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The World of Aldhelm (c.639-709)



Son of Kenten, House of Wessex? c655
 Hermitage, Mael Dub c668- 673
 Canterbury 675 Founded
 Benedictine monastery Malmesbury
 693 Pope Sergius 1 Papal Bull.
 705 Bishop of Sherborne 709
 25th May died

Musician
 riddles & poetry
 poetry

wrote
 Scholar of Latin

Tall, cheerful, friendly
 natured

and good

Travelled West Saxony on foot
 Sang ballads played harp
 gather crowds for sermons
 local dialect.

to
 in the

Established over 20 churches
 monasteries

and

His funeral procession,
 miles Doultling to Malmesbury
 crosses erected every 7 mls where he
 rested.

50
 Stone

Riddle 6 of 101 riddles

**I share with the surf one destiny
In rolling cycles when each month repeats.
As beauty in my brilliant form retreats,
So too the surges fade in cresting sea.**

VI

Nunc egocum pelagi fatis communibus insto

Tempora reciprosis convolvens menstrua cyclis.

Ut mihi lucifluae decrecit gloria formae,

Sic augmenta latex redundans gurgite perdit

My Questions



Where does Aldhelm fit into history?

What was his world like?

What influences were there from the rest of the world?

PRE ALDELM (639-709CE)

313ce Edict of Milan
Emperor Constantine,
Christianity state religion

383- 410ce Roman Withdrawal
from Britain

406 - 453ce Attila the Hun
invasions

449 - 550ce Angles, Saxons,
Jutes migrations into Southern
Britain.

476ce Fall of Western Roman
Empire

516/539ce Ambrosius
Aurelianus/Uther Pendragon/
King Arthur

Victories Badon & Camlann to
counter Anglo-Saxon invasion



Mount Badon 516
Arthur leading cavalry charge
1898 illustration for [*Idylls of the King*](#)

561ce St Columb
Monastery Iona

570 – 632ce Muhammad
founder of Islam (c600)

597ce Pope Gregory ,
Augustine mission

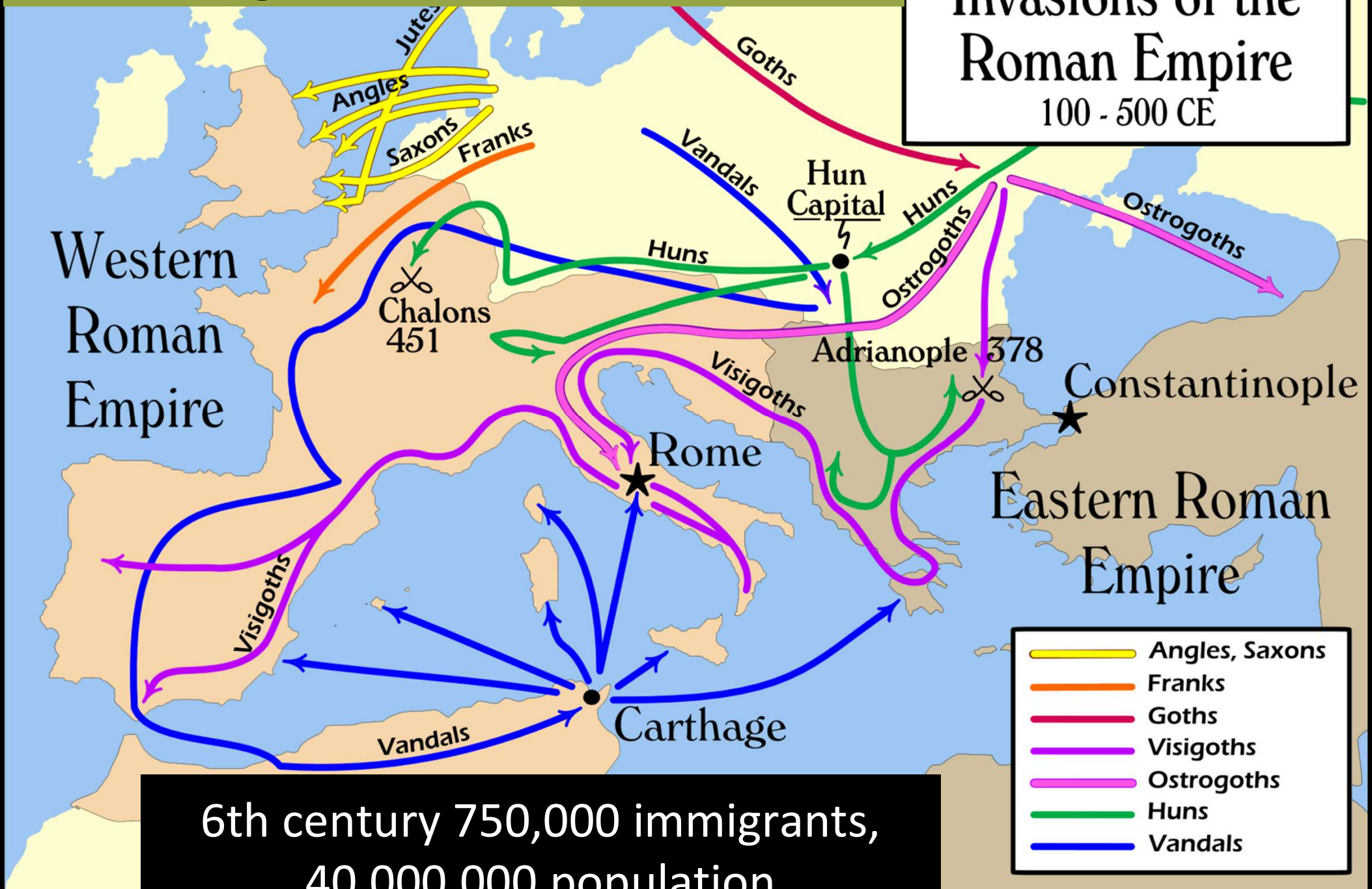
598ce Augustine
1st Archbishop of Canterbury

618ce - 907 Tang Dynasty China
golden age of reform and
cultural advancement.

