

*Sutton Hoo and Syria: The Anglo-Saxons Who Served in the Byzantine Army?**

The Sutton Hoo ship burial is the most famous example of a group of lavishly furnished Anglo-Saxon graves. The discovery in 2003 of another, at Prittlewell, Southend (Essex), and its publication in 2019, has brought our knowledge of them into sharper focus.¹ Some questions, however, remain. How did the men buried in these graves acquire so much wealth? And why were they buried with so many objects from the eastern Mediterranean? The conventional view is that they probably acquired the gold from their Merovingian neighbours, and that the imported goods came as gifts or through trade.² Here I argue for

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1. L. Blackmore, I. Blair, S. Hirst and C. Scull, *The Prittlewell Princely Burial: Excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, 2003* (London, 2019).

2. R. Bruce-Mitford (and A. Care Evans, ed., vol. 3), *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial* (3 vols, London, 1975–1983), iii, p. 164; I.N. Wood, 'The Franks and Sutton Hoo', in I. Wood and N. Lund, eds, *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500–1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 1–14; D. Whitehouse, 'The Mediterranean Perspective', in R. Farrell and C. Neuman de Vegvar, eds, *Sutton Hoo: Fifty Years After* (Oxford, OH, 1992), pp. 117–28; L. Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History* (London, 2012), p. 109; A. Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West: The Archaeology of Cultural Identity, AD 400–650* (Stroud, 2003), pp. 175–88; C. Scull, F. Minter and J. Plouviez, 'Social and Economic Complexity in Early Medieval England: A Central Place Complex of the East Anglian Kingdom at Rendlesham, Suffolk', *Antiquity*, xc (2016), pp. 1594–612; J. Drauschke, 'Archaeological Perspectives on Communication and Exchange between the Merovingians and the Eastern Mediterranean', in S. Esders, Y. Fox, Y. Hen and L. Sarti, eds, *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 9–31.

a different explanation which opens up a startlingly new view of early Anglo-Saxon history.

The graves currently known as princely burials share a number of characteristics. The men were buried fully dressed and provided with large numbers of grave goods, including weaponry. Their burials were carefully orchestrated and included exotic objects imported across great distances. The graves themselves were monumental, in that they were designed to be an enduring feature in the landscape; they were experimental, in that each one took a different form; and they were often placed apart from more normal cemeteries, in prominent locations on the boundaries of kingdoms (Fig. 1).³ These burials were a short-lived phenomenon of the period from c.580 to 635. The Prittlewell chamber grave, created c.580–605, is one of the best preserved. It was perhaps preceded by a poorly preserved ship burial at Snape (Suffolk), and was followed by the burial of a young man and his horse c.590–600 at Sutton Hoo mound 17, and then by the chamber graves at Taplow (Berkshire) and Broomfield (Essex). The Sutton Hoo ship burial of c.625 (mound 1) is among the latest of them.⁴ Most of the princely burials had either been robbed before excavation or were not adequately published: the ones we know most about are Sutton Hoo mound 1 and, now, Prittlewell. The current consensus is that these burials were associated with the development of kingship.⁵ In my view, this was a later rather than earlier stage in the process of kingdom formation, when families were extending their reach beyond their own peoples to be overkings of neighbouring territories.⁶ These power relationships were secured by gift-giving and payment of tribute, and in other ways too, such as through marriage alliances, and the kinds of shared ceremonial likely to have accompanied both.

The publication of the excavations at Prittlewell increases our understanding of the princely burial phenomenon, partly because the burial chamber survived well, was expertly excavated, and has been written up in an exemplary way. It also came at the same time as the concluding phases of a project to refine our chronology of the Anglo-Saxon burials of the sixth and seventh centuries, which greatly enhances the extent to which we can contextualise Prittlewell with other evidence.⁷ All this is helpful because these burials reveal so much about the societies that created them. I begin by looking at some unusual objects in the grave at

3. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, p. 312; J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), pp. 114–16, esp. fig. 29.

4. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 296, 312–14.

5. R. Naismith, *Early Medieval Britain, c.500–1000* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 174–5.

6. This is also the historical context in which Adam McBride argues the early great hall complexes were built: A. McBride, *The Role of Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complexes in Kingdom Formation, in Comparison and in Context, AD 500–750* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 59, 107, 109, 294.

7. A. Bayliss and J. Hines, eds, *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework* (London, 2013).



Figure 1. A map of so-called ‘princely’ burials (in red) and other aristocratic burials in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Based on Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, fig. 266. © MOLA.

Prittlewell, then explain how I think they came to be there and, finally, how they relate to other evidence from the same period.

I

The ‘Prittlewell Prince’ was buried in a coffin placed in a small, partially subterranean room, with an array of objects, some of which were still hanging on their hooks on the walls when excavated (Fig. 2a). He



Figure 2. The Prittlewell princely burial. (a) Reconstruction of the chamber, (b) Spoon, (c) Flagon, (d) Copper-alloy basin, (e) Cylindrical container, (f) Hanging bowl. All images © MOLA.

was buried in the period *c.*580–605, perhaps in the earlier part of that date range.⁸ Among the objects that were placed in the chamber were some that were made in the eastern Mediterranean. These include:

- A large silver spoon of a Byzantine type, made in the late sixth or early seventh century (Fig. 2b). At least two different owners' names are scratched on it, one with the form of an A which is common in Greek inscriptions (but also found in some Anglo-Saxon ones from this period). It is comparatively common for spoons to be buried in

8. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 285, 290–96.

graves in southern and north-western Europe at this date, though most are of the smaller, western European type.⁹

- A copper-alloy flagon of a type made in Asia Minor and the Levant in the sixth and seventh centuries (Fig. 2c). This is of a very unusual kind, decorated with a bracelet of discs with images of St Sergius, an equestrian soldier martyred c.305, that served as pilgrims' badges. Eight others are known, of which only three have archaeological contexts: one from Mount Nebo, Jordan, one from Cyprus, and another from Aidlingen in south-western Germany (also accompanied, as at Prittlewell, by a copper-alloy basin).¹⁰

These flagons came from the centre of Sergius's cult in the remote fortress town of Sergiopolis (modern Rusafa) in central Syria.¹¹ They were not luxury objects in terms of the materials they were made from, nor were such hammered copper vessels exported in any quantity.¹² The one from Prittlewell did, though, occupy a prestigious place in the chamber, in the centre of the north wall, seemingly the only object placed on its own shelf.¹³

- A cast copper-alloy basin, traditionally known as a 'Coptic bowl', that was intended to be used for hand washing and could perhaps be placed over a fire to warm the water (Fig. 2d). This one is of a rare type, known by various names, notably Werner type C1 or Werz Beckenform 1, type B1. It was cast rather than hammered, and has a closed rather than pierced footring, and omega-shaped handles with a central ring-shaped decoration. This type seems to have been made in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Only four others with this group of features are known: one was found in south-west Germany, and three are known from Italy.¹⁴ There is considerable debate about

9. D. Sherlock and R. Tomlin, 'The Silver Spoon', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 159–64; J. Drauschke, "Byzantine" and "Oriental" Imports in the Merovingian Empire', in Harris, ed., *Long-Distance Contacts*, pp. 53–73, at 57–8, esp. n. 27.

10. M. Mango, 'The East Mediterranean Flagon', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 178–84; another example was offered for sale by John Nicholson's on 25 June 2020, lot 1587, available at <https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/john-nicholson/catalogue-id-srjor0268/lot-dod4bf5b-d18a-4922-b0c6-abd900a9e4f4> (accessed 26 July 2024). It was described as 20 cm in height and 16 cm in diameter, and was among a group of Byzantine liturgical equipment, so it is likely to have come from the eastern Mediterranean; its whereabouts are not currently known.

11. E.K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), pp. 35–43; H.C. Evans with B. Ratliff, *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New Haven, CT, 2012), p. 90 (no. 57); Mango, 'East Mediterranean Flagon'. Since writing this, it has been suggested that the example from Prittlewell came from a different shrine to St Sergius, further east in Sasanian territory, at Qasr Serij, Iraq: St J. Simpson, 'Sutton Hoo, St Sergius and the Sasanians: Anglo-Saxon Finds Re-interpreted from an Eastern Perspective', *Ash-sharq*, viii (2024), pp. 1–35, at 17–24.

12. Mango, 'East Mediterranean Flagon'.

13. L. Blackmore, 'Wooden ?Shelves', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, p. 104.

14. M. Mango, 'The East Mediterranean Basin', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 184–6; J. Werner, 'Zwei gegossene koptische bronzeflaschen aus Salona', *Vjesnik: Za arheologiju I historiju Dalmatinsku*, lxi (1954), pp. 115–28, at 121–3, 125, 127; K. Werz, "Sogenanntes Koptisches"

where they were made, not least because similar ones have been found in Nubia, Egypt, Italy, southern Germany, along the Rhine and in eastern England. Marlia Mango, in her discussion of the basin from Prittlewell, clearly thinks this type was made in Egypt. Indeed, in another recent study, these basins are marked out as one of the types of copper-alloy vessel most likely to have been made in the eastern Mediterranean rather than in the west because of their distribution pattern.¹⁵ However, this is a matter of ongoing discussion.

In order to understand better the origins of the copper-alloy basins with moveable handles of this period, many attempts have been made to group them based on their form and metallurgical composition. The principal difficulty is that they tend to show up only in a range of restricted archaeological contexts: in Nubian graves of the late fifth century, in a small number of shipwrecks, and in graves in particular areas of Europe dating from the mid-sixth to the mid-seventh centuries.¹⁶ It is clear that the earliest vessels were made in Egypt but there is debate about whether the finds from Europe were also made there or in workshops elsewhere, most likely in Asia Minor, Constantinople or, perhaps, in Byzantine Italy.¹⁷ Some patterns have emerged:

- Most vessels found in and around Egypt tend to contain 5–10 per cent lead in the alloy and more than 11 per cent zinc, whereas most vessels found in Europe tend to contain more than 20 per cent lead and only 1–5 per cent zinc (Table 1).¹⁸
- Vessels with closed footrings and trapezoidal handles tend to be earlier; vessels with decorated, openwork footrings and omega-shaped handles tend to be later in the sequence (Fig. 3).¹⁹

Table 1. Typical composition of copper-alloy metalwork.

	Lead	Zinc
Vessels found in Egypt	5–10%	11%+
Vessels found in Europe	20%+	1–5%

Source: Drandaki, *Late Antique Metalware*, ch. 6.

Buntmetallgeschirr: Eine methodische und analytische Untersuchung zu den als koptisch bezeichneten Buntmetallgefäßen' (Univ. of Konstanz doctoral thesis, 2005), pp. 38–40, 49, 85–6, synoptic tables 9–11. The more precise classification used by Werz means that some of the Nubian examples given by Mango are of a different type from the Prittlewell basin.

15. M. Beghelli and J.P. Gil, 'Cast Bronze Vessels in the 6th–9th Centuries: Production Centres, Circulation and Use in Ecclesiastical and Secular Contexts', *Sonderdruck aus Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, xlix (2019), pp. 413–34, at 414, 430, 433, fig. 2.

16. For a recent survey with references to key literature, see A. Drandaki, *Late Antique Metalware* (Turnhout, 2000), ch. 6.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 100 and references.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 100, 280–81.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–4.



	Footrings	Handles	
Earlier	Closed	Trapezoidal	
Later	Decorated/ open-work	Omega	

Figure 3. Schematic representation of different types of copper-alloy basins with moveable handles. Vessel forms based on Werz, ‘Sogenanntes Koptisches’, tables 9 and 10.

