

BRITAIN DURING THE ANGLO-SAXON AND SCANDINAVIAN INVASIONS

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.



RECOMMENDED READING

Textbooks

Башманівський О. Л., Вигівський В. Л., Моркотун С. Б. Лінгвокраїнознавство. Житомир : Вид-во ЖДУ ім. І. Франка, 2018. С. 10-13.

McDowall D. An Illustrated History of Britain. Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex : Longman, 2006. P.11-17.

Dictionaries

Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, 2001-2021. URL : <http://ewave-atlas.org/languages> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Internet Resources

Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England by The Venerable Bede. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. URL : <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.html> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Castilo S. The Iberians and the Celts. 2016. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X4FUtt354w> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 5 - Legend and Reality - Full Episode. 2014. URL : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_15yFIEYds (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 6 - A Dead Song? - Full Episode. 2014. URL : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl7X4A_mNeU (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

The Search for Alfred The Great. BBC Documentary. 2019. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZny9k-w3SY> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).



SYNOPSIS

After 43 AD the warlike and illiterate Germanic tribes began to raid Britain and settle there. They came from three powerful Germanic tribes, **the Saxons**, **Angles** and **Jutes** and destroyed almost all traces of the Roman civilization. The following 6th century was spent in consolidation and settlement. A number of kingdoms were established (Essex, Sussex, Wessex, Middlesex, and East Anglia) by the Anglo-Saxons whose migrations gave the larger part of Britain its new name, *England* 'the land of the Angles'.

There is very little archeological evidence of the early Anglo-Saxons. More clues of their settlement pattern are found in the place-names. Those which are of Continental origin end in OE *-ing* (pl. *-ingas*) or *-ing(a)ham* following the name of the most important person within that settlement as in *Hastings* (East Sussex) < *Haestingas* 'the settlement of the followers of *Haesta*'. There are some other Anglo-Saxon elements that have survived in place-names;

-ford 'ford' as in *Oxford* ('ford for oxen');

-worth 'enclosure' as in *Hinxworth* ('horse enclosure');

-tun 'enclosure, farmstead or village' as in *Weston*, *Norton*, *Sutton* ('a settlement in the west / north / south), *Brotton* ('a settlement near the brook'), *Merston* ('a settlement near the marsh'), *Wootton* ('a settlement near the wood');

–*ley* ‘wood’ or ‘clearing in a wood’ as in the following self-explanatory names *Oakley*, *Ashley*, *Elmley*, *Lindley* (‘lime trees’), *Uley* (‘yew trees’), *Willey* (‘willow trees’).

An English monk named **Bede** wrote a detailed account of the events in his **Ecclesiastical History of the English People** (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* written in 731). Although the book was basically intended as the history of Christianity in England, the year of 449 was mentioned as the beginning of the invasion. Bede’s evidence is supported by **the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle** (the end of the 9th century).

In 597 Pope Gregory sent a monk, Augustine, to convert people across Britain to Christianity. However, the Anglo-Saxons belonged to an older Germanic religion. Its linguistic traces are found in the day names:

Tuesday, the third day of the week, is from OE *tiwesdæg* (< *Tiwes*, genitive of *Tiw*) etymologically related to PGmc **Tiwaz* ‘god of the sky’, the original supreme deity of ancient Germanic mythology, differentiated specifically as *Tiu*, ancient Germanic god of war;

the origin of *Wednesday*, the fourth day of the week, is found in OE *wodnesdæg* ‘Woden’s day’, a Germanic loan-translation of L. *dies Mercurii*; OE *Wōden* (*Odin*) is the name of the husband of the goddess *Frigg*, and is stemming from Proto-Germanic theonym **wōđanaz*, the god associated with healing, death, royalty, the gallows, knowledge, battle, sorcery, poetry, frenzy, and the runic alphabet;

Thursday, the fifth day of the week, is stemming from OE *þurresdæg*, literally ‘Thor’s day’ from *Punre*, genitive of *Punor* ‘Thor’, which is a loan-translation of L. *Jovis dies* ‘day of Jupiter’;

Friday, the sixth day of the week, is from OE *frigedæg* ‘Frigga’s day’ (from *Frige*, genitive of **Frigu* (*Frigg*), the Germanic goddess of married love) and is a West Germanic translation of L. *dies Veneris* ‘day of (the planet) Venus’, which itself translated from Greek *Aphrodites hemera*.

