Introduction

This is a book about the origins and development of towns and cities in Anglo-Saxon England from about 400 CE to the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066. It is a topic that has fascinated me since I excavated at the Brook Street site in Winchester over 45 years ago, and it is a topic that has engaged scholars in both history and archaeology throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In this introductory chapter, I want to introduce Anglo-Saxon England and address some of the ways that archaeologists have approached the study of urbanism in the past. This chapter will provide a brief introduction to the chronology of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. It will then address some of the theoretical approaches that have been used to answer questions about the origins and development of towns in medieval Europe and elsewhere. I will also discuss my theoretical perspective and introduce the rest of the chapters in this volume.

Who Were the Anglo-Saxons?

While the Anglo-Saxons are part of every schoolchild's education in the United Kingdom, the medieval world in general and the Anglo-Saxons in particular are often missing from both secondary and higher education in the United States. Courses on world history and western civilization generally begin with Egypt and Mesopotamia, move quickly to Classical Greece and Rome, briefly mention the medieval period between 400 and 1400 CE, and then move on to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the modern world. In popular culture the medieval period is often seen as the "Dark Ages" or the "Age of Faith" (see, for example, Durant 1980) without recognizing that this was a period of substantial social, political, and economic changes that began with the decline of the western Roman Empire and ended with the culture contact that resulted from the European voyages of discovery. The earlier parts of the medieval period have always represented a substantial challenge for traditional historians, since there are relatively few documents that survive from this period. For example, Sawyer's classic, *From Roman Britain*

Table 1.   Basic chronology of Roman and Anglo-Saxon England

Period	Dates
Roman	43–ca. 410 CE
Sub-Roman	ca. 410–ca. 450 CE
Early Anglo-Saxon	ca. 450–ca. 650 CE
Middle Anglo-Saxon	ca. 650–ca. 850 CE
Late Anglo-Saxon	ca. 850–1066 CE

Note: The Late Anglo-Saxon period is often referred to as the Anglo-Scandinavian period in eastern England.

to Norman England (1998), has relatively little to say about the 5th and 6th centuries, since the textual evidence is so limited. The first chapter is entitled "The Seventh Century and Before." Agricultural historians Banham and Faith (2014, 15) have argued that this period should be seen as "a proto-historic, rather than a truly historic period" due to the lack of written source material. Fortunately for us, the development of medieval archaeology, especially since the end of World War II, has helped to shed new light on the "Dark Ages."

Britain became a province of the Roman Empire in the 1st century CE, and the Roman army was finally removed from Britain in 407 CE, almost 300 years later. By the end of the first decade of the 5th century the inhabitants of Britain were on their own politically. Historical sources suggest that Germanic immigrants from the regions that today include the northern portions of the Netherlands and Germany and eastern Denmark began entering southern and eastern England sometime in the mid-5th century, although the nature and extent of this migration has been a matter of serious debate (see Chapter 2). The term "Anglo-Saxon" has been applied to the period from the mid-5th through the mid-11th centuries CE in England. It is based on historical sources, such as the 8th-century Venerable Bede, who wrote that these migrants included Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Efforts to identify specifically Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish material culture in the archaeological record have met with, at best, mixed success, and the culture we describe as Anglo-Saxon is clearly an amalgam of native Romano-British and Germanic practices (see Hills 2003 for a more detailed discussion of the origins of the English).

In dividing up the period between the end of Roman rule in Britain and the Norman Conquest, I will adopt the conventional chronology as a heuristic device (see Table 1). I have used the term "sub-Roman" to describe the first half of the 5th century CE, a period that is poorly known both archaeologically and historically (see Chapter 1). It is important

to recognize that (1) recent archaeological research has challenged this traditional chronology in several ways, and (2) important changes take place both within and across these time periods. We cannot and should not view them as a series of static time slices.

As noted above, there is very limited historical evidence for the Early Anglo-Saxon period. Hills (2003, 110) notes that:

The historical sources tell us reliably only two things. First, that during the 5th century AD Britain ceased to be part of the Roman Empire and was subject to attack from a variety of peoples, including Saxons. Secondly, that the rulers of the peoples living in eastern and southern Britain by the 8th century, and perhaps before that, believed they could trace their ancestry back to heroic Germanic leaders from the continent.

