Language Culture and Civilization

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Second Year

Module Teacher: Prof. Mohammed NAOUA

Lectures of Language Culture and Civilization

British Culture and Civilization

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The Foundation Stones

The Island· Britain's Prehistory

The Island

Lecture 1

The Neolithic Britons

However complicated the modern industrial state may be, land and climate affect life in every country. They affect social and economic life, population, and even politics. Britain is no exception. It has a milder climate than much of the European mainland because it lies in the way of the Gulf Stream, which brings warm water and winds from the Gulf of Mexico. Within Britain, there are differences of climate between north and south, east and west. The north is on average 5°C cooler than the south. Annual rainfall in the east is on average about 600 mm, while in many parts of the west it is more than double that. The countryside is varied also. The north and west are mountainous or hilly. Much of the south and east is fairly flat, or low-lying. This means that the south and east on the whole have better agricultural conditions, and it is possible to harvest crops in early August, two months earlier than in the north. So, it is not surprising that southeast Britain has always been the most populated part of the island. For this reason it has always had the most political power. Britain is an island, and Britain' s history has been closely connected with the sea. Until modern times, it was as easy to travel across water as it was across land, where roads were frequently unusable. At moments of great danger, Britain has been saved from danger

by its surrounding seas. Britain's history and its strong national sense have been shaped by the sea.

Britain's prehistory

Britain has not always been an island. It became one only after the end of the last ice age. The temperature rose and the ice cap melted, flooding the lower-lying land that is now under the North Sea and the English Channel. The Ice Age was not just one long equally cold period. There were warmer times when the ice cap retreated and colder periods when the ice cap reached as far south as the River Thames. Our first evidence of human life is a few stone tools, dating from one of the warmer periods, about 250, 000 BC. These simple objects show that there were two different kinds of inhabitant. The earlier group made their tools from flakes of flint, similar in kind to stone tools found across the north European plain as far as Russia. The other group made tools from a central core of flint, probably the earliest method of human tool making, which spread from Africa to Europe. Hand axes made in this way have been found widely, as far north as Yorkshire and as far west as Wales. However, the ice advanced again and Britain became hardly habit able until another milder period, probably around 50 ,000 BC. During this time a new type of human being seems to have arrived, who was the ancestor of the modern British. These people looked similar to the modern British, but were probably smaller and had a lifespan of only about thirty years. Around 10,000 BC, as the Ice Age drew to a close Britain was peopled by small groups of hunter, gatherers, and fishers. Few had settled homes, and they seemed to have followed herds of deer, which provided them with food and clothing. By about 5000 BC Britain had finally become an island‹and had also become heavily forested . For the wanderer-hunter culture this was a disaster, for [he cold-loving deer and other animals on which they lived largely died out.

The Neolithic Britons

About 3000 BC Neolithic (or New Stone Age) people crossed the narrow sea from Europe in small round boats of bent wood covered with animal skins. Each could carry one or two persons. These people kept animals and grew corn crops, and knew how to make pottery. They probably came from either the Iberian (Spanish) peninsula or even the North African coast. They were small, dark, and long-headed people, and may be the forefathers of dark-haired inhabitants of Wales and Cornwall today. They settled in the western parts of Britain and Ireland, from Cornwall at the southwest end of Britain all the way to the far north. These were the first of several waves of invaders before the first arrival of the Romans in 55 BC. It used to be thought that

these waves of invaders marked fresh stages in British development. However, although they must have brought new ideas and methods, it is now thought that the changing pattern of Britain's prehistory was the result of local economic and social forces.

The great "public works" of this time, which needed a huge organisation of labour, tell us a little of how prehistoric Britain was developing. The earlier of these works were great "barrows", or burial mounds, made of earth or stone. Most of these barrows are found on the chalk uplands of south Britain. Today these uplands have poor soil and few trees, but they were not like that then. They were airy woodlands that could easily be cleared for farming, and as a result were the most easily habitable part of the countryside. Eventually and over a very long period, these areas became over armed, while by 1400 BC the climate became drier, and as a result this land could no longer support many people. It is difficult today to imagine these areas, particularly the up lands of Wiltshire and Dorset, as heavily peopled areas. Yet the monuments remain. After 3000 BC, the chalk land people started building great circles of earth banks and ditches. Inside, they built wooden buildings and stone circles. These "henges", as they are called, were centres of religious, political, and economic power. By far the most spectacular, both then and now, was Stonehenge, which was built in separate stages over a period of more than a thousand years. The precise purposes of Stonehenge remain a mystery, but during the second phase of building, after about 2400 BC, huge blue stones were brought to the site from south Wales. This could only have been achieved because the political authority of the area surrounding Stonehenge was recognised over a very large area, indeed probably over the whole of the British Isles. The movement of these bluestones was an extremely important event, the story of which was passed on from generation to generation. Three thousand years later, these unwritten memories were recorded in Geoffrey of Monrnourh's History of Britain, written in 1136.

Stonehenge was almost certainly a sort of capital to which the chiefs of other groups came from all over Britain. Certainly, earth or Stonehenge were built in many parts of Britain, as far as the Orkney Islands north of Scotland, and as far south as Cornwall. They seem to have been copies of the great Stonehenge in the south. In Ireland, the centre of prehistoric civilization grew around the River Boyne and at Tara in Ulster. The importance of these places in folk memory far outlasted the builders of the monuments.

The Beaker People

After 2400 BC, new groups of people arrived in southeast Britain from Europe. They were round-headed and strongly built, taller than Neolithic Britons. It is not known whether they invaded by armed force, or whether they were invited by Neolithic Britons because of their military or metal working skills. Their influence was soon felt and, as a result, they became leaders of British society. Their arrival is marked by the first individual graves, furnished with pottery beakers, from which these people get their name: the "Beaker" people.

Why did people now decide to be buried separately and give up the old communal burial barrows? It is difficult to be certain, but it is thought that the old barrows were built partly to please the gods of the soil, in the hope that this would stop the chalk upland soil getting poorer. The Beaker people brought with them from Europe a new cereal, barley, which could grow almost anywhere. Perhaps they felt it was no longer necessary to please the gods of the chalk upland soil.

The Beaker people probably spoke an Indo-European language. They seem to have brought a single culture to the whole of Britain. They also brought skills to make bronze tools and these began to replace stone ones. But they accepted many of the old ways. Stonehenge remained the most important centre until 1300 BC. The Beaker people's richest graves were there, and they added a new circle of thirty stone columns, this time **connected by stone lintels, or** cross-pieces. **British society continued to be centred on a number of** henges across the countryside.

From this time, too, power seems to have shifted to the Thames valley and southeast Britain. Except for short periods, political and economic power has remained in the southeast ever since. Hill-forts replaced henges as the centres of local power, and **most of these were found in the southeast,** suggesting that the land successfully supported more people here than elsewhere.

There was another reason for the shift of power eastwards. A number of better-designed bronze swords have been found in the Thames valley, suggesting that the local people had more advanced metal working skills. Many of these swords have been found in riverbeds, almost certainly thrown in for religious reasons. This custom may be the origin of the story of the legendary King Arrhur's sword, which was given to him from out of the water and which was thrown back into the water when he died.

Lecture 2

The Celts

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 **westwards in earlier centuries. 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 westwards into** Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Celts began to control all the lowland areas of Britain, and were joined by new arrivals from the European mainland.

They continued to arrive in one wave after another over the next seven hundred years. The Celts are important in British history because they were the ancestors of many of the people in Highland Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall today. The Iberian people of Wales and Cornwall **took on the new Celtic culture. Celtic languages, which have been continuously used in some areas** since that time, "it still spoken. The British today is often described as Anglo-Saxon. It would be better to call them Anglo-Celt.

