglo-Saxon religion?

It seems highly unlikely that in this period, the Romano-British Christians who were not slaughtered by the Angles and the Saxons, did not exert any religious influence on the newcomers.[42] The Anglo-Saxon elite was probably exposed to Christianity by the very fact that the people they now ruled over were likely to have been Christian. Naturally, an exposure to Christianity does not necessarily imply a conversion to Christianity and it is entirely possible that the apparently pagan religion practiced by the Anglo-Saxons subsumed the Christianity of the previous inhabitants of lowland Britain.[43] However a comparison with continental models of conversion shows that native Christian populations were often successful in converting their new conquerors over a period of time. This was the case with several kingdoms including the Visigoths, Lombards and, if Clovis was an Arian before his conversion to Catholicism, even the Franks.[44] Thus whilst a conversion from Romano-British Christianity in lowland Britain to Anglo-Saxon paganism is possible, it is important to consider the possible impact of a native Christian population on the invaders.

As late as the seventh century there were many localised identities in the form of tribes and newly emerging kingdoms in both Anglo-Saxon and British dominated areas. Such a diverse range of regional identities and peoples cannot simply be categorised as pagans as there is no sufficient evidence to clearly define the religion of most of these kingdoms. They

[42] The term Romano-British in itself applies an acceptance of the Romanisation of the Britons and the idea that from the Romans and the Britons there was a creolisation that led to a mixed Romano-British culture. It also implies the survival of a Romano-British population following the Anglo-Saxon migration in opposition to the outdated conquest and slaughter interpretation.

[43] In the same vein that unity did not exist amongst the Britons in the fifth-century, neither did it for the Anglo-Saxons and therefore I hesitate to use the term Anglo-Saxon paganism freely in relation to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the fifth and sixth century. Very little is known about the religion of the Anglo-Saxons during the Migration Period and as the Anglo-Saxons were not a single homogenous entity there could have been variant forms of paganism amongst the kingdoms and it is impossible to rule out the chance that there might have been some form of Christian influence amongst them.

[44] The Franks were deemed to have been Arians originally but were eventually converted to Catholicism. Collins, for instance, expresses the view that Clovis may never have been a pagan, in Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000* (New York: Palgrave, 1991), 112.

may well have practiced a pagan religion but it is likely that diverse peoples ranging from the Jutes living on the south coast of England to the Bernicians living in the north near the border of Scotland practiced different religions. There was probably no form of political union between the two at the time. The East Saxons, for example, in similarity to the continental Saxons, traced their genealogies back to the god Seaxnet as opposed to the god Woden who was used in the genealogies of all other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[45] This seemingly minor difference serves as evidence for variation in religious practice.

To speak of a shared Anglo-Saxon identity in the fourth to seventh centuries is clearly anachronistic. Undoubtedly there are common traits amongst those kingdoms who would come to be known as Anglo-Saxons in later centuries in terms of material culture. But in the words of the German archaeologist Heinrich Harke, "ethnicity is in the heart not in the blood" and at this stage of ethnogenesis, the heart seems to have related to ethnicity on a regional basis rather than a national one.[46] The Angles, Saxons and other contingents who made the journey west to Britain did not do so as a single people. In fact the migration to or invasion of Britain was far from the only option available to the people of northern Germany and southern Denmark at the time. Gregory of Tours writes that a man named Odoacer was leading a force of Saxons against the Romans and the Franks at Angers sometime between 464-468.[47] Though not certifiable, it is quite possible that this was the same Arian Odoacer who would depose the last Western Roman emperor and become king of Italy. If indeed this was King Odoacer, this is a clear example of a Saxon army under the leadership of a non-Saxon Arian, possibly of Scirian descent (the Sciri were previously in the Hunnic confederacy), contemporaneous to the arrival of the Angles and Saxons in Britain. [48]

[45] Barbara Yorke, "The Kingdom of the East Saxons," *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1985): 14.
[46] Heinrich Harke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis," *Medieval Archaeology* 55 (2011): 4.
[47] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. O. M. Dalton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 2.14 (19).
[48] Robert L. Reynolds, and Robert S. Lopez, "Odoacer: German or Hun?" *The American Historical Review* 52, no. 1 (1946): 46.

Likewise c.560 around twenty thousand Saxon migrants are said to have taken part in the Lombard invasion of Italy.[49] This is not only evidence for continuous migration from the Saxon homelands as late as the latter part of the sixth-century, as Peter Heather suggests, but it also shows that Saxon identity could be maintained even within a larger Lombard army.[50] Though it is almost impossible to sufficiently answer, it is worth posing the question: to what extent were pagan Saxons under an Arian Christian influenced by the religion of their leader?

The acceptance of a deviant form of Christianity allowed the new kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England and the British kingdoms of Wales the opportunity to retain an identity independent from Rome whilst absorbing Christianity. Although subsequently both the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons would convert and become members of the Roman church, during this period of migration, invasion and conversion, the Western empire had essentially fallen. With the fall of the Western empire, the Roman church had also at least temporarily lost its influence on Britain. By the beginning of the fifth century when the Roman legions withdrew from Britain, ecclesiastical ties were somewhat severed. Even during the councils of the fourth-century, there is evidence that the British bishops who attended the church councils disputed the nature of the Trinity and showed a "reluctance on their part to approve the term homoousion."[51] This would suggest that even in the fourth-century the Britons had taken issue with tenets of the Nicene faith and as the British historian Gildas's writings show, their deviance had not been subdued by the sixth-century.

[49] Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: Migration, Development and the Birth of Europe*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 281.
[50] Ibid., 281.
[51] Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 52.

Chapter 3: Textual Evidence for deviant Christianities

Gildas *The Ruin of Britain*

The Ruin of Britain, written by a man named Gildas offers arguably the clearest evidence available from the period for the existence of deviant Christianity in fifth and sixth-century Britain. *The Ruin of Britain* is not a straightforwardly reliable source and can be problematic for a number of reasons; not least of which is that Gildas did not intend for his work to be read as a history. Nevertheless this source is vital to almost any study of fifth and sixth-century Britain and is the key source for this thesis as Gildas offers both explicit reference to what he deemed to be heresy before his time and a number of more cryptic references that suggest the existence of rival forms of Christianity in his own age.

As the sole extant source written by a near contemporary British writer concerning Britain in the fifth and sixth-centuries, *The Ruin of Britain*, is influential yet also extremely problematic in nature. The information we do have about the author himself or indeed the specific context in which he wrote is minimal. It is likely that Gildas was British, however Halsall has pointed out that etymologically there is nothing to suggest a British origin in his name and in fact the name Gildas has more in common with contemporary Gothic names.[52] It is likely that Gildas was born in a part of Britain unoccupied by the Anglo-Saxons; on the banks of the river Clyde according to the tradition of the ninth-century life of St Gildas written in Brittany, though this account also tells that Gildas slew a dragon near Rome and in

[52] Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: Facts and Fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 53.

other areas does not seem entirely reliable.[53] In his introductory chapter, Gildas stated that he decided to undertake this work at the behest of "the devout prayers of my brethren" and he intended this text to be "true to the faith and well intentioned towards every noble soldier of Christ."[54] Thus this would suggest that he recorded his work for the sake of his monastic brethren and that he intended his work to act as a guidebook for his fellow believers and a warning to chastise his enemies. It is likely that Gildas wrote for an audience of his countrymen, however, Gildas's actual intended target audience remains obscure. To reaffirm, the elusive Gildas never saw his work as a historical account. Undoubtedly *The Ruin of Britain* had a clear agenda, to offer exemplary examples of correct Christian behaviour so as to inspire true faith and to admonish the "heretical" behaviour of the Britons and scorn them for their corrupt ways. Gildas, whatever his background and identity may have been, was no impartial historian. His work should be considered a moral guidebook or sermon with a semi-historical introduction supplied for the reader purely as a prelude to situate his thoughts and complaints.