The basin from Prittlewell has a high lead content (29–36 per cent) and has omega-shaped handles, which would indicate that it was not made in Egypt, but it also has a closed footring, which is unusual among the finds from Europe and more common in those found in Egypt.²⁰ It is therefore not certain where this item was made; it may have come from the eastern Mediterranean, but it is also possible that it was made in the west as a copy of such a vessel.

- The remains of a copper-alloy cylindrical container (Fig. 2e). It is c.45 mm long and 25 mm wide, made of sheet metal, with a flat lid that fits over the top to which is attached a chain and a suspension loop for hanging it from something.²¹ It belongs to a group of objects the name and function of which are not settled. It is not written up in the excavation report as being from the eastern Mediterranean, but, following Anastasia Drandaki’s more recent confirmation of the significance of the percentage of lead in such objects, it is very likely that it was made in Byzantine Egypt. The alloy contains 8 per cent lead and 10 per cent zinc, fitting comfortably within the norms for copper-alloy objects found in Egypt from this time.²²

It has been classed with a group of finds once described as work-boxes but now more commonly known as relic-containers.²³ This one is of the rarer and earlier kind, known as Type III, being long and thin rather than squat. Parallels are hard to find; the closest are from

20. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 436–7.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–9, 374–6.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 439; Drandaki, *Late Antique Metalware*, pp. 91, 100, 280–81.

23. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 157–8; C. Hills, ‘Workboxes or Reliquaries? Small Copper-Alloy Containers in Seventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Graves’, in C. Rhumann and V. Brieske, eds, *Dying Gods—Religious Beliefs in Northern and Eastern Europe in the Time of Christianisation* (Hanover, 2015), pp. 51–61; A. Gibson, *Early Anglo-Saxon Christian Reliquaries* (Oxford, 2022); but, for an alternative interpretation, see A. Gannon, ‘Guarding the Sacred: Early Anglo-Saxon Cylindrical Containers’, *Temporis Signa: Archeologia della tarda antichità e del medioevo*, xvi (2021), pp. 213–15.

graves at Kingston Down (Kent), Frankfurt Cathedral (Germany) and Vermand (France).²⁴ They share characteristics with some of the objects that seem to have contained relics, such as scraps of material, but they are also akin to late Roman/Byzantine containers for ink powder, and pyxides and balsamaria for cosmetics, medicines and incense.²⁵

It is also worth noting one other item:

- The hanging bowl (Fig. 2f), although made in the British Isles, is of an unusual kind: rather than being decorated with designs common in insular art, it has ‘classical, non-Celtic derived ornamental motifs’ which are not only ‘Romanising’ but also ‘consonant with continuing contacts with the art of the Christian east’.²⁶

Two things strike me about these finds. Firstly, the spoon, basin and flagon were quite new when they were buried; similar types of flagon were being sold in shops in Sardis, Turkey, when they were destroyed by an earthquake in the early seventh century.²⁷ The hanging bowl is also likely to have been new, given the lack of wear on its suspension rings.²⁸ Secondly, the imported objects are rare types; they are not items that were routinely exported and are not commonly found elsewhere in western Europe.²⁹ The shrine at Sergiopolis was popular among Arab- and Greek-speaking Christians but not pilgrims from the west.³⁰ So how did these things get so rapidly to Prittlewell?

II

The simplest explanation does not invoke unusual diplomatic gifts from Merovingian kings or a special shipment. Instead, I think the Prittlewell Prince obtained these goods when he was in the Middle East. And there is a good historical context to explain how and why he went. In 575, the Byzantine army urgently needed more troops because of the renewed war with the Sasanians. Tiberius, ‘caesar’ under Justin

24. Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 157–9; L. Blackmore, *The Small Finds from Cuxton Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, Kent (ARC CXT98)* (2006), available at <https://doi.org/10.5284/1000230>, pp. 35–41, at 36–7. I think these should be considered as distinct from the other examples classified as Type III, which are more like flasks, wider at the base, narrower at the top, and with a lid that fits inside rather than outside the cylinder.

25. H. Eckardt, *Writing and Power in the Roman World: Literacies and Material Culture* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 101–3; Gannon, ‘Guarding the Sacred’.

26. S. Youngs, ‘Hanging Bowl’, in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 168–78, at 175.

27. Mango, ‘East Mediterranean Flagon’, p. 178; two more flagons were found in probably domestic contexts at Sardis, in buildings abandoned following an earthquake in the early seventh century; N. Cahill, ‘Recent Fieldwork at Sardis’, in S.R. Steadman and G. McMahon, eds, *The Archaeology of Anatolia III* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2019), pp. 122–38, at 130–33.

28. Youngs, ‘Hanging Bowl’, pp. 168, 176.

29. Sherlock and Tomlin, ‘Silver Spoon’, p. 162; Mango, ‘East Mediterranean Flagon’, pp. 178, 184; Mango, ‘East Mediterranean Basin’, p. 184.

30. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, esp. pp. 98–100, 139.

II, ‘conducted a major recruiting campaign’, at great cost, on both sides of the Alps.³¹ According to the early seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta, Tiberius ‘recruited multitudes of soldiers and rendered the recruits’ hearts eager for danger through a flowing distribution of gold, purchasing from them enthusiasm for death by respect for payment’.³² Contemporary sources talk of ‘squadrons of excellent horsemen’ numbering some 150,000; modern historians think it more likely to have been in the region of 12,000–15,000.³³ Nonetheless, we are talking about large numbers of troops. These soldiers probably joined the newly formed *Foederati* as part of a major reorganisation of Byzantine forces.³⁴ They served until the end of the war with the Sasanians in 591, continuing under emperors Tiberius II (578–82) and Maurice (582–602). Maurice himself had been in command of the troops on the eastern front from 577 to 582. It is conceivable that more western recruits may have joined up later on, although there is no evidence for this. All these soldiers were probably discharged in the 590s.³⁵

The *Foederati* were predominantly elite cavalry troops supported by infantry. They were allowed to have their own attendants who were also soldiers: ‘we have to do here with the germanic personal retinue rather than the paid servants of poor soldiers’.³⁶ On joining up, they were issued with uniform and weapons, but thereafter were given an annual allowance to spend on clothing, arms and horse equipment.³⁷ These troops, the ‘Tiberiani’, are thought to have been drawn from

31. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, tr. M. Whitby (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 273–4 and n. 52 (V. 14); *Evagrius Scholasticus. Historia Ecclesiastica—Kirchengeschichte*, ed. A. Hübner (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 209.27–210.2 (V. 14); John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. E.W. Brooks (Paris, 1936), vi. 13; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, tr. C. Mango and R. Scott (Oxford, 1997), p. 373 (251:24–7); *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction and Notes*, tr. M. Whitby and M. Whitby (Oxford, 1986), p. 90 (iii. 12.4). J.F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: An Administrative, Institutional and Social Survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata, c.580–900* (Bonn, 1984), pp. 96–117, esp. 97; M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historians: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 258–9, 268; M. Whitby, ‘Recruitment in Roman Armies from Justinian to Heraclius (ca.565–615)’, in A. Cameron, ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, III: States, Resources and Armies* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), pp. 61–124, at 87–91, 108–10; B. Fourlas, ‘St Constantine and “the Army of Heroic Men” Raised by Tiberius II in 574/575: Some Thoughts on the Historical Significance of the Early Byzantine Silver Hoard at Karlsruhe’, *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums*, lxii (2015), pp. 341–75, at 353, and a shorter version as ‘Early Byzantine Church Silver Offered for the Eternal Rest of Framarich and Karilos: Evidence of “the Army of Heroic Men” Raised by Tiberius II Constantine?’, in Esders et al., eds, *East and West in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 87–107, at 97.

32. *History of Theophylact Simocatta*, tr. Whitby and Whitby, p. 90 (iii. 12.4).

33. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*, p. 97.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–8.

35. Whitby, ‘Recruitment in Roman Armies’, p. 90; Fourlas, ‘Early Byzantine Church Silver’, p. 97.

36. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*, pp. 97–8, 106; F. Trombley, ‘The Operational Methods of the Late Roman Army in the Persian War of 572–591’, in A.S. Lewin and P. Pellegrini, eds, *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 321–56, esp. 326–7.

37. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*, pp. 100–117.

the Franks, Burgundians, continental Saxons, Goths, Lombards, Bulgars and Gepids.³⁸ In the 590s there was an officer on the Balkan front called Godwin, which prompted Michael Whitby to suggest that Anglo-Saxons were also being recruited but, although Godwin was a popular Anglo-Saxon name in the tenth and eleventh centuries, there are no earlier attestations.³⁹ Nevertheless, the ‘Tiberiani’ could have been recruited from Britain too. After all, we know that there were already established connections between Byzantium and Britain and, indeed, Maurice’s own military manual refers to ‘Britons’ being good at fighting ‘in the woods’.⁴⁰ Procopius, writing in the mid-sixth century, albeit for rhetorical effect, says that Emperor Justinian was paying large subsidies to Britain, and that his general, Belisarius, felt able to offer Britain, ‘which was subject to the Romans in former times’, to the Ostrogoths in exchange for Sicily.⁴¹ Procopius also says that Frankish rulers included Angles in their delegation when they went on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople in the mid-sixth century.⁴² There is evidence for trade in the form of pottery vessels, some limited but telling textual sources, and both gold and lower-value copper coins.⁴³ Sixth- and seventh-century pilgrims’ flasks from the shrine of St Menas, Abu Mina, Egypt, have been found at Meols (Cheshire), Canterbury

38. Whitby, ‘Recruitment in Roman Armies’, pp. 89, 108–9; Fourlas, ‘Early Byzantine Church Silver’, p. 98.

39. Whitby, ‘Recruitment in Roman Armies’, pp. 109 n. 239, 110, where he also points to a story about the imperial party encountering three men in the Balkans, ‘Sclavenes by race’, carrying nothing but ‘lyres’ and claiming to live ‘at the boundary of the western ocean’: *History of Theophylact Simocatta*, tr. Whitby and Whitby, pp. 160–61 (vi. 2.10–16); *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (King’s College London, 2005–), available at <https://pase.ac.uk> (accessed 15 Sept. 2024).

40. Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*; E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400–800* (York, 2007); Scull et al., ‘Social and Economic Complexity’, pp. 1603, 1604; C.R. Green, ‘Britain, the Byzantine Empire, and the Concept of an Anglo-Saxon “Heptarchy”’: Hārūn ibn Yahyā’s Ninth-Century Arabic Description of Britain’, in K.L. Jolly and B. Brooks, eds, *Global Perspectives on Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2022), pp. 94–114; *Maurice’s Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, tr. G.T. Dennis (Philadelphia, PA, 1984), pp. 89–90 (VIII. 88). Thanks to St John Simpson for this last reference.

41. Procopius, ed. and tr. H.B. Dewing (Loeb edn; 7 vols, London, 1914–40), III: *History of the Wars*, pp. 344–5 (VI. vi. 28), and VI: *The Anecdota or Secret History*, pp. 232–3 (xix.13); I.N. Wood, ‘Before and After the Migration to Britain’, in J. Hines, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 41–64, at 48; Green, ‘Britain, the Byzantine Empire, and the Concept of an Anglo-Saxon “Heptarchy”’.

42. Procopius, V: *History of the Wars*, ed. and tr. Dewing, pp. 254–5 (VIII. xx. 7–10); Wood, ‘Before and After the Migration’, p. 47; J. Campbell, ‘The Man at Sutton Hoo’, *History Extra* (Mar. 2021), available at <https://www.historyextra.com/period/anglo-saxon/sutton-hoo-burial-who-long-read-professor-james-campbell/> (accessed 6 Apr. 2021).

