The Anglo-Saxons: The Making of England: 410–1066
(Marc Morris)
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England, fabled land of legend and destiny, is over. When you combine a degraded native populace unwilling to replenish itself with a ruling class that is among the most evil and stupid in history, which along with other malignant attacks on those it rules eagerly imports endless alien invaders in order replace the native population, against whom that population is unwilling or unable to fight back, you get—the End. Unlike in the lands currently known as America, in England a solution to renew what was once a proud and free people seems impossible. We should shed a tear, then, and look beyond. And also look backward, at the beginnings of England, sixteen hundred years ago, through the prism of this excellent book.

We often use the shorthand of "Anglo-Saxon" to refer to white English-speaking peoples, those who conquered the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and whose descendants still dominate, for now, what is called the Anglosphere. The term Anglo-Saxon is hated by the Left, because they hate the success of the Anglo-Saxons, because it gives the lie to their toxic fantasies that all cultures and peoples are cut from the same cloth, and capable of the same achievements. The author of this book, Marc Morris, nods toward this hate, but points out that's what the Anglo-Saxons called themselves, and they are a clearly definable people, today and for much more than a thousand years, so too bad. Strictly speaking, it is true, the age of the Anglo-Saxons as the rulers of England ended in 1066, with the defeat of King Harold by the Normans at the Battle of Hastings. Still, what was England for the past thousand years, until very recently, was shaped into something close to its final form by the Anglo-Saxons—its political organization, its religion, much of its culture, and the very DNA of the inhabitants, which contains far more Anglo-Saxon than Norman.

What England is most definitely not is a nation of immigrants, a bald-faced lie you often hear nowadays from those trying to justify the mass importation of destructive aliens. (Though, to be fair, the modern Anglo-Saxon English are responsible as well, because they, aside from a

few heroes such as Enoch Powell, failed to fight back against the flood, which should have been first done by turning back the *Windrush*, a ship carrying illegal West Indian immigrants, in 1948.) The latest outrage (though outrage is so common, one just yawns nowadays) is the attempt by the BBC to propagandize children that "Britain has always been a black country," using completely fictional claims such as that the Roman emperor Septimius Severus was black, along with trivia such that as in 1511 King Henry VIII had a black trumpeter (probably a Moor from Spain, brought to court by Catharine of Aragon). All this is just malicious propaganda, not even in service of building African history up, but rather to spread resentment against and hate of successful white people. The reality is very few immigrants were admitted to England until the twentieth century. The nation of England was, until very recently, simply the land of the Anglo-Saxons, and nobody else.

During the years of Anglo-Saxon ascendancy, however, England changed a great deal from where it started, in the collapse of Roman rule. Morris points out that the Anglo-Saxon world of the eleventh century, where a strong king ruled over a prosperous and mostly unified Christian kingdom, was very different from the early Anglo-Saxon world, where Christianity was absent, the world for the average person was very small, and "a gaggle of smaller kingdoms [were] vying against each other for temporary advantage," Naturally, therefore, Morris adopts a chronological approach—usually the best approach for a history, after all. It is a rare longitudinal history that benefits from a thematic treatment.

We begin with Rome's fall and the arrival of the first Germanic tribesmen, the Saxons. The Romans had ruled, and Romanized, the Britons, the original inhabitants of England. The Romans had not ruled everywhere, however. On the marches, in Wales and Scotland, the natives remained unconquered, as Hadrian's Wall attests. Roman England, although a civilized, cultured place, was therefore under frequent attack. At one point, around ten percent of the entire imperial army was stationed in Britain. As Rome decayed, fewer soldiers could be spared, and fortifications became common for seaside towns, to defend against, among other threats, seaborne Saxon raiders from Germania. Picts and Scots attacked by land from the north. The "last year in which Roman coins appear in Britain's archaeological record in any significant quantities" was A.D. 402. The Saxons stepped up their

attacks; the Britons, angry that the Romans were no longer protecting the land, revolted in 409, severing the connection with Rome. The economy collapsed and civilization regressed very rapidly, leaving the land even more open to invaders. Many buried hoards of coins, plate, and jewelry have been found in England; most date from the fifth century. They are "barometers of unrest," as five hundred years of Roman involvement with Britain evanesced.

Morris narrates how, unlike later Anglo-Saxon history, much of this is opaque, and only knowable through archaeology. The Venerable Bede's chronicle, written three hundred years later, describes how the Britons, under their king Vortigern, invited some Saxons to settle in the east, in order to fight the Picts, and how the Saxons then not only failed to fight the Picts, but invited their compatriots (including the probably-mythical Hengist and Horsa) to join them in a land ripe for the plucking. No doubt some of this is legend, but the core of it is true, and the Saxons quickly came to dominate much of eastern England, as shown by skeletal tooth analysis, as well as DNA. In any case, the movement was substantial, and Morris attributes the rapid cultural dominance of the Saxons, and the disappearance of Romanic Briton culture, the opposite of the more common pattern of new arrivals becoming Romanized, to the low state to which the Britons had been quickly brought by the collapse of Rome's rule.

