

Anglo-Saxon History and Old English Language and Literature

Pre-Historical – 1066 A.D.

Overview of Periods of Early English History Pre-History—1066 A. D.

1. Pre-Roman/Pre-Historical → up to 55 B. C.
2. Roman Occupation → 55 B. C. – 410 A. D.
3. Anglo-Saxon Period → 410 – 787 A. D.
4. Viking Invasions → 787 – 1066 A. D.
5. Norman Conquest begins in 1066

Pre-Historical / Pre-Roman



Stonehenge

Pre-Historical / Pre-Roman

- The island we know as England was occupied by a race of people called the Celts. One of the tribes was called they Brythons or Britons (where we get the term Britain)
- The Celts were Pagans and their religion was know as “animism” a Latin word for “spirit.” Celts saw spirits everywhere
- Druids were their priests; their role was to go between the gods and the people

Roman Occupation



Hadrian's Wall

Important Events During Roman Occupation

- Julius Caesar begins invasion/occupation in 55 B.C.
- Occupation completed by Claudius in 1st cent. A.D.
- Hadrian's Wall built about 122 A.D.
- Romans "leave" in 410 A.D. because Visigoths attack Rome
- St. Augustine (the "other" St. Augustine!) lands in Kent in 597 and converts King Aethelbert (king of Kent, the oldest Saxon settlement) to Christianity; becomes first Archbishop of Canterbury

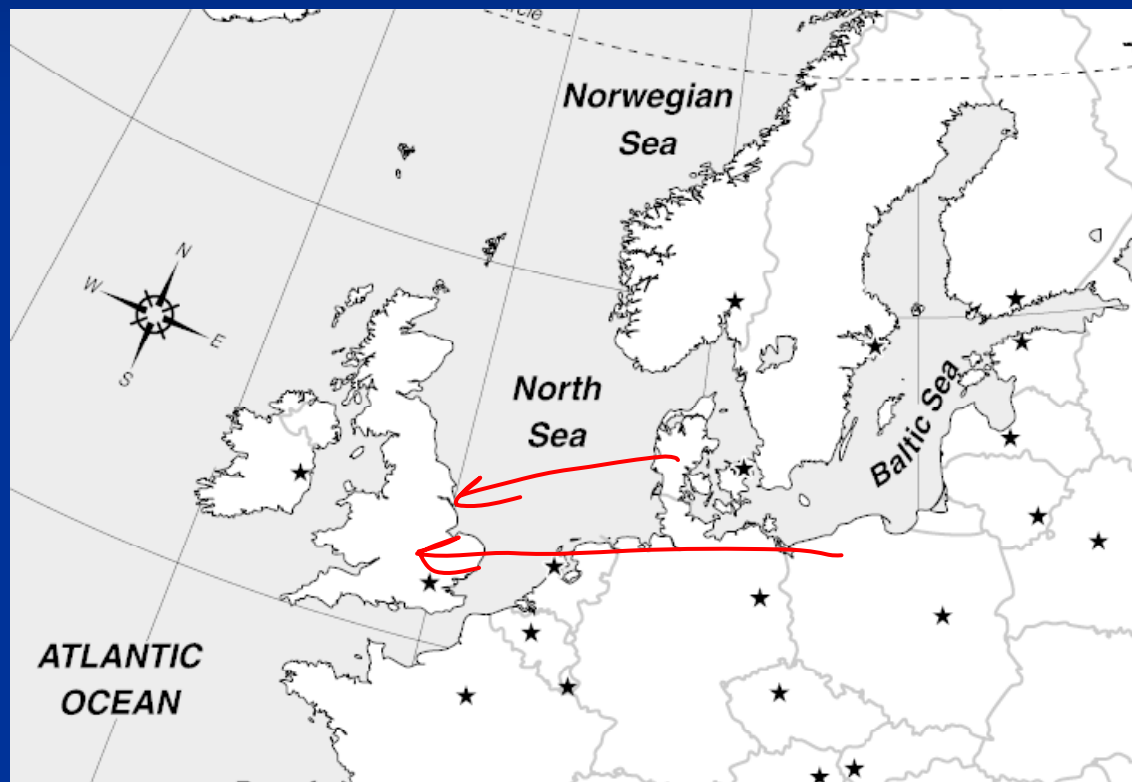
Important Cultural and Historical Results of the Roman Occupation

