

## Chapter 13: Angles, Saxons, & Goths in the North

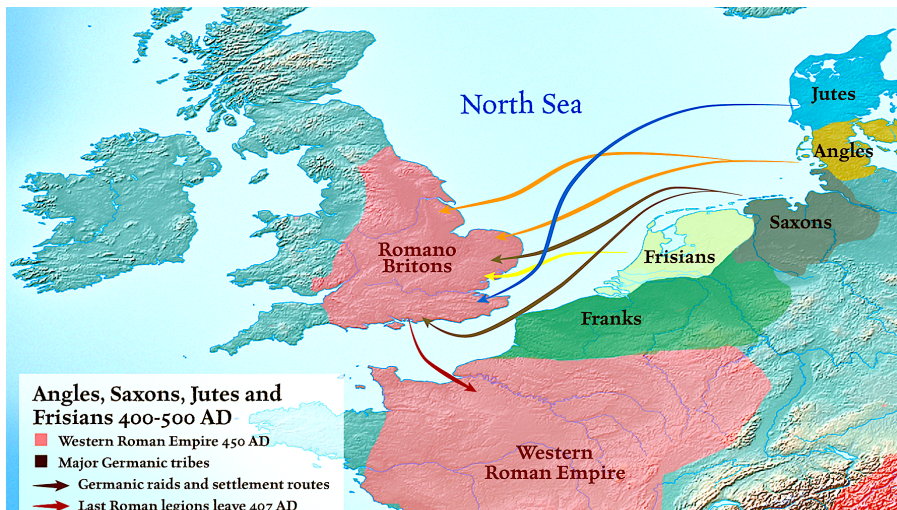
### The Anglo-Saxon Confederation

When the Germanic-Gothic tribes overran Western Europe in the fifth century CE during the final period of Roman decadence, they did so at the cost of their previous homelands.

Of all the people in ancient Germania east of the Elbe whom Tacitus mentions as Germans, **not a single Teutonic vestige remained in the time of Charlemagne.**<sup>1</sup>

Gone! Did they just disappear from the pages of history? Of course not! We know that the East Germani simply followed an old pattern established by the Celts and Scythians seven to nine centuries earlier. An expansion followed the loss of previously held territory. The practice of moving on was an old, old habit that goes back to the Near Eastern nomadic lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>

The East Germani simply went west. They went west into Gaul and what we now call the Netherlands and Belgium. They went west till they came to the North Sea. But water was no barrier. They made ships and continued going west. It was as if an unseen instinct was urging them to keep heading towards whatever new lands might be found towards the setting sun.



#### Germanic Migrations from Europe to England

<https://historyofenglishpodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/27-Angles-Saxons-Jutes-Frisians.png>

Shortly after 450 CE, a great wave of new people took to the sea and went to England. These tribes are generally known as Angles and Saxons. But the Anglo-Saxon name did not just represent two distinct migrating groups. “Anglo-Saxon” was a broad label for a whole confederation of Germani-Gothic tribes that included: Saxons, Goths/Jutes (“Jutes” being a name derived from “Gut(th)” meaning in English “Goths”),<sup>3</sup>

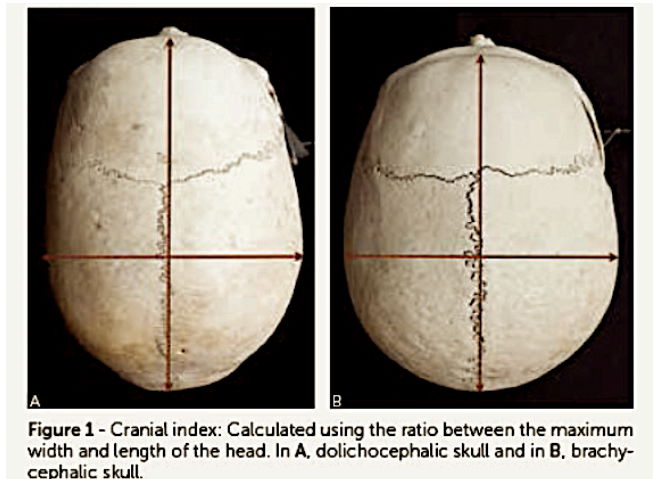
Vandals (Cimbri and Teutones), Frisians, Danes, Hunsings, Rugians, Boructers (Franks), Swedes, Finns, and probably a few Wends besides the public relations savvy Angles.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas William Shore, *Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Race*, Kennikat Press, 1971, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfram, p. 20; Shore, p. 60, The Jutes were “mainly Goths or of Gothic descent.”

