



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY CIC

# NOVA ANGLIA

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# Nova Anglia

## Introduction

As with many of the myths, legends, conflicting documentary evidence and disagreement between modern day historians and archaeologists pertaining to Anglo Saxon refugees fleeing England following the Norman conquest, the truth cannot be confirmed with any absolute certainty, but equally, therefore, cannot be dismissed or disproved.

## Nova Anglia

Of all the legends of Anglo- Saxon England, one in particular is a compelling tale of high adventure and the forming of a new Anglo-Saxon realm in what is now the Crimea and which was named, Nova Anglia. (New England). This Latin name would have been 'Niwi Engalond' in old English to the Anglo-Saxon settlers.



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**Varangian Guardsmen, an illumination from the *Skylitzes Chronicle*; many if not most members of the Varangian guard were English after the 11th century.**

References to this event are recorded in two sources which were attested to some considerable time after the alleged settlement but there is some believable credence to this alluring and dramatic story.

## Norman Conquest

Following the Norman conquest, very few Noble Anglo-Saxon families were permitted to keep their ancestral estates and it is known that many of those who refused to submit to King William, either went into exile or, in some cases, tried to organise resistance.

The feudal system introduced by the Normans was enforced by a strict military doctrine which effectively crushed or prevented organised resistance on a national scale. There were rebellions and the likes of Hereward the Wake proved to be a thorn in the side of the Normans but the mass building of motte and bailey type fortifications proved to be a very effective deterrent.

## Jatvaroar Saga

The Jatvaroar saga, states that in 1075 the Anglo Saxon Earl of Gloucester, Siward, (Sigeweard Bearn) led a fleet of 350 ships from England and that they sailed south where they entered the Mediterranean Sea. Three Anglo Saxon Earls and eight other prominent noble leaders were said to have accompanied Siward together with a large host of fighting men as well as their women and children.

We also know that Hereward the Wake had an Anglo-Saxon ally who fought against the Normans and that he was called Siward Barn. Could this have been Siward, Earl of Gloucester?

The saga records that the Anglo-Saxon fleet attacked the Islamic city of Ceuta on the North African coast and slaughtered the Muslim defenders. They plundered the city and are said to have seized huge amounts of gold and silver. The English fleet is then said to have seized Majorca and Minorca before eventually sailing and occupying a part of Sicily.

No details of what they did in these lands is known but the events are also recorded in a chronicle, which was written by an English monk in France, namely the 'Chronicon Universale Anonymi Laudunensis.' In this version the English fleet was said to have numbered 235 ships. If we take this lower number rather than the 350 ships claimed in the Jatvaror saga, and allocate each ship 40 people, that gives a total of 9,400 people and if we apply the same formula to a fleet of 350 ships, we get 14000 people.

Both sources detail that the Anglo- Saxons heard that the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire was under attack from 'Heathens'. It is not recorded as to who these 'Heathens' were, but we do know that the Emperor at this time was one Alexius 1 Comnenus and that the Empire was at war with the Turks. The difficulty here though, is that there is no record of Constantinople itself, as having been under siege at this time.

The city had been besieged many times but between 1047 and 1203, there are no recorded attacks on the Capital in the 1070's. The Eastern Romans, as they should be called were at war with the Turks though.

If this happened, then the Anglo-Saxon fleet must have been in the Mediterranean for nearly 6 years because the Emperor Alexius 1 Comnenus was not crowned until the 1st of April 1081.

It is likely that Siward offered his services to the Emperor either for payment or land. The Empire, engaged in a constant war with the Turks and other Islamic peoples would have welcomed a powerful army of warriors and it is from this time onwards that a transition starts to take place within the famed Varangian guard, the Emperor's elite unit of predominately Viking warriors. By the 1100's the vast majority of the Varangian guard were Englishmen.

## Influences of the Vikings

The Influences of the Vikings was waning after 1066. The nations that they had attacked and raided had learnt how to stand up to them and knew how to defeat them. The Vikings too, had evolved. Their conversion to Christianity had curbed the savagery that they had been famed for and their integration with the peoples whose lands they had settled in had tamed their impulses. In England, Anglo- Saxons, Vikings and Normans would fuse into the modern-day English people as they entered the late medieval period.

