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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By R. R. Davies

THE PEOPLES OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

1100–1400

II. NAMES, BOUNDARIES AND REGNAL SOLIDARITIES

READ 18 NOVEMBER 1994

DURING 1301 the propaganda war between the king of England and the Guardians of the kingdom of Scotland reached a climax in a welter of claims and counter-claims submitted to the Pope. Differing historical mythologies were part of the arguments deployed by both parties. The English case was based on a gloss placed on one of the wondrous legends recorded in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.¹ Britain, according to the legend, had been divided by its illustrious eponymous ruler, Brutus, between his three sons, Lochrine, Albanact and Camber. Scotland, originally known as Albany, was Albanact's portion; but—and here we come to the gloss placed on the legend—he was to be subordinate to his elder brother and first-born son of Brutus, Lochrine, to whom alone the royal dignity was reserved. Such was the ultimate historical basis for Edward I's claim to superior lordship over Scotland. The Scots could not be expected to accept such a tall story lying down. They did not. They countered with their own even taller tale. They insisted that Brutus's three sons were of equal standing, 'so that none of them was subject to another'; they even queried whether Albany had ever been equated with the whole of what we know as Scotland, suggesting instead that it was the part of the original Britain which stretched from the Humber to the Forth, but no

¹ *Edward I and the Throne of Scotland 1290–1296. An Edition of the Record Sources for the Great Cause*, ed. E. L. G. Stones and Grant Simpson (Oxford, 1978), II, 298–300; *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174–1328. Some Selected Documents*, ed. E. L. G. Stones (Oxford, 1970), 194–7.

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further north.² They then went on the offensive, asserting that a lady called Scota, daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt, had conquered the northern part of Britain (if indeed it was such), expelled the Britons and renamed it Scotland in honour of herself. 'From that time', so they concluded, 'the Scots, as a new people and having a new name, had nothing to do with the Britons'.³ Just in case the English were incapable of grasping the logic of this irrefutable historical argument the Scottish advocate, Baldred Bisset, spelt it out for them: the Egyptians had a claim to Scotland far superior to that of the English!⁴

The merits of these two historical mythologies are not our concern; but the assumptions that inform them deserve our attention. Or rather one assumption in particular. It can perhaps be best expressed in Walter Bower's transcript of the Scottish case presented at the Papal curia in 1301: referring to the triumph of the Scots over the British, he comments, 'the name and memory of the British people (*gens*) was abolished from Albany; instead of the name of Albany the new name of Scotland and its people (*cum sua gente*) was established'.⁵ Names are central to the identity of people; to change a people's name is to change its identity; to threaten to abolish its name is to call its very existence into doubt. That is why invoking the name of a people was one of the most potent of rallying calls. 'Nobles of England, most famous Normans by birth', so Bishop Ralph of Orkney is said to have greeted the troops on the eve of the battle of the Standard in 1138, 'it is well to recall what is your name and pedigree as you are about to go into battle'.⁶ Whether this famous speech is no more than a literary device is of secondary importance, since the appeal to the name (*nomen*) of a people was clearly regarded as fundamental to its honour. By the same token any threat to the future of a name was tantamount to a proclamation of genocide. Nothing less, so the Welsh believed, was in the mind of Henry I when he launched a campaign against them in 1114: he and his allies, so the native chronicle records 'set their minds upon exterminating all the Britons (= Welsh), so that the name of Britons should never henceforth be called to mind'.⁷ The comment was, of course, hysterically exag-

² *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328*, 226-7; John of Fordun, *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. W. F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1871-2), II, 39-40 (Bk. II, c. 6). For the bridge of the Forth as the dividing line between Britain (*Britannia*) and *Scotia* see Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D. E. R. Watt *et al* (Aberdeen, 1987-), VI, 354-7 (XII c. 20).

³ *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328*, 226-7.

⁴ *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots* ed. W. F. Skene (Edinburgh 1867), 280.

⁵ Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, VI. 142 (XI, c. 49). For the editor's comment on these so-called 'Instructions' of 1301 (which he prefers to see as 'Objections' advanced by the Scottish proctors at the papal court) *ibid.*, 260-1.