43. See references in n. 2 above and also M.M. Mango, *Beyond the Amphora: Non-Ceramic Evidence for Late Antique Industry and Trade* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 87–106; E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400–800* (York, 2007); C. Morrisson, ‘Byzantine Coins in Early Medieval Britain: A Byzantinist’s Assessment’, in R. Naismith, M. Allen and E. Screen, eds, *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 207–42; M. Duggan, *Links to Late Antiquity: Ceramic Exchange and Contacts on the Atlantic Seaboard in the 5th to 7th Centuries AD* (Oxford, 2018).

and Faversham (Kent), and elsewhere.⁴⁴ At Penmachno, in North Wales, a memorial stone gives the date as ‘in the time of the consul Justin’; Thomas Charles-Edwards suggests this refers to Emperor Justin II, who was consul for much of the period 567–79.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, perfectly plausible that Anglo-Saxons, and perhaps others from Britain, were among the troops that joined Justin II’s army.

These cavalry units fought on Byzantium’s north-eastern frontier with the Sasanian Empire (Fig. 4). They were first deployed in Armenia in 575–7, then probably as far east as the Caspian Sea, in modern Azerbaijan. In 578, the army, now led by Maurice as ‘supreme commander of the eastern armies’ and ‘count of the federates’, was in the Arzanene and Beth Arabaye border regions between modern Turkey and Syria. In 579 there were skirmishes in Armenia; in 580 they were in Persia. Fighting resumed in earnest in 581 with an expedition down the Euphrates from Circesium which aimed for Ctesiphon, but the mission was aborted and had to return up river as far as Callinicum (Raqqa,



Figure 4. The Middle East in the late sixth century, showing the border between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires in c.581. Drawn by Adam Parsons based on T. Riplinger and H. Benner, *Eastern Mediterranean: The Early Byzantine Empire (527 to 563 A.D.)* (Tübingen Atlas des Vorderen Orients; Wiesbaden, 1988), map B.VI.6.

44. S. Bangert, ‘Menas Ampullae: A Case Study of Long-Distance Contacts’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, xxxii (2006), pp. 27–33; D. Griffiths and S. Bangert, ‘Ceramic: The St Menas Ampulla’, in D. Griffiths, R.A. Philpott and G. Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 58–60.

45. T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 234–8; N. Edwards, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, III: North Wales* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 301–5.

in modern Syria). In 582, fighting resumed after a brief lull and was centred on the frontier zone around Dara and the Arzanene region, and campaigning continued there in 584–9.⁴⁶ At times, notably in 581, the army's documented movements were extremely close to Sergiopolis, where the Prittlewell flagon came from: Callinicum is a little more than 30 miles from Sergiopolis.⁴⁷ This fortress shrine played an important role in the politics of the region; in 592, Khusro II, the Sasanian ruler (590–628), thanked Maurice for helping him regain his throne by donating gifts to the shrine at Sergiopolis, thereby demonstrating their diplomatic connection, his desire to win favour in the area, and his potential willingness to convert from Zoroastrianism. The gifts included the gold cross originally given to the shrine by Justinian, which had been looted by Khusro II's grandfather, Khusro I.⁴⁸ This demonstrates the shrine's importance; cavalry troops stationed in the area would have known about, and may have wished to visit, the shrine of this rider saint.

These western European recruits have left a slight but nonetheless traceable trail. There are contemporary records of soldiers with Germanic names, including Eilifreda, who became a division commander in the 580s.⁴⁹ In Constantinople, there are five funerary inscriptions with Germanic names dating from c.580 to 620.⁵⁰ In the Biqā Valley in Lebanon, a hoard of silver liturgical vessels has been found which includes a censer, chalice and spoon, all probably made in Syria in the late sixth/early seventh century, with inscriptions on them commemorating people with western European names: Framarich, a Germanic name, and Karilos, probably a Merovingian.⁵¹ Benjamin Furlas has also drawn attention to some late sixth-/early seventh-century buckles with triangular plates that were found in Anemurium (the southernmost point of Turkey), two from near Constantinople, and another from the fortress at Sadovec, Bulgaria.⁵² Furlas notes that they are a distinctively western kind of buckle, not used

46. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, pp. 250–304; Trombley, 'Operational Methods'.

47. For recent excavations at Sergiopolis, see T. Ulbert, ed., *Forschungen in Resafa-Sergiopolis* (Berlin, 2016). If instead it came from Qasr Serij, the army is likely to have ridden right past: Simpson, 'Sutton Hoo, St Sergius and the Sasanians', p. 24.

48. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, pp. 134–41.

49. R. Scharf, *Foederati: Von der völkerrechtlichen Kategorie zur byzantinischen Truppengattung* (Vienna, 2001), pp. 101–4; Trombley, 'Operational Methods', p. 331; Furlas, 'St Constantine and "the Army of Heroic Men"', pp. 348–52; Furlas, 'Early Byzantine Church Silver', pp. 97–8, esp. n. 38; J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (3 vols in 4, Cambridge, 1980), iii, pt 1, p. 435.

50. U. Huttner, 'Germanen in frühbyzantinischen Inschriften: Vom Namen der Person zur Identität der Gruppe', *Gephyra*, xvi (2018), pp. 185–204; Scharf, *Foederati*, pp. 91–9; Furlas, 'St Constantine and "the Army of Heroic Men"', pp. 349 n. 41 and refs, 355; Furlas, 'Early Byzantine Church Silver', pp. 97–8, esp. n. 38.

51. Furlas, 'St Constantine and "the Army of Heroic Men"', esp. pp. 344–8.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 353–4; Furlas, 'Early Byzantine Church Silver', pp. 98–9. Anemurium: J. Russell, 'Byzantine *Instrumenta Domestica* from Anemurium: The Significance of Context', in R.L. Hohlfelder, ed., *City, Town and Countryside in the Early Byzantine Era* (Boulder, CO, 1982), pp. 144–5, fig. 8.28. Constantinople: M. Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschnallen und Gürtelbeschläge im Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum* (Mainz, 2009), ii, pp. 279–81, nos

in the East, but widespread in Francia. Such triangular buckles of this particular type are more rarely found in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms at this time, but there are some examples, especially from Kent.⁵³ These may all be sword-harness fittings rather than belt buckles.⁵⁴ It does seem likely that these buckles were dropped by mercenary troops from north-west Europe, especially because this episode was unusual; large numbers of Germanic soldiers were recruited under Justinian I (527–65), and again in the mid-570s and 580s, but not afterwards.⁵⁵

At first glance, then, one might think the presence of material from the eastern Mediterranean in Anglo-Saxon graves is best explained as a product of soldiers from southern Germany and Italy bringing back material which was then passed on to others further west. But this does not explain why these objects were *so* new when they were buried with the Prittlewell Prince, nor why they are of types so rare that few others are known from western Europe. The alternative explanation, that the Byzantine army included elite soldiers drawn from Britain, is not only more likely but also fits with so much else that we know of these men.

III

The men in these princely burials were members of an equestrian elite (Fig. 5). The Prittlewell Prince was buried with a scythe which hung on the wall above a large tub. This tool was designed for scything meadows, plausibly for cutting fodder for animals.⁵⁶ The drinking horns placed in the chamber were decorated with small, exquisitely modelled horses' faces.⁵⁷ The helmet from Sutton Hoo mound I is decorated with images of spear-wielding warriors riding around it on horseback.⁵⁸ The extent to which the horses of these men 'were dressed up too' is clear from the burial of a man next to his horse at Sutton Hoo mound 17, c.590–600, in two adjacent grave-pits under a single mound. The horse's saddle, bridle and bran tub were placed by his master's head: 'the roundels were of gilded bronze and carried ribbon animals ... The horse also had a body harness, with little axe-shaped pendants. This horse will

586–7. Sadovec: S. Uenze, *Die spätantiken Befestigungen von Sadovec (Bulgarien)* (2 vols, Munich, 1992), i, pp. 176, 422, ii, pl. 9 (B 36, 16), pl. 126, 9.

53. These are of Karen Hoiland Nielsen's type BU3-d: Bayliss and Hines, *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods*, p. 141. Comparisons include examples from Dover Buckland (London, British Museum [hereafter BM], 1995,0102.93.b); K. Parfitt and T. Anderson, *Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, Dover: Excavations 1994* (Canterbury, 2012), grave 222: 391, 459; Barham (BM, 1984,0103.7), King's Field (BM, 1111.70), St Peter's Tip (BM, 1980,1021.433).

54. S. Marzinzik, *Early Anglo-Saxon Belt Buckles (Late 5th to Early 8th Centuries AD): Their Classification and Context* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 50, 84–5.

55. Whitby, 'Recruitment in Roman Armies', pp. 108–9; Fourlas, 'Early Byzantine Church Silver', pp. 96–7.

56. S. Hirst with L. Blackmore, 'The Scythe Blade', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 253–5.

57. G. Speake, 'Drinking Horns', in Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, pp. 194–201.

58. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, ii, pp. 190–97.

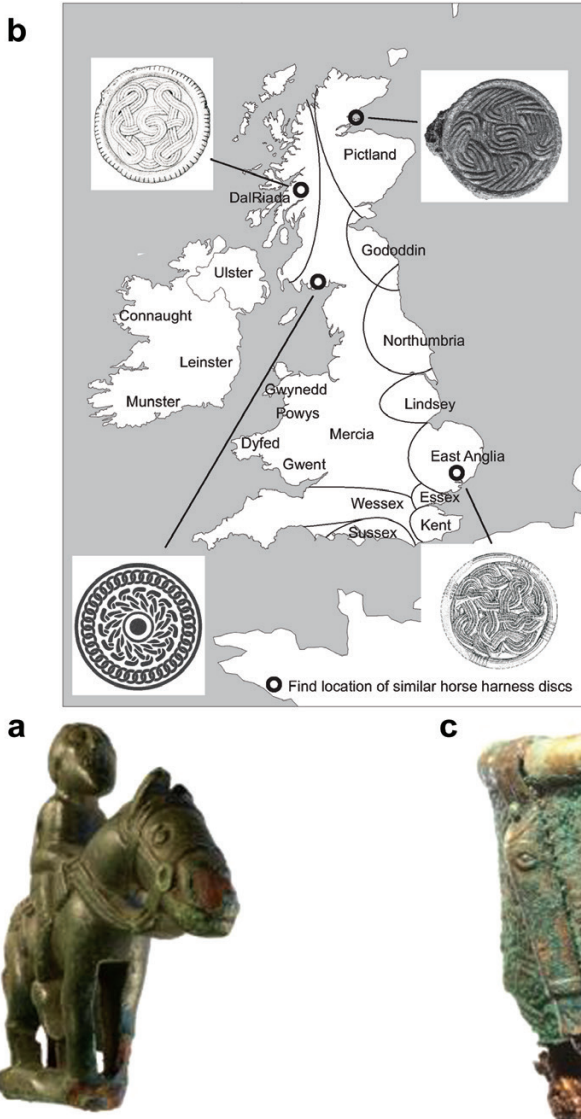


Figure 5. An ‘island-wide equestrian class’. (a) An early Anglo-Saxon figurine of an armed horse and rider found near Bradwell (Norfolk): Portable Antiquities Scheme NMS-40A7A7, for which see C. Hills and S. Ashley, ‘Horse and Rider Figure from Bradwell, Norfolk: A New Early Anglo-Saxon Equestrian Image’, in B.V. Eriksen et al., eds, *Interaction without Borders: Exemplary Research at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (2 vols, Schleswig, 2017), i, pp. 515–24. Image © Norfolk Historic Environment Service. (b) Find locations of similar late sixth-/seventh-century horse harness fittings. Figure by Cecily Spall and FAS Heritage. From Carver, *Formative Britain*, fig. 2.28, by permission of the author. (c) Horse’s face on a rim clip from a drinking horn found at Prittlewell: Blackmore et al., *Prittlewell*, fig. 175. © MOLA.

have glinted in the sun as it trotted by, gold around the head and silver around the body'.⁵⁹ These were experienced cavalry worth recruiting.⁶⁰

