

Britain's invasions an outline of British history

Prehistory

- The British Isles have been populated by human beings for hundreds of thousands of years (human beings have been living in Britain for about 750,000 years).
- For most of that time, they subsisted by gathering food (nuts, berries, leaves and fruit from wild sources) and by hunting.



Prehistoric people in a settlement, Swanscombe, Kent, circa 350,000 BC.

Continental Britain

- Britain was part of the continent of Europe until the end of the last Ice Age (from approximately 110,000 to 10,000 years ago).
- Over the millennia there were phases of extreme cold, when large areas of Britain were covered in ice, followed by warmer periods.
- Around 10,000 years ago, the latest ice age came to an end. Sea levels rose as the ice sheets melted, and
- Britain became separated from the European mainland shortly before 6000 BC.

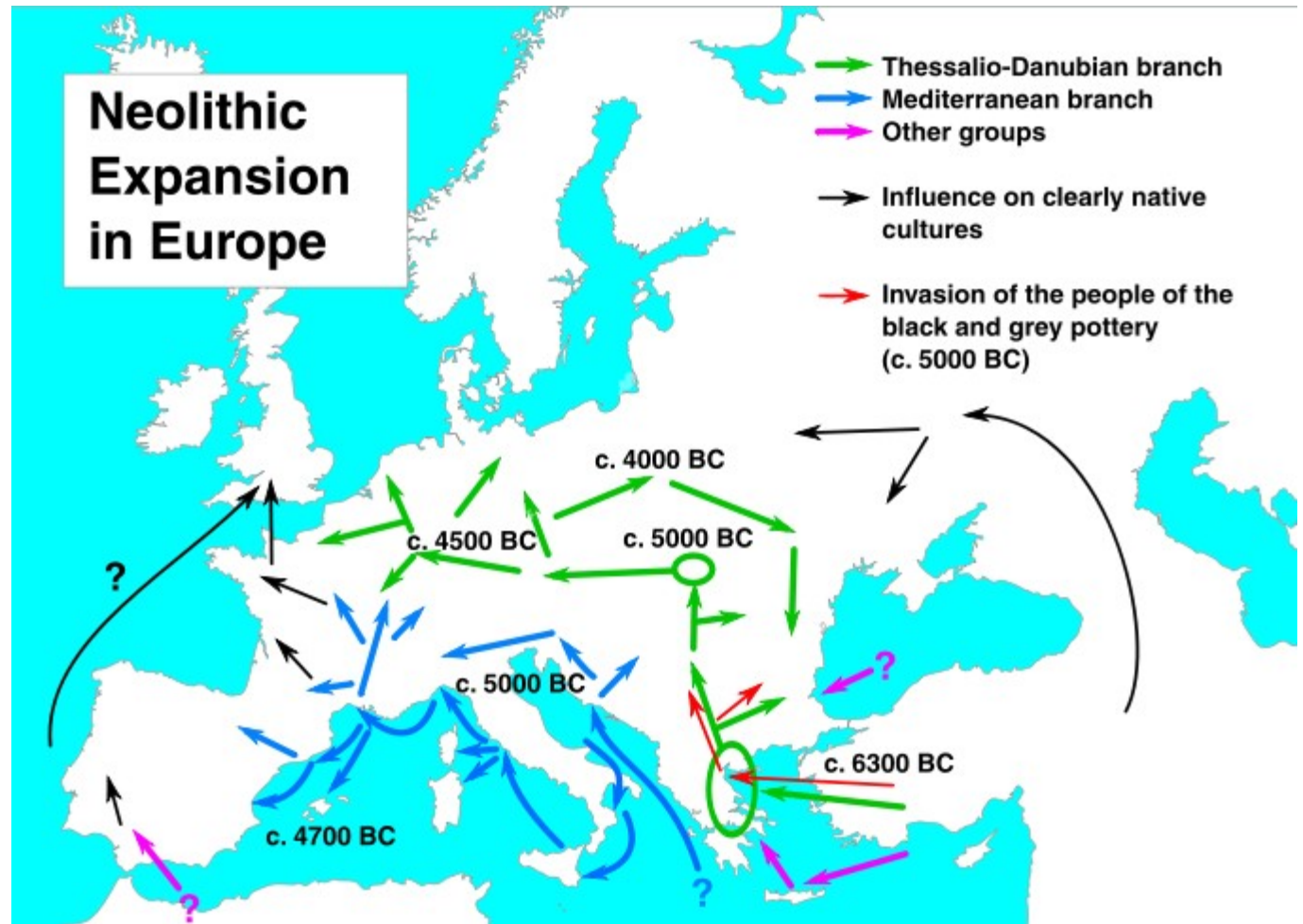
DOGGELAND



Doggerland is a name given by archaeologists and geologists to a former landmass in the southern North Sea that connected the island of Great Britain to mainland Europe during and after the last Ice Age, surviving until about 6,500 or 6,200 BCE and then gradually being flooded by rising sea levels. Geological surveys have suggested that Doggerland was a large area of dry land that stretched from Britain's east coast across to the present coast of the Netherlands and the western coasts of Germany and Denmark. Doggerland was probably a rich habitat with human habitation in the Mesolithic period

