

ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

450-1066

1st year Licence - Semester 1
Civilization of the Language/ British Civilization

THE HISTORY OF ANGLO-SAXONS IN ENGLAND: DIVERSE SOURCES

Disconnected data of England in the 5th and 6th centuries come from different sources:

- + Writer Gildas (6th century)
- + *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (a history of the English people begun in the 9th century)
- + saints' lives
- + Poetry
- + Archaeological findings and Place-name studies

IMPORTANT REMARK

- + At that time **England and Britain as countries did not exist.**
- + The word "England" did not exist.
- + There were peoples called Britons (mixed ethnicities: descendents of Celts and Romans who had settled the island).

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE ROMANS LEFT BRITAIN ?

- + In the absence of Roman administrators, local **warlords (who were Britons)**, who were Christian, ruled **small, unstable kingdoms**
- + **Britons were the peoples of Celtic and Roman origins who have been settling Britain since the Celtic era and then the Roman rule.**
- + These warlords maintained some Roman traditions of governance.
- + In the mid-5th century, they revived the Roman policy of employing **Germanic mercenaries**
- + **They hired Germanic mercenaries** to help defend them against hostile peoples of the north (Picts and Scots).

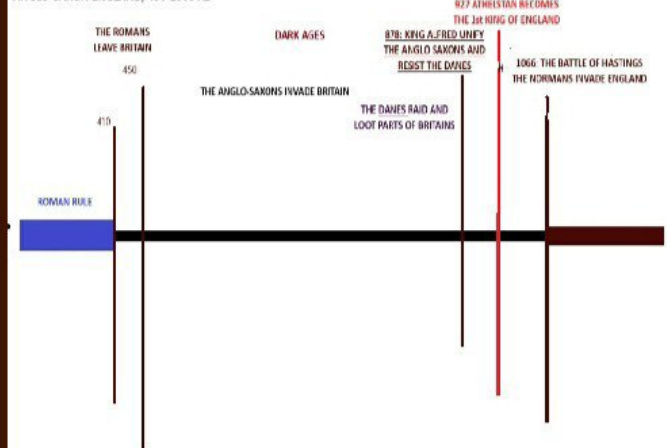
PREVIOUS LECTURE

- + From the origins to Roman Britain
- + We have had a look at some peoples who settled Britain during Prehistory, the Antiquity, and the Roman Civilization

WHAT PERIOD ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

- + **The Dark Ages** (5th to 10th Centuries AD) which started with ...
 - insecurity
 - Chaos
 - Anarchy
 - Social and political disorders
- It was a period (centuries) of uncertainty, instability, and insecurity but which gradually witnessed some kind of order and stability.

ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND, 450-1066 AD



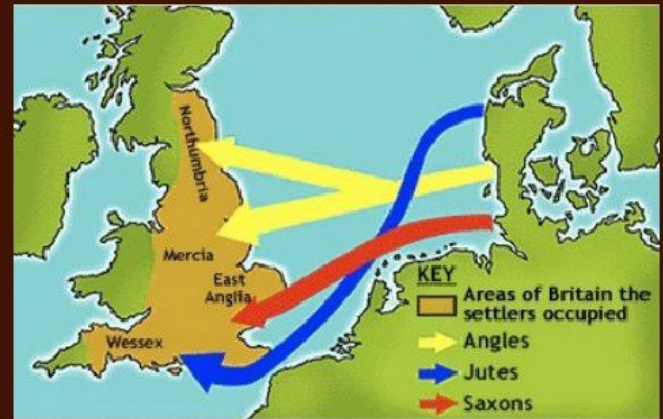
THE SAXON MERCENARIES REBELLED AND INVADDED THE LAND THAT IS NOW CALLED ENGLAND

- + The Saxons were German mercenaries.
- + They revolted against their British chiefs. They wanted to invade the island and rule it.
- + the process of invasion and settlement began and destroyed the native ruling class
- + **Germanic kingdoms** appeared throughout the island by the 7th century. It was a period of violence and disorder.
- + During that **unstable period** of British history (**Dark Ages**), any man of noble birth and success in war could organize an army of warriors loyal to him personally and attempt to conquer and establish a kingdom.

