"Burnt Germans", Alemannic graves and the origins of Anglo-Saxon archaeology

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Introduction – Histories of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology

Studies of the history of Anglo-Saxon archaeology have long-recognised the influence and interaction between archaeology, philology, history and ethnology in the development of racial interpretations of early medieval graves in Victorian Britain (Hills 2003; Lucy 2002). However, these studies have tended to be somewhat insular in perspective, with only passing reference to contemporary developments in Continental and Scandinavian mortuary archaeology (Effros 2003). Consequently, the origins of Anglo-Saxon archaeology have tended to back-project the somewhat limited twentieth century dialogue between German and British archaeology onto the period when the study of early medieval graves was in its infancy (see Härke 2000). This has given the impression that Anglo-Saxon archaeology’s origins were conceived primarily in relation to British socio-political and intellectual traditions, overlooking the strong impact of Continental and Scandinavian archaeological discoveries and ideas upon the racial interpretations of English archaeologists.

To pursue this argument, the paper aims to summarise two early and influential reports on German early medieval grave-finds by English scholars. These are John Mitchell Kemble’s account of cinerary urns from Perlberg, Stade, Lower Saxony and William Michael Wylie’s commentary on the excavations of inhumation graves at Oberflacht, Württemberg. Both were published in volume 36 of Archaeologia for 1855 and were among numerous reports on Continental discoveries that pervaded British journals during the 1850s. The translation, publication and assessment of the Stade and Oberflacht graves – together with other reports on Merovingian and Continental cemeteries including those by Ludwig and Wilhelm Lindenschmit for Selzen and Jean Benoit Desiré Cochet for Normandy – allowed the early medieval artefacts and burial rites uncovered in southern and eastern England to be dated and interpreted in comparison with those from the Continent. In this way, the Continental reports affirmed to an English audience that the Anglo-Saxons were a branch of the Teutonic race and, in turn, provided material testimony for Germanic migrations into Britain. Hence, the reports by Kemble and Wylie are both valuable historical documents, shedding light not only on the communications between German and English archaeologists during the birth of the discipline but also demonstrating the complex intersections between archaeology and the politics of nationhood and race in the early Victorian era. By considering the ways in which mid-nineteenth century archaeologists presented and wrote about Continental discoveries it is possible to appreciate how racial interpretations were woven into their accounts and commentaries.

Given Michael Gebühr’s interests in the history of archaeology and mortuary archaeology, and given the ongoing debates over migration and ethnicity in the first millennium AD, this paper serves to put some of the recent debates in perspective. It is also hoped that this contribution may provide a belated »thank you« to Michael and his students for their hospitality and enthusiasm when I visited Hamburg and Schleswig at a very early stage of my own explorations into the world of early medieval mortuary archaeology.

Background: Victorian Anglo-Saxon Archaeology

Let us begin by introducing the background to the nineteenth century investigation of early medieval graves and cemeteries. Early Victorian Britain saw a generation of enthusiastic antiquaries, archaeologists and historians studying a rapidly increasing corpus of early medieval graves. Among the more prolific writers on this subject were John Yonge Akerman (1855), Charles Roach Smith (1848; 1852b), Thomas Wright (1847; 1852; 1855) and John Kemble (1863) while many more scholars contributed reports on discoveries and excavations to the publications of the era’s local and national archaeological, antiquarian and historical societies. Although it is easy to criticise the quality of Victorian cemetery excavations with the benefit of hindsight, the data from nineteenth century discoveries remains invaluable both as a series of publications of early medieval grave-finds and as surviving museum collections. Some (admittedly a minority) of the reports were produced to an extremely high-quality in terms of detailed description and illustrations of both artefacts and (occasionally) of the burial contexts in which they were found. Hence,
despite their limitations, the modern study of early medieval burial archaeology in Britain continues to owe a huge debt and remains reliant on the discoveries of these nineteenth-century pioneers.

Yet, Anglo-Saxon archaeology has inherited more than data from Victorian archaeologists. Modern scholarship has also been influenced by the intellectual perspectives of nineteenth-century scholars. The racial, cultural and religious labels assigned to early medieval graves have endured, influencing the manner of their presentation and interpretation within subsequent generations of researchers. Nineteenth-century archaeologists drew heavily upon these Continental studies to emphasise the Germanic roots of England’s people, language and customs. This encouraged the ascription of explicitly racial and tribal labels to the mortuary archaeology. By digging up Saxons, Anglo-Saxons or Teutons, nineteenth-century archaeologists were able to demonstrate a material stratum to contemporary and related debates about race, nationality, class and religion within the context of British nationalism and imperialism.