Unlike other English day names, no god substitution seems to have been attempted for *Sunday*, the first day of the week, *Monday*, the second day of the week, and *Saturday*, the seventh days of the week. *Sunday* in OE *sunnandæg*, literally ‘day of the sun’, is a loan-translation of L. *dies solis* (from Greek *hemera heliou*). It is noteworthy that in European Christian tradition, outside Germanic, *Sunday* is often a name meaning ‘Lord’s Day’. *Monday* is from OE *mondæg*, literally ‘day of the moon’, is a loan-translation of L. *Lunæ dies* (from Greek *selenes hemera*). *Saturday* is from OE *sæterdæg*, *sæternesdæg*, literally ‘day of

the planet Saturn', is a partial loan-translation of L. *Saturni dies* 'Saturn's day' (from Greek *kronou hemera* 'the day of Cronus'). The northern European pantheon lacks a correspondence figure to Roman Saturn. Instead of that, in Scandinavian languages there are traces of an ancient Nordic custom to take a bath on Saturdays: Dan. *lørdag*, Sw. *lördag* "Saturday", literally 'bath day' from ONorse *laug* "bath".

By c700 all of the Anglo-Saxon England was Christian. The influence of Christianity on Old English can be illustrated by the loans associated with religion: *munuc* "monk", *scol* "school", *heofon* "heaven", *halga* "holy", *apostol* "apostle", etc.

The Saxons created a number of institutions which gave strength to the country. One of them was the King's Council, called **the Witan** /wi:tan/ (probably from OE *witan* 'to know' which is related to PGmc **witana* and PIE perfect form of **weyd-* 'to see'; Cf. Rus. *ведать*). In spite of that there was no central government and efficient army. The King was dependent on the loyalty of those who composed the Witan - **the thegns** /'θej(e)n/ (OE *þeg(e)n*), i.e. local landowners, **the bishops**, and **the ealdermen**, i.e. people governing a kingdom, district, or shire as viceroy for an Anglo-Saxon king (OE *ealdorman* 'elder man').

In the 8th century the raids of **the Vikings** began, but by the middle of the 9th century those raids became an invasion. In 875 **King Alfred the Great** held out against them and made the Danes to come to terms.

As the Vikings came to settle, they quickly accepted Christianity and did not disturb the local population. Like Anglo-Saxons, they belonged to Germanic culture and spoke Old Norse, a language cognate with English. However, it is difficult to judge about the degree of mutual intelligibility between Old English and Old Norse for the lack of precise information.

One important result of this contact was bilingualism which stimulated borrowings. A large number of Scandinavian loanwords are associated with everyday life and the sea, for instance, ONorse *fe* "money, *felagi* > c1200 OE *feolaga* "partner, one who shares with another (obviously 'one who puts down money with another in a joint venture') > *fellow* "companion, comrade"; ONorse *rif* "reef of a sail" > *reef* "horizontal section of sail"). Loanwords of Scandinavian origin influenced English vocabulary in many different ways:

- they gradually displaced Old English equivalents – ONorse *taka* > *take* (OE *niman*);

- they coexisted with Old English words and caused some semantic differentiation - ONorse *scinn* “animal hide, fur” > c1200 “animal hide (usually dressed and tanned)” > *skin* “the natural outer layer that covers a person, animal, fruit” and OE *scinn, scinu* > *shin* “a fore part of the lower leg”;

- for unknown reasons, forms of some Modern English words resemble Scandinavian equivalents rather than native Old English continuants of Proto-Germanic roots – PIE **swestr* > OE *sweostor, swuster* and ONorse *suster, systir* but ModE *sister*;

- many English place-names end in Scandinavian elements - *-by* ‘town, farm’ (*Whitby*), *-thorp(e)* ‘village’ (*Althorp*), *-thwaite* ‘an isolated piece of land’ (*Braithwaite*), etc.