628ce [Battle of Cirencester](#):
[King Penda of Mercia](#)
captures lands along river
Severn

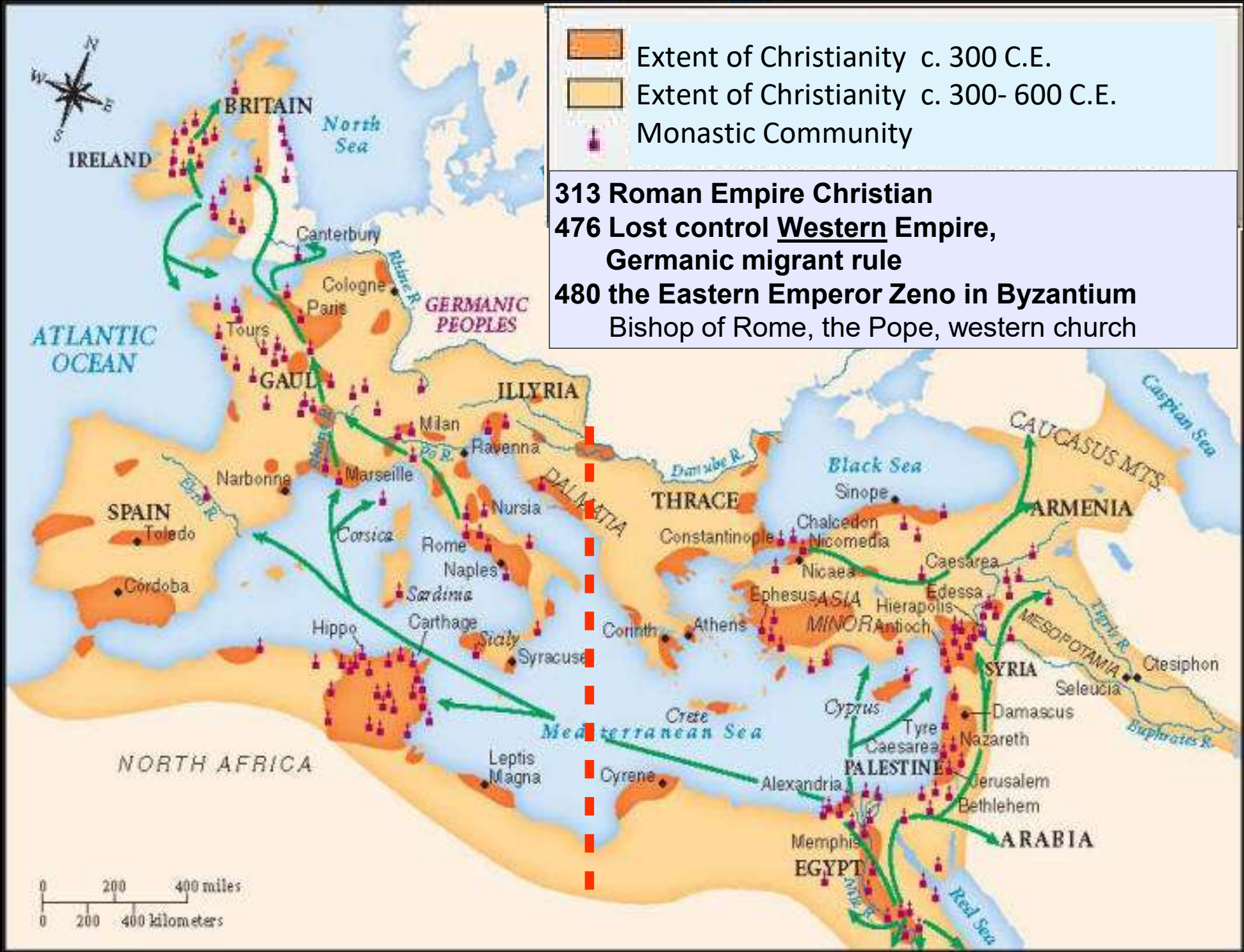
"The Migration Period" 300 - 800ce

Invasions of the Roman Empire 100 - 500 CE

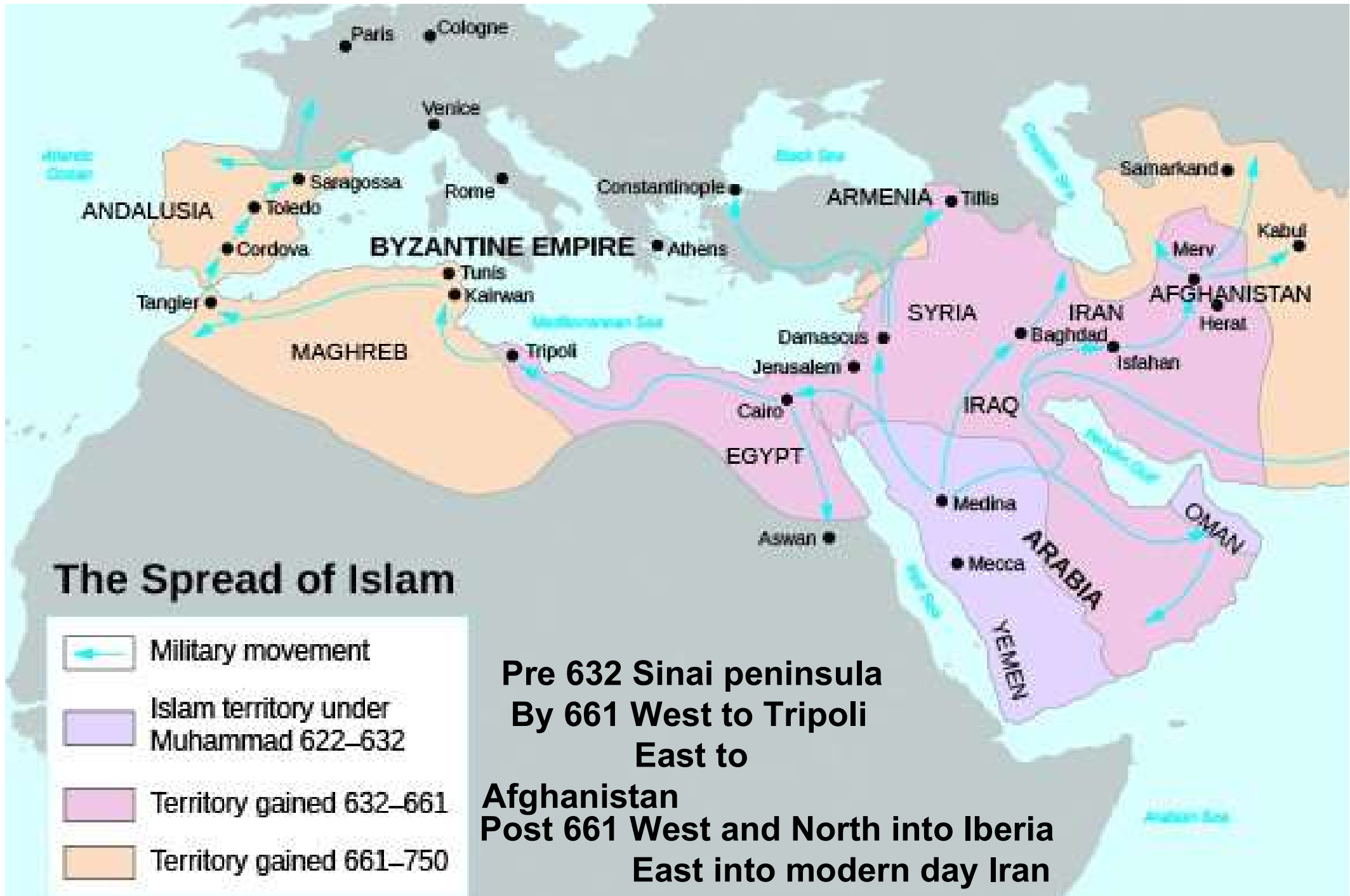


6th century 750,000 immigrants,
40,000,000 population

Western & Eastern Church 300 - 600



The Islamic World 622 -750



RELATIONSHIPS After C7th Invasions monasteries & settlements allowed to remain.



