

Celts, Germans and Vikings are names given to various peoples of north-western Europe by those who suffered from their attacks.

Celts (凱爾特人) were called by the Greeks and Romans as Keltoi, Celtae, Galati, Galli. They were bands of nomadic warriors from the west of various ethnic traditions causing considerable problems to the Roman Empire in the **last century before Christ**.

Germani (日耳曼人) or **Teutonic**(條頓人) or **Goths**(哥德人) are the same people.

Germania knew by the Romans was the area between the Rhine and Danube, extending possibly as far as the Vistula, and including in the north Denmark and the southern parts of Norway and Sweden.

Germans was the collective name used by the Romans for the barbarians beyond the Rhine. This region was later overrun by Slav peoples. The Germanic tribes moved out of the area between the Rhine and the Vistula in various directions in the **5th and 6th centuries AD** and finally overran and destroyed the Roman Empire. The best known of these tribes are

- the **Franks** (法蘭克人), who settled in Gaul;
- the **Visigoths** (西哥德人), who invaded Italy, captured Rome and later moved into Spain;
- the **Ostrogoths** (東哥德人), who settled in Italy;
- the **Alamanni** (阿拉曼人), in south Germany and Switzerland;
- the **Langobards** (倫巴底人), who took over northern Italy;
- the **Burgundians** (勃艮第人) in eastern Gaul;
- the **Vandals** (汪達爾人) who finally crossed to north Africa.

In the fifth century a mixture of tribes generally known as **Angles** (盎格魯人) and **Saxons** (撒克遜人) came to England and settled in the south and east, driving much of the Celtic population westwards into Wales and Cornwall.

In spite of the threats which they posed, the Mediterranean peoples were fascinated by the Celts and tended to idealise them as noble barbarians, led by druids possessing the secrets of ancient wisdom. In the same way the Romans regarded the troublesome Germans with both fear and admiration.

Tacitus found much to admire in the courage, loyalty, toughness and simple family life of the Germanic warriors, and yet he was by no means blind to their shortcomings. He admitted their ignorance, their excessive love of drinking, and a fatal tendency to quarrel among themselves, and this picture is very similar to that which an earlier historian left of the Celts about a century before.

The third set of barbarians from northern Europe who raided and rubbed the richer and more settled lands to the south were **Scandinavians** (斯堪的那維亞人), generally known as **Vikings** (維京人), of the same stock as the northern Germans. They were called **Northmen**(諾爾斯人) by contemporaries, but the term Viking (vikingr in Old Norse) used by monkish chroniclers came to denote pirates and raiding bands who attacked monasteries and had no respect for churches. The term probably comes from vik (bay/fjord), and 'to go a-viking' meant to sail out from home to seek fame and wealthy fighting, trade or piracy or a mixture of the three. Consequently the period when the Scandinavians were most active outside their home-lands, from **the mid 8th to the mid 11th** centuries, is generally known as the Viking Age.

By the eighth century the men who inhabited Norway, Sweden and Denmark were building seagoing ships of unrivalled excellence, and forging fine, reliable weapons. In their vigour and ruthlessness they were in no way inferior to the Germans and Celts who preceded them.

In the Viking Age, Scandinavian pirates, adventurers, traders and warrior bands, fighting either independently or as mercenaries, penetrated from one end of Europe to the other. They attacked and terrorised the very peoples who had behaved in the same way centuries earlier, such as the Anglo-Saxons, the Franks, and the Celtic inhabitants of Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The Vikings found a few areas in which to settle permanently, such as Iceland, Orkney, Shetland and the Faroes, as well as parts of northern and eastern England and Normandy, but over most of Europe their dominion proved no lasting one.

These Scandinavians were superb seamen and good fighters, loyal to their chosen leaders and ready to die in their defence. At the same time they are described as touchy and quarrelsome, overfond of drinking, and too independent in spirit to build up large, well-disciplined armies. They operated mainly in small bands, continually forming loose alliances which soon broke up again. They were able to endure appalling conditions of cold and hardship, and were shrewd and knowledgeable traders, ready to go far into inhospitable regions if there seemed a chance of gaining silver and winning valuable booty. There were gifted poets and story-tellers among them, and they had a gift for communicating with those of other languages and cultures. They much enjoyed legal arguments and the complexities of word-games and genealogies. What we know of their character and mode of life is similar to that of the Celts and Germans before them, and indeed they were of the same stock as the Germanic tribes of northern Europe. But while the continental Germans and Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity fairly early, the Vikings continued to hold on to their old religion for some centuries after the Christian church was well established in neighbouring kingdoms. The Scandinavian Vikings were not converted to Christianity until about AD 1000.

From the seventh century onwards there were rich ship burials in East Anglia, Norway and Sweden.

At the close of the Viking Age, myths and symbols from the pre-Christian past were employed to decorate monuments raised over the Christian dead, so that Thor and Odin and the ancient World-Serpent are found in association with the cross of Christ.

Much of their religion was concerned with battle ritual, since Celts, Germans and Vikings were all warrior peoples in a period of expansion. It was also closely associated with the natural world, of which they were very much aware. They did not regard this as something inanimate or wholly separate from themselves; as Henri Frankfort pointed out: 'For modern scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an **It**; for ancient - and also for primitive - man it is a **Thou**'.

Source: MYTHS AND SYMBOLS IN PAGAN EUROPE, H.R. Ellis Davidson, 1988. Pp. 6-12.