

History of English Language and Literature
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Lecture No 1A
Locating the Starting Point- The Anglo Saxon Period


Good morning and welcome to today's session of the course History of English language and literature. In today's session we begin to look the starting points of English literary history, in that sense, the discussion is going to be mostly on how and when the history of English literature began.

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+ The Beginnings

- **C**elts (Brythons and Gaels) up to 55 B.C.
- **R**oman Conquest 55 B.C. - 407 A.D.
- **A**nglo-Saxon Invasions 407 A.D. - 787 A.D.
- **V**iking Invasions 787 A.D. - 1066 A.D.
- **N**orman Conquest begins 1066 A.D.

C. R. A. V. N.



So let us try and locate the beginning in terms of a socio political history, so this is how these may be early inhabitants of England if we try to give a chronological and sequential sense of it. They were initially the Celts were also Brythons and Gaels, they were initially the Celts which included the Brythons and the Gaels in fact incidentally the name Britain has emerged from the tribe called Brythons.

And the Celts inhabited England up to 55 B.C. and we find a Roman Conquest happening from 55 B.C. till about 407 A.D. then the Anglo-Saxon Invasion happened from 407 A.D. and last until the 787 A.D. And then the Viking Invasions which is also continuation of the Anglo-Saxon period this happens from 787 A.D. to 1066 A.D. and with 1066 A.D. we find the beginning of the Norman Conquest and also the end of the old English period. So we try and classify this period I have coin an acronym to make you remember the sequential order of

various inhabitants in the island of England C.R.A.V.N. Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and the Normans.

So in certain ways some of the historians as we noted in the earlier lecture, they are there is lot of debate about the starting point of English literary history. Some argue that the English literary history can only begin from 1066 A.D. onwards with the Norman Conquest, but some are also of the opinion that we need to trace back the history from the Anglo-Saxon times onwards because that is where the old English literature is located and it is very important to get a sense of national heritage and the starting point of the story of England and story of literature and some are of the opinion that one need to go back from the time of the Celtic inhabitants onwards.

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+ Celts and Romans: England before the English people

- Fifth century onwards – migration of Celts and Gaels
- **Romans** – repeated invasions
 - Julius Caesar (55 BC), Claudius (1 AD) – successful
 - Camps = Towns – Romanised with good infrastructure
 - **Military** presence - Maintained **peace**
- Implications
 - **Latin** influence on English language
 - **Christianity** replacing Paganism – St. Augustine converts King Aethelbert in 597 AD

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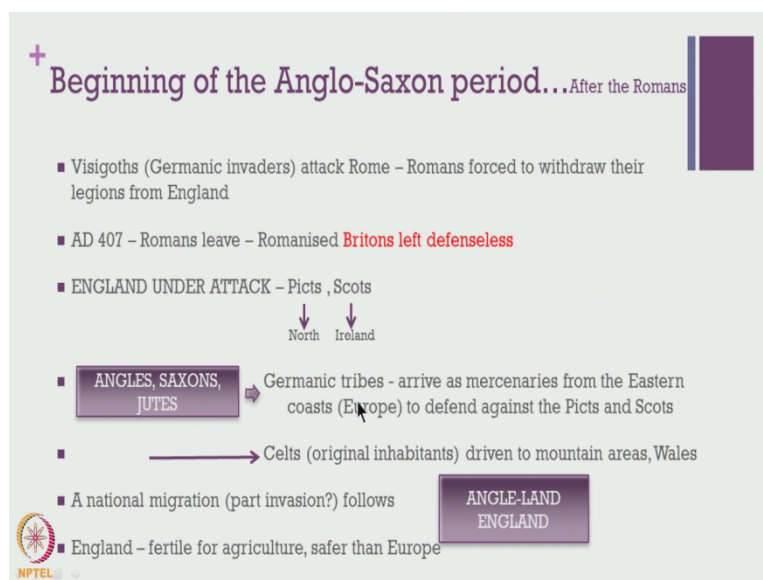
So here we begin the story of England and the story of English literature from the time of the Celtic migration to this island that we now know as England. So from the fifth century onwards, we find massive migration of Celts and Gaels to this particular island and we also note that this island was repeatedly invaded by Romans because Rome world's most dominant empire and the most dominant military force of that time. But this was not a very aggressive kind of invasion because we find that by 55 B.C. and later by the first century A.D. Romans are quite successful in establishing a system of governance in this Celtic England.