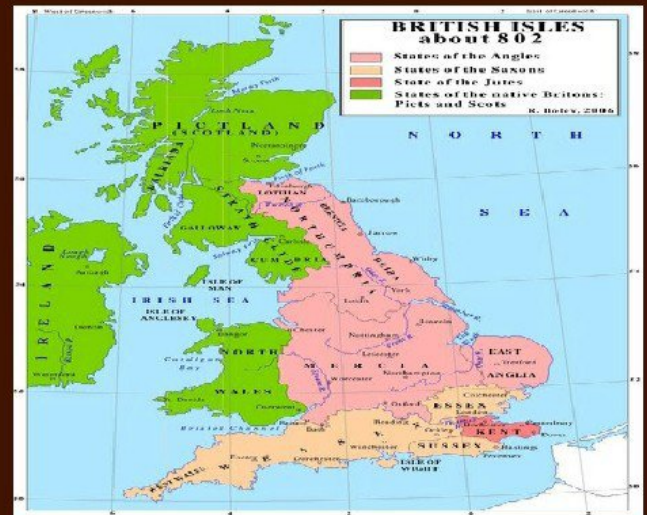
VARIOUS GERMAN INVADERS

- + The German invaders were diverse:
 - Angles
 - Saxons
 - Frisians
 - Jutes
 - Franks
- + All these peoples were **similar in culture** and eventually identified themselves indifferently as **Angles** or **Saxons**.

ANGLO-SAXON INVASIONS OF BRITAIN



- + By the 7th century the Germanic kingdoms included
 - Northumbria
 - Bernicia
 - Deira
 - Lindsay
 - Mercia
 - East Anglia
 - Essex
 - Wessex
 - Sussex
 - Kent
- + They were **unstable states** characterized by **constant warfare and insecurity**



DURING THOSE "DARK AGES" ANGLO-SAXON SOCIETIES WERE CHARACTERIZED BY

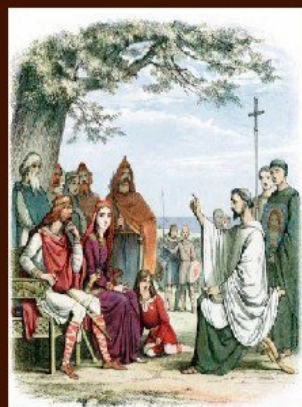
- + Strong kinship groups
- + Regular warfare (fighting and conflicts)
- + Customary law and a system of money compensations for death, personal injury, and theft
- + The practice of traditional polytheistic religions.
- + Lack of written language.
- + The dependence on mixed economies of agriculture, hunting, and animal husbandry.

DURING THE 7TH AND 8TH CENTURIES TWO MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS:

- + The successful development of Christianity
- + The political unification of England under King Alfred and his dynasty.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

- + Christianity came from two directions—Rome and Ireland.
- + In 596, Pope Gregory I sent a group of missionaries under a monk named **Augustine** to Kent, where King **Ethelbert** had married Bertha, a Christian Frankish princess.
- + Ethelbert was baptized
- + **Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury**
- + the southern kingdoms became Christian.



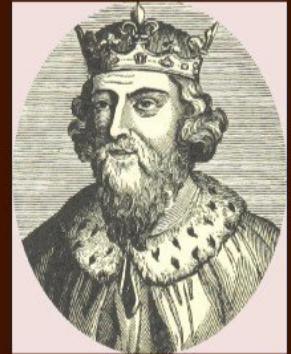
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

- + In Northumbria, the Christianity from Rome met Celtic Christianity, which had been brought from Ireland to Scotland by **Saint Columba** and then to Northumbria by **Saint Aidan**, who founded the monastery of Holy Island in 635.
- + **Theodore of Tarsus**, who became archbishop of Canterbury in 668, created dioceses and gave the English church its basic structure.

KING ALFRED THE GREAT

- + Alfred became king of Wessex in one of England's darkest hours.
- + The **Danes**, part of the **Viking** forces that had begun to raid the English coasts in the late 8th century.
- + The **Danes** first **regularly looted Anglo-Saxon towns and villages** but soon gave up that primary goal and decided to conquer England.

- + Alfred, King of Wessex, unified Anglo-Saxon kingdoms against the Danes/ Vikings.



