

0. WHO WERE THE GEATS? - Story Preface

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No one can be sure about the appearance of the "Geats," but artists have created illustrative images of them. This image, copyright Paramount Pictures, all rights reserved, provides a point of view. It supports the 2007 film version of "Beowulf," in which Geats play a prominent role. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

The warrior Beowulf, according to the story, was a Geat. Who were the Geats? The short answer is: We can't be sure. Many historians think they were Gauts; others think not.

Scholars do largely agree that the Geats lived in the area we know as southwest Sweden. If so, they had endured fierce wars with their neighbors to the north.

According to *A History of the Vikings*, a highly respected work by Gwyn Jones:

*The two cardinal facts of homeland Swedish history during the first millennium of our era are, first, that about the year 100 they were, on the testimony of Tacitus, more powerful and better organized in their Uppland province than any of the tribes that surrounded them, and second, that at a date which still remains bewilderingly uncertain (it might be as early as post-550 or as late as c. 1000) they would so impair the strength of their southern neighbors in Väster [Western]- and Östergötland [Eastern Gotland] that thereafter, apart from some forced interchanges of territory with Denmark, they would prove masters in their own part of Scandinavia. (Jones, *Vikings*, page 34)*

In other words, the Geats - who lived in the southwestern area of the country we know as Sweden - were apparently dominated by their neighbors to the north. That point (about which scholarship fills rows of library shelves) helps us to understand some of the issues a warrior like Beowulf, and his people, had to face.

But ... were the Geats the same as the Gauts? And, if so, who were the Gauts? Jones continues:

Unfortunately we still have less knowledge of the Gauts at this time than of the Swedes, and outside Beowulf and Widsith, no knowledge at all of the Geats. (Jones, page 35.)

Lack of documentation from the Dark Ages keeps us in the dark about such matters. Of one thing we can be sure, however. Beowulf, the Geatish warrior, continues to fascinate us more than a thousand years after his story was first recorded.

It's time, now, for us to look at the original manuscript which tells the tale.

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Map Depicting Presumed Location of Geats

Image, described above, online courtesy Beowulf Translations.net

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Vaster Gotland - Map Loctor

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Oster Gotland - Map Locator

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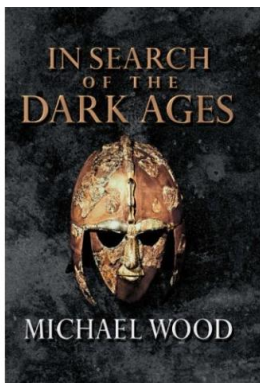
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Sweden - Map Locator

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In Search of the Dark Ages

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