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Musical Finds and Political Meanings: Archaeological Connexions Between Lyres, Poetry and Power in Barbarian Europe

Summary

Although often recreational today, music can also accompany ritual and form indices of social class and political affiliation. Its practitioners may be drawn into close proximity with government and serve the political purposes of institutions and states. New instrument finds from inhumation cemeteries of the 5th to 8th centuries CE in northern and Atlantic Europe emphasize the political relevance of ancient musics associated with the lyre. While early historical accounts of singers, their political connexions and acts of diplomacy connect ancient song with political landscapes, so the finds emerge as material proxies for political agency. Might closely similar finds of the earlier Iron Age reference political agency in cultural milieux that lie 'beyond the texts' in deep Prehistory?

Keywords: musicianship; inhumations; institutions; diplomacy; agency; identity; early medieval

Wenngleich Musik heutzutage überwiegend der Entspannung dient, kann sie auch Rituale begleiten und Hinweise auf soziale und politische Zugehörigkeiten liefern. Musizierende können in die unmittelbare Nähe zur politischen Führung geraten und so politischen Absichten dienen. Neue Instrumentenfunde in Gräbern des 5. bis 8. Jhd. aus dem nördlichen und atlantischen Europa lassen auf die politische Bedeutung antiker Leiermusik schließen. Während in historischen Berichten über Sänger, ihre politischen Verbindungen und diplomatischen Handlungen alte Lieder mit Politik in Verbindung gebracht werden, fungieren archäologische Funde als materielle Repräsentanten politischer *agency*. Könnten analog dazu recht ähnliche, aus der frühen Eisenzeit stammende Funde als Ausdruck politischen Handelns in schriftlosem Umfeld verstanden werden?

Keywords: Musikantentum; Bestattungen; Institutionen; Diplomatie; *agency*; Identität; Frühmittelalter

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I Introduction

In around the year 1200 CE the Scandinavian historian Saxo Grammaticus, drawing together threads of earlier folk tradition for his *Gesta danorum*, or History of the Danes, contemplated the ancient tale of a common musician named Hiarnus, whose skills in song had propelled him onto the very throne of Denmark.¹ On the death of the legendary Danish king Frotho, apparently without an heir, this Hiarnus (Saxo labels him *rusticano*, which is to say ‘peasant’) had composed a four-line verse eulogy, or epitaph, of such perfection that he was promptly acclaimed king in Frotho’s place. *Quo carmine edito*, we are told, *auctorem Dani diademate munerati sunt*: ‘when the song had been presented, the Danes rewarded its author with the crown.’ Saxo neglects to supply the vernacular text of Hiarnus’ ‘barbarous stave’ (*suo barbarum condidit metrum*), but provides a terse Latin paraphrase which, read in the light of similar verses that survive in the Old Norse saga literature, may give us some sense of the heroic quality of the supposed original:

Frothoem Dani quem longum vivere vellent
per sua defunctum rura tulere diu.
Principis hoc summi tumulatum caespite corpus
aethere sub liquido nuda recondit humus.

Frotho / for whom the Danes / a longer life / would have wished,
upon his death / through the lands / they bore long.
The prince was then / entombed under turf / his corpse
beneath the clear sky / they laid in earth.²

It seems a remarkable and, on the face of it, unlikely claim: that a man might acquire political control over a famous state merely through his skills in song and verse; and indeed, from his cultivated vantage-point in the 13th-century Saxo takes a somewhat modern, unsympathetic, view of the Danish people’s alleged behaviour, as we shall see. Yet, illogical and erratic as such a choice may seem to us, as well as to Saxo, Hiarnus’

1 Knabe et al. 1908–1912 VI, 1–16.

2 Author’s near-literal translation. A closely comparable sentiment is expressed in the stave composed by Oddi Glumsson *Litli* (‘the Little’) for the poet Thorbjorn *Svarti* (‘the Black’) who died at Acre in around 1154, as told in *Orkneyingasaga* 88: *Þá sá ec hann · at höfutkirkiu : siklings vín · sandi ausinn ; nu þrumer grund · grytt yfer hönum : solu signud · á sudr-löndum*. ‘Then saw / I / him · beside the great kirk ; the earl’s friend · / in sand / surrounded; now [are]

the mourning earth · [and] the stones above him : / by sunlight / blessed · in a southern land.’ Author’s near-literal translation from Jonaeus’ reading of the Old Norse (ON) text in the *Flatexjarbók* (Stofnun Arna Magnússonar Reykjavík, MS GKS 1005; Jonaeus 1780, 312). A variant reading together with a transcription from the very much later Uppsala MS (UppsUB R702) can be found at <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=3503&cf=default&table=verses> (visited on 19/07/2019).

story is merely one of many reported (and even documented) instances of ancient poets and musicians attaining high political rank, whether amongst illiterate Barbarians or in the more sophisticated, lettered world of Classical and early Medieval statecraft. Thus, when in the fifth and sixth books of his *Spring and Autumn* the Chinese writer Lü Buwei asserts profound connexions between a state's musical customs and its order and stability,³ whilst his ideas may seem merely dogmatic they may not be quite so detached from real life as we his modern audience might otherwise suppose. Taken together, his opinion, Hiarnus' alleged experience and Saxo's derision may prompt us to revisit some interpretive challenges posed by modern developments in the material culture of ancient poets and their music, particularly those for whom a political inclination might be suspected.

In this chapter I will focus specifically on the musical and poetical behaviours of Saxo's northern Barbarians insofar as they are represented in the written and archaeological records, paying particular attention to the period between the collapse of Rome's Western Empire in the 5th century CE and its revival in the Carolingian Renaissance of the 9th. I choose this 500-year span in part because of the diversity and increasing richness of its archaeological footprint, but also because of its ready susceptibility to diachronic perspectives including (because relatively recent in the timeline of music's prehistory) the viewpoint of ethnology. I will argue that whilst the modern scholar may find Lü's bold assertions to be simplistic, naïve, prejudiced, unscientific, they nevertheless represent an ancient point of view, perhaps widely held, and thus have the potential to draw Ancient Studies into a new and ambitious theoretical engagement with music's archaeological record. Broadening Lü's notion of the politics of states to include also political aspects of established institutions, such as church, tribe and household, I will explore textual support for the notion that certain forms of Barbarian musical expression – especially those associated with the lyre – could have had a profoundly political dimension at that time. I will show how a recent wave of archaeological finds of musicians and their instruments contribute materially to the case. We will see from the texts how poetry and power intertwine in some familiar but also in some unexpected ways; how both for individuals and for their kin and wider society, music was a recurrent political tool. We will see that, rightly or wrongly, the northern Barbarians did indeed perceive themselves and each other through something resembling Lü's prism: that by providing an index of cultural and intellectual character, their music and musical traditions might reveal something of people's social and political credentials – especially their nobility – and therefore their entitlement to respect and to authority in an age

3 *Lüshi Chunqiu* (or *Lu-shih ch'un ch'iu*, 吕氏春秋), V, 4.4; VI, 3.5. Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 144–145; 162–163. Lü was writing in ca. 240 BC.

when lordship could be as much a matter of reputation, manoeuvre and negotiation as it was of inheritance.

In pursuing this line of thought it will be necessary to explore the material contexts of lyres found in so-called musicians' graves and in elite chamber burials, and to present some of the growing archaeological evidence which hints that their placement in these funerary assemblages should be seen as a political as well as a votive gesture, enacted before witnesses. I will consider whether their political value in this funerary context would have resided merely in their expressing connexions with song and tradition, or whether, echoing Lü, they were meant to evoke particular genres: genres of repertoire and even of sounds themselves. In conclusion I will ask whether such material expressions have the potential to tell us something new about the workings of the machinery of politics in ancient times.

2 First indications

In the summer of 1846 the first ancient lyre grave came to light in the south of Germany, at a place called Oberflacht in the Schwäbische Alb, near the source of the river Danube and not far from Konstanz on the Upper Rhine (Fig. 1).⁴ During investigations of a large inhumation cemetery on land to the north of the present settlement, Captain Ferdinand von Dürrich found a number of graves in which wooden items had been preserved, in some cases in their entirety, as a consequence of an unusual clay subsoil and a high water table. In the following year Dr. Wolfgang Menzel was able to report that one of von Dürrich's graves, today designated Oberflacht 31,⁵ included an object which seemed at first to be the body and neck of a lute. He uses the word *Geige*, which normally means 'fiddle' or folk violin. However, in 1892 further excavation within the same cemetery complex, by Berlin archaeologist Dr. Albert Voss, revealed another such grave, known today as Oberflacht 84, which contained a complete wooden lyre.⁶ From its form it quickly became apparent that Menzel's *Geige* had been merely the surviving half of a closely similar instrument: one arm and part of the sound box. The context was in each case Barbarian, evidently post-Roman. Each man had a sword, showing that in death, and presumably in life, he had enjoyed elevated status within his community. Each burial was contained within a narrow chamber with wooden walls, floor and roof,

4 In the earliest musical treatments the site is often referred to as 'Lupfen,' 'Lupfen bei Oberflacht' or 'Lupfenberg,' after the hillside on which it is situated. However, 'Oberflacht' has always been the name of the parish in which it is located.

5 Schiek 1992, 37–40, pl. 8 (plans), 31–34 (finds); Dürrich and Menzel 1847, 13, 17.

6 Schiek 1992, 55–57; pls. 60–61 (finds). Today Voss shares the honours for the discovery with the collector Julius Schad, a former mayor of Tuttingen whose museum seems initially to have received the finds.



Fig. 1 Europe, showing the location of Oberflacht in relation to subsequent finds of lyres and lyre components. 500–1100 CE. a – Oberflacht; b – Trossingen; c – Concevreux; d – Cologne; e – Dorestad; f – Abingdon; g – Taplow; h – Prittlewell; i – Dover; j – Deal; k – Sutton Hoo; l – Snape; m – Oakley; n – Morning Thorpe; o – Bergh Apton; p – York; q – Elisenhof; r – Haddeby (Hedeby/Haithabu); s – Broa-Halla; t – Gerete-Fardhem; u – Birka-Björkö. Scale: 500 km.

the space just large enough to enclose the coffin and a piece of wooden furniture at its foot. In Grave 37 the body lay supine in a closed casket with a two-headed serpent running along the ridge of the casket lid; there was also a spear, horse-harness gear, a candlestick and a gaming board. In Grave 84 the body lay supine within a framed bed, or

bier, which had elaborate sides, gables and a stout ridge-pole, together with a fine double chair (serving also as a repository for smaller objects) standing at its foot. This time there was no horse gear, but prominent elements included a spear, a bow and arrows, two wooden travelling flasks and a candlestick. Neither grave preserved any obvious metal armour, such as helmet, shield or mail.

Together, the two finds offered scholars their first enigmatic glimpse of a phenomenon that is becoming familiar to us today but was then unknown to science: the Germanic warrior-musician. Who these people were, and what their exact role had been in society, remained unclear. They were fighting men, certainly, yet somehow instrumentalists also. Each instrument was a highly elaborate piece of equipment, skilfully made, elegant in its external appearance. Each was evidently placed so as to seem embraced in a gesture of intimacy and possession.⁷ In those earliest days of our field, theories of ancient music were still entirely led by the texts, and nothing in the vernacular and early medieval Latin literatures, which provided most of the references, seemed to link stringed instruments either with weapons, as such, or with burial rites: they appeared mostly in the heroic context of feasting and leisure, and to some extent of Christian song, especially psalmody. The clearest external parallels were provided by the practitioners of later medieval courtly song – troubadours, *trouvères* and *Minnesänger* – whose combat-readiness is rarely emphasized in their songs; likewise the bardic poets and associated performers of Insular Celtic tradition. Nevertheless, with these as the only available models, the generic designations ‘bard’ and ‘minstrel’ came to be widely adopted, and attention began to focus instead on the lyres as objects, dwelling especially on their constructions and modes of operation.

It must be admitted that they were remarkable objects, and would have seemed startlingly advanced to scholars whose thoughts were still dominated by notions of a ‘dark’ post-Roman world. Their remains clamoured for practical exploration. Indeed they were to be much celebrated both in the literature and in the museums that curated them. Dürrich’s Oberflacht 37 fragments came to be displayed at the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart, where they remain to this day, whilst in due course Voss’ complete specimen from Oberflacht 84 would feature prominently in Berlin’s Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde⁸ and later in the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte,⁹ when the collections moved there in 1922. And there it remained until the Second World War.

7 Dürrich and Menzel 1847, pl. 8. 3–7, supplies an ink-wash drawing of the Grave 37 finds *in situ* (reproduced in Schiek 1992, pl. 8, and Lawson and Krempel-Eichmann 2015, pl. 1), which shows the sword and lyre together in the crook of the man’s right arm. I have seen no grave plan for Grave 84, but a replica of the whole grave (viewed obliquely in Schiek 1992, fig. 10) presents the lyre as lying di-

agonally across the man’s chest, with the bow in the crook of his left arm. The sword is hidden from sight, so probably on his right side.

8 The Royal Museum for Ethnography, which opened on the corner of Stresemann and Niederkirchnerstraße in 1884.

9 The Museum for Pre- and Early History, in the nearby Martin Gropius Bau.

Although musicology seems at first to have been slow to explore the finds' full cultural significance, deterred perhaps by the smallness of the sample,¹⁰ they were to be cited many times (if often unexamined at first-hand) by organologists such as Otto Andersson¹¹ and Hortense Panum,¹² taking their cue from Oskar Fleischer's essay in Hermann Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*.¹³ Fleischer's treatment, brief though it is, was amongst the first in the philological sphere to recognize the essential similarity between the two finds and to establish, contra Jacob Grimm, that Dürriich's was a plucked stringed instrument. He renames it *chrotta*¹⁴ in place of the *Geige* which Grimm had innocently perpetuated on Menzel's authority. Interestingly, Fleischer treats the people themselves under the heading "die berufsmässigen Musiker der Kelten und Germanen: die Barden",¹⁵ thereby asserting identification with a professional, or at least specialist, class or cadre of performer. Contemplating the Frankish court poet Venantius Fortunatus' reference to the *harpa*, evidently the *chrotta*'s equivalent amongst 6th-century Barbarians, he adds "Die Harfe war den Sachsen ein unveräusserliches Besitztum, ihre Spieler politische Persönlichkeiten",¹⁶ and in so doing touches upon our present theme. Yet although the political implications of poets and of song have continued to engage the attention of philologists, and even music historians, they have persistently failed to attract serious archaeological consideration. Which is to say that archaeology has failed to address the political questions posed by these and other finds of similar sort, even when found in association with persons of political class.

For many years the Oberflacht instruments remained isolated, their only known parallels being images of King David and his lyre shown in Late Antique and early medieval manuscript miniatures purporting to illustrate stringed instruments referenced in the Old Testament Psalms and related texts. But then, during the dark days of the Second World War, the publication of another German discovery introduced fresh detail to the picture. Since 1924 Roman archaeologist Fritz Fremersdorf had been conducting

- 10 The music historian Emil Naumann, for example, makes no mention of Oberflacht 31 in the first volume of his *Illustrierte Musikgeschichte* (Naumann 1880; also Naumann Undated, after 1880), despite devoting three pages to a discussion of the lives and repertoires of earlier, Roman poets, later troubadours and *Minnésänger* (Naumann Undated, after 1880, I, 228–230).
- 11 Andersson 1923; Andersson 1930, 211, fig. 69 supplies a photograph of the Oberflacht 84 lyre.
- 12 Panum 1940, 92–93; fig. 76 supplies only a crude line drawing of the Oberflacht 84 lyre, unattributed.
- 13 Fleischer 1900, 570–571 has not been allowed an illustration.