Thanks to the great efforts of Alfred, who died in 900, the 10th century was something of a golden age.

In 1040, the Witan chose **Edward**, one of Saxon Erhelred’s sons to be the king. He was known as **the Confessor** and was interested in the Church rather than in kingship. It is believed that Edward the Confessor promised England to his second cousin **William, the Duke of Normandy**. After Edward’s death in 1066, his brother-in-law Harold was made the king. William decided to conquer England and assume the power.



SELF-STUDY INSTRUCTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Reading for this session on your own or partly alone, **it is important to give attention to the following issues.**

- We know very little of the first few hundred years of the Anglo-Saxon, era.
- The invaders were an illiterate people.
- The earliest records are highly inventive lists of rulers.
- We know that they established separate kingdoms.
- They probably thought of themselves as separate peoples, but they shared a common language and similar customs.

Assignment 1. Read Bede’s sketches of the early history of Britain, describing the country and giving some account of the various races by whom it was inhabited. Look into the description and its accuracy.

Chapter I.

Of the Situation of Britain and Ireland, and of their ancient inhabitants

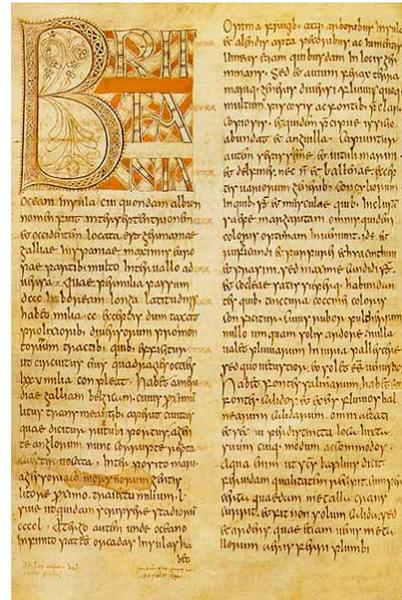
Britain, an island in the Atlantic, formerly called Albion, lies to the north-west, facing, though at a considerable distance, the coasts of Germany, France,

and Spain, which form the greatest part of Europe. It extends 800 miles in length towards the north, and is 200 miles in breadth, except where several promontories extend further in breadth, by which its compass is made to be 4,875 miles. To the south lies Belgic Gaul. To its nearest shore there is an easy passage from the city of Rutubi Portus, by the English now corrupted into Reptacaestir. The distance from here across the sea to Gessoriacum, the nearest shore in the territory of the Morini, is fifty miles, or as some writers say, 450 furlongs. On the other side of the island, where it opens upon the boundless ocean, it has the islands called Orcades. Britain is rich in grain and trees, and is well adapted for feeding cattle and beasts of burden. It also produces vines in some places, and has plenty of land and water fowl of divers sorts; it is remarkable also for rivers abounding in fish, and plentiful springs. It has the greatest plenty of salmon and eels; seals are also frequently taken, and dolphins, as also whales; besides many sorts of shell-fish, such as mussels, in which are often found excellent pearls of all colours, red, purple, violet and green, but chiefly white. There is also a great abundance of snails, of which the scarlet dye is made, a most beautiful red, which never fades with the heat of the sun or exposure to rain, but the older it is, the more beautiful it becomes. It has both salt and hot springs, and from them flow rivers which furnish hot baths proper for all ages and both sexes, in separate places, according to their requirements. For water, as St. Basil says, receives the quality of heat, when it runs along certain metals, and becomes not only hot but scalding. Britain is rich also in veins of metals, as copper, iron, lead, and silver; it produces a great deal of excellent jet, which is black and sparkling, and burns when put to the fire, and when set on fire, drives away serpents; being warmed with rubbing, it attracts whatever is applied to it, like amber.