The influence of racial theories on interpretations of early medieval graves was not exclusive to English society in the nineteenth century. For example, Bonnie Effros has recently reviewed the nationalist agenda of the Lindenschmit brothers who employed early medieval artefacts, human remains and their mortuary context to define the distinctive racial, linguistic and cultural character of the early Germans in contrast to other ancient peoples (Effros 2003, 55–60). This tradition of assigning early medieval furnished graves to the Anglo-Saxons was conducted by a group of scholars with far-flung interests and through sustained interactions with both Continental discoveries and scholars who drew upon these Continental studies to emphasise their shared Germanic heritage. For instance, Charles Roach Smith travelled extensively on the Continent, published notes on Roman and early medieval discoveries and encouraged Continental archaeologists like the Abbé Cochet to publish reports of their findings in the pages of British archaeological societies (Smith 1852a; 1852c; Kidd 1978). Meanwhile, Smith’s friend Thomas Wright made frequent reference to the publication of the Selzen cemetery (Lindenschmit and Lindenschmit 1848) by means of comparison with Anglo-Saxon artefacts in his influential book The Celt, the Roman and the Saxon (Wright 1852). It is clear that German and French grave-finds were widely read in antiquarian and archaeological circles in the 1850s, yet the contemporaries and friends John Kemble and William Wylie, more than any others, pioneered the reporting and interpreting of Continental early medieval grave-finds for an English audience. Turning to the writings of Kemble and Wylie, we can regard how their interpretations of Continental discoveries were permeated by racial theories aimed at making specific statements about the shared Teutonic affinities and origins of the English and the Germans.

John Kemble on Saxon cinerary urns from Stade

John Mitchell Kemble was born in 1807, was a graduate of Trinity College Cambridge and died in 1857 after a long career as an early medieval scholar. He was principally an historian and philologist until the closing years of his life when he turned towards archaeology to explore further his fascination with the early Germans. In a series of publications he considered the discoveries of over eighty cinerary urns from Perlberg, Stade, Lower Saxony and curated by the Museum of the Historical Society in Hanover, as incontrovertible material proof of the cultural and racial connections between the Continental Saxons and the Anglo-Saxons. For Kemble this material evidence served to strengthen the historical reality of the migrations of Germanic peoples into England during the mid-first millennium AD. Indeed, he regarded archaeological evidence as more reliable than the available written sources (see Williams 2006).

Kemble’s archaeological interpretations were built upon precise empirical observations but were also guided by a determined theoretical approach derived from his personal, academic and political background. In all senses, Kemble was a strong Germanophile, born of a German-speaking mother of Swiss nationality, married to the daughter of a German University Professor and a close friend of the Grimm brothers. These influences were reflected in his politics; as a young man he was a radical liberal who despised the despotism of France and Russia and favoured the liberal democracies of England and the German states. As an historian and philologist he strongly emphasised the Teutonic roots of the English and in the last eight years of his life, first in England and subsequently during residence in the kingdom of Hanover, Kemble turned to archaeology to provide more direct and material testimony for the early connections between the Germans and the English.

In an article entitled »On Mortuary Urns Found at Stade-on-the-Elbe, and Other Parts of Northern Germany« published in Archaeologia volume 36 for 1855, Kemble developed an explicit thesis through a comparison of cinerary urns from Stade and those from England. In particular, he noted close similarities between the Stade graves and those from Eye in Suffolk reported by John Yonge Akerman in his richly illustrated monograph Remains of Pagan Saxondom (Akerman 1855), those from Little Wilbraham in Cambridgeshire, published by Richard Neville in his Saxon Obseseques (Neville 1852) and reports contained within Charles Roach Smith’s Collectanea Antiqua (Smith 1848).