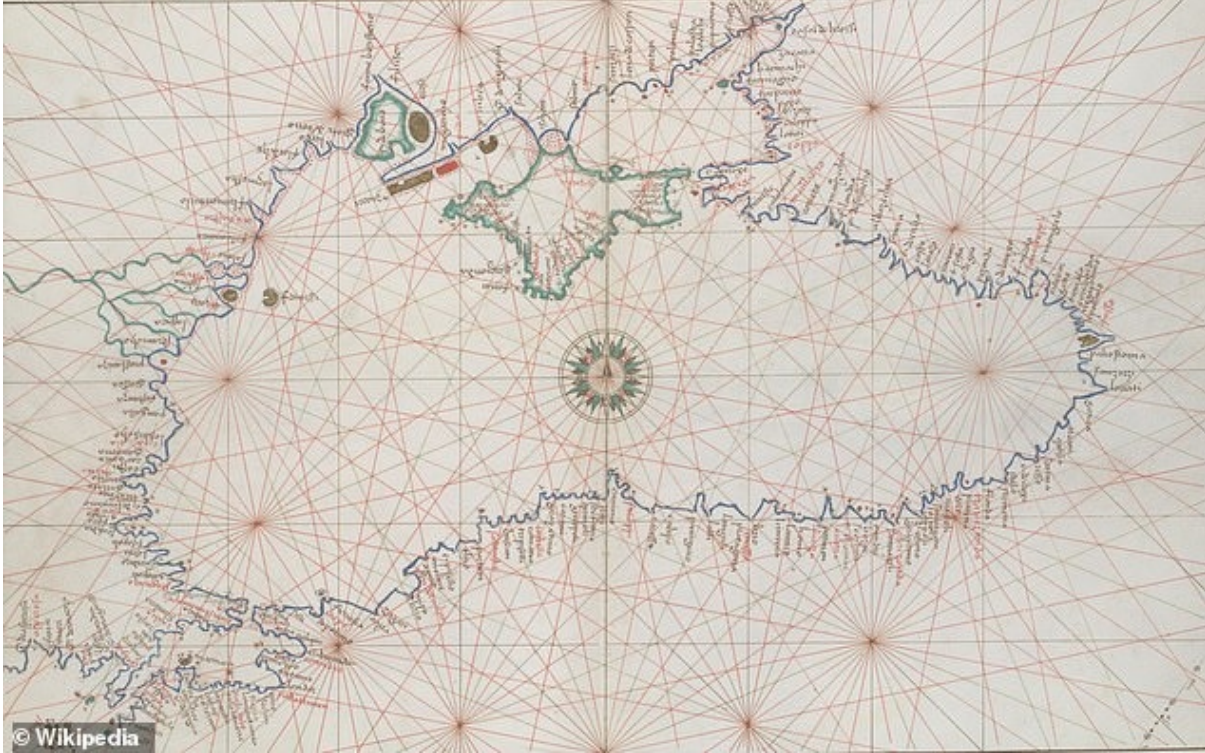
Of course, Warriors, whether Christian or pagan in this period were violent and ferocious in combat, as to be otherwise would be a weakness that would likely get them killed in battle.

It is recorded that Siward and his retinue fought for the Emperor and that he granted them land in what is now the Crimea. Siward took part of his fighting force across the Black Sea to the Crimea, whilst leaving a large unit of warriors in the Emperor's service.

Siward fought with a people called the Kipchaks, a Turkish Steppe tribe and supposedly defeated them. This land he took was named Nova Anglia (New England) and towns were formed and named after English cities such as London and York.

There is a possible connection that this actually happened.

Portolans (coastal charts made by Italian and Greek navigators) are mentioned in two 14th century sources, namely the Edward saga and the Chronicon Laudunensis. They cite that two areas on the Crimean coast were named Londinia and Susaco. The latter place name is believed to have derived from the name Sussex.



Italian atlas of 1553 of the Crimea, which names Susaco (Sussex) and Londina (London), believed to have been settlements in 'Nova Anglia'.

Jansson, Jan, 1588-1664.

### Further historical references

Further historical references refer to the land of the Saxi (Terram Saxorum).

Franciscan friars in the 13th century recorded that the Saxi lived in well-fortified cities and that they were Christians. One friar reported that the Saxi were a formidable fighting force and that they had defeated the Tartars who had attacked one of their cities.

The fact that this Saxon enclave was still thriving in the middle of the 13th century is not so surprising given that in this period, the Varangian Guard in Constantinople was now known as the 'Englinovarangoi' or 'Inglinoi'. We know this with certainty as it is recorded in a document of Emperor Michael VIII. We also know that some Scots served in the Guard too.

The eventual fate of the Anglo-Saxon colony is unknown but given that Constantinople finally fell to the Turks in 1453 it is unlikely that it could have survived without Byzantine support. What we do know is that when the city finally fell, is that the Varangian Guard stood and fought to the death.

There is much dispute amongst historians with regards to Nova Anglia. Several believe that the evidence is compelling and that Anglo-Saxon refugees from Norman England did colonise the Crimea and the area near the Sea of Azov. Others do not accept it.

Whatever the truth, it's a fascinating tale but the reader of this article must make their own mind up. A subject worthy of debate for sure.