As a result, most of our data on settlement patterns and lifeways for the Early Anglo-Saxon period come from archaeology.

The Middle Anglo-Saxon period, conventionally dated between 650 and 850 CE, is the period that saw the development of the emporia or *wic* sites, arguably the first towns in post-Roman Britain. These sites appear to have served as centers of craft production and of regional and international trade. The period ends with the appearance of the Great Viking Army in eastern England.

During much of the Late Anglo-Saxon period, traditionally dated between 850 and 1066 CE, Scandinavians controlled large parts of eastern England. The late 9th and 10th centuries were probably some of the most politically and militarily tumultuous in all of English history, as the Vikings and the kings of Mercia and Wessex vied for political and military control of the region. The period ends with the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 CE.

An Outsider's View of Anglo-Saxon Urban Origins

This volume will focus on the development of urbanism in later Anglo-Saxon England (ca. 700–1050 CE) and the background to urban development (ca. 400–700 CE). It will highlight the *archaeological* evidence for the rebirth of towns in the post-Roman world, since historical data for the earlier part of Anglo-Saxon England are strictly limited. Although I have been active in the archaeology and zooarchaeology of Anglo-Saxon England since my postgraduate days in the 1970s, I come to this project as a bit of an outsider. When I first arrived at the University of Southampton in the 1970s, my late friend and colleague Jennie Coy asked me why an American like me would be interested in the Anglo-Saxons. It is a good question. As noted above, while the Anglo-Saxon period is

part of the national dialogue in the United Kingdom, the Anglo-Saxons are among the missing in secondary and tertiary education in the United States. The few Anglo-Saxonists in the US are to be found primarily in university departments of English and history. I am one of the very few university archaeologists in the United States whose primary interest is in Anglo-Saxon England. The number of medieval archaeologists in the United States can probably be counted on the fingers of two hands. As a result, the treatment of the Middle Ages in the United States focuses almost entirely on literary and other written sources. There is almost no role for material culture outside of art history.

On the other hand, I do have some advantages as an outsider. Modern post-processual archaeologists have challenged the earlier notion that archaeological research is entirely objective. We always view the past through the lens of the present, and Anglo-Saxon studies are no exception (see, for example, Harke 1998). For example, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the scholarly view of Early Anglo-Saxon England was based primarily on the documentary sources, such as Gildas, a 6th-century British cleric writing in what today is Wales, and Bede, an 8th-century ecclesiastic writing *A History of the English Church and People* in Northumbria (Bede, tr. Sherley-Price 1968). The general view based on the limited historical record was that the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in post-Roman Britain in the 5th century led to the defeat and disappearance of the Romanized Britons, who were killed in battle, enslaved, or driven into western Britain and Wales. This viewpoint can be seen as both Germanist and migrationist (see Oosthuizen 2016 for a modern critique of this approach). Ideas about the relationship between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England began to change in the post-war period. The role of Germanic migration was downplayed, and archaeologists began to look for possible continuities between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England at both rural and urban sites. The search for continuities between Late Roman/early post-Roman Britain and Early Anglo-Saxon England is certainly a valid one, and it was one of the questions that formed part of my PhD research on the faunal remains from the Anglo-Saxon village of West Stow. It is certainly no coincidence, however, that these questions began to be asked in the aftermath of the two world wars that pitted Germany against the United Kingdom. In addition, much of the research on Anglo-Saxon England has been written by British people for a British audience. In some cases it has been both literally and figuratively insular. My goal in this volume is to bring Anglo-Saxon archaeology to a wider audience and to involve Anglo-Saxon archaeology in the broader comparative discussions about early urban origins.

Since the focus of this volume is specifically on the origins of urbanism in Anglo-Saxon England, I will begin with a brief review of some of the

general archaeological literature on urban origins. I will then address some of the specific theories that have been put forth to explain the origins of early medieval towns in Britain and northwest Europe.