- 14 The word *chrotta* is used by Fortunatus in the 6th century to describe the instruments of the Britons or Bretons (it is unclear which he means). Its various equivalents in medieval Insular tradition include Irish-Gaelic *crúit*, English *crowd* and Welsh *crwth*. Today *chrotta* no longer carries any universal implication as to type (beyond 'plucked stringed instrument') and has lost its place in music's archaeological nomenclature.
- 15 Fleischer 1900, 570: "The professional musician of the Celts and Germans: the bard?"
- 16 Fleischer 1900, 572: "The harp was, for the Saxon [i. e. the Anglo-Saxon], an essential possession, its players political persons?"

investigations in and around the Romanesque basilica of St Severin in Cologne, including its early medieval levels, and in the course of his continuing exploration in early 1939 he found and excavated two élite graves of the early medieval period: one male, the other female.¹⁷ Benefitting from more modern investigative techniques, associated finds showed them to date from the early 8th century, their context Frankish. This was the time in which the Frankish élite were consolidating their conversion to Christianity and, under their king and later self-styled emperor Karl der Große (Charlemagne, r. 768–814), would soon begin their conquest of Western Europe in the image of ancient Rome, inaugurating the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. In one of the burials, grave P100,¹⁸ lay a young man¹⁹ with a wooden lyre (Fig. 2). Although smaller than the Oberflacht 84 lyre, and somewhat less well preserved, it too had had tuning pegs for six strings, as well as evidence of a tail-piece of iron. It had a broadly similar outline, the arms and sound box carved from one continuous piece of wood, the cavity extending up inside the arms. The context too preserved some important details. The sides of the grave were made up of dressed sandstone slabs of various colours, rising from a floor of trachyte paving.²⁰ The surviving photographs reveal his ghostly shape, lying on his back with his legs extended (he wore leather shoes) and the lyre placed over his right forearm.²¹ On the floor were traces of plant materials, thought to be from his mattress. A wooden stave with an organic mass of fatty material and willow bast was interpreted as a torch. A wooden pilgrim flask similar to those at Oberflacht lay by his right foot.²² The personal equipment clustered by his left foot included a folding knife or razor, a comb, a small pair of shears and an iron strike-a-light. For all these fine things and his prestigious position (under the present historic church), there were no weapons, and his gloves seemed not to be a matching pair.²³ He was, however, expensively dressed. He was clothed in woollen and linen textiles, his tunic mounting a gold-threaded collar and facings, whilst below his knees were scattered fine silver ornaments that may once have decorated the lower part of his costume.²⁴ These ornaments were decorated in a

17 Fremersdorf 1943, 133–139; for the lyre itself, 136–139; fig. 7; (*in situ*) pl. 55.

18 Since redesignated III, 100 by Bernd Päffgen. Päffgen 1992, part 1, 481–485; part 2, 280–285; part 3, pl. 59–60, 130.

19 The absence of weapons led the composer and harpist H. J. Zingel, who saw the press reports and went to see the find, to presume female gender; Zingel 1939, 335. However, this is inconsistent with the evidence later presented by Fremersdorf and Päffgen; perhaps he had been confused by the second of Fremersdorf's important graves, which was clearly female.

20 Päffgen 1992, part 2, 280–284.

21 Fremersdorf 1943, pl. 55. As with Oberflacht 84 in Berlin, the find itself did not survive the war, being lost when the museum store burned on the night of 28–29 June 1943. Päffgen 1992, part 2, 284.

22 Päffgen 1992, part 2, fig. 126.

23 The right glove was of soft buckskin; the left was of cow hide and decorated with a different pattern. Both gloves were gauntlets, with extended cuffs. Fremersdorf 1943, 133, fig. 7 c–d; 137–138.

24 Päffgen 1992, part 3, pls. 59, 60. Some equally fancy silvered ornaments found at Oberflacht and associated with Oberflacht 37 (Veecik 1931, pl. 58) have been identified as belt fittings (Schiek 1992, 39–40; fig. 9).

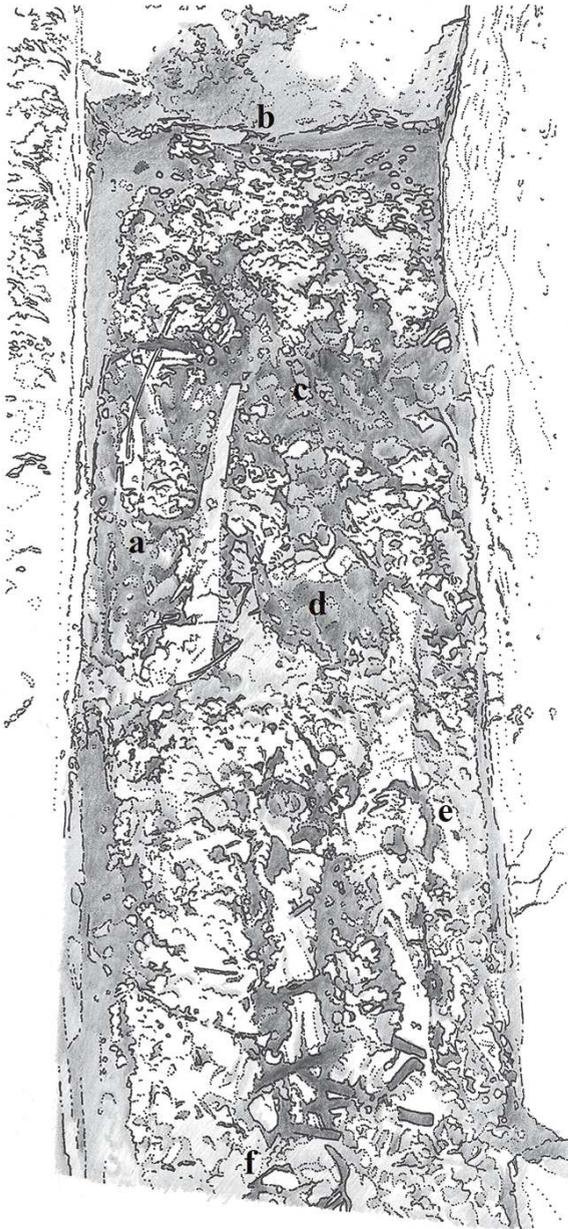


Fig. 2 The Severinskirche lyre and musician *in situ*. Cologne, early 8th century CE (a – lyre; b – head; c – thorax; d – pelvis; e – left knee; f – right shoe and bindings).

style that could be dated to around the beginning of the 8th century. Some finds provided still more personal, indeed poignant, detail. Strewn across his torso and over the lyre were fragments of plant stalks which were identified as the stems of wild roses and possibly lavender.²⁵

As an archaeologist and culture-historian who knew Oberflacht well, Fremersdorf must have begun to wonder about the relationship between the Frankish and Alamannic lyres, but sadly he failed to produce a fuller publication. Indeed it would not be until the 1970s, as scholars shifted their focus from the instrument's construction, typology and musical characteristics towards contemplation of its material-cultural aspects, that archaeological discussion of its symbolic, contextual and demographic meaning would begin. Yet already in 1943 there were questions that called for answers. Who, or rather what, had these three men been? Why had they each been buried with a lyre? To what cultural milieu did they belong? Did the minor differences in their presentation signify differences in character, or rank, or tribal affiliation? The vegetal residues at Cologne also invited questions about the circumstances of the burial, the nature of the funeral rite and the likely identities and purposes of actors and witnesses.

3 Royal lyre graves

The puzzle took its next step forward in the 1960s through the work of Rupert Bruce-Mitford and his daughter, the musician Myrtle Bruce-Mitford, on fragments of wood with metal fitments found in the early 7th-century royal ship burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, on the east coast of England (Fig. 3, no. 1).²⁶ Amongst many items of treasure recovered from the collapsed burial chamber in 1939, the same year that had seen Fremersdorf excavating the Cologne lyre, the pieces had quickly been identified as parts of a stringed musical instrument (they included one of its hollow arms and a curved bar bearing a series of sockets for pegs, the pegs still preserved within them).²⁷ In an echo of Oberflacht 31, the exact type of instrument was at first unclear: misled by literal readings of the texts, some kind of small harp was suspected. However, by 1970 the identification of further wooden fragments and careful comparison with details of Oberflacht and Cologne showed that it was in fact another lyre.²⁸ Its original length could not be determined, but from its breadth and overall shape it seemed closest to the Oberflacht finds in size, with only a minor structural difference in the joints used to assemble the upper part of its frame. It did however possess one other feature unknown in

25 Fremersdorf 1943, 137.

26 Excavated in 1939 under the direction of Charles Phillips; today it usually carries the more prosaic

designation 'Mound 1'.

27 R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford 1948.

28 R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1970.

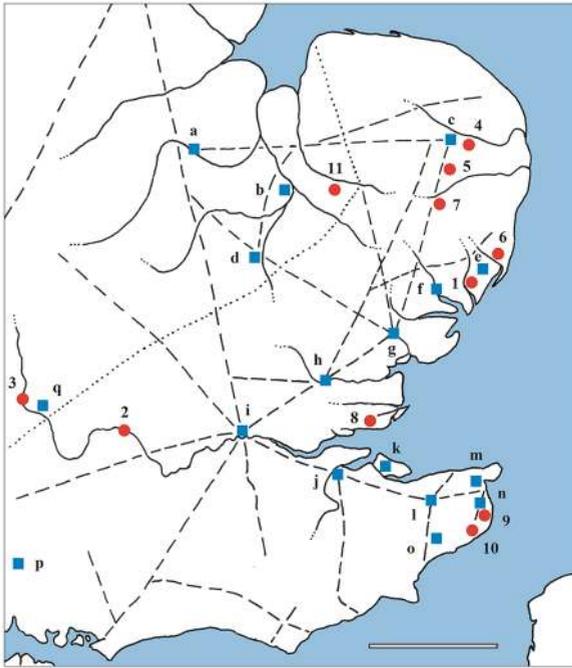


Fig. 3 Southern and Eastern England, showing lyre graves (red dots) in relation to coastline, waterways, principal land routes and (blue squares) centres of power and authority, 500–700 CE (1 – Sutton Hoo; 2 – Taplow; 3 – Abingdon; 4 – Bergh Apton; 5 – Morning Thorpe; 6 – Snape; 7 – Oakley; 8 – Prittlewell; 9 – Deal; 10 – Dover; 11 – Eriswell). Scale: 50 km.

the German lyres: a pair of elaborate gilded bronze plaques or escutcheons. With their carved birds' heads, zoomorphic interlace, small panes of glittering garnet *cloisonné* and bosses made of shell and yet more garnet, these appeared to mark it out as an instrument fit for a king.

As the work progressed, Rupert Bruce-Mitford revisited other unpublished materials in the British Museum stores. Amongst early Anglo-Saxon finds discovered in 1883 within the large princely tumulus in the churchyard at Taplow Court, Buckinghamshire, he found part of another, broadly similar instrument, which had been identified merely as a “crescentic ornament.” Again the wood was adorned with a pair of bird-headed plaques of gilded bronze, with carved interlace and garnet inlays. The placement of both lyres at a distance from the bodies (or, at Sutton Hoo where no skeletal remains survived, where it was guessed that the body should have been) also contrasted sharply with Oberflacht and Cologne. However, Bruce-Mitford was also able to locate a third, previously unidentified English specimen in the literature, this time within a cemetery of more typical burials and cremations, at Abingdon in the valley of the upper Thames, not far from Oxford (Fig. 4).²⁹ It consisted of pieces of two curved antler plates with

29 Saxton Road, Abingdon, burial 42. Leeds and Harden 1936, 38–39; pls. V, IX, XIX.

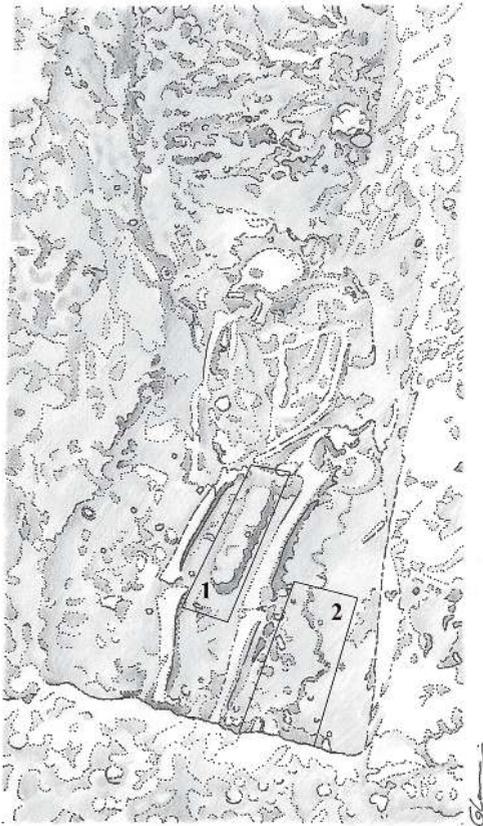


Fig. 4 Abingdon grave 42 *in situ*,
1 – the 5th-century sword and
scabbard; 2 – the location and
probable orientation of the lyre.
Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 5th or
6th century CE.

holes for tuning pegs, from the upper end of the instrument. Their placement in the grave differed slightly from Oberflacht and Cologne, in that they seemed to have been deposited near the foot. Otherwise, allowing for differences in preservation, the context was broadly similar to those of Oberflacht 31 and 84: the accompanying finds, which included an iron sword of a type believed to date from the 5th century, were consistent with a person of elevated status, rather than a ruler. Abingdon thus came to play an important role in establishing circumstantial connections, not only between the Anglo-Saxon instruments and their Frankish and Alaman parallels overseas but also, being English, between Anglo-Saxon lyre graves and the performers referred to in the surviving Anglo-Saxon literature, both Old English and Latin. It now seemed that, although lyres like Sutton Hoo could come into very close proximity to power, like the German finds they still had their place amongst the wider population.

What royal function might the princely instruments have served? It is a question that might equally be asked of other enigmatic aristocratic finds, from the lyres, harps

and lutes of Ancient Egypt to the instruments found in the frozen tombs of the Altai. Ought we to envision them as the intimate personal possessions of the dead, or as domestic equipment from the ruling houses over which they had presided? Could they be extraneous, third-party offerings, inserted into the grave in order to satisfy some ritual formula, perhaps votive? Or could their presence be symbolic, surrounded as they are by more familiar attributes of kingship? The Anglo-Saxon evidence was equivocal. To be sure, they seemed to exist alongside equipment that could be interpreted as household gear associated with feasting and leisure, such as cauldrons, bowls and drinking horns. Next to the Taplow fragments, where they lay by the wall of the chamber, was a set of gaming pieces, a drinking horn and an elaborate glass beaker. But did this mean that lyres were mere playthings or utensils, parts of the mechanism – and theatre – of domestic life, like the traditional parlour piano or the modern home audio system? Some archaeological commentators have assumed so.³⁰ However, the presence of similar lyres in two Insular manuscript miniatures of the 8th century provided indirect exemplars of an alternative, more intimate relationship, a relationship which, as we will now see, was also hinted at in the texts. The implications of this dichotomy would be considerable. On the one hand we might begin to imagine the music and poetry that Sutton Hoo and Taplow represent being no more than incidental accompaniments to the men's lives, while on the other we might see them as signs of personal musical preferences. Might it be that they were indeed intended as statements, to say something about the identities of the people themselves: about their personalities as rulers and patrons, about the nature of their rule and patronage, and about the manner in which they or their successors wished them to be remembered?

4 Household analogues in the texts

It should be stressed from the outset that, beyond the cemeteries, no lyre or fragment of lyre has ever been recovered in a household location, rich or poor. Certainly no aristocratic dwelling has yet produced a lyre. Some finds, such as the 8th and 9th-century amber lyre bridges from Elisenhof, Schleswig-Holstein,³¹ and Dorestad, Netherlands,³²

30 See Hines 2007, 219.

31 R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1970, 8, fig. 2; R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford 1974, 192; R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1983, 694, fig. 505 c, d; Salmen and Schwab 1971, 10, pl. 3. For the finds context, see generally Bantelmann 1975, and, in more detail, Westphalen 1999; Westphalen 2010.