Iberians

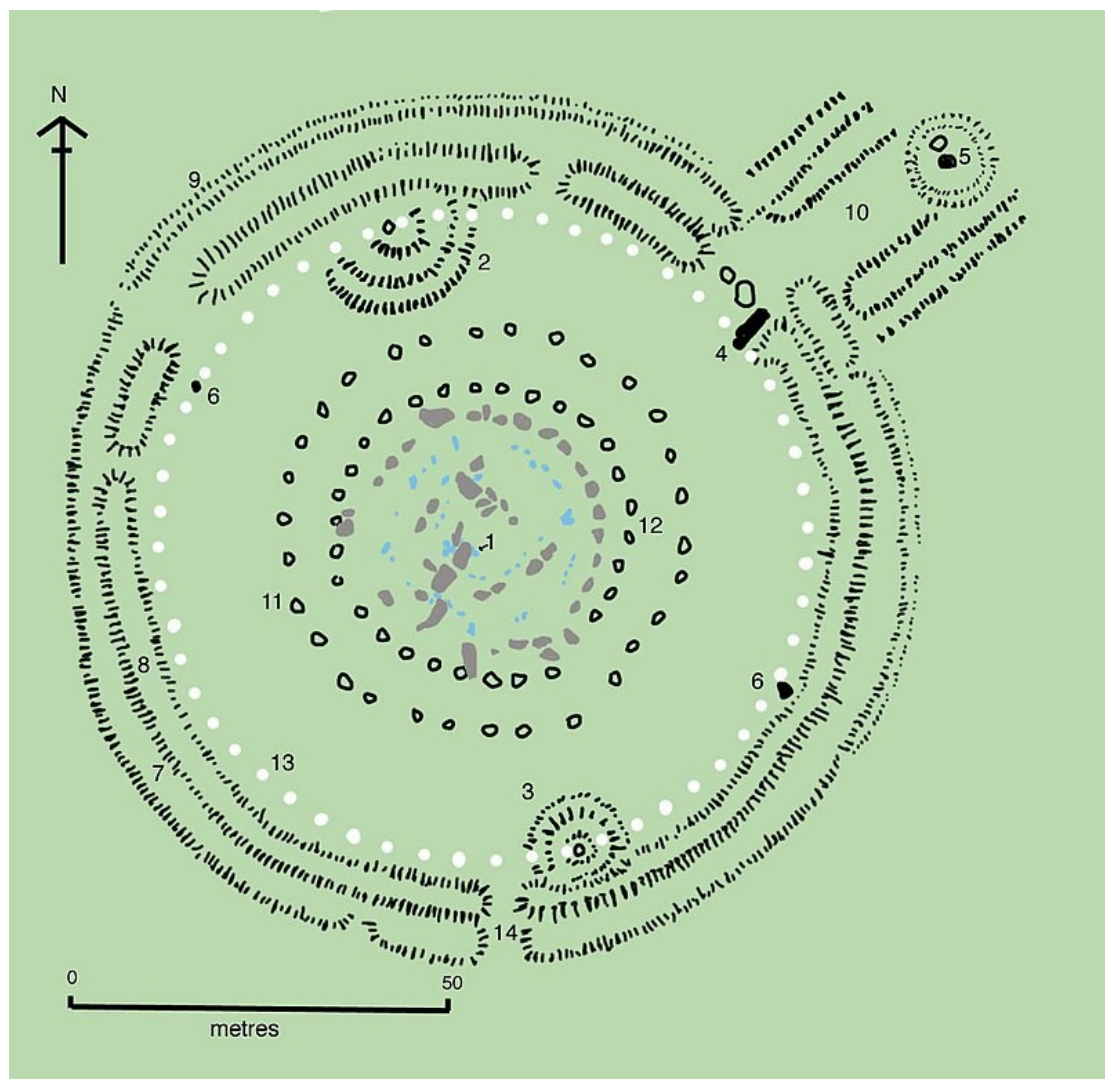
The first great civilisation came from the Mediterranean by way of the Atlantic coast of Portugal, Spain, and France (2500-2000 B.C.), and spread all along the west coast of Britain and in Ireland.



IBERIANS

- This people, called Iberians, left behind them great monuments in stone, or *megaliths* (such as Stonehenge) in Salisbury Plain similar to those (*nuraghi*) which can still be seen in Sardinia.
- ***Stonehenge*** was probably a place of worship and an astronomical observatory made of giant stones. Archaeologists have recently established that the stones were transported by sea from Wales.





Lo scrittore greco Diodoro Siculo (I secolo a.C.) potrebbe fare riferimento a Stonehenge in un passo della sua Bibliotheca historica. Citando Ecateo di Abdera, uno storico del IV secolo e "certi altri", Diodoro dice che "in una terra oltre i Celti" (cioè la Gallia) c'è "un'isola non più piccola della Sicilia" nel mare del nord chiamata Hyperborea, chiamata così perché è al di là del luogo di origine del vento del nord o Borea. Gli abitanti di questo luogo principalmente adorano Apollo, e c'è "sia una magnifica zona sacra di Apollo sia un tempio notevole che è adornato con molte offerte votive ed è di forma sferica"





The Celts' invasion

- Later invaders, belonging to the Celtic stock, reached Britain (from about 2000 B.C. onwards) coming from Central Europe and penetrating the island mainly from the south and east.
- These were the Britons, who were organised in warlike tribes, and were well advanced in craftsmanship (they were quite skilled at working iron) but rather backward in agriculture.
- Among the most influential Celts were the Druids, who administered religion, justice and the education of the young.
- The Celts worshipped the natural elements such as the Sun, the Moon, the trees and the rivers. Water was regarded as a holy element which generated life and was the door to the world after death.

The Celts

- The Celts were a group of peoples loosely tied by similar language, religion, and cultural expression.
- They were not centrally governed, and quite as happy to fight each other as any non-Celt.
- They were warriors, living for the glories of battle and plunder.
- They were also the people who brought iron working to the British Isles.

Celtic language

There was a written Celtic language, but it developed well into Christian times (there's evidence that Christianity started penetrating Britain at the end of the second century), so for much of Celtic history Celts relied on ...

- oral transmission of culture, primarily through the efforts of bards and poets.
- The role of bards and poets was tremendously important in Celtic society: much of what we know of their traditions comes to us today through the old tales and poems that were handed down orally for generations before eventually being written down.

Celtic Art

- No literary productions;
- A few artifacts

Some examples of Celtic art

1. **The Kirkburn Sword** (from a burial at Kirkburn, East Yorkshire, England), probably the finest Iron Age sword in Europe (300-200 BC);
2. The **Battersea Shield**, one of the most significant pieces of ancient Celtic art. Dated to 350-50 BC, it was found in the River Thames at Battersea Bridge, London, England.
3. **The Tara Brooch**, from Ireland, dates from the 8th century (about 700 AD). It is generally considered to be the most impressive of over 50 elaborate Irish brooches.
4. The **Wandsworth Shield** is a circular bronze Iron Age shield boss that was found in the River Thames at Wandsworth in London. (2nd century BC)