Clearly, as with any historical source, an established date of production is integral to understanding the context in which the author was writing in. But yet again there is no explicit reference in the work of Gildas to confirm when he actually wrote the *The Ruin of Britain*. The oldest surviving manuscript of *The Ruin of Britain* has been dated to the eleventh century, some five centuries after the time of Gildas.[55] Sir Frank Stenton provided the archetypal dating of *The Ruin of Britain* to be "a little before the year 547 by a British monk

[53] The monk of Ruys, *The Two Lives of Gildas by a Monk of Ruys and Caradoc of Llancarfan*, trans. Hugh Williams, (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1990) in *Celtic Literature Collective*, http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/gildas07.html (Accessed April 27 2016)

[54] "fratrum religiosis precibus coactus … et amicale quibusque egregiis chrisi tironibus, grave vero et importabil apostatis insipientibus." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*: Latin text in Gildas, "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," in *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, vol. 3, ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH, Auct. Ant. 13 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 40; English translation in Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and other works*. Tr. Michael Winterbottom. London: Phillimore and Co.Ltd , 1978).

[55] Thomas D. O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date.* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) , 3.

named Gildas."[56] Though this date has been constantly challenged since, historians have rarely dated the book any later than this.[57] This mid-sixth century dating has been based largely around the names of the five princes whom Gildas mentions in part two of *The Ruin of Britain.* In addition, in reference to the Siege of Mons Badonicus (Badon Hill) he cryptically wrote "was the year of my birth; as I know, one month of the forty-fourth year since then has already passed."[58] This extract can be interpreted in a number of ways but it seems to imply that Gildas was born forty-four years after the siege. The *Annales Cambriae* (The Welsh Annals), written in the tenth century, were used as evidence for this system of dating as they record the death of King Maglocunus, still living in Gildas' text, as occurring in the year 547 and Gildas therefore must have written before that date.[59] Yet the *Annales Cambriae* also record that the siege of Mons Badonicus took place in the year 516.[60] Thus if Gildas was writing forty four years after the siege, then there is clearly a contradiction in the accuracy of the *Annales Cambriae* as this would mean that Gildas wrote after the given date of the death of Maglocunus.[61] Halsall sums up the nature of the issue well in saying that "it is unlikely that Gildas wrote before 480/490 or much after about 550; beyond that we cannot go."[62]

Ultimately the source was written after the withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain and before the Augustinian mission of 597. As the purpose of this thesis is to investigate deviant Christianity in Britain from the fourth to seventh-centuries, any written source dating from this seventy year period 480AD to 550AD is highly relevant and the

[56] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
[57] For a more comprehensive dating of *The Ruin of Britain* see O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas* and for a recent summary see Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: Facts and Fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 53-55.
[58] "Quique quadragesimus quartus ut novi orditur annus mense iam uno emenso, qui et nativitais est. Gildas," *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.26; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 28.
[59] O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas*, 53.
[60] Ibid., 53.
[61] Ibid., 53.
[62] Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur*, 54.

complaints of Gildas about his contemporaries whom he deems "heretics" are most valuable. In addition to the historical section of *The Ruin of Britain*, parts two and four in which Gildas denounces wicked kings and priests respectively, are useful in revealing the attitude of the author towards deviancy. Though they often receive far less focus in most modern scholarship, these sections also offer potential proof that certain so-called "heresies" were still a contemporary issue for those of the Catholic faith in the late fifth to early sixth century.

Gildas provides the most explicit reference to the presence of the so-called Arian "heresy" in Britain in part one of the *The Ruin of Britain*:

> "This pleasant agreement between the head and limbs of Christ endured until the Arian treason, like a savage snake, vomited its foreign poison upon us, and caused the fatal separation of brothers who had lived as one. And as though there were a set route across the ocean there came every kind of wild beast, brandishing in their horrid mouths the death-dealing venom of every heresy, and planting lethal bites in a country that always longed to hear some novelty- and never took firm hold of anything.[63]

The language is intensely dramatic and this extract undoubtedly plays a major part in the Biblical style narrative that Gildas attempted to construct in which the Britons recurrently enjoy a state of peace until their faithlessness brings about their own destruction. The historical implications, however, are clear: Christianity in Britain was far from what Gildas would consider to be orthodox. Herren and Brown believe that the mention of "the head and the members" refers not only to Christ and his people but also to the separation of Christ from the other members of the Trinity, something Gildas clearly detested.[64] This outbreak and tumult of heresy follows a description of a temporary restoration to piety and peace some ten years after the Diocletian persecution, which would place the period of peace in

[63] "mansit namque haec christi capitis membrorumque consonantia suauis, donec arriana perfidia, atrox ceu anguis, transmarina nobis euomens uenena fratres in unum habitantes exitiabiliter faceret seiungi, ac sic quasi uia facta trans oceanum omnes omnino bestiae ferae mortiferum cuiuslibet haeresos uirus horrido ore uibrantes letalia dentium uulnera patriae noui semper aliquid audire uolenti et nihil certe stabiliter optinenti infigebant." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.12; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 20.
[64] Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*.

313.[65] Gildas then goes on to discuss the usurpation of Magnus Maximus in 383 and his subsequent conquests in Gaul, Italy and Spain.[66] This implies that the so-called Arian heresy was rife in Britain between 313 and 383 and this seems entirely plausible in comparison to the situation on the continent. The Council of Nicaea in 325 had been called to clarify the church's position on the status of the Trinity but it did not sufficiently answer the Arian question as the Council of Constantinople in 381 was still required to once more condemn Arianism. Gildas offers no defeat of or end to Arianism in Britain and his focus turns to a scourge and punishment of the sins of his countrymen at the hands of the Picts and the Scots.[67]

The most remarkable observation regarding Pelagianism in relation to Gildas is that there is no direct reference to it in *The Ruin of Britain*. This is surprising as, even if Pelagianism had not been as widespread in Britain as was previously thought, the mere fact that Pelagius had been born in Britain would provide a perfect example of a faithless Briton who actually created and subsequently spread a far-reaching "heresy".[68] This example would have suited the motives of *The Ruin of Britain* and would have been perfect evidence, further to that of Arianism, of the religious sin of the Britons that would help Gildas justify the divine retribution and the calamities of his own time. Why then did Gildas not mention Pelagianism in his text?

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* will be discussed at further length in the next sub-chapter but it is worth mentioning here that although most of Bede's history of the fifth and sixth-century is based on the writings of Gildas, he chose to include

[65] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1:12
[66] Ibid: 1:13; *The Ruin of Britain*, 20.
[67] Ibid: 1:14; *The Ruin of Britain*, 21.
[68] O'Loughlin, for example, argues that Pelagianism had only a minor influence in Britain but had more of an impact in Italy and Africa. Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World, and God in Early Irish Writings* (London: Continuum, 2000), 16.