32 Werner 1954, 14, pl. II. 2, 4; R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1970, 8; R. L. S. Bruce-

Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1983, 694–695; fig. 505 b. Werner's two, which he attributes to the Centraalmuseum, Utrecht, are stray finds from earlier explorations (incorrectly numbered 2 and 3 on Werner's plate). Although found during excavations in 1974, the third also lacked a useful find-context. For the excavations and finds see Van Es and Verwers 1980 and more especially Van Es and Verwers 2009.

may correspond to loci of craft and commerce. Others, such as the 9th-century antler bridge from Birka (Björkö), Östergötland,³³ the 10th-century lyre yoke from Hedeby (Haithabu), Schleswig-Holstein,³⁴ and its 1st-century equivalent from Bremen-Habenhäusen, Lower Saxony,³⁵ may be associated with settlement environments that included houses. But all are in essence stray finds: none can be attributed with confidence to a particular building or otherwise identified as a household item. The texts too offer little in the way of support. Few present lyre-playing within a strictly domestic milieu, and only one purports to offer precise detail. This is Bede's story of the 7th-century Northumbrian herdsman-poet Caedmon.³⁶

Caedmon's story contains several points of political importance. Like Hiarnus, he is a figure for whom musical and poetical experience has led to upward social mobility, in his case elevating him abruptly (at least in Bede's 8th-century narrative) from unknown common man to monkish celebrity, from agricultural worker to Christian poet and teacher. The occasion is his composition of a vernacular song in praise not of a dead king but of God's Creation of the World and of Humankind. Caedmon, says Bede, has long lived with a fear of performing to an audience, and has a particular horror of the *cithara* (for which Bede's later Anglo-Saxon translator supplies *hearpe* in Old English) as it is passed around the common table according to the custom of the house. Then, one night, whilst asleep in his hut, a figure (the text simply describes him as 'someone') appears to him and asks him to sing something. Caedmon has recently returned from dining, the instrument's arrival having as usual caused him to flee 'in the middle of eating'. He protests that he cannot sing; but the figure persists, Caedmon eventually plucks up the courage to sing, and the marvellous outcome is pronounced by Bede to be the first Christian song composed in the English language. Sadly the melody of 'Caedmon's Hymn', as it is generally known today, does not survive, but two closely similar dialect versions believed to represent the original vernacular text have come down to us as later interpolations into the various surviving Latin and West Saxon³⁷ manuscripts of Bede.

This account of the Hymn's first composition may or may not relate to real events in the 7th century. However, for us the question of its historicity is of less musical consequence than the glimpse the tale affords us of Bede's 8th-century notion of music's place in a household: a household in which it might be normal for such an instrument to circulate during and after mealtimes, when everyone – not just the householder – would be expected to perform upon it. It is incidentally one of the very few sources which make clear the direct, practical connexion between lyres and the performance of Old English

33 Arbman 1939; Lund 1984, no. 30.

34 Lawson 1984.

35 Bischof 2002b; Bischof 2002a.

36 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum [HE]* IV, 24.

37 The 'West Saxon' dialect of Old English was spoken in the south-west of England, centred on the cultural region now known as Wessex.

(OE) poetry. The ownership of the *cithara* is not indicated: Bede's narration is economical and probably ownership had no bearing on his purpose.³⁸ Scholars have speculated that the table from which Caedmon fled may have belonged to the hall of some monastic house, though the Latin text nowhere demands that the community need be a religious one: it could be the common table of any aristocratic farming estate.³⁹ More significant for us is the process of diplomacy, negotiation and political engagement that now ensues. The song somehow comes to the attention of the reeve, the administrative head of the estate, and the reeve, perhaps sensing his opportunity, takes the trouble to bring it to the notice of the church authorities.

The authority he finds is one of the most influential political figures of 7th-century Britain, the redoubtable Hild, daughter of a leading Northumbrian family and founder of the famous double monastery of *Streonshalb* or *Streanæshalch*. Hild convenes a committee and together they examine Caedmon. Finding him to be authentic, he is invited – Bede says “instructed”, which leads some scholars to infer that thus far he has not been a free man – to join the monastery as a monk. The story concludes with Caedmon installed as a revered teacher, his persuasive poetic voice strengthening the Church in its continuing attempts to secure the conversion (and subsequent orthodoxy) of all the English. In short, Bede presents Caedmon as propagandist, placing his poetry, and by implication his music, alongside Hild at the forefront of one of the most important political struggles of the post-Roman world.⁴⁰

From an organologist's perspective, Bede's clear implication is that the instrument *cithara* that has so unnerved the simple herdsman is not his own individual property.⁴¹

38 For Bede's interest in emphasizing the impact of Caedmon's experience on his later missionary role, see Frantzen and Hines 2007, 6; Hines 2007, 199.

39 For discussion of such contrasting milieux and the challenges involved in separating them in the archaeological record, see Loveluck 2007, especially 161–169.

40 For Bede's interest in reform of the Northumbrian church, and the agency he attributes to Caedmon, see DeGregorio 2007, 68, 76.

41 For the significance of Latin *cithara* and OE *hearpe* during the 6th to 8th centuries, and their relevance to the identities of the lyre graves, compare the traditional philological view eloquently championed by Robert Boenig (Boenig 1996) with the archaeological position proposed by Rupert and Myrtle Bruce-Mitford (R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1970; R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and M. Bruce-Mitford 1983) and expanded by the present writer (Lawson 1981; Lawson 2001; Law-

son 2009; Lawson and Krempel-Eichmann 2015; Lawson 2019; Graeme Lawson. “Old English Poets, Dangerous Knowledge and Secret Agency in Late Antiquity: A Musical and Archaeological Viewpoint.” In *Knowledge to Die For: Secret Knowledge in the Ancient World*. Ed. by F. Geller. Forthcoming; Graeme Lawson. “The Lyres and Their Contexts [from Eriswell, Suffolk, Graves 313, 255 and 221].” In *Excavations of the Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Eriswell, Suffolk*. Forthcoming; Graeme Lawson. *The Prittlewell Lyre and the Kingdom of Kent. Anglo-Saxon Poets' Graves, from Deal and Dover*. Forthcoming). At the time of writing there is still no archaeological support for the etymological reasoning that either word must imply ‘harp’ in the later triangular sense. As with *chrotta* above, they simply mean ‘stringed instrument’; and although true harps do appear in the art of the later Anglo-Saxon period, their remains have yet to appear anywhere in the British finds record before around 1200.

So whose might it be? Although some kind of shared ownership cannot be ruled out, it is nowhere specified, or even hinted at: to Bede it is merely something that is passed around. Perhaps it belongs to the house or to a prominent member of the community, perhaps the householder him- or herself, whoever that may have been in this particular case. We are limited by the uniqueness of the story as well as by its economy of detail. Other early medieval traditions offer surprisingly few insights. In the early Irish tale of the pre-Christian god-hero Dagda, for example, a story much quoted by early organologists such as Francis Galpin, Hortense Panum and Otto Andersson,⁴² a stringed instrument *crot* or *cruit* is spoken of as hanging on the wall of a feasting hall, presumably reflecting contemporary medieval practice. Instruments, including lyres, are shown in this mode in some medieval manuscript miniatures, as well as in Greek and Roman art.⁴³ But wall-hanging hardly implies communal property: many things might be hung on walls, including guests' personal equipment and trophies. Indeed the poet makes it clear that this is the hero's own personal instrument, previously taken from him in battle, which he finds hanging in the hall of his enemies.

A stronger model for a musical household, or at least for a musical householder, might be provided by the early Danish king Hrothgar, whom we hear described in OE *Beowulf*,⁴⁴ reciting verses and songs (*gidd ond glēo*) of long ago to his assembled guests and retainers during the gift-giving that follows Beowulf's defeat of the monster Grendel. In doing so Hrothgar accompanies himself on the instrument *bearpe*, which in the following line attracts the kenning or epithet *gomen-wudu*, 'joy-wood':⁴⁵ At the same celebration his *scōp*, who is also kened *glēo-man*, 'glee-man,' has already performed a long narrative song, concerning the fates of the sons of Finn Folcwalding, to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument again described as *gomen-wudu*.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there is no sense in the text that we are meant to imagine the two men sharing an instrument, nor is there any indication that either instrument might be passed around in the manner that Bede describes.

42 E. g. Galpin 1910, 1–2; Panum 1940, 125; and most extensively Andersson 1930, 198–199, 204, drawing on the lectures of Eugene O'Curry (O'Curry 1873). The Dagda has a *cruit*-player called Uaithne, whose instrument carries the epithets *Coirecethaircuir* (or *Coir cethar chuir*) meaning 'four angled music' (the number evidently representing the seasons of the year) and *Dur da blá* (indicating that it is made of

oak). In the tale it is stolen from the god during the second Battle of Moytura (*Cath Mag Tuired*), and hung up on the wall of its captors' hall, whence the Dagda eventually recovers it.

43 Panum 1940, fig. 150.

44 Wrenn 1953, line 2106.

45 Wrenn 1953, lines 2105–2110.

46 Wrenn 1953, lines 1063–1070, 1159–1160.

5 Household models: the Trossingen find

I mention these questions of household and community, of kings and ministers and the life of hall and table, partly because they have recently been touched upon in relation to the Oberflacht instruments and to a more recent German find (which I shall shortly describe) but also because together they have an important bearing on the ways in which we should envision musicianship and poetry functioning in post-Roman social and political milieux. The growing impression of a functional division between royal lyres, such as Sutton Hoo, and those found in more modest graves, apparently indicative of a musical division between rulers and other men, has appeared to some to correspond also to a duality already identified within the OE literature, indeed even within *Beowulf* where the poet discriminates between Hrothgar as kingly performer and the subordinate figure of his *scōp* or *glēoman*. The question ‘who was the *scōp*?’ has long perplexed philologists,⁴⁷ just as they have sometimes been moved to ask ‘what kind of instrument is indicated by *bearpe*?’ Into these debates now came archaeology’s not dissimilar enigma: ‘who were the lesser men buried with their lyres at Oberflacht, Cologne and Abingdon?’ Might these questions, perhaps, be related?

The more recent find was made in the winter of 2001/2002 during excavations of another Alamannic cemetery, on land belonging (by sublime coincidence) to the Hohner musical instrument factory at Trossingen, in the district of Tuttlingen, Baden-Württemberg. Not far from Oberflacht, and benefitting from the same hydrological circumstances and taphonomy, Trossingen grave 58 proved to contain the body of a man lying on his bed in a narrow chamber, surrounded by weapons and items of wooden furniture. In his arms was a lyre, very similar in shape and size to the Oberflacht instruments, and perfectly preserved.⁴⁸ It lay face-downwards.⁴⁹ In considering the likely status of the dead man, Barbara Theune, who has been responsible for his post-excavation study and publication, tends to favour identification as a significant local householder. There is much to be said for this. There is little evidence in the Tuttlingen cemeteries of a treasure-laden ruling class, of the kind seen in the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon sphere; yet all three lyre graves are clearly equipped in such a way as to indicate a ranking amongst persons of substance: substantial, that is, in terms of the region’s economic and political landscape. They are still part of a well-to-do warrior élite.

Such a convivial, *amateur*, model of Barbarian musicianship, élite yet essentially domestic, contrasts strongly with vernacular text-driven models which have often evoked affiliation with a discrete cadre or priesthood comparable with the *bardoi* of the Celts, or

47 See for example Cassidy 1965. For a challenge to traditional viewpoints see Niles 2003. For a recent review see Horton 2010.

48 Theune-Großkopf 2004; Theune-Großkopf 2006;

Theune-Großkopf 2008; Theune-Großkopf 2010; also Lawson and Krempel-Eichmann 2015.

49 Theune-Großkopf 2010, 7.

with such evidence as we have of them. It contrasts too with *berufsmässigen* models such as Fleischer's, in which the poet is to be seen as part of an equally discrete, largely mobile, perhaps even itinerant, class of a kind that has been suspected from OE poetic texts such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *Deor*. The peripatetic, patron-seeking lifestyle seems explicit in OE *Widsith*. 'Thus wandering · / by fortune / driven : the *gleomen* travel · through many lands' writes the *Widsith* poet, ostensibly from personal experience,⁵⁰ whilst the first-person voice of OE *Deor* laments the loss of his former position as *beodeninga scōp*, poet at the court of the legendary Heoden.⁵¹ How is this circle to be squared?

Theune's notion of the local hero gains some support from stable-isotope analysis of her subject's tooth enamel.⁵² Although dental isotope data can tell us nothing about where and how Trossingen 58 spent his adult life, they do at least reveal that he was buried within the region of his childhood. He is by no means displaced. If he has travelled, he has returned. The grave finds too lack obviously exotic items that might connect him to distant places. On the other hand, the weapons and the defensive capability that they represent may still indicate an aptness to participation in travel, whether of a peaceable nature or on some kind of military service, whilst a mobile lifestyle may also be hinted at by a stoppered wooden flask, suggesting a form of victualling more portable than we see in the pots, horns, beakers, buckets and platters which are usually associated with refreshments of the table and feasting hall.⁵³ Indeed it is of a form generally described as *Pilger-* or *Feldflasche*, 'pilgrim flask' or 'field flask', in the archaeological literature. As we have seen, two such flasks accompanied Oberflacht 84, and another accompanied Cologne 100.⁵⁴ Further isotope analyses now in preparation elsewhere, notably in England, may or may not add to this picture: only time will tell. But already the question benefits from increasing numbers of finds and from their broadening distribution within the landscape.⁵⁵ For if Abingdon 42 raised hope that lyre finds might some day be looked for amongst the wider population, that hope has been amply justified by subsequent discoveries.⁵⁶ Indeed, as I shall shortly show, lyres now appear more widespread and more frequent than we have hitherto dared to suppose, to such an extent that space and number, as well as context, are beginning to have something to contribute too.

50 *Swa scriþende · gesceapum hweorfad : gleomen gumena · geond grunda fela*. Chambers 1912, lines 135–136.

51 Heoden can be identified with Hetele in later German sources, Heðinn in ON (his name is spelled 'Henden' in the *Widsith* MS).

52 Theune-Großkopf 2010, 20–21.

53 According to analyses by Manfred Rösch, residues within the flask indicated that it had contained a strong honeyed beer. Theune-Großkopf 2010, 90–91.

54 Wooden *Feldflaschen* of much the same form are re-

ported also from Oberflacht graves 11, 14, 30, 34, 71/2, 79, 82, 233, together with one of barrel type in grave 23 and another in 70; Schiek 1992. Where they are described in the Roman finds literature their military connexion is usually presumed, and sometimes evident, whereas in the medieval literature pilgrimage is the more usual attribution.

55 For the musical value of archaeological context and spatial distribution see Lawson 2006.

56 Lawson 1978b; Lawson 1987; Lawson 2001.

The popular, as it were democratizing, implication of the Caedmon story was helpfully revisited in 2007 by John Hines and colleagues, in a volume of papers devoted to Caedmon's place in Bede's writing. Whereas to an earlier generation of philologists, such as C. L. Wrenn,⁵⁷ *cithara* and *bearpe* had seemed the exclusive preserve of the élite, to archaeologists such as Hines and the present writer Caedmon's experience increasingly indicated a poetic tradition with a very much broader base, in which the role of *scōp* might be without formal social limitation. Like 'poet' and 'musician' today, it was a calling, perhaps even a lifestyle, but not a job title. Within this looser framework, much of the Anglo-Saxon population might be imagined participating in *scōpcraft* – in harping and vernacular versifying – in a spirit of inclusivity and continuity that would serve to bind together the whole of society in a matrix of shared tradition. Its more skilful exponents, whether élite figures like *Widsith* or rustics like Caedmon's fellows, might be imagined from time to time emerging from the mass of the population to fill prominent positions in Barbarian cultural life, according to wit and opportunity.