⁶ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Series, 1879), 262.

⁷ *Brut y Tywysogion Peniarth Ms. 20*, ed. T. Jones (Cardiff, 1941), 58-9; *Translation* (Cardiff, 1952), 37.

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gerated; but it was a kind of paranoia which was not peculiar to the Welsh. The cool-headed if morbid Henry of Huntingdon explained the Norman conquest of England in terms of God's decision that the English should cease to be a people (*populus*).⁸ By the thirteenth century it was foreigners rather than God who were plotting the extermination of the English: Simon de Montfort's supporters put it about that the intention of his enemies was 'to delete the name of the English'.⁹

This obsession with names should occasion no surprise. Nothing touches our individual or collective identity more closely than the name or names with which we are associated. Our very essence seems to rest in them; to lose them is to be threatened with oblivion. It is through names that we order, describe, categorise and label the world. They are truly in J. L. Austin's famous phrase part of the things we do with words. The more abstract they are—be they the names of social classes, peoples or countries—the more willing have men and women been to lay down their lives for them. In terms of ethnic descent (in so far as that can ever be actually determined), let alone in terms of social, economic and gender divisions, most peoples are complex amalgams; but beneath the label of a single name they become, and come to believe themselves to be, a single people. Names in that sense make a people; no people can exist without its name. That is precisely why peoples were so haunted by the prospect of the loss of their name. It was that apocalypse, as we saw, which terrified the Welsh in 1114. Two more centuries' experience of coping with the English only confirmed them in their conviction and terror. When the Welsh leader Sir Gruffudd Llwyd, sent a clandestine letter to Edward Bruce, brother of King Robert I of Scotland, and self-styled king of Ireland, in 1316, it was the same spectre which haunted him: 'the intention of the English', he commented was 'to try to delete our name and memory from the land'.¹⁰ The Scots needed no persuading that the threat was a real one, for later in the century they delivered themselves of the opinion that the English had indeed destroyed the Welsh 'name and nobility' (the twinning is significant) and also those of the Irish, 'so far as they could'.¹¹

Names, therefore, were central. The deletion of its name was the greatest threat to a people; the revival of its name to its full pristine glory and resonance was that same people's highest aspiration. The

⁸ *Historia Anglorum*, 241.

⁹ *The Song of Lewes* ed C. L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1890), ll. 281–2.

¹⁰ J. Beverley Smith, 'Gruffudd Llwyd and the Celtic Alliance, 1315–18', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 26 (1974–6), 478.

¹¹ 'Papers relating to the captivity and release of David II', ed. E. W. M. Balfour-Melville, *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, 9 (1958), 42 quoted in R. Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100–1400* (Oxford, 1990), 141.

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Welsh oscillated between the two polarities. ‘According to the prophecies of Merlin’, so Gerald of Wales observed of them, ‘they confidently hope that both the nation (*natio*) and the name (*nuncupatio*) of the foreigners (i.e. the English) shall be expunged and that the Britons would once more glory in their ancient name (*nomen*) and status in the island’.¹² Given that names had such a remarkable potency, root-and-branch reformers soon recognized that to delete old names was a necessary pre-requisite to creating a new people and thereby a new loyalty. John Mair writing in 1521 had no doubt that the only sure way to resolve the centuries-old enmity between English and Scots was to call both of them Britons. He knew that his suggestion would get short shrift among his fellow Scotsmen, so he prepared his response in advance. ‘And what although the name and kingdom of the Scots had disappeared, so too would the name and kingdom of the English no more have a place among men, for in the place of both we should have a king of Britain’.¹³ His words were to be echoed by King James VI and I when he advocated that ‘the divided name of England and Scotland’ be discontinued in order to make way for the new name of ‘Great Britain’.¹⁴ Unfortunately for John Mair and King James it requires more than a stroke of a theoretician’s or even a monarch’s pen for a people to assume a new name; the change must also be effected in the hearts and minds of the people itself. The names of peoples are in a measure political artefacts; but they are also ultimately, more importantly and irreducibly, manifestations of a sense and conviction of collective solidarity.