The Venerable Bede writing the Ecclesiastical History of the English People, from a codex at Engelberg Abbey, Switzerland.

Source: Venerable Bede in an illustrated manuscript at <https://en.wikipedia.org>



Folio 3v from the St. Petersburg Bede
Source: Beda Petersburgiensis f3v. Dated

746

<https://commons.wikimedia.org>

The island was formerly distinguished by twenty-eight famous cities, besides innumerable forts, which were all strongly secured with walls, towers, gates, and bars. And, because it lies almost under the North Pole, the nights are light in summer, so that at midnight the beholders are often in doubt whether the evening twilight still continues, or that of the morning has come; since the sun at night returns to the east in the northern regions without passing far beneath the earth. For this reason the days are of a great length in summer, and on the other hand, the nights in winter are eighteen hours long, for the sun then withdraws into southern parts. In like manner the nights are very short in summer, and the days in winter, that is, only six equinoctial hours. Whereas, in Armenia, Macedonia, Italy, and other countries of the same latitude, the longest day or night extends but to fifteen hours, and the shortest to nine.

There are in the island at present, following the number of the books in which the Divine Law was written, five languages of different nations employed in the study and confession of the one self-same knowledge, which is of highest truth and true sublimity, to wit, English, British, Scottish, Pictish, and Latin, the last having become common to all by the study of the Scriptures. But at first this island had no other inhabitants but the Britons, from whom it derived its name, and who, coming over into Britain, as is reported, from Armorica, [Editor's note:

In Caesar's time, the whole district lying along the northwestern coast of Gaul, afterwards narrowed down to the modern Brittany. That the Britons (or Brythons) came from Gaul is doubtless a fact. Another branch of the Celtic race, the Goidels or Gaels, appears to have been in possession in Britain before them. They possessed themselves of the southern parts thereof. Starting from the south, they had occupied the greater part of the island, when it happened, that the nation of the Picts, putting to sea from Scythia, as is reported, in a few ships of war, and being driven by the winds beyond the bounds of Britain, came to Ireland and landed on its northern shores. [Editors note: By Scythia Bede means Scandinavia. He only mentions this account as a tradition. The problem of the Picts has not been solved yet. According to one view, they belonged to the pre-Aryan inhabitants of Britain, pushed westward and northward by the Celtic invaders. In Scotland they held their own for a considerable time in a wide tract of country, and they may have to some extent amalgamated with the Celts who dispossessed them (Rhys). Others regard them as Celts of the same branch as Welsh, Cornish, and Britons, being probably nearest to Cornish. The absence of all but the scantiest remains of their language makes the question of their origin one of great difficulty.] There, finding the nation of the Scots, they begged to be allowed to settle among them, but could not succeed in obtaining their request. Ireland is the largest island next to Britain, and lies to the west of it; but as it is shorter than Britain to the north, so, on the other hand, it runs out far beyond it to the south, over against the northern part of Spain, though a wide sea lies between them. The Picts then, as has been said, arriving in this island by sea, desired to have a place granted them in which they might settle. The Scots answered that the island could not contain them both; but "We can give you good counsel," said they, "whereby you may know what to do; we know there is another island, not far from ours, to the eastward, which we often see at a distance, when the days are clear. If you will go thither, you can obtain settlements; or, if any should oppose you, we will help you." The Picts, accordingly, sailing over into Britain, began to inhabit the northern parts thereof, for the Britons had possessed themselves of the southern. Now the Picts had no wives, and asked them of the Scots; who would not consent to grant them upon any other terms, than that when any question should arise, they should choose a king from the female royal race rather than from the male: which custom, as is well known, has been observed among the Picts to this day. In process of time, Britain, besides the Britons and the Picts, received a third nation, the Scots, who, migrating from Ireland under their leader, Reuda, either by fair means, or by force of arms, secured to themselves those settlements among

the Picts which they still possess. From the name of their commander, they are to this day called Dalreudini; for, in their language, Dal signifies a part.

