

Celtic Invasion/ Roman Invasion/ Anglo Saxon Invasion

I- The Celtic Invasion (700 BC - 55 BC):

Around 700 BC, another group of people began to arrive. Many of them were tall and had fair or red hair and blue eyes. These were the Celts, who probably came from central Europe or further east from southern Russia and had moved slowly westward in earlier centuries. They had spread out across Spain, France, and a number of countries in Europe's "Alpine" region.

The Celts were technically advanced. They knew how to work with iron and could make better weapons than the people who used bronze. It is possible that they drove many of the older inhabitants westward into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

The Celts are important in British history because they are the ancestors of many of the people in Highland, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall today. Our understanding of the Celts is limited and incomplete. It is still uncertain whether the Celts invaded Britain or came peacefully as a result of the lively trade with Europe from about 750 BC. **The Celtic tribes continued the same kind of agriculture** as the Bronze Age people before them. But their use of iron technology and their introduction of more advanced plowing methods made it possible for them to farm heavier soils.

The Celts did not leave behind written accounts. Instead, they maintained an oral tradition of learning. In the Celtic world, learning things by heart was deemed to be a great virtue. **Archaeologists have found remnants of inscriptions in languages such as Greek and Latin** at Celtic settlements, however. Most of the written accounts of the Celts came from Greek and Roman sources who were naturally biased since they perceived the Celts as the enemy. This explains why numerous documents assert that the Celts were primitive savages, a claim that is both blatantly false and uncertain. In contrast, the Celts were able to create a sophisticated, advanced trading network before the Romans themselves achieved such a feat.

The Celts developed iron weapons before their rivals. This is one of the main reasons why they were able to create an empire of sorts in Europe prior to their encounters with the Romans. **They were also excellent warriors** and liked to fight. They were actually highly trained and more than capable of defeating any army they encountered. **One of the reasons the Celts ultimately lost to the Romans was their lack of unity, not their lack of combat training.** It was common for Celts tribes to fight among themselves, and this enabled the unified Romans to band together and defeat a dangerous foe (enemy).

✓ Remember:

The Celts were indeed brave warriors, but also outstanding thinkers, inventors, builders, and creators. The main thing they lacked was unity, and this would ultimately cause their downfall.

II- The Roman Invasion (55 BC- 5th Century AD):

1- A Brief Background: The name "Britain" comes from the word "Pretani," the Greco-Roman word for the inhabitants of Britain. The Romans mispronounced the word and named the island "Britannia."

The Romans invaded Britain because the British Celts were collaborating with the Celts of Gaul to oppose them. The British Celts were giving them food and allowing them to hide in Britain. There was another reason. By using cattle to pull their plough, the Celts were able to cultivate richer, and heavier land. **Under the Celts, Britain had become an important food producer because of its mild climate.** It now exported corn and animals, as well as hunting dogs and slaves, to the European mainland. **The Romans could utilize British food to fuel their own army's battle against Gaul.**

The Romans brought the skills of reading and writing to Britain. The written word was important for spreading ideas and for establishing power. While the Celtic peasantry remained illiterate and only Celtic-speaking, a number of town dwellers (residents) spoke Latin and Greek with ease, and the richer landowners in the country almost certainly used Latin. **But Latin completely disappeared both in its spoken and written forms when the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain in the 5th century AD.** Britain was probably more literate under the Romans than it was to be again until the 15th century.

2- The Invasion: Julius Caesar first arrived in Britain in 55 BC, but it wasn't until nearly a century later, in **AD 43, under Emperor Claudius, that a Roman army actually occupied the island. Romans had little difficulty to conquer Britain because they had a well-trained army, and because the Celtic tribes fought among themselves only.** The Romans established a Romano-British culture across the southern half of Britain, from the River Humber to the River Severn. This part of Britain was inside the empire. The upland areas beyond were under Roman control but remained undeveloped. The towns of York, Chester, and Caerleon in the western peninsula of Britain, later known as Wales, kept watch over these areas. A Roman legion of about 7000 men held each of these towns. The total Roman army in Britain was about 40.000 men.

The Romans could not conquer "Caledonia", as they called Scotland, although they spent over a century trying to do so. At last, they built a strong wall along the northern border, named after the Emperor Hadrian who planned it. At the time, **Hadrian's wall** was simply intended to keep out the raiders from the north. But it also marked the border between the two later countries, England and Scotland.

Roman control of Britain came to an end as the empire began to collapse. The first signs were the attacks by Celts of Caledonia in AD 367. The Roman legions found it difficult to stop the raiders from crossing Hadrian's wall. The same was happening on the European mainland as Germanic groups, Saxons, and Franks, began to raid the coast of Gaul. **In AD 409 Rome pulled its last soldiers out of Britain** and the Romano-British (the Romanized Celts) were left to fight alone against the Scots, the Irish and Saxon raiders from Germany. The following year Rome itself fell to raiders. When Britain called to Rome for **help** against the raiders from Saxon Germany in the mid-fifth century, **no answer came.**

III- The Anglo-Saxon Invasion (5th -11th cc.):

Anglo-Saxons (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) were Germanic tribes living in today's northern Germany and Denmark. They had already started attacking the south coast of Britain in the 3rd century, but in the 5th century they conquered and settled the whole of today's England. They destroyed the Romano-British Civilization, and established their own agricultural system. In the course of the 6th century, a number of rather unstable kingdoms arose in England. Four of them successively held supremacy over the others: **Kent, Northumbria, Mercia, and finally Wessex.**

England was finally united under the kings of Wessex in the 10th century. **Danish Vikings** had conquered a large part of north-eastern England and created a confederation of Scandinavian communities called **Danelaw** (878-975) there. King **Alfred the Great** of Wessex (871-c.900) defeated the Danes and his successors reconquered the Danelaw in the 10th century. However, a new Danish invasion shattered England in 978: in 1016, **Canute** (1016-35), the King of Denmark and Norway, became the first king of a fully united England. His Scandinavian Empire, however, broke up under his incompetent successors and the Saxon heir, **Edward the Confessor** (1042-66), was restored to the throne of England.

Edward unwittingly prepared the way for the Norman Conquest: he introduced Norman nobles into high state offices and left behind a disputed succession. After his death, **Harold**, son of the mightiest English nobleman, was chosen to become king. But the Duke of Normandy and the King of Norway claimed the

English throne too, and both of them attacked England almost simultaneously in 1066. Harold defeated the Norsemen, but he was himself defeated and killed in the **battle of Hastings** in October 1066 by William of Normandy, who succeeded him on the English throne.

✚ *The Map: The Anglo-Saxons Invasion and the Kingdoms they established.*



Works Cited:

McDowall, David. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Longman Group UK, 1989.

Sansri, Insaf. *Anglo-Saxon Culture*, 2018.

