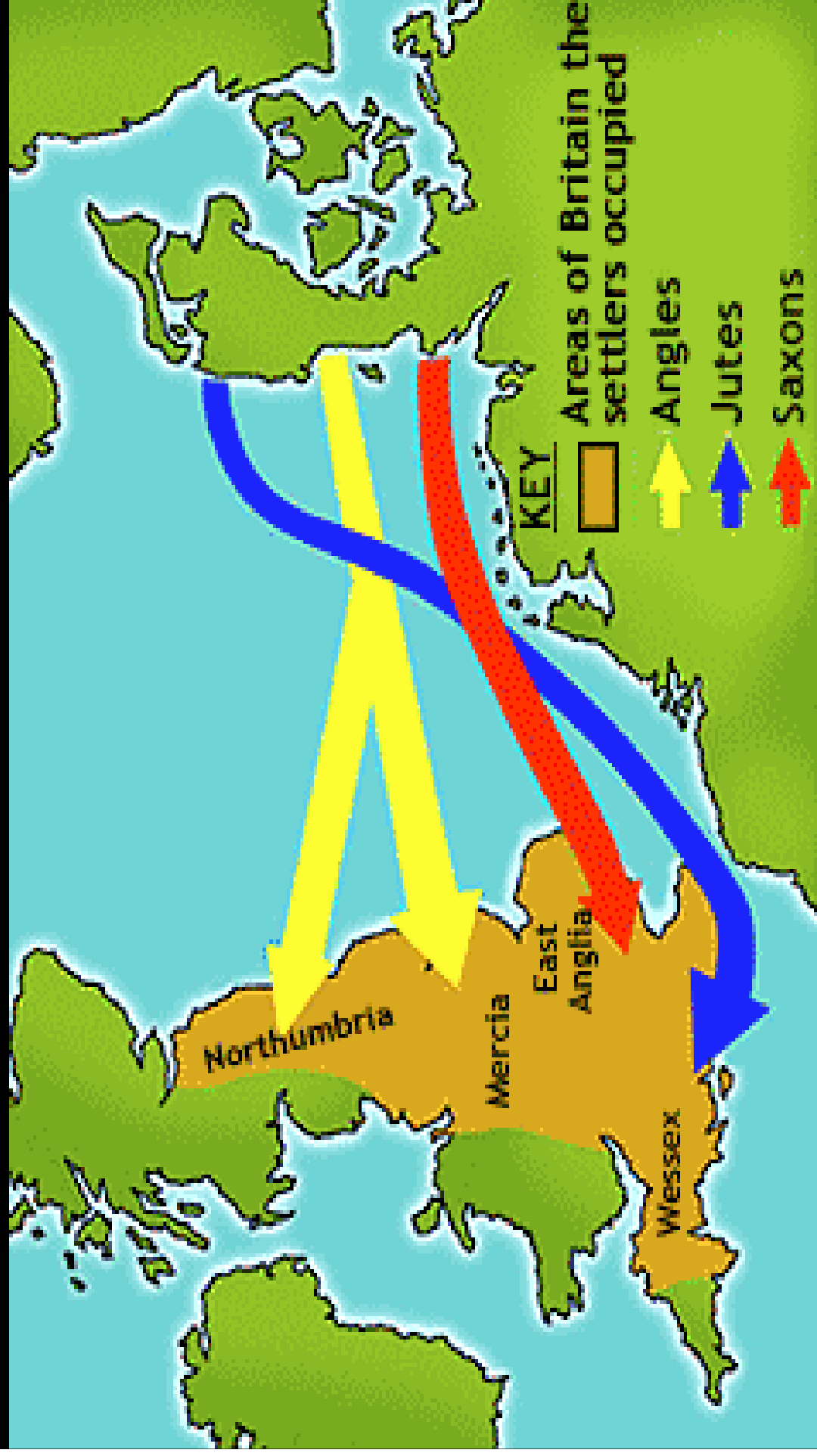




The Saxon Invasions

- ‘Saxon’ was a generic term for groups of Germanic invaders including Angles, Jutes, Franks, & Frisians. Celts & Gaels called them ‘Sassenoch; the Britons ‘Sais.
- ‘Saxon’ comes from the word *Seax* or ‘long-knife.’
- Saxon raiding began in the 400s and caused the Romano-British to build the ‘Saxon Shore’ forts.
- After the Roman withdrawal in 410 the Saxon raiding became a full scale invasion. Saxons no longer raided but settled in the SE.
- 439AD Vortigern hired Saxon & Jute mercenaries led by Hengist & Horsa to fight Picts. He did not pay them.
- Saxons terrorize Britannia and the amount of settlers, at first very small, becomes a flood.
- Gildas, a Briton (Welsh) poet recorded the Saxon invasions as horrific events portending the end of the world.

The Saxon Invasions²



Map from: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/anglosaxons/invasion/index.shtml

The Saxon Invasions



- Why did the Saxons invade/settle Britain?
 1. Climatic change caused flooding in Northern Germany and colder weather shortened their growing season.
 2. Demographic explosion. Too many people, not enough food.
 3. Political climate: Too many chiefs & kings. and warriors to sustain a lawful society, so young warriors were encouraged to venture out.
- Saxons were envious of Roman civilization, and often built their towns over the ruins of Romano-British cities.
- Saxon kings also sought the *regnum Britanniae*.



The Saxon Invasions

- By 600AD 5 main Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had emerged: Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, Kent, and Anglia.





The Saxon Invasions

- Saxons have been portrayed as ignorant brutes & barbarians that ruined the civilization of Britain. Not entirely true.
- Unlike the Romans, who at times saw war and violence & sport (Gladiators, etc.) Saxons used war as a system. Chiefs became kings through physical prowess.
- Plunder was the glue of Saxon society. It bound warriors to their chiefs, land was held in return for military service, it was the honor that fed their epic poems and culture.
- The Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf written in the 7th or 8th century is a fantasy epic, but clearly shows how honor, war, and the society of ceorls ‘free warriors’ dominated Anglo-Saxon society.



The Saxon Invasions⁻⁶

- We have learned a lot about Anglo-Saxon culture from *Beowulf* and the burial ship found at Sutton Hoo.
- No bodies have been found at Sutton Hoo but archeologists think it is the burial site of King Raedwald of Anglia & built around 625AD
- Combination of pagan and Christian influences. Were these Anglo-Saxon warriors bound for Valhalla or the Christian heaven?