And this was not through any violent or aggressive means because there is lot evidence to show that there was a kind of peaceful coexistence between the Celts and the Romans during

that time. In fact, their military camps were not really the camps of the later nature, the military camps lead to the emergence of towns mostly Romanized towns in England and they also ensured that a good infrastructure was in place. So in that sense the military presence helped a lot in maintaining peace in the island of England during the Celtic times.

So what were the implications of this? This the details of the influence of Latin language and later on how Christianity made a comeback even after the Romans had left England, all of these we shall be taking a detail look at, when we talk about the implications of when we talk about the evolution of language from the Celtic period onwards. What is very important for us to note at this point is that the original inhabitants of England this island that we now know as England were the Celts. So in that sense, the story of English begins even before the arrival of the English people at a later point of time from the Anglo-Saxon time onwards.

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So the Anglo-Saxon period which is also known as the old English period, this begins after the Romans. So at the outset it is important to note that the term England the nation gets the name from ANGLE-LAND, which later evolved into ENGLAND. So we begin with the Anglo-Saxon period after the withdrawal the Roman legions from the land of England. Why were the Romans forced to leave? This was and in fact they had a very practical reason to withdraw their legions from the island of England. Visigoths a very violent Germanic invading tribe they were attacking Rome and Rome had to withdrawal its legions from England and in order to defend its own home soil. So we find that by A.D. 407 all the Roman legions are withdrawn from Britain and at this point we find that curiously enough England is

in very vulnerable stage, they are open to attack, they are defenseless because they do not have the Celts, did not have any kind of army to defend themselves.

They heavily relayed on the protection and on all kinds of guidance which they had been receiving from the Roman army. So as we have noted earlier this peaceful coexistence also had offer a lot of protection to the Celts because those were the times when the invading tribes could come and land on any fertile soil and they could even use up the land and over through the original inhabitants from any land. So uh the Celts received a lot of protection from all of these attacks due to the presence of the Roman army. So once they leave, they are under attack and we find these sets of tribes from different areas invading them.

And the two important of those tribes were the Picts and Scots who arrived in the land of England from the north and from also from Ireland. So we find that England is under the severe attack at this point of time, in fact it is at this juncture that the Angles, Saxons and the Jutes arrived in order to protect England from the impending attack of the Picts and the Scots. So historians many historians feel that the Angles, Saxons and the Jutes together arrived in England initially as mercenaries from the eastern coast of Europe and they were quite welcomed in the beginning by the Celts because the Angles, Saxons and the Jutes also offered a kind of defense against invading tribes Picts and Scots.

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So in that sense Celts in fact, made a very strategic political mistake they were using the help of one set of invading tribes to defend themselves against another set of invading tribes. So we find that over a period of time the Angles, Jutes and the Saxons who arrived from this

eastern coast of Europe, they come and begun to settle in this island find them quite spread across the land of England across Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex. So there is a clear domination of all of these tribes put together Angles, Jutes and Saxons in this island of Britain.

So when the Angles, Saxons and Jutes where invading England, was there any resistance against the Anglo-Saxons? we shall be giving an answer to this very shortly. And as we move on it is important to note that these were invading Germanic tribes, this information is very important at the outset in order to understand how Germanic inflections where built into English language at a later stage. So they the original inhabitants the Celts who were living with the support of the Romanized army, they are now being driven to the mountains areas and Wales.