It wasn't just Saxons, of course. It was a variety of Germanic tribes, traditionally the "Angles, Saxons, and Jutes," but also others, such as Frisians and Franks. These peoples started their lives in a new land as independent farmers, but by the end of the sixth century had begun coalescing into *Beowulf*-type small kingdoms with an elite warrior class, the same structure as the lands of their origin. Morris is careful to note that we have very little hard information about this period, but various catastrophes in the sixth century, including plague and volcanic eruptions in Iceland which caused harvest failures, no doubt played a part in political change. None of this is surprising; armed patronage networks which ultimately form larger polities have always been the default organizing form of the West in conditions of societal collapse.

The names of these kingdoms still resonate today. Sussex, Essex, and Wessex, the kingdoms of the South, East, and West Saxons. (It was a king of Essex, probably the early seventh-century Raedwald, who was

buried in the famous, and fantastic, ship burial at Sutton Hoo, excavated in 1939.) Kent, whose people were largely Frankish, and whose king Æthelberht was the first Anglo-Saxon ruler to convert to Christianity, around A.D. 600, in part due to taking a Christian Frankish bride, and who allowed Augustine of Canterbury to very successfully preach in the land. Northumbria. East Anglia. And a few others whose names are forgotten, such as Deira, which soon enough were absorbed by more powerful neighbors. The history of these petty kingdoms is a catalog of what one expects from *Beowulf*-era militarized societies—a lot of intrigue, fighting, and searching for power and glory. Even so, by the end of the seventh century, all the Saxons, or at least all the Saxon kings, were Christian—in the somewhat aggressive style favored by Germanic warriors, exemplified by the *Heliand*, the "Germanic gospel," where Christ is a "generous mead giver," John the Baptist a "warrior-companion for Christ," and the disciples his *comitatus*, a loyal war band.

While naturally he focuses mostly on the Anglo-Saxons, Morris does not ignore the areas never fully dominated by the Anglo-Saxons, the west and the far north. He discusses Offa's Dyke, an eighth-century barrier of uncertain purpose built between the Anglo-Saxon Mercians and the Britons still living in Wales. Whether it was a defensive structure or more of a mere demarcation, it showed that by the eighth century the Anglo-Saxons had begun to consider themselves a single ethnic group, the "English"—in opposition, of course, to the Britons. Mercia was one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which waxed and waned in power—at one point in the eighth century, the "Mercian Supremacy," the kings of Mercia, especially Offa (who aspirationally called himself "king of the English") were dominant in all of Anglo-Saxon England. Regardless of who ruled, the Anglo-Saxons kept steadily on the upswing, with economic activity, trade networks, coinage, and so forth all expanding greatly—including a partial rebirth of the London area.

But then the Vikings arrived. Their advent is traditionally marked down as 793, when the monastery at Lindisfarne was plundered by what Offa had referred to the previous year as "seaborne pagans with migrating fleets." What exactly drove these Scandinavians is debated, but they certainly wanted loot, and that the Anglo-Saxons had managed to pile up, without giving much thought to defense, except against each other. Throughout the first half of the ninth century, Viking raids grew

in size and scope, with the Anglo-Saxons generally suffering defeat during seasonal raids, often being forced to pay huge tributes, while still fighting among themselves. The future looked gloomy indeed for Anglo-Saxon England.

What changed was the ascension of Alfred, the Great, King of Wessex, in 871, who created what Morris calls a "resurrection." As with so many heroic figures of the past, it has been fashionable in past decades to deny Alfred's greatness. But Morris disagrees, although he thinks perhaps the Victorian hagiography is a bit overdone. "He was courageous, clever, innovative, pious, resolute, and far-sighted." Alfred took the fight to the Vikings—something that had been done before, with intermittent success. But after an early defeat, Alfred famously retreated to the marshlands and raised a new army, which decisively defeated a large Viking army at the Battle of Edington.

Battles had been won before, however. Alfred had long-term success because he was more organized, and because he systematically built a network of fortified towns. This was done through the creation of *burhs* (from which "borough" comes), where the local citizens were responsible for creation, maintenance, and garrisoning of forts (thus expanding military service well beyond the military elite, a major change in Anglo-Saxon practice). The *burhs* frustrated the Vikings, who were largely incapable of sieges, so they allowed the Anglo-Saxons to choose when and where to fight, and gave them a place to retreat, something the Vikings did not have. Alfred also began requiring defeated Vikings to accept baptism, while himself accepting that the Vikings had permanently settled the so-called Danelaw, in the east and center of England. And in 886, after defeating a Danish naval force, he re-established London as his capital, and began styling himself "King of the Anglo-Saxons"—which was no idle boast, but now the actual truth. He also spent a great deal to restore the ruined state of the Church, refounding monasteries and churches destroyed by the Vikings, especially their libraries. He wasn't just a warrior, either; he himself translated important Latin works into English.