St Catherine's Monastery Sinai Peninsula Egypt -Built 548 - 565



Shared veneration Mount Sinai
Prophet Muhammad charter
safety & tax exemption

Arabs had
right of passage,
access to food and lodging.

Christians had security
security in their city
travelling...by land or sea

THE WIDER WORLD & WEST SAXONY

Widespread Trade

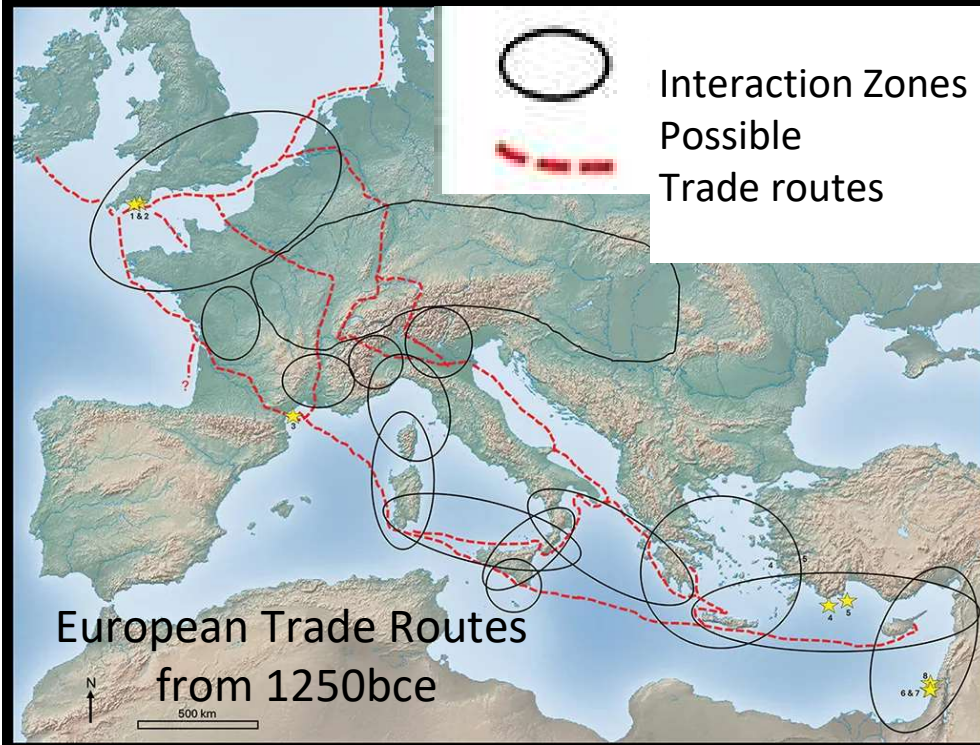
A chunk of Baltic amber
Amber traded since c [3000 BCE](#),
amber beads from the Baltics
reached as far as Egypt.



THE TIN ROUTE

- already flourishing in the 1st millennium BCE.
- stretched from tin mines in Cornwall
- through France, down to Greece and beyond.

EXTENSIVE TRADE ROUTES

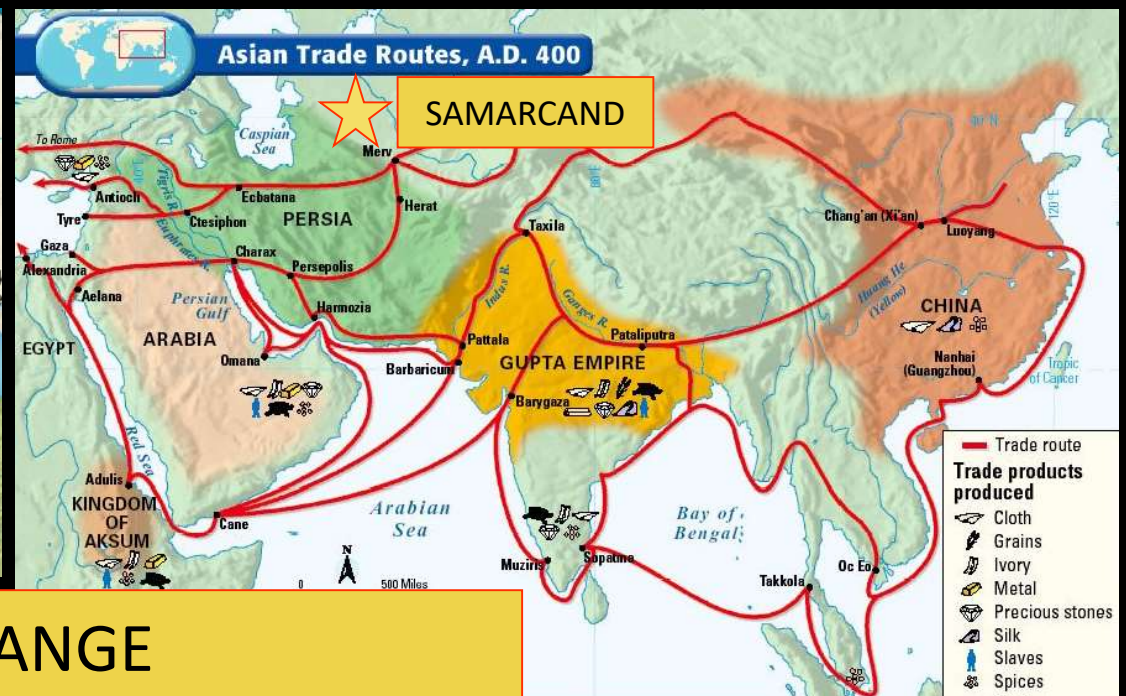


TRADE

- wool / flax
- tin
- silver
- gold
- grains
- ivory
- spices
- incense
- slaves
- precious stones
- silk