Pelagianism in his book. In particular, Bede writes a lengthy account of how the pious Bishop Germanus of Auxerre visited Britain on two occasions to suppress Pelagianism.[69] It is odd that Gildas does not recount these events as they would have fitted his moral narrative well. Bede revels in the pious success of the bishop and uses this example as a story that demonstrates the power of the servants of his true faith and also denigrates the faithlessness of the Britons. It is justifiable to assume that Gildas chose not to write of the suppression of Pelagianism and the success of Germanus as there were still deviant forms of Christianity in Britain at the time he was writing; hence the purpose and motives of the book.

Hugh Williams, in a footnote of his translation of *The Ruin of Britain*, makes a clear case that Gildas would most likely have known of Pelagius and his treatises.[70] Gildas attributes a quote in reference to Britain as a province "fertile of tyrants" to Porphyry, whom he also terms "the mad dog of the east."[71] However, Williams shows that Gildas mistakenly took words written by Jerome in his *Epistle 133* in reference to Porphyry to have actually been the words of Porphyry himself.[72] The importance of this is not that Gildas made a mistake but that his mistake has revealed that Gildas must have been familiar with the writings of Jerome including the book *Against the Pelagians*. As Williams argued "we cannot, therefore, argue from his silence that he 'knew nothing of the Pelagian heresy.'"[73] Gildas therefore, was most probably aware of Pelagianism and as *The Ruin of Britain* shows, was extremely hostile to heresy. Might it be possible that Gildas chose not to scorn Pelagianism in his writings because he was sympathetic to the teachings of Pelagius? Any attempt to designate Gildas as a Pelagian would almost certainly be inconclusive as quite

[69] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1:17-1:21: *Historia Ecclesiastica, Ecclesiastical History*, 65-72
[70] Gildas. *The Ruin of Britain*. Translated by Hugh Williams. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008. 86
[71] "inquiens, 'fertilis provincia tyrannorum." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain,* 1.4; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 29.
[72] Gildas. *The Ruin of Britain*. Translated by Hugh Williams. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008. 86
[73] Gildas. *The Ruin of Britain*. Translated by Hugh Williams. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008. 86

simply there is not sufficient evidence to substantiate such a claim. But it remains remarkable that Gildas failed to include either the negative example of the presence of the "Pelagian heresy" amongst the Britons or the positive example of Germanus's suppression of Pelagianism and thus a Pelagian Gildas or at least a Gildas sympathetic to some Pelagian ideas should be considered a possibility.

Another possible reason for the lack of any explicit mention of Pelagianism in *The Ruin of Britain* could be as a result of Nicene attitudes towards heresies in general. To Gildas it mattered not which form of heresy a heretic espoused; all forms of heresy were equally detrimental in their poisonous nature. This type of view is common amongst Nicene authors across Europe in the fifth and sixth century who saw pagans and heretics as being on a par with each other in terms of their faithlessness and forthcoming damnation. Further to this, Pelagianism and Arianism shared many similarities and William Swan argued that Pelagius's theology in relation to grace was "a direct consequence of an Arian understanding of Christ."[74] Referring to the passage quoted earlier in this chapter, Gildas tells how the coming of the Arian heresy was "as though there were a set route across the ocean" and subsequently many other heresies followed in its wake."[75] Gildas, therefore did not need to make such a defined distinction between the various heresies as the Arian heresy was seen as the parent heresy and those that followed in its wake were merely its spawn.

It is not until sometime after 446 and a British victory over the Picts and Scots that Gildas returns to his reproach of the post-victory excesses and perfidy of the Britons who are at this point described as worshipping "Satan as an angel of light."[76] Gildas mentions that the reason for the success in this battle against the Scots and Picts was that the Britons were

[74] William Declan Swan, *The Experience of God in the Writings of Saint Patrick: Reworking a Faith Received* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2013), 175.
[75] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.12; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 20.
[76] "exceptio satanae pro angelo lucis" Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.21; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 24.

"trusting not in man but in God"[77] This quote may be interpreted in two ways. It is entirely possible, if not probable, that Gildas refers simply to a restored faith in Christianity and that rather than trusting in themselves, the Britons placed their trust in god and were subsequently victorious. But perhaps this focus not on "man but in God" is a reference to the accusation that the Arians and some other deviant forms of Christianity saw Christ as a creature (not of the same status as god) and that victory in battle was given as a result of some form of religious awakening and restoration. Gildas describes a brief British respite from their punishment following this success in battle. But although they had caused the withdrawal of the Picts and the Scots, Gildas writes that "the people did not retreat from their own sins."[78] Despite the victory over the Scots and the Picts a lack of consistency and will to follow what Gildas believed to be the right path to salvation, led to further punishment.[79] It should be noted that the reference to faith in God over man might have referred to Pelagianism instead of Arianism as the Pelagians were also accused of placing too much emphasis on humanity. They were said to have believed in the ability of the human will to choose salvation without divine assistance.

Throughout *The Ruin of Britain*, Gildas makes references to what for him is heresy but he does not specify which heresy in particular he is referring to. The lexis he uses and the images he conjures of heretical people and practices are fairly consistent in their style throughout. When Gildas mentions denial of truth, human impetus on the power of man over the power of the divine or when he metaphorically creates visceral images of decay or poison, I would argue that he is referring to deviant Christianity, albeit not explicitly. In part four of the text, Gildas admonishes the clergy of his own time saying "They hate truth as an

[77] "Non fidentes in homine, sed in deo." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.20; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 24.
[78] "nec ciues a suis sceleribus" Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.20; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 24.
[79] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1:21; ; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain*, 24.

enemy, and love lies like favourite brothers. They look askance at the just poor as though they were dreadful snakes; and, showing no regard for shame, they respect the wicked rich as though they were angels from heaven."[80] The image of serpents is used once more as it was in the extract when Gildas first mentioned the coming of Arianism and the obvious biblical connotations represent the way in which Gildas viewed these priests. The mention of the priests treating the poor in a corrupt way does not necessarily imply heresy or deviance in terms of theological beliefs, taken alone this could be a reference to the excesses of otherwise accepted Christian priests. However, the mention of a hatred of truth, for me, implies a degree of deviance from Gildas's orthodoxy. To imply that these priests hated truth to such a degree would mean that surely in the eyes of Gildas they could no longer be Christian; they could though be believers of a deviant form of Christianity. As shown above, an individual's personal belief that they were practicing an orthodox form of Christianity did not ensure that other Christians recognised them as a Christian in this period.

In similarity, as a precursor to further destruction from the attacks of the Picts and the Scots, Gildas refers to the people of Britain having a "hatred of truth and its champions and the love of falsehood and its contrivers".[81] This once again suggests adherence to a deviant form of Christianity. It might refer to unbelief in terms of paganism or some other non-Christian form of worship. But again it is key to note that Gildas does not attack paganism in *The Ruin of Britain*. Paganism does not appear to have been a threat to the Britons until the coming of the Saxons and even after the arrival of the Saxons in Britain, at least up until the period Gildas was writing, there is no mention of forced conversion or a reversion to the historic paganism of the Britons. Despite the lack of a pagan threat to the spiritual wellbeing

[80] "Iustus inopes immanes quasi angues torvis vultibus conspicantes et sceleratos divites absque ullo verecundiae respectu sicut caelestes angelos venerantes." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain,* 4.66; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain,* 62.
[81] "Ad exeqenda pacis ac veritatis insignia et fortis ad scelera et mendacia." Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1:21; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain,* 24.

of the Britons in *The Ruin of Britain*, Gildas undoubtedly believes the Britons not to have been true Christians from the arrival of the Arian heresy until his own period when the clergy continued to act contrary to his morals.