Such a scenario is hugely attractive, especially for what it might say about the character and techniques of early OE poetic tradition, and perhaps about mechanisms of ancient Tradition more generally. In an oral literature of the kind that the early Anglo-Saxons and their Germanic cousins are widely believed to have inherited,⁵⁸ according to Caedmon's example the predominant dynamic of storage and transmission becomes one of collective as much as individual recall, and the sharing of material and process strengthens and consolidates the tradition. The broader the repository – the more commonly things such as styles, rules, conventions, geographical and historical subject matter are shared and practised – the more robust becomes the transmission of information.

Yet such an egalitarian vision is not without its interpretive risks when applied to the hard archaeology. It must be remembered that, with almost the sole exception of the Caedmon story, household and householder models of ownership are entirely dependent upon later historical and indeed modern experience. Although they may appear *consistent* with the earliest textual evidence, neither enjoys any direct contemporaneous or even near-contemporaneous support; and from this weakness flow certain consequences. By tacitly embedding the lyre within the material culture as a whole, each to an extent risks imposing interpretive limits, confining it to the daily round. Lyre finds – even those of kingly graves such as Sutton Hoo and Taplow – become mere elements of domestic routine, perhaps not even personal to their dead. Hines argues as much when he draws a parallel with the feasting equipment that accompanies the royal lyres, remarking that “we can safely assume that the lord of the hall provided the feasts without

57 See for example French 1945; Wrenn 1962.

58 In a much quoted passage, Tacitus (*Germania* 2) not only states that the ancient songs (*carminis antiquis*) of the Germans are the memorials and annals of

their race (*apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est*) but in doing so seems to imply that commemoration is also their prime function.

cooking or serving them himself”⁵⁹ Such a circumscribed view of the lyre’s function, in which the instrument is somehow detached from and impersonal to the owner of the grave, may also have the effect of helping to perpetuate the tacit assumption, still quite widespread within archaeological circles, that music and poetry are of interest to Ancient Studies primarily as proxies for entertainment. Sure, this represents a viewpoint, as far as it goes, and it would be absurd to deny that entertainment (of the right sort) was held in high esteem within early medieval feasting culture. But this ought not be allowed to impose upon the archaeological evidence, especially if what we are seeking from that evidence is a deeper understanding of the finds’ potential roles, particularly as measures or indices of the ownership of poetry and Tradition. If we take a more holistic view of the evidence a somewhat different picture begins to emerge, in which a distinctly political engagement may also be discerned. One of Hines’ colleagues, Scott DeGregorio, finds in Hild’s response to Caedmon, and in the use to which Bede puts their story, support for the notion of a specific political application for vernacular song, including Caedmon’s Hymn: its application to the highly charged matter of ecclesiastical reform, as Bede and his friends set out to re-invigorate the Church’s mission in 8th-century England.⁶⁰ Let us look again at the evidence of some of the other early medieval narratives.

6 Princely poets

Despite its remoteness in time and despite its mythical elements, Saxo’s telling of Hiarno’s story may bear further inspection. The bare facts appear to be as follows. Frotho the king⁶¹ has died fighting supernatural beings.⁶² A competition is launched in order to supply a praise song which should preserve his glorious reputation for future generations. Since his only heir, Fridlevus, is absent, presumed dead, it is decided that the very crown of Denmark should be the prize. Hiarnus’ verse wins, and time passes; but when Fridlevus returns unexpectedly from his travels, the Danes urge Hiarnus to abdicate (he has been governing ineffectually, Saxo assures us, by way of justification). Rather than retire into vulgar and dishonourable obscurity (and here Saxo describes his origins just as Bede does Caedmon’s, as being “of the peasantry”)⁶³ he chooses to stay and fight. The nation is thus divided and civil war ensues. When Fridlevus’ army prevails in battle, Hiarnus retreats to Jutland, where he is finally routed and seeks refuge on “the island that

59 Hines 2007, 219.

60 DeGregorio 2007, 68–78.

61 Frotho is generally designated the third Danish king of that name, Frotho III, who may be equated with the hero Fruote of OE *Widsith*; Gillespie 1973, 48.

62 The dates of Frotho, whom Saxo identifies as the son

of Fridlevus, are not known for certain. If he existed at all, he would have lived several centuries before Saxo’s time. Frotho’s life story occupies the major part of Saxo’s Book V.

63 Knabe et al. 1908–1912, 6.3.2 [4]: *rusticae condicionis hominem*.

now bears his name”.⁶⁴ From there, in time, he travels back alone to Fridlevus’ court, craftily disguised as a salt-maker, with a view to attaching himself as a servant to the king’s household and killing him. When the disguise fails the two men meet in single combat and Hiarnus himself is killed.

So much for the legend, it seems. But there is some external support for the idea that at least one early Danish poet may indeed have achieved a high station in life, perhaps high enough to allow him to aspire to kingship. Although brief enough in Saxo’s telling, the tale connects with other traditions of a poet-hero of similar name, perhaps cognate, which, despite corruptions in later tradition, may help flesh out Hiarnus’ improbable career trajectory. In the South German poem *Kudrun* (a work preserved in *Das Ambraser Heldenbuch* of ca. 1240) and in the Middle German *Dukus Horant* (a poem written in Hebrew characters in a codex of 1382 preserved in the Cairo Genizah) the eponymous singer Hôrant von Tenemark (Denmark) is a retainer to Hetele (or Etene, OE *Heoden*) who sends him as his ambassador on a mission to seek Hilde Hagen’s daughter in marriage. Marriage and marriage embassies are widely acknowledged to have been one of the most important political devices in early medieval statecraft.⁶⁵ The assignment proves a dangerous one for Horant, since Hagen is the jealous father to end all jealous fathers; but Horant possesses the musical skills of an Orpheus⁶⁶ and his poetic diplomacy is eventually crowned with success. Hiarnus’ literary character may be obliquely referenced too in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, where in the OE poem *Deor* the eponymous poet laments that he has lost his job, or rather estate, to one ‘Heorrenda, þæt lēoð-cræftig monn’ (‘that song-powerful man’). *Deor*’s ostensible association with the court of Heoden tallies, and thereby with the tales of Hetele, Hagen and Hilde, even finding an echo in OE *Widsith* where in line 21 the poet expresses knowledge of these events by his coupling of *Hagen Holmrycgum ond Heoden Glommum*, ‘Hagen of the Holmrycgings and Heoden [Hetele] of the Glommas’ in a catalogue of famous heroes and legends. Both of their peoples belong in the Danish sphere (incidentally Hrothgar too gets a thumbnail in lines 45–49, as the famous Danish warrior-king).

The proposition that a poet and musician might attain political power draws further support from other early medieval instances of princely musicianship. Whilst Hrothgar is perhaps the most notable in the OE literature, both as singer and as patron, there is also the Burgundian prince Gundaharius or Gundicarius, Middle High German (MHG) Gunther, who, as the *harpa*-playing Gunnarr ‘vin Borgunda’ of Scandinavian tradition, is commemorated in some of the most memorable tableaux in the entire canon of Scandinavian medieval art (Fig. 5).⁶⁷ In *Widsith* lines 55–56 one Gūðhere the Burgundian is

64 Hjarnø is a small island at the mouth of Horsens Fjord, on the Baltic coast of Jutland. But this may merely be Saxo attempting to anchor his myth in the physical world.

65 See for example Bornholdt 2005.

66 For Orpheus see Vendries, this volume.

67 Lawson 1978a.



Fig. 5 Stone baptismal font from Norum, Bohuslän, Sweden, showing the captive Burgundian prince Gunnar in the snake pit, playing a lyre with his toes. Around 1100 CE.

celebrated as a patron of poets, rewarding *Widsith* himself with gold. Then there is the eminently historical Geilamir, the Vandal leader whom Procopius cameos seeking the solace of a *kithara* during the siege of his fortress at Pappua, Numidia, in around 570. And from that same decade there is the no less historical figure of Venantius Fortunatus, poet amongst the Merovingian Franks.

Much quoted by organologists for a poem in which he famously apportioned certain instruments (or to be more precise, certain instrument names) to the panegyric traditions of different nations, the relevance of Fortunatus' personal history to Barbarian poetry is surprisingly neglected. Maybe it is because he is remembered for his Latin verse, or rather, because such of his verse as survives is rooted firmly in the Latin tradition; maybe it is compounded by his North Italian origin. Maybe it is because, like Caedmon, he shows religious tendencies, composing Christian hymns (such as the famous *Vexilla regis prodeunt* and *Pange lingua gloriosi*) and eventually becoming bishop in St Hilary's ancient see of Poitiers. Nevertheless a critical, and as it were anthropological, view of his oeuvre and *modus operandi* shows them to be in no profound sense inconsistent with the career dynamics of a *Widsith* or a *Deor*, or even a Hiarnus.

Arriving in Francia as a youth, the political circles in which Fortunatus moves there are from the outset decidedly Germanic. He immediately attaches himself to the court of the king of Austrasian Franks, Sigibert of Metz and his Visigoth wife Brunihildis, performing at their wedding in about 567. According to the details he reveals in his books of *carmina*, which he will later publish, he appears to spend the remainder of his life running back and forth on embassies between friends and patrons, massaging egos and smoothing paths with his panegyrics, eulogies and encomia. He addresses his praises to Frankish rulers like Sigibert and Charibert and Chilperic both on his own account and as advocate for others, notably for church figures like bishop Gregory of Tours (the

historian of the Franks) whose life he successfully defends in verse in 580 against false charges of treason. He supports the Thuringian abbess of Poitiers, Radegund (formerly the wife of Frankish king Chlothair I) when she appeals to Justin II and his empress Sophia in Byzantium for relics of the True Cross. Whether or not he ever composes in the Barbarian manner he does not say, and he includes no such poems in his published verse, but we can be reasonably sure that he is at least acquainted with vernacular tastes since this is hinted at both by the traditions he lists in *carmen* 7.8 to his friend Lupus, Duke of Champagne and, as Judith George remarks,⁶⁸ by the playful use of alliteration that he exhibits in a short *carmen* addressed to the young king Childebert II.⁶⁹ His is an intensely political life, rewarded, like *Widsith* and *Deor*, by noble gifts of land and by a distinguished appointment.⁷⁰

Much the same political career path can be seen the world over. It can be guessed, for example, and more than guessed, in the journeys of the Baghdadi poet and musician Ali ibn Nafi, pupil of al-Mawsili, who progressed to be chief minister to the emir Abd ar-Rahman II in early 9th-century Spain. It is abundantly clear outside the European theatre too: in the Near East, for example, in India and beyond. And of course the long history of Roman imperial court poetry abounds in political poets and poetical politicians: one need only think of Corippus at the court of Justinian in the 6th century (and indeed that of Justin II, his successor); of Claudian in the entourage of Stilicho in around 400, or of Ausonius' compositions in honour of Gratian in the 4th century. For these men panegyric was a powerful political tool, just as it is today – even if we now have many more subtle forms and media in which to express it, and other names with which to describe it. Neither was its flattery targeted only at rulers and courtiers. But since I have already visited these and other cases at length elsewhere,⁷¹ I shall not labour their particulars now, except to make this observation: that it seems unreasonable, indeed illogical, to argue that any of the high-achievers I have described could have suddenly become poets and musicians *after* securing their political advancement. Poetry and musicianship were surely skills that they would have brought with them from their youths. And even if we cannot assume that a poetical reputation would necessarily have earned them their titles, in the manner that Saxo claims for Hiarnus, it surely cannot have failed to add lustre to their candidature. Indeed the impression we gain from their stories is one of the very high value attached to accomplishment and knowledge and a facility with words. Perhaps this should come as no great surprise. A poet's skills and resources

68 George 1995, 118.

69 'On King Childebert', designated 'Appendix 5' by George 1995, 118.

70 For a concise political treatment of Fortunatus as forerunner of the panegyrists of Carolingian Gaul, see especially Godman 1987.

71 Graeme Lawson. "Old English Poets, Dangerous Knowledge and Secret Agency in Late Antiquity: A Musical and Archaeological Viewpoint?" In *Knowledge to Die For: Secret Knowledge in the Ancient World*. Ed. by F. Geller. Forthcoming.

are likely to have been as close as a person could come to scholarship in a pre-literate society, and scholarship itself has been a frequent attribute of historical kingship, from Alfred the Great to Alfonso the Wise and beyond.

In Barbarian Europe this esteem for verse is perhaps most vividly expressed by the author of *Orkneyinga saga*, reporting a stanza by Kali Kolsson, later earl Rognvald (Raugnvalldr) Kali of Orkney in the Northern Isles of Scotland (r. 1136–1158). In it we hear Kali playfully boasting:

Tafl em ec aurr at efla, iþrottir kann ec nú,
týne ec traulla runum, tíð er bok oc smíþer,
skríða kann ec í skíðum, skýt ec oc ræ sva at nýter,
hvert veggja kann ec at higgja harpslátt oc bragþáttu.⁷²

[At the chess] table am/I an enthusiast, [of such] pastimes can/I [do] nine:
rarely [do] I forget [a] rune, [oft-]times I [read] a book and write,
slide can/I on skis, shoot/I and row, if needed;
[and] either of [these] twins can I do: harping and verse.⁷³

The saga-writer devotes much space to the story of Kali's sea voyage to the Holy Land, and supplies several examples of his verses, as well as verses composed by poets who are amongst his closest retainers. He was himself the kinsman of poets, we are told. His grandfather Kali Sæbjarnarson, who as an estate-holder held lands in Norway under king Magnus Olafsson 'Bare-Legs' (r. 1093–1103), was "a great sage, dear to the king and good with words."⁷⁴ His uncle too was a prominent *skald*: Magnus Erlendsson, earl of Orkney, later Saint Magnus.⁷⁵

If Rognvald, Magnus and their poet-friends and kinsmen represent what we might call the 'skaldic' model for vernacular *scōþcræft*, it is a model that is perhaps most powerfully expressed in the person of the 10th-century poet Egil Skalla-Grímsson whose story we know from his own Icelandic saga compiled and composed from Icelandic tradition in around 1230.⁷⁶ A complex character – at times exuberant, at others sentimental, soulful, yet capable of great violence – he was also by tradition a family man, a householder

72 ON text after Jonaeus 1780, 150. Jonaeus' Latin translation reads: *in alea instauranda sum alacer · artes novem calleo · vix dedisco characteres Runicos · frequens est mihi liber & ars fabrilis · xylosoleis vehi possum · jaculor & remigo ut sit utile · utrumque, ni fallor, teneo · chitarizandi artem & rythmorum sectiones*. The saga survives in manuscript in the codex known as *Flatleyjarkbók* (Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Reykjavik, MS GkS 1005) compiled ca. 1390.

73 Near-literal translation by the present author. For a

modern literary translation see Pálsson and Edwards 1978; Pálsson and Edwards 1981, 108.

74 Kali *var spekingr mikill oc kærri kongi oc orti vel* (Jonaeus 1780, 108). The saga writer includes an example of Kali Sæbjarnarson's strongly alliterative verse (Jonaeus 1780, 114).

75 For Magnus' poetry and musicianship see De Geer 1985.

76 Snorri Sturluson, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Einarsson 2003.

and, like Rognvald and Magnus, no stranger to foreign travel. The saga-writer supplies something of his genealogy and early childhood, of his marriage and children, and of his death and his pagan burial mound at Tjaldness in the West of Iceland. We are told of his family's estates at Borg and Mosfell nearby, and of his family and neighbours there, including amongst them other poets.⁷⁷ He has even named one of his sons Gunnar. We hear him attending at the Althing, or parliament, disputing points of traditional law. Most importantly the saga-writer includes remains of his verses. But there are also accounts of his overseas journeys and of his contacts with ruling élites along the way. He leaves Iceland on four separate occasions between around 925 and 960, in the course of which he visits the Scandinavian mainland and England, joining piratical raids on Denmark, Friesland and Saxony. We know that he is a pagan, that he composes political verse (including both panegyric and polemical forms) and counts earls and kings amongst his patrons – and enemies – in England and Norway. Included amongst the former are the Christian West-Saxon king Æthelstan (r. 924–939) in whose army he fights at 'Vin Moor' in around 937, whilst the latter includes the not-so-Christian king of Northumbria, the Norwegian Eiríkr Haraldsson 'Bloodaxe', from whose anger his poem *Höfuðlausn* ('Head Ransom') narrowly saves him at York in 948.

