

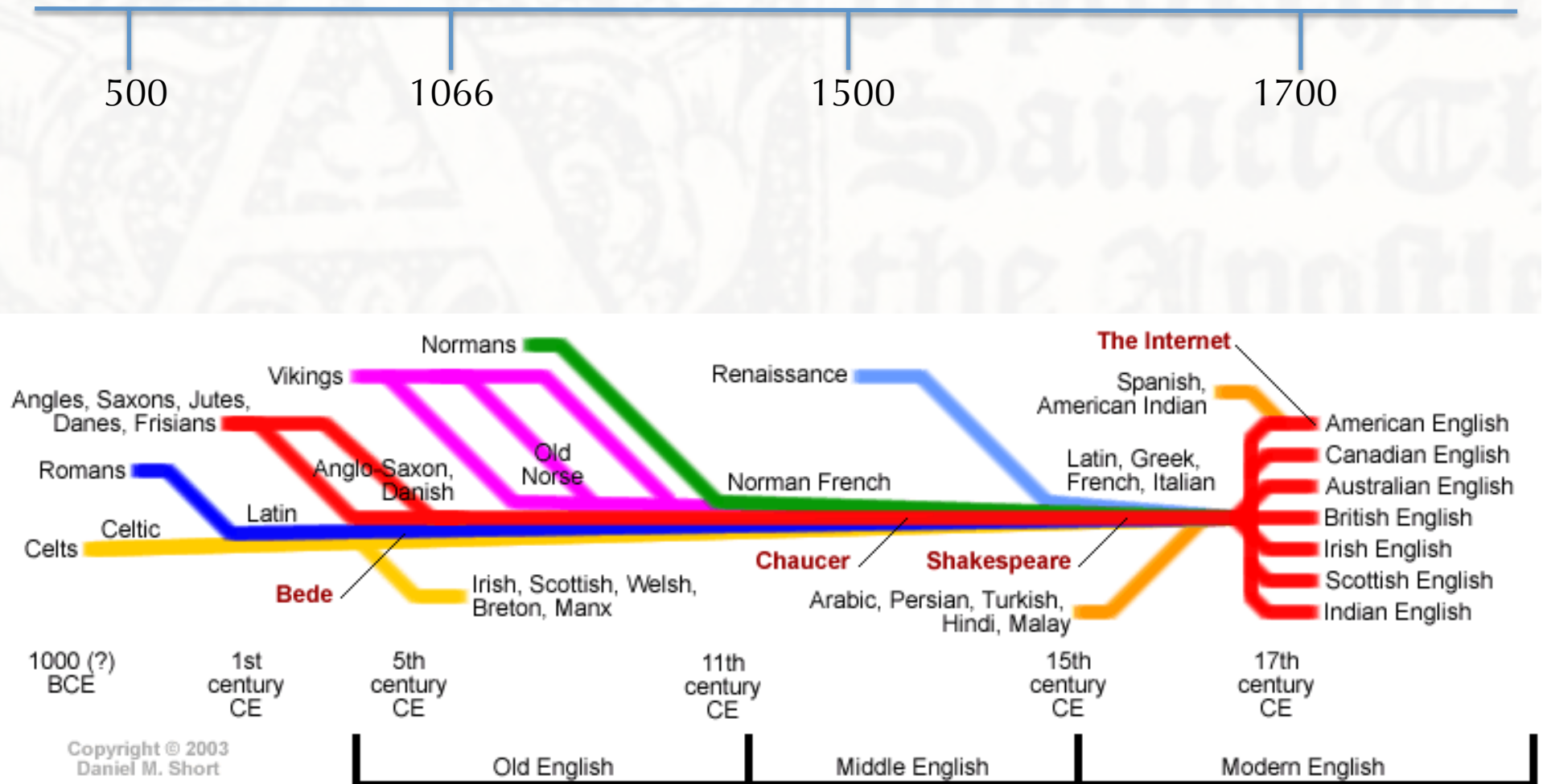
The History of English.