One remarkable feature of elite culture in later sixth- and early seventh-century Britain, specifically from 580 to 640, was its surprising degree of homogeneity. The different regional characteristics began to disappear: in particular, we might not be able to tell that the peoples of eastern Britain were ruled by different kings from the evidence of the material culture alone.⁶¹ On a small scale, almost identical elaborately decorated horse harness mounts have been found in some of the centres of power in the far reaches of the British Isles: at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) and Portmahomack (Easter Ross), as moulds from the Mote of Mark (Dumfries & Galloway) and Dunadd (Argyll & Bute), and two of a similar shape are known from near Cardiff and from North Wales (Fig. 5b).⁶² On a larger scale, the great hall complexes also exemplify this. They began to be built in the late sixth century, and display a 'striking similarity' across the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. From Northumbria to Kent, via the kingdoms of the Gewisse and the East Angles, they shared 'a common architectural and spatial vocabulary, which was exceptional, monumental, ritualized and symbolic'.⁶³ This was the world inhabited by the men laid to rest in the princely burials. They were members of an equestrian elite whose kings were not tribal leaders within

59. M. Carver, *Formative Britain: An Archaeology of Britain, Fifth to Eleventh Century AD* (London, 2019), p. 99.

60. C. Fern, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Horse Burial of the Fifth to Seventh Centuries AD', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, xiv (2007), pp. 92–109, esp. 101; C. Fern, 'The Archaeological Evidence for Equestrianism in Early Anglo-Saxon England, c.450–700', in A. Pluskowski, ed., *Just Skin and Bones? New Perspectives on Human–Animal Relations in the Historical Past* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 43–71; C. Fern, 'Horses in Mind', in M.O.H. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple, eds, *Signals of Belief in Early England* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 128–57. On fighting on horseback, see G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London, 2008), pp. 180–88.

61. H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion Period England, c.600–c.850* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 107, 125–6; H. Geake, 'Invisible Kingdoms: The Use of Grave-Goods in Seventh-Century England', in T.M. Dickinson and D. Griffiths, eds, *The Making of Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 203–15; C. Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c.AD 600–1150: A Comparative Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 102; Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, pp. 66–7, 75–80, 91–7; Bayliss and Hines, *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods*, fig. 816. Many of the artefact types that Geake mentions—wire rings, linked pins, bullae pendant necklaces—are all assigned to phase AS-FD or AS-FE; garnet or red glass cabochon pendants are also found in the earlier phase AS-FC which began to be deposited 555–85. This is not to say there were not some regional characteristics.

62. Carver, *Formative Britain*, p. 99; Fern, 'Archaeological Evidence for Equestrianism', esp. pp. 53, 58; A. Evans, 'Seventh-Century Assemblages', in M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (London, 2005), pp. 201–82, at 225–41; L. Laing and D. Longley, *The Mote of Mark: A Dark Age Hillfort in South-West Scotland* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 148–51, figs 21, 30, 56; M. Carver, J. Garner-Lahire and C. Spall, *Portmahomack on Tarbat Ness: Changing Ideologies in North-East Scotland, Sixth to Sixteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 2016), pp. 91–5. For the Welsh examples, see Portable Antiquities Scheme NMGW-2971A3, available at <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1027838> (accessed 2 Aug. 2021). There are now many more examples recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme [hereafter PAS] at <https://finds.org.uk/>, and see A. Still, 'Horse Harnesses: the Evidence for an "Insular" Elite' (Univ. of Oxford B.A. diss., 2022).

63. McBride, *Role of Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complexes*, pp. 1, 59 for quotations, and also 109, 294, 300.

their regions but overlords of a more extensive kind, leaders in a wider world.⁶⁴ This explains why this generation were buried on the edges of their territories rather than in the centres of them. The relationships that needed to be negotiated were as much with their neighbours as their own people. These kings, and the aristocratic elite of which they were a part, shared a 'remarkably cosmopolitan ... cultural idiom'.⁶⁵ They liked the same things; they knew one another, would have recognised one another, and, perhaps, shared adventures as well as aesthetics.

This is strikingly apparent from the princely burials which, because of the huge quantity of grave goods they contain, allow us a very detailed view into elite male culture in eastern Britain. Although the form the princely burials take varies greatly, the clothes these men wore, and the objects they were buried with, are very similar (Fig. 6). Among the similar objects are unusual items from the eastern Mediterranean. Other examples of these from princely burials, in addition to the objects I have already discussed above, include:

Large Byzantine silver spoons: As well as the one from Prittlewell, two such spoons were found in Sutton Hoo mound I (Fig. 7a). They also date from the late sixth to early seventh centuries and are of the large, eastern Mediterranean type. They are inscribed in Greek 'Paulos' and 'Saulos' although they were not inscribed by the same person and it is possible that the one with 'Saulos' on it was inscribed in western Europe.⁶⁶

Silver Anastasius dish: A huge silver dish stamped with the monogram of Emperor Anastasius (491–518), probably made in Constantinople, was found in Sutton Hoo mound I (Fig. 7b). Its decoration was probably added in the later sixth century, some time after it was made.⁶⁷ This is one of the largest Roman silver dishes to survive, belonging 'to that class of objects which the Emperor gave on special occasions to the holders of high imperial rank or to barbarian kings'.⁶⁸

Silver ladle: No close parallel has yet been found for the ladle found in Sutton Hoo mound I, but it is similar in form and in some details to ladles from the eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁹ The Sutton Hoo ladle is similar in size to the ladle from the contemporary Hama Treasure from

64. Carver, *Formative Britain*, pp. 24, 40, 99, 102, 112, for discussion of an 'equestrian class'.

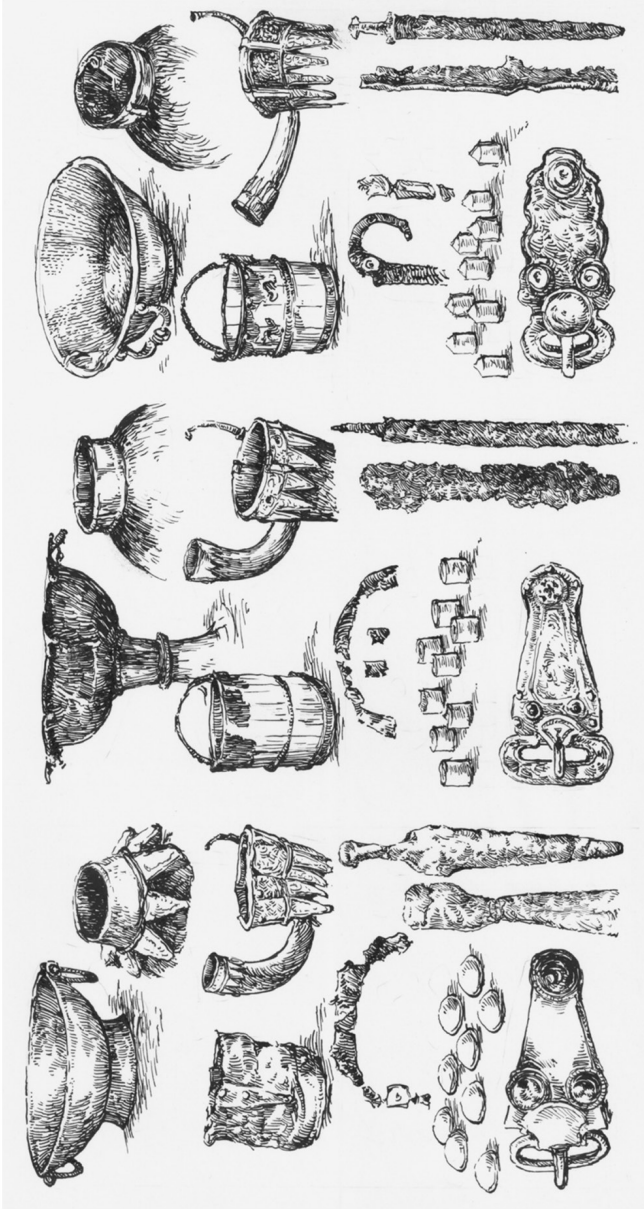
65. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 123.

66. R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford and S.M. Youngs, 'The Two Spoons', *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 125–46; Sherlock and Tomlin, 'Silver Spoon', pp. 162–4.

67. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 7, 28–45, but see J. Werner, 'Review of *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial Volume 3: Some Remarks, Thoughts and Proposals*', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, v (1992), pp. 1–24, at 2–5; R. Hobbs, *The Mildenhall Treasure: Late Roman Silver Plate from East Anglia* (London, 2016), pp. 36, 38–9.

68. Werner, 'Review of *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*', p. 21.

69. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 146–57; Drandaki, *Late Antique Metalware*, p. 134; M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (Baltimore, MD, 1986), pp. 128–9.



Sutton Hoo, Mound 1

Taplow

Prittlewell

Figure 6. Similarities between princely burials. A selection of objects found at Prittlewell, Taplow and Sutton Hoo mound 1: copper-alloy basins, metal fittings from bottles/cups, buckets, drinking horns, lyres, swords, spears, game pieces and triangular belt buckles. Drawn by Elaine Franks (not drawn to scale). Objects depicted: Prittlewell: Southend Museums Service; Taplow: BM, 1883.1214.1, 4, 7.a-I, 8, 19, 20, 26, 34, 76, OA.5573; Sutton Hoo: BM, 1939.1010.1, 95, 101, 109, 119, 121, 122 (replica), 172.1 (with replica), 203.

near Kaper Koraon, Syria (Table 2 and Fig. 8). It has been suggested that such deep-bowled spoons were used for measuring servings of wine or for pouring libations.⁷⁰



Figure 7. Silver vessels from Sutton Hoo, mentioned in the text, all in the British Museum. (a) Spoons and bowls: BM, 1939,1010.79, 80, 81, 88, 89. (b) Anastasius dish: BM, 1939,1010.76. (c) Drop-handle bowl: BM, 1939,1010.77.b. All images © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Table 2. Dimensions of silver ladles (cm).

	Height	Width	Depth
Sutton Hoo	23.0	7.2	4.7
Kaper Koraon	27.6	8.0	4.2

70. Hobbs, *Mildenhall Treasure*, pp. 216–17.



Figure 8. Silver ladles. (a) Sutton Hoo mound 1: BM, 1939,1010.90. © The Trustees of the British Museum. (b) Early seventh-century ladle found with other liturgical items at Kaper Koraon, Syria: Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum, 57.646. Photo: Walters Art Museum.

Set of ten silver bowls: The closest parallel for the dishes found in Sutton Hoo mound 1 (Fig. 7a) is a set of bowls in the Lampsacus hoard from Cyprus, with control stamps of Heraclius (613–629/30), probably made in Constantinople. Interestingly, Bruce-Mitford also drew attention to similarities between the decorations on these and on a *trulla* (pan) from Mala Pereshchepina (Ukraine), with control stamps of Emperor Maurice (582–602).⁷¹

Fluted silver bowl with handles: This bowl, from Sutton Hoo mound 1 (Fig. 7c), was probably made c.550–625 in the eastern Mediterranean or perhaps eastern Europe. Such vessels were intended to be used as water containers. Susan Youngs, in her discussion of its construction, notes the use of hard solder to attach the footring, and observes that this was used in contemporary Sasanian silver vessels but not in late Roman silver from western Europe.⁷²

71. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 69–125, 162.

72. BM, 1939,1010.77; Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 45–69, 164 n. 3 (Alexandria?), 183; Hobbs, *Mildenhall Treasure*, pp. 182–3, 190–91.