The urns in question were presented to the Museum of the Historical Society of Hanover by the clergyman of Stade (Kemble 1855a; fig. 1). Kemble noted that the urns were not to contain holy water or sacrificial meals, but were instead used as cinerary urns: »filled with the ashes of the dead themselves« (ibid. 271). They also contained artefacts or as Kemble put it: »what ornaments and implements the piety of the survivors de-
voted to the service of the departed« (ibid. 271). These included artefacts that were pyre-goods including buckles, brooches, fibulae, girdle-plates, buttons and a variety of coloured glass beads. Kemble then recognised that a selection of the artefacts were grave-goods that »were no doubt placed upon the bones, after these had already been collected into the urns« (ibid. 271).

Kemble also observed the similarities between the English urns from Eye and Little Wilbraham and the Stade vessels in terms of their incised, plastic and stamped decoration as well as the overall »rude« nature of the pots (ibid. 271–274). He further considered the similarities in the artefacts, particularly the triangular 'bone or ivory' combs and the metal tweezers, earpicks...
and shears (ibid. 275–278). Kemble summed up his view of the significance of these finds by arguing that they represented clear evidence for Germanic migrations and the pagan ancestors of the English:

»The urns of the ›Old Saxon‹ and those of the ›Anglo-Saxon‹ are in truth identical, as there was every reason to suppose they would be. Keltic they are not, or they would not be found in Lüneburg; Slavonic they are not, or they would not be found in Warwickshire:

Fig. 2: A grave from Oberflacht illustrating Wylie's commentary (Wylie 1955a, 160 pl. 12).
one only race remains – they are Saxon in the one place as well as the other. The bones are those of men whose tongue we speak, whose blood flows in our veins» (ibid. 280).

In an article entitled »Burial and Cremation« published in the *Archaeological Journal* for the same year, Kemble developed this racial interpretation by drawing upon varied written sources regarded as illuminating the character of Germanic society from Tacitus’ *Germania*, the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* and the Scandinavian sagas. Kemble equally considered a wide range of archaeological discoveries from throughout England and the Continent to define a simple contrast between two types of Germanic burial custom, inhumation (the »Unburnt Germans of the Age of Iron«) and cremation (the »Burnt Germans of the Age of Irons«). Kemble explained this distinction in terms of religion alone. Kemble observed that the Continental graves showing closest similarities to the English urns were restricted to those uncovered at Stade (Kemble 1855b) although other similarities could be found with burials from nearby sites »occupied by the fore-fathers of the Anglo-Saxons« (ibid. 315). In England, Anglo-Saxon cremation urns were rarer than those cinerary urns of earlier ages, »making their resemblance all the more instructive« (Kemble 1855a, 279). However, urns of »precisely similar form« to Continental grave-finds (Kemble 1855b, 315) were found over a wide geographical area across England (ibid. 318) and described as being »of a very marked and peculiar character« (ibid. 315).

Hence, for Kemble, cremation was the older, pagan and more »pure« Teutonic burial rite, practised by Germans without sustained exposure to the Roman world. In contrast, inhumation was a Christian rite, whether the dead were accompanied with grave goods or not. In this light, the »Burnt Germans of the Age of Iron« were the primitive and unsullied progenitors of the modern Germans in all their forms, whether they lived in Germany or in England. Cremation was here regarded as more than a means of disposing of the dead, it was a custom that defined religious and racial characteristics (ibid. 329). Through his writings, Kemble brought a unique perspective to Continental grave-finds and their affiliations of the Anglo-Saxons, Franks and Alemanni (ibid. 369). Through his researches, correspondences and extensive travels, he accumulated a wide knowledge of the latest archaeological discoveries across Europe. His early reports were recognised in his obituary for their »vast amount of scholarship and industrious applications« (ibid.).

Wylie had many interests but his research frequently focused on the Teutonic origins of the English. This topic is found embedded in *Fairford Graves* as well as a study entitled »The Burning and Burial of the Dead« published in *Archaeologia* for 1857 in which he concurs strongly with Kemble’s pan-Germanist reading of the early medieval burial evidence (Wylie 1858). Wylie produced a series of commentaries on Continental discoveries including Frankish burials in Normandy (Wylie 1853a; 1853b; 1857), Carolingian brooches from Saxony (Wylie 1873) and gold ornaments from the grave of a »Lombard lady of rank interred after the general Teutonic fashion« from Ascoli in central Italy (Wylie 1867).