Our knowledge of the Celts is slight. As with **previous groups of settlers, we do not even know for certain whether the Celts invaded Britain or came** peacefully as a result of the lively trade with Europe from about 750 BC onwards, At first most of Celtic **Britain seems to have developed in a generally** similar way. But from about 500 BC trade contact with Europe declined, and regional differences **between northwest and southeast Britain increased.** The Celts were organised into different tribes, and tribal chiefs were chosen from each family or tribe, **sometimes as the result of fighting matches between** individuals, and sometimes by election.

The last Celtic arrivals from Europe were the Belgic tribes. It was natural for them to settle in the southeast of Britain, probably pushing other Celtic tribes northwards as they did so. At any rate, when Julius Caesar briefly visited Britain in 55 BC he saw that the Belgic tribes were different from the older **inhabitants.** "The **interior is inhabited", he wrote,** "by peoples who consider themselves indigenous, the coast by people who have crossed from Belgium. Nearly all of these still keep the names of the [European] tribes from which they came."

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 sloughing methods made it possible for them to farm heavier soils.

However, they continued to use, and build, hill forts. The increase of these, particularly in the southeast, suggests that the Celts were highly successful farmers, growing enough food for a much larger population. **Within living memory, certain annual fairs were** associated with hill -forts. For example, there was an annual September fair on the site of a Dorset hill-fort, which was used by the write r Thomas Hardy in his novel *Far from the* Madding *Crowd,* published in 1874.

The Celts traded across tribal borders and trade was probably important for political and social contact between the tribes. Trade with Ireland went through the island of Anglesey. The two main trade outlets eastwards to Europe were the settlements along the Thames River in the south and on the Firth of Forth in the north. It is no accident that the present-day capitals of England and Scotland **stand on or near these two ancient trade centres.** Much trade, both inside and beyond Britain , was conducted by river and sea. For money, the Celts used iron bars, until they began to copy the Roman coins they saw used in Gaul (France).

The Celtic tribes were ruled over by a warrior class, of which the priests, or Druids, seem to have been particularly important members. These Druids could not read or write, but they memorised all the religious teachings, the tribal laws, history, medicine and other knowledge necessary in Celtic society. The Druids from different tribes all over Britain probably met once a year. They had no temples, but they met in sacred groves of trees, on certain hills, by rivers or by river sources. We know little of their kind of worship except that at times it included human sacrifice.

During the Celtic period women may have had more independence than they had again for hundreds of years. When the Romans invaded Britain two of the largest tribes were ruled by women who fought from their chariots. The most powerful Celt to stand up to the Romans was a woman, Boadicea. She had become queen of her tribe when her husband had died. She was tall, with long red hair, and had a frightening appearance. In AD 61, she led her tribe against the Romans. She nearly drove them from Britain, and she destroyed London, the Roman capital, before she was defeated and killed. Roman writers commented on the courage and strength of women in battle, and leave an impression of a measure of equality between the sexes among the richer Celts.

The Romans

The name "Britain" comes from the word "Pretani ", the Greco-Rornan word for the inhabitant s of Britain. The Romans mispronounced the word and called the island "Britannia". The Romans had invaded because the Celts of Britain were working with the Celts of Gaul against them. The British Celts were giving them food, and allowing them to hide in Britain. There was another reason . The Celts used cattle to pull their ploughs and this meant that richer, heavier land could be farmed. 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 make use of British food for their own army fighting the Gauls. The Romans brought the skills of reading and **writing to Britain.**

The written word was important for spreading ideas and also for establishing power. As early as AD 80, as one Roman at the time noted, the governor Agricola "trained the sons of chiefs in the liberal arts. The result was that the people who used to reject Latin began to use it in speech and writing. Further the wearing of our national dress came to be valued and the toga [the Roman cloak] came into fashion." While the Celtic peasantry remained illiterate and only Celtics peaking, a number of town dwellers 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 fifth century AD

Britain was probably more literate under the Romans than it was to be again until the fifteenth century. Julius Caesar first came to Britain in 55 BC, but it was not until almost a century later, in AD 43, that a Roman army actually occupied Britain. The **Romans were determined to conquer the whole** island. They had little difficulty, apart from Boadicea's revolt, because they had a better trained army and because the Celtic tribes fought among themselves. The Romans considered the Celts as warmad, "high spirited and quick for battle", a description some would still give the Scots, Irish and Welsh today. 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 beyond were the upland areas, under Roman control but not developed. These areas were watched from the towns of York, Chester and Caerleon in the western pen insula of Britain that later became known as

Wales. Each of these towns was held by a Roman legion of about 7,000 men . 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 raiders from the north. But it also marked the border between the two later countries, England and Scotland. Eventually, the border was established a few miles further north. Efforts to **change it in later centuries did not succeed, mainly** because on either side of the border an invading army found its supply line overstretched. A natural point of balance had been found. 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 more and more 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 A D 409 Rome pulled its last soldiers out of Britain and the Romano-British , the Romanised 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.

Roman life

The most obvious characteristic of Roman Britain was its towns, which were the basis of Roman administration and civilisation. Many grew out of Celtic settlements, military camps or market centres. Broadly, there were three different kinds of town in Roman Britain, two of which were towns established by Roman charter. These were the coloniae, towns peopled by Roman settlers, and the municipal, large cities in which the whole population was given Roman citizenship. The third kind, the *civitas,* included the old Celtic tribal capitals, through which the Roman s administered the Celtic population in the countryside. At first, these towns had no walls. Then, probably from the end of the second century to the end of the third century AD, almost every town was given walls. At first, many of these were no more than earthworks, but by AD 300 all towns had thick stone walls.

The Romans left about twenty large towns of about 5,000 inhabitants, and almost one hundred smaller ones. Many of these towns were at first army camps, and the Latin word for camp, *castra,* has remained part of many town names to this day (with the ending chester, caster or cesrer) : Gloucester, Lei**cester,** Doncaster, **Winchester, Chester, Lancaster** and many others besides. These towns were built with stone as well as wood , and had planned streets, markets and shops. Some

buildings had central heating. They were connected by roads which were so well built that they survived when later roads broke up. These roads continued to be used long after the Romans left , and became the main roads of modern Britain. Six of these Roman roads met in London, a capital city of about 20,000 **people. London was twice the size of Paris, and** possibly the most important trading cent re of **northern Europe, because southeast Britain produced so much corn for export.**

Outside the towns, the biggest change during the Roman occupation was the growth of large farms, called "villas". These belonged far the richer Britons **who were, like the towns people, more Roman than** Celt in their manners. Each villa had many **workers. The villas were usually close to** towns **so** that the crops could be sold easily. There was a **growing difference between the rich and those who** did the actual work on the land. These and most people still lived in the same kind of round huts and villages which the Celts had been living in four hundred years earlier. when the Romans arrived.

In some ways, life in Roman Britain seems very civilized, but it was also hard for all except the richest. The bodies buried in a Roman graveyard at York show that life expectancy was low. Half the entire population died between the ages of twenty and forty while 15 percent died before reaching the age of twenty. It is very difficult to be sure, how many people were living in Britain when the Romans left. Probably it was as many as five million, partly because of the peace and the increased economic life, which the Romans had brought to the count ry. The new wave of invaders changed all that.