The Roman invasion

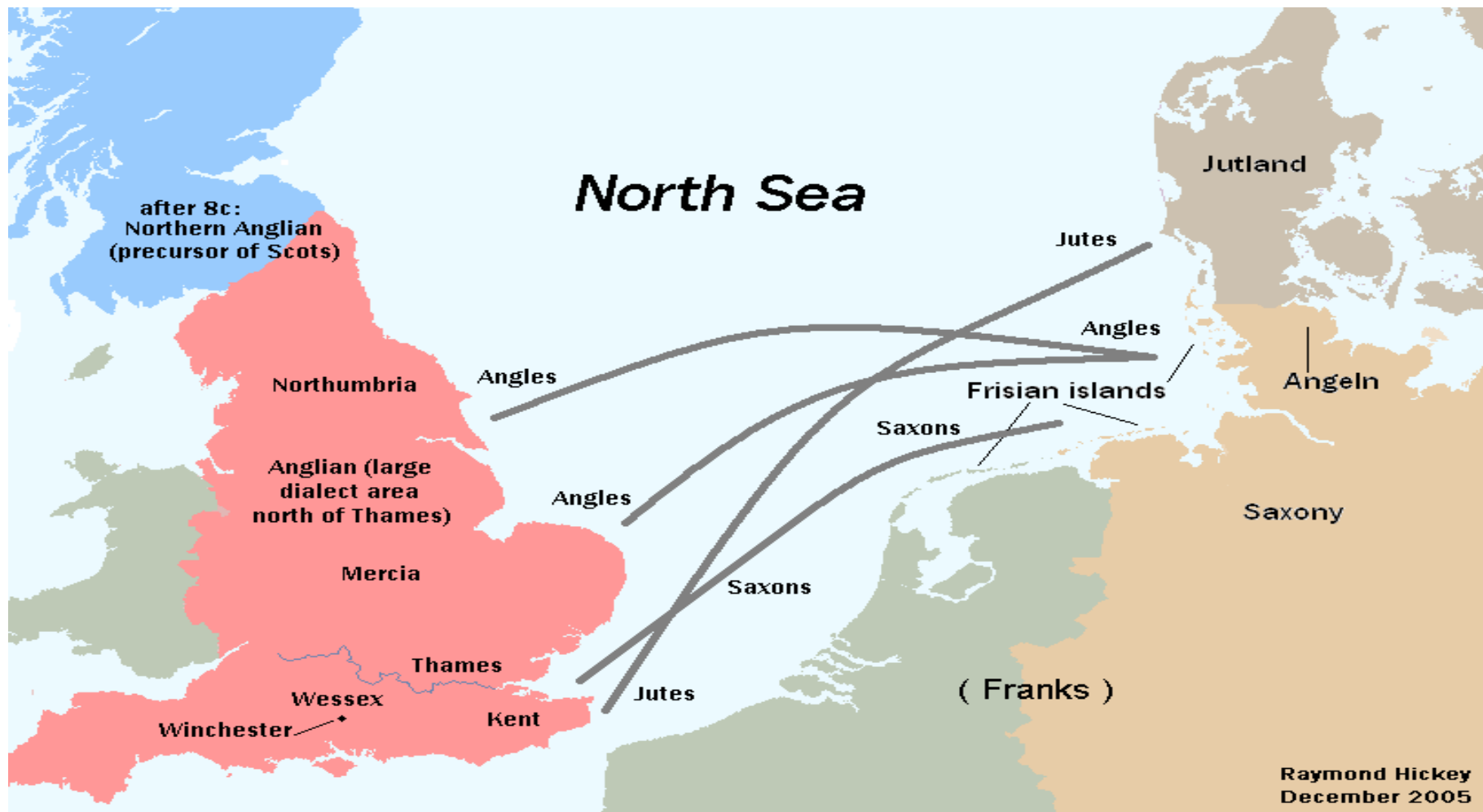
- Britain was invaded by the Romans in 55 B.C. by Gaius Julius Caesar who crossed the Channel with his legions , reached the Thames and reduced the inhabitants to the allegiance of Rome but ...
- the region was really conquered in the years 43-47 A.D., under emperor Claudius.
- The Romans brought their culture and language with them.
- They built towns and connected them with a radial system of roads;
- Many of the cities of today (London, Bath, Colchester, Gloucester , Chester) were founded by the Romans;
- All the streets were paved and drained with pavements for foot-passengers;
- The houses had central heating and often a water supply.

The Roman invasion

- There were three different kinds of towns:
- The “coloniae”, inhabited by Roman settlers;
- The “municipia”, whose inhabitants were given Roman citizenship;
- The “civitates”, which were the old Celtic tribal capitals.
- Many of these towns were originally army camps, and the Latin name, “castra”, has remained in many modern town names ending in “caster”, or “cester”, such as Lancaster, Gloucester, and Manchester.
- In 122 A.D. Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall (Vallum Hadriani) to be built to mark the border between the conquered Britons and the Scots and Picts of Caledonia (now Scotland) in the north.

The Anglo-Saxon invasion

- In the fourth century the Roman Empire began to collapse.
- By the end of the century the Roman legions had been withdrawn (383 A.D.) as they were needed to defend Italy itself, and the defence of the island from Germanic invaders was left in the end to the Romanised Britons who had no military training.
- The struggle for survival was carried on successfully for about 150 years and spawned the legend of King Arthur (probably a Romanised Briton, Artorius) and his knights of the Round Table.
- There is no historical evidence of its truth.
- In the 5th century three Germanic tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes came by sea. According to tradition their settlement started in 449 A.D.
- These tribes were racially akin; they had similar languages (Germanic dialects), religion (paganism), and literature (epic poems like “Beowulf”).



Routes taken across the North Sea by Germanic tribes in the 5c. The Jutes came from Jutland and settled in Kent. The Saxons came from the area of present-day (Lower) Saxony and settled largely south of the River Thames. The Angles came from the lower part of the the Jutland peninsula which is now Schleswig Holstein in Germany and settled in central and northern England.

The lines in the above map are very approximate. Many of the settlers may have crossed the North Sea from the area of present-day Belgium as this would have involved the shortest sea journey.

The Heptarchy

- The **Jutes** were probably the first to come to Britain (about 450).
- They founded the kingdom of *Kent*.
- The **Saxons** followed and established the kingdoms of *Sussex* (South Saxons), *Wessex* (West Saxons), *Essex* (*East Saxons*) and *Mercia*;
- The **Angles** founded *East Anglia* and *Northumbria* and gave their name to the country. (*England* means “land of the Angles”).
- The Britons either became serfs of the conquerors or fled to the mountainous west, where they resisted for over 150 years. They were called Welsh (that is, “strangers”) by the Anglo-Saxons.
- The seven kingdoms were often at war with each other, until the whole country was united under Egbert, king of *Wessex*. (802-839).