Copper-alloy pedestal bowl: This pedestal bowl was found in the princely burial at Taplow (Berkshire) (Fig. 9a).⁷³ It has a twelve-sided scalloped rim and trapezoidal handles and is classed as Werner A1a/Werz Beckenform 4, type A. Werz identifies only three comparable examples, all from Egypt.⁷⁴

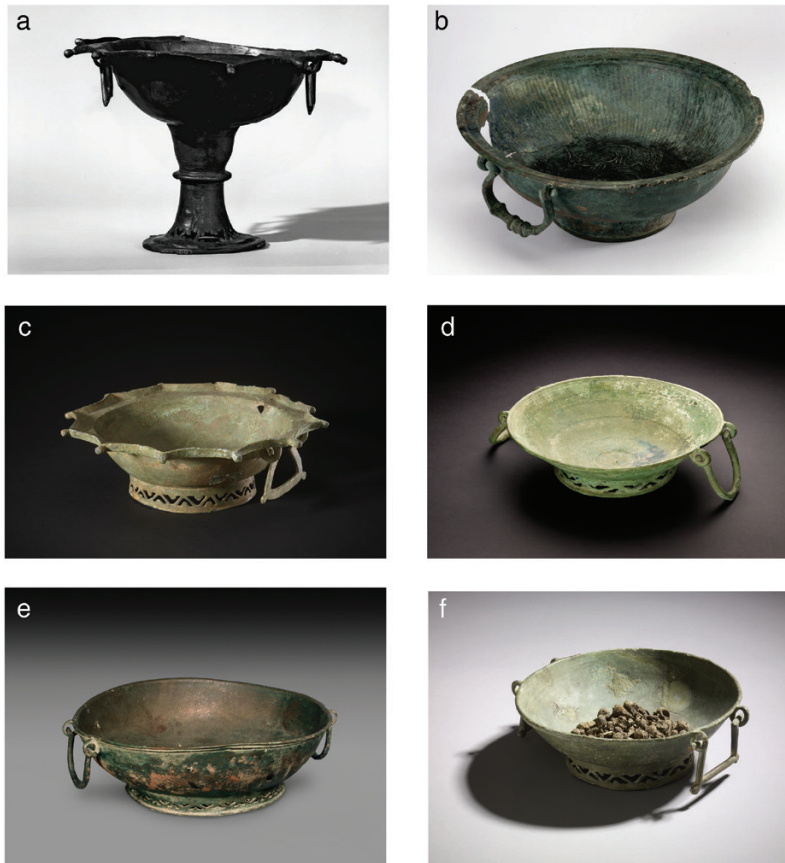


Figure 9. Copper-alloy vessels from (a) Taplow: BM, 1883,1214.8. (b) Sutton Hoo mound 1: BM, 1939,1010.109. (c) King's Field, Faversham: BM, .1290.70. (d) King's Field, Faversham: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, AN1942.257. (e) Gilton, Kent: Ashmolean Museum, AN1927.6685. (f) King's Field, Faversham: BM, .1293.70. All images of objects in the British Museum are © The Trustees of the British Museum and those in the Ashmolean Museum are © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

⁷³ BM, 1883,1214.8; Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, p. 756.

⁷⁴ Werner, 'Zwei gegossene koptische bronzeflaschen', pp. 121–3, 125, 127; P. Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels in Britain and Europe' (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1980), pp. 234–6; Werz, 'Sogenanntes Koptisches', pp. 42–3, 89.

Copper-alloy situla: A tall bucket, *c.*23 cm high, found in a probable barrow burial at Cuddesdon (Oxfordshire). It is classed as Werz Eimerform 1 A, of which only one other example has been identified, in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, said to have come from Thebes. The other related examples are all from Egypt and Nubia.⁷⁵

Copper-alloy basins: More than twenty examples of these basins have been found in Anglo-Saxon contexts, some, but not all, from 'princely' burials. The one from Sutton Hoo mound 1 is particularly notable (Fig. 9b). The alloy has proportions of lead (*c.*3 per cent) and zinc (11 per cent) characteristic of vessels found in Egypt and likely to have been made in that region (closed footring, omega-shaped handle, outward turned rim, fluted interior, animal frieze on inside base). This is classified as Werner group C/Werz Beckenform 1, type B₂, for which there are no close comparisons known from anywhere.⁷⁶ Another strong candidate for a basin made in the eastern Mediterranean is an unusual example found in the cemetery at King's Field, Faversham (Fig. 9c).⁷⁷ The form of the bowl is similar to the pedestal bowl from Taplow described above, itself likely to have been made in the eastern Mediterranean. No close parallels for this hybrid form are known. Most of the other examples have openwork feet and, in the few cases where metallurgical analysis has been done, their alloys tend to be in proportions like the example from Prittlewell discussed above (Fig. 9d–f). These are Werner Type B₁/Werz Beckenform 2, Types A, B₁, B₂ and B₃. They are the forms most commonly found in western Europe (Fig. 10). The comparanda for the ones with trapezoidal handles are mostly from Egypt, but the other types tend to be found in Italy and Germany. It is not yet clear where these were made but it seems likely it was within the Byzantine empire.⁷⁸ There are examples from: Asthall (Oxfordshire); three from King's Field, Faversham, two from Sarre, two from Saltwood Tunnel, and one each from Wickhambreaux, Wingham, Teynham, Gilton and ?Reculver (all Kent); ?Caistor-by-Norwich (Norfolk); Chilton, Radley and Wickham Market (Suffolk); Burley (Rutland); and RAF Cardington (Bedfordshire).⁷⁹ It is a puzzle why there are so many of

75. T.M. Dickinson, *Cuddesdon and Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire: Two Early Saxon 'Princely' Sites in Wessex* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 15–17, pl. III; Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels', pp. 295–7; Werz, 'Sogenanntes Koptisches', pp. 42–3, 90.

76. BM, 1939.1010.109; Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 732–55; Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels', pp. 274–5; Werz, 'Sogenanntes Koptisches', pp. 38–40, 86; Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, pp. 105–6, 166; M. Mango, 'East Mediterranean Basin', pp. 184–6.

77. BM, 1290.70; Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels', pp. 247–8.

78. Beghelli and Gil, 'Cast Bronze Vessels', pp. 414, 430, 433, fig. 2.

79. Canterbury, Beany Museum, 1106 (Teynham/Westwell), 1107 (?Reculver); Ipswich Museum, 1924.22 (Wickham Market); Norwich, Castle Museum, 76.94 (?Caistor-by-Norwich); Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, AN1923.776 (Asthall), AN1927.6685 (Gilton, grave 8), AN1942.257 (Faversham); BM, 1289.70 and 1293.70 (Faversham), 1860.1024.3 (Sarre), 1879.0524.53 (Wingham),



Figure 10. Distribution of finds of copper-alloy vessels of Werner's type A1 and B1. Source: Beghelli and Gil, 'Cast Bronze Vessels', fig. 2.

these bowls in England and I wonder whether they might be an archaeological signature of returning veterans rather like the finds of lead gaming pieces which, it has been argued, are a trail left by the Great Viking Army of the 870s.⁸⁰

At the Saltwood central cemetery (Kent), two late sixth-/early seventh-century graves contained B1 vessels (Fig. 11, graves C1048 and C1081). They are in a group of four special graves laid out along the line of a trackway, some of the largest graves in the cemetery, and both have affinities with princely burials. The men buried in graves C1048 and C1081, in the period c.575–625, were placed in coffins within wooden chambers, one encircled

1905,0418.8 (Wickhambreaux); Liverpool Museum (now lost). All are catalogued in Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels'. Additional, more recently found, examples include: PAS LEIC-47AE03 (Burley), discussed in R.A. Bradley and R. Hedge, 'A Barrow Complex and High Status Anglo-Saxon Finds: Investigations on a Multiphase Site at Burley, Rutland', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, xciii (2019), pp. 25–48 (found with a triangular gold buckle akin to the one from Prittlewell); A. Harris, 'Copper-Alloy Bowls', in A. Harris et al., *Early Anglo-Saxon Vessels and Containers from Saltwood Tunnel, Kent* (2006), available at <https://doi.org/10.5284/1000230>, pp. 3–12, at 5–6. For discussion, see Werner, 'Zwei gegossene koptische bronzenflaschen'; Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, pp. 64–9, 164–7, fig. 14; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, p. 85; Werz, 'Sogenanntes Koptisches', pp. 40–41, 87–8 (though note that Werz does not ascribe the English examples to particular groups and does not seem to have seen Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels').

80. J.D. Richards and D. Haldenby, 'The Scale and Impact of Viking Settlement in Northumbria', *Medieval Archaeology*, lxii (2018), pp. 322–50.

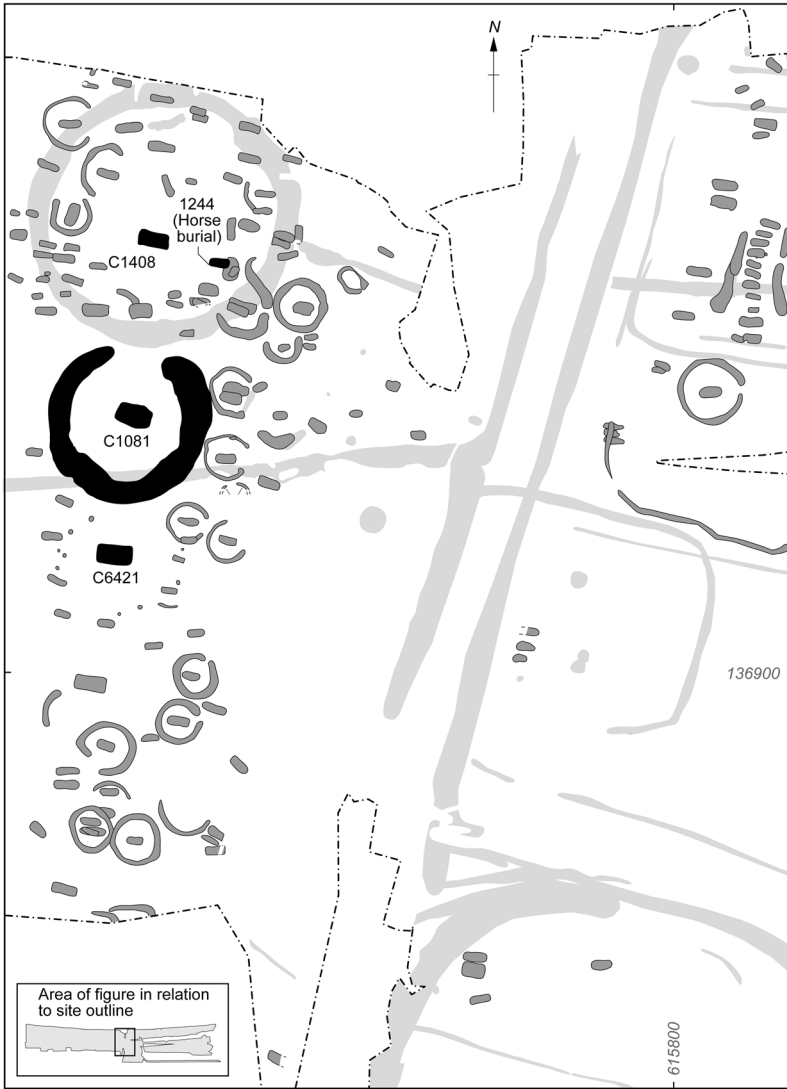


Figure 11. Saltwood Central Cemetery, Kent, with graves mentioned in the text highlighted, based on Riddler and Trevarthen, *Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel, Kent*, fig. 44. Image reproduced courtesy of HSI Limited and Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture.