Names, therefore, are basic to a sense of communal identity; they are redolent of memories and aspirations. Yet there was a problem attached to them. They might appear timeless, literally aboriginal, especially in a society which constructed so much of its history around the concept of an eponymous founder; but they are in fact the product

¹² Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer *et al* (Rolls Series 1861–91) VI, 216 (*Descriptio Cambrie*, II, vii). The comment directly echoes one of the Merlinic prophecies recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 1130s: ‘The island will be called by the name (*nomen*) of Brutus and the name (*nuncupatio*) given to it by the foreigners will perish’: *Historia Regum Britannie*, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms. 568 (Cambridge, 1984) ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1984) 77 (114 (20)). *The Description of England* (for which see below n. 49) made a very similar comment: ‘the Welsh go about saying that . . . by means of Arthur they will win back the land . . . and they will give it back its name. They will call it Britain again’.

¹³ John Mair (Major), *History of Great Britain*, ed. and trans. A. Constable (Scottish History Society, 1892), 180. For excellent discussion see Roger A. Mason, ‘Kingship, Nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union: John Mair’s *History of Greater Britain* (1521)’, *Innes Review* 41 (1990), 182–222.

¹⁴ Quoted in J. Wormald, ‘The Creation of Britain: Multiple Kingdoms or Core and Colonies?’ *ante*, 6th ser., 2 (1992), 178.

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of time, circumstance and accident. As such they have no ultimate fixity; they can be modified, transformed or forgotten. Encyclopaedists such as Isidore of Seville recognized that the names of peoples, as of places, came and went; while authors of a pessimistic cast of mind, such as Henry of Huntingdon, found a source for both their historical curiosity and their chronic gloom in comparing the names of places and peoples no longer extant with those now current.¹⁵ But the problem was not merely a general one; it had particular application to the peoples of Britain and Ireland. Already in the ninth century Irish poets were intrigued by the question of why the people of Ireland were called by different names—Scuitt, Gáedil, Féni.¹⁶ In Scotland the issue of the disappearance of named peoples and the shifting labels of countries and peoples was even more obvious and could not be ducked. There was, first of all, the problem of the Picts. For Bede as for ‘Nennius’ they were most certainly one of the peoples, indeed one of the oldest peoples, of the island of Britain¹⁷; but they were now no more. That was reason enough to set men thinking about names and peoples. But that was only a beginning. Anyone who considered, or considers, the multiple, changing and often overlapping meanings of the words *Scotia*, *Scotti*, *Alba* and *fr Alban* would soon conclude that names are the most deceiving and least simple of things. When, for example, did the term *Scotti* (which seems originally to have been a common term for the Gaels of both ‘Ireland’ and ‘Scotland’) become largely restricted to the inhabitants of Dál Riata? When, likewise, were the terms *Scotia* and *Scotti*, which had once referred to the area and the peoples north of the Forth, extended in common parlance to the country, kingdom and people of a greater Scotland? And to make confusion worse, confounded, when did Alba which had originally meant ‘Britain’ (though even on that score there was room for disagreement) come to be equated with the unit and peoples which would eventually be called Scotland and Scots, *fr Alban*?¹⁸ The palimpsest of terms in a state of confusing flux is a healthy reminder to us of the shifting, indeed shifty, vocabulary of peoples and units in the early medieval period. The shifts are certainly significant, but if we try to pin them down too exactly or

¹⁵Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. W. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), IX, ii, 38; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 9.

¹⁶D. Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, *Historical Studies* II (1978), 6.

¹⁷*Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 16–19 (i, 1), 230–1 (iii, 6) 560–1 (v, 23); ‘Nennius’, *British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. J. Morris (1980), c. 7.

¹⁸For a recent challenging discussion of these issues, with reference to the views of earlier scholars, see D. Broun, ‘The Origin of Scottish Identity’, *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past*, ed. C. Bjørn, A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (Copenhagen, 1994), 35–55. I wish to thank Dr. Broun for giving me early sight of this paper.

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to order them into a pattern which corresponds neatly with our modern theories and aspirations, we may clarify our own thoughts but at the expense of clouding the essential fluidity of early medieval peoples and their nomenclature.

