

# Crime and Punishment

## Learning Objective:

To explore crime and punishment in the Anglo-Saxon and Viking period.



Can you remember when the  
Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings came  
to Britain?



43  
to  
410

**Roman Britain**

410  
to  
1066

**Anglo-Saxons and  
Vikings**

1066  
to  
1154

**Norman Britain**

1154  
to  
1485

**Middle Ages**

1485  
to  
1603

**Tudors**

1603  
to  
1714

**Stuarts**

1837  
to  
1901

**Victorians**

1914  
to  
1918

**World War 1**

1939  
to  
1945

**World War 2**

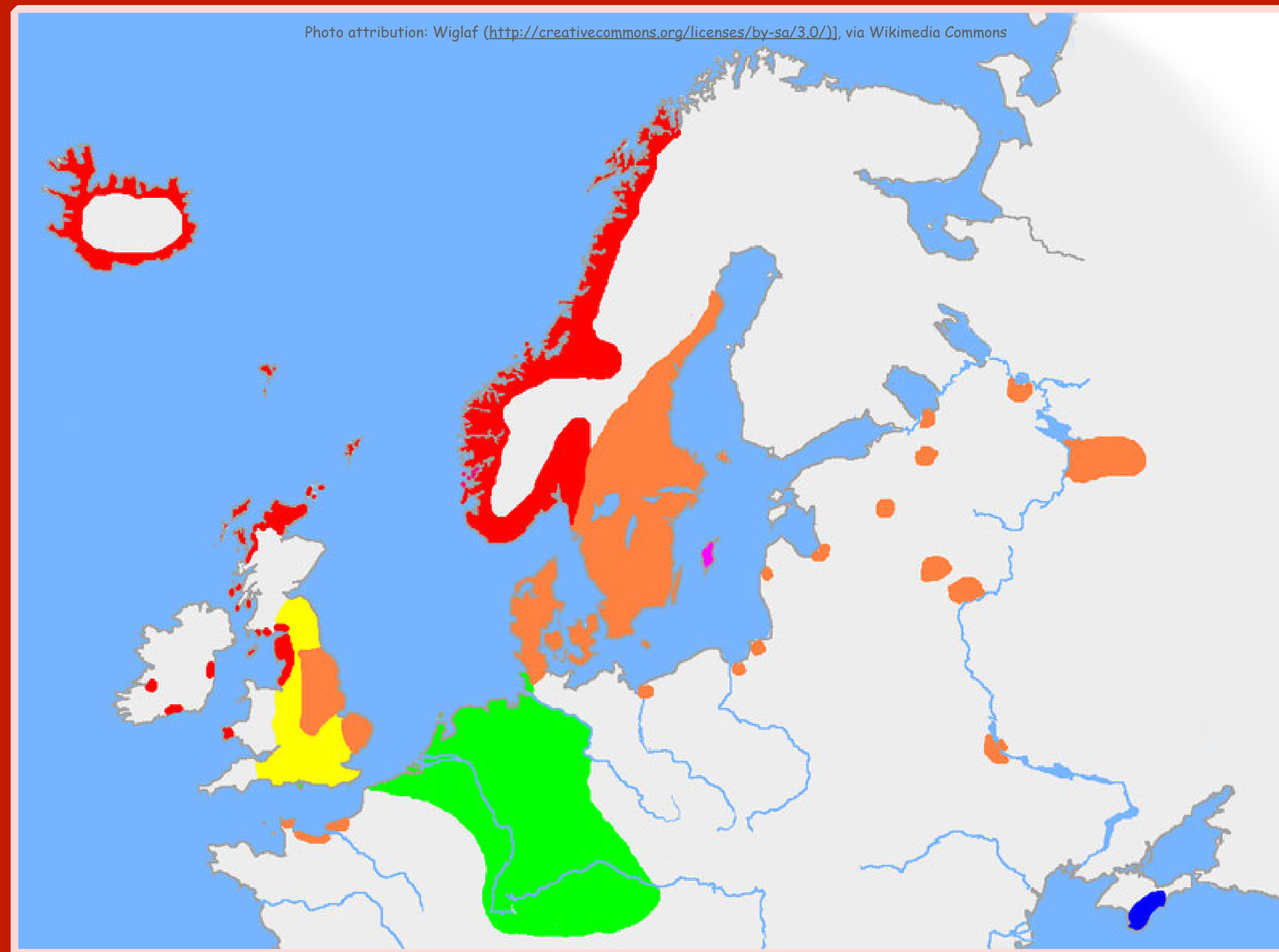
2000  
to  
today

**New Millennium**



Angles and Saxons started invading Britain in the 5th century AD.

Vikings started invading in the 8th century AD.



Angles and Saxons (yellow) came from what is now Germany (green). Vikings were mainly from Norway (red) and Sweden (orange).



