

The Anglo-Saxon Invasion of Britain

First, you should know that:

The Anglo-Saxons were the second group of people who invaded Britain after the Romans left.

The Anglo-Saxon age in Britain started around 410 (the end of Roman Britain) and ended in 1066 (the year the Normans conquered Britain).

Therefore,

The Anglo-Saxons ruled Britain for more than six (6) centuries

Second, you should also know that:

Much of the information known about the Anglo-Saxons comes from the Anglo-Saxon chronicle. The latter is a year-by-year account of the history of the Anglo-Saxons and all the major events of the time, **such as** the main battles. It is the single most important source of the period.

Who were the Anglo-Saxons and Where did they Come from?

* The Anglo-Saxons were a group of farmer-warriors who settled in Britain between the 5th and 11th centuries.

* The Anglo-Saxons, **precisely**, were a mix of tribes which came from modern-day Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The three biggest were the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes.

In this case, you should keep in mind that:

1)- The Saxons were German-Dutch / The Angles were Southern Danish / The Jutes were Northern Danish.

2)- **The Angles** and **the Saxons** were the two largest tribes which is why they came to be known as the **Anglo-Saxons**.

3)- The Anglo-Saxons settled in the land known as 'Angle-land', present-day England. England, in other words, was created by the Anglo-Saxons and named after the Angles.

Note

a)- These different tribes were not united. As they competed for dominance, they were regularly at war with each other. During the Anglo-Saxon rule, **consequently**, Britain was divided into **seven kingdoms** known as **the Heptarchy**.

b)- These seven kingdoms were:

Kent, Wessex, Essex, Sussex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria.

* East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria were mainly settled by the Angles.

* Essex, Wessex and Sussex were primarily inhabited by the Saxons.

* Kent was occupied by the Jutes.

However,

c)- In 927, these Kingdoms were united by Athelstan, Alfred the Great's grandson, and formed the Kingdom of England. Athelstan, as a result, became the first king of all England.

d)- Who was Alfred the Great? Alfred was the King of Wessex, the only Anglo-Saxon Kingdom that survived the Viking invasion. He stood strong against the Viking threat and paved the way for the future unity of England which was achieved under his grandson Athelstan.

Why did the Anglo- Saxons Invade Britain?

The Anglo-Saxons wanted control and land. This is why they were farmer-warriors.

a)- Anglo-Saxon warriors were invited to Britain, around AD380, to help the Romans fight the Picts (from Scotland), and the Scoti (from Ireland) who frequently attacked Britannia from the north. However, instead of leaving when Roman Britain ended, they took over.

b)- Some others came peacefully, looking for land to farm. The countries they came from regularly flooded. Consequently, it was difficult to grow crops and feed their families.

You need to bear in mind that:



The Anglo-Saxon period witnessed the growth of Christianity in England.

When the Anglo-Saxons sailed to Britain, they were **Pagans** which means that they worshipped several gods. Each pagan god, they believed, controlled a particular part of everyday life. However, in AD 597, Pope Gregory the Great chose a monk named **Saint Augustine** to lead a mission to convert the Pagan Anglo-Saxons to the Christian faith (religion). This resulted in the Christianization of most of them.



Most of the days of the week are named after specific Anglo-Saxon gods and goddesses.

Tuesday comes from **Tiw**: the god of war / **Wednesday** comes from **Woden**: the king of Anglo-Saxon gods / **Thursday** comes from **Thunor** or **Thor**: the god of weather / **Friday** comes from **Frige**: the goddess of love, marriage, home and children.

The Anglo-Saxons had a major influence on British culture and society. Their legacy can still be seen in many aspects of British life.

1)- One of the most obvious legacies of the post-Roman period is the language. It was during the Anglo-Saxon period that the English language was first born in the form of what is known today as Old English. The epic poem **Beowulf** and the **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**, for instance, were written in Old English.

Note

Old English is very different from modern English. It has many Germanic words. Its grammar is difficult, and close to Old German. It is written in runes, an alphabet completely different from the Latin alphabet used for English today.

2)- They also named lots of towns. Lots of place names in Britain today come from the Anglo-Saxons. These include Sussex, Essex, Hastings, Peterborough, Greenwich, Shaftesbury, Birmingham, and dozens more. Lots of these place names come from Anglo-Saxon words that describe the area, for example, 'bury' means fortified or fort.

3)- The Anglo-Saxons divided England into Shires. The shire (scir in Old English) was an administrative division. Today it is used interchangeably with the word county. The word shire lives on in many county names, such as Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Hampshire, Berkshire, and Yorkshire.

Sources:

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BBC. "Why did the Anglo-Saxons Come to Britain?" Web.

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