



# The Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Southern Britain AD 450-650: Beneath the Tribal Hidage

*By Sue Harrington, Martin Welch*

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The Tribal Hidage, attributed to the 7th century, records the named groups and polities of early Anglo-Saxon England and the taxation tribute due from their lands and surpluses. Whilst providing some indication of relative wealth and its distribution, rather little can be deduced from the Hidage concerning the underlying economic and social realities of the communities documented. Sue Harrington and the late Martin Welch have adopted a new approach to these issues, based on archaeological information from 12,000 burials and 28,000 objects of the period AD 450–650. The nature, distribution and spatial relationships of settlement and burial evidence are examined over time against a background of the productive capabilities of the environment in which they are set, the availability of raw materials, evidence for metalworking and other industrial/craft activities, and communication and trade routes. This has enabled the identification of central areas of wealth that influenced places around them. Key within this period was the influence of the Franks who may have driven economic exploitation by building on the pre-existing Roman infrastructure of the south-east. Frankish material culture was as widespread as that of the Kentish people, whose wealth is evident in many well-furnished graves, but more nuanced approaches to wealth distribution are apparent further to the West, perhaps due to ongoing interaction with communities who maintained an essentially ‘Romano-British’ way of life.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **Review**

The 'death and taxes' theme sounds very much like our own contemporary world, and for that reason all the more credible. (Christopher Catling *Current Archaeology*)

The volume is beautifully produced with 62 maps and figures, 49 tables and 10 color plates, plus a bibliography and index. Harrington and Welch succeed in their stated goal to an admirable extent, clarifying, at least for the larger kingdoms and policies of Kent, Sussex, Wessex and Surrey, the relationship between the suggestive but faulty Tribal Hidage and the complex realities implied by the material record, demonstrating both the value of this document and its limitations. (Craig R. Davis, Smith College *The Medieval Review*)

Perhaps the time has come for Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeologists to begin a more productive dialogue, and this book will in future be seen as a crucial step towards that conversation. Early Anglo-Saxon Britain deserves more than artifact typologies and a focus on burials. This book goes a long way to redressing the balance and providing a wider way of looking at the evidence. We can only hope that someone will seek to do for other parts of Anglo-Saxon England what this book has done for the far south. (*Speculum*, 90.3)

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