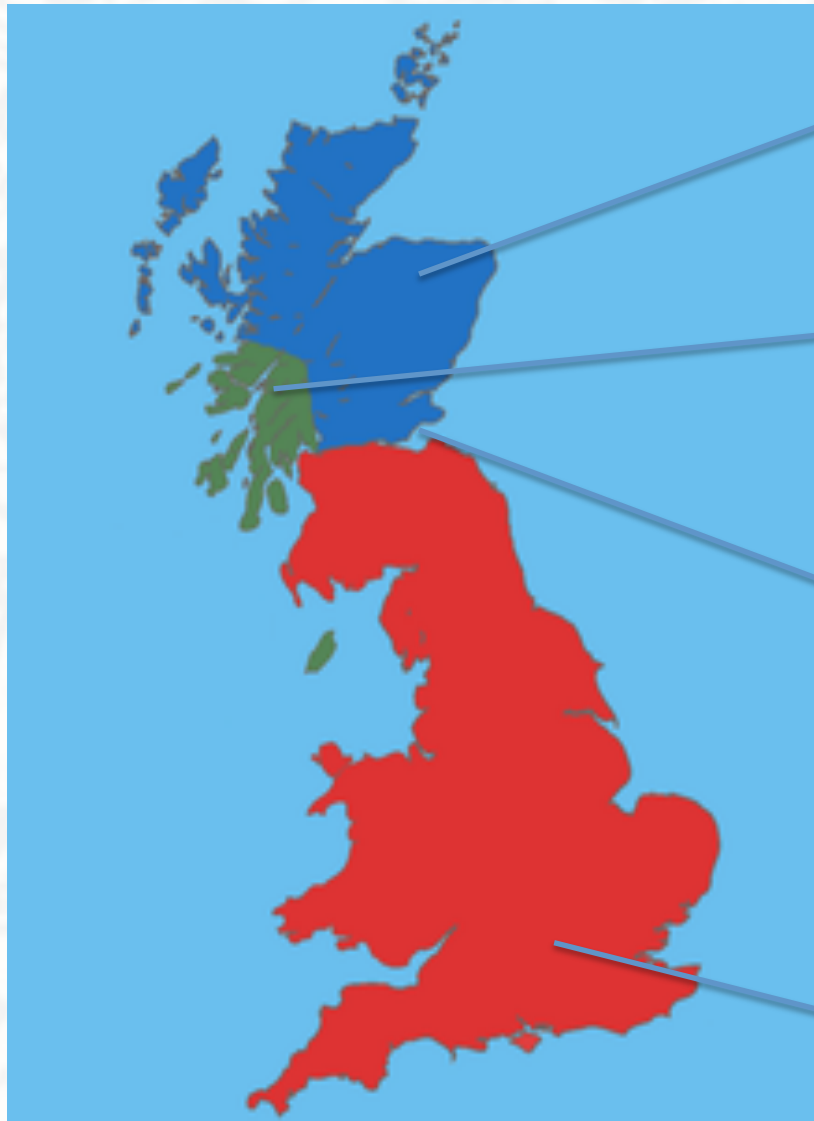
An Introduction.

“There was variety from the very beginning. There must have been. No one has ever found a speech community which does not contain regional and social variation, [...]. Indeed the society which the Anglo-Saxons joined in Britain in the fifth century was notably heterogeneous. Old English, as we have come to call the earliest stage of the language, evolved in a land which was full of migrants, raiders, mercenaries, temporary settlers, long-established families, people of mixed ethnic origins, and rapidly changing power bases.” (David Crystal, *The Stories of English*, Penguin, 2004, p. 15.)