The Angles were later called Normans, Northmen, or Vikings.<sup>4</sup>



#### Common Anthropological Characteristics

<https://www.scielo.br/j/dpjo/a/Ysjy9xVxQJbNTQNb3wy3YkQ/?lang=en>

The great majority of these various tribes had an anthropological characteristic in common. According to archaeological excavations of ancient English cemeteries, the new settlers were long skulled or dolichocephalic. Statistically speaking, only about eight percent of ancient “Saxon” skulls were brachycephalic or round skulled. This means the typical Saxon skull, like the Celts also,<sup>5</sup> had a width not exceeding four-fifths of the length. The Goths, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Angles and Saxons all had this head type. A survey of the 400 bodies recovered from the peat bogs of northern Europe and Scandinavia, dating from about 100 BC to 500 CE, fit the Roman stereotype of the Germani as large-limbed and fair-haired. These northern Germani were also

long skulled. While this anthropological characteristic is typical of the ancient northern Germani, the majority of southern Germani living south of Thuringia during this time were brachycephalic or round skulled.<sup>6</sup>

The ancient British chronicler, the Venerable Bede, who was himself an Angle, stated that the English were descended from many tribes. “Saxon” like “Saka” or “Scythian” was a tribal confederation name originally used by outsiders to designate a whole group of related tribes. During the reign of King Alfred the Great (871-899) it was recorded that Franks, Frisians, Gauls,

---

<sup>4</sup> Shore, p. 42: “The Angles lived on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula and Scandinavia. Later they were called Vikings or Northmen, or Normans”; pp. 52-53: “Frisians, Danes, Hunni or Hunsings, Rugians, and Boructers, must certainly be numbered among them....the Boructarii or Bructers...are known later on to have been part of the Frank confederation”; p. 57: “Under the general names of Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, some Goths and Vandals...took a considerable part in the invasion and settlement of England”; pp. 70-71: “Alliance, indeed, played a very important part in the earlier conquest of England by the Anglo-Saxons, and in its later conquest by the Danes. In both of these conquests the Frisians took part. Some came in the former period under the name of Angles or Saxons, in the latter under the name of Danes or Vikings”; p. 136: “The Finns have left the name by which they were called by the Frisians, Saxons, and other Germans, in some Finn place names. They were called ‘Cwaen,’ which is mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charters and other early records”; Deisner, p. 123: “The first mention of the Vandals [as Celtic Vandilii] is by early Imperial authors such as Tacitus. They were often associated with the Cimbri and the Teutons since they originally came from the same area—Jutland (North Jutland is still known as Vendsyssel and Cape Skagen was formerly called Vandilsskagi) and the district around Oslo Bight. Many similarities of the cultural and linguistic nature with the Gothic tribes have already been noted.”

<sup>5</sup> Shore, p. 192.

<sup>6</sup> Shore, pp. 31-32; Todd, pp. 82, 84-85.



## The Baltic Sea—The Trading Hub of Northern Europe

Maritime communications linked all the tribes living on the shores of the Baltic. For centuries the people living there had traded with one another and with others far to the south and east. As stated previously, the fossil gum called amber, which was found on the coasts of the Baltic, was a highly prized commodity that was easily sold to both barbarian and Roman. The Gutones and the Æestyi (the Eastmen) were heavily involved in its trade.

In the section on the ethnogenesis of the Gothic people, it was established that various clans of the Gutones contributed one of the major ethnic components that helped form a new Scythian people at the Black Sea who became known later as the Goths. Also, as previously noted, the Ostrogothic king Ermanaric's great trading kingdom reached as far north as the Baltic Æestyi. The main Ostrogothic trade routes through Eastern Europe were via the Dvina, Volga, and Dnieper rivers. Traders, however, also ranged west.

Amber was certainly used as an ornament among the Anglo-Saxons at a very early date. It has been frequently found in the form of beads and other articles in cemeteries in many parts of England, and its use at this early time in England points to an early trade with the Baltic.... These amber traders were commonly known in England by their German name of Eastman, the *Æestyi*....