As with his account in *Fairford Graves* discussed elsewhere by this author (Williams forthcoming) the article »The Graves of the Alemanni at Oberflacht in Suabia« (Wylie 1855a) promoted a perception that early medieval graves were testimony to the shared racial affiliations of the Anglo-Saxons, Franks and Alemanni (fig. 2). The article consisted of an English translation by Wylie of a report on the remarkably well-preserved graves uncovered by Captain von Dürrich and Dr. Wolfgang Menzel in 1846. Wylie had met von Dürrich in Stuttgart and emphasised to his readers that these »satisfactory« and »scientific« excavations had yet been reported to British antiquarian circles (ibid. 131). He provided his readership with a detailed assessment of the significance beginning by contrasting the current recognition of Germanic graves by both British and Continental archaeologists to previous generations of antiquaries who threw: »... a Roman halo round relics it was too impossible to ascribe to the Celts« (ibid.)

William Wylie on the Alemannic Graves from Oberflacht

William Wylie’s account of excavations at Oberflacht in Suabia was published in the same year and volume of *Archaeologia* (Wylie 1855a) as Kemble’s report on the Stade discoveries. A friend of Kemble, Wylie shared his reading of the significance of the Continental evidence but was able to develop his interpretation in distinctive new directions. While Kemble’s report has been discussed previously in other publications, Wylie’s work has received much less attention warranting a longer discussion in this paper.

William Michael Wylie Esq. MA FSA was born in London, graduated from Merton College, Oxford in 1834, was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in June 1851 and died in 1887 (Anon. 1887). He is most famous for his account of early medieval graves uncovered near Fairford in Gloucestershire published as a monograph in 1852 entitled *Fairford Graves* (Wylie 1852; see also Williams forthcoming). Subsequently, Wylie was a regular contributor to the Society of Antiquaries of London’s *Proceedings* and their journal *Archaeologia*. In his obituary, Wylie was commended as a gentleman of widespread interests whose »linguistic powers were never at fault« (Anon. 1887, 369). Through his researches, correspondences and extensive travels, he accumulated a wide knowledge of the latest archaeological discoveries across Europe. His early reports were recognised in his obituary for their »vast amount of scholarship and industrious applications« (ibid.).

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129). Wylie regarded his generation as sailing uncharted waters:

»...our more zealous antiquaries are ever seeking to increase our still scanty stock of information on this all-important subject, by such comparison with the remains of the cognate races of continental Europe as the isolated efforts of individuals may effect. The zealous writings of the Abbé Cochet, and Dr. Riggot, in France and of Herr Lindenschmit, in Germany, have rendered infinite service, by setting vividly before us, in detail, their discoveries of the remains respectively of the Salic and the Ripuarian Franks« (ibid. 129).

Wylie then introduces the fact that the Oberflacht discoveries served to augment this picture, shedding light on their common Teutonic qualities:

»...we may trace the same salient peculiarities which portray the habits and customs of the conquerors of Gaul and Britain. It is indeed very probable that the same family assimilation will ever be found to exist in all Teutonic remains assignable to the Heathen period« (ibid. 130).

Wylie overtly connected his study of the past with contemporary views on race and European politics. The report was presented to the Society of Antiquaries in the spring of 1855, at which time the Crimean war was in full swing (Evans 1983, 334–336). The Anglo-French alliance was competing in a bloody conflict that chauvinistic British public opinion considered was intended to curtail the expansionist plans of a despotic Russian tsar. In this view, all of Europe might have become embroiled in warfare but for British intervention. This prompted Wylie to situate the contemporary conflict in terms of ancient racial enmities:

»At this moment, when the fearful struggle for mastery between the rival races of Teuton and Sc lane seems about to convulse the world, such retrospective inquiry as may recall the primeval kindred ties and brotherhood of Frank, German, and Saxon, may not be altogether useless or uninteresting« (Wylie 1855a, 130).

Having made explicit his agenda, Wylie described the »general Teutonic character« of the Oberflacht graves, arguing that they showed close affiliations with Rheinish, Belgian and French graves »which we distinguish by the term Frankish« (ibid. 139). He concurred with Menzel in ascribing them to the Alemanni who he recognised as a confederation of tribes rather than a coherent racial group in their own right, a view he also extended to the Saxons and the Franks (ibid.). Concerning their date, Wylie regarded the graves as »late Carolingian«, citing the work of the Lindenschmids and in contrast to comments by Jacob Grimm. He cited the poor preservation of the bronze and the styles of the artefacts as supporting evidence (ibid. 140).