So we find that as and when the Angles, Saxons and Jutes defend the Celts against the attack of Picts and Scots, they also end up driving out the original inhabitants of the island. And so this was in fact to know after that what follows is a national migration of the Anglo Saxons into the island of Britain this some historians feel that there is mostly an invasion and partly a migration but however, from this point of time we note that the Celts are no longer seen in the area of Britain, but they have been completely displaced and they have been completely won over by the Anglo-Saxons.

So what made this possible? In the sense, that why the Angle, Saxons and Jutes coming over to England and overthrowing the native population and also establishing their settlements over there. Many historians have given various reasons for this, but some of the more convincing reasons are about the fertile soil that England had at that point of time. And it was also considered quite safe for than rest of the Europe because in the Europe had not emerged into this civilized the nation state that it is now comprised of.

It was mostly under attack by many invading tribes so all these tribes where on the lookout for a safe place where they could build their civilization and also lead a peaceful life through agriculture. So England offered almost all of these things, since England was mostly an island it also offered a protection from many of these invading tribes. So we find the Anglos, Saxons and jutes settling in this island and at a later point we even find that we hear only about the Anglo-Saxons and the Jutes are no were to be found in later stage.

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+ **King Arthur**

- The historicity of King Arthur – much debated
 - 5th and early 6th century BC
- Led the defense of Britain **against the Anglo Saxon** invaders
- Present in Medieval histories, legends, folklores
- Creator of the **literary persona of Arthur**
 - Geoffrey of Monmouth (1130s)
- A fictional hero? Half-forgotten Celtic deity?
 - Not mentioned in *the Anglo Saxon Chronicle*
 - Not mentioned in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*



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At this point it is also the time for us to give an answer to the question whether there was any kind of resistance offered when the Anglo-Saxons began their attack. So this is a time to perhaps introduce this figure of King Arthur. The historicity of King Arthur is much debated, he said have lived during the 5th and the early 6th century B.C. and he said to have united the Celtic inhabitants of that time. And it also said that he had lead defense of Britain against the Anglo-Saxons invaders and obviously he ends up losing it as well.


We find lot of legends and folklores about King Arthur in mostly in the Medieval histories and also at later point we find that specially in the 1130's we find the Geoffrey we find this writer Geoffrey of Monmouth creating a literary persona of King Arthur. Well at the same time, whether King Arthur actually lived or whether this is just a fictional creation is a much debated and a much contested issue of literary history.

And some even argue that may be he is half forgotten Celtic det who is worshiped during those times because we do not find any mention of King Arthur in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle which is perhaps the most important historical document of the Anglo-Saxon times and we do not find him being mentioned later in B.D's ecclesiastical history of the English people either. So in that sense, one is not very sure of the historical one is not very sure of the historicity of the king Arthur, but at the same time he the story is about King Arthur offer a lot of insights about the life during the Celtic times and also the life of England even before the English people or the Anglo-Saxons arrived in England.

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+ **Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and language**

Five kingdoms (The Heptarchy)



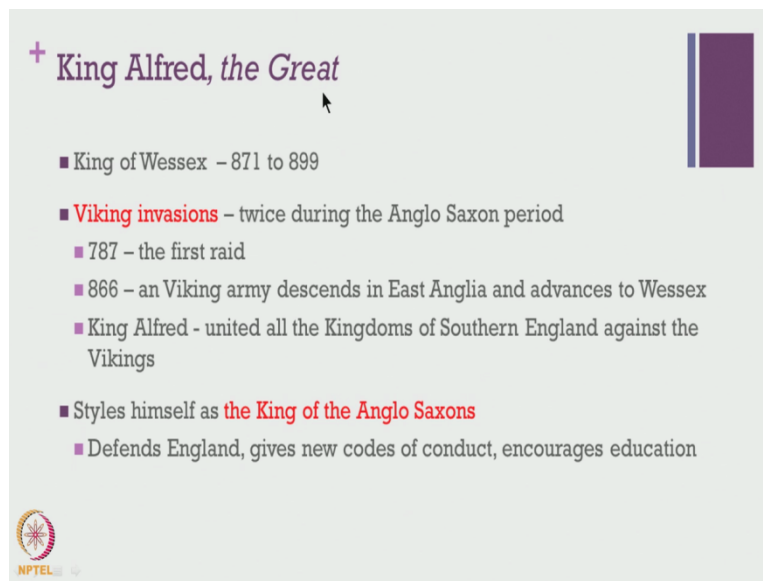
Four main dialects

1. Northumbrian – first to produce literature
2. Mercian
3. Kentish
4. **West Saxon** – becomes standard due to the political supremacy of Wessex – almost all extant texts are preserved in this (language of King Alfred)

