

1.2 ANCIENT BRITAIN

OBJECTIVES

This unit traces the pre-historic period of the British Isles, turns to the life and culture of the original settlers who had been there before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.

IN THIS UNIT, YOU WILL LEARN:

- the geology of the British Isles before and during the Stone Age;
- the beginning of England with the Stonehenge;
- the Bronze Age civilization followed by the Iron Age culture;
- the Roman legions landing.

OUTLINE

- Britain as a part of the continent.
- The Iberians.
- The Beaker folk.
- The Celts and their heritage.
- Roman Britain.



SYNOPSIS

Britain became an island only after the end of **the last Ice Age**. About 3000 BC **Neolithic** people (the Stone Age hunters and gatherers) arrived from Europe (probably came from **the Iberian** (Spanish) peninsula) in small round boats. They kept animals and grew corn crops.

Stonehenge was built in separate stages over a period of more than a thousand years. By 2500 BC the first phase was completed. Although its precise purposes still remain a mystery, the monument was obviously connected with a sun cult.

The Iberians left their stone tombs (referred to as **great barrows**, or **burial mounds**) in the Stonehenge site. Those were also very common along the coast from Cornwall to the Orkneys.

About 2000 BC the Iberians merged with **the Beaker Folk**, so called from their characteristic drinking vessels.

From about 800 BC **the Celts** moved from the Central Europe in three distinct waves: the Gaels, the Britons, and the Belgae. **The Age of Iron** began. The Celts knew how to work with iron, and were more sophisticated weapon makers compared to the people who used bronze.



Stonehenge



**Replica of old settlement huts from 2500BC
(displayed at Stonehenge visitor center)**

Beaker Folk vessel

Photos: Tetyana Kozlova (Wiltshire, England, 2017)

Those were **the Britons** who resisted the landing of **Julius Caesar's** expeditions between 55 BC and 54 BC. In 43 AD the Roman **Emperor Claudius** sent his legions to occupy Britain. The most obvious characteristic of Roman Britain was the growth of towns many of which started as Roman fortresses: L. *castrum* 'fort' > OE *ceaster*, *caster* > ModE *-chester* in place-names as in *Portchester* (L. *porta* + L. *castra*), etc.

Outside the towns, there were other big innovations during the Roman occupation such as the building of roads (L. *strata* 'paved road' > OE *stret* > ModE *street*) and the growth of large farms (L. *villa* 'country house, farm', related to L. *vicus* 'village, group of houses'). The Roman occupation brought cultural prosperity and stimulated the absorption of many Latin words into the native tongue of the British. For example, the ancient name of England is likely derived from L. *albus* 'white' which

would be an apt description of the chalk cliffs of the island's southern coast. The name, attested in Old English, has survived as *Albion*.

The fact that the Celtic linguistic heritage did not disappear under the Roman rule is evidenced by place-names of partly or completely Celtic origin: *Winchester* (Celtic *Wentā* or *Venta* 'town, meeting place' + OE *ceaster* < L. *castrum*), *Kent* (Celtic *canto* 'rim, border'). The name of the capital is a latinization of Celtic **Londo-* 'wild, bold'.



RECOMMENDED READING

- Ощепкова В. В. Britain in Brief. – М. : Лист, 1999. – С. 178-179.
- McDowall D. An Illustrated History of Britain. – Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex : Longman, 2006. – P. 3-11.

1.3 THE ANGLO-SAXON AND SCANDINAVIAN INVASIONS IN BRITAIN

OBJECTIVES

This unit provides an outline of Britain up to the beginning of the 11th century and begins with the Anglo-Saxon invasion. It describes the establishment of feudal system in Britain. It also traces the events and consequences of the Scandinavian invasion.

IN THIS UNIT, YOU WILL LEARN:

- about the invaders from the continent who destroyed almost all traces of the Roman civilization;
- about cultural and linguistic consequences of the conversion into Christianity;
- about Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the evidence of social differentiation in Old English;
- when the Scandinavian invasion took place;
- about King Alfred's initiative to English Latin texts.

OUTLINE

- The Germanic invaders and their kingdoms. The Witan.
- The introduction of Christianity.
- The Viking Age.
- King Alfred – the warrior and the law-giver.