From these diverse Barbarian examples, Burgundian, Vandal and later Norse, one may begin to wonder whether the reality behind Saxo's story of Hiarno's ordinariness and, if I dare say it, behind Bede's story of Caedmon's ordinariness too, may be a little less straightforward than either author would like us to believe. After all, Saxo, like Bede before him, has his political axes to grind. Admittedly all of the poets I have mentioned have to an extent been self-selecting, known to history because of the prominence they achieved in their own day; and inevitably they must represent the more prosperous end of their calling. No doubt there were many more whose attainments failed to guarantee them a place in either history or myth. But it is noteworthy how those that are reported do appear accustomed to foreign travel, how repeatedly they engage in political activity, and how their art evidently supports them in their diplomacy. So when we come to re-evaluate our earlier grave finds, whilst we may find the idea of commonality and commonness attractive, and notions of the householder as poet, it would perhaps be a mistake to assume ordinariness, even when accompanying grave goods appear scanty. The question, as always, is one of *representativeness*: whether we should imagine a sparseness of grave furnishings to represent parsimony or taphonomy; and, by the same token, whether we should imagine evidence of a political element in the texts to be typical or inflated by literary bias.⁷⁸ Might not Hiarnus (supposing that he existed) have been a member of the king's *comitatus* whose poetry merely embellished an otherwise political

77 Notably Einar Scale-Clatterer of Breidafjord. *Egils saga* 78.

archaeological record see Lawson 2005; Lawson 2008.

78 For issues of representativeness in the music-

career? And, in the real world, might not Caedmon (who surely did exist) have been a poet all along?

7 Further 'simple graves'

The questions of status which Trossingen 58 raised had been foreshadowed not only by Abingdon 42 but also by three subsequent discoveries in the East of England; and here too questions of representativeness would prove a challenge. In 1973 gravel extraction near the village of Bergh Apton, Norfolk, on a low ridge overlooking the river Chet (a modest tributary of the Yare), revealed the remnant of a cemetery of much the same date, now comprising just 63 inhumations of men, women and children.⁷⁹ In one of these, designated grave 22, were various small objects of iron and copper alloy, together with skeletal remains of an adult, much-degraded.⁸⁰ The body seemed to have been laid on its back. Of the legs only the femurs remained, but these were enough to show that the knees had been raised and had then tilted to the person's left, giving them a seated appearance. Framed in the space above the knees and to the left of the torso were the remains of a delicate wooden object, of which portions had been preserved by copper-mineralisation: by copper salts emanating from the corrosion of small copper-alloy fittings. Later examination showed it to be another lyre, its delicate construction similar to Sutton Hoo and lacking only that royal lyre's extravagant decoration.⁸¹

The person's status now became the principal focus of archaeological (as distinct from organological) discussion. Accompanying finds were few: the dry, acid soils of this part of Norfolk and Suffolk are hostile to metals as well as to organics, and part of the upper body area had already been destroyed by quarrying when the excavation began. Such finds as there were, however – two small buckles and an iron knife – hinted that the person had been male, an impression supported by the lack of female attributes of the kind seen in women's graves nearby. The absence of weaponry might or might not prove significant: a shield and/or a spear were the norm for male burials in this cemetery (of which generally only the metal parts remained, heavily crusted); but either type of weapon might have been lost with the missing part of the grave. Otherwise the grave's size and form were not dissimilar to those of Abingdon 42. Only the absence of a sword provided obvious contrast, but then such ostentation seems to have been rare at Bergh Apton in any case: grave 19 contained a sword, but otherwise the principal surviving indicators of the community's prosperity consisted of beads, rings and brooches.⁸²

79 Green and Rogerson 1978, 1–5.

80 Green and Rogerson 1978, 21.

81 Lawson 1978b, 87–93.

82 Besides numerous annular brooches, including those from graves 7, 18, 37 and 64, there are four fibulae of cruciform type from graves 5, 6, 18 and 37, and two of square-headed type from graves 7 and 64.

Other accessories included decorative wrist-clasps and, in the case of women, 'chate-laines' or girdle-hangers; but precious metals were few. Two large square-headed Cu-alloy brooches, one in male grave 7 and the other in male grave 64, had elaborate carved decoration, gilded and plated with silver. No evidence remained of coffins or beds, or of any of the fine wooden furnishings that were preserved so beautifully at Oberflacht and Trossingen; likewise, little remained of any textiles. Thus, apart from the lyre, there was nothing to suggest that the person in grave 22 was in any way highly placed. And yet, for him to have been buried in the cemetery at all a certain status would still have been necessary. Thus whilst his burial might seem to lack ostentation, his position was still broadly consistent with an ordinary free man, if not a householder,⁸³ and because so little was still known about the *scōp* and what it really meant to be (or to have been) a *scōp*, some relationship to that central mystery still could not be ruled out.

In grave 97 at Morning Thorpe, some 9 miles (15 km) SW of Bergh Apton, this sense of ordinariness was repeated in a little more detail, providing a clearer pointer to the person's status within the community.⁸⁴ The lyre itself was highly fragmented: the upper part of the grave contained numerous mineralised wooden fragments. Nevertheless two with copper-alloy fittings sufficiently resembled a feature of the Bergh Apton find to justify a similar identification. At the time their organological value appeared slight, but the context proved to be of some interest. Accompanying finds included a shield boss and the head and detached ferrule of a spear.⁸⁵ There was a small knife in the upper-body area and a number of metal clothing accessories such as wrist-clasps and small buckles. Some pieces were suspected of having been disturbed from an earlier female grave, but this did not seem to apply to the lyre. No skeletal remains were found. However, the condition of a number of detached teeth found in the upper-body area suggested that the principal had been a young adult. He sported a copper-alloy fibula of cruciform type, with punched decoration and dragon-head ornament.

The grave appeared not to be one of the richer graves in the cemetery. Compared to the Bergh Apton community Morning Thorpe seemed to contain a higher proportion of affluent persons. In addition to nine cremations, around 365 inhumations remained. Amongst males, spears and shields again appeared to be the preferred form of armament, and fibulae the most frequent (surviving) form of ostentation. Only grave 218 contained a sword, grave 362 the only axe (together with a spear, but no shield). Graves 16, 30, 90, 96, 153, 346, 353 and 370 had three fine fibulae each, whilst in graves 288, 359 and 371 there were single large gilt and silvered fibulae of square-headed type. Beads were numerous and, in female graves, girdle-hangers were frequent, some of them very finely made. Feasting culture was represented by large wood-and-metal vessels, as well as

83 Lawson 1978b, 96.

85 Green, Rogerson and White 1987, 63, 231–233.

84 Lawson 1987.

pottery: a large iron-bound wooden tub accompanied the male in grave 35 and another smaller tub in male grave 200 together with two vessels of copper-alloy sheet. Male-and-female grave 148 contained a fine cone-beaker of imported glass. Other buckets included one with the sword (and a spear and shield) in male grave 218, and two more in male-and-female grave 238. In short, excepting the presence of the lyre, grave 97 again gives the impression of a neutral, inconspicuous position in the social order: neither peasant nor important householder. Yet he is still a fighting man amongst fighting men, and for all its fragmented condition we can see that his musical instrument has been a fine one.

The third of the three lyre players emerged in 1992 from excavations on Snape Common, in the Sandlings district of coastal Suffolk, on raised ground overlooking the River Alde. The existence of a cemetery had long been known from the presence of several large burial mounds which had been variously explored by antiquarians during the 19th century.⁸⁶ They included the famous ship burial, investigated in 1862. In the 1980s it was noticed that parts of the remaining site were being endangered by agricultural erosion: unlike the gravel subsoils of Bergh Apton and Morning Thorpe the ground here was light and sandy, and subject to degradation by the combined action of ploughing, irrigation and wind. Ploughing had begun in the 1950s (the site having previously been pasture) and some mounds had already been ploughed out. Some graves had become dangerously shallow. Following renewed excavations at Sutton Hoo in 1983, therefore, the affected areas were scheduled for investigation, and were dug by William Filmer-Sankey and Tim Pestell over several seasons between 1985 and 1992. Grave 32, which lay on the very edge of one of the excavated areas, Area B, close to the verge of the modern roadway, was one of the very last to be explored. Here again the acid nature of the ground had taken its toll of both organics and metalwork. However, this time the comparative sterility of the soil – there had been few trees and little in the way of nutriment to encourage faunal disturbance of the soil structure – had left organic features silhouetted as dark stains in the pale orange sand of the grave floor. The body lay on its back, turning slightly to its left (the left knee was turned outwards) with the shield placed as a cover above the head and torso. To the left of the upper body were fragments of a large, delicate wooden object with copper-alloy fittings. Removed as a soil block and investigated in the laboratory,⁸⁷ it proved to be another lyre, the wooden elements again preserved by copper-mineralisation.⁸⁸ Although distorted in the process of drying out, the surface detail showed it to be a finely made instrument. So what kind of person had owned it?

86 Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001.

logy, Oxford.

87 The work of investigation and conservation was carried out by Vanessa Fell at the Institute of Archaeo-

88 Lawson 2001.

The finds were of a distinctly male type. The weaponry – spear,⁸⁹ shield and small iron knife – connected him with Morning Thorpe, and indeed one of the elements of the lyre provided a close parallel for features of the Morning Thorpe and Bergh Apton finds. In addition the man wore a fine composite buckle at his waist and carried an iron strike-a-light. An equally fine wooden drinking bowl had been placed at his feet: like the fragments of lyre, it survived only where Cu-mineralisation from a repair had preserved part of the rim. He thus gave a clearer impression of prosperity than was apparent at either Bergh Apton or Morning Thorpe. But still there was no evidence of wealth, as such. There seemed to be no brooch, no beads or other dress accessories; no expensive trinkets. His burial still seemed a very functional one.

On the other hand the location of the grave seemed suggestive of more. If Morning Thorpe showed a musician in proximity to a prosperous class, here surely was a musician in proximity to the ruling class, for the ship burial was not the only grave in the cemetery to carry an aristocratic implication. Eight or nine other substantial mounds had been recorded. One of them, robbed-out grave 33, lay only 15m to the south of 32 and had once been surrounded by a ring ditch.⁹⁰ A few metres to the east and still within Area B were parts of two others, while just beyond eastern limit of excavation the remains of Mound 4 still lie unexplored. The finds from the cemetery also indicated a prosperous, even wealthy community. Apart from the ship and its contents, brooches, weapons (spears and shields) and feasting vessels of various kinds were numerous. Grave 1 contained a fine glass beaker of Continental type. Grave 16 contained a particularly fine fibula. In grave 47, which lay immediately to the south-west of Mound 4, the body was found to be enclosed in a boat, together with a sword, shield, three spears, a stave-built wooden bucket and (added on the north-west corner of the grave) a horse's skull with its harness. Under the man's head were traces of fibres thought to derive from a feather pillow. With such wealth all around him, a poet in need of patronage need have looked no further. And of course the same might equally be said for a wealthy person in need of a poet.

Questions of distribution also now began to emerge. It might be too early to say much about their place in the wider landscape, but already all four lyre graves – Abingdon, Bergh Apton, Morning Thorpe and Snape – seemed to exhibit two common geographical traits. Each lay close to a line or lines of communication: to rivers and coastal waters or, inland, to known Roman roads and other ancient land routes. And together with a metal lyre bridge and tuning peg from a robbed grave near Oakley (overlooking

89 The spiked iron ferrule was found within the NE corner of the grave, beyond the dead man's left foot, in a position suggesting that it may have been planted there as a grave marker. Part of the socket of an iron spear-head was found in the plough soil just

beyond the NW corner, to the left of the dead man's head. Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 77, fig. 56.

90 Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 13, reverse of fold-out plan.

the river Waveney close to the same Roman road that passes Morning Thorpe) they all lay within a day's journey of one or another centre of Anglian royal activity: at Snape and Sutton Hoo, naturally, but also at Rendlesham, Bede's *Casa Rendili*, the chief villa of the kings of the East Angles.⁹¹ Could we now be glimpsing an emerging cluster, or even network, of people whose calling required that they be within reach of royal and aristocratic patronage? The organology appeared suggestive.⁹² Each lyre was closely similar in structure to Sutton Hoo and Taplow, and had been manufactured to the same rigorous standards, evidently at the high end of woodworking craft tradition. They were by no means rustic, home-made instruments, but the work of specialists. How could this be?

8 Princely poets: the Prittlewell find

The next breakthrough came near the site of Prittlewell Priory, on the outskirts of Southend-on-Sea in Essex, when in 2003 archaeological prospection in preparation for road improvement works revealed a substantial chamber tomb of the late 6th or early 7th century, once covered by an earthen tumulus.⁹³ Other Anglo-Saxon graves had been found in the surrounding area since the 19th century, notably during the construction of the nearby railway line, so finds had been expected. What was quite unexpected, however, was the richness of this particular grave. The site had been prominently situated on raised ground between the northern shore of the Thames Estuary and the marshes at the head of the tidal river Roach. It again benefitted from a near-sterile sandy soil, and during the course of excavation the chamber yielded finds of such quantity and wealth as to indicate that the person buried there was either a ruler himself or, if not, had at least belonged to the highest echelons of the ruling élite. He had been buried in a wooden chest laid against the north wall of the chamber. Amongst the furniture, weapons and other equipment festooning the floor and wooden walls of the chamber, which had become filled with sand during the gradual collapse of the roof, were objects and utensils associated with feasting, including some fine imported items. Within the chest, or coffin, were two small crucifixes of gold foil, thought to have been placed over the dead man's eyelids. On the floor by the south wall lay the complete silhouette of a lyre (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Although reduced to a dark powdery stain, it contained within its shapely outline the now-familiar pieces of wood, preserved by salts emanating from the corrosion of numerous small copper-alloy and silver fittings. This time, however, preservation seemed to have been enhanced by mineralisation from the oxidation of pieces of iron.

91 Lawson 2006, 5.

92 Lawson 2009.

93 Hirst 2004; Blackmore et al. 2019.

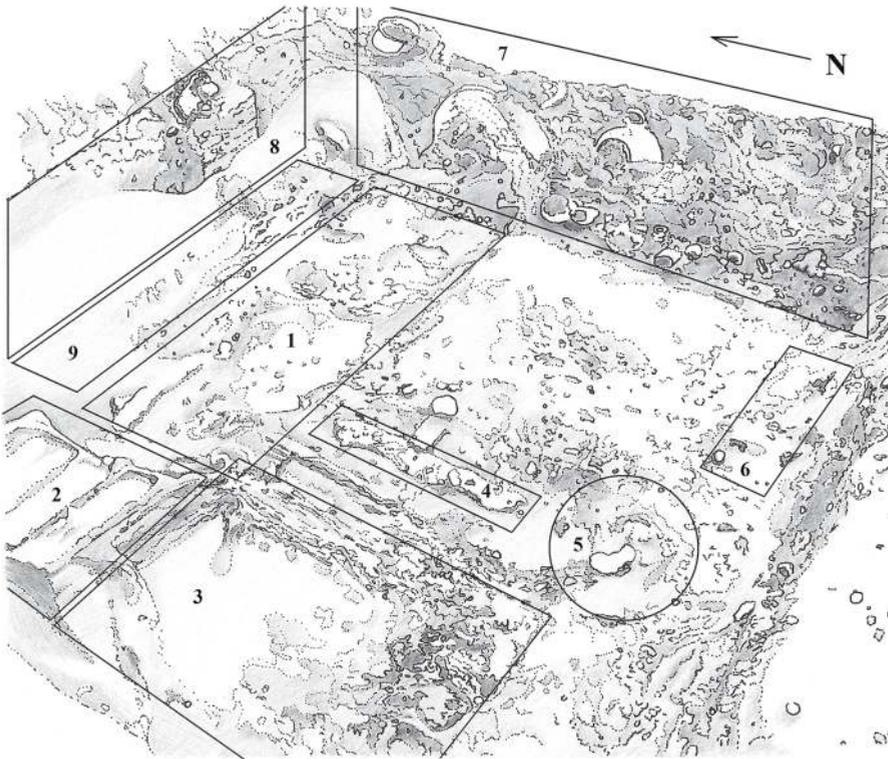


Fig. 6 The Prittlewell tomb, Essex, first quarter of the 7th century CE. General view of the excavation of the chamber in progress (1 – coffin; 2 – folding stool; 3 – wicker basket; 4 – sword; 5 – shield; 6 – location of the lyre, not yet revealed; 7 – East wall with suspended feasting vessels and equipment; 8–9 – North wall and floor, ditto).