After the Romans left Britain, the Anglo-Saxons and then the Vikings attacked. They had not been ruled by the Romans and so had their own ways of dealing with crime.

Instead of punishment, most crimes demanded that the criminal pay the injured party compensation, known as weregild. 'Gild' meant gold. The amount of compensation a person got depended on their standing in society.



# Weregild

- ❖ The standard rate of weregild for killing a man was 200 shillings
- ❖ This was multiplied if a nobleman was killed, generally 1200 shillings were paid to his family
- ❖ It was 30,000 for killing a king, half for the family and half for the country
- ❖ The amount varied for women, in some places it was double, in others, half that of men





There were no police but villages were divided into ten households called tithings who made sure that wrongdoers were brought to justice. People accused of a crime were brought to court. There were no lawyers but a jury would swear an oath of guilt or innocence.



A criminal could be outlawed for a crime. This meant that they were outside the law and anyone could harm or kill them without redress. Only the most serious crimes earned a death penalty.



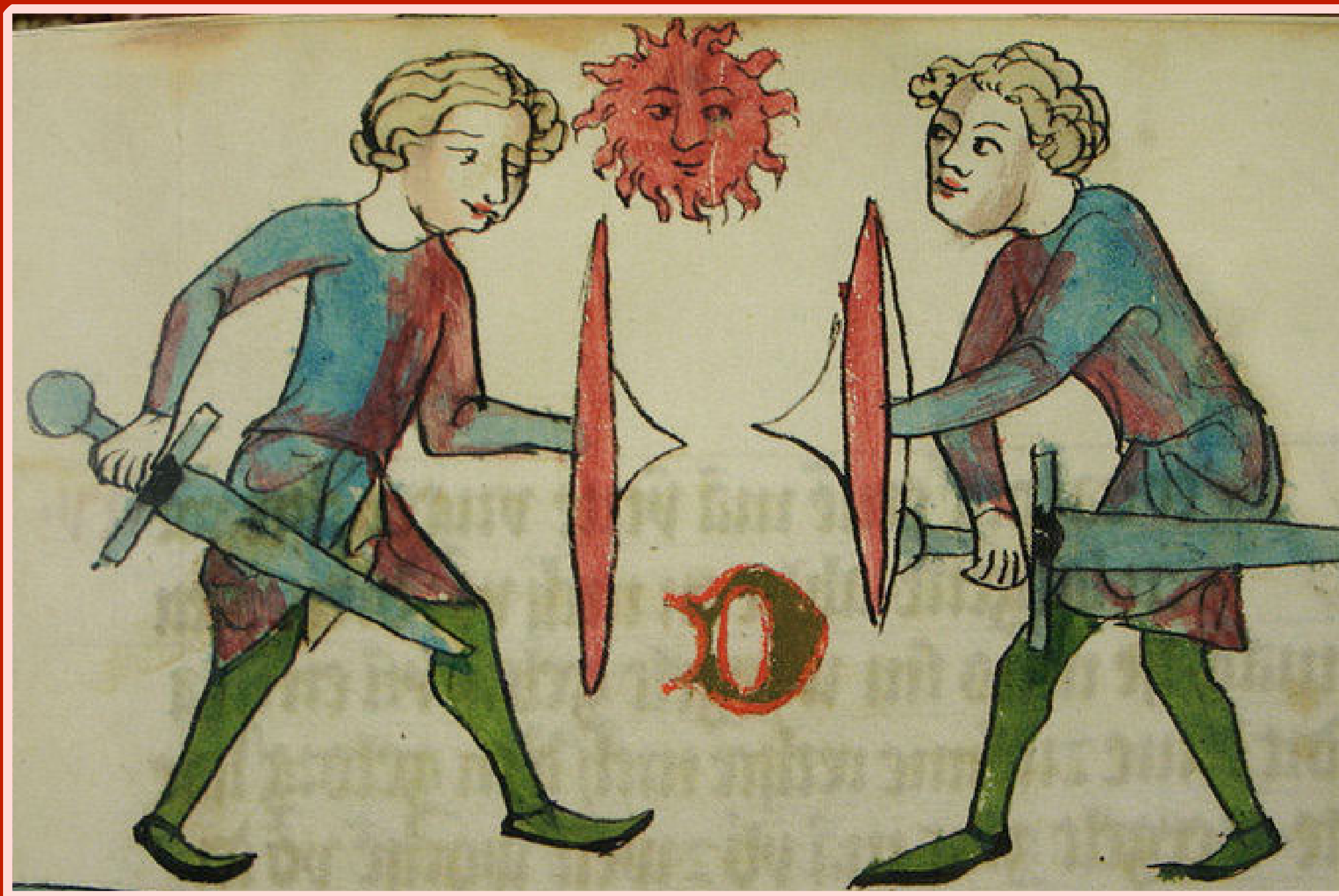
If there were no witnesses to a crime, or witnesses disagreed, the accused could have a trial by ordeal. This involved subjecting the accused to a dangerous or painful death. The theory was that God would perform a miracle and save them if they were innocent.