So what did the Anglo-Saxons do after they arrived in this island? we find that they had in mind a proper kind of a settlement so they went on to establish 5 kingdoms which are also known as the Heptarchy, the 5 kingdoms being Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Wessex and Kent. And in terms of the language that evolved during that time, there were four main dialects, Northumbrian which was indecently also the first one to produce any kind of oral literature and there was Mercian, Kentish and West Saxon. And later on we find that West Saxon get more supremacy than the other because of the political supremacy of Wessex and also because this was the language that King Alfred about whom we will be hearing about very shortly. And this being the language of political supremacy and the language that King Alfred used and we find the language the dialect West Saxon becoming more important than all the others.


And we also note that many of the extend text we have in the contemporary they are also preserved in this italic of West Saxon. And in terms of literature which we shall be taking a detail look at it in later sessions, poetry flourished mostly in the north and Prose was available mostly in the south. And when we talk about literature of these times it was not always about written literature, but it was also about the oral traditions which were prevailing during those times. So this is also perhaps the time to take a look at who king Alfred the great was.

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+ King Alfred, the Great

- King of Wessex – 871 to 899
- **Viking invasions** – twice during the Anglo Saxon period
 - 787 – the first raid
 - 866 – an Viking army descends in East Anglia and advances to Wessex
 - King Alfred - united all the Kingdoms of Southern England against the Vikings
- Styles himself as **the King of the Anglo Saxons**
 - Defends England, gives new codes of conduct, encourages education

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He is always mentioned as King Alfred the great in literary and political history, he was a king of Wessex if we take a quick look again at this map Wessex was the most important one but also Wessex was kind of a leader who could bring together all the other kingdoms and the provinces. So we find King Alfred being King of Wessex from 871 to 899 and he in fact successfully could unite the rest of the kingdoms and rest of the provinces under his supremacy and he was very important in the political history of England because he had lead the British army against the Viking invasions.

Vikings were a group of very ruthless and very violent invaders who were quite dreaded during that time we find that they were usually always associated with war, with conquest and their violence was quite notorious during that time. So Britain being this land which was very fertile, which was safe which was also quite a fertile land in establishing proper kind of settlements. Vikings continuously invaded Britain, we find that during the Anglo-Saxon period itself the Vikings invaded twice, one in 787 and the second one in 866, there is a third one about which we shall be hearing quite shortly.

And in 866 we find that a Viking army had descended in this area of East Anglia and it also advanced to Wessex, but we find that king Alfred had successfully driven out all the Vikings from that area because he could unite kingdoms all the kingdoms against the attack of the Vikings. And if you note the all the kingdoms were quite aware of the threat that the Vikings had posed to them, so in that sense it was easier as well for king Alfred to unite them politically and also come up with an army to attack.


And in the available records later on we find that though King Alfred was primarily the king of Wessex, he styles himself as a king of the Anglo-Saxons because there is no other figure that we see in the old English period was capable of uniting all the kingdoms together and who was capable of assuming this political and other kinds of status that serves a king. So he not only united England, but he also had given a new code of conduct for them to abide with and he is also the one who encouraged education art, literature, etcetera during the old English period.

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The Dane Law

Meanwhile...