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OLD ENGLISH MIDDLE ENGLISH EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PRESENT DAY ENGLISH





Mainly Pictish areas

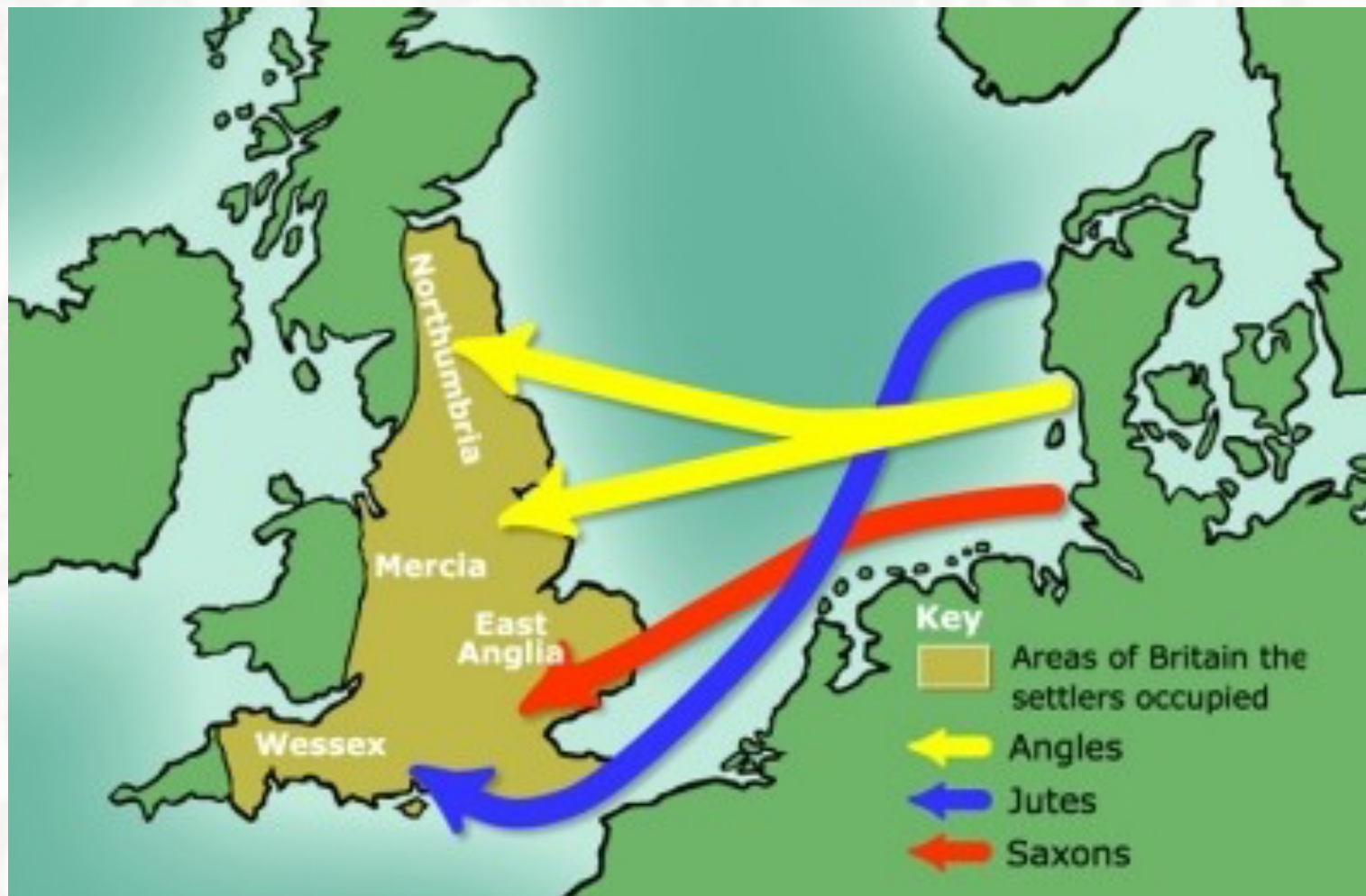
Mainly Goidelic areas

Firth of Forth

**Mainly Brittonic
areas**

OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

449 AD: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians began to occupy Great Britain, thus separating the early English language from its Continental relatives.