Lecture 4

The Saxon invasion

The invaders

The wealth of Britain by the fourth century, the result of its mild climate and centuries of peace, was a temptation to the greedy. At first, the Germanic tribes only raided Britain, but after AD 430 they began to settle. The newcomers were warlike and illiterate. We owe our knowledge of this period mainly to an English monk named Bede, who lived three hundred years later. His story of events in his *Ecclesiastical* History *of the English People* has been proved generally correct by archaeological **evidence.**

Bede tells us that the invaders came from three powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. The Jutes settled mainly in Kent and along the south coast, and were soon considered no different from the Angles and Saxons. The Angles settled in the east, and also in the north Midlands, while the Saxons settled between the Jutes and the Angles in a band of land from the Thames Estuary westwards. The Anglo-Saxon migrations gave the larger part of Britain its new name, England , "the land of the Angles".

The British Celts fought the raiders and settlers from Germany as well as they could. However, during the next hundred years they were slowly pushed westwards until by 570 they were forced west of Gloucester. Finally, most were driven into the mountains in the far west, which the Saxons called "Weallas", or "Wales", meaning "the land of the foreigners". Some Celts were driven into Cornwall, where they later accepted the rule of Saxon lords. In the north, other Celts were driven into the lowlands of the country, which became known as Scotland. Some Celts stayed behind, and many became slaves of the Saxons. Hardly anything is left of Celtic language or culture in England, except for the names of some rivers, Thames, Mersey, Severn and Avon , and two large cities, London and Leeds.

The strength of Anglo-Saxon culture is obvious even today. Days of the week were named after Germanic gods: Tig (Tuesday), Wodin (Wednesday), Thor (Thursday), Frei (Friday). New place-names appeared on th e map. The first of these show that the earliest Saxon villages, like the Celtic ones, were family villages. The ending ing meant folk or family, thus "Reading" is the place of the family of Rada, "Hastings" of the family of Hasta. ***Ham*** **means farm, ton means settlement.** Birmingham, Nottingham or Southampton , for example, are Saxon place-names. Because the Anglo-Saxon kings often established settlements , Kingston is a frequent place-name.

The Anglo-Saxons established a number of kingdoms, some of which still exist in county or regional names to this day: Essex (East Saxons), Sussex (South Saxons), Wessex (West Saxons), Middlesex (probably a kingdom of Middle Saxons), East Anglia (East Angles). By the middle of the seventh century the three largest kingdoms, those of Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex, were the most powerful.

It was not until a century later that one of these kings, King Offa of Mercia (757-96, claimed "kingship of the English". He had good reason to do so. He was powerful enough to employ thousands of men to build a huge dyke, or earth wall, the length of the Welsh border to keep out the troublesome Celts. But although he was the most powerful king of his time, he did not control all of England.

The power of Mercia did not survive after Offa's death. At that time, a king's power depended on the personal loyalty of his followers. After his death, the next king had to work hard to rebuild these personal feelings of loyalty. Most people still believed, as the Celts had done, that a man's first duty was to his own family. However, things were changing. The Saxon kings began to replace loyalty to family with loyalty to lord and king.

Government and society

The Saxons created institutions which made the English state strong for the next 500 years. One of these institutions was the King's Council, called the Witan. The Witan probably grew out of inform al groups of senior warriors and churchmen to whom kings like Offa had turned for advice or support on difficult matters. By the tenth century the Witan was a formal body, issuing laws and charters. It was not at all democratic, and the king could decide to ignore the Witan's advice. But he knew that it might be dangerous to do so. For the Witan's authority was based on its right to choose kings, and to agree the use of the king's laws. Without its support the king's own authority was in danger. The Witan established a system which remained an important part of the king's method of government. Even today, the king or queen has a *Privy Council,* a group of advisers on the affairs of state.

The Saxons divided the land into new adminis**trative areas, based on *shires.* or counties. These** shires, established by the end of the tenth century, remained almost exactly the same for a thousand years. "Shire" is the Saxon word, "county" the Norman one, but both are still used . (In 1974 the **counties were reorganised, but the new system is** very like the old one.) Over each shire was appointed a *shire reeve,* the king's local administrator. In time his name became shortened to "sheriff".

Anglo-Saxon technology changed the shape of English agriculture . The Celts had kept small, square fields, which were well suited to the light plough they used, drawn either by an animal or two people. This plough could turn corners easily. The Anglo-Saxons introduced a far heavier ploughed which was better able to plough in long straight lines across the field . It was particularly useful for cultivating heavier soils. But it required six or eight oxen to pull it, and it was difficult to turn. This heavier plough led to changes in land ownership and organisation. In order to make the best use of village land . It was divided into two or three very large fields. These were then divided again into long thin strips. Each family had a number of strips in each of these fields. amounting probably to a family "holding" of twenty or so acres. Ploughing **these long thin strips was easier because it avoided** the problem of turning . Few individual families could afford to keep a team of oxen, and these had to be shared on a co-operative basis.

One of these fields would be used for planting **spring crops, and another for autumn crops. The** third area would be left to rest for a year, and with the other areas after harvest, would be used as common land for animals to feed on. This Anglo**Saxon pattern, which became more and more** common was the basis of English agriculture for a thousand years until the eighteenth century. It needs only a moment's thought to recognise that the fair division of land and of teams of oxen and the sensible management of village land shared out between families meant that villagers had to work **more closely together than they had ever done** before.

The Saxons settled previously unfarmed areas. They **cut down many** forested **areas in valleys to farm the** richer lowland soil and they began to drain the wet land. As a result, almost all the villages which appear on eighteenth-century maps already existed by the eleventh century.

In each district was a "manor" or large house. This was a simple building where local villagers came to pay taxes, where justice was administered and where men met together to join the Anglo-Saxon army the *fyrd.* The lord of the manor had to organise all this and make sure village land was properly shared. It was the beginning of the manorial system which reached its fullest development under the Normans.

At first the lords, or aldermen were simply local officials. But by the beginning of the eleventh century they were warlords and were often called by a new Danish name, earl. Words, alderman and earl remain with us today: aldermen are elected officers in local government and earls are high ranking nobles. It was the beginning of a class system, made up of king, lords, soldiers, and workers on the land. One

other important class developed during the Saxon period, the men of learning. These came from the Christian Church.

Lecture 5

Christianity: the Partnership of Church and State

We cannot know how or when Christianity first reached Britain but it was certainly well before Christianity was accepted by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century AD. In the last hundred years of Roman government Christianity became firmly established across Britain, both in Roman- controlled areas and beyond. However, the Anglo-Saxons belonged to an older Germanic religion and they drove the Celts into the west and north. In the Celtic areas, Christianity continued to spread. bringing paganism to an end . The map of W ales shows a number of place-names beginning or ending with llan. meaning the site of a small Celtic monastery around which a village or tow n grew. In 597, Pope Gregory the Great sent a monk Augustine to re-establish Christianity in England. He went to Canterbury, the capital of the king of Kent. He did so because the king's wife came from Europe and was already Christian . Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in 601. **He was very successful. Several ruling families in** England accepted Christianity. But Augustine and his group of monk s made little progress with the ordinary people. This was partly because Augustine was interested in establishing Christian authority, and that meant bringing rulers to t e new faith.

It was the Celtic Church, which brought Christianity to the ordinary people of Britain. The Celtic bishops went out from their monasteries of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, walking from village to village, teaching Christianity. In spite of the differences between Anglo-Saxons and Celts, these bishops seem to have been readily accepted in Anglo-Saxon areas. The bishops from the Roman Church lived at the courts of the kings, which they made centres of Church power across England. The two Christian Churches, Celtic and Roman, could hardly have been more different in character. One was most interested in the hearts of ordinary people, the other was interested in authority and organisation. The competition between the Celtic and Roman Churches reached a crisis because they disagreed over the date of Easter. In 663 at then Synod (meeting) of Whitby the king of Northumbria decided to support the Roman Church. The Celtic Church retreated as Rome extended its authority over all Christians , even in Celtic parts of the island.