- + After his victory at **Edington in 878**, Alfred forced the Danish king Guthrum to accept **baptism** (religious ceremony in order to become Christian) and a division of England into two parts:
 - Wessex
 - The Danelaw (Essex, East Anglia, and Northumbria), under Danish rule



KING ALFRED'S ACHIEVEMENTS

- + Alfred created an English navy
- + he reorganized the Anglo-Saxon "**fyrð**," or militia, allowing his warriors to alternate between farming and fighting
- + he built strategic forts. These achievements enabled him to capture London and to roll back the Danish rush.
- + Alfred also gave his attention to efficient government, issuing a set of **dooms**, or laws, and to scholarship.
- + He promoted the translation of Latin works into **Old English** and encouraged the compilation of the **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**. For his many accomplishments, Alfred was called The Great, the only English king so acclaimed.

- + The conquest of the Danelaw was completed by Alfred's son, **Edward the Elder**
- + But more important, Alfred grandson, **Athelstan**, unified all kingdoms and became king in **927**. He won a great victory against the Danes at Brunanburh in **937**.

- + **Athelstan**, unified all kingdoms and became king in **927**.
- + He became the **1st King of England**.



THE BIRTH OF ENGLAND UNDER ATHELSTAN

- + The conquest of the Danelaw meant the creation of a **unified government for all England** and the evolution of the territorial state, which was replacing the kinship structure of earlier times:
- + The king ruled with the support of the **witenagemot**, a **council of wise men** who participated in the issuing of dooms and oversaw the selection of kings.

THE BIRTH OF ENGLAND UNDER ATHELSTAN

- + About 40 **shires (counties)** were created out of former kingdoms or from significant military or administrative units.
- + Each shire had a **shiremoot**, or **court**, consisting of all free males and meeting twice a year, at first presided over by a royal official called an **alderman** (later an **earl**) and then by a **shire reeve, or sheriff**.
- + Smaller administrative, tax, and military units, called hundreds, had courts roughly parallel to the older folk moots, which met every four weeks, handling most of the ordinary judicial business.

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ANGLO-SAXON RULE

- + During that time, England had the most advanced system government in Western Europe, especially at the local level and in the office of sheriff who was the basic link between the king and local administration.
- + After 991, that administration proved capable of collecting the **Danegeld, a tax on land**, initially used as tribute to the Danes but later as an ordinary source of royal revenue. No other country in Western Europe had the ability to assess and collect such a tax.

ANGLO-SAXON RULE

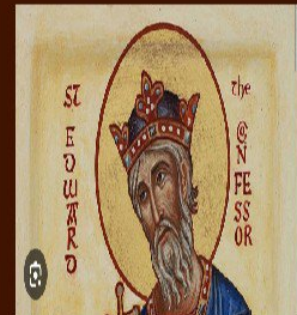
- + A new round of Danish invasions came during the reign of **Ethelred II**. Often called the Redeless (meaning "unready" or "unwise"), the **Danegeld** was his idea. He also wanted to kill all the Danes from previous invasions, who were by that time becoming assimilated and lived peacefully with Anglo-Saxons.
- + When Ethelred died in 1016, Sweyn's son Canute II won out over Edmund II, called Ironside, the son of Ethelred. **Under Canute, England was part of an empire that also included Denmark and Norway.**

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

- + Following the short and unpopular reigns of Canute's sons, Harold I and Hardecanute, **Edward the Confessor**, another son of Ethelred, was recalled from Normandy (nowadays in western France) where he had lived in exile.
- + Edward's reign is noted for the first influx of Norman-French influence.
- + The reign of **Edward witnessed the building of Westminster Abbey**, which was completed just in time for his burial in January 1066.

- + Edward the Confessor king from 1042 to 1066

- + The last Anglo-Saxon King of England



- + Edward's death without an heir left succession in uncertainty.
- + The witenagemot chose Harold, earl of Wessex,
- + Another other aspirant claimed the throne: Duke **William of Normandy**.
- + Harold II was defeated by **William** at Hastings on October 14, 1066.
- + **William (the Conqueror)** was thus crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day and the country entered a new era: **the Norman Era**

- + When William of Normandy, also called William the Conqueror (from France) became **king of England**, the country became under **Norman rule**.

FURTHER READINGS

- + <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/subjects/history>
- + <https://libguides.columbiasouthern.edu/c.php?g=718738&p=5119024>