Archaeology and Urban Origins

I will begin with a very simple definition of urbanism, drawing on the criteria that seem to be most universal for archaeologists studying urban origins. First and foremost, towns and cities should have relatively large, dense residential populations. This allows us to distinguish cities and towns from ceremonial centers, which may have monumental architecture, including religious monuments, but may be home only to a small permanent population. Second, cities should be home to some people who are engaged in activities other than food procurement (animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, agriculture, and plant collecting) on a full-time basis. These may include people working as craft specialists, laborers, judges and administrators, traders and moneyers, and religious specialists. Third, cities should show some evidence for organization and planning, which can be taken as evidence for complex political organizations. These need not necessarily include a king or emperor. Sodalities and complex kinship systems may also form part of urban governments, as they did in places such as Jenne Jeno in Mali in the 1st millennium CE (R. McIntosh 2005). Urban planning can take a variety of forms ranging from street plans to defenses to the zoning of residential and commercial areas. This is essentially a functional definition of urbanism, and I recognize that urbanism is a process rather than an event and that we can talk about a wide spectrum of urban societies. As Carballo and Fortenberry (2015, 542) note:

Consideration of the spectrum of urbanism illustrates that early urban 'revolutions' do not constitute an end point in archaeological study and reveals the ways in which certain settlements were more urban than others, as remains the case among modern cities and towns.

I will return to this discussion in Chapter 3 when I consider whether the Middle Anglo-Saxon settlements known as *wics* or emporia should be seen as urban. I will consider whether these settlements are stepping stones on the way to the development of towns in the Late Saxon period, and/or whether they are reflective of a particular moment in the development of trade around the North Sea.

Urbanism, however, is more than just the presence of a substantial population and evidence for occupational specialization and some degree of urban planning; urbanism is a process that transforms the countryside as well as the emerging urban center. For example, in describing the process of city-state formation in Mesopotamia, Yoffee (1995, 284) noted

that "the countryside was created as a hinterland of city-states." More recently, Monroe (2011) has adopted a landscape approach to the question of urban development along the Slave Coast in West Africa. He suggests, "Cities are thus settlements that provide specialized services to a broader hinterland. The key issue, therefore, is not what a city *is*, but what a city *does* for rural communities within its sphere of influence" (Monroe 2011, 400). This approach is not unlike the definition of urbanism adopted by Russo (1998, 22; following Reynolds 1977), who suggests the following working definition of a medieval town:

[A] permanent human settlement with a significant portion of the population living off a variety of non-agricultural occupations and forming a social unit more or less distinct from the surrounding countryside.

In this volume, I plan to draw on the landscape approach. I will examine not only the archaeology of emerging urban sites, but also changes in rural settlements that may reflect changes in relationships between emerging urban centers and the surrounding countryside. However, this is not strictly a book about the landscape archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England. I plan to draw on other theoretical perspectives from contemporary archaeological thought.

Theoretical Perspectives

The rise of complex societies, including the beginnings and development of urbanism, is one of the most interesting and important questions faced by archaeologists and anthropologists. Unfortunately, much of our understanding of the process of urban development in the archaeological record has been based on the study of a limited number of ancient societies. Childe, who was perhaps the most important archaeological theorist of the first half of the 20th century, focused primarily on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus civilization in his classic studies such as *Man Makes Himself* (1936). At that time, relatively little was known about the archaeology of early China, and Childe was largely unaware of the archaeological record for the emergence of complex societies in the Americas. Medieval Europe only played a minor role in Childe's theoretical framework. In *What Happened in History* Childe (1942, 25) argued, for example, that feudalism tied medieval cultivators to the soil and emancipated them from Roman slavery. However, he had nothing to say about the development of towns and cities in medieval Europe.

In a subsequent publication, Childe (1950) introduced his concept of the "urban revolution," based on an analogy with the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th and earlier 20th centuries. It was seen as

a change in technology that had ramifications for many other aspects of society. For Childe, the urban revolution was the second of two prehistoric revolutions. The first, the agricultural revolution, including the domestication of plants and animals, was a necessary precursor for the second, since farming provided the food surpluses that could be used to support non-farmers, including everyone from rulers to laborers, and to support everything from regional and long-distance trade to the construction of monumental architecture. Childe identified ten criteria that he saw as central to what he termed the "urban revolution." They included urbanism, craft-specialization, the concentration of economic surplus through taxation or tribute, class stratification, state formation, monumental public works, long-distance trade, standardized art, writing, and advances in the sciences, including mathematics and astronomy. Redman (1978, 218) subsequently subdivided these into primary and secondary characteristics. Redman saw the first five criteria – urbanism, craft-specialization, the concentration of economic surplus through taxation or tribute, class stratification, and state formation – as primary. He saw the secondary criteria as consequences of the first five.