Following the siege of Mons Badonicus, loosely dated to the late fifth to early-sixth century, Gildas ends part one of his book discussing those who are the devil's "slaves, too, not of Christ, who is God, blessed for ever….Indeed, why should their own countrymen conceal what surrounding nations are aware of and reprove?"[82] This emphasis on Christ being "God, blessed forever" could be a fitting Christian description of the power of Christ juxtaposed against those following the devil. However, I propose that this could be a reference to deviant Christianity. It is nearly impossible to classify any specific deviant form of Christianity because the available sources we are consigned to work with are written by aggressors against these forms of Christianity. The Arianism of the sixth-century Lombards, for example, was not the Arianism of Arius in the fourth century and obviously these deviant Christianities were never so clearly defined as the "heresies" that they became under the judgement of Nicene authors. Nevertheless, Gildas's addition of Christ as "God blessed forever" is interesting in the sense that the key accusation against the Arians and other divergent branches of Christian thinking was that they devalued the status and power of Christ.

Was Gildas here re-affirming a belief in the Holy Trinity? Gildas's mention of fellow-citizens not following that which other nations already knew is a further testament to the deviant nature of the religion that was being practiced in Britain. In the sixth century many kingdoms and peoples that had practiced forms of Christianity that deviated from that of Rome were converted from their own form of Christianity to that which Rome saw as

[82] "sed diablo potius quam Christo, qui est benedictus in saecula deus, non tam diceptavero, quam deflevero, quippe quid celabunt cives, quae non solum norunt, sed exprobant iam in circuitnationes?" Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain.* 1.26; "De excidio et conquestu Britanniae," 85; *The Ruin of Britain,* 29.

orthodox. The Visigoths, the Alamanni and the Franks, converted from a form of Christianity that had been referred to as Arian, to the Catholic faith. It would be interesting to know which other "nations around" Gildas was referring to. He could be referring to Ireland or Gaul but it is also possible that he referred to people who had previously been Christians, albeit "heretical" ones.

Bede *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Despite around two centuries separating Gildas from Bede and his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731, Bede's work is also a vital source for this study. Bede hailed from the powerful Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria and as a monk living in the monastery of Jarrow, he was Catholic and unsurprisingly hostile to deviant Christianity. Unlike Gildas, Bede did aim to write a historical account, albeit an ecclesiastical one. Nevertheless he used *The Ruin of Britain* extensively in his discussion of the history of Britain for the period before 597. Although he relied heavily on *The Ruin of Britain*, Bede does add new details to the narrative. Bede gives the name of the British tyrant Vortigern who is said to have invited the Saxons to Britain as mercenaries and also the names of Hengest and Horsa who, as he later writes, were the leaders of the first Anglo-Saxon group to arrive in Britain. This has led some historians to speculate that Bede had access to an earlier and more complete version of *The Ruin of Britain*; the oldest surviving manuscript of Gildas's work is from the eleventh century and Bede was writing in the eighth century so this seems highly probable.[83]

There are approximately 140 surviving manuscripts of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.[84] Four of these manuscripts have been dated to the eighth century and,

[83] Michael Jones, *The End of Roman Britain.* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996).
[84] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. A. M. Sellar (New York: Dover Publications, 2011),xix.

this therefore, is in stark contrast to the singular eleventh-century copy of Gildas' text. The earliest manuscripts of Bede's text are near contemporaries (within a century) of the original text.[85] Though it is not possible to be certain, this probably implies that the text that survived was close to the author's original text.

In addition to Gildas, Bede also consulted Orosius, Pliny and Constantius's *Life of Germanus* as primary sources for his history.[86] Notably, however, aside from his use of the work of Gildas, Bede makes no reference to British sources. In similarity to Gildas, Bede held an equally dismal view of the religious virtues of the Britons. The clearest example of his complete disdain for the Christian Britons is his description of the slaughter of 1200 British monks from the monastery of Bangor at the hands of Ethelfrid, the pagan king of Northumbria, prior to the Battle of Chester in c. 616.[87] Rather than lament the massacre of Christian monks by pagans, as one might expect a Christian author to do, Bede saw this act as the fulfilment of Augustine's prophecy that "the faithless Britons, who had rejected the offer of eternal salvation, would incur the punishment of temporal destruction."[88] Bede frequently uses the word *perfidia* (faithlessness) in relation to the Britons. This is noteworthy, as Alan Thacker highlights, as the word was commonly used in the fourth century in relation to the doctrines of both Arius and Pelagius. Subsequently *perfidia* became synonymous with Catholic descriptions of both heretics and Jews.[89]

Bede's open hostility towards the Britons was motivated by a number of reasons but primarily it seems to have been driven by Bede's understanding of the existence of a British

[85] Ibid., xix.
[86] Leo Sherley-Price, introduction to Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 25.
[87] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 2:3. *Historia ecclesiastica*, *Ecclesiastical History*, 107-108.
[88] "Ut etiam temporalis interitus ultione sentirent perfidi, quod oblata sibi perpetuae salutis consilia spreverant." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. 2.2: *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 107.
[89] Alan Thacker, "Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel," in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 129–49.

Christianity that deviated from his own. Though it is beyond the temporal scope of this thesis, Bede's perspective on the state of the Britons in his own age is relevant here. Bede's stance is most telling of the development, or rather the lack of development, of the relationship between the British church and the Catholic one (both Roman and English) in the centuries that preceded his own. Under the date 725-731, Bede praises the Irish and the Picts who are "united in Catholic peace and truth to the universal Church."[90] Yet of the Britons, who had a history of Christianity dating back far longer than the Irish or the Picts, Bede says they "have a national hatred for the English, and uphold their own bad customs against the true Easter of the Catholic Church."[91] The Britons were apparently "opposed by the power of God and man alike."[92] Clearly, for Bede, the British church was not deemed worthy of Christendom and was heretical and therefore just as damned as the pagans. In fact for Bede, heretics appear to have been worse than pagans. Bede presents the Anglo-Saxons at the time when they were pagan as simply innocent and unaware of the "true faith" whereas he bitterly sees the Britons as having knowledge of the "correct" religion but choosing to disregard it; denial of the truth for him was worse than obliviousness.