As a result of Alfred's success, the Vikings largely receded as a major threat, and the Anglo-Saxons gradually exerted their hegemony over the Danelaw. The Scandinavians who had settled there (and it is an open question how many of the inhabitants were Scandinavian, as

opposed to Anglo-Saxon) were not as united as the Anglo-Saxons now were, and over time smaller lords and kings began to adhere to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. The ninth century King Æthelstan added Northumbria to the English domains, and called himself simply "King of the English," also extracting tribute from both the Welsh and the Scots. The kingdom's wealth and stability increased the influence of the Church, in particular through the rapid re-spread of monasticism, which as usual was of reformist bent, and closely tied to the Cluniac reforms in Aquitaine, across the Channel. Still, stability was far from guaranteed. Succession struggles were common, and every so often Vikings would cause trouble.

As everyone knows, or used to know when this history was taught in school, we are approaching the Norman Conquest, and with it the end of Anglo-Saxon elite dominance. The long reign of Æthelred the Unready, who ruled from 979 to 1016, set the stage for the Conquest. His moniker meant not that he was unprepared, but that he lacked good counsel. That was true, Morris says, not helped by Æthelred repeatedly changing his advisors wholesale, but the real problem was that the Vikings had returned, and Æthelred proved unequal to the challenge. He lost the Battle of Maldon in 991, against a Viking who later became king of Norway, and about which battle a famous contemporaneous poem was written. The battle was a severe blow to the English psyche; the country, which was prosperous, urbanizing, united, and proud of its success in defeating the Vikings, now had to face that perhaps God had withdrawn His protecting hand. Æthelred did not help matters by refusing, unlike Alfred, to himself fight in battle.

After Æthelred massacred many Danes living in England, in the St. Brice's Day Massacre of 1002, King Swein of Denmark, called Forkbeard (son of Harold Bluetooth, after whom the wireless technology is named), either opportunistically or from real anger, proceeded to invade with a large army. He was paid off with a huge sum, which limited his destruction. But in 1013, Forkbeard returned, intending to make himself king of England in place of the unpopular Æthelred. He forced Æthelred into exile, and did make himself king—but then dropped dead in 1014. His son Cnut (famous for the episode where he ordered the tide to retreat), became king, but Æthelred cut various deals with the English nobility, and returned, whereupon Cnut fled—only to come back with more men.

In 1015 and 1016, the Danes and English fought several battles, with the English under the command of Æthelred's son, Edmund Ironside. Æthelred died of natural causes in 1016, and Edmund succeeded, but he also died a few months later, probably murdered (a lot of prominent people among the Anglo-Saxons were murdered; it seems to have been a traditional way of resolving succession disputes), or perhaps from wounds sustained in battled against Cnut. Thus Cnut became undisputed king of all England (as well as of Denmark and Norway).

Cnut largely restored England to prosperity and security, and died in 1035. The last thirty years of Anglo-Saxon England were yet another complicated succession struggle, well-covered by Morris, but the take-away is that in 1066 William, Duke of Normandy, emerged victorious as King of England. He wiped out, either directly or by confiscation, essentially all the old Anglo-Saxon elite—a complete replacement of the ruling class. Still, much of the structure of government, as well as ecclesiastical structure, and the perception of England as a country of free men, along with much more that characterizes England, is the result of the Anglo-Saxons. The Normans did not destroy the foundations, though they arguably spiffed England up, and made it fully into what we think of as medieval England, the England of Richard the Lionheart and Robin Hood. But the office of the Sheriff of Nottingham, after all, was an Anglo-Saxon organizing device, the "shire reeve," part of the system initiated by Alfred the Great. Scratch any part of England, and you will find something Anglo-Saxon.

That may not be true for much longer, and what will replace England remains to be seen. I can't help but be very pessimistic. On its current path, with deracinated natives swamped by those from inferior cultures who have never accomplished anything, we can be pretty sure whatever is generated by "England" will be worthless on every level. Is there an alternative? It seems very unlikely that the English—that is, the Anglo-Saxons—will rise up and reverse sixty years of swarming invasion, while simultaneously rebirthing their own culture. A miracle might happen, I suppose, but it sure doesn't seem likely, nor does it have any histori-cal precedents. But maybe this is a failure of imagination, and some new inhabitants will form a new synthesis, such as that which birthed England. It's not on the horizon—but then, most of what happens is not, until it is suddenly made manifest.