- 876 – England falls on **the Danes**
 - Denmark and Norway
- 1003-1013 – Many invasions
- **Dane Law** – England occupied by Danes
 - Many laws survived
 - Danes – unworthy successors
 - The end of Danish rule - 1066



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So meanwhile there are these other kinds of development that happened politically, in 876 we find that Britain falls into the hands of Danes for a brief time and this is Danes were the group of tribes that attacked England from primarily from Denmark and Norway. And there were many invasions from 1003 till 1013 and during this time we find that the Danes end up occupying most of the land and Britain and here we can see in the map that most of Mercia, East Anglia, Northumbria all had fallen into the hands of the Danes. So this also leads to something that we now known as Danelaw, Danelaw emerged in the areas that were occupied by the Danes. So in fact, the after king Alfred we do not even find any kind of a single person who was capable of uniting the all Anglo-Saxons together. So this had also may be Anglo-Saxons and the land of Britain quite vulnerable to a lot of attack.

But though the Danes was successful in establishing a code of conduct, establishing what we now call as the Daneslaw in almost half of Britain. We find that they did not have any worthy successors so at a later point of time, we also note that the Danish rule and the prevalence of the Danes Daneslaw ends by 1066. it is of much curiosity and interest to know that some of

the legal terms survived from the Daneslaws period has survived into the modern English as well. These details we shall be taking a look at when we talk about the revolution of language from the old English period onwards.

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+ End of Anglo-Saxon period:
End of the Viking Age and Norman Conquest of 1066 AD

- 1066 AD – the **Battle of Stamford**
 - England defeats an invading Norwegian army
 - The end of the Viking Age
- In less than 3 weeks - Attack from Normans – England defeated – **Battle of Hastings**
- **Norman Conquest** - 1066 AD - under William the Conqueror
 - William of Normandy arrives in Kent (Hastings) from Normandy, France
 - Defeats **Harold Godwinson (the last Anglo Saxon King)**
- Norman-French influence on England
 - French as the official language
- The end of Anglo Saxon dominance



So what exactly mark the end of Anglo-Saxon period, it was certainly not the Danish occupation, there was another bigger event which had to follow after that and this also noted the end of not just the end of Anglo-Saxon period but we also simultaneously find the end of the Viking invasions and end of Viking age as well. And from 1066 A.D. with the Norman Conquest we find not just England, but also Europe entering a new phase of a new phase in history in literature so on and so forth because most of this invading tribes we do not here about them from this point onwards.

So this is how the turn of events were like, in 1066 A.D. there was initially this battle of Stamford which in which England successfully defeated Norwegian army, Norwegian were also a kind of invading tribes who could also be classified among the Vikings. And the battle of Stamford was successfully defended by the then Danish king and but at the same time we find that this success was very short lived because in less than three weeks there was an attack from the Normans and in this England gets defeated and this changes the history of England forever.

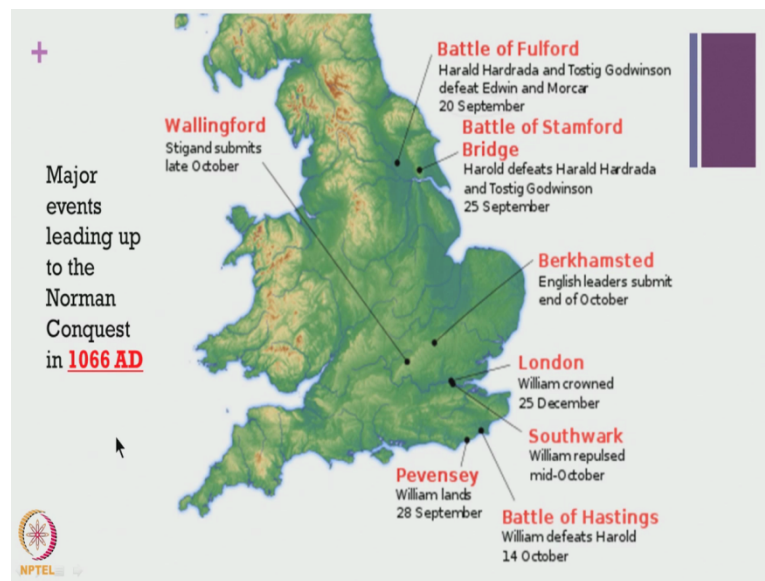
And many historians feel that England was quite unprepared for this attack because they had just survived the war and they were they did not have enough time to come with the resources or even try and prepare for an attack against the Normans. So Norman Conquest is also

known as the battle of Hastings this marks the end of the Anglo-Saxon age and it began it marked the beginning of the Norman rule and French influence in England.