Ireland is broader than Britain and has a much healthier and milder climate; for the snow scarcely ever lies there above three days: no man makes hay in the summer for winter's provision, or builds stables for his beasts of burden. No reptiles are found there, and no snake can live there; for, though snakes are often carried thither out of Britain, as soon as the ship comes near the shore, and the scent of the air reaches them, they die. On the contrary, almost all things in the island are efficacious against poison. In truth, we have known that when men have been bitten by serpents, the scrapings of leaves of books that were brought out of Ireland, being put into water, and given them to drink, have immediately absorbed the spreading poison, and assuaged the swelling. The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any lack of vines, fish, or fowl; and it is noted for the hunting of stags and roe-deer. It is properly the country of the Scots, who, migrating from thence, as has been said, formed the third nation in Britain in addition to the Britons and the Picts.

There is a very large gulf of the sea, which formerly divided the nation of the Britons from the Picts; it runs from the west far into the land, where, to this day, stands a strong city of the Britons, called Alcluith. The Scots, arriving on the north side of this bay, settled themselves there.

Chapter II.

How Caius Julius Caesar was the first Roman that came into Britain. [54 BCE]

Now Britain had never been visited by the Romans, and was entirely unknown to them before the time of Caius Julius Caesar, who, in the year 693 after the foundation of Rome, but the sixtieth year before the Incarnation of our Lord, was consul with Lucius Bibulus. While he was making war upon the Germans and the Gauls, who were divided only by the river Rhine, he came into the province of the Morini, whence is the nearest and shortest passage into Britain. Here, having provided about eighty ships of burden and fast-sailing vessels, he sailed over into Britain; where, being first roughly handled in a battle, and then caught in a storm, he lost a considerable part of his fleet, no small number of foot-soldiers, and almost all his cavalry. Returning into Gaul, he put his legions into winter-quarters, and gave orders for building six hundred sail of both sorts. With these he again crossed over early in spring into Britain, but, whilst he was marching with the army against the enemy, the ships, riding at anchor, were caught in a storm and either dashed one against another, or driven

upon the sands and wrecked. Forty of them were lost, the rest were, with much difficulty, repaired. Caesar's cavalry was, at the first encounter, defeated by the Britons, and there Labienus, the tribune, was slain. In the second engagement, with great hazard to his men, he defeated the Britons and put them to flight. Thence he proceeded to the river Thames, where a great multitude of the enemy had posted themselves on the farther side of the river, under the command of Cassobellaunus, and fenced the bank of the river and almost all the ford under water with sharp stakes: the remains of these are to be seen to this day, apparently about the thickness of a man's thigh, cased with lead, and fixed immovably in the bottom of the river. This being perceived and avoided by the Romans, the barbarians, not able to stand the charge of the legions, hid themselves in the woods, whence they grievously harassed the Romans with repeated sallies. In the meantime, the strong state of the Trinovantes, with their commander Androgius, surrendered to Caesar, giving him forty hostages. Many other cities, following their example, made a treaty with the Romans. Guided by them, Caesar at length, after severe fighting, took the town of Cassobellaunus, situated between two marshes, fortified by sheltering woods, and plentifully furnished with all necessaries. After this, Caesar returned from Britain into Gaul, but he had no sooner put his legions into winter quarters, than he was suddenly beset and distracted with wars and sudden risings on every side.

Chapter III.

