Early Germanic Tribes

Beginning around 1000 B.C.E. Germanic tribes began to leave their Scandinavian homeland.

Encounters with the Celts

Around 500 B.C.E. the Germanic tribes began to move south into central Europe. They encountered the Celts, who already inhabited a wide area between present day France to Russia.

Encounters with the Roman Empire

c. 200 B.C.E. Migrating Germanic tribes come in contact with Romans

120-101 B.C.E. Cimbrians and Teutons battle the Romans.


►9 C.E. *Arminius*, or "Hermann," stops the Romans near Osnabrück in northwestern Germany, resulting in a stalemate along the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. A 350 mile buffer zone was built between the Rhine and Danube rivers, known as the *limes*.

►98 C.E. *Germania*, by Tacitus.

179-253 C.E. The task of defending the northern frontier of the Roman Empire is handed over to Germanic tribes.

Values and Ethics of German Tribes

Germanic warriors valued loyalty, obligation, fidelity, trust and mutual protection. The lived according to a highly personal code of ethics which emphasized mutual personal allegiance and service. These values are reflected in *The Lay of Hildebrand*.

Mythology and Religion

Germanic mythology was associated with the forces of nature. Among the many deities were the so-called *sky gods* who were known by different names throughout northern Europe.

1) *Woden*, known in Scandinavia as Odin, was the principle god of Germanic peoples

2) *Frigg*, known in Norway as Fria, was the wife of Woden.

3) *Donar*, also known throughout Scandinavia as Thor, was the god of thunder & war.

4) *Tieu*, also known by various other names (Ziu, Tius, Tiw, Tyr), was also a god of war.
Migrations of the Goths

1. Some migrated southeast and settled in present-day Italy. They would become known to historians as the **Ostrogoths** (East Goths).

2. Some migrated southeast, occupied present-day Italy for a while, only to be forced to move on to present-day Spain. They would become known to historians as the **Visigoths** (the West Goths).

3. Other tribes, such as the Burgundians (who appear as the Nibelungen tribe in the *Song of the Nibelungen*, written ca. 1200), Vandals, and Lombards would first migrate south towards present-day Italy as well, and then eventually westward towards the Rhine and beyond.

The Goths

**The Visigoths** (the West Goths)

The Visigoths were the first Germanic tribe to invade the Roman Empire. Ulifas, a Visigoth who had been kidnapped by the Romans and later became an ambassador to the Roman emperor Constantine, was named bishop of Dacia (Romania) and charged with the Christianization of the Goths in 341. The Visigoths were thus the first Germanic tribe to accept Christianity (*Arianism*). Forced to move south by invading Huns in 375, the Visigoths asked the Romans for refuge. They settled in present-day Austria, as well as in lands between Greece and Turkey. 40,000 Visigoths entered the Roman army.

►476 A.D. **Fall of the Western Roman Empire**

Humiliated by the Romans, the Visigoths attacked Rome three times. In 476 their king, Odovacar, deposed the Emperor Romulus Augustus, thereby ending the Western Roman Empire.

**The Ostrogoths** (the East Goths)

The Ostrogoths were also threatened by the Huns in 375. After Attila the Hun’s death in 453, the Ostrogoths, under their king Theodoric the Great, defeated the remaining Huns and moved on to conquer present-day Italy.

The Ostrogoths then defeated the Odovacar (the Visigoth king) and set up court of their own kingdom at *Ravenna* which had been the seat of the Roman Emperors of the West since 402. The defeated Visigoths got permission to leave and headed towards southwest Gaul (present-day France), eventually reaching Spain by 711. By 526, the Ostrogothic kingdom began to collapse under pressure from attacks by Justinian the Great, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (based in *Constantinople*).