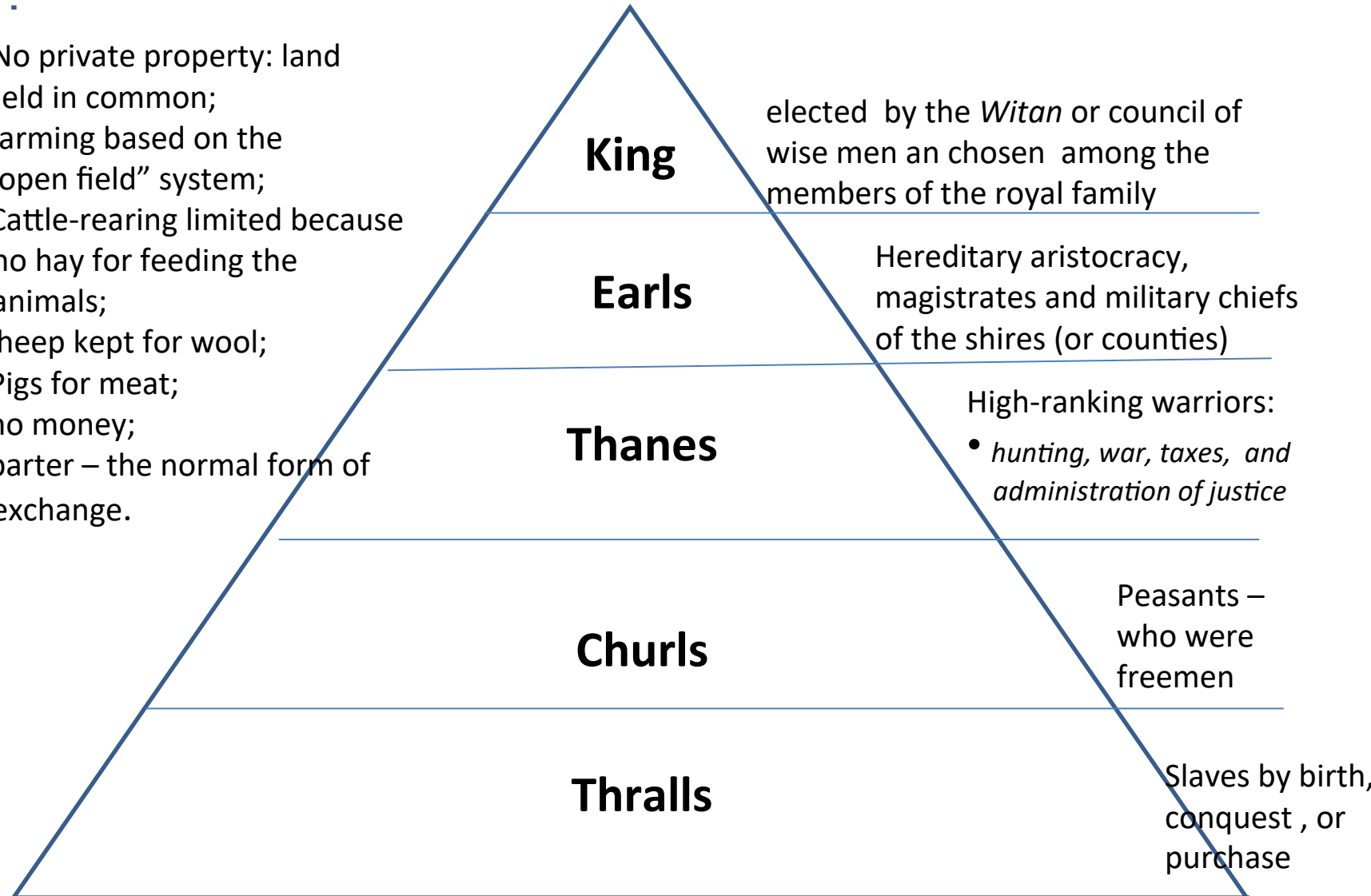
Ecgbert (771-839) King of Wessex. Incorporated into the kingdom Kent, Sussex

Aethelwulf (839-858) – defeated Vikings

Alfred the Great (871-899) Youngest son, became king after the death of his brother Aethelred. Defeated Vikings at the Battle of Edington in 878 and made an agreement, which brought to the establishing of Danelaw in Northern England under King Guthrun who converted to Christianity.

Anglo-Saxon society

- No private property: land held in common;
- farming based on the “open field” system;
- Cattle-rearing limited because no hay for feeding the animals;
- Sheep kept for wool;
- Pigs for meat;
- no money;
- barter – the normal form of exchange.



Anglo-Saxon religion

- The most important deities of the Anglo-Saxons were:
- **Tiw**, the god of war;
- **Woden**, king of the gods, the god of death and battle;
- **Thor**, the god of thunder and lightening, the strongest of gods;
- Their names are commemorated in the names of three days of the week: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.
- Friday, instead, commemorates **Frig**, the bride of Woden, and goddess of love, marriage and sexuality.



Earliest English written records

The first English written texts are in the language used by Anglo-Saxon invaders, the runes.

There is a limited corpus of runic inscriptions from the 5th to 7th centuries, but the oldest coherent texts are to be found in “Franks Casket” and date to the 8th century.



Front panel of the Franks (Ruthwell) casket, the scenes are both pagan and Christian. The inscription around the margins is made up of runes, letters of an old alphabet used by Germans.

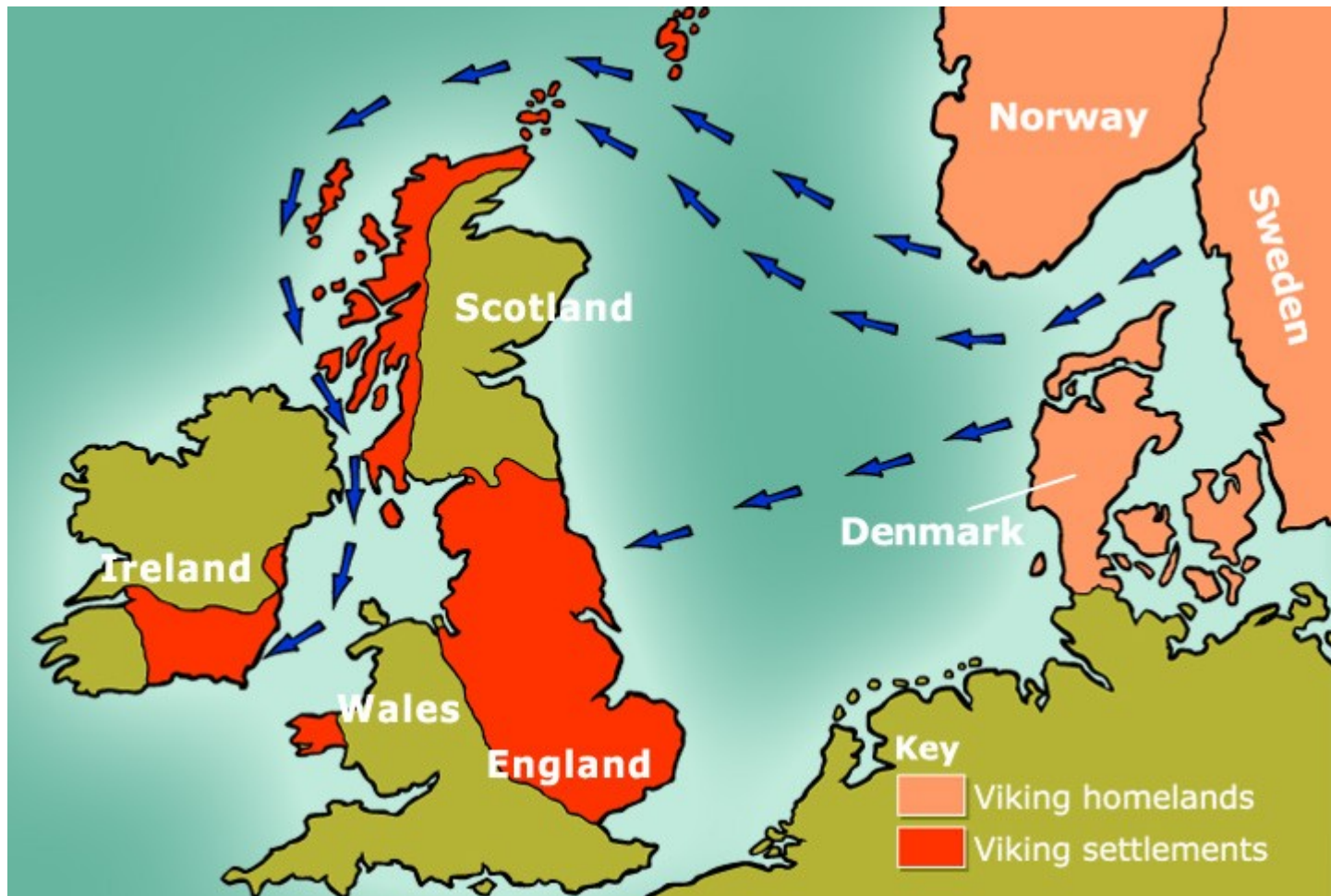
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Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity

- In 597, during the period of Anglo-Saxon power, Pope Gregory I (Gregory the Great), sent Augustine to bring Christianity to England.
- However, it was the Celtic monks, from small communities in Wales and Ireland, who brought Christianity to common people.
- The monasteries became important centres of culture where Latin was introduced once again.
- The conversion of the English to Christianity was a very important event, because England thus re-established contact with Latin civilisation.

Danish raids AD 787-865

- In AD 787 three Viking long ships landed in southern England.
- In AD 793 the famous monastery on the island of Lindisfarne in northern England was attacked by Vikings. Many monks and ordinary people were killed, others were taken as slaves and the monastery was plundered.
- Like the Anglo-Saxons had done centuries before , Scandinavian invaders (Danes and Northmen), initially did not actually “invade” England. They plundered the villages and monasteries on
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King Ecbert

- During this period Ecgbert (771-839) was King of Wessex. Ecgbert had been educated in Frankia (France) and was wise and skillful leader.
- He fought the Scandinavians many times, most notably in the battle of Carhampton (836) although the outcome is not clear
- He incorporated into the Wessex the minor kingdoms of Essex, Sussex and Kent

Battle of Carhampton (836)

- Ms A (Parker): Her gefeaht Ecgbryht cyning wiþ .xxxv. sciphlæsta æt Carrum 7 þær wearþ micel wēl geslægen, 7 þa Denescan ahton wēlstowe gewald
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- ‘Here fought King Egbert with 35 ‘shiploads’ æt Carrum and there was great slaughter, and the Danes had the place of slaughter’ (meaning of phrase somewhat disputed as to whether it indicates defeat or victory).

Scandinavian invasion I:

The Great Heathen Army

- 865 Arrival of Great Heathen Army (led Halfdan, and Ubba). Northumbria conquered
- 866 East Anglia is conquered and king Edmund (the Martyr) killed
- 870 Army splits. Ubba goes to Northumbria and then to Ireland, Ivar to Scotland, Halfdan remains in East Anglia.
- 870 Ivar sacks Dumbarton with Olaf from Dublin and retires to Scandinavia



Scandinavian invasion II

Invasion of Wessex

- 870 Halfdan invades Wessex and wins minor battle at Reading
- 871 Halfdan defeated by king Aethelred and his brother Alfred at the battle of Ashworth
- Scandinavian reinforcements arrive from overseas led by Guthrun
- Fighting continues. Aethelred dies. Alfred pays for peace. Halfdan retires to Northumbria and begins actual colonization. Guthrun retires to East Anglia.

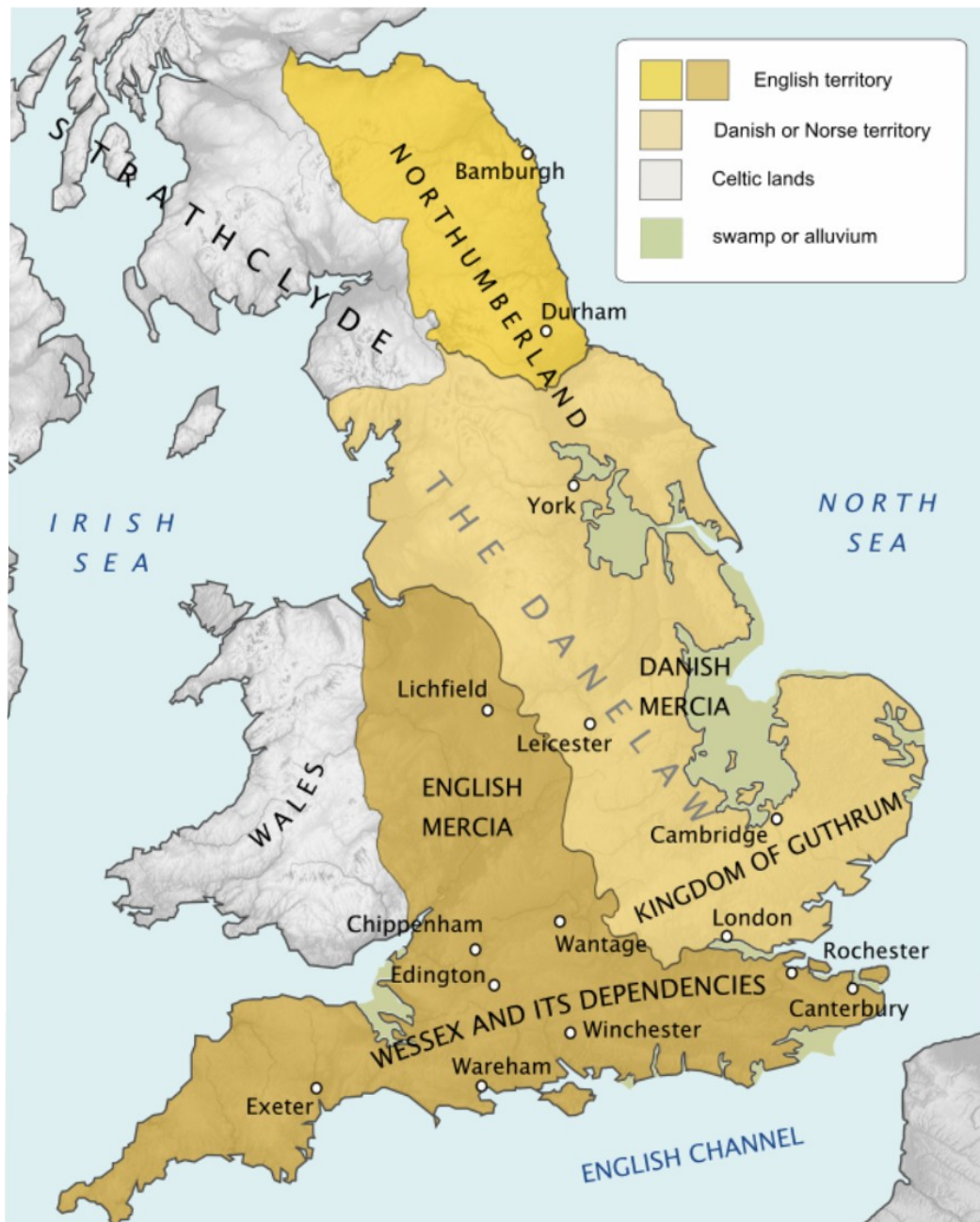
Scandinavian Invasion III: Ethandun and Danelaw