To the north of [the amber country] is the **Isle of Gotland...in the time of the Romans and during the Anglo-Saxon period [it] was the greatest commercial center in the north of Europe.** Thousands of Arabic coins have been found there; also silver ornaments, to which the name Kufic has been given, showing that **the old trade route with Gotland extended at one time as far eastward as Bokhara, Samarkand, Bagdad and Kufa.**<sup>10</sup>

The Baltic island of Gotland (Goth land) trading as far east as distant cities on the Silk Road just north of Bactria? This was close to the Tarim Basin, the Tien Shan Mountains—the old territories of the Massagetae and the Tokharian-speaking Eastern Scythian Yuezhi! The knowledge and ability to carry on such trade certainly did not come out of nowhere.

As the major trading hub of the north, Gotland also carried on a brisk trade with England. More than 20,000 ancient Anglo-Saxon coins have been recovered in Gotland and Sweden. Even as late as the Norman-era Domesday Book, it was mentioned that the Scandinavian and Danish settlers in England used a coinage called marks and oras. The weight and value of these coins were according to the prevailing monetary standards used in the eastern trade with the Byzantine Empire!

The commerce of the Baltic during the period of the Anglo-Saxon settlement was largely in the hands of the Goths. **It is impossible to overrate the commercial importance of the Isle of Gotland at this time and for many centuries later.** The ruins of Wisby, the chief port of ancient Gotland, are to this day the greatest wonder of the Baltic, and Öland Isle was another seat of ancient Gothic trade. **There is some connection between the ancient trade of the Goths and the settlement of them and their allies in England.**<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Shore, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Shore, p. 53.

The Isle of Gotland and the Black Sea stood at opposite ends of the great Ostrogothic trading empire of Ermanaric. From these two bases of operations the Goths reached west to England and east toward China and India. When the Huns destroyed the Black Sea hub of the Ostrogoths, this still left the Baltic operations intact. From Gotland the Goths developed colonial activities in England, and when the Hunnic confederation of Attila collapsed and withdrew from Europe, evidently the Goths reestablished trade connections with the Byzantine Empire and much farther east via the Silk Road.



### **Vandals and Vikings — Masters of Trade**

<https://naval-encyclopedia.com/medieval-ships.php/>

Here is a curious fact of history. While the Byzantine Emperor Justinian was sending his talented general Belisarius to kick the Vandals out of North Africa and the Ostrogoths out of Italy, Belisarius (in the name of his Roman emperor), ceded Britain, one of the old provinces of the Roman Empire, to the Goths!<sup>12</sup> Justinian must have been aware of the Gothic connections to Britain. The significantly large numbers of late Roman Empire coins found in Gotland would indicate the Romans were aware of its trading importance and connections.

It seems clear the Goths (Jutes) played a significant role in organizing and providing ships and manpower for the English invasions. And, of course, accompanying the Goths would have been their closely related allies and the Vandals whose language was “Gothic.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Shore, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Diesner, p. 123.



There is definite evidence of a Gothic colonial expansion into England. In ancient English records Eastmen or Esterlings were noted as coming to the country. Even the Ostrogothic name is recognized by scholars as being preserved in the clan name “Osgotbi” listed in two Saxon charters as well as in the Lincolnshire place name “Osgodby.”<sup>15</sup>

But even more conclusive is the archaeological evidence testifying of a Gothic presence. In the parts of England such as Kent and Northumberland, which were known to have been settled by Angles and Jutes, there have been a number of discoveries of inscriptions written in runes. The runic alphabet was used by the Goths, even if its origin is still debated.

...early Gothic runes were modifications of the letters of the Greek alphabet, and were developed in Northern Gothland as a result of the commercial intercourse of the Goths across Eastern Europe with the Greek traders of the Levant.... There were Gotlanders in early Russia, and we know that the Isle of Gotland has revealed abundant traces of an ancient overland trade across that country.<sup>16</sup>

A good number of runic inscriptions discovered on the Scandinavian peninsula, an area of Gothic settlement, show distinctive links between that area and England. For example, a special runic inscription at Skaäng, in Södermanland, Sweden, uses a peculiarly English runic symbol for “and” showing that the person who carved it was familiar with the further development of the runic alphabet in England. There are also a variety of inscriptions explicitly talking of someone “who died in England,” of a young man “who went to England,” or a memorial set up by the children of a man who “resided westward in England.”<sup>17</sup>



**Baltic Antler Comb — Runes 160CE**

Bloodofox/ CC BY SA 3.0 National Museum of Denmark

Thousands of these inscriptions were carved on stone pillars erected along public highways in what is now Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Runic inscriptions on smaller, portable objects also have been found in the Danube Valley. Setting up stone pillars was a common custom among the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, as well as, the Sweons or Swedes. The Swedish tribe on the Scandinavian peninsula only became predominant in the ninth century CE and the Goths residing there essentially blended into them in a fashion similar to their fusion with the Anglo-Saxon-Celts *et al* in England. Presence of the Swedish tribe in England is also preserved in place names like Suanescamp, Kent;

Swanesig, Berks; Swanetun, Norfolk; Swonleah, Hants; and Swonleah, Oxfordshire.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Shore, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Shore, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Shore, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Shore, p. 140.





