



The Middle Ages 449-1485



The Middle Ages 449-1485

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



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- ▶ *The earlier part of this period is sometimes called The Dark Ages.*
- ▶ The Middle Ages is divided into two parts: the first is named the Anglo Saxon Period or Old English Period (449-1066); the second is named the Anglo Norman Period or Middle English period (1066-1485).



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- ▶ In 449 tribes of Jutes, Angles, and Saxons from Denmark and Northern Germany started to invade Britain defeating the original Celtic people who escaped to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland.
- ▶ *The language of these tribes was Anglo-Saxon.*



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



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Life and Culture:

- ▶ Life in Saxon England: society was based on the family unit, the clan, and 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



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- ▶ 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 (wordiness).



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Anglo-Saxon Literature

- ▶ Anglo-Saxon literature began as an oral tradition. Stories, poems, and songs were all told aloud and passed from generation to generation orally through minstrels (also called scop).
- ▶ Poems traditionally had a strong beat, alliteration, and no rhyme.
- ▶ Caesura: “a cutting.” A break in a line of poetry, used in Old English to depict a half line. We use a comma for a modern effect.
 - ▶ i.e. *Da com of more under mistheleopum*
“Out from the marsh, from the foot of the hills.”
- ▶ Kenning: derived from the Norse word “kenna” which means “to know, to recognize.” It is a compact metaphor that functions as a name.
 - ▶ i.e. *helmberend*: “Helm bearer” or “warrior”



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Art

- ▶ Anglo-Saxon jewelry, weapons, and illuminated manuscripts show their love for intricacy
- ▶ The most important examples of pagan art are those from the Sutton Hoo treasure



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Language History

- ▶ Before 449 in England: Britons with Celtic languages and Romans, with Latin
- ▶ After 449: Angles, Saxons, and Jutes imposed their languages, so the Celtic languages survived only in Wales Ireland and part of Scotland
- ▶ After 1066: many French words were added to the language



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The Spread of Christianity

- ▶ due to Saint Augustine towards the end of 6th century (A.D. 597).
- ▶ Became Christian but still valued heroic ideals and traditional heroes.
- ▶ The spread of Christianity introduced the Anglo Saxon culture to the continental (from the European Continent) Christian culture which had strong classical components and brought written documents to Britain.



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The Influence of Christianity and Vikings

- ▶ Christianity introduced a lot of Latin words into Old English and gave new meanings to old words
- ▶ The Anglo Saxon folk tales (with heroes and monsters) were interwoven with Christian values and beliefs



Pagan vs. Christianity in Beowulf

Beowulf contains traces of both beliefs.

Pagan

- ▶ Strong nature presence
- ▶ Strength of the warrior

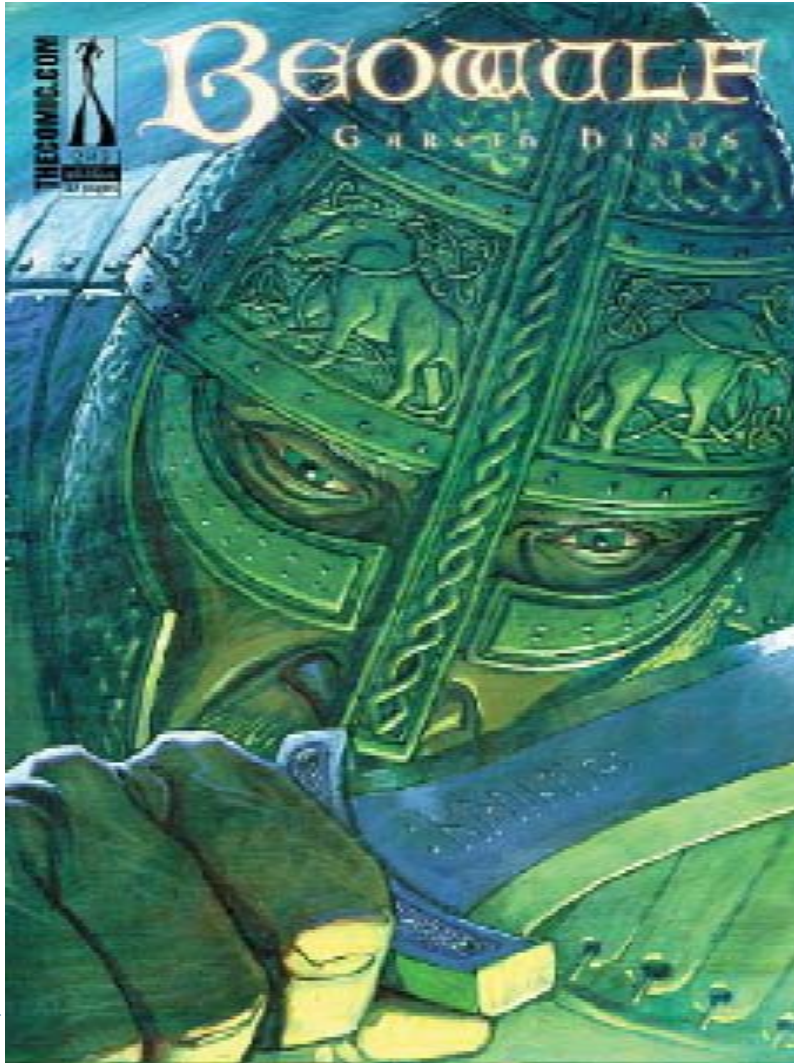


Christianity

- ▶ God is mentioned by two of the main characters in the poem: Beowulf and Hrothgar.
- ▶ Grendel as Lucifer
 - ▶ Both are outcasts
 - ▶ Perform a task for God
 - ▶ Grendel is described as a son or descendant of Cain, a clear Biblical reference.



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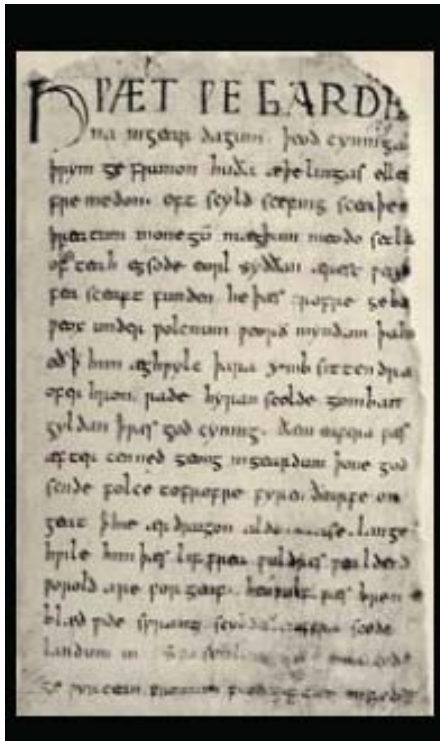
*What is
Beowulf?*

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- ▶ Beowulf is a long epic (more about this later) poem probably composed between the 6th and 8th centuries.
- ▶ 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



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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