CULTURE

- religion
- arts
- knowledge
- technology
- intellectual exchange



INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGE

ALDELM AD 639-709

669ce

Theodore of Tarsus

Archbishop Canterbury

Adrian Abbot St

Augustines

c. 615 – 683 **St Æbbe**

founded monasteries

[Ebchester](#) & [St Abb's](#)

[Head](#)

c 634 – 687 **St Cuthbert,**

Bishop of Lindisfarne

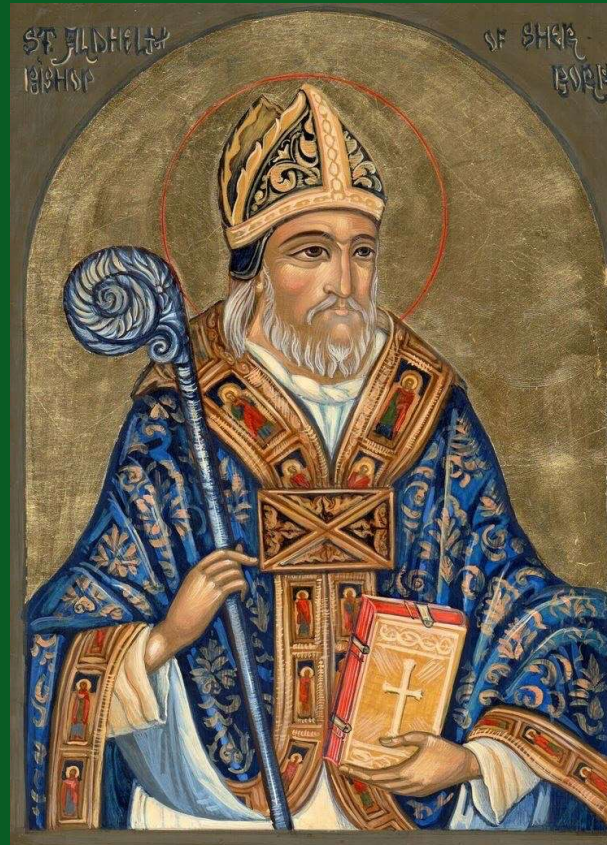
c 642 - 672 **King**

Cenwealh

pagan at accession,

baptised a few years later

Wessex Christian



? - 675 **St Máel Dubh**

established hermitage -

monastery Malmesbury

664 **Synod of Whitby:**

Aldhelm voted with Roman faction

c 675 **Aldhelm** appointed

1st Abbot of Malmesbury

689 - 726 **King Ine(a)**

Codified law & appointed

Aldhelm Bishop of

Sherborne

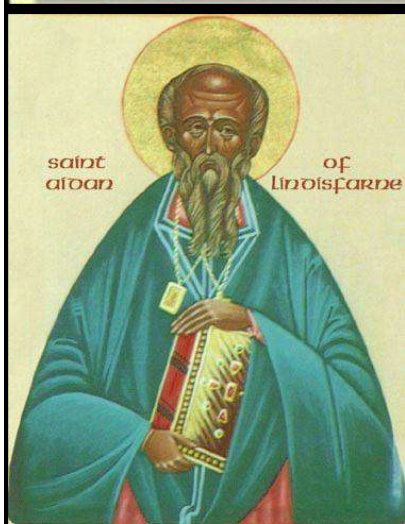
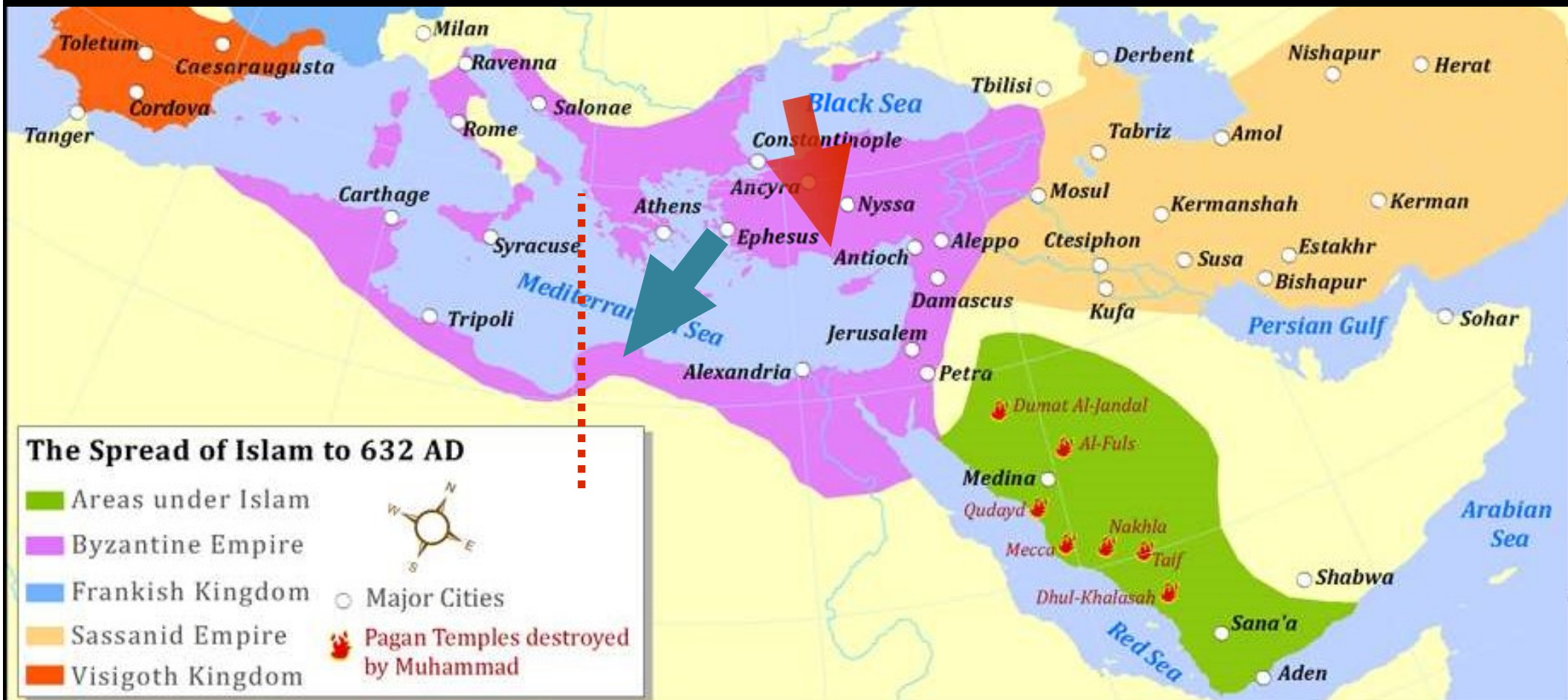
c. 698 AD **Lindisfarne**