Having set out his explicit racial agenda for interpreting the Oberflacht cemetery in relation to Frankish and Anglo-Saxon mortuary evidence, Wylie proceeded to weave this emphasis through his commentary on the graves, incorporating a literal translation of Menzel’s description of 40 graves (ibid. 133–139). Wylie clearly regarded the Oberflacht inhumation rites as evidence of pagan Teutonic beliefs and practices. This stood in contrast to Wylie’s articles on Frankish graves where his dealings with the Abbé Cochet led him to entertain that furnished graves could contain the remains of early Christians (Wylie 1855b). This blanket pagan ascription also stood in contrast to Kemble’s view that cremation was universally pagan and inhumation Christian. Yet Wylie was probably motivated in his view not only by the interpretations of the excavators but also by his pagan ascription of the furnished graves at Fairford.

Through the detailed treatment of the archaeological evidence from Oberflacht we can recognise how Wylie’s racial and religious interpretations permeated the account in Archaeologia. Wylie observed that the Oberflacht cemetery was situated on a hillock near a spring, reflecting a common Teutonic propensity when locating cemeteries. He noted similar locations of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (Wylie 1855a, 130) and then proceeded to consider the burial rites, noting the lack of cremation, the consistent orientation with heads to the west, the presence of men, women and children, and the excellent preservation of grave structures and grave goods. He defined the two forms of structure: log-coffins and wooden couches with gabled roofs (ibid. 131–132).

Wylie regarded the fact that the burial rites uncovered resonated with local folk-customs to support his assumption about their Teutonic character. Following Menzel, Wylie observed that the use of log-coffins reflected the fact that coffins continued to be called todten-baum (›tree of the dead‹) by local people. The provision of grave goods was compared to the local folk-custom of burying the dead in clothes with favourite objects from the deceased’s household belongings. Wylie was here following Menzel and Grimm in perceiving the German peasant as the custodian of »lingering heathen observances« (ibid. 139–140).

The appeal of the graves for Wylie clearly lay in the preservation of wooden articles, illustrating the »domestic requirements« of the Alemanni. He argued that they were a window onto similar discoveries that would have been found in the graves of »cognate nations« were it not for poor preservation (ibid. 140–141). These artefacts also showed to Wylie that grave goods were not simply articles of high value, but domestic items and personal belongings of the deceased and his or her family. Wylie was also interested in the craft skills indicated by the finds, approving of the »skilful application« of the wooden vessels (ibid. 145). This provided Wylie with confirmation that Frankish and Anglo-Saxon graves contained a direct window onto the early medival past and the »habits and customs« of the ancient Germans rather than simply objects made especially for burial (Wylie 1852).
Unlike other early archaeologists considering Anglo-Saxon and Frankish graves, Wylie paid particular attention to the weapons rather than the brooches (Efros 2004). This is evident in his discussion in *Fairford Graves* (Wylie 1852, 21) and this is repeated when he observed details of the weaponry at Oberflacht. He highlighted the stark differences in the weapons from those found in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon graves, supporting the view that distinctive weapon-combinations could indicate the particular martial practices of specific tribes within the Teutonic family:

»Of the lance, above all others the Teuton weapon, we find but three examples here, while the sword, elsewhere usually so rare, occurs no less than six times in not more than twenty-five graves, which may be assigned to males of every degree« (Wylie 1855a, 144).

Similarly he observed a contrast with Frankish graves:

»No specula present themselves, and the absence of the francisca, and the scramasax would at once certify these are not the graves of Franks« (ibid. 144–145).

Furthermore he remarked that the discovery of bows was a novelty from Teutonic graves and their deposition at Oberflacht related to the specific circumstances of the Alemanni’s culture and environment amidst the Black Forest:

»Dwellers in deep forests, as this tribe were, the bow must have been an important weapon of the chase« (ibid. 145).

Despite these distinctive assemblages, Wylie remained dedicated to emphasising the overall Teutonic character of the weapons by noting comparisons with Frankish and Anglo-Saxon grave finds. For example, the wooden scabbards reminded him of Ludwig Lindenschmit’s finds from Selzen. The disposition of lances with the point by the head of the skeleton mirrored the deposition of weapons in Anglo-Saxon graves like those from Fairford. Wylie recognised that the use of lime for constructing shields coincided with the descriptions of the poem *Beowulf* and that the bows from Oberflacht were similar to later medieval English long-bows (ibid. 144).