However, what becomes apparent here also, is that for whatever reason, the Catholic church and subsequently the Christianity of the Angles and Saxons, was likewise not deemed correct or appropriate by the Britons. Bede held the view that the hatred of the Anglo-Saxons went hand in hand with a British defiance and deviance from the authority of the Catholic Church. In a sense what can be seen here is an evolution from the early fifth-century adoption of deviant Christianity as a form of separation from Rome to a context in the eighth century

[90] "Et catholicae pacis ac ueritatis cum uniuersali ecclesia particeps existere gaudet." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 5.23; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 325.
[91] "Brettones, quamuis et maxima et parte domestico sibi odio gentem Anglorum, et totius catholicae ecclesiae statum pascha minus recto, moribusque inprobis inpugnent". Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 5.23; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 325.
[92] "Tamen et diuina sibi et humana prorsus resistente virtute." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. V.23; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 325.

whereby the British still continue their separation from the Roman Church but in addition also choose to remain aloof from their enemies, the now Christian Anglo-Saxons. Both groups saw themselves as Christians but by practicing a deviant form of Christianity with distinctly separate dates of worship and practices from the Anglo-Saxons, the Britons were able to create a clear boundary between themselves and their rivals. In a similar vein, Bryan Ward-Perkins suggests that by the mid-sixth century the Britons seem to have become "solidly Christian" and that the presence of the pagan Anglo-Saxons actually hastened the full Christianisation of the Britons.[93] Similarly, it is plausible that the seventh-century conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the Roman-Catholic church hardened the resolve of the Britons to maintain their own practices and assert their own deviant branch of Christianity.

Bede's chastisement of the Britons is interesting as he mentions that they shamefully did not try to convert the "Saxons" and the "Angles." It is notoriously notable that Bede summarises the period of 440-590 without mentioning any specific events, individuals or battles.[94] Echoing Gildas, Bede does, however, recount that in addition to their other "unspeakable crimes" the Britons "never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who dwelt with them in Britain."[95] This sentence is both problematic and highly revealing at the same time. The fact that 150 years of history is condensed into such a small chapter suggests one of several possibilities. It could be that there was nothing worthy of recording in relation to "ecclesiastical history" at this time, which seems most unlikely. Or perhaps Bede's own knowledge of this period was limited due to a lack of source material, which seems entirely plausible. However, I argue that it is likely that Bede had knowledge of this period besides that which he took from Gildas but he did not include a more detailed account of this period

[93] Ward-Perkins, "Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?," 515.
[94] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, I.22.
[95] "Qui inter alia inenarrabilium scelerum facta … ut numquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Brittaniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1.22; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 72.

because it would not serve one of his primary aims, that is, of highlighting the importance of the Kingdom of Kent and St Augustine's mission in the conversion of the English.

One of the most irksome contemporary features of the British church for Bede was its celebration of Easter on the "wrong" date. Yet this was not an isolated example of British *perfidia*. As Lynch pointed out, "There was something about the way the British Christians performed baptism that the Roman missionaries did not like, but no source says explicitly what it was."[96] This is evidenced in the words Bede attributed to Augustine in conversation with some high ranking British bishops in 603. Augustine was willing to allow the continuance of some British religious customs that conflicted with those of "the universal church" if, in addition to preaching the faith to the English and holding the celebration of Easter in accordance with Catholic belief, the Britons would "complete the Sacrament of Baptism."[97] The idea that baptism was not being completed according to the rite of the Roman Catholic church suggests once again that British practice deviated.

As Bede does not elaborate on the exact nature of the deviance we cannot say with any certainty which aspects of the British rite Augustine found unacceptable. However, one theory is that the British liturgical practice concerning baptism involved only a single immersion and that it is likely that Augustine insisted on the Catholic practice of triple immersion.[98] The Catholic practice of triple immersion involved the invocation of the Holy Trinity. The possibility that the Britons did not acknowledge the Trinity during the baptism could once again be evidence for a deviance from the practice of the Roman church and the connotations this would have in relation to such forms of deviant Christianity as Arianism are

[96] Joseph H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 42.
[97] "universalis ecclesie…..ut pascha suo tempore celebretis" Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1.22; *Historia ecclesiastica* ; *Ecclesiastical History*, 72.
[98] For further elaboration on this theory and other such theories related to the "incomplete" baptism of the British including possible omission of the chrism, despite its age, for a highly insightful discussion of the problem see: Henry Austin Wilson. "On Some Liturgical Points Relating to the Mission of St Augustine," In *The Mission of St. Augustine to England According to the Original Documents; Being a Handbook for the Thirteenth Centenary*, ed. Arthur James Mason (London: Cambridge University Press, 1897).

blatant. For the church of Rome, the controversy surrounding both the status of the Holy Trinity and the correct way to perform the ritual of the baptism had been resolved in the fourth century. The fact that at the beginning of the seventh century the Christian Britons still maintained deviant beliefs and practices that were at odds with Rome is further testimony to the isolation of the religion of the Britons from the fifth century onwards. That they were able to maintain these deviant practices at all suggests that Roman ecclesiastical decisions had no direct influence over the Christians of Britain in this period.

Bede recorded in his *Ecclesiastical History* a long history of deviant British Christianity that dated as far back as the coming of Arianism. In terms of a direct reference to Arianism, Bede simply regurgitates the passage previously quoted in this thesis from *The Ruin of Britain* that referred to the "Arian heresy" as a "poisonous error" that opened the doorway to "every sort of pestilential heresy" for a people "ready to listen to anything novel."[99] Yet in stark contrast to Gildas, who fails to mention Pelagianism, Bede devotes several chapters to its impact on the British church and its suppression in two visits by the Gallic bishop Germanus.[100] Bede even decided to include a letter from as late as 634 written by Pope John IV to the Irish church, which was still closely connected to the British church at the time, mentioning that "the pernicious Pelagian heresy has once again revived among you, and we strongly urge you to expel the venom of this wicked superstition from your minds."[101]

In Bede's account, Bishop Germanus and his companion Lupus of Troyes are sent by the Gallic church to Britain in 429 as "a few years before their arrival, the Pelagian heresy introduced by Agricola, son of Severianus a Pelagian prelate, had seriously infected the faith

[99] "Mansitque haec in ecclesiis Christi, quae erant in Brittania, pax usque ad tempora Arrianae uesaniae, quae, corrupto orbe toto, hanc etiam insulam extra orbem tam longe remotam, ueneno sui infecit erroris; et hac quasi uia pestilentiae trans oceanum patefact, non mora, omnis se lues hereseos cuiusque, insulae noui semper aliquid audire gaudenti, et nil certi firmiter obtinenti infudit." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. 1.8; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 54-55.

[100] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, see 1:17 to 1:21.

[101] "Et hoc quoque cognouimus, quod uirus Pelagianae hereseos apud uos denuo reuiuescit; quod omnino hortamur, ut a uestris mentibus huiusmodi uenenatum superstitionis facinus auferatur." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 2.19; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 139.

of the British Church".[102] Though for Bede the important facts here are undoubtedly the numerous miracles Germanus performed in restoring the true faith to the Britons, what is key here for this study is that Bede references British Christians in 429 at all. Allowances must be made for possible embellishment by Bede in order to glorify Bishop Germanus in that he suggests that "great crowds gathered from all quarters to greet the bishops" upon their arrival.[103] But regardless of the size of the crowds, the fact that Germanus was sent to contend with a deviant form of Christianity in Britain is evidence that there was some form of Christianity in Britain at this time. As Bede dates the coming of the Saxons to the year 449 there is no reason to suppose that the Christian Britons Germanus came into contact with were limited to Wales and the west. As Germanus visited Britain in both 429 and subsequently 438 it is likely that he was dealing with a British church that spanned the region of both England and Wales.