Gospels begun

705 **Aldhelm**

First Bishop of Sherborne

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

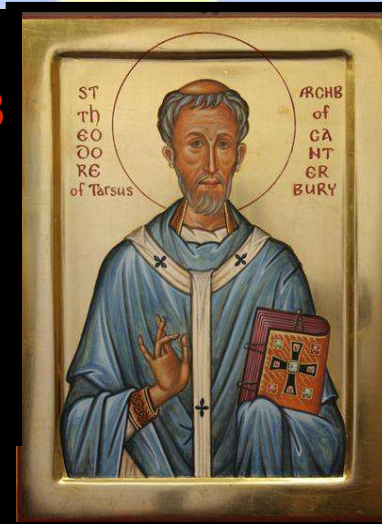


Adrian c 630 -710
Abbot St Augustine's
Canterbury 668.
Berber from Cyrenaica

- famed scholar,
- well travelled
- Aldhelm was his pupil

Theodore of Tarsus 602 – 690
Archbishop of Canterbury 668
Grew up in Tarsus,

- Muslim conquest c 630,
- fled to Constantinople,
- relocated to Rome
- 668 to Canterbury.



King Ine's Law Code (c. 690s) - first major law code of Wessex
appended to Alfred the Great's laws,

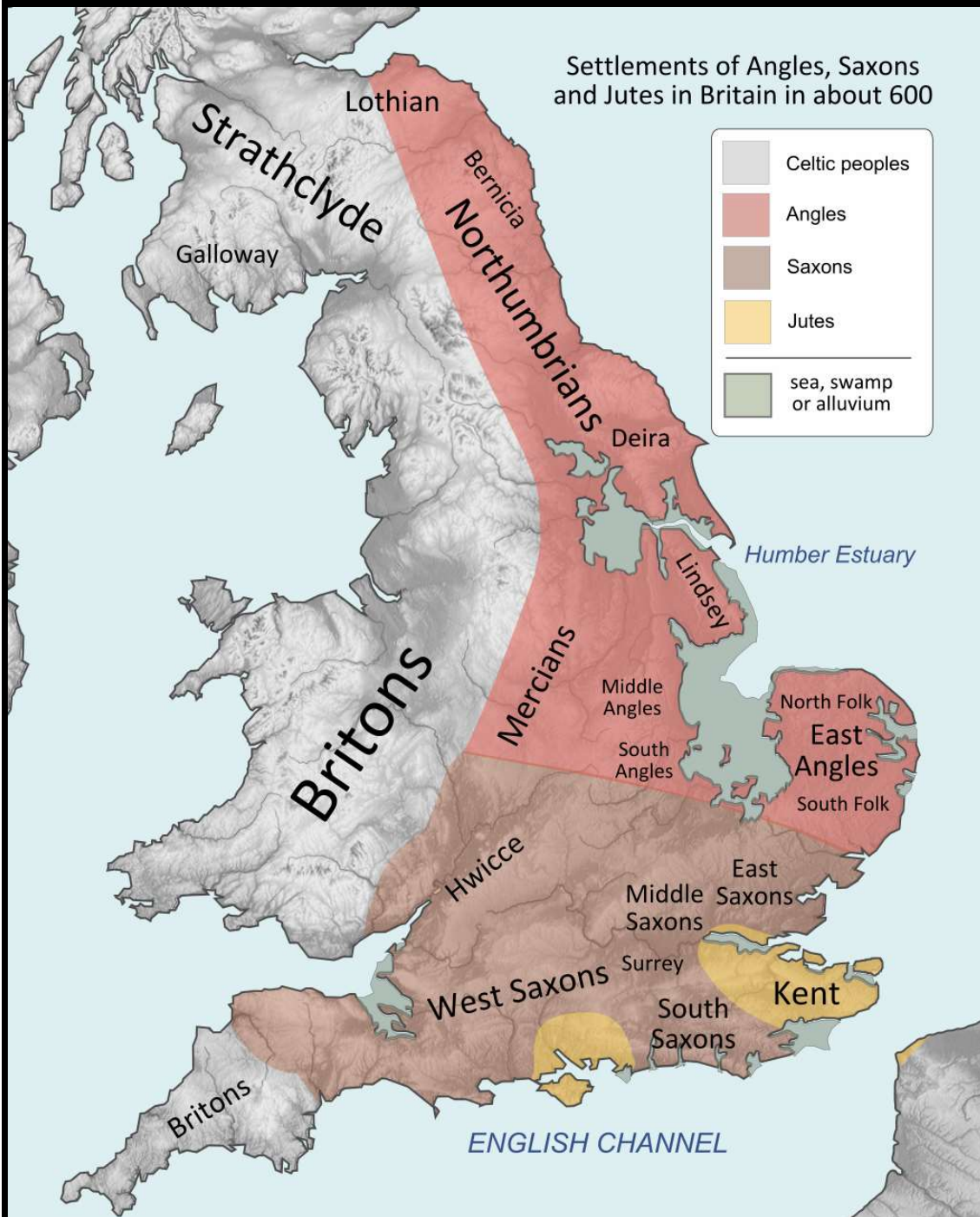
Rules on: church dues, Sunday work, land enclosure, military service & penalties

Key Aspects of [King Ine's](#) Laws

- **Spiritual Welfare:**
Mandated baptism within 30 days, church dues & Sunday observance.
- **Farming & Land:**
Required land fencing, documented early open-field farming, regulated cattle straying.
- **Social Structure:**
Defined roles for Britons (lower status)
Established the shire system with aldermen.
- **Justice & Crime:**
Required witnesses for trade, valued Christian oaths, detailed fines for offences.
- **Military Service:** Required both nobles and free men to serve in the fyrd (militia) or pay fines

Southern Britain AD 600

accepted wisdom -Britons forced west



DARK AGES? ANGLO SAXONS?

1970s evidence: isotopic analysis
ancient & modern DNA

- Adaptation and innovation from a pre Roman and late Roman base
- Britain not cut off after Roman retreat
- No large scale invasion from east
- Persistence of prehistoric and Romano-British field layouts and boundaries
- “Peaceful and secure” (St Patrick C5th)
- Thriving economy and trade with Europe
- Productive agriculture

- Roman influence patchy even during occupation
- Most of population descended from pre Roman inhabitants
- immigrants from North Africa, the mediterranean and all parts of Europe
- no one common culture or language
- no evidence that Old English language was imposed by Germanic elites
- no group of people who brought English to Britain as a ready-formed language.