Today, most archaeologists would reject a "Chinese-menu" approach to the study of the origins of complex societies. We know that the Inca, the largest empire in the Americas prior to European contact, had no formal writing system, although they did have an elaborate system of record-keeping based on knotted strings known as the *quipu* (Asher and Asher 1997). Long-distance trade is not a unique feature of complex, urban societies. For example, the Natufians were late Pleistocene hunter-gatherers who lived in the southern Levantine regions of the Middle East. Natufian sites in the Jordan Valley have yielded beads made of shells from both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Crabtree et al. 1991). Neolithic monuments in Europe, including megalithic tombs like Newgrange in Ireland that reflect complex astronomical observations, were constructed millennia before the beginnings of urbanism in that part of the world (Harbison 1988, 76).

Similar lists of traits have been used to define urbanism in the medieval world. Medieval towns were seen as having one or more of the following: defenses, a planned street system, a market, a mint, legal autonomy, a role as a central place, a large and dense population, a diverse economic base, houses and plots of urban type, social differentiation, complex religious organization, and a judicial center (Biddle 1976, 100, following Heighway 1972).

This list presents many of the same problems as Childe's ten criteria do. Some complex early medieval defense systems such as the Danewerke in Denmark (Hellmuth Andersen et al. 1976) and Offa's Dyke near the

Welsh border in Britain (Hill and Worthington 2003) are not directly associated with urban centers. Judicial centers and execution sites, such as Sutton Hoo (Carver 2005), also exist outside urban centers. Other criteria, such as legal autonomy, seem to be based on our knowledge of later medieval cities and may not be appropriate for the initial development of urbanism in the earlier medieval world. In summary, trait lists are not necessarily reliable ways to define early medieval urbanism. Despite these reservations, however, it is clear that questions about the origins of urbanism and state formation lie at the heart of most studies of the emergence of complex societies.

In the 1960s and 1970s, both archaeologists (e.g., Adams 1966) and anthropologists (e.g., Service 1975) who were interested in urban development focused primarily, although not exclusively, on a limited number of ancient societies that were seen as examples of independent or primary urban development and state formation. These included regions such as ancient Egypt, Mesoamerica, China, the Indus region, Peru, and Mesopotamia where states and cities were supposed to have developed without much in the way of outside influence. However, this perspective began to change in the 1980s. There are several reasons for this change. First, cultural anthropologists abandoned their interest in cultural evolution, leaving these questions to the archaeologists. This has led to an approach that is based increasingly on archaeological data rather than on ethnographic parallels to the 19th- and 20th-century societies studied by earlier generations of social anthropologists. This is, in many ways, a welcome development. For example, for too much of the later 20th century, archaeologists viewed ancient hunter-gatherer societies through the lens of the !Kung San (Lee 1968, 1979). We saw these societies as unchanged and unchanging, failing to acknowledge that many non-western societies studied by early anthropologists were undergoing rapid social, political, and economic changes as a result of culture contact and colonialism. The archaeological record allows us to look for greater variability among both hunter-gatherer and early urban societies without viewing them through the prism of a small number of well-known ethnographic case studies.

Second, as a truly world archaeology has developed in the past 40 years, studies of the development of urbanism and state formation have been carried out in regions outside the Middle East and Latin America. An excellent example is the research conducted by S. K. McIntosh (1999) and R. McIntosh (2005) on early urbanism in the Middle Niger region in Mali. While the development of urbanism in this region was traditionally linked to contacts with Islamic traders in the Middle Ages, their research has shown that urbanism developed independently in Mali well before the beginnings of the trans-Saharan trade. Similarly, Kirch (2010,

2012) has argued that states developed independently in Hawaiʻi in the late pre-contact period. While the archaic Hawaiian states were non-urban, the process of state formation presents some interesting parallels to the beginnings of state formation in Anglo-Saxon England (Crabtree 2017). Several decades of rescue archaeology have shed new light on the Mississippian urban center at Cahokia near St. Louis, MO, and some researchers (J. Z. Holt 2009) have suggested that Cahokia may be the center of a performance state, similar to the arguments that have been made for the Maya (Demarest 2005). In short, we now have a broad range of data on the emergence of complex societies in a number of different regions of the world. These case studies can provide useful comparative data for the study of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon urbanism.