Wylie connected the grave-structure and grave-goods to pagan religious beliefs shared by the Teutonic race. Wylie is categorical about the fact that the graves were »unmistakably of the Heathen period«, noting that the figure of a cross upon dress accessories was an »ornamental device« to which »we can attach no importance« or that the brooch was initially »in Christian hands«. He noted similar occurrences in Kentish graves (ibid. 148).

Equally, although Wylie believed that the Anglo-Saxons did not use log-coffins, he mentioned that traces of them have been found from other Frankish graves. Drawing upon wide-ranging literary, philological and ethnographic evidence for the uses of logs, boats and sledges as coffins among different cultures, he regarded the Oberflacht evidence as one permutation of a broader disposition in ancient Indo-European burial customs (ibid. 142–143).

Wylie developed his discussion of the Oberflacht graves by regarding the serpentine decoration of the coffins:

»The serpent forms sculptured on the coffin lids would alone suffice to convince us of the Teutonic character of these graves, even if all further evidence were wanting« (ibid. 143).

Wylie entertained an interpretation that the serpents represented dragons as guardians of treasures (in this context the »treasure« being guarded was the deceased’s body). However, he suggested an even »deeper and more mystic symbolism« (ibid. 143). Noting that serpents were sacred to Odin and appeared on Scandanavian rune-stones, he considered the possibility that they were appropriate to the mortuary context as emblems of the soul, life, health and immortality. Regardless of their precise interpretation, Wylie was keen to assert that they demonstrated a common regard for serpents, held in »reverance and awe« among all the Germanic tribes (ibid. 143–144). Wylie sought confirmation through correspondences with Jacob Grimm whom he claims agreed with his interpretations.

Some artefacts were also seen as evidence of Teutonic customs and social institutions but more specifically of pagan beliefs. Beads were regarded as a common element of costume among »all the Northern nations« (ibid. 148). Moreover, the designs on the beads spoke of the »taste natural to their sex«, referring to the »Teuton ladies« they adorned. Hence the choice of »unseemly pieces of pierced amber« indicated their amuletic value rather than their role as ornaments (Wylie 1855a, 148). Wylie once again employed *Beowulf* and the writings of early medieval saints to support his interpretations (ibid. 148–149).

At Oberflacht, the use of fire had pagan religious symbolism according to Wylie. The candle sticks and flints were interpreted with reference to warnings against the pagan use of light and fire in early councils and capitularies. Wylie argued that lights may have been lit within the graves in a comparable manner to the discovery of lamps from Roman graves (ibid. 146). Flints are similarly interpreted by Wylie as a »symbolic representation of the power of light over darkness« linked to the worship of Thor and Odin and hence an »essential superstition of Northern heathenism«. Wylie drew upon Grimm’s work to suggest that the rite preserved a sanctity connected with fire that »had its origins in a far distant Eastern land«, presumably referring to the widespread Victorian belief in a common ancient Asiatic homeland for the Teutons (ibid. 149).
Once again Wylie cited comparisons in Anglo-Saxon graves (ibid. 150). Similarly, he noted the deposition of iron-working slag in grave 19 with reference to his own discoveries at Fairfield, suggesting that «there was the same amulet belief in the products of the furnace that there seems to have been in those of the smithy» (Wylie 1852, 24–25; 150).

The animal and vegetable remains from the funerary vessels were seen by Wylie as evidence of mortuary sacrifices that the clergy found hard to eradicate. He argued that Teutons and Romans shared a belief that offerings were a way of propitiating the spirits of the dead (ibid. 150). Concerning horse sacrifice, Wylie referenced Tacitus’ Germania and regarded it as a universal practice of Teutonic belief that «the warrior rode his steed to Valhalla, hence in their graves the remains of horses are found» (ibid. 146). Wylie suspected that the presence of a wooden saddle and horse trappings in grave 31 denoted that horse sacrifice was also a social rite – only afforded as a «mark of distinction» to the chieftain of the tribe (ibid. 147). Meanwhile, the presence of a lyre in the grave suggests the «milder taste of this young warrior» (ibid. 147). In combination, they provided «an early record of knighthood and minstrelsy» (ibid. 147). Here Wylie clearly portraying the Oberflacht graves as evidence of a social hierarchy and a proto-feudal way of life, and hence as ancestral to later medieval institutions. The discovery of spinning equipment in female-gendered graves was similarly linked to the legal and social status of Alemannic women (ibid. 147), while the ubiquity of bronze tweezers and combs is commented upon by Wylie as indicating the «great personal cleanliness as among the virtues of the peoples» (ibid. 148).