- 874 Halfdan and Guthrum defeat Burgdred in Mercia and establish Ceowulf as puppet king (Wessex is alone)
- 875 Raids on all sides on Wessex
- 876 Guthrum invades. Ubba arrives with 4000 ships from Ireland but fleet is semi-destroyed by freak storm.
- Surprise attack on Chippenham, Alfred escapes to the marshes in Somerset

Scandinavian Invasion IV

Ethandun and Danelaw

- 878 Ubba returns to join Guthrun but is defeated and killed at the battle of Cynwyd by Odda, ealderman of Alfred
- Alfred calls the fyrds from all the remaining counties and waits at Ecbert's Stone. Then they march on Ethandun
- Battle of Ethandun: Guthrun defeated and escapes to Chipenhamn
- Treaty of Wedmore: Essex extended to part of Mercia, the rest is Danelaw with Guthrun as king, who converts to Christianity



- England after the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum

Alfred the Great

- After making peace with the Danes, Alfred
- reorganized his kingdom,
- had the first English fleet built,
- educated himself and his people:
 - he ordered the translation of various Latin works into Anglo-Saxon and encouraged the writing of a history of England, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,
 - he encouraged education as a way of promoting strength and unity.



Alfred's descendants

Kingdom of England

- his successors managed to win back from the Danes the lands of the Danelaw and united the whole country again under the leadership of Wessex.
- A second wave of Danish invasions swept away their work around the year 1000 and, after vain attempts, England became part of the Scandinavian Empire and was ruled by Danish kings for 25 years.
- One of them Canute (1016-1035) was a man of great wisdom and ability.

899 Alfred dies and is succeeded by his son Edward I, the Elder (899-924) who extends kingdom up to the Humber

924 Succeeded by his son Athelstan (924-940) who extends kingdom beyond the Humber conquering Danelaw

940 Succeeded by his nephew Edgar (940-975) who is recognized king of England and has a peaceful reign

975 Succeeded by his son Edward the Martyr (975-978) killed in a plot

978 Ethelred the Unred (978-991 and 1014-1016) his younger brother nominated king

– New Scandinavian raids against England

991 Battle of Maldon – Sweyn proclaimed king. Ethelred escapes to Normandy.

1014 Sweyn dies. Ethelred recalled

1016 After defeating Ethelred's son Edmund, Sweyn's son Cnut (Canute) becomes king

1036 Canute dies succeeded by Hardicanute

1042 Hardincanute dies Edward the Confessor recalled from Normandy

Canute

- Canute was generally remembered as a **wise** and **successful king** of **England**, although this view may in part be attributed to his **good treatment of the Church**, that , in return for it, wrote positively of him in its historical records.
- Accordingly, we hear of him, even today, as a religious man, despite the fact that he was in a sinful relationship, with two wives, and treated his opponents inhumanely.
- In an effort to reconcile himself with the Roman Church, Canute repaired all the English churches and monasteries that had been victims of Viking plunder and refilled their coffers. He also built new churches and was an active patron of monastic communities.
- It is difficult to ascertain whether his attitude towards the Church derived from deep religious devotion or was merely a means to reinforce the power of his regime on the people.

Canute's achievements

- He was **the first king to successfully rule over a truly united realm of England**, free from internal and external conflicts and unrest.
- He also ruled the Viking homelands (Denmark, Norway and part of Sweden).
- He was able to protect England against attacks, maintaining **twenty years of peace** during which **trade, Anglo-Scandinavian art and Christianity flourished**.
- Canute had **great respect for the old English laws**, to which he brought a keen **sense of justice and a regard for individual rights**.
- Canute died in November 1035 at about 40 years of age.
- The empire he built rapidly disintegrated into its various components; **his direct heirs ruled for only a few years** (Harthacnut, son of Canute, was the last Danish king to rule England – he died suddenly in 1042) before the lands he had conquered reverted to the old royal lines.

The last Saxon kings

- When the Danish dynasty came to a end, Edward the Confessor, the last Saxon king of the line of Alfred the Great, was recalled from Normandy, where he lived in exile, and made king (1042)
- Initially, the English were happy to have an English king on the throne once again but ...
- Edward, whose mother was a Norman and who had been brought up in Normandy, appointed a number of Normans to high positions in the church and the state. Moreover, he gave privileges to Norman traders so there were lots of tension, and fights between Edward and Godfred, earl of Wessex
- on Edward's death, the King's Council (the Witan) chose Edward's brother-in-law, Harold son of Godfred as King.

William the Conqueror

- William, Duke of Normandy and a distant cousin of Edward the Confessor, argued that Edward the Confessor had previously promised the throne to him, and that Harold had sworn to support William's claim.
- To defend his right to the English throne, William built a large fleet and invaded England in September 1066.
- He took seven months to prepare his invasion force, using some 600 transport ships to carry around 7,000 men (including 2,000-3,000 cavalry) across the Channel.
- William defeated and killed Harold at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066.
- On Christmas Day 1066, he was crowned king in Westminster Abbey.
- A Norman aristocracy became the new governing class and many members of the native English elite, including bishops, were replaced with Normans.