by a penannular ditch, the other covered by a barrow. Grave C1048 had a sword, angon, spear, two shields, fourteen arrows, a horse harness and some gaming pieces. A horse was buried in a separate pit immediately to the east (grave C1244). The next man to be buried, in grave C1081, was

accompanied by a sword, knife, two shields, angon, a bucket and a horse harness. These two men were buried within just a few years of each other.⁸¹ The bowls were deposited in comparable ways to the ones at Prittlewell and elsewhere, in that they were placed vertically against the side of the grave, as if hanging from the walls of a chamber.⁸²

Nestling up against C1081 was the burial of a young woman (C6421), probably also under a mound. She was buried in the 620s wearing a gold and garnet pendant necklace which included a gold *solidus* minted at Marseille and issued in the name of Maurice—the general who was in charge of most of the eastern campaign and who went directly from the eastern front to become emperor (Fig. 12a).⁸³ Might she be



Figure 12. Pendants with coins of Emperor Maurice. (a) Saltwood, grave C6421, from Riddler and Trevarthen, *Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel*, fig. 192. Image reproduced courtesy of HSI Limited and Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture. (b) Found near Hoath (Kent), Portable Antiquities Scheme KENT-AC7E52. Image licensed under CC BY 2.0. (c) Found near North Elmham (Norfolk), Portable Antiquities Scheme NMS-98E733. Image licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. (d) Necklace from Sarre (Kent), with coins of Emperor Maurice at nos 1 and 3 reading from left to right: BM, 1860,1024.2.d. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

81. I.D. Riddler and M. Trevarthen, *The Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel, Kent*, ed. J. McKinley, Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture, unpublished report series (Oxford, 2006), available via the Archaeology Data Service at <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/series.xhtml?recordId=10209>, pp. 36–63, esp. 37, 41–6, figs 44, 127, 128, 135–8, 140–44, 168, pl. 12; A. Reynolds, ‘The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods’, in P. Booth et al., *On Track: The Archaeology of High Speed 1 Section 1 in Kent* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 341–99, at 357–64; Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, p. 165.

82. Harris, ‘Copper-Alloy Bowls’ (bowls ONS 1090 and 804 from graves C1048 and C1081).

83. Riddler and Trevarthen, *Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel*, p. 62, fig. 192, pl. 10d.

the daughter of a man who had returned from the eastern army—he buried with a basin that he had brought back, she with a coin issued in the name of the man for whom he had fought;⁸⁴ Intriguingly, there are coins of Maurice made in Merovingian mints which have also been set into fine jewellery (Fig. 12).⁸⁵

There is a tantalisingly poorly recorded companion to these burials at Bishopsbourne (Kent). An antiquarian excavation of what sounds like a chamber grave beneath a barrow found a bucket and a copper-alloy bowl—still shining brightly, which had been hung inside the grave—along with a shield, a horse bit, a weapon and two gaming pieces.⁸⁶ Might this be the grave of another veteran?

Cameo with winged victory or angel: One of the items recorded from Sutton Hoo mound 3, probably buried in the 590s, was a stone cameo of such high quality that it has been suggested to be ‘a most important diplomatic gift to a barbarian chieftain comparable in that respect to the Anastasius dish in Mound 1’.⁸⁷ More recent work on the small number of comparable objects, including from the broadly contemporary grave of Västhögen, Gamla Uppsala (Sweden), indicates that it was probably a sixth-century Byzantine object, originally set into a finger ring.⁸⁸

Textiles: Among the textiles in Sutton Hoo mound 1, and the barrow burials at Snape and Broomfield, are some which, it has been argued, were made in Syria. These include a fine worsted wool, found in a

84. The next burial in the sequence, C6653, seems to illustrate well a general trend in the importation of Byzantine vessels because it also includes a Br bowl (ON 2471), but this one was probably made in western Europe in imitation of the earlier ones from the eastern Mediterranean: Harris, ‘Copper-Alloy Bowls’, pp. 4, 9–10. This fits well with the proposed burial sequence, as this is the latest of the four graves. The same cemetery also included an example of a Byzantine buckle in a probable female grave (C1261); Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, p. 165. It is possible imitations were being made in Britain; copper-alloy was, for example, being worked at Rendlesham at this date: E. Blakelock, M. Martín-Torres and C. Scull, ‘Early Medieval Copper-Alloy Metalworking at Rendlesham, Suffolk, England’, *Medieval Archaeology*, lxxi (2022), pp. 343–67.

85. Richards, ‘Byzantine Bronze Vessels’, pp. 181–3, Appendix 8; E. Harris, ‘Gold Coinage as Elite Female Pendants in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Symbolism and Significance’ (Univ. of Oxford B.A. diss., 2023); K.D. Haworth and K.M. Clarke-Neish, ‘Pierced, Looped and Framed: The (Re) use of Gold Coins in Jewellery in Sixth- and Seventh-Century England’, *Early Medieval Europe*, xxxii (2024), pp. 1–50, esp. Appendix which lists a total of seventeen examples of coins of Maurice made into pendants.

86. T. Wright, ‘An Account of the Opening of Barrows in Bourne Park, near Canterbury’, *Archaeological Journal*, i (1844), pp. 253–6; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, p. 161; Fern, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Horse Burial’, p. 96–7, 109.

87. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, i, pp. 112–13, fig. 64; Richards, ‘Byzantine Bronze Vessels’, pp. 278–9; G. Grainger and M. Henig, ‘A Bone Casket and Relief Plaque from Mound 3 at Sutton Hoo’, *Medieval Archaeology*, xxvii (1983), pp. 136–41; Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, pp. 181–2; M. Carver, *The Sutton Hoo Story: Encounters with Early England* (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 121, 124–5. This item is currently lost.

88. J. Ljungkvist, ‘Influences from the Empire: Byzantine-Related Objects in Sweden and Scandinavia—560/570–750/800 AD’, in F. Daim and J. Drauschke, eds, *Byzanz—das Römerreich im Mittelalter*, III: *Peripherie und Nachbarschaft* (Mainz, 2010), pp. 419–41, at 428–9.

number of places in the area where the Sutton Hoo 1 man was buried, so perhaps from a tunic and trousers; and also several different silky cloaks laid out around his body, with a thick pile, like those found at Broomfield and Snape.⁸⁹

Bitumen: Analysis of some lumps of organic material buried in Sutton Hoo mound 1 reveals that they are bitumen, which is likely to have come from the eastern Mediterranean, probably Syria. Although it is tempting to think the bitumen was used in waterproofing the ship, it is more likely that it was used medicinally, for which there is evidence from the East.⁹⁰

Many of these items from the eastern Mediterranean were new when they were buried, or at least they were in contemporary use elsewhere—these are not legacy items.⁹¹ As Anthea Harris has said about Sutton Hoo:

the actual contemporaneity of the objects in Byzantium is seldom fully appreciated. Most of the objects often argued to carry Late Roman associations would have carried the same associations in the Byzantine Empire during Late Antiquity. Sceptres were still carried in procession by the Emperor and large gold belt buckles have parallels in both seventh-century Byzantium and the Western Roman Empire.⁹²

These are also items which are rare in a European context. In other words, one of the features of the shared culture of these men was their access to current and unusual types of objects from the eastern Mediterranean. I think we should be open-minded about whether this was restricted to elites in southern and eastern Britain or shared with their counterparts in western Britain, from where our evidence

89. E. Crowfoot, 'The Textiles', in Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, iii, pp. 409–62, at 419, 442–4, 453–6, 457, 459–60, 468–9, 471–2 (SH1, SH10, B2, B4), and see also comments about one of the fabrics from Taplow, *ibid.*, pp. 477–8 (TB 7); Carver, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground*, p. 188; Filmer-Sankey and Pestell, *Snape*, p. 195.

90. P. Burger et al., 'Identification, Geochemical Characterisation and Significance of Bitumen among the Grave Goods of the 7th Century Mound 1 Ship-Burial at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk, UK)', *PLoS ONE*, xi, no. 12 (2016), e0166276; Simpson, 'Sutton Hoo, St Sergius and the Sasanians', pp. 5–14.

91. I have only included items here from 'princely burials'; this means there are other notable objects not discussed which may be relevant, including a small group of flask-shaped Type III relic containers which I plan to discuss in a future article and a group of copper-alloy buckets which are conceivably evidence for an earlier generation of soldiers who served in the Byzantine army: A. Drandaki, 'ΥΠΙΕΩΝ ΧΡΩ ΚΥΡΙΑ(Ε): A Late Roman Brass Bucket with a Hunting Scene', *Μουσείο Μπενάκη [Benaki Museum]*, ii (2002), pp. 37–53, esp. 48; M.M. Mango, C. Mango, A. Care Evans and M. Hughes, 'A 6th-Century Mediterranean Bucket from Bromeswell Parish, Suffolk', *Antiquity*, lxiii (1989), pp. 295–311; D.A. Hinton and S. Worrell, 'An Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and Archaeological Survey at Breamore, Hampshire, 1999–2006', *Archaeological Journal*, clxxiv (2017), pp. 68–145, esp. 89–95. There is also a copper-alloy lidded ewer found in a burial at Wheathampstead (Hertfordshire), classed as Werner type B4, *Werk Kannenform 8*, Type C: BM, 1900,0719.4; Werner, 'Zwei gegossene koptische bronzenflaschen', pp. 121, 127; Richards, 'Byzantine Bronze Vessels', pp. 244–6; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, p. 8; Werz, 'Sogenanntes Koptisches', pp. 29–31, 80–81, synoptic table 5; Beghelli and Gil, 'Cast Bronze Vessels', pp. 423–4.

92. Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, p. 181.

for contact with Byzantium is of a different kind but includes pottery, pilgrims' flasks and low-value coinage.⁹³ To be clear, I am arguing that the princely burials help us to see what was going on, not that service in the Byzantine army explains their appearance.

Other aspects of these burials were influenced by Byzantine models but they were combined with Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian motifs. Of these, the most extraordinary of all is the military armour of the man buried in Sutton Hoo mound 1. The armour he was wearing was modelled on Roman armour, but was made in East Anglian workshops using Anglo-Saxon designs, notably the shoulder clasps, which are all that survive from what was probably a linen cuirass covering his torso and worn over his mail coat.⁹⁴ The similarities with Roman armour have long been recognised, and have been hard to explain. William Filmer-Sankey argued that they were based on representations of Roman emperors, such as are found on cameos: 'The purpose of all these objects ... was to give an impression of more than just a passing interest in Romanitas. Rather, it was to show that man as a Roman ruler ... a fancy dress Roman Emperor'.⁹⁵

I don't think this was fancy dress. Noël Adams, in a study of the shoulder clasps, has drawn attention to quite how extraordinary they are:

There is no object typology into which we can slot the shoulder clasps. The only clue as to the existence of an object type related to the Sutton Hoo clasps is a group of hinged clasps which survive on the eastern borders of Byzantium. Although we cannot trace a clear link in the archaeological record between these objects and the Mound 1 shoulder clasps, their existence cannot be ignored.⁹⁶

Is this, then, that link?

It is hard to explain why else objects that were so clearly made in East Anglian workshops should be constructed to eastern designs. We know that the Tiberiani troops were first given a set of armour when they joined up and, subsequently, an annual grant to spend on armour, weapons and horse equipment. This would all make sense if the man buried in Sutton Hoo mound 1 had brought back with him armour he had commissioned in the East and asked his own smiths to make something similar in design but Anglo-Saxon in style. Might he even

93. See above, nn. 2 and 43.

94. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, ii, pp. 523–35; N. Adams, 'Rethinking the Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasps and Armour', in C. Entwistle and N. Adams, eds, *Intelligible Beauty: Recent Research on Byzantine Jewellery* (London, 2010), pp. 83–112.

95. W. Filmer-Sankey, 'The "Roman Emperor" in the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, cxlix (1996), pp. 1–9, pl. I, at 4, 6, 8. Filmer-Sankey's tone is echoed by R. Hodges, 'Henri Pirenne and the Question of Demand in the Sixth Century', in R. Hodges and W. Bowden, eds, *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 3–14, at 13, who talks about a desire for 'primitive valuables' which Anglo-Saxons could use 'to define themselves as Late Roman aristocrats had'.