England had become Christian very quickly. By 660 only Sussex and the Isle of Wight had not accepted the new faith. Twenty years later, English teachers returned to the lands from which the Anglo-Saxon s had come, bringing Christianity to much of Germany.

Saxon kings helped the Church to grow, but the Church also increased the power of kings. Bishops gave kings their support, which made it harder for royal power to be questioned . Kings had "God's approval ". The value of Church approval

was all the greater because of the uncertainty of the royal succession. An eldest son did not automatically become king, as kings were chosen from among the members of the royal family, and any member who had enough soldiers might try for the throne. In addition, at a time when one king might try to conquer a neighbouring kingdom , he would probably have a son to whom he would wish to pass this enlarged kingdom when he died. And so when King Offa arranged for his son to be crowned as his successor, he made sure that this was done at a Christian ceremony led by a bishop . It was good political propaganda, because it suggested that kings were chosen not only by people but also by God.

There were other ways in which the Church increased the power of the English State. It **established monasteries, or** minsters, **for example** Westminster, which were places of learning and **education. These monasteries** trained **the men who** could read and write, so that they had the necessary skills for the growth of royal and Church authority. The king who made most use of the Church was Alfred, the great king who ruled Wessex from 871- 899. He used the Literate men of the Church to help establish a system of law, to educate the **people and to write down important matters. He** started the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the most **important source, together with** Bede's **Ecclesiastical** History of the English People, for understanding the period.

During the next hundred years, laws were made on a large number of matters. By the eleventh century, royal authority probably went wider and deeper in England than in any other European country. This process gave power into the hands of those who could read and write, and in this way class divisions were increased. The power of landlords, who had been given land by the king, was increased **because their names were written down.** Peasants, who could neither read nor write, could lose their traditional rights to their land, because their rights **were not registered.** The Anglo-Saxon kings also preferred the Roman Church to the Celtic Church for economic reasons. **Villages and towns grew around the monasteries** and increased local trade. Many bishops and monks in England were from the Frankish lands (France and Germany) and elsewhere. They were invited by English rulers who wished to benefit from closer Church and economic contact with Europe. Most of these bishops and monks seem to have come **from churches or monasteries along Europe's vital** trade routes. In this way, close contact with man y parts of Europe was encouraged. In addition, they all used Latin, the written language of Rome, and this encouraged English trade with the continent. Increased literacy itself helped trade. Anglo-Saxon England became well known in Europe for its exports of woollen goods, cheese, hunting dogs, pottery and metal goods. It imported wine, fish , pepper, jewellery and wheel-made pottery.

Lecture 6: The Vikings

Towards the end of the eighth century new raiders were tempted by Britain's wealth. These were the Vikings, a word, which probably means either "pirates" or "the people of the sea inlets", and they came from Norway and Denmark. Like the AngloSaxons they only raided at first. They burnt churches and monasteries along the east, north and west coasts of Britain and Ireland. London was itself raided in 842. In 865, the Vikings invaded Britain once it was clear that the quarrelling Anglo-Saxon kingdoms could not keep them out. This time they came to conquer and to settle. The Vikings quickly accepted Christianity and did not disturb the local population. By 8 75 only King Alfred in the west of Wessex held out against the Vikings, who had already taken most of England. After some serious defeats Alfred won a decisive battle in 878, and eight years later he captured London. He was strong enough to make a treaty with the Vikings.

Viking rule was recognised in the east and north of England. It was called the Danes law, the land where the law of the Danes ruled. In the rest of the country Alfred was recognised as king. During his struggle against the Danes, he had built walled settlements to keep them out. These were called burghs. They became prosperous market towns, and the word, now usually spelt borough is one of the commonest endings to place names, as well as the name of the un it of municipal or town administration today.

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Who should be king?

By 950 England seemed rich and peaceful again after the troubles of the Viking invasion, But soon afterwards the Danish Vikings started raiding westwards. The Saxon king, Ethelred, decided to ray the Vikings to stay away. To find the money he set a tax on all his people, called Danegeld, or " Danish money". **It** was the beginning of a regular tax system of the people, which would provide the

money for armies. The ordinary villagers most heavily felt the effects of this tax, because they had to provide enough money for their village and lord to pay Danegeld.

When Erhelred died Cnut (or Canure), the leader of the Danish Vikings, controlled much of England. He became king for th e simple reason that the royal council, the Witan, and everyone else, feared disorder. Rule by a Danish king was far better than rule by no one at all. C nut died in 1035, and his son died shortly after, in 1040. The Witan chose Edward, one of Saxon Erhelred's sons, to the king .

Edward, known as "the Confessor" was more interested in the Church than in kingship. Church building had been going on for over a century, and he encouraged it. By the time Edward died there was a church in almost every village. The pattern of the English village, with its manor house and church, dates from this time. Edward started a new church fit for a king at Westminster, just outside the city of London. In fact, Westminster Abbey was a Norman, not a Saxon building, because he had spent almost all his life in Normandy, and his mother was a daughter of the duke of Normandy. As their name suggests, the Normans were people from the north, they were the children and grandchildren of Vikings who had captured and settled in Northern France, They had soon become **French in their language and Christian in their** religion, but they were still well known for their fighting skills

Edward only lived until 1066, when he died **without an** obvious **heir. The** question **of who should follow him as king was one of the most important in English history.** Edward **had brought many** Normans **to his English court from France. These** Normans **were not liked by the more** powerful Saxon nohles, particularly by the most powerful family of Wessex, the Godwinsons. It was **a** Godwinson , Harold, **whom the Witan chose to** be the next king of England. Harold had already **shown his bravery and ability. He had no royal blood, but he seemed a goo d choice for the throne** of England.

Harold's **right to the English throne** was **challenged** by Duke William of Normandy. William had two **claims to the English throne. His first claim was that King** Edward **had promised it to him. The second claim was that** Harold, **who had visited** William in 1064 or 1065, had promised William that he, Harold, would not try to take the throne for himself. Harold did not deny this second claim, but said that he had been forced to make the **promise and that** because **it** was **made unwillingly he** was **not tied by it.**

Harold was faced by two dangers, one in the south and one in the north. The Danish Vikings had not given up their claim to the English throne. In 1066, Harold **had** to **march north into Yorkshire to defeat** the Danes. No sooner had he defeated them than he learnt that William had landed in England with **an army. His men were tired but they had no time** to rest. They marched south as fast as possible.

Harold decided not to wait for the whole Saxon **army the Fyrd to gather** because **William's army** was small. He thought he could beat them with the **men who had done so well against the Danes. However, the Norman soldiers were better armed, better organised, and were mounted on horses. If he** had waited, Harold might have won. But he was defeated and killed in battle near Hastings.