The Bayeux Tapestry

- The main events of the Norman conquest of England are depicted in the **Bayeux Tapestry***
- An **embroidered cloth** – not an actual tapestry – nearly **70 metres** (230 ft) **long**.
- The tapestry consists of some **fifty scenes** with Latin captions, **embroidered on linen with coloured woollen yarns**.
- it was **probably commissioned by Bishop Odo**, William's half brother, and **made in England** – not Bayeux—in the **1070s**.

* Tapestry = a large piece of heavy cloth on which coloured threads are woven to produce a picture, pattern etc.

The Normans

- The Normans were of the same race and origin as the Danes and the Northmen, but had become completely French in customs and language.
- They introduced to England the Feudal system and a higher civilisation from France.
- The Norman army consisted of a few thousands knights. This small minority –better armed, trained and organised than the Saxons conquered and held down a population of about one million and a half.
- The Normans, a sort of military caste, formed the new governing class, while the English were completely excluded from power for over three centuries, and their possessions confiscated.

The Feudal system

- All the conquered lands belonged to the King.
- He kept the best lands, the towns, and forests and distributed the rest to his Normans followers, who thus became king's tenants.
- The most important of them were the barons, called tenants-in-chief .
- Barons were responsible for providing knights and soldiers for the king's army.
- Other tenants-in-chief were the bishops and the abbots.
- Tenants-in-chief generally built castles to demonstrate and keep their power.

The Feudal system

- The tenants-in-chief could sub-let their lands to lesser tenants (knights) in return for their services.
- The military service provided by the Barons and knights and
- the agricultural labour given by peasants, who belonged to the lands of their tenants,
- guaranteed security and food, and so peace and prosperity.

The Domesday Book

- A manuscripts written in Latin in 1086
- A complete survey of the economic life of the country.
- The survey, which had been ordered by William, had two main objectives:
 1. To provide the necessary information for collecting the “geld”, i.e. the property tax;
 2. To give the king a detailed understanding of the extent and distribution of the wealth of his tenants.
- the judgement of the Domesday assessors was final—whatever the book said about who held the material wealth or what it was worth was the law, and there was no appeal.

