

The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages. 449- 1485

Life and culture

Art

Language history

The spread of Christianity

Beowulf

- Middle Ages is the period of time that extends between the ancient classical period and the Renaissance
- Middle Ages extends from the Roman withdrawal and the Anglo Saxon invasion in 5th century to the accession of the House of Tudor in the late 15th century

The earlier part of this period is called The dark Ages

- Middle Ages is divided in two parts: the first is named Anglo Saxon Period or Old English Period (449-1066); the second is named the Anglo Norman Period or Middle English period (1066- 1485)

Anglo Saxon or Old English period (449-1066)

- In 449 the tribes of Jutes, angles and Saxons from Denmark and Northern Germany started to invade Britain defeating original Celtic people who escaped to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland.

The language of these tribes was the Anglo-Saxon

- The country was divided into 7 kingdoms, which soon had to face Viking invasions. The joined the forces and managed to defeat Vikings

Life and culture

- Life in Saxon England: society was based on the family unit, the clan, the tribe
- The code of values was based on courage, loyalty to the ruler, generosity. The most important hero in a poem of this period is Beowulf

The culture was military, based on war and dominated by the figures of noble-hearted warriors

- The oral tradition was very important; the art of speech was developed to express ideas with poetic circumlocutions

Art

- there were jewellery and illuminated manuscript that shows their love for intricacy
- The most important examples of pagan art is Sutton Hoo treasure
- Medieval painting began with the spread of Christianity to realize devotional wall paintings and illuminated manuscripts

Language history

- Before 449 in England there were Britons with Celtic languages and Roman, with Latin
- After 449 Angles Saxons and Jutes imposed their languages, so the Celtic languages survived only in Wales Ireland and part of Scotland

The spread of Christianity

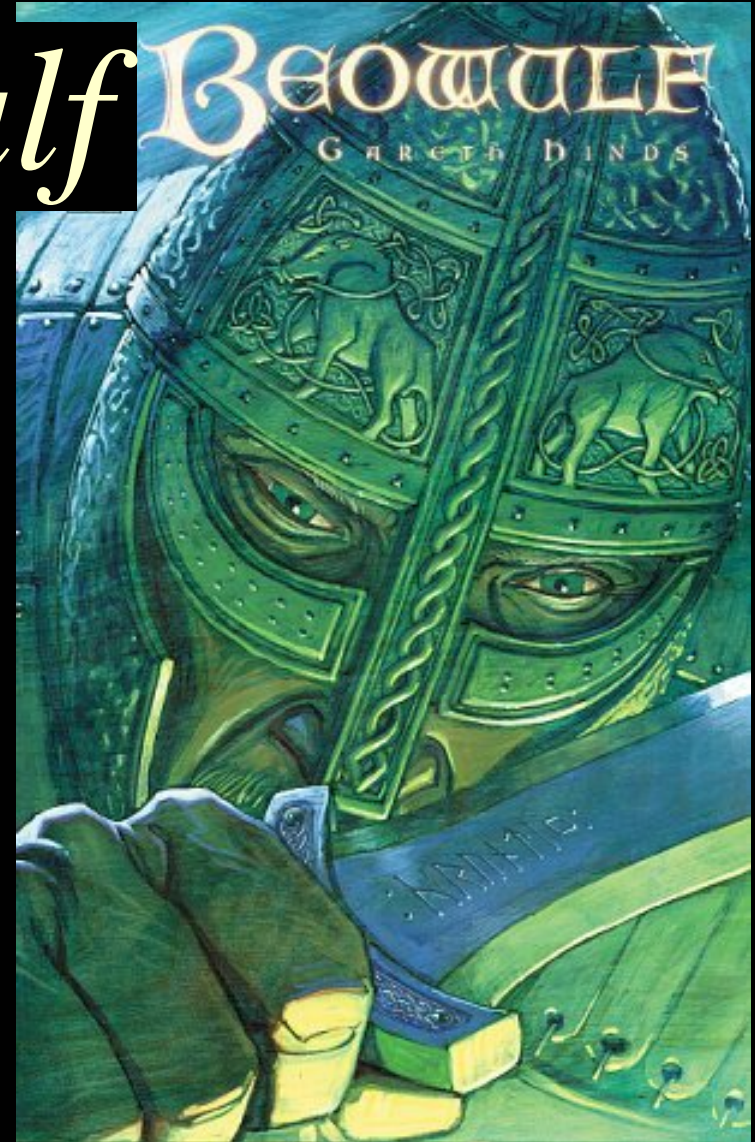
- is due to Saint Augustine towards the end of 6th century (A.D. 597).
- The spread of Christianity introduced in the Anglo Saxon culture the continental Christian culture which had strong classical components and brought written documents.

The cristianity

- introduced in old english a lot of latin words and gave to old words new meanings
- The Anglo Saxon folk tales (with heroes and monsters) were interwoven with Christian values and beliefs
- In 8th and 9th century the raids of the vikings (called also danes) influenced the structure of old english

Beowulf **BEOWULF**

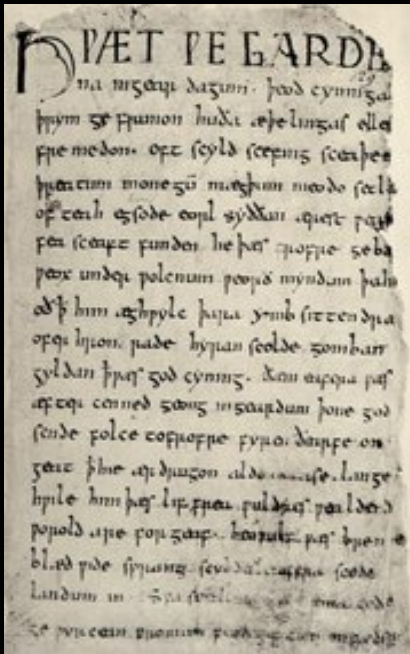
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What is Beowulf?