The absence of display items from the interior of the coffin, excepting the crosses, and the profusion of valuable objects outside it have suggested that this person died in the midst, and maybe even at the political heart, of one of the most significant political and diplomatic crises to affect southern England during the first half of the 7th century. It is a reasonable proposition. Whilst his personal space within the coffin is undoubtedly Christian, the public space outside it, which includes the lyre, is undeniably pagan, or at least conforms determinedly to more traditional practice, a contradiction, or ambiguity, that has its counterpart in Bede's historical narrative of the East Saxons. Across the river, he tells us, the first Roman mission to the kingdom of Kent had begun formally in 597 under Pope Gregory I, with the arrival of the holy Augustine at the court of king Æthelberht and his queen Bertha, in Canterbury. Æthelberht, then the most powerful of all the English kings, benefitted in no small degree from Frankish political support, and no doubt the Christianizing mission served the political ambitions of both parties, as

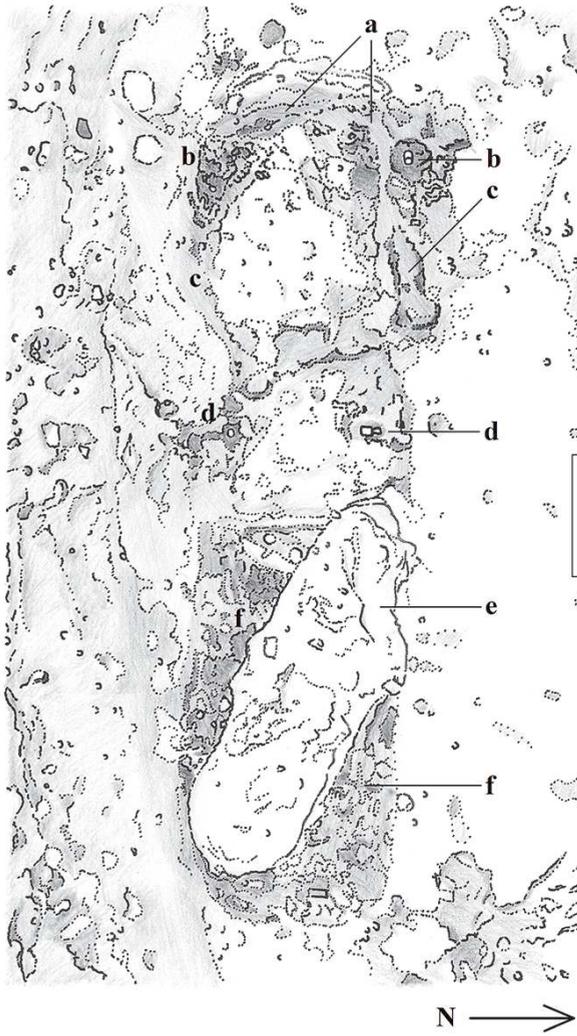


Fig. 7 The Prittlewell lyre lying face-down *in situ* during excavation (a – yoke; b – backs of gilt escutcheons; c – arms; d – backs of silver fittings; e – overlying iron concretion, unrelated; f – back of sound box). Scale: 10 cm.

indeed had Æthelberht’s earlier marriage: Bertha was the daughter of the Merovingian ruler Charibert I who, as well as being king of the Neustrian Franks at Paris, is also remembered as one of the targets of Fortunatus’ poetic diplomacy. But Æthelberht and Bertha were also uncle and aunt to the current East Saxon king, Sæberht, who ruled all of the coastlands immediately to the north of the Thames, including London and the Essex Coast. Sæberht’s dates and circumstances have therefore made him a prime candidate for the Prittlewell burial.⁹⁴ The nature and gravity of the ensuing crisis may be read as

94 Lawson 2019.

follows. In 604 Sæberht had received a mission from Kent, led by Augustine's aristocratic protégé Mellitus, and had soon afterwards accepted Christianity, establishing a church and see for Mellitus in London;⁹⁵ but, as in other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, Sæberht's people were not entirely of the same mind. Indeed even his own family was divided. On Æthelberht's death in 616, Kent passed to his son Eadbald, who promptly reverted to paganism; and when Sæberht died shortly afterwards the crisis spread across the river into Essex.⁹⁶ All Sæberht's three sons, Bede says, had continued in their pagan ways whilst professing Christianity. No doubt hedging of this sort was common enough in the age of Conversion; but it led to a major disagreement with Mellitus, now bishop of the East Saxons, who seems to have suspected as much; and when he haughtily refused them the Sacrament on grounds of their heterodoxy they drove him into exile. So severe was the traditionalist backlash that followed that it would be more than a generation before Essex would again engage politically with Christianity, by which time it would be a Northumbrian, not a Kentish (and thereby Frankish), alliance that the East Saxons courted.⁹⁷

But in the meanwhile one can readily imagine the tensions at Sæberht's funeral.⁹⁸ And it is not difficult to discern such tensions here at Prittlewell, with its two discrete phases appearing to serve on the one hand the personal preferences of the dead prince and of his Christian advisors, and on the other the contrary pressures of tradition and of public and family opinion. Did Mellitus himself stand at the graveside? Perhaps. We shall never know. But we should be in no doubt that these ritual distinctions mattered. Even without textiles and other soft furnishings, of which all but mineralised traces are now lost, the careful placement of the gold crosses in the coffin and the laying out of the various elements of hardware within the chamber – the chair, the weapons and household equipment – have something of the appearance of a stage set, dressed for alternate theatrical productions, the Christian production subsequently hidden from view while the more conservative performance took centre-stage. Evidently, although Christian sensitivities have been satisfied, traditionalism has had the last word. The presentation, though conflicted, is by no means a jumble; and in its pristine state, with the various objects framed against textiles and interspersed with other ephemera, it must have made a remarkable sight. Of course, such manifest display in the performance of state occasions, closely paralleled at Sutton Hoo, has had a very long history, both before and since. Doubtless the Christian rite was able to match Paganism's in its theatricality, albeit emphasizing its drama in a more transitory, less material way.

95 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* II, 3.

96 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* II, 5.

97 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* III, 22. Bede describes the rapprochement commencing with Sigibert's visits to the North and culminating in the

mission of Cedd to the East Saxon court in 653.

98 Bede refers only to Sæberht's death, and does not include him amongst rulers whose funerals merit a mention.

- with battle-weapons and war-weeds [armour]
 with bills [blades] and byrnies [shields];
 43 No less did they / him / furnish with gifts given
 from the nation's treasury [...].

The key word here is *gelæded*, 'brought,' though whether he means things brought from faraway for the ceremony, as Ibn Fadlan might have brought gifts with him, or merely existing imports brought from nearby is unclear. But he does offer us a second description which details the sorts of persons that are likely to have participated in such practices. Speaking of another funeral late in the poem,¹⁰³ he describes (or imagines) the complex *dramatis personae* involved in Beowulf's cremation at *Hrones-næsse*, a headland by the sea somewhere in what is now south-east Sweden (it is hard here not to think of the wonderful Ales Stenar, by the sea at Kåseberga in Skåne). Wiglaf the king's heir summons seven of his best war-leaders to assemble the treasure for the pyre; the Geat people then prepare the pyre itself, hanging weapons upon it; warriors lay the body on the pyre and light it; from the crowd comes the sound of weeping; the people express their grief; a lone woman keens a dirge in Beowulf's memory, lamenting hard times to come; then in the space of ten days the Geats have built a great mound over the ashes, using the skills of their best craftsmen to fashion the chamber; they load it with treasures; then finally, princes (*æpelinga bearn, ealra twelfe*, 'noble's sons: in all, twelve of them') circle the mound on horseback (here the poet uses the verb *riodan*, to ride) reciting a eulogy or eulogies in their dead king's honour, just as Hiarno and his fellows might have done, and indeed Sæberht's unnamed sons and kinsmen in Essex. Such purposefulness is evident at Prittlewell in the orderly presentation of the grave's various elements, and seems particularly captured by the presence, location and condition of the lyre.

If the form of the Prittlewell lyre raises questions about the dead man's personal engagement with music, and therefore his own musicianship and *scōpcraeft*, its precise placement within his pagan tableau, seemingly remote from his body, inevitably recalls the counter-argument that such instruments could be merely part of the household's domestic equipment. The royal lyres of Sutton Hoo and Taplow had been similarly detached. Here, however, a close inspection of its juxtapositions in the grave plan shows that it is placed not amongst the feasting equipment but lies rather in its own discrete space, unencumbered by other items (an iron concretion found lying on top of it proved to be a bundle of spears that had merely detached itself from a nail or hook on the wall). In any case it is evident from the austerity of the coffin deposit that an intimate placement would not have been appropriate there. Close by are the dead man's sword and

103 Wrenn 1953, lines 3137–3182.

shield. Moreover, microscopic examination has shown that the instrument is not a theatrical property made (or otherwise obtained) merely in order to be buried, but has had a complicated personal history of its own, being buried only after a long and seemingly distinguished royal service. It is a working lyre *and* a royal lyre, and it has been both of these things since it left its maker's workshop. If there is a paradox, it is that it should belong to the same school of manufacture as all the other English lyres: of the same elegant design, its construction and finish expressing the same investment in workmanship and materials. And of course, such comparison works both ways. If men like Snape 32 and Bergh Apton 22 are mere 'rustics', in the pejorative sense insinuated by both Bede and Saxo, why are they playing such fine instruments – instruments that are indistinguishable from those used at the courts of princes like Prittlewell?

The surprising details of the Prittlewell lyre's narrative began to emerge in the laboratory, even before any attempt was made to separate its structural elements in conservation.¹⁰⁴ From a tomography scan of the soil block it had been established that the instrument lay face-downwards, like Trossingen 58; but already there were several glimpses of a shiny yellow metal. On further investigation these proved to be the gold plating on small copper-alloy bridging plates which held together a split that ran the full length of the back of the sound box. Each plate was delicately fluted and gilded on its exposed face, and was clamped to its copper-alloy back-plate by short, dome-headed rivets whose exposed heads were also gilded. A similar series, this time in solid silver, performed the same remedial function on the sound board, at the front of the instrument. The head of the lyre too, the 'yoke' in organological terms, had been broken into at least two portions, and had been repaired by clamping the remains between two stout iron bands. If the severity of all this damage posed questions enough, the steps taken to repair it were equally perplexing. Why, in the age before modern glues, would anyone try to repair an instrument that had suffered such catastrophic failure: and what did they hope to achieve by it? Did they expect that the instrument could be made to sing again? Evidently they did, and evidently they succeeded, to an extent, for the tailpiece (a loose fitment held in place only by the tension of the strings) was still close to its predictive position, indicating that the instrument had been strung and tensioned when it was placed in the grave. But this is not all. Under the microscope the gold plating showed clear traces of wear in places that could only have been worn after the plates were fixed in place. It was becoming clear that the instrument had been repaired not simply for inclusion in the grave-group: it had been rebuilt long before, while the prince was still very much alive, and had been much handled in the meanwhile. One would like to say *much played*, but the evidence does not go quite that far. Still, it indicates at least that it

104 Conservation was carried out by Elizabeth Barham at Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) in

consultation with the present writer: Barham 2008; Lawson 2019.

has been cherished and used in the interim. Other gilded ornament appears to be original: the two discs mounted over the principal structural joints do so in much the same decorative manner as the paired escutcheons at Sutton Hoo and Taplow. Each disc has a beaded rim and a centrally mounted garnet eye with gold-foil backing, the intervening band filled with delicately carved interlace, also worn. Yet whereas the elements of decoration show that they were intended from the outset to reflect the owner's royalty, or at least someone's royalty or royal ambitions, the disc shape and the structural principle employed closely resemble Snape 32.

These commonalities naturally bring into focus the furnishing of the other, lesser, lyre graves, including even the meagre Bergh Apton 22. Are these lesser grave groups simply depositories of equipment, or could they too represent tableaux, their compositions ceremonial, witnessed both by participants and bystanders? The number and character of such participants can only be surmised, of course, but it would perhaps be a mistake to assume that in addition to the immediate actors – presumably close family and kinsfolk – the event did not also involve onlookers: passers-by perhaps but also conceivably significant members of the circles, communities and kinship groups to which the dead had belonged. Bare as Bergh Apton 22 may now seem, stripped of its organic detail by the passage of time, the fact is that someone has still laid out the body and made the funeral arrangements, someone has still dug the grave, and someone has still assembled the equipment – including the lyre – and set it all in place. Even in a modest grave like Bergh Apton 22, the inclusion in such a display of so valuable an item as a lyre with the intention of sealing it within the grave, sacrificing it to the earth, would surely have seemed a significant as well as extravagant gesture, and could so easily mark a political choice, if only at the level of family and community. Unless expressed as a solitary act of piety (and even solitary piety may be noticed) such display would surely make it worthy of an audience, however small that audience may have been. What evidence might we hope to find to test this idea?

Secondary deposits might offer one avenue, such as we glimpsed in the rose and lavender stems that Fremersdorf found at Cologne. Barbara Theune and Manfred Rösch have already raised the probability of something similar in Trossingen 58, where Rösch identifies traces of cereals (including barley, *Hordeum vulgare*), hops (*Humulus lupulus*), wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and hedge-row flowers such as white mustard (*Sinapis alba*) and campion (*Lychnis viscaria*, 'catch-fly').¹⁰⁵ The unthreshed nature of the cereals and the inclusion of plant stems, they argue, make it unlikely that these derive from the stuffing of the man's bedding.

Another test might be in the arrangement of furnishings: do the objects for example favour particular lines of sight? A suggestive distribution has been noted at Prittlewell,

105 Rösch 2010.

where part of the central area of the chamber is, or now appears to be, bare of finds, as though to allow the placement of a ladder.¹⁰⁶ Another might be in the condition of the finds. Barbara Theune has shown that the chair, table and spear accompanying Trossingen 58 are mere tokens, unserviceable or even incomplete at the time of burial.¹⁰⁷ She attributes their compaction to the lack of space in the crowded burial chamber, drawing support from dismantled furniture found in other, non-musical graves, such as the chair referenced in grave 11 at Oberflacht by only its bird's-head terminals: in Trossingen grave 47 a weaving loom is represented only by its foot-board (the lyre, by contrast, appears to have been complete and fully functional).