The Bayeux Tapestry

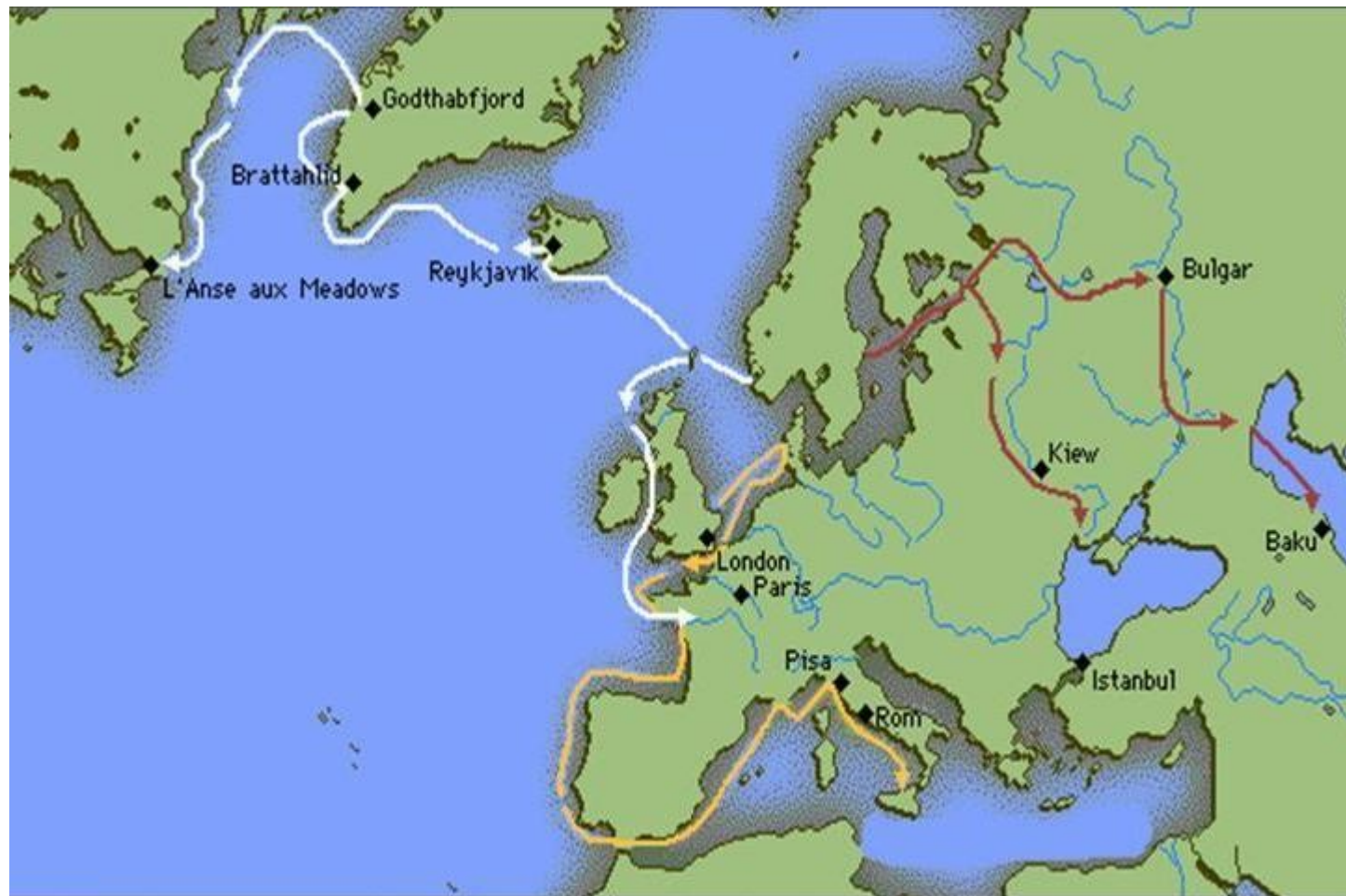


Battle of Hastings

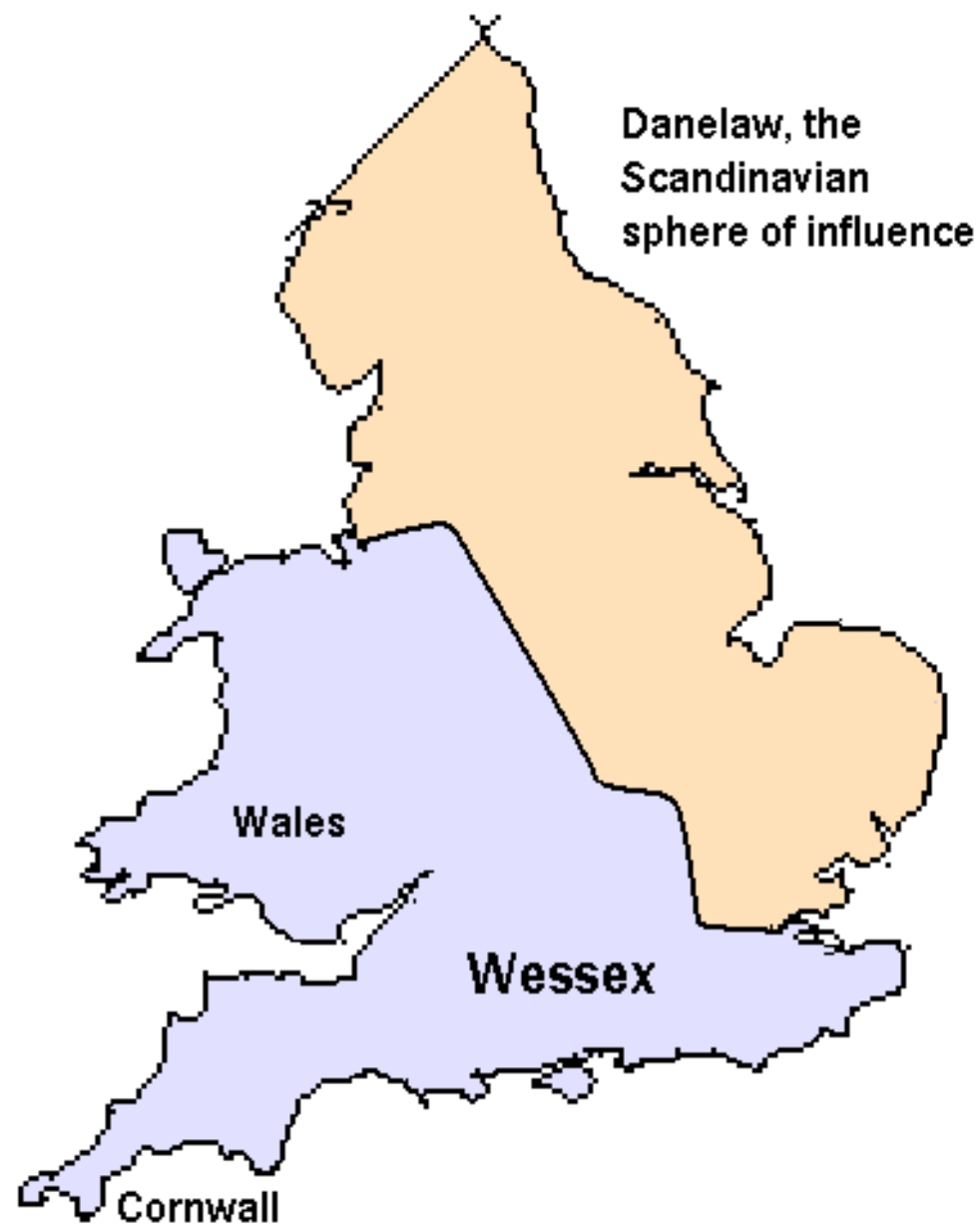
The Bayeux Tapestry

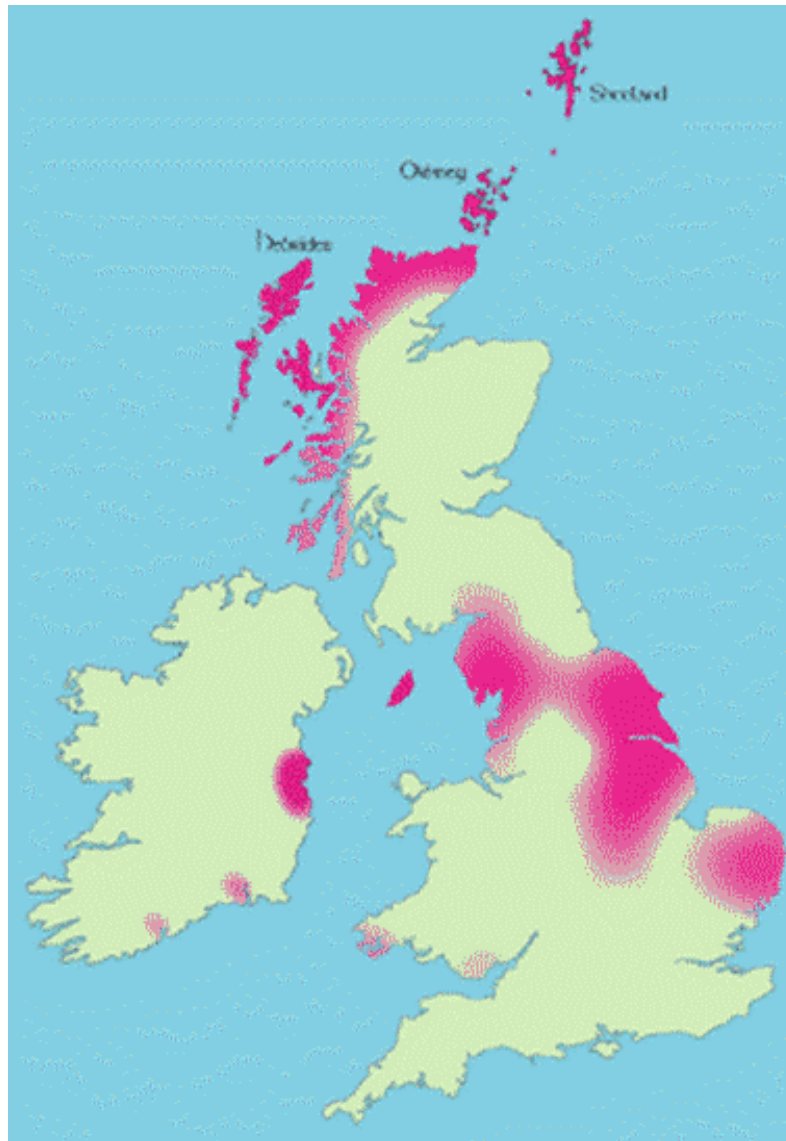


Harold's death



Main Viking expansion routes from the 8th to the 11th centuries





Areas of Scandinavian settlement in Britain and Ireland

