

Anglo-Saxon Background

499-1066 a.d.

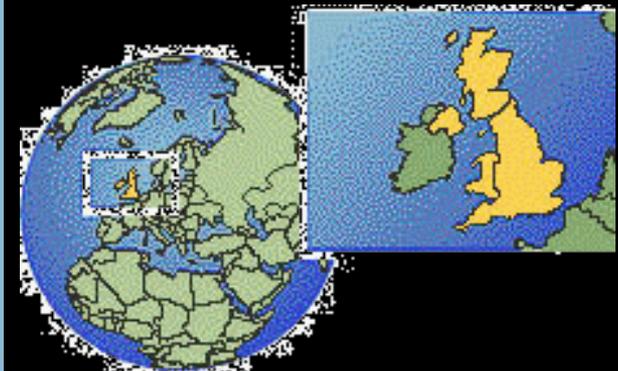
Known as “Dark Ages” because of the barbaric nature of the people.
Also called Middle Ages.

England



- Part of an island that includes Scotland and Wales (Ireland is a separate island to the west of England)
- As a whole the countries today are known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain (UK)
- Modern culture primarily the result of a series of invasions from many other European cultures/countries, Rome, France, the Vikings, Germanic tribes, et.al.
- Two of the most important things the US inherited from England: Language and Law (US Constitution based on democratic concept of the Magna Carta)

Modern Great Britain



People of England - Celts



- early settlers of England (Britons or Brythons)
- religion was a form of animism or spirit worship
- priests called druids (built Stonehenge)
- believed in a “Great Mother” who was primarily associated with nature
- male god(s) primarily associated with the tribe
- creators of King Arthur legend (the “once and future king”)

People of England - Romans



- earliest recorded invaders of England (55 BC – Julius Caesar)
- occupied England for about four centuries
- left behind:
 - Christianity (most important to development of English culture)
 - literacy (important for progress)
 - roads, public baths, walls, villas, etc.
 - no central government

People of England - Angles, Saxons, Jutes

- invaders from Germany and Denmark
 - Celts retreated primarily into Wales
 - Anglo-Saxon England still not unified; division and infighting left them open to constant invasion
 - Greatest Anglo-Saxon king was Alfred the Great (died 899 AD)
- began unification of Anglo-Saxon England into one country (through defense against the Vikings and language)
- began a running history called the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*
- has Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* translated into English



Anglo-Saxon Culture - Life



- dominated by warfare
- main responsibilities of leader were protection and maintaining law and order
- Most time spent in the Mead Hall
- success (material and fame) was achieved through loyalty to leader and prowess in battle
- Literature was a way to escape reality or to give a lord/thane immortality
- Thanes (men who fought for a king or lord)
- Believed in COMITATUS—allegiance between a lord and thane; code of honor
 - The lord leads his thanes and provides for them
 - Thanes never outshine their lord in battle
 - Thanes never desert their lord during battle

Anglo-Saxon Culture - Religion

- brought from Germany; mainly concerned with ethics
- God of weather (particularly thunder and lightning) was Thunor or Thor  
- God of death, poetry, magic was Woden or Odin
- days of our week named primarily after these Anglo-Saxon gods
- mythological guardian of grave and treasure was the dragon

Anglo-Saxon Culture - Literature

- was originally oral (passed down through songs and stories)
- storytellers/poets called scop
- poets held honored positions because they preserved fame; fame = life after death
- monasteries began recording Anglo-Saxon Literature
- writing done in Latin



Christianity

- began by Romans, but largely abandoned after Roman withdrawal
- re-establishment done mainly by Irish and European missionaries
 - most important was St. Augustine
 - founded cathedral at Canterbury
 - became first Archbishop of Canterbury
- Anglo-Saxon Christianity retained many pagan customs and beliefs and remained this way for many years



Timeline of British History

- 2000 b.c.—Stonehenge
- 1500-1000 b.c.—Celts arrive in England
- 55 b.c-410 a.d—Roman occupation
- 450—Jutes, Angles, Saxon arrive
- 597—St. Augustine brings Christian revival
- 500-600—Historical King Arthur in Celtic Wales
- 707—Beowulf written
- 787—Danish (Viking) raids
- 1066—The Battle of Hastings (Norman conquest)