



Filiere: English Studies

Semester 3

Module: 19

British Culture/ US Culture

Instructor: Dr. Rachid Agliz

Lecture 1: The Founding of Britain

-The main objective of this module is to introduce students to a background of Britain's development throughout history from the dark ages until recent times and also to give them a deep insight into the political system in Britain as well as other important aspects of the British culture mainly the system of education, the common traditions and customs and the characteristics of the British economy. The other main objective of the course is to provide students with an extensive background of the situation of religion in Britain in the past and nowadays. So much focus will be on the confrontation between the different religious groups in Britain and more particularly the protestants and the catholics. Apart from this, the students are also required to familiarize themselves with the American history. Obviously, each nation has its proper historical features and characteristics. America or what is called the new world was the target of different colonial powers. The students will gradually be introduced to the coming of the Europeans and their different settlements and by the same token are invited to consider the hostile confrontations between the Europeans over power in the new world. The last lecture in this module will be mainly concerned with the rise of big business from 1860 to 1929. The students are supposed to be quite familiar with the main features and reasons of the American industrial revolution.

-It is interesting to point out that Britain around 4000 before the birth of Christ witnessed the movement of the Neolithic people who settled in the country and who left some amazing monumental architecture. The spectacular achievement of the Neolithic people was undeniable. They have, in fact, left behind remains of their causewayed camp, burial grounds known as barrows, chambered tombs and amazing ritual centers called henges. Many of the first Neolithic monuments are found in Wiltshire, in the south west of Britain. At Silbury Hill, there is the largest man-made mound in Europe. Stonehenge dates from before 2000 before the birth of Christ and is one of the most mysterious and complex archaeological sites in the world.

-The end of the second century saw the invasion of the Celts coming from north western Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. This group settled in Southern England and gradually spread North Scotland and Ireland. They were tall, fair-skinned and blue-eyed. They were good warriors and remained tribesmen. They believed in hidden practices and worshipped magical and supernatural powers. The Celts had an organized caste of priests called The Druids who actually presided over religion and education.

-The Romans organized their invasion into stages and actually conquered and occupied most of the country in 43 A.D. Immediately after this event; the country entered a process of Romanization. But north of Scotland and Ireland could not be invaded. The contributions of Romans were so numerous but were limited to towns. They founded cities like London; built the Thames bridge allowing a commercial exchange with Europe. For example, Britain was the first exporter of corn. They also developed the network of roads, built villas in the Italian style and were experts in building baths fed by underground springs. The Romans converted the Celts to Christianity; though some of the British kept or retained their language and culture which survived in North Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

-The aim of the Romans when they first set their foot in England in 55 before the birth of Christ was both to control and to assess the wealth of the country with the intention to absorb it later into the empire. The Roman commander Julius Caesar had an easy victory over the Britons; but he was compelled to retire or to withdraw his military forces as storms in the channel hindered his cavalry from arriving from Gaul. In 54 before the birth of Christ Caesar returned and marched through southern Britain. The Britons were divided; but Cassivellaunus, king of the Catuvellauni; mounted stiff resistance and opposition. In the end; Cassivellaunus's stronghold was taken and the king himself captured. The Romans took hostages and also arranged for the Britons to pay an annual tribute to Rome.

-The Romans managed to gain first-hand knowledge of Britain and noted its agricultural and mineral wealth. After they departed and left; trade between Britain and the empire increased and the schemes to link or to annex such a potentially rich country to the rest of the Roman empire were achieved and forwarded by the Roman planners.

-The invasion of most Britain came in AD 43 when Aulus Plautius; following the instructions of the emperor; Claudius invaded Britain with an army of some 40,000 men. After the army

had established control of the south east ; claudius himself arrived with an impressive retinue ; including elephants. The emperor received the submission of a number of the British kings and then left. The annexation was celebrated in Rome. But of course a lot of hard fighting was in the process before the downfall and conquest of Britain.

-Still ; it is important to stress that the Romans managed to spread their power and empire in different parts of Britain. But; there were some places which were hard to conquer as the people there mounted stiff opposition. The north of Scotland peopled by the fierce celtic people known as the picts was not occupied by the Romans. Rome exercised sovereignty over the lowlands of Scotland except the northern part which actually was controlled by the picts who prevented the romans from spreading their ideologies and civilisation. Between AD 122 and 127 the Romans built a wall called the Hadrian. This wall was mainly intended to divide two tribes, the Brigantes and the Selgovae and to hinder them from forming an alliance against Rome. The wall was also meant to protect the population to the south from the picts and their allies.