How Claudius, the second of the Romans who came into Britain, brought the islands Orcades into subjection to the Roman empire; and Vespasian, sent by hint, reduced the Isle of Wight under the dominion of the Romans. [44 AD

In the year of Rome 798, Claudius, fourth emperor from Augustus, being desirous to approve himself a prince beneficial to the republic, and eagerly bent upon war and conquest on every side, undertook an expedition into Britain, which as it appeared, was roused to rebellion by the refusal of the Romans to give up certain deserters. No one before or after Julius Caesar had dared to land upon the island. Claudius crossed over to it, and within a very few days, without any fighting or bloodshed, the greater part of the island was surrendered into his hands. He also added to the Roman empire the Orcades, which lie in the ocean beyond Britain, and, returning to Rome in the sixth month after his departure, he gave his son the title of Britannicus. This war he concluded in the fourth year of his reign, which is the forty-sixth from the Incarnation of our Lord. In which year

there came to pass a most grievous famine in Syria, which is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles to have been foretold by the prophet Agabus.

Vespasian, who was emperor after Nero, being sent into Britain by the same Claudius, brought also under the Roman dominion the Isle of Wight, which is close to Britain on the south, and is about thirty miles in length from east to west, and twelve from north to south; being six miles distant from the southern coast of Britain at the east end, and three at the west. Nero, succeeding Claudius in the empire, undertook no wars at all; and, therefore, among countless other disasters brought by him upon the Roman state, he almost lost Britain; for in his time two most notable towns were there taken and destroyed.

Chapter XV.

How the Angles, being invited into Britain, at first drove off the enemy; but not long after, making a league with them, turned their weapons against their allies

In the year of our Lord 449, Marcian, the forty-sixth from Augustus, being made emperor with Valentinian, ruled the empire seven years. Then the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three ships of war and had a place in which to settle assigned to them by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, on the pretext of fighting in defence of their country, whilst their real intentions were to conquer it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and the Saxons obtained the victory. When the news of their success and of the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, reached their own home, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a greater number of men, and these, being added to the former army, made up an invincible force. The newcomers received of the Britons a place to inhabit among them, upon condition that they should wage war against their enemies for the peace and security of the country, whilst the Britons agreed to furnish them with pay. Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany—Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people, of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, including those in the province of the West-Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East-Saxons, the South-Saxons, and the West Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Angulus, and which is said, from that time, to have remained desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East-Angles, the Midland-Angles, the Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those

nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the Angles. The first commanders are said to have been the two brothers Hengist and Horsa. Of these Horsa was afterwards slain in battle by the Britons, and a monument, bearing his name, is still in existence in the eastern parts of Kent. They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father was Vitta, son of Vecta, son of Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces trace their descent. In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over into the island, and the foreigners began to increase so much, that they became a source of terror to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time repelled by force of arms, they began to turn their weapons against their allies. At first, they obliged them to furnish a greater quantity of provisions; and, seeking an occasion of quarrel, protested, that unless more plentiful supplies were brought them, they would break the league, and ravage all the island; nor were they backward in putting their threats into execution. In short, the fire kindled by the hands of the pagans, proved God's just vengeance for the crimes of the people; not unlike that which, being of old lighted by the Chaldeans, consumed the walls and all the buildings of Jerusalem. For here, too, through the agency of the pitiless conqueror, yet by the disposal of the just Judge, it ravaged all the neighbouring cities and country, spread the conflagration from the eastern to the western sea, without any opposition, and overran the whole face of the doomed island. Public as well as private buildings were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; no respect was shown for office, the prelates with the people were destroyed with fire and sword; nor were there any left to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the miserable remnant, being taken in the mountains, were butchered in heaps. Others, spent with hunger, came forth and submitted themselves to the enemy, to undergo for the sake of food perpetual servitude, if they were not killed upon the spot. Some, with sorrowful hearts, fled beyond the seas. Others, remaining in their own country, led a miserable life of terror and anxiety of mind among the mountains, woods and crags.

(*Source:* Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England by The Venerable Bede. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. URL : <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.html>)



Assignment 2. Write a brief outline of the key facts and events as they were written by Bede (approx. 250-300 words). Adapt (i.e. modify the text to make it more understandable, given a student's reading level. Teacher adaptation may include text summary, vocabulary support (e.g., providing synonyms), and

translation. Take into account the level of secondary education and the English language proficiency level (see CEFR).