A further test might be in the presentation of the bodies, and indeed of the lyres themselves: have they been displayed in a particular way? For example, are the flexing of both legs to the left in Bergh Apton 22 and the outward turn of the left leg in Snape 32, significant? We believe that the instrument is played typically on the player's left side, and it is buried in that position at Bergh Apton, Morning Thorpe, Snape and of course Trossingen. And is it merely a coincidence that several lyres are deposited in an unexpected orientation: face-downwards in the case of Prittlewell and Trossingen 58, displaying the elaborate decoration on their backs; or head-to-tail in the case of Bergh Apton 22 and, very probably, Abingdon 42? At Prittlewell the lyre was not the only item to be found lying face-downwards: so also were the nearby sword and shield, suggesting a symbolic and perhaps even functional connexion.¹⁰⁸ Is there significance, finally, in a gruesome detail of Snape 32: the unusual number of fly pupae, which suggests that the body was exposed before or during the funeral process?¹⁰⁹

Today archaeologists have come to think of cemetery sites in anthropological terms, as aggregation centres for the expression of kinship and cultural identities, often delineated by spatial boundaries, often enjoying vistas of and visibility from the lands about them, often centring on iconic monuments such as (in the extreme case) the major tumuli at Sutton Hoo and Snape, and now Prittlewell: mounds whose implication of dynastic power would not have been lost on those involved in any acts and ceremonies occurring in the surrounding spaces. These are cemeteries, after all, not graves scattered randomly across the landscape. At Morning Thorpe, grave 97 seemed to belong to a cluster of four graves grouped near the ring ditches of two earlier monuments. Each of the other three included fragments of complex wooden objects, so far unidentified but exhibiting certain lyre-like materials and craftsmanship. Could they be lyres also, and

106 Blackmore et al. 2019.

107 Theune-Großkopf 2010, 99. Theune's claim that the Prittlewell lyre was unserviceable at the time of its burial reflects the evidence available at the time; however, as we have seen, subsequent research has shown this to be mistaken.

108 Blackmore et al. 2019.

109 Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 79; some 250 pupae of the genus *Ophyra* (*O. capensis* or *O. leucostoma*) were preserved, mineralised, on the buckle and knife (see also chapter 5, section VI).

could their arrangement be an attempt to express the relationship between poet and patron?¹¹⁰

9 The Prittlewell dividend

If Prittlewell's organology has done more than just confirm Rupert and Myrtle Bruce-Mitford's theories of the form of the Anglo-Saxon instrument, it has also done more than clarify its relationship to the continental German traditions. Its wealth of structural and remedial detail has enabled the identification of a series of new lyre finds, previously overlooked because their fragments had so far found no exact match either amongst the Sutton Hoo fragments or at Taplow. And these finds have brought with them further insights, particularly of a contextual kind, revealing more about the kinds of people that these lyre men could have been.

The details of damage seen at Prittlewell and especially the steps taken to remedy it cast an immediate spotlight on two finds from excavations in Kent, across the Thames estuary: the first from Vera Evison's excavations within the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Buckland, Dover,¹¹¹ and the second from Keith Parfitt's explorations of a similar site at Mill Hill, Deal.¹¹² Evison had already proposed a tentative musical identification for Buckland 114, but for want of direct parallels it remained unproven. Mill Hill 91 likewise appeared suggestive, but no more. Each find evidently represented a large, more-or-less flat, wooden object with assorted metal fittings, consistent with a lyre in its overall dimensions but lacking a diagnostic outline or any of the tell-tale details seen in previous lyres. Each involved a row of little metal mounts on wood, portions of the wood itself being preserved at Buckland (though not, alas, at Mill Hill) by copper mineralisation. At Buckland, identification was further complicated by the excavator's conclusion that the plates surmounted a deliberate joint between two thin wooden sheets, their made edges carefully chamfered to fit snugly together. Such a design choice made neither structural nor acoustical sense in a lyre. Prittlewell now solved the puzzle at a single stroke: the joined edges were a crack, not made, and the bridging plates were repairs, not parts of the original design. It seemed that Prittlewell might be far from the only lyre to embody a complicated narrative.

110 Graves 112, 152 and 178; ring-ditches 121 (perhaps associated with grave 157) and 179; Green, Rogerson and White 1987, fig. 5; Lawson 1987, 171 (note 1); Lawson 2006, 5, fig. 5.

111 Excavated in 1851–1852. Evison 1987, 121 (discussion), 242 (catalogue); fig. 2 (plan); fig. 50 (finds).

112 Excavated in 1988–1989. For the site see Parfitt and Brugmann 1997, 13–15; fig. 4 (fold-out plan); for a discussion of both Mill Hill and Buckland, see Graeme Lawson. *The Prittlewell Lyre and the Kingdom of Kent. Anglo-Saxon Poets' Graves, from Deal and Dover*. Forthcoming.

Each confirmation brought with it valuable new contextual information. Both men were armed, fighting men. In Mill Hill 91 the lyre-like elements 'g', 'k', and 'l' formed a short series in the lower part of the grave, evidently above his right leg and aligned with it. (Apart from his femurs, which were poorly preserved, no bones remained.) Over his feet was placed a large (30 cm) bronze bowl ('f'), elaborately constructed with handles and trivet. It was upside-down. In the middle of the grave were his weapons: a fine iron sword ('e'), spear ('a') and shield ('d'), with its central boss ('d1') placed over the lower thorax or abdomen. The sword was ranged along the man's left side, from thorax to knees, the spear along his right with its head alongside his shoulder and head.¹¹³ Buckland 114 likewise contained a spear, or at least an iron spear head ('2'), of which the head lay horizontally alongside the man's left foot, pointing away from him. At his waist he carried a small knife ('1'). His skeletal remains were somewhat better preserved. He lay on his back with legs extended, his arms by his sides and his head turned fully to his right. The lyre-like elements ('3; together with small metal ring '4') lay in a series over his left femur and aligned with it. Unlike Mill Hill 91, however, there was no other sign of ostentation. No evidence remained of a shield. The absence of dress-ornaments and accessories, such as brooches and buckles, was particularly striking. It is true that Evison attributed the grave with 'high status,' but she seems to have predicated this primarily on its containing the lyre, for which in those days Sutton Hoo and its royal association offered the most obvious English parallel.

Of course parsimony of finds in any of these graves may be more apparent than real, attributable simply to the failure of soft furnishings to survive: a person could be clad in silks and surrounded like Trossingen 58 by a wealth of fine wooden objects, and still no trace of prosperity might remain. But here it is all the more remarkable when we look around at the significant displays of wealth and status routinely exhibited by finds elsewhere in the cemetery, particularly in the matter of dress accessories. Brooches are everywhere, some of them with fine carved decoration and cloisonné garnet and glass (including an especially fine one in grave 126). There are glass vessels of Continental origin in graves 6, 20, 22 and 38, a metal bowl in grave 20, and other complex objects in graves C (a balance, with a purse of Roman coins), 107 (an elaborate container made from sheet bronze) and 110 (an antler comb in its case). The location of the grave within the cemetery is equally unremarkable. At the highest point in the cemetery was a prehistoric barrow surrounded by a ring ditch, and on its eastern side was a tightly defined cluster of graves (perhaps laying optimistic claims to ancestral association); but although grave 114 lies precisely to the south of the barrow's centre, it is separated from the ring ditch by some 45m of open ground and clearly belongs to a separate cluster. As at Morning Thorpe, two other Buckland graves preserve lyre-like fragments not noted

113 Parfitt and Bruggmann 1997, 150–151, 207; fig. 70; also appendix V, 245.

by Evison. Of these, grave 71, lay in the same broad range of burials as grave 114, and also had a sword, a spear, a shield and a knife.¹¹⁴ The shield was placed next to the legs, standing on-edge rather like the shield in Trossingen 58. The other, grave 93, lay in a tight cluster of graves near the north-western edge of the survey area and had a sword, a seax (large knife) and a shield, the shield being placed over the legs.¹¹⁵

Be that as it may, both cemeteries are again located significantly in the wider landscape. Both are set on high ground, both are widely visible; and on a fine day each would have afforded clear views across the ocean to the Frankish shore. Moreover, neither is more than half a day's walk from a royal estate: Buckland is only 14 km from Lyminge, by former Roman road, while Mill Hill is around 10 km from a suspected royal villa at Eastry, near Sandwich.¹¹⁶ Both enjoyed good long-distance communications too, neither being more than 22 km from the East Kentish capital, Canterbury, while Buckland lies close to the crossing of two Roman roads, the principal of which, Watling Street, connected Dover with Canterbury and London before proceeding on into the heart of England – as it still does today.

If Prittlewell has opened up new possibilities in Kent it has also done so further to the north, in East Anglia especially. Most remarkable are three graves from the large Anglo-Saxon cemetery complex on a United States Air Force base, RAF Lakenheath, in the parish of Eriswell, North-West Suffolk. Excavated in 1997 by Joanna Caruth in advance of a programme of redevelopment following the end of the Cold War, the site benefits from an alkaline soil quite different from those further to the east and south, resulting in the preservation of skeletal material and even whole skeletons.¹¹⁷ Eriswell 313, an extended supine male, contains a pair of Fe repairs to a delicate wooden object which on closer inspection has proved to be the jointed top of a lyre, elements of the wood (a fine hardwood, perhaps maple) being preserved by iron mineralisation. The workmanship is again indistinguishable from the royal lyres. The more complete joint of the two exhibits an elegant half-mortice exactly matching the internal and external form of joints employed at Sutton Hoo and Taplow, as well as Bergh Apton 22 and Snape 32. The instrument has been placed to the right of, or perhaps diagonally across, the man's torso, with its yoke in line with his head. Apparently bundled with it is an iron spear-head, an arrangement reminiscent of the lyre and sword in Oberflacht 31, and the whole of his upper body has been covered by a large circular shield, its central boss placed over his face. An iron knife is positioned at his left thorax.

In a second extended supine male grave, Eriswell 221, parts of a large, delicate, repaired wooden structure were again found, scattered from the right of the man's head

114 Evison 1987, 235.

115 Evison 1987, 238.

116 Hawkes 1979, Parfitt and Sweetinburgh 2009.

117 Joanna Caruth and John A. Hines. *Excavations of the Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Eriswell*. Suffolk. Forthcoming.

(next to the iron spear-head) towards his waist, its lower part apparently cradled by his forearms (his left hand is placed over his heart, his right over his abdomen, as though holding something to his chest). The structure of the object includes a pair of copper-alloy fittings which closely match lyre fittings at Bergh Apton 22 and Snape 32, and especially the paired fittings 'H' and 'P' in Morning Thorpe 97. Associated with it was a cluster of organic and metal elements perhaps representing a purse or ditty bag: removed as a soil block and investigated in the laboratory, the block proved to contain (amongst other suggestive items) some fine spooled organic cordage preserved by iron mineralisation from the corrosion of a steel strike-a-light. The fineness, smoothness and density of the cord, and the inclusion of different gauges, suggests a specialised requirement, and could be spare stringing for a lyre. In addition to the spear-head, his weaponry included a shield, of which an iron boss and paired studs centred on his left elbow, and an iron knife which lay at his right waist. Near it were two buckles, one of copper alloy, the other of silver. In the presence of such a precious metal we may again glimpse an underlying prosperity, or claim to prosperity, which the taphonomy has otherwise failed to express. A third grave, meanwhile, is laid out somewhat differently. In Eriswell 255 the body has been placed on its right side with its legs drawn up as though seated, the right arm extended towards the raised knees and the left hand held up in front of the face. In the space between knees and face, and thus between the two hand positions, is a scatter of wood and metal fragments that are again consistent with the shape and size of a lyre. Behind his head, over his left shoulder, is an iron spear-head. An iron knife has been placed over his extended right forearm.

Within the present distribution of lyre graves, Eriswell 313, 255 and 221 are at present the most distant from any royal estate attested by Bede in the 8th century, lying as they do some 65 km as the crow flies from Rendlesham. However, Bede's list is by no means complete, and they do lie within a very short walk of the junction of two major land routes: the prehistoric ridgeway known today as the Icknield Way, which runs south-westwards from the coast of North Norfolk to the Upper Thames in the vicinity of Dorchester, Oxfordshire (the site of an important early bishopric mentioned by Bede),¹¹⁸ and the Roman road which still runs west-south-westwards from Caistor St Edmund, Norwich, to join Roman Britain's principal north-south artery, Ermine Street, at Royston in Hertfordshire. Standing on raised ground, the cemetery is also situated on the watershed between the river Lark and its near neighbour the Little Ouse, whose navigable lower reaches flow westwards respectively from Bury St Edmunds and Thetford into the fen river network of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely (incidentally the

118 Abingdon 42 is only an 8 km walk upstream from Dorchester, while an easy boat journey would lead

downstream to Taplow (45 km as the crow flies) and eventually to London, Prittlewell and the sea.

locations of royal monastic foundations also mentioned by Bede). Moreover the communities represented by the Eriswell cemeteries already display conspicuous prosperity of their own, including most famously the large grave of a man buried with his horse, found in 1997. In addition to his sword, shield and other items indicative of exceptional status, he is known particularly for his horse's elaborate harness. Thus it seems reasonable to suppose that a warrior-poet such as Eriswell 313 would already have been well positioned to seek engagement amongst aristocratic families in the neighbourhood, even without such convenient access to the wider world.¹¹⁹

10 Conclusions: towards a political theory of ancient musics

Whether one looks at ancient poets in the Classical literature or in the vernacular, whether one contemplates their historical narratives or their surviving poetical works, it is difficult to escape the impression that a skill in verse and music carried with it a certain political advantage, at one level or another, an advantage with the potential to enhance a poet's individual prestige and status within a community, undoubtedly, but also to carry the more ambitious into proximity with power and authority. Indeed much the same proximity can be discerned amongst skilled poets and songsmiths of later centuries, including our own, as they engage in many aspects of life that can be considered to be political, sometimes profoundly so, even up to the level of government and state. It becomes apparent too that in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages this political engagement was in no way restricted to purveyors of overtly and directly political forms such as panegyric, epithalamium and eulogy,¹²⁰ but consisted also in a more general conferment of prestige, for example through patronage of lyric poetry, instrumental music and performances and entertainments of various other kinds, notably in the context of hospitality and feasting.¹²¹ The interesting complication arises when we come to establish such claims to political connexion as it were forensically: when we attempt to correlate the implications of the histories and poems with the new materialities emerging in the field and in the laboratory. How are we to reconcile the élite, often heroic milieux implied by the texts, floating within their literate and literary bubbles, with the necessarily broader, earthier, even prosaic, impressions conveyed by the archaeological finds and their contexts?

Happily, this challenge is of a kind that has long been embraced by historical archaeologies (which is to say archaeologies directed at epochs in which written texts supply

119 Graeme Lawson. *The Prittlewell Lyre and the Kingdom of Kent. Anglo-Saxon Poets' Graves, from Deal and Dover*. Forthcoming.

120 For the power of panegyric in 6th to 8th-century

Francia, see especially Godman 1987.

121 For recent treatments of the social and political importance of feasting and 'commensality' see variously Halstead 2012; Sallaberger 2012; Pollock 2012.

– or purport to supply – accounts of the remote past); and, as it turns out, the tensions it creates there are by no means unproductive. In place of misleading clarities of definition, with their inherent temporal and spatial weaknesses and an inclination towards categorization, typology and hierarchy, emerges a new, real-world blurring of boundaries, in which elements of evidence are nevertheless situated, in which the patterns of behaviour that they reveal are complex as well as dynamic, and where the increasing richness and variety of evidence redirects our attention to matters of diversity, continuity, adaptability of genre and negotiability of status.¹²²

Some of the finds, it is true, strongly support and expand the evidence of the texts. The ‘princely’ lyre graves at Sutton Hoo, Taplow Court and Prittlewell emphasize the status enjoyed by lyre music (and by implication, by song and poetry) at the very top of society, amongst the ruling class. It is hard not to be aware of how closely they match the *Beowulf* poet’s now-familiar description of the aged king Hrothgar, his instrument and his reciting of traditional lays. Others however confront us with surprises that demand fresh thinking. The English material, for instance, indicates a greater density of lyre players amongst the early Anglo-Saxon population than we have previously anticipated, at any rate during the period in which funerary rites result in the deposition of equipment. Such density may also be emerging, or at least may be suspected, in some of the Continental evidence, especially from southern Germany. Neither can the instruments themselves be dismissed as mere theatrical properties. Even the ‘princely’ lyres turn out to be cherished, much used, essentially functional instruments, whose inclusion in the graves of kings and magnates can be seen as symbolic gestures, for sure, but also as celebrations of real personalities, expressing important components of real identities and reputations whilst also adding to the cultural capital of the kinsfolk of the dead and the populations which they governed. As we gaze at the structures and contents of their graves we must not forget that, as we saw in the crisis at the death of Frotho, Hiarno’s predecessor, as we saw in the schism at the death of Sæberht in Essex, and as the poet laments at the end of *Beowulf*, the demise of a prince and the moment of his or her succession are inevitably moments of political tension and manoeuvre, as well as of solemnity, when interested parties may lay claim to cultural as well as moral authority.