SUTTON HOO 7TH CENTURY (1939)



THE HELMET

influences from:

- Roman cavalry helmets
- Swedish helmets

- Scandinavian designs

Artefacts decorated with garnets from Sri Lanka

Artefacts from Byzantine Empire, Egypt & Europe

STAFFORDSHIRE HOARD 625CE (2009)



- pre-Christian ritual
Christian & Roman imagery

- artefacts carried as talismans into battle
- new religion seen as providing divine protection.



- innovative fusing traditional motifs / new Christian objects.

Around 500CE British Isles: population ca 500,000
Ceorls; Gebur; Labourers; Slaves

Thegns;

VILLAGES OR FARMSTEADS

Up to 20 households
Hall
Living Houses
Grubenhous with storage pit
Weaving House
Smithy
Cultivation plots
Livestock: cattle, pigs, chickens
Boundary fences/ hedges
Access Woodland & Water



RIGHTS

- private area (haga kitchen garden)
- strips in main field
- access to meadow and forest

DUTIES TO COMMUNITY, NATION

- food rent to king
- militia
- building repairing fortifications/ bridges

EARLY MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENTS

Wood Wattle & Daub and Thatch Huts



**One room, central open fire
shared by family & animals for warmth**

EARLY MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENTS

Saxon Hall Exterior



SAXON HALL INTERIOR



Large, open hall for eating, cooking, and sleeping, central hearth

Floor Packed earth/timber planks

sometimes sunken pits for storage or as workshops

Households included extended family, servants, & workers

WOODLAND COVER



By the Anglo-Saxon period
Agricultural clearance since Neolithic
period "Wildwood" that once covered
around 75% Britain
already much diminished

VITAL RESOURCE

- **Woodworking for houses, boats, wheels, roads, fences, carts, fuel for cooking and pottery.**
- **Management by coppicing hugely important**
- **woods highly managed, pannage coppices or wood-pastures.**

1086 Domesday Book

- **15% woodland/ wood-pasture,**
- **35% was arable,**
- **30% pasture,**
- **1% hay meadow and**
- **20% was mountain, moor, heath, fen or urban land.**

FOOD

ANGLO SAXONS ATE WHAT THEY GREW & FORAGED

Cereals

wheat (emmer)/rye for bread
oats for fodder & porridge

Veg

carrots, parsnip, cabbages, peas, beans,
leeks, onions, foraged greens and herbs:
nettles, dandelions,
chickweed, watercress, mallow

Eggs

from chickens & ducks

Fruit

apples, cherries, plums, berries, grapes

Drink

barley beer, wine(not water)



FOOD

ANIMALS & FISH



Most Anglo Saxons Vegetarian

Wild Game landowners

Pigs useful for meat

- woodland pannage
- litters mature over 3 months
- ready for slaughter autumn

Other animals cattle, sheep
reared for wool / beasts of burden
slaughtered when old for

- meat
- hides
- glue
- fat for lamps

Fish

for those with access river & sea

C7th TOWNS

Early 7th century emergence for trade & administration:

Tamworth: royal centre for Mercia
Rendlesham East Anglia: Sutton Hoo burials
Tamworth: Royal centre for Mercia
Eoforwic (York): Centre for trade & church
Monkwearmouth (Jarrow): C7th monastic town
Ludenwic (London): 670ce “mart of many peoples”



Gipeswic: (Ipswich) early C7th trading port
Hamwic (Southampton): port of trade

Ludenwic (London): 670ce
“mart of many peoples”

7TH CENTURY MONASTERY CHURCHES



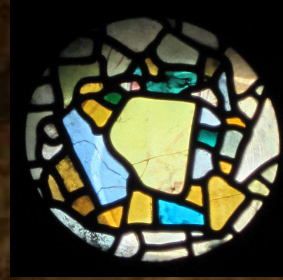
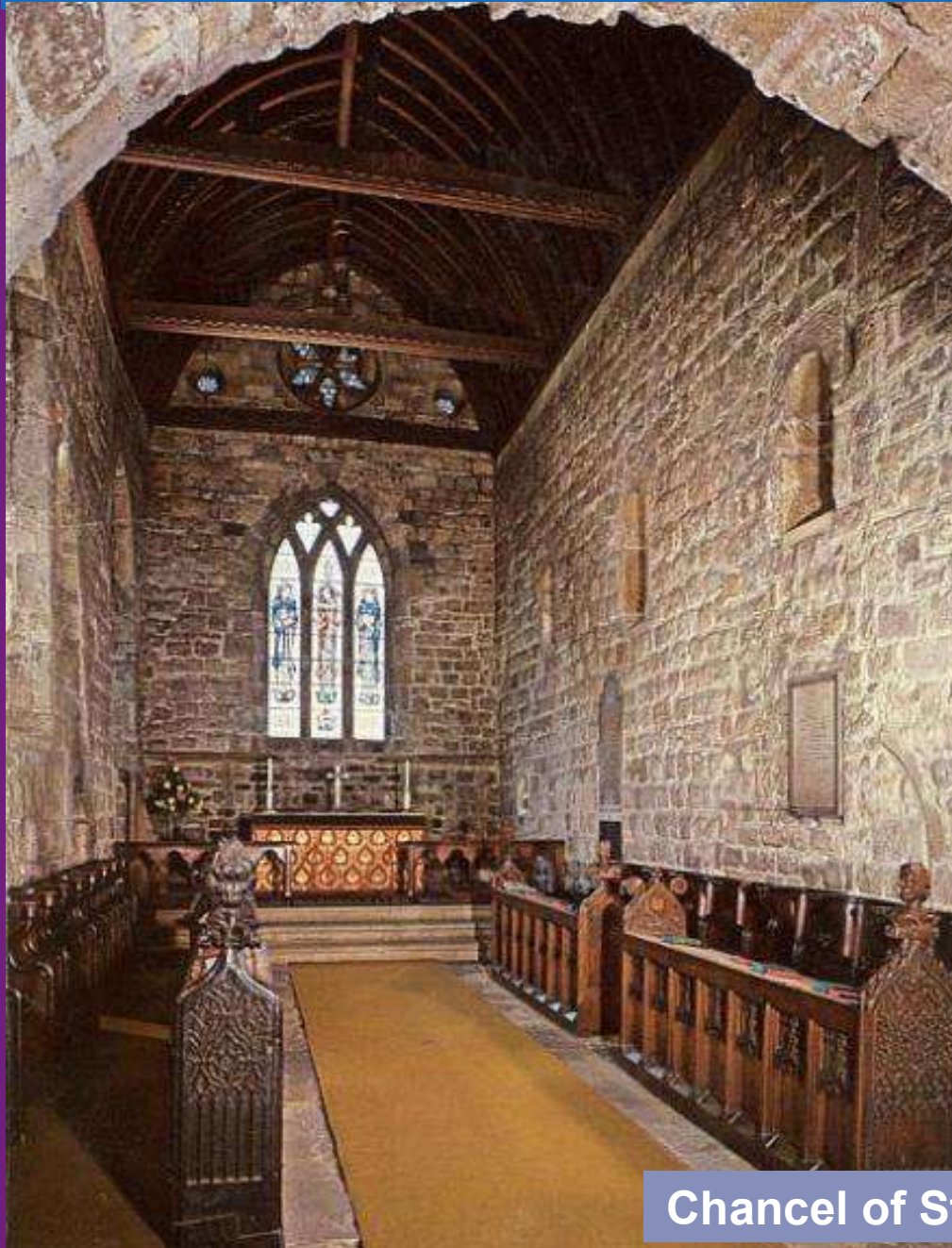
**St Laurence's Church,
Bradford-on-Avon:
one of most complete Anglo-Saxon
churches to survive.
Majority of building
dates from Aldhelm's lifetime.**

**Chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall,
Bradwell on Sea Essex AD 660–662.
Roman bricks from abandoned fort**

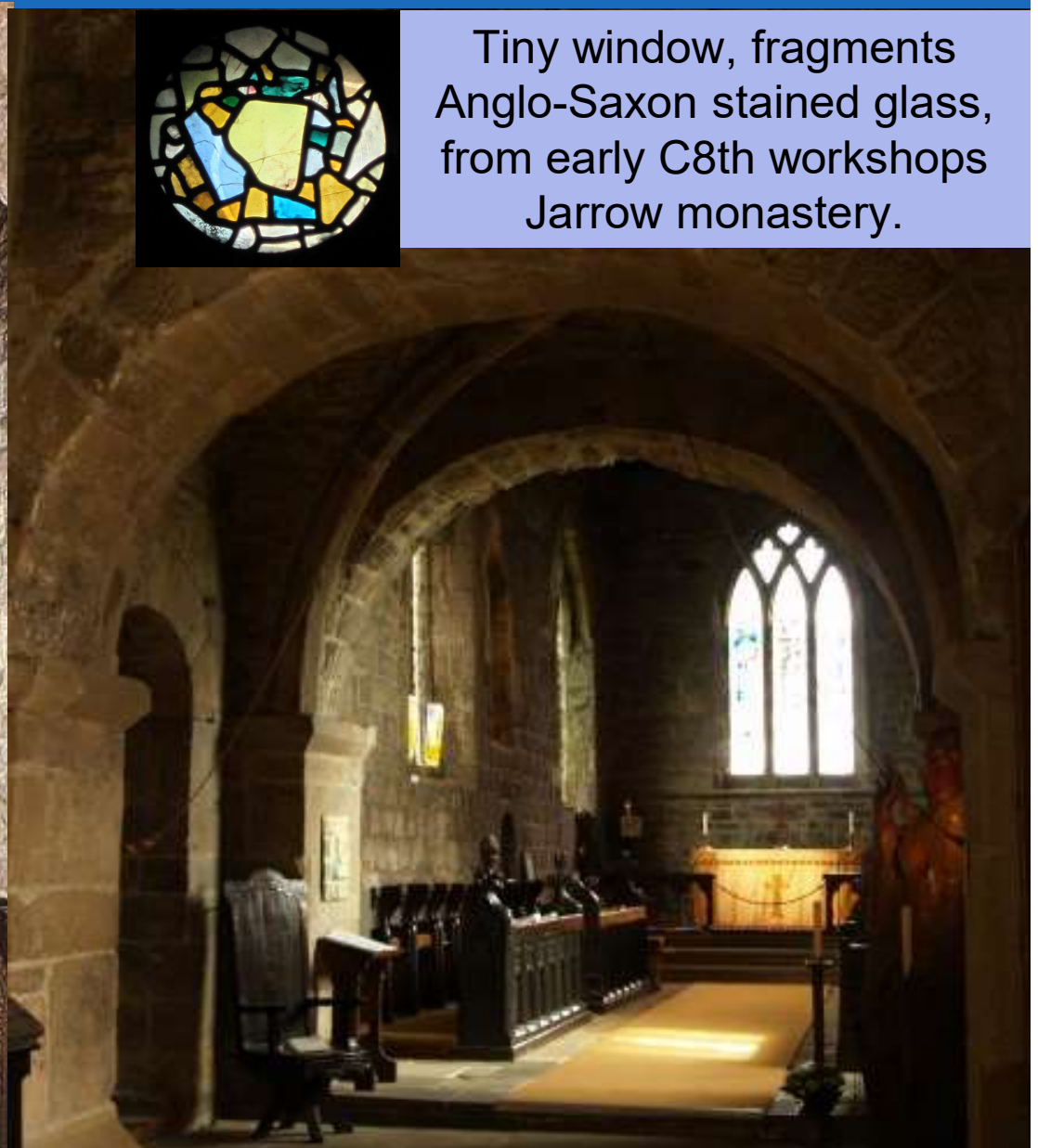


7TH CENTURY MONASTERY CHURCHES

St Paul's Church, Jarrow, Tyne and Wear 674-81



Tiny window, fragments
Anglo-Saxon stained glass,
from early C8th workshops
Jarrow monastery.