All these “barbarian” tribes who cooperated in the invasion and resettlement of England shared a great deal in common. They shared an anthropological characteristic of being mostly ethnic long-headed types. Their spoken dialects or languages were mutually intelligible. And they seemed to share many other prejudices and customs.

All the groups who participated in the Anglo-Saxon confederation of Baltic eastmen had a common reverence for wells and fountains in their pagan worship. In this they were not at all different from the Celts. The custom of lighting bonfires at the summer solstice was pervasive in Old England and throughout Scandinavia. They also shared some unusual burial customs.



**Burial Mounds at Rehaugane**

[fjordnorway.com](http://fjordnorway.com)

In Scandinavia, barrows or burial mounds were commonly raised over the dead although cremation was also popular for the average person. Among the northern Germani the practice of inhumation tended to be reserved for the elite of society. On the Baltic islands of Gotland and Bornhold both burial methods were practiced. The erection of such mounds of soil or cairns of stones over the dead persisted there long after it had been discontinued elsewhere in northern Europe.

A good example of a richly furnished barrow is that from Saetrang (Ringerrike, Norway), dating from the late fourth century. This was a double grave, the dead and their grave-offerings being placed within a wooden chamber and the whole covered by a stone cairn. The bodies were those of a man and a woman, richly clad and lying on bear-skins. Their grave-goods included weapons, drinking vessels, buckets, pottery, jewelry and gaming pieces.<sup>20</sup>

Another striking feature of Gothic-Germani burials was the horse sacrifice.

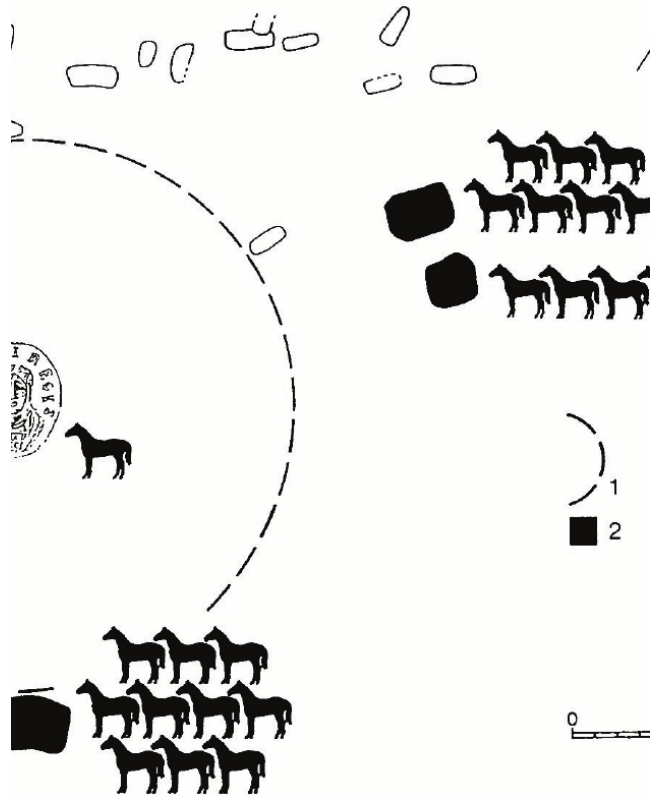
At Leuna, a grave in the Saale group [c. 300 CE, in central Germany] lay close to a pit, which contained the skull and lower leg bones of a horse. these must be the remnants of a horse sacrifice of a kind which spread westward from the nomadic peoples of the Russian steppes....

The horse sacrifices, however, were not only celebrated in cemeteries. Several have been evidenced in peat-bog deposits, and another within a settlement, at Sorte Muld on the island of Bornholm. **In one area, among the Saxons in Westfalen, the burials of entire horses are frequently found among the graves of men and women.**<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Todd, p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> Todd, pp. 148-149.