According to the Venerable Bede's account in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written in Latin and completed around 730, almost three centuries after the event, the Britons called the "Saxons" to their aid "from the parts beyond the sea." As a result of their appeal, shiploads of Germanic warrior-adventurers began to arrive. The date that Bede gives for the first landing of those Saxons is 449. With it the Old English period begins.

"They consulted what was to be done, and where they should seek assistance to prevent or repel the cruel and frequent incursions of the northern nations; and they all agreed with their King Vortigern to call over to their aid, from the parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation... Then the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships."



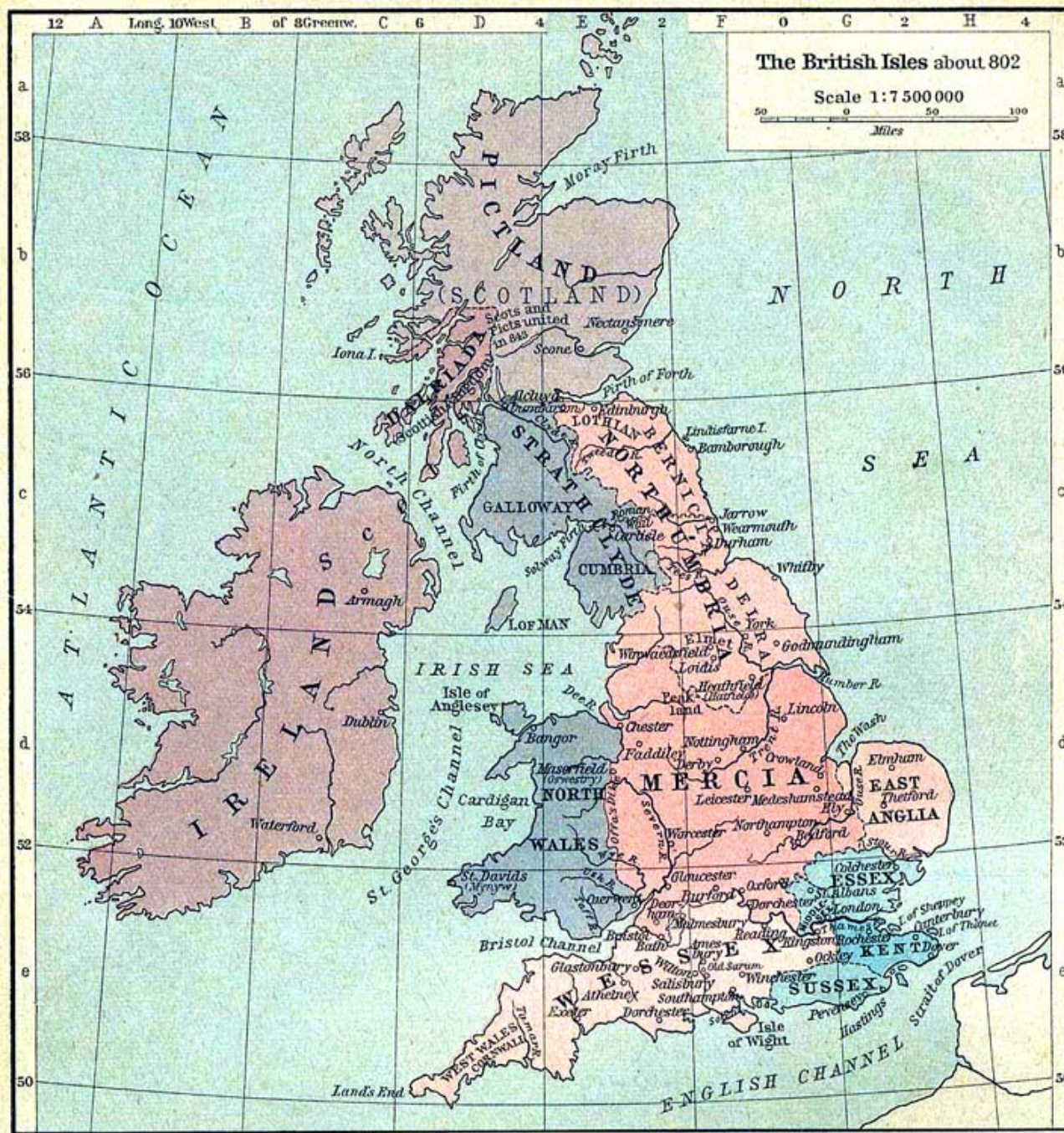
In 731/732 Bede completed his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*. Divided into five books, it recorded events in Britain from the raids by Julius Caesar (55–54 bc) to the arrival in Kent (ad 597) of St Augustine. For his sources he claimed the authority of ancient letters, the “traditions of our forefathers,” and his own knowledge of contemporary events. Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica* leaves gaps tantalizing to secular historians. Although overloaded with the miraculous, it is the work of a scholar anxious to assess the accuracy of his sources and to record only what he regarded as trustworthy evidence. It remains an indispensable source for some of the facts and much of the feel of early Anglo-Saxon history.