Wylie paid particular attention to the widespread symbolic association between the provision of shoes and the voyage to the afterlife found in Scandinavian sources in order to suggest that the shoes at Oberflacht were worn for this purpose. However, Wylie recognised that shoes were also symbols of affection by mourners and he remained sceptical concerning interpretations of symbolic wooden shoes and hands alleged by the excavators to have been found in the Oberflacht graves (ibid. 154–155).

Wylie concluded his report by emphasising once more the reason for his detailed and extensive report on the Oberflacht discoveries:

«It is only by attentive examination of these archaeological discoveries in continental Europe that we can hope to thoroughly study the history of the great migration of the Teutonic nations; and so closer correspondence with foreign societies would most certainly be attended with mutual advantage» (ibid. 157).

Wylie was therefore not arguing that the Alemanni were the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons, but that both were branches of the Teutonic race and this was clearly revealed through the burial rites uncovered at Oberflacht. The informed English historian, archaeologist or antiquary would have read Wylie’s report in relation to his discoveries at Fairfield in Gloucestershire reported at length in the volume Fairford Graves, and Wylie was clearly encouraging his readership to see them as versions of the same phenomenon.

**Conclusion**

It is clear then that hand-in-hand with the Victorian excavation, description and illustration of Anglo-Saxon graves, integral ingredients of an emerging Anglo-Saxonism in British archaeology during the 1850s were commentaries upon early medieval grave-finds from the Continent. These were either reports in English journals written by European archaeologists themselves, or as in the case of Kemble and Wylie, English antiquaries writing with first-hand experience of the discoveries in close correspondence with their finders.

This paper has sought to illustrate how the commentaries by Kemble and Wylie were more than descriptive; they also incorporated explicit racial interpretations of the archaeological evidence. In part, these can be seen as passive adaptations of the virulent racial archaeologies current in pre-unification Germany in which artefacts, graves and bones were deployed to assert a common racial Germanic identity (see Effros 2003). Kemble and Wylie were certainly intent upon seeing the artefacts, burial rites and cemeteries as indicators of a common ancestry defined in terms of customs, pagan religion, language and blood that they saw materialised in the similarities between the burial customs of the Anglo-Saxons, Old Saxons, Franks and Alemanni. Yet, both Kemble and Wylie’s accounts were written for English audiences and were intended to have other resonances. It might be argued that their emphasis on race had little to do with a German desire for national unification but on the contemporary perception of the English as sharing in a pan-national Germanic racial identity rooted in the early Middle Ages. The relevance of such a racial reading of the early medieval data can be understood as of significance in relation to a series of contemporary socio-political environments including the perceived racial superiority of the English over the Celtic peoples of the British Isles, the contemporary conflict with (Slavic) Russia in the Crimea, and in relation to English colonial and imperial aspirations of supremacy throughout the globe at the time when the British Empire was approaching the height of its power.

In this regard, the Stade and Oberflacht discoveries were both important to English antiquaries in different ways. The Stade finds were significant not only because of their date and geographical association with the regions from which the Saxons were believed to have departed to settle in England, but also because of their association with the rite of cremation, regarded by Kemble as an unequivocal symbol of the earliest pagan Teutonic beliefs and practices. For Oberflacht, the connection to the Anglo-Saxons was not a direct one of migration.
and ancestry. But for Wylie the amazing preservation of the graves from the Alemannic cemetery shed a light on customs and practices that were likely to have been more widespread and shared by all Teutonic peoples in the early Middle Ages. The point of this paper is not to deny the validity or assess the accuracy of the work of Kemble and Wylie. What is argued is that the description and commentary of archaeological reports on Continental early medieval graves by English scholars were enmeshed with a racial paradigm that had a longer-lasting effect on how early medieval graves have been studied and interpreted in Britain than is usually acknowledged.

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