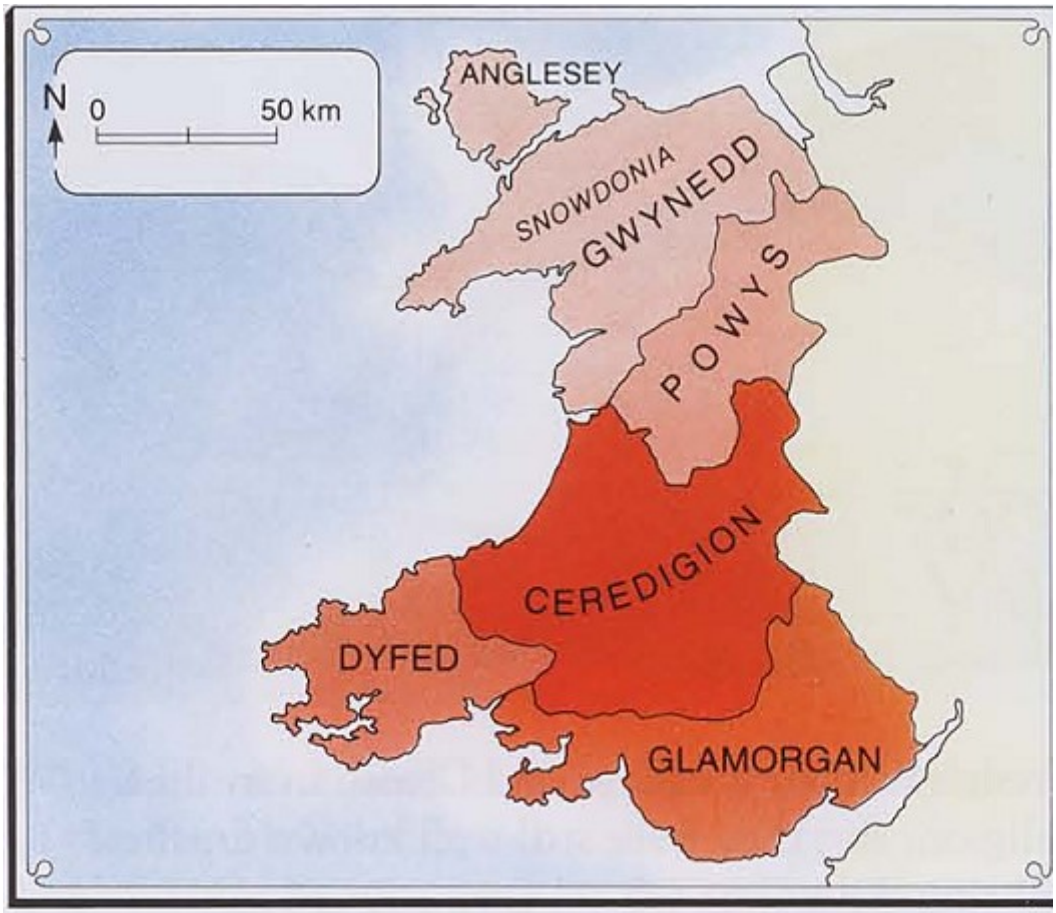
William marched to London, which quickly gave in when he began to burn villages outside the city. He was crowned king of England in Edward's new church of Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day, 1066. A new period had begun.

Lecture 7: The Celtic kingdoms

Wales Ireland Scotland

England has always played the most powerful part in the history of the British Isles. However, the other three countries, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, have a different history. Until recently, few historians looked at British history except from an English point of view. But the stories of Wales Ireland and Scotland are also important, because their people still feel different from the Anglo-Saxon English. The experience of the Welsh, Irish and Scots helps to explain the feeling they have today.

Wales



Wales and its Celtic kingdoms.

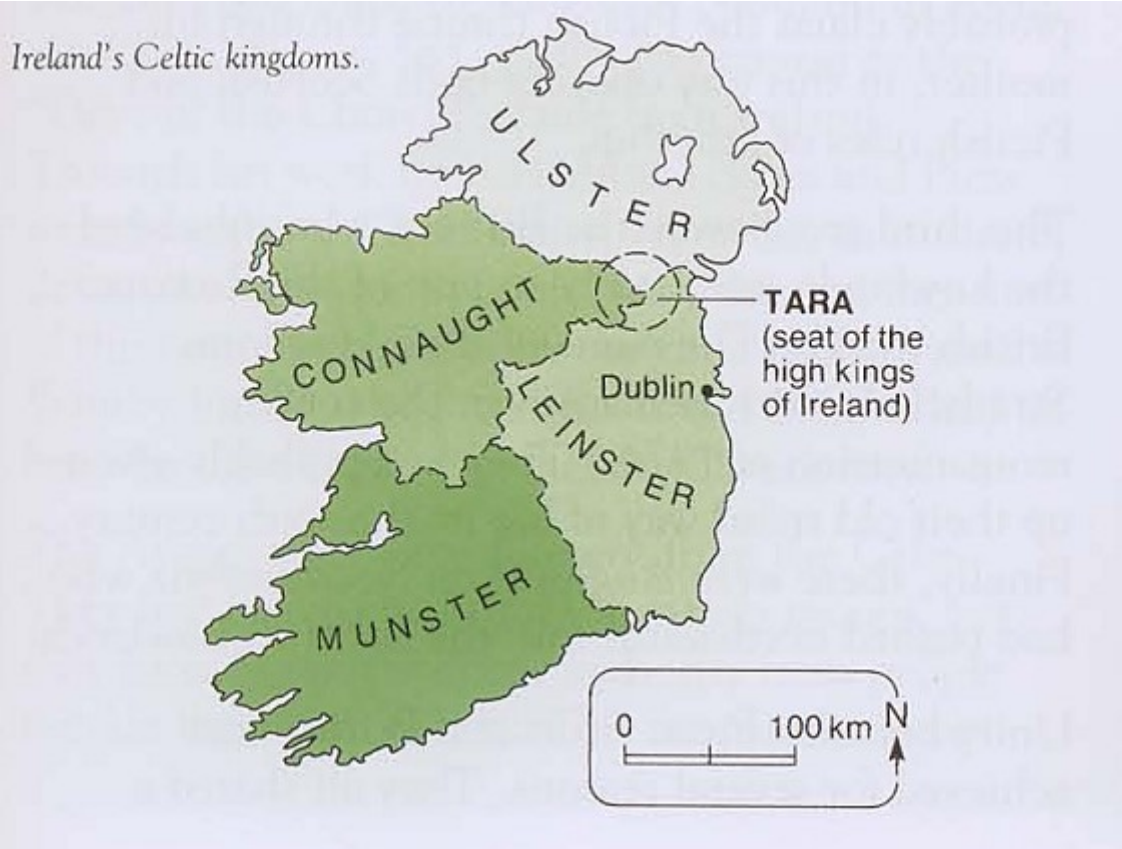
By the eighth century most of the Celts had been driven into the Welsh peninsula. They were kept out of England by Offa's Dyke, the huge earth wall built in AD 779. These Celts, called Welsh by the Anglo-Saxons, called themselves cymry, "fellow countrymen". Because Wales is a mountainous country, the cymry could only live in the crowded valleys. The rest of the land was rocky and too poor for anything except keeping animals. For this reason, the population remained small. It only grew to over half a million in the eighteenth century. Life was hard and so was the behaviour of the people. Slavery was common, as it had been all through Celtic Britain. Society was based on family groupings, each of which owned one or more village or farm settlement. One by one in each group a strong leader made himself king. These men must have been tribal chiefs to begin with, who later managed to become overlords over neighbouring family groups. Each of these kings tried to conquer the others, and the idea of a high, or senior, king developed.

The early kings travelled around their kingdoms to remind the people of their control. They travelled with their hungry followers and soldiers. The ordinary people ran away into the hills and woods when the king's men approached their village. Life was dangerous, treacherous, and bloody. In1043 , the king of Glamorgan died of old

age. It was an unusual event, because between 949 and 1066 no less than thirty-five Welsh rulers died violently, usually killed by a cymry, a fellow countryman.