Furthermore, according to Bede, this British church had been infected by the Arian heresy c. 325 and as far as can be inferred still required "correcting" in 438. Unlike the case of Pelagianism whereby a man of God gloriously defeated the "heresy", neither Bede nor Gildas nor any of the continental sources tells of the defeat of Arianism in Britain. It does seem odd that if it was quashed by a notable figure or movement, this is not mentioned, as it would serve Bede's purpose in juxtaposing the holy Roman church with the faithless British church well.

It is possible, however, that as Arianism was viewed by both Gildas and Bede as the "poison" that opened the door to many other errors, it did not need a specific instance in which it was defeated. As we have seen already from a Nicene perspective all deviant forms

[102] "Ante paucos sane aduentus eorum annos heresis Pelagiana per Agricolam inlata, Seueriani episcopi Pelagiani filium, fidem Brittaniarum feda peste commaculauerat" Bede, *Ecclesiastical History,* 1:17; *Ecclesiastical History,* 65.
[103] "Ibi coueniens ex diversis partibus multitudo excepit sacerdotes" Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1:17: *Historia Ecclesiastica; Ecclesiastical History, 66.*

of Christianity were equally detrimental and as Herren and Brown suggest "there is an Arian strain in Pelagianism."[104] Even despite Germanus's second intervention, Bede notes that from just one generation after 440 "then were all restraints of truth and justice so utterly abandoned that no trace of them remained."[105] From this entry there is a gap of 156 years in Bede's history and the next time he mentions the Britons in 603 they are still deviant Christians in their refusal to follow the Roman dating of Easter and conform to the formula of Roman baptism.[106] In relation to other post-Roman kingdoms, including the Burgundian and Vandal elites who tried to assert their own separation from the populace with the use of a separate religion, I argue for the application of this same logic for the Britons in their adoption of deviant Christianities. The Britons appear to have used deviant Christianity as way of confirming their separation from the Church of Rome and as a means of keeping their religion distinct from that of the Anglo-Saxons.

Other sources

The accounts of Gildas and Bede have been chosen as the focal sources for study as they are the most contemporary sources to the time period in question written by authors who were living in Britain. In this sub-chapter I will briefly discuss some other sources that mention deviant Christianity in fourth to seventh-century Britain. The importance of Constantius's fifth-century life *Life of St Germanus* for this study lies in the fact that Bede's account of the two visits of Germanus to Britain to combat Pelagianism follows Constantius almost word for word. Henceforth in order to understand the validity of Bede's account it is worth briefly considering the validity of Constantius's account. Historians differ over the exact century in which the *Life of St Germanus* was written but generally speaking it is dated

[104] Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 52.
[105] "Ita cuncta veritatis ac iustitiae moderamina concussa ac subuersa sunt, ut earum non dicam vestigium." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1.22 ; *Ecclesiastical History*, 72.
[106] Ibid., 1:22.

between 460 and 480.[107] Ultimately this would mean that it was written either in the lifetime of Germanus or within a matter of decades of his death. Constantius clearly wished to extol the virtues of Germanus as a miracle-worker and the ideal image of a bishop; as he nears the shores of Britain on his first visit he calms a storm whipped up by the Pelagian demons, subsequently exorcises these demons and goes on to perform healing miracles.[108] On the occasion of one such miracle, Germanus is also said to have healed a blind girl. However, Nick Higham suggests that this should not necessarily be taken literally but that the healing of this girl "symbolizes Germanus' recovery of Britain from the spiritual blindness of the Pelagian heresy."[109] With such a strong motive in presenting the bishop as a holy man, this *vita* is problematic as a historical source. However Constantius's (and therefore Bede's) account is corroborated by Prosper in his chronicle entry for the year 429 in that he also claims the British church has been infected by the Pelagian heresy and that Germanus had been sent by Pope Celestine to Britain to combat it.[110] The key element here is that these two continental sources, although they differ slightly in terms of detail, confirm two major points. Firstly that Pelagianism was strong enough in Britain to warrant a mission to be sent to quash it, and secondly that the British church required external forces to act against Pelagianism as presumably the British church was unable to do so itself.

Much of the additional continental material that might be considered in a study of deviant Christianity in Britain from the fourth to seventh-centuries is largely theological in nature and consists of work directed against those beliefs that were termed heretical by the

[107] For an overview of historiography concerning Constantius's *Life of St Germanus* in addition to a discussion of the validity of the *vita* as a historical source, see Nick Higham, "Constantius, St Germanus and Fifth-Century Britain," *Early Medieval Europe* 22, no. 2 (2014): 118.
[108] Constantius, "The Life of Saint Germanus of Auxerre," 1:13 and 1:15. English translation in *Soldiers of Christ, Saints and Saint's Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed.Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, Tr.Frederick R. Hoare (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 86 and 88.
[109] Higham, "Constantius, St Germanus and Fifth-Century Britain,"125.
[110] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma* Chronicon, cited in Higham, "Constantius, St Germanus and Fifth-Century Britain,"125.

Nicenes. There are additional written sources concerning this period that were written in Britain at a later date. Produced in 828 in Wales, the *History of the Britons*, which was later attributed to a certain Nennius, would seem by its very title to be a useful source though unfortunately in relation to this study it is both ambiguous and highly dubious in its accuracy. The writer of *The History of the Britons* used both Gildas and Bede as sources for his history though he also includes an origin myth that the Britons traced their lineage back to a man named Brutus who was apparently a descendant of Aeneas.[111] The legendary figure Arthur is also first mentioned in *The History of the Britons* along with a list of battles he is said to have won.[112]Germanus of Auxerre is mentioned at length in *The History of the Britons*, however, in this source he spends most of his time in Britain, with the aid of the British clergy, chasing the tyrant king Vortigern and admonishing him for his incest.[113] Arianism and Pelagianism are not mentioned once in *The History of the Britons*. It is particularly surprising that Pelagianism goes unmentioned given that the author had access to *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and Bede gives Pelagianism as the reason for the mission of Germanus. The *History of the Britons* sheds very little light on the nature of deviant Christianities in Britain and this in itself is probably more telling of the attitudes of the British church in the ninth-century than it is of the reality of Britain from the fourth to seventh-centuries.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, with their earliest composition dating to around the end of the ninth century, are also mostly devoid of mention of deviant Christianity. In the Canterbury manuscript entry for the year 381 it says that "In those times the heresy of Pelagius arose throughout the world."[114] Arianism once again receives no mention and there is no direct reference to British Pelagianism, merely an acknowledgement that it had spread

[111] Chapter 10 in Nennius, *The History of Britain*, vol. 8. trans. John Morris, Arthurian Period Sources (Chichester: Phillimore and Co, 1980).
[112] Chapter 50 in Nennius, *The History of Britain*
[113] Chapter 39 in Nennius, *The History of Britain*
[114] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. Michael Swanton (London: Phoenix, 2000), 10.

"throughout the world." Again this is more telling of the context in which the source was written in the ninth century than the events of the fourth to seventh centuries. At this time the greatest threat to Catholic Wessex and the emerging English kingdom came not from followers of deviant Christianity, but rather from the attacks of the Norse pagans. Therefore unsurprisingly it is pagans who receive the most attention in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles: Arianism and Pelagianism are no longer a threat to the Catholic English church.