So this is how Norman Conquest happened, it happened in 1066 A.D. saying that England was quite weak under the Dane Danish ruler as we noted earlier the Danish were not worthy of preserving their throne because the successors were quite weak. So William the Conqueror from Normandy in France, he identified that there is a potential through which he could become the king of England. So he launches this attack from France William of Normandy, he arrives in Kent which is also known as Hastings he arrives from Normandy in France and he defeated Harold Godwinson the then Danish ruler. Incidentally, he also happens to be the last Anglo-Saxon king that we hear of because the death of Harold Godwinson and also Norman Conquest marked the end of Anglo-Saxon rule.

And this event is very important politically, geographically and also linguistically because from then on from 1066 A.D. with the Norman Conquest we began to see a Norman French influence on England. We find that the Germanic influence that the Anglo-Saxons had brought in earlier it begins to fade away and the Norman French influence begins to stay on in that sense French also becomes the official language displacing the old English language of the Anglo-Saxons and we also find this event marking in end of the Anglo-Saxon dominance in all ways. So which is why historians debate a lot about which could be the starting point of English history and English literature whether we begin talking about the Anglo-Saxon period or do we begin talking about the Norman conquest onwards. But in this course we have we have given you attention to the old English literature as well and also we have marked the ways in which this transition has been enabled after the Norman Conquest.

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So just to make this little easier for you, there are this set of events that led to Norman Conquest in 1066 A.D. which would also enable us to understand there was no way in which the Anglo-Saxon could have resisted the invasion of the Normans. On 20th September, we find this battle of Fulford happening there are a lot of these as we mentioned earlier itself, there are a lot of these invading tribes were continuing to attack Britain because it was fertile land also because Britain was safer than Europe. On 25th September again in 1066 itself we find the battle of Stamford Bridge where Harold defeats the invading Norwegian tribe and he is successful over here.

But at the same time within three days we find that William of Normandy, he lands in this province known as Pevensey and though Harold and his army comes to know about this there is very little time for him to organize an attack and come all the way to the south to launch an attack against William of Normandy's army. And we find that gradually by 14th October there is a battle there is this battle of Hastings which happens and William successfully out do's Harold in all ways because there was not enough time to again come up with an army after this battle of Stamford on 25th September.

So we do find that there is very little time and very little resources available to launch another attack. And as we move on to see the other turn of events, by mid-October William is repulsed and we also find that by the end of October all the English leaders they submit to the authority of William of Normandy and by late October we find there is this one a province which was descending under this ruler Stigand, we find him also submitting after this battle

of Wallingford. And by the end of December by the end of 1066 A.D. we find the inevitable happening William of Normandy is crowned as the king of Britain.

And this also marks the beginning of the Norman Conquest and the beginning of the Norman French influence into English culture, English language, English literature, English social life and almost everything that has come to define England from the time onwards. So as we come to the end of today's session it is very important for us to note that the battle of Hastings or the Norman Conquest of 1066 mark the beginning of Middle English period. And this is of supreme importance to our understanding because in this certain way the history of English literature also as some historians argue it begins properly with the beginning of the Middle English period.

But however, as we noted earlier on it, language and literature began to evolve from the old English period onwards. So in that sense we also need to take a closer look at the kind of literature that had begun to emerge from the old English period onwards. So in the next lecture we shall be taking a look at the poetry and prose that began to emerge during the old English period, which will also get a clearer understanding about how literature was fashioned during that times and also how literature serve as a window to understand the various socio political happenings of the period. With this we come to an end of this lecture, thank you for listening and look forward to see you in the next session.