- Military—strong armed forces (“legions”)
 - Pushed Celts into Wales and Ireland
 - Prevented Vikings from raiding for several hundred years: C. Warren Hollister writes, “Rome’s greatest gift to Britain was peace” (15).
- Infrastructure
 - Government (fell apart when they left)
 - Walls, villas, public baths (some remains still exist)
- Language and Writing
 - Latin was official language
 - Practice of recording history led to earliest English “literature” being documentary
- Religion
 - Christianity beginning to take hold, especially after St. Augustine converts King Aethelbert

The Most Important Results of the Roman Occupation

- Latin heavily influenced the English language
- Relative Peace
- **Christianity** begins to take hold in England (but does not fully displace Paganism for several hundred years)

The Anglo-Saxon Period 410-787



Important Events in the (First) Anglo-Saxon Period

- 410- 450 Angles and Saxons invade from Baltic shores of Germany, and the Jutes invade from the Jutland peninsula in Denmark
 - The Geats are a tribe from Jutland
- Nine Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms eventually became the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy (England not unified), or “Seven Sovereign Kingdoms”

Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy

■ Heptarchy = Seven Kingdoms

1. Kent
2. Essex (East Saxon)
3. Sussex (South Saxon)
4. East Anglia
5. Northumbria
6. Mercia
7. Wessex (West Saxon)



Viking Invasions 787-1066



Vikings

- By definition, Vikings were sea-faring (explorers, traders, and warriors) Scandinavians during the 8th through 11th centuries.
- Oddly enough, the Anglo-Saxon (and Jute) heritage was not much different from the Vikings': they, too, were Scandinavian invaders. In fact, some Vikings were also called "Northmen" which is related to yet another culture (this one French) which made conquest of England—the Normans, and William the Conqueror in 1066.
- However, when the Viking raids began around 787, the Anglo-Saxons were different culturally from the Viking invaders

They were ALL Vikings!

Except for the Celts* and the Romans, all of the cultures who successfully invaded England in the first millennium were from Northern Europe at one time or another. The Angles, Saxons, Frisians, and Jutes were from the Baltic region, and the Normans (1066) were primarily from Normandy and had originally been from Norway

*the Celts were indigenous at the time of the Roman conquest, and are therefore considered England's "natives"

Important Results of the Viking Invasions

- Politically and Culturally
 - Continued political instability and conflict (i.e., tribal war): there was no central government or church*
 - The Anglo-Saxon code (more on this when we read Beowulf)
 - Linguistically (The English Language at its Earliest)
 - The English language is “born” during the first millennium and is known as Old English (OE). Anglo-Saxon is the term for the culture.
 - Old English is mainly Germanic** in grammar (syntax and morphology) and lexicon (words) → the core of our modern English is vastly influenced by this early linguistic “DNA” (but even Germanic languages derived from a theoretical Proto-Indo-European language, the grandparent of classical languages such as Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, and German (**Remember: Vikings were Germanic people))
 - LOTS of dialects of Old-English, as one might imagine. This is because there were several separate Kingdoms many founded by essentially five or six different cultures: Angles, Saxons, Frisians, Jutes, Danes, and Swedes
- *Alfred the Great (ruled from approx. 871-899 A.D.) was one of the first Anglo-Saxon kings to push Vikings back; in fact, he was one of the first kings to begin consolidating power, unifying several of the separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms

Huh?

(we better boil those important results down!)

- Lots of ongoing tribal feuds and wars led to . . .
- Lots of intermingling of similar but different Germanic languages . . . interrupted by . . .
- MORE Viking invasions, which gave way to . . .
- Some political unification (Alfred) . . .
- . . . Which led to . . .
- OLD ENGLISH, the earliest form of our language!!