96. Adams, 'Rethinking the Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasps', p. 93.

have brought an imperial smith back with him? Noël Adams points out that coats of mail are extremely rare in graves of this period but that they were worn by the Byzantine cavalry: ‘The image projected by the Mound 1 assemblage was that of a top military commander, perhaps identifiable by his shoulder clasps as a high-ranking member of a particular tribal or military order whose emblem was the crossed boars’.⁹⁷ The ridge helmet is comparable in form to late Roman cavalry helmets.⁹⁸ The identification of the whetstone as an insular version of a Roman imperial sceptre now looks more plausible given its similarity to an example excavated in Rome.⁹⁹ And, furthermore, the tall iron stand is remarkably like a ceremonial version of a military standard. Rupert Bruce-Mitford noted that its spiked foot was intended to be set into the ground, and that it was light enough to carry (Fig. 13).¹⁰⁰ Because so little



Figure 13. (a) The ‘stand’ from Sutton Hoo mound 1: BM, 1939.1010.161. © The Trustees of the British Museum. (b) A replica of the stand made by Robin Pattinson: National Trust 1433770. © National Trust/Robin Pattinson. (c) Roman military standards depicted on Trajan’s Column (detail of scene 48). © Roger B. Ulrich.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 102 (for quotation).

98. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, ii, pp. 220–25; J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London, 1999), p. 322 n. 79; R. D’Amato and A.E. Negin, *Decorated Roman Armour from the Age of the Kings to the Death of Justinian the Great* (Barnsley, 2017), pp. 256–66 and 286–9, for some discussion of face-mask helmets being used by cavalry troops.

99. D. Quast, ‘Ein spätantikes zepter aus dem childerichgrab’, *Sonderdruck aus Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, xl (2010), pp. 285–96.

100. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, ii, pp. 403–31, esp. 423, 430–31.

physical evidence for such standards survives, our sources are primarily pictorial and descriptive. Maurice's late sixth-century *Strategikon* says that every cavalry unit (*meros*) should have two eagle bearers, and that within the *meros* each band of 300 cavalrymen should themselves have two standard bearers, known as *draconarii* or *bandofori*.¹⁰¹ For eagles (*aquilae*) we have good depictions from the first and second centuries AD, and a few surviving eagles, though not the poles to which they were attached.¹⁰² Similarly, there are late Roman images and examples of *drakontia*.¹⁰³ It is less clear what was meant by a *bandon* but there are good reasons for thinking they took the form of a Roman *vexillum*.¹⁰⁴ Of these types, the Sutton Hoo standard looks most like an *aquila*, especially the type which had a trapezoidal support.¹⁰⁵ This one seems different from the earlier Roman ones because it is made entirely of iron rather than having a wooden shaft, so perhaps it is a version of such a thing designed for ceremonial display. There may have been a sculpted leather or wooden animal, such as a boar, on the top.¹⁰⁶ Even if it was a tribal emblem modelled on an imperial battle standard rather than an actual Roman *aquila*, it is a remarkable survival.

It might seem odd to want to emphasise connections between two burials at either end of the chronological range of princely burials. In part, this is because these are the two that we know most about, because of the care with which they were excavated and published, and the state of the preservation of the burials. But it isn't only for that reason. If the man buried in Sutton Hoo mound 1 had been 20 years old in 575, and served in the Byzantine army until 591, he would have been 36 when he was discharged, and about 70 when he died.¹⁰⁷ We know nothing of how old he was because his skeleton did not survive the acidic sandy soils, but this is not implausible. Although average life expectancy was low, some people, especially the well fed, survived into old age.¹⁰⁸ Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury (668–90), was aged 67 when he arrived in Britain to sort out the institution of the church, and 88 when he died.¹⁰⁹ Wilfrid, seventh-century bishop and abbot, lived until

101. A. Babuin, 'Standards and Insignia of Byzantium', *Byzantion*, lxxi (2001), pp. 5–59, at 14–16.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16, 44, 47–8; K.M. Töpfer, *Signa Militaria: Die römischen Feldzeichen in der Republik und im Prinzipat* (Mainz, 2011), p. 17, tables 146–7.

103. Babuin, 'Standards and Insignia of Byzantium', pp. 13–15, 44, 47; Töpfer, *Signa Militaria*, p. 33, table 143.

104. Babuin, 'Standards and Insignia of Byzantium', pp. 17–18, 44, 47.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 47 (nos 1–7). There could have been a different emblem on it, or even a Chi Rho symbol, like nos 7 and 8. With something on top of the support, it would have been c.190 cm tall and therefore akin in length to nos 1, 2, 10, 18, 19, 25, 30, 32, 33, 35. For other comparisons, see Töpfer, *Signa Militaria*, p. 18, table 19 (SR 3.2), 20, 22 (SR 6.5), 26 (SR 6.13), 30, 37, 64 (SR 18.1).

106. Thanks to Andrea Babuin and Kai Töpfer for discussing this with me.

107. The minimum age for recruitment was 18: Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*, p. 100.

108. J. Hines, 'Lies, Damned Lies, and a *Curriculum Vitae*: Reflections on Statistics and the Populations of Early Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Cemeteries', in S. Lucy and A. Reynolds, eds, *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London, 2002), pp. 88–102, esp. 100.

109. M. Lapidge, 'Theodore of Tarsus [St Theodore of Tarsus] (602–690), Archbishop of Canterbury and Biblical Scholar', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

his late seventies.¹¹⁰ The Gothic general in the Byzantine army, Bessas, was in his seventies when he was besieging Petra in the 550s; Belisarius was in his sixties when he was sent by Justinian to command an army against the Huns just outside Constantinople in 559.¹¹¹ It is perfectly plausible that the Prittlewell Prince and the man buried in Sutton Hoo mound 1 were part of a generation of young soldiers who signed up to serve in 575, campaigned together in their twenties and thirties in the Middle East and returned home, honourably discharged, in the early 590s. The man at Prittlewell could have died soon afterwards, the man in Sutton Hoo could have lived on for thirty years—or, indeed, continued in service longer. Had these men campaigned together, it would explain so much about the similarities in their burials. We should be willing to consider that these weren't men *dressed up* as Roman soldiers, they *were* Roman soldiers.

We might think of Sutton Hoo mound 1 man as someone like the various Hun commanders, Aigan, Sunicas, Ascan and Simmas, who fought at the battle of Dara in 530, or the Herul commander, Fulcaris, who fought in Italy in the early 550s, or the Sueve, Droctulf, who fought the Lombards in Italy and then the Avars in Thrace, before being honoured with burial in San Vitale, Ravenna, in the early seventh century.¹¹² Each of these men led a few hundred of their compatriots, and will have been well rewarded for their service. If Sutton Hoo man was a younger son of royalty, or a minor warlord, one could envisage him taking service in the eastern army, probably accompanied by a retinue of young men whose main distinction was their ability to fight, and once in the East, other recruits from the British Isles could have been assigned to his command.¹¹³

There is certainly a spike in the number of Byzantine coins from this period found in Britain, particularly ones issued in the reign of Maurice (582–602). After this, the quantity 'drops dramatically'.¹¹⁴ A number of these are from Merovingian mints, but there are also significant numbers from imperial mints. The examples have increased with the discovery of a coin hoard from West Norfolk deposited c.610 (Table 3).¹¹⁵ It is interesting to see that so many coins in this horde were minted in Constantinople. It is striking to imagine the late sixth-century man from Prittlewell handling Byzantine coins, perhaps walking into somewhere like the early seventh-century shops in Sardis, western Turkey—one of

110. A. Thacker, 'Wilfrid [St Wilfrid] (c.634–709/10), Bishop of Hexham', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

111. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, ii, pp. 226–9, at 228; iii, pt 1, pp. 181–224, at 218.

112. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, iii, pp. 32–33, 133, 425–7, 496–7, 1206–7, 1152–3.

113. I am grateful to Michael Whitby for the substance of this paragraph.

114. G. Williams, 'Anglo-Saxon Gold Coinage. Part 1: The Transition from Roman to Anglo-Saxon Coinage', *British Numismatic Journal*, liii (2010), pp. 51–75, at 58, 65–6; Morrisson, 'Byzantine Coins in Early Medieval Britain'.

115. A. Marsden with A. Pol, 'Recent Archaeology: The West Norfolk Hoard, East Anglia's Trophy Type Thrymsas and Anglo-Saxon Nummular Brooches', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xlvii (2020), pp. 394–422, at 400, 405.

Table 3. Byzantine coins from the West Norfolk hoard.

	Coin	Date range
1.	Pseudo-imperial solidus in the name of Justinian	527–565
2.	Pseudo-imperial solidus in the name of Justinian	527–565
3.	Tremissis, Justinian	517–565
4.	Solidus, Justin II, Constantinople	565–578
5.	Solidus, Tiberius II Constantine, Constantinople	578–582
6.	Solidus, Tiberius II Constantine, Constantinople	578–582
7.	Solidus, Maurice Tiberius, Constantinople	582–602
8.	Solidus, Maurice Tiberius, Constantinople	582–602
9.	Solidus, Maurice Tiberius, Constantinople	582–602
10.	Solidus, Maurice Tiberius, Constantinople	582–602

Source: Marsden with Pol, 'West Norfolk Hoard', p. 405.

the best-preserved Byzantine shopping streets we have—and to realise how much of that world would have been familiar to him: iron folding camp stools, tall candelabras, lathe-turned metal tubes, copper-alloy drinking flacons, buckles with interlace decoration (Fig. 14).¹¹⁶ Anglo-Saxon women were adopting Byzantine fashions in the early seventh century, but, intriguingly, their jewellery was inspired by, but not made in, Byzantium.¹¹⁷ If these men were shopping in eastern cities, they were not bringing back gifts for their womenfolk.

If I am right about this hypothesis, one would expect to find similarly unusual items in elite military graves of this period from elsewhere in the regions from which Tiberius's recruits came. And, indeed, there are some examples. At Gammertingen, in south-west Germany (Fig. 15), a man was buried c.570 in a wood-panelled chamber, with a helmet, a long mailcoat with hood (one of the few comparisons for the mail at Sutton Hoo), horse bridle, arrows, spear, sword, angon, drinking horn and eastern Mediterranean copper-alloy basin.¹¹⁸ At Tiszagyenda (Hungary) a 'high-status warrior' in his late thirties was buried with his sword, shield and belt set, a copper-alloy jug (which had once contained wine) like the one from Prittlewell, though without the Sergius medallions, and a gold *solidus* of Maurice; his horse and horse harness were buried in an adjacent grave.¹¹⁹ These exceptional graves may be those of Alemannic, and Gepid, compatriots of the man from Prittlewell.

116. J. Stephens Crawford, *The Byzantine Shops at Sardis* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

117. For the adoption of Byzantine fashions, see Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, pp. 108–22. I owe this point to Helena Hamerow.

118. Adams, 'Rethinking the Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasps', p. 96; K.G. Kokkotidis, *Der Mann mit dem Goldhelm: das frühmittelalterliche "Fürstengrab" aus Gammertingen* (Berlin, 2019).

119. T. Vida, *Late Antique Metal Vessels in the Carpathian Basin: Luxury and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Budapest, 2016), pp. 73–4; L. Kocsis and E. Molnár, 'A 6th–7th Century Solitary Burial of a Warrior with his Horse at Tiszagyenda', *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, lxxii (2021), pp. 137–92. M.-C. Truc, *Saint-Dizier 'La Tuilerie' (Haute-Marne): Trois sépultures d'élite du VI^e siècle* (Caen, 2019), burial 12, is another intriguing comparison, although the excavators date it earlier in the sixth century.