In 1039, Gruffydd ap (son of) Llewelyn was the first Welsh high king strong enough to rule over all Wales. He was also the last, and in order to remain in control he spent almost the whole of his reign fighting his enemies. Like many other Welsh rulers, Gruffydd was killed by a cymry while defending Wales against the Saxons. Welsh kings after him were able to rule only after they had promissed loyalty to Edward the Confessor, king of England. The story of an independent and united Wales was over almost as soon as it had begun.

Ireland



Ireland was never invaded by either the Romans or the Anglo-Saxons. It was a land of monasteries and had a flourishing Celtic culture. As in Wales, people were known by the family grouping they belonged to. Outside their tribe they had no protection and no name of their own. They had only the name of their tribe. The kings in this tribal society were chosen by election. The idea was that the strongest man should lead. In fact the system led to continuous challenges.

Five kingdoms grew up in Ireland: Ulster in the north, Munster in the southwest, Leister in the **southeast, Connaught in the west, with** Tara **as the** seat of the high kings of Ireland. Christianity came to Ireland in about A D 430. The beginning of Ireland's history dates from that time, because for the first time there were people who could write down events. The message of Christianity was spread in Ireland by a British slave, Parrick, who became the "patron saint" of Ireland. Christianity brought writing, which weakened the position of the Druids, who depended on memory and the spoken word. Christian monasteries grew up, frequently along the coast.

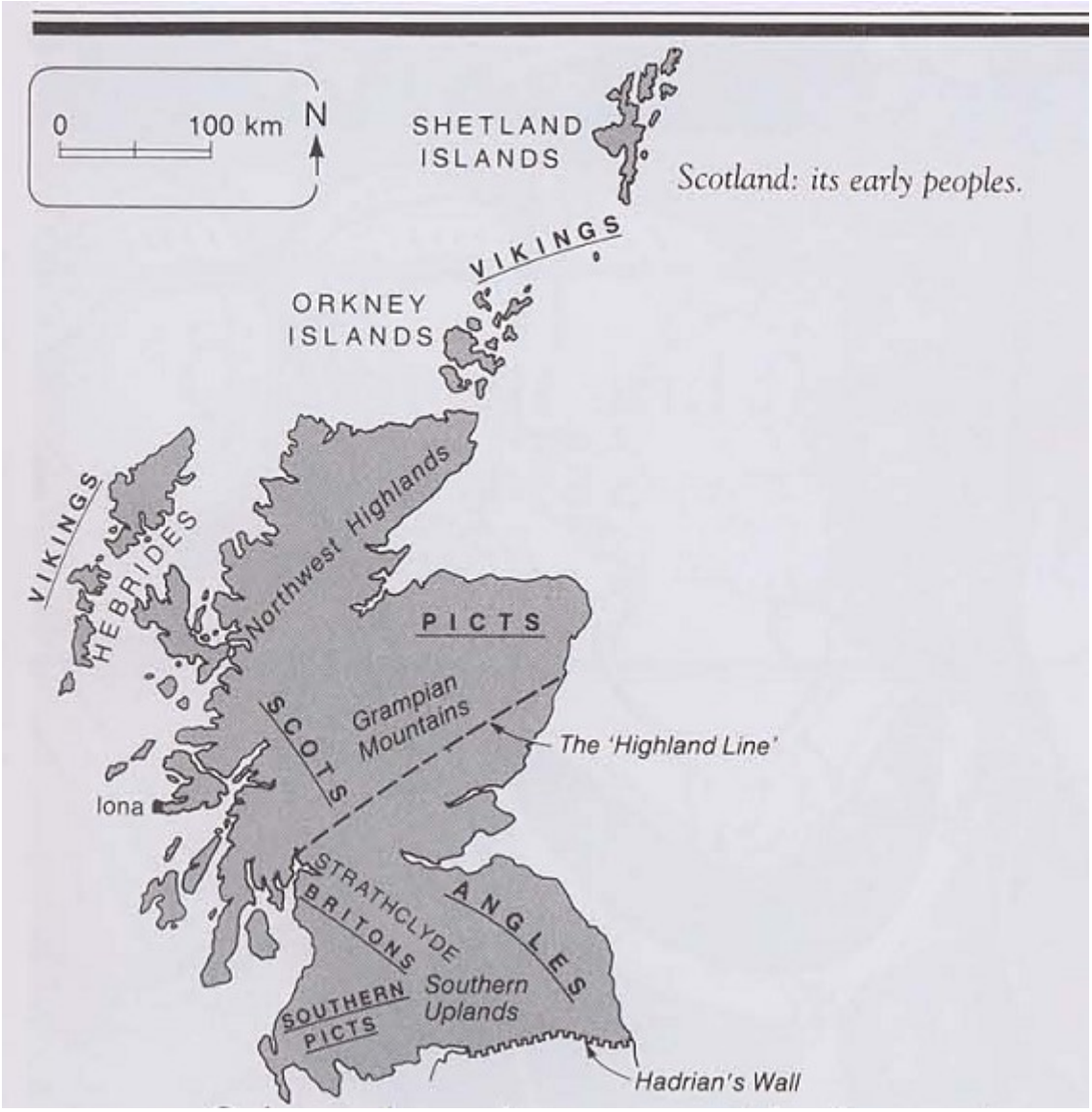
This period is often called Ireland's "golden age". Invaders were unknown and culture flowered. But it is also true that the five kingdoms were often at **war, each trying to gain advantage over the other,** often with great cruelty. This

"golden age" suddenly ended with the arrival of Viking raiders, who stole all that the monasteries had. Very little was left except the stone memorials that the Vikings could not carry away.

The Vikings, who traded with Constantinople (now Istanbul), Italy, and with central Russia, brought fresh economic and political action into Irish life. Viking raids forced the Irish to unite. In 859 Ireland chose its first high king, but it was not an effective solution because of the quarrels that took place each time a new high king was chosen. Viking trade led to the first towns and ports. For the Celts, who had always lived in small **settlements, these were revolutionary. Dublin,** Ireland's future capital, was founded by the Vikings.

As an effective method of rule, the high kingship of Ireland lasted only twelve years, from 1002 to 1014, while Ireland was ruled by Brian Boru. He is still looked back on as Ireland's greatest ruler. He tried to create one single Ireland, and encouraged the growth of organization in the Church, in **administration, and in learning.** Brian Boru died in battle against the Vikings. One of the five Irish kings, the king of Leister, fought on the Vikings' side. Just over a century later, another king of Leister invited the Normans of England to help him against his high king. This gave the Normans the excuse they wanted to enlarge their kingdom.

Scotland



As a result of its geography, Scotland has two different societies. In the centre of Scotland mountains stretch to the far north and across to the west, beyond which lie many islands. To the east and to the south the lowland hills are gentler, and much of the countryside is like England, rich, welcoming and easy to farm. North of the "Highland Line", as the division between highland and lowland is called, people stayed tied to their own family groups. South and east of this line society was more easily influenced by the changes taking place in England.

Scotland was populated by four separate groups of people. The main group, the Piers, lived mostly in the north and northeast. They spoke Celtic as well as another, probably older, language completely **unconnected with any known language today, and** they seem to have been the earliest inhabitants of the land. The Piers were

different from the Celts because they inherited their rights, their names, and **property from their mothers, not from their fathers.**

The non-Pictish inhabitants were mainly Scots. The Scots were Celtic settlers who had started to move into the western Highlands from Ireland in the fourth century. In 843, the Pictish and Scottish kingdoms were united under a Scottish king, who could also probably claim the Pictish throne through his mother, in this way obeying both Scottish and Pictish rules of kingship.

The third group were the Britons, who inhabited the Lowlands, and had been part of the Romano-British world. (The name of their kingdom , Strathclyde, was used again in the county reorganisation of 1974.) They had probably given up their old tribal way of life by the sixth century. Finally, there were Angles from Northumbria who had pushed northwards into the Scottish Lowlands.