Chancel of St Paul's Church dates back to the 7th century

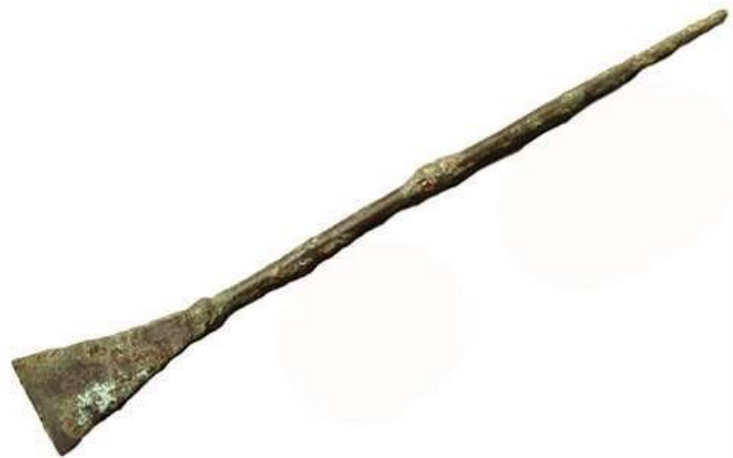
LANGUAGE

BEDE c AD 720

5 languages in Britain

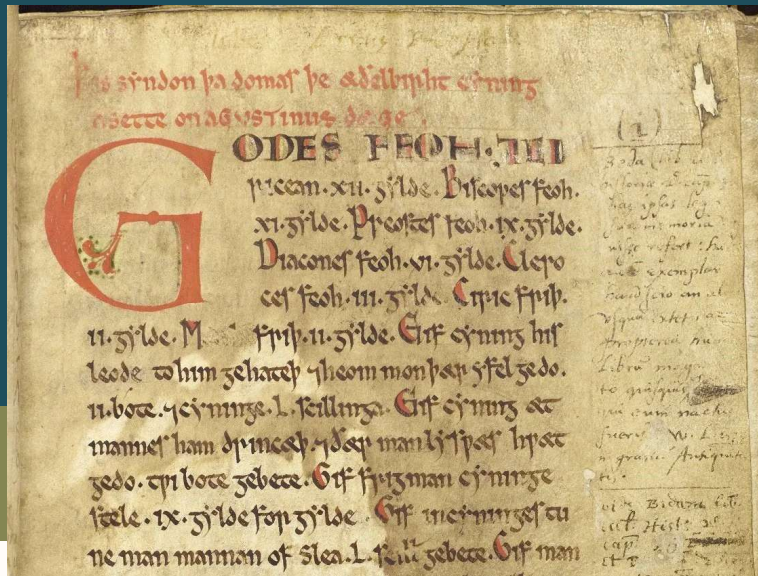
- **British**
ancestor of Welsh,
Cornish & Breton
- **Irish**
- **Pictish**
- **English**
- **Latin**

Styli for carving
and writing on wax tablets



WRITTEN LANGUAGE

mostly Latin
early texts in English survive
as short runic inscriptions
on metal objects & pots.



Earliest example
of written English
code
Elberht, Kent (c.
601-616)

SPOKEN LANGUAGE

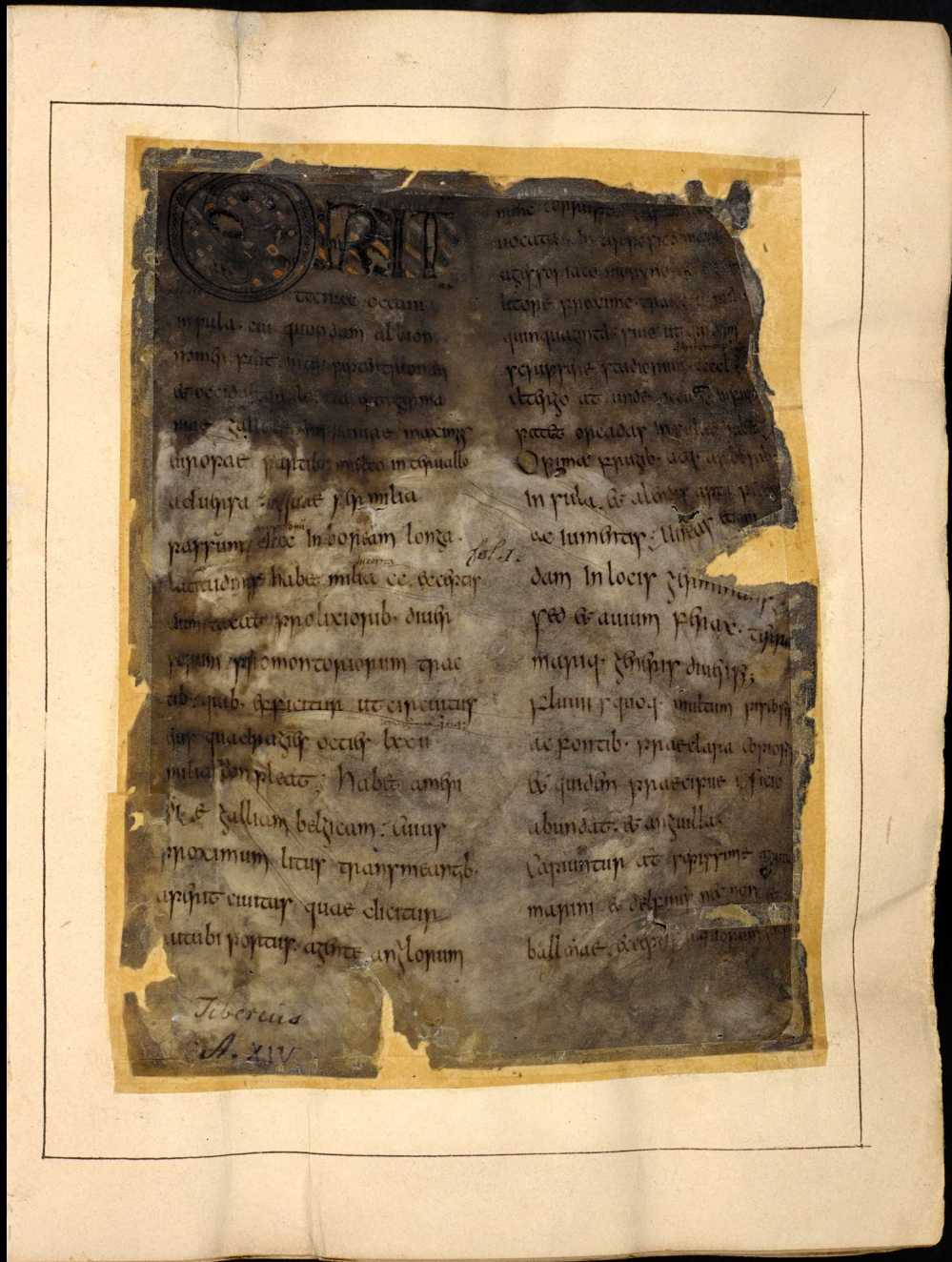
- Old English
- vernacular spoken Latin
- Classical Church Latin

Many people could speak two or three languages
Almost everyone could speak vernacular Latin

MANUSCRIPTS



Lindisfarne Gospels c 698 Latin
Influences: Hiberno-Saxon, Mediterranean
[Anglo-Saxon](#) & [Celtic](#)



Cædmon's Hymn 658-680
Old English

Aldhelm 639 - 709) ... Where does he fit into history? What was his world like?



He was born

c300 years after withdrawal of Roman troops

c200 years after Germanic tribes took over Western Roman Empire

c150 years after final resistance to Germanic invasions

c100 years after Columba (Iona) and Augustine (Canterbury)

c20 years after the start of the Tang Dynasty

During his life

- Islam spreading to Iberia in the west and Iran in the east. -
- Southern Britain was a land of territorial disputes between kingdoms & ruling families
- Chaotic dark ages? - secure enough for traditional farming & trade
- West Saxony adopted Christianity but still valued its Roman and pagan culture - Exciting time- art, ideas and skills exchanged, adapted & assimilated. - The church offered opportunities for learning (men and women) - church stabilising influence, rulers codifying laws to govern society. -