One trial by ordeal that was often used was to walk over hot coals or ploughshares. Another popular trial was trial by boiling water. The accused would have to put their hand in boiling water to pick up a stone. The hand was then bound. After three days, if the hand had healed, they were declared innocent.

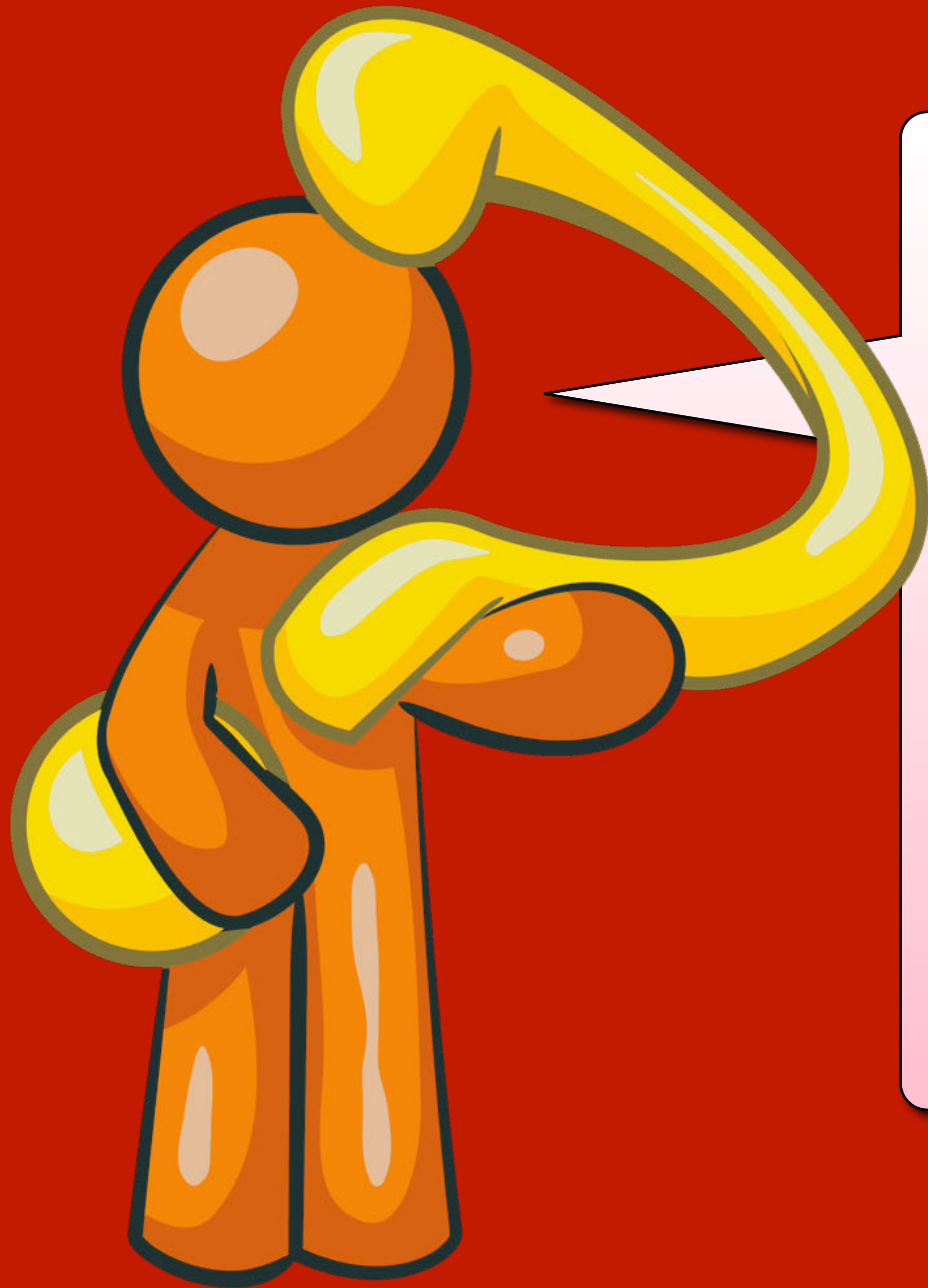




Trial by water also included submerging someone in a river or stream. If they drowned, they were considered guilty but if they survived, they were innocent.



If two people had a dispute, they could prove who was right in a trial by combat. This was like a duel. The winner was declared innocent.



What do you think  
of the Anglo-  
Saxon and Viking  
law system?  
Why?