Every one of the written sources discussed above is problematic in one respect or another in relation to the information they provide concerning deviant Christianity in Britain, be it the strong bias and motives of an obdurately hostile Catholic author or a simple neglect or lack of care for the recording of historical detail or dates. But ultimately this investigation has shown that the Britons were under the sway of forms of Christianity that were described as Arianism and Pelagianism at one time or another and for the Britons this deviation in terms of their religion seems to have been related to a desire to maintain a separate identity. One area where the sources are not conclusive, however, is in terms of the scale and the impact that these deviant Christianities had. Bede talks of crowds of people affected by the Pelagian "error" greeting Bishop Germanus and Gildas writes of Arianism as a huge evil that poisoned Britain and led to a flood of other heresies. How far does this portrayal reflect contemporary realities? In the next chapter I will discuss the extent to which archaeology can shed light on this issue.

Chapter 4 – Archaeology in relation to deviant Christianity

As should now be apparent, the written sources that refer to deviant Christianity in the fourth to seventh centuries offer a great deal of conflicting information. Both Bede and Gildas write that Arianism had affected Britain and so it would seem likely that the Britons had practiced some form of deviant Christianity. They were still viewed as unfaithful in the eyes of the Catholic Church at the time when Gildas was writing and Bede offers no history on the period between 440 and 590 whatsoever. Where textual history is insufficient how far can archaeology reveal the reality of the religious make up of Britain in this period? Can an object or building that seems to be identifiably Christian ever be defined as Nicene or deviant?

Archaeology can reveal evidence for the survival of Christianity in Britain to a degree with the survival of Christian inscriptions, sacred spaces and objects that depict Christian imagery. But it is incredibly difficult to show definite characteristics of either deviant or Nicene Christianity in the archaeology of both Roman and post-Roman Britain. The Ostrogothic Arian baptistery of Ravenna is an illustrative example from Italy of this lack of demarcation between the imagery produced by deviant Christians and Catholics respectively.[115] The differences in the art created by the Arians in comparison to the later Catholic art in Ravenna are very subtle. This should come as no surprise, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, "Arians" and "Pelagians" did not perceive themselves to be heretical. Aside from some theological differences, deviant Christians were for the most part

[115] Bryan Ward-Perkins. "Where is the archaeology and Iconography of Germanic Arianism?" In *Religious Diversity in Antiquity* ed. D.M.Gwynn, S.Bangert. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2010.

similar to the Nicenes in terms of style and worship. Bryan Ward-Perkins notes that although there is a fair amount of potential "Arian" material, it cannot be "defined as specifically Arian or indeed as specifically Catholic" and so it is difficult to draw conclusions from any study of it.[116]

A lack of distinction between the various forms of Christianity is obviously frustrating. But a noteworthy point here is that although it is not possible to define a church or holy site as Arian or Pelagian, this should also mean that it is not possible to define a church as strictly Nicene either. This is a point that is often neglected because ultimately deviant Christianity was subsumed by its Nicene rival. This may seem like an attempt at an argument from silence but it is an argument that is worthy of consideration. Archaeological evidence for Christianity in Britain from the fourth to seventh centuries should not automatically be considered to represent the Christianity of Rome. Though it is almost impossible to know either way, evidence for Christianity could just as easily be evidence for deviant Christianity as Nicene Christianity.

There is, however, one lead tablet found in the pump room of the Roman baths in the city of Bath that almost certainly corroborates Gildas's claim that Arianism had reached Britain. Dated between 318 and 336 it reads that "Christ's enemy has sent Biliconus from Viriconium that ye may take (him) in the sheepfold, although a dog of Arius."[117] This is evidence that a Christian who was described as a follower of Arius, contemporary to the life of Arius, was present in Viriconium (Wroxeter). Furthermore, the fact that the tablet mentions a settlement as far west as Viriconium on the banks of the river Severn suggests that the influence or at least knowledge of Arianism had spread deep into the province of Britannia. Whitney Bolton writes that the name Biliconus was a Latinised version of a Celtic

[116] Ibid, 267.
[117] "Inimicus XTI Biliconum Viriconio misit ut sumatis ovili &si canem Arii" Roger S. O. Tomlin, "Vinisius to Nigra: Evidence from Oxford of Christianity in Roman Britain," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 (1994): 99.

name meaning "good dog."[118] She poses the question as to whether the writing on this tablet might be "one between Celtic-speaking Christians, who employed Latin only as a self-conscious formality?"[119] This is highly evocative as it proposes communication between two non-Arian Christians, referring to a Christian with a Celtic name who was an Arian. Both Aquae Sulis (Bath) and Viriconium (Wroxeter) remained under the control of the Britons until the late sixth century. Essentially this tablet is evidence of deviant Christianity in this region at an incredibly early date in the fourth century and according to both Gildas and Bede, these people continued to practice a deviant form of Christianity into the sixth-century. In this instance, this lead tablet clearly adds weight to and substantiates the information given in the later written sources.

I originally intended to include a comparison of grave goods with Christian connotations found in Britain in the post-Roman period in this thesis. In a previous analysis of the grave goods of the high status East Saxon burial at Prittlewell, dated between 600-650, I assessed the significance of the presence of two gold foil crosses found in this grave. [120] These crosses were unique finds in Britain but they resembled closely other examples found in Lombard Italy. The Lombards were most probably Arians up until the mid-seventh century.[121] It is certainly an anomaly that these crosses have only appeared at the Prittlewell burial in Britain in a kingdom that seemingly rejected the Christianity of Augustine on several occasions. But how far can the presence of similar grave goods and items prove the

[118]Whitney French Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 597-1066*, vol. 1, *597-740* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 13.
[119] Ibid., 13.
[120] "The Prittlewell Burial," BA dissertation, University of Kent, 2009. See also Museum of London Archaeology Service, *The Prittlewell Prince: The Discovery of a Rich Anglo-Saxon Burial in Essex* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2004), 39.
[121] Gold foil crosses were also used in Byzantine funerary practice, the crosses bore the closest resemblance to other examples discovered in Lombard northern Italy. The most probable candidate for the person buried at Prittlewell, though it cannot be proven that it was a royal burial with certainty, would be Sabert who died in 616. His contemporary in Lombard Italy was Agilulf who was said to have been baptised an Arian but later converted. For a full version of the analysis of the Prittlewell crosses see Sharp, "An Investigation into the Possible Presence of the Arian Heresy in Anglo-Saxon England in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries," BA dissertation, University of Kent, 2010.5-9.

presence of a deviant Christianity? Ultimately it cannot do so with certainty. It is strange that these crosses only appear in this isolated high status burial in Britain and it is tempting to answer this peculiarity with the suggestion that this represents trade or communication between Arian kingdoms. But once again, though it is highly likely that the crosses express Christian belief, there is no way of assuredly saying what the religion of the deceased really was. A multitude of possibilities exist. The crosses might express belief in deviant Christianity or Nicene Christianity, or they may purely be items of trade, war-booty or gifts that were used as grave goods for their aesthetic value. Though it is likely that Christian objects in graves signify some connection with Christianity, our tenuous understanding of why exactly they were included means that they are not entirely reliable sources that can attest to the presence of deviant Christianity.