Unity between Piers, Scots, and Britons was achieved for several reasons. They all shared a common Celtic culture, language and background. Their economy mainly depended on keeping animals. These animals were owned by the tribe as a whole, and for this reason land was also held by tribes, nor by individual people. The common economic system increased their feeling of belonging to the same kind of society and the feeling of difference from the agricultural Lowlands. The sense of common culture may have been increased by marriage alliances between tribes. This idea of common land holding remained strong until the tribes of Scotland, called "clans", collapsed in the eighteenth century.

The spread of Celtic Christianity also helped to unite the people. The first Christian mission to Scotland had come to southwest Scotland in about AD 400. Later, in 563, Columba, known as the "Dove of the Church", came from Ireland. Through his work both Highland Scots and Picts **were brought to Christianity. He even, so it is said,** defeated a monster in Loch Ness, the first mention of this famous creature. By the time of the Synod of Whitby in 663, the Piers, Scots and Britons had all been brought closer together by Christianity.

The Angles were very different from the Celts. They had arrived in Britain in family groups, but they soon began to accept authority from people outside their own family. This was partly due to their way of life. Although they kept some animals, they spent more time growing crops. This meant that land was held by individual people, each man working in his own field . Land was distributed for farming by the local lord. This system encouraged the Angles of Scotland to develop a non –tribal system of control, as the people of England further south were doing. This increased their feeling of difference from the Celtic tribal Highlanders further north.

Finally, as in Ireland and in Wales, foreign invaders increased the speed of political change. Vikings attacked the coastal areas of Scotland, and they settled on many of the islands, Shetland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man southwest of Scotland. In order to resist them, Piers and Scots fought together against the enemy raiders and settlers. When they could not push them out of the islands and coastal areas, they had to deal with them politically. At first the Vikings, or "Norsemen", still served the king of Norway. But communications with Norway were difficult. Slowly the earls of Orkney and other areas found it easier to accept the king of Scots as their overlord, rather than the more distant king of Norway.

However, as the Welsh had also discovered , the English were a greater danger than the Vikings. In 934, the Scots were seriously defeated by a Wessex army pushing northwards. The Scots decided to seek the friendship of the English, because of the likely losses from war. England was obviously stronger than Scotland but luckily, for the Scots, both the north of England and Scotland were difficult to control from London. The Scots hoped that if they were reasonably peaceful the Sassenachs, as they called the Saxons (and still call the English), would leave them alone.

Scotland remained a difficult country to rule even from its capital, Edinburgh. Anyone looking at a map of Scotland can immediately see that control of the Highlands and islands was a great problem. Travel was often impossible in winter, and slow and difficult in summer. It was easy for a clan chief or noble to throw off the rule of the king.

Lecture 8: The Norman Conquest

Feudalism · Kingship: a family business·

William the Conqueror's coronation did not go as planned. When the people shouted "God Save the King", the nervous Norman guards at Westminster Abbey thought they were going to attack William. In their fear, they set fire to nearby houses and the **coronation ceremony ended in disorder.** Although William was now crowned king. His conquest had only just begun and the fighting lasted for another five years. There was an Anglo-Saxon rebellion against the Normans every year until 1070. The small Norman army marched from village to village, destroying places it could not control and building forts to guard others. It was a **true army of occupation for at least twenty years.** The north was particularly hard to control. and the Norman army had no mercy. When the Saxons fought back, the Normans burnt, destroyed and killed. Between Durham and York not a single house was left standing and it took a century for **the north to recover**.

Few Saxon lords kept their lands and those who did were the very small number who had accepted William immediately. All the others lost everything. By 1086, twenty years after the arrival of the Normans, only two of the greater landlords and only two bishops were Saxon, William gave the Saxon lands to his Norman nobles, After each English rebellion there was more land to give away. His army included Norman and other French land seekers. Over 4.000 Saxon landlords were replaced by 200 Norman ones.

Feudalism

William was careful in the way he gave land to his nobles. The king of France was less powerful than many of the great landlords of whom William was the outstanding example. In England, as each new area of land was captured. William gave parts of it as a reward to his captains. This meant that they held separate small pieces of land in different parts of the country so that no noble could easily or quickly gather his fighting men to rebel. William only gave some of his nobles' larger estates along the troublesome borders with Wales and Scotland. At the same time, he kept enough land for himself to make sure he was much stronger than his nobles were. Of all the farmland of England, he gave half to the Norman nobles, a quarter to the Church, and kept a

fifth himself. He kept the Saxon system of Sheriffs, and used these as a balance to local nob les. As a result, England was different from the rest of Europe because it had one powerful family, instead of a large number of powerful nobles. William and the kings after him thought of England as their personal property.

William organized his English kingdom according to the feudal system, which had already begun to develop in England before his arrival. The word "feudalism" comes from the French word feu, which the Normans used to refer to land held in return for duty or service to a lord. The basis of feudal society was the holding of land, and its main purpose was economic. The central idea was that all land was owned by the king but it was held by others. Called "vassals", in return for services and goods. The king gave large estates to his main nobles in return for a promise to serve him in war for up to forty days. The nobles also had to give him part of the produce of the land. The greater nobles gave part of their lands to lesser nobles, knights and other "freemen". Some freemen paid for the land by doing military service while others paid rent. The noble kept "serfs" to work on his own land. These were not free to leave the estate, and were often little better than slaves.

There were two basic principles to feudalism: every man had a lord and every lord had land, The king was connected through this "chain" of people to the lowest man in the country. At each level, a man had to promise loyalty and service to his lord. This promise was usually made with the lord sitting on his chair and his vassal kneeling before him, his hands placed between those of his lord. This was called "homage", and has remained part of the coronation ceremony of British kings and queens until now. On the other hand, each lord had responsibilities to h is vassals. He had to give them land and protection.

When a noble died, his son usually rook over his estate. But first, he had to receive permission from the king and make a special payment. If he was still a child the king would often take the produce of the estate until the boy was old enough to look after the estate himself. In this way, the king could benefit from the death of a noble. If all the nob le's family died the land went back to the king, who would be expected to give it to another deserving noble. But the king

often kept the land for some years, using its wealth before giving it to another noble

If the king did not give the nobles land, they would not fight for him. Between 1066 and the mid fourteenth century, there were only thirty years of complete peace. So, feudal duties were extremely important. The king had to make sure he had enough satisfied nobles who would be willing to fight for him.

William gave our land all over England to his nobles. By 1086, he wanted to know exactly who owned which piece of land and how much it was worth. He needed this information so that he could plan his economy find out how much was produced and how much he could ask in tax. He therefore sent a team of people all through England to make a complete economic survey. His men asked all kinds of questions at each settlement: How much land was there? Who owned it? How much was it worth? Ho w many families, ploughs and sheep were there? And so on. This survey was the only one of its kind in Europe. Not surprisingly, it was most unpopular with the people, because they felt they could not escape from its findings. It so reminded them of the paintings of the Day of Judgement, or "doom" on the walls of their churches that they called it the "Doomsday" Book. The name stuck. The Doomsday Book still exists, and gives us an extraordinary amount of information about England at this time.

Lecture Kingship 9: a family business

To understand the ide a of kingship and lordship in the early Middle Ages it is important to realise that at this time there was little or no idea of nationalism. William controlled two large areas: Normandy, which he had been given by his father‹ and England, which he had won in war. Bot h were personal possession s, and it did not matter to the rulers that the ordinary people of one p lace were English while those of another were French. To William the important difference between Normandy and England was that as duke of Normandy he had to recognise the king of France as his lord, whereas in England he was king with no lord above him.