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, and those also 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 Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East-Angles, the Midland-Angles, 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 English.

(Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, bk, 1, ch. 15).

As a result of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain, the country was broken up into a large number of tiny local 'kingdoms', each with its own king or sub-king, some of whom were really little more than tribal chieftains. The situation was chaotic. Eventually, seven main kingdoms evolved and smaller domains were incorporated into these seven main ones.





The situation, however, was far from stable. There was an unbroken succession of wars in which the various rulers sought to eclipse and dominate their neighbours. Kings who achieved overall dominance are remembered as a "Bretwalda" or "Ruler of Britain".

Danelaw, also spelled Danelagh or Danelaga, the northern, central, and eastern region of Anglo-Saxon England colonized by invading Danish armies in the late 9th century. In the 11th and 12th centuries, it was recognized that all of eastern England formed a region in which a distinctive form of customary law prevailed in the local courts, differing from West Saxon law to the south and Mercian law to the west. The region derived its name from the Old English *Dena lagu* ("Danes' law") under the assumption that its unique legal practices were of Danish origin.



449 Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians began to occupy Great Britain, thus separating the early English language from its Continental relatives.

597 Saint Augustine arrived in England to begin the conversion of the English by baptizing King Ethelbert of Kent, thus introducing the influence of the Latin language.

664 The Synod of Whitby aligned the English with Roman rather than Celtic Christianity, thus linking English culture with mainstream Europe.

730 The Venerable Bede produced his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, recording the early history of the English people.

787 The Scandinavian invasion began with raids along the northeast seacoast.

865 The Scandinavians occupied north-eastern Britain and began a campaign to conquer all of England.

871 Alfred became king of Wessex and reigned until his death in 899, rallying the English against the Scandinavians, retaking the city of London, establishing the Danelaw, securing the kingship of all England for himself and his successors, and producing or sponsoring the translation of Latin works into English.

987 Ælfric, the homilist and grammarian, went to the abbey of Cerne, where he became the major prose writer of the Old English period and of its Benedictine Revival and produced a model of prose style that influenced following centuries.

991 Olaf Tryggvason invaded England, and the English were defeated at the Battle of Maldon.

1000 The manuscript of the Old English epic *Beowulf* was written about this time.

1016 Canute became king of England, establishing a Danish dynasty in Britain.

1042 The Danish dynasty ended with the death of King Hardicanute, and Edward the Confessor became king of England.

1066 Edward the Confessor died and was succeeded by Harold, last of the Anglo-Saxon kings, who died at the Battle of Hastings while fighting against the invading army of William, duke of Normandy, who was crowned king of England on December 25.