There is also growing evidence of connexion between ordinary and princely pots. We have seen in particular how the lyres found in lesser graves are nevertheless fine

122 For a persuasive example from the 7th and 8th centuries at Flixborough in Lincolnshire, England, see Loveluck 2007. Noting that styli and other paraphernalia of literacy have previously been assumed to be indicators of monastic centres, especially *scriptoria*, Loveluck finds them in elite settlements also.

He goes on to chart the changing character of such communities through patterns of consumption and literacy evidenced by their finds and *débitage*, including especially tell-tale variations in dietary and commensal habits through time.

products of the same high technology as those of ‘princes’, and how this unexpected continuity and indeed commonality increases the possibility, made explicit in the cases of *Hiarnus* and *Fortunatus* and *Caedmon*, that a skill in song could indeed have brought social mobility within the grasp of the Barbarian and the Latin poet alike – the transition itself negotiable through the poet’s own medium of music and verse. Grave contexts too in no way deny the notion of social mobility and political aptitude amongst lyre-bearers. Despite the apparent parsimony expressed in the furnishing of some of the lesser burials, they might still represent a secular *Caedmon* or a younger *Fortunatus*, a struggling *Widsith* or a disappointed *Deor*. We have also seen how even the lesser burials are generally situated amongst or in geographical proximity to potential patrons, from local magnates to heads of states, and that even in those few instances where this cannot be established they are located in convenient proximity to road, river and/or maritime communications. Some are horsemen (Oberflacht 37, Broa) while all but two (Bergh Apton 22 and Cologne 100) are conspicuously armed and equipped for warfare or the hunt – or indeed for travel. And with such finely made and cherished instruments in their hands, we can see that even the least of them has been buried with some measure of sacrifice and an eye to display and ostentation.

It is easy therefore to foresee how identification of political agency amongst these long-dead lyre bearers, and others like them, might enrich our understanding of their roles in society, and might thereby lend music a new relevance to archaeological theories of the remote past. It certainly threatens to undermine received perceptions of musicianship as being somewhat marginal to archaeological thinking, a mere subset of leisure or an accompaniment to religious ritual. This growing realisation may also begin to have a contribution to make to Ancient Studies more generally. In the first place, lyres and poetry seem difficult to divorce from ancient commensal behaviours;¹²³ and since the social and political importance of commensality is now widely appreciated, and since music at least has left us an archaeological footprint, they surely deserve to be factored into our interpretive schemes. If an inclusive, social and political theory of ancient musical behaviour, or at least of lyre musics, promises to illuminate political aspects of the time-frame on which this chapter has focussed – the post-Roman and early medieval period of northern Europe – there may be a wider application too, particularly for students of Late Prehistory. Indeed prehistoric studies may yet prove to be its biggest beneficiary. In attempting to access and understand the mechanisms of ancient political agency (other than warfare, whose brute expression has long influenced readings of the archaeological record) this realisation seems to me to be pregnant with possibilities and opportunities. If evidences of feasting such as the paraphernalia and *débitage* of food

123 For the repeated use of alimentary and commensal metaphors in *Fortunatus’ carmina*, see Godman 1987, 17.

preparation offer powerful archaeological proxies for social mechanism¹²⁴ it seems entirely reasonable that, through the art forms that they signify, the remains of lyres might go one step further and serve as archaeological proxies for social engagement not just in its leisure aspects but also in its political: in diplomacy itself, including the oral diplomacy which must have been the life-blood of political exchange in the age before letters. We can hear clear echoes of such diplomacy in action in the marriage quest ascribed to the poet in OE *Widsith*, and can see its workings laid bare in missions of other kinds expressed in the Latin poetry of Fortunatus as he plays intermediary between the rival aristocratic courts of 6th-century Gaul.

In the midst of his negotiations the notion of 'lyre' too is never very far from Fortunatus' creative consciousness. Although it may still be the instinct of many critics to assume that when he and his kind invoke such things in verse they are merely following an archaic, even anachronistic, convention of poetic metaphor, there is less and less reason to suppose that they were not also referencing actual, contemporary instruments or that their audiences would not have attributed to them such physical meaning. Indeed, some of our lyre graves could equally be those of Latin poets. The widespread assumption that all the extant Barbarian lyre finds must somehow reference vernacular traditions such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith* and Caedmon, which is to say traditions distinct from the Latin *oeuvres* of Fortunatus, Aldhelm, Alcuin and their kind, has been no more than that: an assumption. The Christian symbols found with the Sutton Hoo and Prittlewell princes, and hinted at in the iconography of Trossingen 58, combine with the late date and ecclesiastical proximity of the unarmed young man in Cologne 100 to warn us against trite categorizations of this kind.

Poetry and song are not, of course, the first genres of ancient music to be suspected of concealing a hidden, political dimension, neither is this the first suggestion that musical finds might usefully serve as proxies, or markers, for ancient human aptitudes and behaviours. Musical pipes-with-finger-holes (sometimes called 'flutes,' though this involves a value judgement) are amongst the material proxies proposed for cognitive and linguistic development in modern humans of the earliest Upper Palaeolithic in northern Europe, between around 35 000 and 40 000 years ago.¹²⁵ It has long been recognized too that the metal horns and trumpets of the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in northern and central Europe exhibit such extravagant investments of skill, material resources and knowledge, and that the resulting instruments are capable of such energy and drama, that they cannot satisfactorily be explained without reference to ostentation and the pro-

124 Funerary feasts figure amongst the examples discussed by Alexandrescu, this volume.

125 For examples of the use of proxies, including mu-

sical proxies, in human evolutionary studies see Lawson and D'Errico 2002; D'Errico et al. 2009, especially 14–16.

jection of power.¹²⁶ In some instances a competitive dimension seems well within the bounds of possibility. Often musical instruments are found to represent the pinnacles of technology. Another supreme example can be seen in the conspicuous technical advances revealed by instruments buried in Ancient China at around this time, including in the 5th century BCE the large carillon of bronze bells from the tomb (and originally we may suppose the court) of Marquis Zeng Yi, at Suizhou, Hubei Province.¹²⁷ And already within the protohistoric range of the present study, archaeologists are fully accustomed to rely on material proxies for a number of other transient phenomena: pollen, seeds and phytoliths for changes in the natural environment; coinage and exotic products such as amber for patterns of foreign trade; styli and book mounts for literacy and scholarship; and faunal remains for dietary habits, including feasting. So why not musical instruments?

A first opportunity to test these ideas may recently have emerged from a site of the Early Iron Age in the Atlantic north-west of Scotland. During excavations on a hillside at Kilbride, near Torrin on the Isle of Skye, the partly carbonised remains of wooden objects have been recovered which include the bridge of a lyre. It is quite unmistakable. Dating from at least the 4th century BCE, perhaps earlier,¹²⁸ it was found in layers of ash representing a long series of burning events associated with hearths. The context is very unusual. Other finds and residues from the site represent ritual behaviours including feasting with, from time to time, funerary acts. In the midst of the site is a sunken walkway leading to a sink-hole, through which hewn steps lead down to an underground watercourse. Enclosed for a time within a circular wall or revetment, the focus of activity above ground teems with evidence of sound of various kinds including, besides noises of fire and water, a variety of sonorous or percussive craft activities. The cave mouth itself is a mysterious and essentially liminal space, transitioning between light and dark, fire and water, the world of the living and a chthonic otherworld. Clearly much more than a habitation or locus of production, the site seems to be a place of active congregation too, conceivably of pilgrimage. So what might a lyre have been doing there? It is unexpected, to say the least. Not only is it the oldest example found anywhere north of the Alps, but it is so far the only lyre bridge contemporary with Classical civilization found anywhere in Europe – including the Classical Mediterranean itself. If its use has been purely recreational, why has it been burned? And if it was meant to be burned, how

126 See Lund 1986, 36 for the bronze 'lurs'. For the Etruscan *lituus*, see Holmes 2013. For the context of the La Tène (late Iron Age) trumpet deposit of Tintignac, Corrèze, see Maniquet 2008; also Vendries, this volume. For examples of modern political re-use and abuse of the spectacle these antiquities afford today, see Højring 1986, 235–251; Lund 1986, 39–44; Schween 2004.

127 Falkenhausen 1993; Falkenhausen 2000. See also Fang 2010.

128 Birch 2004; Steven A. Birch, Jo T. McKenzie and Gemma Cruickshanks, eds. *High Pasture Cave: Ritual, Memory and Identity in the Iron Age of Skye*. Oxbow Books. Forthcoming (2021). See also <http://high-pasture-cave.org/> (visited on 19/07/2019).

was it not incinerated? We need not doubt its association with music and musicianship. However, since all known lyres seem to exist in close association with song and verse, and these in turn imply Tradition (which is to say the storage, recall and sharing of information as Text), might it be hinting too at something still more ephemeral? If its delicate manufacture is any indication, the type of instrument for which it was made must have been every bit as sophisticated as those of the 6th to 8th centuries CE. Might the deliberateness of its destruction be similarly suggestive of some broader symbolic, even political, engagement?

Naturally, whilst a find might be invoked as a proxy for a particular suite of behaviours, a single proxy cannot in itself constitute proof. For a proxy to function it must form part of a pattern, or be corroborated by other clues. So, what other tests of political and/or diplomatic connexion ought we to seek? How might the political relevance of lyres and lyre-bearers be developed and tested in terms of evidence? Recurrent anomalies may afford one avenue: were a lyre-bearer to be found to be accompanied by some other suggestive grave furnishings perhaps, or wearing unusual dress-accessories, this might be suggestive. The *skomorokh* poets of medieval Russian tradition are distinguished by their unusual headgear, it seems,¹²⁹ whilst the runic inscription on a wooden stick or *Spazierstock* (so-called) found in an early medieval layer at Schleswig, Germany, claims association with one *Suein barbara*, ‘Svein the harper.’¹³⁰ And as we have seen there are already several curious grave finds. Cologne 100 is both weaponless and wears odd gloves, though in both of these respects he is so far unique. The lyre of Bergh Apton 22 was strangely installed up-ended, its head pointing towards the foot of the grave. The meaning of this remains unclear, but something similar can be seen in Abingdon 42, whilst in Trossingen 58 and Cologne 100 the instrument lay face-down and at Prittlewell it was placed face-down on the chamber floor, remote from the body yet also separated from the feasting equipment and major weapons. Individually perhaps such quirks ring no more than small alarm-bells, in our present state of knowledge; but as our sample increases in size any repetition might prove significant.

‘Constructive ambiguities’ may offer a more direct approach to habits and techniques of diplomacy.¹³¹ The bird-headed plaques of the Sutton Hoo and Taplow lyres, for example, may correspond to the paired birds and animal heads that accompany King David enthroned in some early medieval miniatures (Fig. 8); but whilst a Christian or Christological allusion may therefore be suspected, some pagan meaning is also possible, referencing perhaps creatures such as those that came to be known as ‘Huginn’ and ‘Muninn’ in ON *Grimnismál*, the feathered messengers of the Norse poet-god Óðinn (Fig. 9).¹³² Amongst the decorative zoomorphic schemes adorning the lyre of Trossingen

129 See Zguta 1978.

130 Düwel 1989, 55–56, drawing on Moltke 1975.

131 For ambiguities and their political application see

Pehar 2001; Scott 2001.

132 Lawson 1981, 50.



Fig. 8 The biblical King David as divine singer, poet and model of kingly virtue, accompanying a copy of Cassiodorus' commentary on the Old Testament Psalms. Durham Cathedral, MS. B. II. 30, folio 30 verso. 8th century CE.

58, meanwhile, is a broad tableau showing armed men arranged enigmatically around a central, weapon-like motif. As Barbara Theune has argued,¹³³ it is impossible to say whether these represent Christian notions of Christ's twelve apostles or whether they reference some independent Barbarian tradition of twelve heroes, such as the twelve young men who circle the king's barrow in the closing lines of *Beowulf*, chanting his pagan epitaph. If we take Fortunatus' ambivalences as a starting point, together with the Anglo-Saxons' curiously inconsistent treatment of the notorious tyrant Ermanaric (who has been the target of the poet's diplomacy in OE *Widsith*), the possibility remains that such dualities may be no accident, and that an audience or patron is intended to draw from them whatever meaning most suits or least offends its own particular leanings and susceptibilities. Performers then, as now, are unlikely to have underestimated their audiences' sensitivities, or would have done so at their peril. After all, as Peter Godman has remarked of the Carolingian poets, "Panegyric, in these circumstances, was not the cosy occupation of an armchair versifier but a political act with its special attendant dangers."¹³⁴

If evidence of musical preference can reveal to us something of a long-dead person or class of persons, or an ancient people and its ruling élite, it is hard to believe that it was not also capable of doing so within its own cultural milieu, and might have been exploited to that effect much as Lü Buwei proposes. In the final analysis, music-making and poetry of social kind are media of expression and communication, shared between actors and recipients, participants and witnesses, their diversity of forms affording an enormous range of choices as to genre, repertoire, mood and tone quality. Thus when Lü suggests that "by observing the musical customs of a regime" (and he might equally

133 Theune-Großkopf 2006, 131–138.

134 Godman 1987, 24.



Fig. 9 Head of the one-eyed Óðinn (Odin), pagan Norse god of poetry, knowledge, death and divination, on a church portal preserved at Kraviksfjord, Norway. Around 1200 CE.

imply its musical choices) “we can appreciate the manner of its government and the character of its ruler”; he may be speaking from a vantage point that is not so very dissimilar to Fortunatus? Indeed one wonders what Fortunatus would have thought of the idea. Given the close study he has clearly made of his own patrons’ characters, as well as those of their enemies, one somehow feels that he would not have found it especially incongruous. His oeuvre clearly shows that he has the measure of his subjects, he knows what they like, and he knows how to deliver. To the dangerous king Chilperic, whose anger he has to appease at Brinnacum (perhaps Berny-Rivière, near Soissons) in 580 CE, incidentally the very year of the Trossingen 58 burial, he is as soothing as can be; and the happy outcome¹³⁵ is testament as much to the soundness of his political judgement as to his skill in composition. Moreover, his frequent allusions to the sweetness (*dulcedo*) of the lyre and of lyric verse are consistent with the tones produced by lyres reconstructed from the archaeological finds of those times, including Trossingen, as well as with the evidence, such as it is, of the texts. *Swūtol sang scōpes*, exclaims the Beowulf poet: “sweetly sang the poet”. And this recurrent preference has to be understood in relation to the contrasting timbres of the myriad flutes and bells, clashing cymbals and brazen trumpets with which the archaeological and pictorial records of Late Antiquity are otherwise so richly endowed. It is hard, of course, to deny that Lü’s assertions lack scientific or philosophical rationale, at least of a kind that we would recognize today,¹³⁶ yet such thoughts and prejudices may still be authentic, reflecting his perception and honest opinion as he experiences and reflects upon the political world in which he lives.

135 Fortunatus, *Carmen* 9.1 (discussed by George 1992, 48–57). Fortunatus’ task is to defend bishop Gregory of Tours (the famed historian of the Franks) against charges of treason. Gregory survives. George 1995,

73–80 supplies the text in modern English, with additional commentary.

136 Hagel, this volume.

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