Of the peoples of these islands it was, significantly, the English who sorted out their nomenclature earliest and did so with a briskness and directness which contrasted with the ambiguities and uncertainties of their neighbours. It marked them out as a people who knew where they were going and how to get there. They faced two problems and solved both with consummate mastery. First, what were they to do about the names of the island and its inhabitants—Britain and Britons—which were now largely under their control. Already in the late tenth century Ealdorman Aethelweard gave a pithy answer to that question which has done good service for a thousand years: ‘Britain’, he said, ‘is now called England, thereby assuming the name of the victors’.¹⁹ That, as they say, is that. All that was needed was to prop the claim up with suitable historiographical underpinning. Henry of Huntingdon obliged in his gloss on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s list of the kings of Britain. With the death of Cadwaladr, the last of these kings, ‘the Britons lost the name (*nomen*) and kingdom’.²⁰ In the next century Roger of Wendover garnished the explanation a little by commenting that the decision was the co-ordinated response of early Anglo-Saxon kings.²¹ One can almost hear the smack of firm government at this first recorded, if imaginary, constitutional convention in England’s history. Geoffrey of Monmouth, it is true, rather queered the pitch of this early English triumphalism with his account of the global glories of the early Britons; but his story ends with the defeat and utter dejection of the Britons, prophetic hopes notwithstanding; while in the First Variant version of his *History* the triumph of the English is specifically linked to the loss of the name of Britain (*nomen Britanniae*).²²

¹⁹ *Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1962), 9. Aelfric soon followed suit by commenting how the persecution of St Alban, a Romano-British martyr, extended to ‘Angla lande’: quoted in P. Wormald, ‘Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 13.

²⁰ Henry of Huntingdon, ‘Epistola ad Warinum’ in Robert of Torigni, *Chroniques*, ed. L. Deslisle (Rouen, 1872–3), I, 111. The observation soon became commonplace, as in the chronicles of Alfred of Beverley or Gervase of Canterbury. In a similar vein Roger of Howden converted Arthur from ‘king of the Britons’ to ‘king of England’: John Gillingham, ‘The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1991), 103 n. 23.

²¹ Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. O. Coxe, (1841), I, 92–3.

²² Cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britannie* ed., N. Wright, I (1984), pp. 134–5 (c. 188) 145–6 (c. 204) and II (1988) 178 (c. 188) and esp. 190 (c. 204). The issue, and many others, are very illuminatingly discussed in R. W. Leckie, jnr., *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981), esp. 104–7.

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Now that the name of Britain had been deleted, it remained only to address the second question: what was to be the name of the new people which had now so triumphantly taken charge of the island? It was a measure of its genius that it solved the problem not by theorising but by action. Cutting through any sensitivities of nomenclature it had certainly found a solution by the early eighth century at the latest: the English, *Anglici*, *Angelcynn*. There was, of course, as later generations acknowledged, some explaining to do. Why, as a later text put it, were the peoples called English rather than Saxons? The latter group, after all, was 'the most powerful in the country' and it was the Wessex monarchy's superiority and conquests which were to be the basis of English political unity.²³ There were some suitably ridiculous answers to the question, such as inventing a Queen Angela, daughter of a renowned Saxon leader.²⁴ Modern historians have emphasized the rôle of conversion, the ambitions of Canterbury and the adoption by the Roman church of the term 'Angli' to describe the Germanic converts of its newly-established province as key factors in the establishment of this anomalous name.²⁵ But the charming if fictitious explanation put forward by Ranulf Higden has also a great deal to recommend it, because in its innocence it shrewdly recognized the key role of kingship in the making of the English people. About 800, so Ranulf reported, Egbert king of the West Saxons commanded that all the men of the land be called English, *Angli*.²⁶ It was never that simple, of course; but it is undoubtedly true that from the tenth century, initially though not consistently in charters and thereafter on coins, the monarchs adopted the title king of the English, *rex Anglorum*.²⁷ They were kings of a people, a named people.