- Beowulf is a long epic poem probably composed during the 7th century
- The only surviving manuscript of the poem dates from the 10th century
- It is written in Anglo-Saxon
- IT RECOUNTS THE LEGENDS of Germanic tribes which lived in the Baltic area

Fiction or history?



The first page of Beowulf

- In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of a Germanic tribe from southern Sweden called the Geats, travels to Denmark to help defeat a terrible monster.
- Why was a poem about Danish and Swedish kings and heroes preserved in England? The English people are descendants of Germanic tribes called the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Jutes and northern Saxon tribes came from what is now southern Denmark and northern Germany. Thus, Beowulf tells a story about the old days in their homeland.
- The poem is a work of fiction, but it mentions a historic event, the raid by king Hygelac into Frisia, ca 516. Several of the personalities of *Beowulf* (e.g., Hrothgar, Hrothulf and Ohthere) and some of the events also appear in early Scandinavian sources

- King Hrothgar built a great hall called Heorot for his people.
- In it he and his warriors spend their time singing and celebrating, until Grendel, a monster, angered by their singing, attacks the hall and kills and devours many of Hrothgar's warriors. Hrothgar and his men, helpless against Grendel's attacks, have to abandon Heorot.
- Beowulf, a young warrior, hears of Hrothgar's troubles and, with his king's permission, goes to help Hrothgar.



See notes

places



Characters:

- · **Scyld Scefing** -- ruler of all the Danes
- · **King Hrothgar** -- the strongest of Scyld's sons; builder of Heorot;
- · **Grendel** -- archenemy of all things good; the personification of evil
- · · **Queen Wealhtheow** -- wife of Hrothgar
- · **Beowulf** -- nephew of King Hygelac; slayer of Grendel, Grendel's mother, the Firedrake, and nine sea monsters; personification of true good
- · **She** -- Grendel's mother; totally evil

The Anglo-Saxon language and the Modern English

Beowulf is min nama.	. <u>Beowulf</u> is my name.
Wille ic asecgan sunu Healfdenes,	I wish to declare to the son of <u>Healfdene</u>
mærum þeodne, min ærende,	To the renowned prince, my mission,
aldre þinum, gif he us geunna wile	To your lord, if he will grant us
þæt we hine swa godne gretan moton."	that we might be allowed to address him, he who is so good."

the decision of Beowulf to go to Hrothgar's aid

Then tales of the terrible deeds of Grendel
Reached Hygelac's thane' in his home with the Geats;
Of living strong men he was the strongest, Fearless and gallant
and great of heart.

He gave command for a goodly *vessel*
Fitted and furnished; he fain²would sail Over the swan-road to
seek *the king*
Who suffered so sorely for need. of men. And his bold retainers
found little to blame
to In his daring venture, dear though *he* was; *They* viewed the
omens, and urged him on.

the preparations for the journey *the actual crossing of the sea*

- Brave was the band he had gathered about him, Fourteen. stalwarts' seasoned" and bold,
- Seeking the shore where the ship lay waiting,
- A sea-skilled mariner sighting the landmarks. Came the hour of boarding; the boat was riding the waves of the harbour under the hill. The eager mariners mounted the prow;
- Billows were breaking, sea against sand.
- In the ship's hold snugly theyr stowed their trappings",
- Gleaming armour and battle-ge;
- Launched the vessel, the well-braced bark, Seaward bound on a joyous journey.

the arrival in Denmark

Over breaking billows, with bellying sail

And foamy beak, like a flying bird

The ship sped on, till the next day's sun

Showed sea-cliffs shining, towering hills

And stretching headlands.

The sea was crossed

The voyage ended, the vessel moored

And the Weder people waded ashore

With clatter of trappings and *coats of mail*; Gave thanks to
God that His grace had granted Sea-paths safe for their ocean-
journey.

questions

- Which lines describe the actual journey?
- How long does the journey last?
- What information is given about the land they arrive at?
- Underline in the text the words the poem uses to describe it.
- What aspects of the ship do the words emphasize?



text

- Do the lines rhyme?
- Do the lines make occasional or frequent use of alliteration? Justify your answer, quoting from the text.

Life in Anglo Saxon Period

Beowulf displays features of the socio-political world common to all Germanic peoples in the early Middle Ages, including the Anglo-Saxons.

Anglo-Saxon society was based on a military aristocracy.

The unit was the clan which was bound by loyalty to thethane or lord.

the lords were closely tied to the king.

They were expected to accompany him, to live in the hall and to fight and die for him. Aristocratic life was communal and centred on the area hall.



The composition of the poem has been the object of much debate.

- the poem was probably composed in the 7th century.
- Was the poem composed and written as we know it today? Or did it gradually grow and take shape as it was transmitted orally from generation to generation?
- Anglo-Saxon poetry was oral.** The characteristics of an oral style were imposed mainly by the necessity to keep chanting without stopping.

style

- Alliteration fell only on stressed key words

rhythm was based on the number of stressed syllables

extensive use of **formulae, that is, fixed expression** or set forms of words, for very common nouns he had to repeat