### Childeric Tomb and Horse Burials

JO - Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History

In the royal burial of the Frankish chieftain Childeric (482 CE, Tournai, Belgium), the father of the Merovingian king Clovis, along with much fine gold jewelry, magnificently decorated swords, a spear and ax, his mourning family included the head of a horse with its harness. A horse sacrifice! All these Germani-Gothic burials resemble the traditional, but much earlier Scythian burial practices found on the Hungarian plains, in the Black Sea region, much farther east at Pazyryk in Western Siberia, and even in Chinese Turkestan!

When it comes to religion and ideology... the many survivals of totemism and shamanism which are found among the Germanic tribes...**must have come from the common past of the Indo-European peoples....** Homage to the dead also included the often sumptuous articles placed in the graves of high-ranking persons, especially in the so-called "princely" graves. **Here there are parallels with other civilizations, such as the Scythian kurgans of Eastern Europe.**<sup>22</sup>

The Scythians appreciated eating horses and so did the Germani and the Anglo-Saxons! It seems in 732 that Pope Gregory III wrote a letter to Bishop Boniface, posted to Germany at that time, protesting his tolerance of his parishioners culinary appreciation of horse flesh. However, what seemed abominable to an Italian pope must not have been considered unusual to the bishop, a native of Anglo-Saxon England. Nay, he would have thought nothing of it.

In the Old Saxon *Heliand*, a paraphrase of the gospels made early in the ninth century, the "shepherds" of the original become in Germanic rendering *ehuskalkos*, horse-servants, who were not watching their flocks by night, but rather were guarding their horses.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Diesner, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> Gummere, pp. 40-41.

## **Unwritten Right**

The list of common practices among these Indo-European peoples could go on and on. Who were these confederations of Anglo-Saxons, Goths, Parthians, Celts, and Scythians? They were people who looked similar, and spoke closely related languages. These related tribes demonstrated considerable talents in mining, metalworking, and commercial trading. They shared cultural traditions of cloth making, an artistic flair, and kindred motifs. They were renown for their military prowess and expertise with the bow. They loved their horses and moved in great wagon caravans with their sheep and cattle. Often they were nomads — people who kept having to move on to new territory. They were called a hidden people, exiles, and wanderers. They cherished oral traditions, had some common civil and religious customs, and loved their liberty.

In the thirteenth century, the English legal writer, Henry de Bracton, noted that England was different from other countries of his day because they still followed the old way, that of unwritten right and custom.<sup>24</sup> So during the time of King Henry II, while the general custom was to give an entire property to the eldest son, if, however, the land belonged to a “free socman” (Sakman or Saxon) the land might be partible among all the man’s sons. Some ancient customs in different counties held that all of a property was the right of the youngest son. Among the Saxons from the most ancient times the male descendants were to receive the inheritance, but for default of a male, the daughters were to inherit. Where did such a mix of customs come from? Legal experts have suggested that some of them must have originated from the east.

Customs in the ‘East’ were varied, and the biblical accounts may give us some relevant information to consider:

— Abraham sent away Ishmael, his older son, so that only his youngest son, Isaac, the son of Abraham’s first wife Sarah would receive the inheritance.

— Later, the grandsons of Isaac shared a partible inheritance, among 12 brothers.

— However, in the course of time Jacob’s younger son, Joseph, ended up receiving a double portion. This occurred when Jacob adopted Joseph’s sons as his own. In this way, Jacob’s two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh shared the inheritance with their uncles.

—Jacob’s daughter did not receive an inheritance. But, if a man died with no male heirs, Moses made a judgment that the daughters could inherit in order to preserve their family lineage.

Strange isn’t it. We followed these ten tribes from their homeland, Samaria, into Arzareth, the Eurasian steppes as Scythian nomads. We demonstrated their close ties with related Celtic tribes, and later with Germanic tribes. We examined the Celto-Scythian Tokharian speakers in the Tarim Basin, and later the Scythian influence in Bactria and Parthia. Then we traced the Achaemenid Parthians (Ostrogoths) as they melded with the Visigoths then moved west with the Alans, and Germanic tribes pushed by the Huns attacks. Finally, we considered the great migrations from Europe into Britain. So having followed the evidence, the mysterious origins of the peoples of Northwestern Europe and their customs should not be quite so mysterious anymore.

---

<sup>24</sup> Shore, p. 146.