

Anglo-Saxon Invasions

The Roman occupation of Britain left little mark on the country as most of what they did vanished when they left. The collapse of Roman Britain left an opening for the influx of Germanic migrants from across the Channel. It is with the invasion of the Angles and Saxons that the history of England and the identity of the English nation began. The language and institutions came from the Saxons. The Anglo-Saxons were in the East, the Celts in the North, and the Frisians in the West.

These invaders came from northern Germany, Denmark, and northern Holland beginning about the middle of the fourth century. Over the next century and a half, Anglo-Saxons took control of most of Britain, although they never conquered Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall. They divided the country into kingdoms, each with its own royal family. The stronger kingdoms often took control of the weaker kingdoms. The Saxons used the term "king" (cyning) which meant tribal chieftain to identify their leaders. This was the beginning of the eventual unity of England. Christianity appeared in 597, which also helped in the unification.

The settlers brought with them an extensive body of lore, including verified laws as well as historical and legendary narratives. Some of the earliest could use a music alphabet to carve brief messages, mostly on wooden sticks, but writing was not used for fledgling historical or literary material until the conversion to Christianity, when manuscript technology entered from Rome and Ireland. Anglo-Saxons would rule England until 1066.

Critical-Thinking Question:
What geographical factors may have made England vulnerable to invasion?

Byzantine Empire to 565

During the reign of Justinian I (483-527), the Eastern Empire had its greatest era of expansion. Justinian was a dominant leader in the 5th century. It was one of the traditional duties of the emperor to guard the territory he had recovered, but this was not enough for Justinian. If the empire were to be restored to its ancient glory, he would have to recover the western provinces as well. The loss of territory in the western Mediterranean had been a severe blow to the empire's prosperity. Recovery of these markets would mean a great deal. The food supplies that could be obtained from the fertile lands of North Africa would be a major addition to the limited production of the western Mediterranean.

Justinian attempted to reconquer the West from the Germanic tribes that had divided the empire. His army invaded Italy in 527 to oust the Ostrogoths who had controlled the peninsula since the late 4th century. The Ostrogoths were finally eliminated in 553. Then he set his sights on the recovery of the western provinces. The army's strength was limited. A campaign in the West could be launched only if the Persian Empire were at least temporarily secure. This happened four years after Justinian's death in 527. Justinian's army reconquered Persia after had concluded with a revolution among the Sassanid in Carthage. Justinian saw an opportunity for intervention in Africa.

The African expedition sailed from Constantinople in 537 CE. Under the leadership of General Belisarius, the Vandals were defeated and their cities were taken. Justinian's attempt to reconquer met only limited success. After Justinian's death, much of the reclaimed territory was back in the hands of barbarians.

Critical-Thinking Question:
What are the disadvantages of having an empire spread over as large a territory as Justinian's?

Empire of Charlemagne 768-814

In 768, he and his cousin, St. Arnulf, and Carloman (Frank) an earlier emperor called the 10th Roman Empire in his book. Carloman, a member of the Carolingian dynasty, was the first emperor to be crowned in the West. He was crowned in 768 in Aachen, the site of Charlemagne's palace. Charlemagne's empire was the largest in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. It was the only empire in Europe to be ruled by a single monarch. Charlemagne's empire was the largest in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. It was the only empire in Europe to be ruled by a single monarch. Charlemagne's empire was the largest in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. It was the only empire in Europe to be ruled by a single monarch.

Charlemagne had a unique system of governance. He divided his empire into counties, each with its own ruler. The rulers were appointed by Charlemagne and were responsible for the collection of taxes and the maintenance of the law. Charlemagne also had a system of royal envoys, called missi dominici, who traveled throughout the empire to report on the activities of the local rulers. Charlemagne's empire was the largest in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. It was the only empire in Europe to be ruled by a single monarch.

Critical-Thinking Question:
Compare this map to a map of modern Europe. Describe three significant changes.

Vikings

In 1066, the first invasion date in English history. Prior to 1066, England was a territory divided into warring petty kingdoms. After 1066, a united England emerged. The Normans, a mix of French and Viking, invaded England in 1066. They defeated the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Hastings. The Normans introduced feudalism to England, a system of land for service. The Normans also introduced the concept of a king who was elected by his nobles. The Normans also introduced the concept of a king who was elected by his nobles.

The Vikings were a people of many different backgrounds. They were a mix of Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic. They were known for their seafaring skills and their raiding parties. The Vikings invaded the British Isles, France, and the Mediterranean. They were a mix of Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic. They were known for their seafaring skills and their raiding parties. The Vikings invaded the British Isles, France, and the Mediterranean. They were a mix of Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic. They were known for their seafaring skills and their raiding parties.

Critical-Thinking Question:
How did the Carolingian political situation contribute to Viking invasions?

The Germanic World

The Western Roman Empire gradually lost control of more and more territory to tribes of Germanic people identified by the Romans as barbarians. In the third century, the Franks moved into Gaul. The Goths threatened the Eastern Roman Empire. In the fourth century, the barbarians themselves were threatened by the Huns, a warlike people originating in central Asia.

To escape the Huns, many Germanic people settled on Roman land. Rebellions occurred with the barbarians winning a major victory over the Eastern Roman Empire in 378 CE. This opening the way for greater barbarian infiltration of the Western Empire. The Visigoths moved into Greece and, led by Alaric, sacked Rome in 410 CE.

The greatest military threat to Rome came from the Huns. As they spread from central Asia, they threatened the Germanic barbarians who were forced into contact and finally conflict with the Romans. In 410 CE, the Huns, under the command of Attila, declared war on the Western Roman Empire. An alliance of the Franks, Visigoths, and Romans was able to defeat the Huns at Troyes. The Huns, however, continued to plunder throughout southern Europe until the death of Attila in 453 CE.

The German barbarian Odoacer deposed the last Roman emperor in 476 CE. A date now referenced as the end of the Western Roman Empire.

Critical-Thinking Question:
What factors may account for the migration of Germanic tribes?

Vikings

In the 8th century, Vikings, or Norwegians, sailed west of Scandinavia in small longships throughout Europe. Their longships were equipped with oars and sails, combined with their sailing skills, allowed them to cross open seas or sail up shallow rivers. The Vikings began attacking lands in modern-day England, Ireland, and Scotland. They entered as far as Greenland in the west and Kiev in the east. There are archaeological grounds to indicate that a settlement had been established in Newfoundland in 1000. The Vikings traveled coastal regions of France and Spain for nearly two hundred years. The name of the French word for Northerners. In the east, the Vikings pushed across the Baltic into Russia and south as far as Constantinople.

The Norwegian Vikings settled the islands of the North Atlantic, the Shetlands, and Iceland, and Greenland one hundred years later. They established a base on the hill of Man and founded Dublin in Ireland.

The most populous were the Danish settlements in Southern and Eastern England. Danish established about 470. They were administered according to Danish law. As for language and religion, the Danes gradually assimilated into the English surroundings and became Christian. They married into local Christian families in Ireland and Russia.

In the 10th century, the Vikings ended diminished due to renewed German pressure on Denmark. In 1012, Sweyn's son Knud (Cnut the Great) was elected king of England by the Angles, Saxons, and Danes. He pacified the Vikings by recognizing their trade, religion, and law and became the first Christian ruler of Denmark. His son ruled until the Atlantic islands and became the first Christian ruler of Norway. He died in 1035.

Critical-Thinking Question:
What physical characteristics did the Viking homelands have that caused them to seek other territory?