The assumption of a name, by an individual or a people, is an act of self-identification. In the case of a people it is an acknowledgement that it perceived itself as having a communal identity, a sense of

²³ *Le Livre des Reis de Britannie et Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre*, ed. J. Glover (Rolls Series, 1865), 41. Geoffrey of Monmouth, with uncharacteristic self-restraint, ducks the problem by commenting blandly: 'Hinc Angli Saxones vocati sunt qui Loegriam possedunt et ab eis Anglia terra postmodum dictum est': *Historia Regum Briannie*, II, 172. (c. 186).

²⁴ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby (Rolls Series, 1865–86), II, 4.

²⁵ H. E. J. Cowdrey, 'Bede and the "English" People', *Journal of Religious History*, XI (1981), 501–23; P. Wormald, 'Bede Beowulf and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy', *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. T. Farrell (British Archaeological Reports no. 46, 1978); *idem*, 'Bede, the Bretwalda and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), 99–129.

²⁶ Higden, *Polychronicon*, II, 152.

²⁷ Cf. Susan Reynolds, 'What do we mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?' *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985), 395–414.

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togetherness, *wirgefihl*. This may arise from, or manifest itself in, a belief in common lineage descent, as happened in Ireland to peoples such as the *Ui Néill*. It may also express a sense of fellowship arising from being dwellers of the same district: such, at least etymologically, is the root of the word *Cymry* employed from at least the seventh century to refer to the Britons of Strathclyde-Cumbria as well as to those of the country we know as Wales.²⁸ A name may also be assumed relationally, since nothing perhaps serves to raise a people's awareness of itself and of its distinctiveness, or superiority, more than living cheek by jowl, often indeed in conflict, with other peoples. What probably made the early English, *Angelcynn*, most aware of themselves as a single people deserving a single name—in spite of their memory that they were composed of different ethnic-groups (Saxons, Angles, Jutes) and in spite of their divided political structures and loyalties—was their awareness of their solidarity *vis-à-vis* the other peoples, more especially the Celtic-speaking peoples, of Britain.

A people may assume a name, though for the medieval period it is very rarely that we know when or under what circumstances it did so. But it may also be given a name by others; the two sets of names sometimes, but by no means always, coincide. Indeed the name that is given by one people to another may be perceived as an act of cultural domination, a deliberate imposition of one's own terminology at the expense of the indigenous name. The thin-skinned Gerald of Wales certainly regarded the English usage of the words 'Wales' and 'Welsh' in that light.²⁹ They were, he thought, demeaning terms: they derived from a generic Germanic word for anything foreign and had no foundation other than in the perceptions of the invading peoples themselves. Gerald had at least half a good case: the Welsh knew themselves as Britons (or *Cymry*) and there was no reason, other than the ambition of the victor to appropriate such an evocative term for his own use³⁰ or, alternatively, to abolish it, why the English could not have used it. Etymologically Gerald's outrage may have been well-founded; but victors rarely pay much heed to the niceties of etymology. It is their categories and names which normally win the day. Contemporaries had no doubt about that: 'when the Saxons conquered

²⁸ Ifor Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff 1972), 71–2, 86; R. Geraint Gruffydd in *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd*, ed. R.B. Jones and Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff, 1978), 25–44.

²⁹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, VI, 179 (*Descriptio Kambrie*, I, vii). For comment Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982), 185; but Gerald did not consistently use *Kambria* in preference to *Wallia*.

³⁰ For *Britones* used as a synonym for *Angli* see e.g. *The Political Songs of England from the reign of John to Edward III* (Camden Society, 1839), 128, 131. For *Britannia* in the styles of pre-Conquest Kings, E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and other Studies* (Leicester 1966).

