Beowulf

An Anglo-Saxon Epic

Origins of *Beowulf*

- Mysterious and unclear
- Thought to have been **orally composed** in the 8th century
- Composed by a Christian author for an audience in Anglo-Saxon England
- Written in **Old English** (also called Anglo-Saxon)
- Epic tales were told by **scops** (oral poets of medieval times)
  - Scop comes from the Old English word for "to create" or "to form"

Context of the Story

- Though the story was told to Anglo-Saxons, the characters in the story are **Scandinavian**

- Main groups of the story: Swedes, Geats, Jutes, Danes, Frisians

- Beowulf is a Geat who strengthens an alliance with the Danes through his heroism

- Germanic culture of loyalty, honor, and strength

- Kingships

Map of Medieval and Modern Scandinavia

Beowulf as an Epic Poem

- What is an **epic poem**?
  - An epic poem is a long, narrative poem written in an elevated style which celebrates the deeds of a legendary hero or god.

- What is an **epic hero**?
  - An epic hero is often superhuman, legendary, and central to the epic.