Third, many archaeologists and anthropologists (Service 1975; Kirch 2010) have focused on the differences between primary state formation and secondary states. In early medieval Europe, Hodges (1982) suggested that state formation (and concomitant urbanism) in Carolingian France was primary, while broadly contemporary state formation in Anglo-Saxon England was secondary. I would argue that this is a distinction without a real difference. There is no question that the inhabitants of Hawaiʻi were relatively isolated from other complex state-level societies prior to the late 18th century. However, this does not appear to be the case in many other parts of the world. For example, detailed archaeological research in the Middle East and Mesoamerica has cast some doubt on the alleged independence or primacy of urban development and state formation in these so-called primary centers. Research in Mesoamerica has shown that the Olmecs are less of a mother culture (*cultura madre*) and more of an older sister culture to the complex urban societies that developed in Oaxaca, the Valley of Mexico, and the Maya regions (see, for example, Lesure 2004). Archaeological research that has been carried out in the geographical region that stretches between Egypt and the Indus has identified a number of additional early urban societies, such as Elamites in Iran, and these early complex societies appear to have been in contact with one another. In short, the evidence for contacts between early complex societies in the so-called primary centers of urbanism has made the distinction between primary urban societies and other early urban societies less meaningful, and the study of urban origins has encompassed a wider range of societies in the past 30 years.

A Processual Plus Perspective

The theoretical model that I use is one that Michelle Hegmon (2003) first described as "processual plus." It grows out of the new or processual

archaeology movement that dominated archaeological thought from the 1960s through the early 1980s (see, for example, Binford 1962; Binford and Binford 1968; Watson et al. 1971). The goal of processual archaeology was to focus research on the processes of cultural change in the past, including questions such as the origins of plant and animal domestication and the origins and growth of cities and states, Childe's (1936) two revolutions. While processual archaeology never managed to come up with law-like generalizations about the processes of social change similar to the laws of physics (*contra* Watson et al. 1971), the processual movement did lead to significant improvements in archaeological methods, including improvements in archaeological surveying techniques, development of systematic methods for the collection and analysis of plant and animal remains from archaeological sites, and advances in the stratigraphic excavation and interpretation of archaeological sites, among other methodological advances. The use of these techniques has radically transformed the ways in which Anglo-Saxon archaeology is practiced today.

By the mid-1980s, however, archaeologists were also beginning to recognize some of the inherent weakness in the processual approach (see, for example, Hodder 1986). A relentless focus on general models left little room for human agency or historical contingency. In addition, the processual model paid little attention to issues of personal identity at a time when issues surrounding race, class, and gender were becoming increasingly important in many of the other social sciences (Conkey and Spector 1984). Archaeologically, men and women were simply reduced to "faceless blobs" (Tringham 1991, 94). The processual plus approach acknowledges these criticisms and tries to combine the methodological advances of the processual era with an awareness of the importance of social and historical issues such as agency and identity. It also recognizes that social institutions are the products of everyday decisions made by people living their lives (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). In other words, day-to-day lives of common people matter, and their decisions can give us insight into how societies develop and change.

I am a zooarchaeologist, an archaeologist who analyzes animal bone remains in an attempt to reconstruct past animal husbandry practices, hunting patterns, and diets. I have spent a good portion of my academic career studying animal bone assemblages from Anglo-Saxon sites in eastern England. As such, I have a strong interest in the medieval economy. As a student who was trained during the processual era, I was intrigued by an approach known as economic prehistory (see Higgs 1972; Higgs 1975). This methodological and theoretical approach focused on the use of data such as animal bones and seed remains to reconstruct