When William died, in 1087, he left the Duchy of Normandy to his cider son, Robert. He gave England to his second son, William, known as Rufus" (Latin for red) because of his red hair and red face. When Robert went to fight the Muslims in the Holy Land, he left William II (Rufus) in charge of Normandy. After all, the management of Normandy and England was a family business. William Rufus died in a hunting accident in 1100, shot dead by an arrow. He had not married, and therefore had no son to take the crown. At the time of William's death, Robert was on his way home to Normandy from the Holy Land. Their younger brother Henry knew that if he wanted the English crown he would have to act very quickly. He had been with William at the time of the accident. He rod e to Winchester and took charge of the king's treasury. He the n rode to Westminster where he was crowned king three days later. Robert was very angry and prepared to invade. But it took him a year to organise an army.

The Norman nobles in England had to choose between Henry and Robert. This was not easy because most of them held land in Normandy. In the end, they chose Henry beause he was in London, with the crown already on his head. Robert's invasion was a failure and he accepted payment to return to Normandy. But Henry wanted more. He knew that many of his nobles would willingly follow him to Normandy so that they could win back their Nor man lands. In 11 06 Henry invaded Normandy and captured Robert. Normandy and England were reunited under one ruler. **Henry** I's **most important aim was to pass on both** Normandy and England to his successor. He spent the rest of his life fighting to keep Normandy from other French nobles who tried to take it. But in 1120 Henry's only son was drowned at sea.

At the time, both the possible heirs to Henry were on their own estates. Matilda was with her husband in Anjou and Henry's nephew. Stephen of Blois, was in Boulogne, only a day's journey by sea from England. As Henry had done before him, Stephen raced to England to claim the crown. Also as before, the nobles in England had to choose between Stephen, who was in England, and Matilda who had quarrelled with her father and who was still in France. Most chose Stephen, who seems to have been good at fighting but little else. He was described at the time as "of outstanding skill in arms, but in other things almost an idiot, except that he was more inclined towards evil." Only a few nob les supported Matilda's claim.

Matilda invaded England four years later. Her fight with Stephen led to a terrible civil war in which **villages were destroyed and many people** were killed. Neither side could win, and finally in 1153 Matilda and Stephen agreed that Stephen could keep the throne but only if Matilda's son, Henry, could succeed him. Fortunately for England, Stephen died the following year, and the family possessions of England and the lands in France were united under a king accepted by everyone. It took years for England to recover from the civil war.This kind of **disorder and destruction was common in Europe,** but it was shocking in England because people were used to the rule of law and order.

Henry 1I was the first unquestioned ruler of the English throne for a hundred years. He destroyed the castles which many nob les had built without royal permission during Stephen's reign, and made **sure that they lived in manor houses that were** undefended. The manor again became the centre of local life and administration.

Henry 1I was ruler of far more land than any previous king . As lord of Anjou he added his father's lands to the family empire. After his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine he also ruled the lands south of Anjou. Henry ll 's empire stretched from the Scottish border to the Pyrenees.

England provided most of Henry' s wealth , but the heart of his empire lay in Anjou. And although **Henry recognised the king of France as the overlord** of all his French lands, he actually controlled a greater area than the king of France. Many of Henry's nobles held land on both sides of the English channel.

However, Henry quarrelled with his beautiful and powerful wife, and his sons, Richard and John, took Eleanor's side. It may seem surprising that Richard and John fought against their own father. But in fact they were doing their duty to the king of France, their feudal overlord, in payment for the lands they held from him. In

1189 Henry died a broken man, disappointed and defeated by his sons and by the French king.

Henry was followed by his rebellious son, Richard. Richard I has always been one of England's most popular kings, although he spent hardly any time in England. He was brave, and a good soldier, but his nickname Coeur de Lion, "lionheart", shows that his culture, like that of the kings before him, was French. Richard was everyone's idea of the perfect feudal king. He went to the Holy Land to make war on the Muslims and he fought with skill, courage **and honour.**

On his way back from the Holy Land, Richard was captured by the duke of Austria, with whom he had quarrelled in Jerusalem. The duke demanded money before he would let him go, and it took two years for England to pay. Shortly after, in 1199, Richard was killed in France. He had spent no more than four or five years in the country of which he was king. When he died the French king took over parts of Richard's French lands to rule himself.

Richard had no son, and he was followed by his brother, John. John had already made himself unpopular with the three most important groups of people, the nobles, the merchants and the Church.

John was unpopular mainly because he was greedy. The feudal lords in England had always run their own law courts and profited from the fines paid by those brought to court. But John took many cases out of their courts and tried them in the king's courts, taking the money for himself.

It was normal for a feudal lord to make a payment to the king when his daughter was married, but John asked for more than was the custom. In the same way, when a noble died, his son had to pay money before he could inherit his father's land. In order to enlarge his own income, John increased the amount they had to pay. In other cases when a noble died without a son, it was norm al for the land to be passed on to another nob le family. John kept the land for a long time, to benefit from its wealth. He did the same with the bishoprics. As for the **merchants and towns, he taxed them at a higher** level than ever before.

In 1204, King John became even more unpopular with his nob les. The French king invaded Normandy and the English nobles lost their lands there. John had failed to carry out his duty to the m as duke of Normandy. He had taken their money but he had not protected the Ireland.

In 1209 John quarrelled with the pope over who should be Archbishop of Canterbury. John was in a weak position in England and the pope knew it. The pope called on the king of France to invade England, and closed every church in the country. At a time when most people believed that without the Church they would go to hell, this was a very serious matter. In 1214, John gave in, and accepted the pope's choice of archbishop.

In 12 15 John hoped to recapture Normandy. He called on his lords to fight for him, but they no longer trusted him. They marched to London , where they were joined by angry merchants. Outside London at Runnymede, a few miles up the **river. John was forced to sign a new** agreement

The Magna Carta and the Decline of Feudalism

This new agreement was known as "Magna Carta", the Great Charter, and was an important symbol of political freedom. The king promised all "freemen" protection from his officers, and the right to a fair and legal trial. At the time, perhaps less than one **quarter of the English were** "freemen". **Most were** not free, and were serfs or little better. Hundreds of years later, Magna Carta was used by Parliament to protect itself from a powerful king. In fact, Magna Carta gave no real freedom to the majority of people in England . The nobles who wrote it and forced King John to sign it had no such thing in mind. They had one main aim: to make sure John did not go beyond his rights as feudal lord.

Magna Carta marks a clear stage in the collapse of English feudalism. Feudal society was based on links between lord and vassal. At Runnvmede, the nobles **were not acting as vassals but as a class. They established a committee of twenty-four lords to** make sure John kept his promises. That was not a "feudal" thing to do. In addition, the nobles were **acting in cooperation with the merchant class of towns.**

The nobles did not allow John's successors to forget **this charter and its promises. Every king recognized** Magna Carta, until the Middle Ages ended in **disorder and a new kind of monarchy came into** being in the sixteenth century.

There were other small signs that feudalism was changing. When the king went to war, he had the right to forty days' fighting service from each of his lords. But forty days were not long enough for fighting a war in France. The nobles refused to fight for longer, so the king was forced to pay soldiers to fight for him . (They were called "paid fighters" *"solidarius* ", a Latin word from which the word "soldier" comes). At the same time, many lords preferred their vassals to pay them in

money rather **than in services. Vassals** were **gradually beginning to change into tenants . Feudalism, the use of land in return for service was beginning to weaken. But** it took another three hundred years before it disappeared completely.