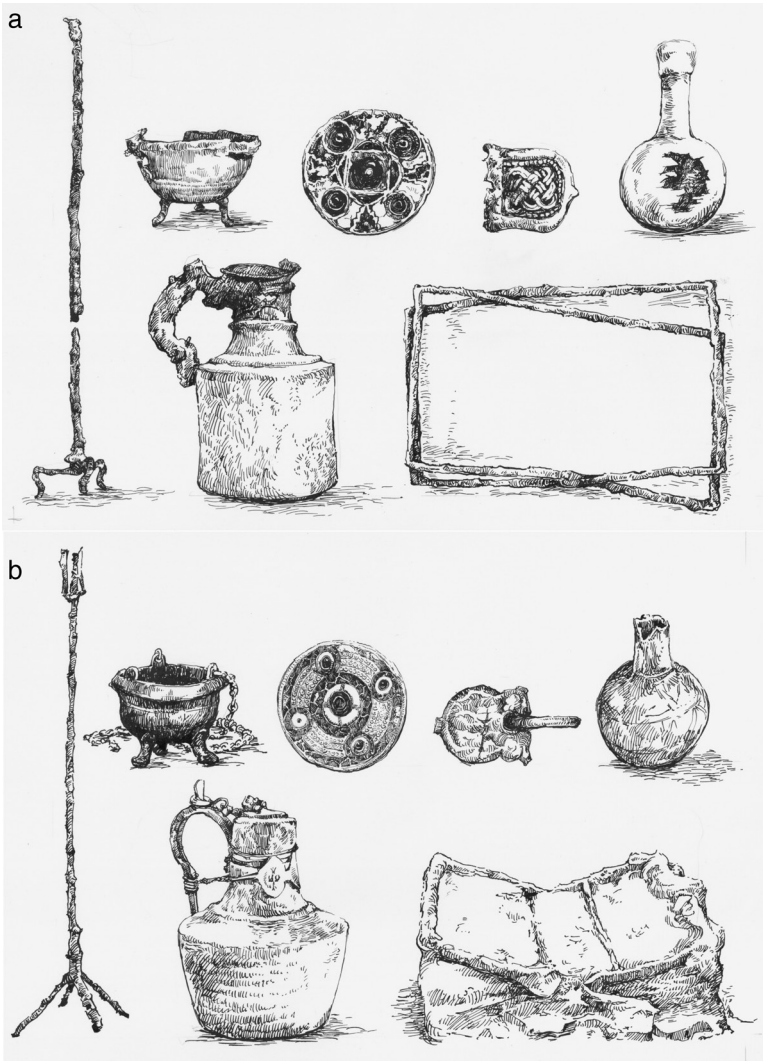


Figure 14. Examples of similar finds from the eastern Mediterranean and from southern England: (a) Finds from Sardis, western Turkey, in buildings destroyed by an earthquake in the early seventh century. (b) Finds from Prittlewell, Sarre, 'Kent' and Glastonbury. Drawn by Elaine Franks (not drawn to scale). Sources: (a) Stephens Crawford, *Byzantine Shops*, figs 211, 289, 338, 339, 381, 525, 582; Cahill, 'Recent Fieldwork at Sardis', fig. 10-14. (b) Candelabra, stool and flagon, Southend Central Museum; censer, brooch, buckle, BM, 1986,0705.1; 1860,1024.1; 1891,0414.5.

Much follows from this. One of the distinctive aspects of these eastern campaigns was that they were conceived as conducted by a Christian army. Tiberius II Constantine (574–82) was the first emperor



Figure 15. Finds from a princely burial at Gammertingen, Germany. Image licensed by Landesmuseum Württemberg, Hendrik Zwietasch Lizenz, CC BY SA 4.0.

to make use of the image of Constantine.¹²⁰ Maurice, in the *Strategikon*, describes how, before battle: ‘All, led by the priests, the general, and the other officers, should recite the *Kyrie Eleison* for some time in unison. Then, in hopes of success, each *meros* should shout the *Nobiscum Deus* three times as it marches out of camp’.¹²¹ It may well be, then, that the connections between eastern Britain and Byzantium in the late sixth century were associated with conversions to Christianity that pre-date the Gregorian mission. They might also be part of the background to Pope Gregory’s mission itself, not least since during the eastern campaign Gregory was a papal legate in Constantinople from 579 to 586, became friends with Maurice and his family, and stayed in the imperial palace.¹²² Gregory’s interest in missions to the English could have been stirred by encounters with English cavalry fighting for the Christian empire. This might also have emboldened those English recruits to request a mission directly from the Byzantine papacy, rather than from Merovingian bishops. Tiberius II’s use of Constantinian imagery helps us see that when Pope Gregory connected King Æthelberht with

120. Fourlas, ‘Early Byzantine Church Silver’, pp. 101–6; Fourlas, ‘St Constantine and “the Army of Heroic Men”’, pp. 356–65.

121. *Maurice’s Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, tr. G.T. Dennis (Philadelphia, PA, 1984), pp. 33–4.

122. *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, tr. J. Martyn (3 vols, Toronto, ON, 2004), i, pp. 4–5, 7–11; M. Hughes, ‘Æthelberht of Kent’s Conversion to Christianity: Byzantine and Persian Connections’ (Univ. of Oxford B.A. diss., 2024).

Constantine, he was using rhetoric that was new and current.¹²³ And there is evidence that this resonated within Anglo-Saxon courts. An imitation gold *solidus*, found near Caistor-by-Norwich, was minted in the late sixth/early seventh century in the name of Helena, the mother of Constantine: the only such example from western Europe.¹²⁴ The imagery of Constantine is now so familiar that it is useful to be reminded how contemporary these allusions were.

IV

I am arguing that it is likely that the men buried in the princely burials at Prittlewell and Sutton Hoo mound 1 served, with a group of their contemporaries, as cavalry soldiers in the *Foederati* recruited by Tiberius in 575 in the wars with the Sasanians on the eastern front. Those who returned brought back with them metalwork, and other items including textiles, which were brand new, and distinctive, and not the kinds of things that were part of normal trading networks. They were buried with military equipment and armour associated with their military status, perhaps in part paid for with the annual grants for weaponry, horse equipment and armour they received when serving. This is visible to us because it coincides with a brief period in the development of overkingship when there was intense investment in the burials of elite males. The desire to mark the extraordinary lives and official military status of these men may have been one of the factors that led to this generation being buried in such unusually ostentatious ways. However, such service does not explain the princely burial phenomenon in its totality; instead, it is revealed by it. Nor were these the only contacts the Anglo-Saxons had with Byzantium at this time. They had plenty of other connections with the empire: directly through diplomatic ties, of which Pope Gregory's mission to Kent was one; through pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and a trade network that connected the eastern English kingdoms with a corridor stretching down the Rhineland to southern Germany, especially the Alemannic region, and thence to Lombard and Byzantine Italy, and from there to the eastern Mediterranean.¹²⁵ These different sorts of links are likely to have reinforced one another. They

123. *S. Gregorii Magni, Registrum epistularum*, ed. D. Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CXL, CXLA (2 vols, Turnhout, 1982), ii, p. 930 (II.37); *Letters of Gregory the Great*, tr. Martyn, iii, p. 783 (II.37).

124. A. Gannon, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles 63: British Museum Anglo-Saxon Coins*, I (London, 2013), no. 1 and see p. 86; A. Gannon, 'Money, Power, and Women: An Inquiry into Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage', in S. Solway, ed., *Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power* (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 211–28, at 216–17.

125. For the trade network, see most recently Beghelli and Gil, 'Cast Bronze Vessels', *passim*, esp. p. 430. For Byzantine finds from Rendlesham: Scull et al., 'Social and Economic Complexity in Early Medieval England', and for growing evidence for Byzantine coinage in eastern Britain, *ibid.*, p. 1603. For connections with southern Germany, see R. Klapper, 'Pre-Bonifacian Connections between Southeast England and Southwest Germany, c.560–680' (Univ. of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, in progress 2024, working title).

also fit into a wider pattern of long-term Byzantine interest in potential sources of military manpower.¹²⁶

I am not the first person to suggest that Anglo-Saxons travelled to Byzantium in the sixth century. James Campbell, writing before the discovery at Prittlewell, considered it ‘perfectly possible—if not particularly likely—that the man of mound 1 had been to Byzantium’.¹²⁷ Noël Adams, in her discussion of the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasps, cautiously says that ‘we might also need to consider whether direct Byzantine contact ... might explain how Byzantine silver found its way into the hands of this Anglo-Saxon elite family’.¹²⁸ David Hinton and Sally Worrell, in their discussion of a group of eastern Mediterranean buckets, say it is likely they were ‘associated with the sixth-century diplomatic contacts that probably saw at least a few people from England at the Byzantine court, who could have brought them back as gifts’.¹²⁹ Marlia Mango, in her analysis of the flagon from Prittlewell, having explained that such items were not being traded, suggests it could have been brought by a pilgrim or ‘carried by military men who were devoted to the soldier saint. One may ask: did this include the person buried at Prittlewell?’¹³⁰

Why, then, have early medievalists been so reluctant to consider direct contacts between eastern Britain and Byzantium? I think three things have blinded us. The first is a tendency to see the Anglo-Saxons as late followers of continental trends rather than in step with them. The reasons for this probably have to do with the comparatively late date for the recorded conversion to Christianity, the extent to which Britain was less Romanised than other regions, the degree to which urban life collapsed during the fourth century, and a more general wariness about English exceptionalism. Secondly, there is a tendency to think of *Romanitas* too much in terms of a Roman past rather than a Byzantine present.¹³¹ The third is a tendency to favour explanations

126. J. Shepard, ‘The Emperor’s Long Reach: Imperial Alertness to “Barbarian” Resources and Force Majeure, from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries’, in N. Drocourt and É. Malamut, eds, *La diplomatie byzantine, de l’Empire romain aux confins de l’Europe (V^e–XV^e s.)* (Leiden, 2020), pp. 287–325.

127. Campbell, ‘Man at Sutton Hoo’.

128. Adams, ‘Rethinking the Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasps’, p. 103.

129. Hinton and Worrell, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and Archaeological Survey at Breamore’, p. 136.

130. Mango, ‘East Mediterranean Flagon’, p. 184, and further discussed in D. Quast’s review of the Prittlewell report in *Germania*, xcvi (2020), pp. 407–11, at 409–10. See also, relatedly, Mango, ‘Tracking Byzantine Silver and Copper Metalware, 4th–12th centuries’, in M.M. Mango, ed., *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th Centuries: The Archaeology of Local, Regional and International Exchange* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 221–36, at 232–3; E. Wamers, ‘Warlords oder Vasallen? Zur Semiotik der merowingerzeitlichen Bootsbestattungen von Vendel und Valsgårde in Mettelschveden’, in S. Brather, C. Merthen and T. Springer, eds, *Warlords oder Amtsträger?* (Nürnberg, 2018), pp. 212–37, esp. 233. Most recently, D. Quast and A. Hilgner, ‘Ornamental Fish’, in J. Andrzejowski, M. Pruska and J. Schuster, eds, *From the Depth of Time: A Tale about a Fish* (Warsaw, 2021), pp. 73–82, at 82: ‘it has been discussed whether they might represent former members of the Lombardic confederacy in which mercenaries from different Germanic tribes were stationed together with Byzantine troops in Italy and more eastern regions of the Byzantine empire’.

131. A similar point is made by Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, p. 121.

which posit gradual social changes over sudden ones, when of course both can happen concurrently. At a time when there is much consideration about the boundaries of empires, the evidence presented here indicates that the shadow cast by the eastern Roman empire in the west was longer—and less shadowy—than we have tended to think.

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