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this land', as Henry of Huntingdon remarked, 'they established seven kings and they imposed their names (*nomina*) at their whim on the kingdoms'.³¹

Names, I hope you will agree, are important to an understanding of peoples, especially of the self-perception of peoples. But names, it should also be clear, are treacherous. They deliberately set out to manufacture a facade of unity and to establish a mythology of timelessness and unchangeability. In Benedict Anderson's striking phrase, they 'turn chance into destiny'.³² In reality names change their meanings as the social realities which they seek to describe themselves change. So it is with peoples. One important era of change is that which I have chosen as the chronological focus of these lectures, the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries in the British Isles. During those centuries, as I suggested in last year's address, the identities of the peoples of the British Isles became more clearly etched and simplified and so, accordingly, did their names; those names also acquired many of the connotations which they have retained since. In other words it was a formative period in the definition of the labels of the peoples of the British Isles. Contemporaries recognized as much as the period drew to its close. When Ranulf Higden compiled his *Universal Chronicle* at Chester in the mid-fourteenth century he dutifully listed the seven peoples who had at one stage or another come to Britain; but of those seven two, he conceded, had disappeared—the Picts and the Danes; one, the Flemings, was no more than the memory of a distant episode in south-west Wales; and as to the Normans they were now 'intermingled throughout the whole island', as he put it, with the English. That left three peoples—English, Scots and Welsh.³³

Taking a leaf from Higden's book I would like to look briefly at these peoples of mainland Britain and the names they bore—with an occasional glance over my shoulder towards Ireland—and to do so in the light of two interlinked criteria which may have shaped their identities and thereby their names during these formative centuries. The first of those criteria is, to borrow Susan Reynolds' most servicable phrase, that of regnal solidarity.³⁴ In other words how far was the identity of a people and the label it bore shaped by the growth of a

³¹ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 8.

³² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition, 1991), 12.

³³ Higden, *Polychronicon*, II, 152–4.

³⁴ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), 261. Borrowing this phrase is only a minor indication of the immense debt of stimulus, and reassurance, that I owe to this book. At least if I am barking up the wrong, or non-existent, tree I am in good company.

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more powerful, penetrative and well-articulated royal authority which mediated its view of the world and of its subjects through the language of its public documents? What was the relationship, in short, between peoples and kingdoms, nations and states? The second criteria is that of territorial definition or boundaries. Peoples and boundaries are not, of course, necessarily connected. A people is defined by its own collective sense of self-identity and its cultivation of the mythologies and emblems of such identity rather than by a necessary attachment to a particular area of land. Indeed a never-never land in the past and/or the future can often be a more potent force in creating a sense of ethnic cohesion than the mundane realities of a particular terrain in the present. Nevertheless the notion of a homeland, actual or mythical, and of regarding such a homeland as sacred is a potent feature of the ideology of most peoples, ancient and modern. Defining the boundaries of such a homeland may also serve to define membership of a people.

It is with the English, *gens Anglorum*, that we begin, because they were first off the mark. In 1100 they started with both a handicap and a huge headstart. Their handicap was that they had twice suffered the trauma of conquest in the eleventh century. That, as Henry of Huntingdon lugubriously remarked, was evidence enough that God wished to delete them as a people.³⁵ If so, God did a poor job of it, since the English seem to have recovered much of their poise and confidence well before the centenary of the battle of Hastings was celebrated. If we seek an explanation for the divine failure it rests surely in the fact that the headstart was ultimately far more important than the handicap. It was in fact a double headstart. The English, as we have been seen, had sorted out their identity and name as a single people—*gens Anglorum*, *Angelcynn*—at least three centuries before the disaster of 1066 struck. The ideological underpinnings of the sense of Englishness—what a spokesman at the Council of Constance many centuries later was to call ‘the habit of association’³⁶—had been successfully cultivated for centuries, and with increasing effectiveness from the tenth century.³⁷ Such a sense of collective solidarity could be badly dented; it was unlikely to be eradicated. Secondly the Old English monarchy was, in James Campbell’s phrase, ‘a formidably organized state’ where the practice and habits of effective rule under a single king had instilled a

³⁵ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 214.

³⁶ C. M. D. Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform 1378–1460. The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* (1977), 120 (*collectio*). For comment see L. R. Loomis, ‘Nationality at the Council of Constance. An Anglo-French dispute’, *American Historical Review*, 44 (1939), 508–27; J. P. Genet, ‘English Nationalism: Thomas Polton at the Council of Constance’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 28 (1984), 60–78.

³⁷ Wormald, ‘Engla-lond’, as cited in n. 19 above, and the references given there to Wormald’s earlier work.