Early England Created by Three Invasions

1. Roman Occupation 55 B.C.-410 A.D.



LATIN

2. Anglo-Saxon
and Viking
Invasions 410 –
1066 A.D.



GERMAN(IC)

3. The
Norman
Invasion
(The Battle
of Hastings)
in 1066 A.D.



FRENCH

Norman Invasion

- In 1066 at the Battle of Hastings, the Normans (powerful Northern Frenchmen) defeated the English and started a centuries-long conquest of England
- Two Most Important Effects:
 - French becomes official language of politics and power and exerts enormous influence on Old English
 - England begins unifying under a French political system, much of which is still with us (even in the U.S.) today

The Anglo-Saxon Period in Review

- Pre-Anglo-Saxon (really “pre” historical)
 - Celtic Peoples (approx 1700/400 B.C. – 55 B.C.)
 - Roman Occupation (55 B.C.-410 A.D.)
- Anglo-Saxon/Viking
 - Angles, Saxons, Frisian, and Jutes (410-787)
 - Viking Raids/Invasions begin 8th c. and end 10th c.
- Norman Invasion/Occupation (really in the Middle Ages)
 - Battle of Hastings in 1066, then about four centuries of French rule

A Short History of Our Language

—or—

“How English got to be so hard to study,
but is still so beautiful to hear and read”

Quick History of English Language

- Old English (OE) dates from approximately* 400 A.D. to 1066
- Middle English (ME) dates from approximately 1066-1485
- They are quite different to the eye and ear. Old English is nearly impossible to read or understand without studying it much like and English speaker today would study French, Latin, or Chinese

*The dating of the beginnings of OE is difficult; scholars only have written texts in OE beginning in around 700 A.D., but peoples in England must have been speaking a version of OE prior to works being written in the vernacular (as opposed to Latin)

Another Way of Looking at the History of English

Old English	400-1066	<u>Beowulf</u> (from <u>Beowulf</u> !)	“Gaæþ a wyrd swa hio scel” (OE) = “Fate goes ever as it must” (MnE)
Middle English	1066-1485	Chaucer (from <u>CT</u>)	“Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote . . .” (ME) = “When that April with its sweet showers . . .” (MnE)
Early Modern English	1485-1800	Shakespeare (from <u>KL</u>)	“Sir, I loue you more than words can weild ye matter” (EMnE) = “Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter” (MnE)
Modern English	1800-present	Austen (from <u>P&P</u>)	It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

OE=Old English ME=Middle English EMnE=Early Modern English MnE=Modern English

English = ?

- Celtic (from 1700 or 400 B.C. to 55 B.C.) +
- Latin (from 55 B. C. to 410 A. D.) +
- German (from 410 A.D. to 1066 A.D.) +
- French (from 1066 A.D. to 1485 A.D.) =

OLD ENGLISH and MIDDLE ENGLISH

VERY DIFFICULT LANGUAGE, BUT ONE
PERFECT FOR LIMITLESS AND
BEAUTIFUL EXPRESSION

English is a Melting Pot of Indo-European Languages



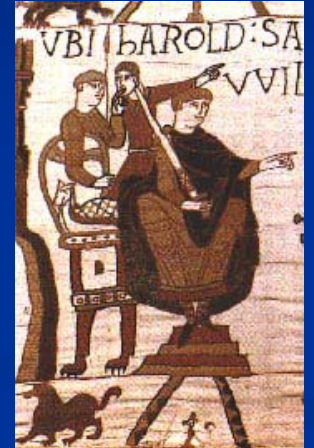
Celtic



Latin



German



French

Transition to Beowulf

- The major text we will read from this period is the epic Beowulf. It is the story of a Scandinavian (Geat) “thane” (warrior or knight) who comes to help a neighboring tribe, the Danes, who are being attacked by a monster.
- We study English history to understand the context of Beowulf, and we study Beowulf to understand the world which was Old England.
- According to Venerable Bede (an early English historian who lived in the eighth century), the Britons called the Romans for help when the Picts and Scots were attacking them (B.C.). Hundreds of years later, the Britons called the Saxons to help them when the Romans couldn't. The Saxons came “from parts beyond the sea” (qtd. in Pyles and Algeo 96).
- This journey of Germanic peoples to England “from parts beyond the sea” is the prototypical story for the first millennium of England's history. It formulates much of their cultural mindset and clearly influences their stories. Be sure to consider how it plays a role in Beowulf.

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