There has been a recent focus in British archaeology on post-Roman Christian archaeology. Charles Thomas offered a controversial re-interpretation of the significance of a number of stone inscriptions, mainly tombstones, across Britain in his book *Christian Celts*. In this work Thomas suggested that previous scholarship had failed to understand the complexity of the British inscriptions of the late-Roman and post-Roman period. In likeness to Jerome's Vulgate Bible, Charles Thomas claimed that most of these inscriptions contained various arithmetic and letter-based patterns that conveyed hidden meanings most commonly concerning Christian themes. Thomas wrote that his work largely aimed to "counter a prevalent (European view)" that "British Christianity expunged by a red tide of heathen Saxondom, bequeathed little or nothing to the Dark Ages."[122] These findings received a mixed reception and are still divisive with some academics crediting his revolutionary ideas and others stating that they personally 'are actively hostile to them."[123] Guy Halsall

[122] Charles Thomas, *Christian Celts: Messages and Images*, 2nd ed.(Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 37.
[123] Ibid., 9-12. Thomas summarises much of the debate and criticism his work received in the preface to the second edition of his book.

commented on the work of Thomas that "not all of this evidence is entirely convincing but it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that Roman Britain was significantly Christianised."[124] This movement for the re-interpretation of the evidence for the survival of Christianity in post-Roman Britain is important to this thesis. If the British church was as complex as Thomas and subsequent archaeologists have proposed, perhaps the reason that we do not have much written evidence for it, in itself is evidence for the fact that the British church practiced deviant Christianity?

[124] Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur,* 123.

Conclusion

The source material available for the study of deviant Christianity is very problematic as the written sources are almost all written by authors hostile to these deviant Christianities and it has not yet proven possible to distinguish archaeological evidence for Christianity as being deviant or otherwise. This thesis has collated the evidence for the existence of deviant Christianity in Britain between the fourth and seventh centuries and sought to provide context and an analysis of the reasons why Arianism and Pelagianism were present in Britain. In addition to the gathering of evidence I have attempted to cast light on the motivations of both Gildas and Bede in order to understand the limitations of their work as sources for deviant Christianity. I have shown that the Nicene portrayal of Arianism and Pelagianism was representative of early medieval attitudes towards the recording of the history of deviant Christianity and that clearly these hostile sources had no desire to record the intricacies of the forms of Christianity that they considered heretical. The evidence shows that it is highly likely that British Christianity was influenced by deviant forms of Christianity that differed from the religion that was considered orthodox in Rome from the mid-fourth century through to at least the early-seventh century. It also seems highly probable, leaving aside the doctrinal reasons for these different beliefs, that deviant Christianity may have been accepted as the result of a desire to remain politically separate from the religion of Rome and in later centuries the religion of the Anglo-Saxons.

Concerning Eastern Britain, the sources suggest that an invasion or invitation led to an initial occupation of part of Britain by an Anglo-Saxon military force, which was in turn followed by a gradual migration and an expansion of Anglo-Saxon territory between the fifth to the early seventh century. I suggest that the Romano-British inhabitants, who had not fled to Wales, lowland Scotland or Brittany, were assimilated over a period of time, driven

particularly by a desire to compete in the upper echelons of a now Anglo-Saxon elite. In this sense, the identity of the Britons in the lands conquered by the Anglo-Saxons, was not systematically wiped out, but rather displaced over time by the new identity of power. In line with recent attempts in archaeology to re-evaluate the strength of British Christianity in the post-Roman period, the landscape of Eastern Britain from the fifth to the seventh century was by no means entirely bereft of Christianity.

Despite these problematic preconceptions, there are a variety of paths for further investigation of deviant Christianity. One of the aims of this thesis was to express that deviant Christianity, similarly to thoughts on the use of Arianism amongst Germanic kingdoms as a marker of "non-Roman military identity," acted as a political marker for separation and the continuance of an independent identity for the Britons.[125] Before aspects of identity formation and preservation in relation to deviant Christianity can be discussed in depth, it is first essential to present an analysis of the surviving sources and establish the evidence for the existence of deviant Christianity in Britain. As such, though this thesis has attempted to show the value of adopting deviant Christianities for the preservation of a separate religious identity, the limited scale of this paper means that it has not been possible to deal thoroughly with identity as a concept. This could be remedied in a more comprehensive and extensive future study. Again the fact that the source material for this topic is constrained by its bias does limit the scope for expanding future research to a certain degree. But a study that considers the reasons why sources written by deviant Christians did not survive could prove to be potentially fruitful. The most obvious explanation for their lack of survival is clearly because they were at odds with the form of Christianity that eventually thrived. This is largely the case but there is a vast difference between a deliberate destruction of deviant

[125] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, 469.

Christian material and the alternative that it simply was not extensive enough to have survived.

A comparative analysis of Christianity and conversion in the regions neighbouring the Britons would also prove useful. In a previous study I investigated the possibility of Arianism amongst the Anglo-Saxons and though the source material for this is even scantier than for the Britons, the overall conclusion was that Anglo-Saxon Arianism was a possibility. Comparative study is a useful way of attempting to cope with a lack of primary sources. In my previous thesis, a study of Arianism amongst the kingdoms who would have shared borders with the Angles and Saxons in their continental homeland allowed me to hypothesise that at least some of the Anglo-Saxons would have been exposed to Arianism before their migration to Britain.[126] A comparative study of the conversion of the Britons with the conversion of their neighbours is therefore another angle of research that might allow for a greater understanding of the deviant Christianity of the Britons when considered in a wider European context. Likewise an investigation into the potential for deviant Christianity amongst the Scots in Ireland and the Picts in Scotland would be useful. For example, Bede included a letter in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* addressed to the Irish that mentions that although he had thought the Irish better than the Britons, "the Irish are no different from the Britons in their practices."[127] There are also other works of Bede, *On the reckoning of* time, for example, that have survived and could be useful in the study of deviant Christianity. In this thesis I have focused on Arianism and Pelagianism but the calculation for the correct dating of Easter, which is central to *On the reckoning of time*, caused a great deal of controversy and the Britons deviated from Rome in their dating of Easter. For the purpose

[126] "An Investigation into the Possible Presence of the Arian Heresy in Anglo-Saxon England in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries," BA third year dissertation, University of Kent, 2010.
[127] "Scottos uero per Daganum episcopum in hanc, quam superius memorauimus, insulam, et Columbanum abbatem in Gallis enientem nihil discrepare a Brettonibus in eorum conuersatione didicimus." Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 2.4; *Historia ecclesiastica*; *Ecclesiastical History*, 110.

of this study I have used the term Britons collectively, however, like the many kingdoms that constituted the Anglo-Saxons as a people, post-imperial Briton was divided into many smaller kingdoms. A detailed study of the Christianity of the Welsh kingdoms on an individual basis, in particular the powerful kingdom of Gwyned, would be beneficial to the study of British deviant Christianity.

As archaeology continues to challenge previous notions of a limited survival of British Christianity, it will be important to consider the form of Christianity that historians are dealing with. If historians determine that Britain was highly Christianised from the fourth century onwards and that this Christianity was not consigned to the abyss in the following centuries, then it is necessary to consider two questions. Why is so little recorded in the contemporary written sources and what form did this surviving Christianity take? Consequently as this thesis has shown, it is important to consider the existence of Arianism and Pelagianism in the religious history of Britain and to situate deviant Christianity in the midst of this re-evaluation and debate. This thesis has shown that deviant Christianity was present in Britain in the early Middle Ages and that further analysis and investigation is integral to achieve a more complete understanding of the impact and influence that deviant Christianities had on the identity of the Britons.

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