-The Anglo Saxons originate from Denmark; North West Germany and Netherlands. The Saxons first attack was in 367 A.D when they invaded the east and south east of Britain. The rest of England and lowlands fell under the control of the Angles. There was a sharing of power and England was divided to small kingdoms. The most powerful ones were: Northumbria in the North; Mercia in Midlands and Wessex in the south. The lack of central government; an efficient army and lack of unity paved the way for the Vikings to conquer England.

-In the fourth century; the Roman Empire was threatened not only by the Scots and the Picts from the North but also by the Saxons; a loose term used to describe a number of peoples living in present day Denmark; North West Germany and the Netherlands. The Roman military forces were unable to hinder or to stop Saxon attacks and piracy. This led to the building of defences along the east and south coasts. In 367; there was a combined attack on Britain by the picts; scots and Saxons. Due to the fierce raids of the picts; scots and Saxons; the Roman military forces withdrew. It was now important and very urgent for the Romano British population to look for better military means to stop the combined attacks of the picts; scots and Saxons. In such a situation, the Roman Empire as well as its ideologies and civilization could not be spread in the whole country.

- The picts and the scots did not benefit from the Roman army withdrawal and decided instead to fight each other until the ninth century. It was difficult at the time to hold back the Saxons and to prevent them from reaching the British land. They came across the North sea and attacked the east and south east coasts of Britain. Vortigern, a British leader in the south east employed two saxon warriors, Hengist and Horsa to defend the country but in vain and with little success. Instead, they got hold of parts of the south east for themselves and the invasions continued. By 450 Essex, kent and Sussex were held by the Saxons.

-The Vikings originate from Scandinavia basically Denmark; Sweden and Norway. They were very good fighters and attacked and robbed people. In 865, they invaded Northumbria and called it Danlaw. Also Scotland, Shetland...even Ireland which escaped the invasions of the Romans. Soon England was divided between Anglo-Saxons Vikings but soon the former collapsed and Canute the king of Vikings became the only ruler in England (some of the Vikings fled to France in order to establish a colony called Normandy). After his death, his two sons Harold and Hardicanute took over the throne in succession.

-The Normans were the last people who invaded Britain and it was in 1066 (two centuries after the first invasion of the Vikings). They were descendants of the Vikings settlers in Northern France. Duke William came with his nobles, in the battle of Hastings on the 14th of October, 1066 and the Anglo Saxons were defeated. The Duke invaded London and was then crowned a king of England on Christmas day. The victory of the Normans meant the supremacy of the French aristocracy. The French language was, then, used by the elite of the society. The Normans brought with them the feudal system. The king used to control lands in both France and England which, then, led to conflicts between the two countries. William died in Rouen in Normandy in 1087.

-Historically speaking, king Harold faced two threats in 1066. Not only was Duke William of Normandy intent on taking the throne which he believed was his, but Harold's half brother, Earl Tostig, whom Harold himself had previously overthrown; dispossessed and driven out of the country, was planning a military invasion and revenge. Tostig's threat was serious as he was allied to the powerful Norwegian king, Harold 'Hardrada' (the severe) who commanded a huge Viking fleet and army. Tostig and Harold Hadrada enjoyed the friendship of the king of the scots; and the English could accordingly expect a fearsome attack from the north.

-It is important to note that in September 1066, Tostig and the Norwegian king landed in the north of England. King Harold was in the south, awaiting Duke William's invasion. He had to march rapidly north to meet the Scandinavian invaders. At a great battle at Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire on the 25 of September, Harold defeated and Killed Tostig and Harold Hadrada.

-The Vikings and the Normans armies met at Hastings on the 14 of October, 1066. After a long and hard battle William and the Normans won. Harold died on the battlefield after an arrow hit him in the eye. Duke William of Normandy marched north and took London. He was, then, crowned king of England at Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of York on a Christmas day in 1066. William known as the Conqueror managed to get hold of the country. At that historical period, the English had no natural leader to succeed Harold and they were disunited. William ruthlessly suppressed all the kinds of opposition to Norman supremacy and ruled in England.

-The battle of Hastings is actually considered as a turning point in English history. The native English aristocracy was then replaced by the French one. Language, then, separated the new rulers of the country from their subjects. Clearly defined classes appeared in English society. At the top of society was the king, who was surrendered by great nobles or barons. These

looked upon the king as a near equal. After the great barons came lesser lords, who lived in manors or castles in villages and to whom the ordinary people or peasants owed their services. The peasantry was Saxon that is English. The people could not move from their land or village without seeking the permission of their lord. This system of dependence and hierarchy is known as the feudal system. Though it would be wrong to say that feudalism was unknown in Saxon England, the rigid system imposed by the Normans was an innovation which of course brought England into line with the rest of Western Europe.