

Chapter One

Old English (c. 700-1100)

1.1. Historical events

Important dates:

8c. B.C. Gaelic tribes in the British Isles.

55-54 B.C. Julius Caesar's attempt at conquering Celtic Britain.

43 A.D. Emperor Claudius establishes military camps; cf. English place-names, such as *Lancaster*, *Doncaster* in the North, *Chester*, *Rochester*, *Winchester* in the Midlands and the South (cf. L castra 'military camp'); *Lincoln* (cf. L colonia 'colony'), *Watling Street* (a highway from London to Chester), whose second component, originally denoting 'road', comes from the late L strāta (via).

80 Emperor Domitian captures Southern Scotland.

410 Legions recalled to Rome.

449 Hengest and Horsa (Jutes) arrive as the first Germanic invaders to capture Britain; cf. an account in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

[Ond on hiera dagum Hengest ond Horsa from Wyr̥tgeorne geleaðade Bretta kyninge gesohton Bretene on ðam staðe ðe is genemned Ypwinesfleot, ærest Brettum to fultume, ac hie eft on hie fuhton.]

455 [Her Hengest and Horsa fuhton wið Wyr̥tgeorne ðam cyninge, in ðære stowe ðe is gecueden Agælesðrep, ond his broður Horsan man ofslog. Ond æfter ðam Hengest feng to rice ond Æsc his sunu.]

457 [Her Hengest ond Æsc fuhton wið Brettas in ðære stowe ðe is gecueden Crecganford, ond ðær ofslogon IIII wera, ond ða Brettas ða forleton Centlond, ond mid micle ege flugon to Lundenbyrg.]

473 [Her Hengest and Æsc gefuhton wið Walas, ond genamon unarimedlicu herereaf, ond ða Walas flugon ða Englan swa fyr.]

** *hiera* 'their', *Wyr̥tgeorn* 'Vortigern', *geleaðan* 'invite', *Ypwinesfleot* 'Ebbsfleet', *fultum* 'aid', *ac* 'but', *hie* 'they', *eft* 'again'; *stow* 'place', *cwæðan*

'quoth/name', *fon* (PT *feng*) 'capture', *rice* 'kingdom' (cf. G *Reich*); *Crenganford* 'Crayford', *III* 'four thousand', *wer* 'man' (cf. werewolf), *ða* 'the(n)', *forletan* 'leave' (cf. G *verlassen*), *mid* 'with' (cf. G *mit*), *ege* 'awe'; *genamon* 'took' (cf. G *nahmen*), *riman* 'count', *here* 'army' (cf. G *Heer*), *reaf* 'spoils' (cf. G *Raub*), *swa* 'as' **

The above excerpts from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle depict the events of Britain's conquest (lasting about 150 years) by the Germanic tribes which arrived from North Jutland (**Jutes**, with Hengest and Horsa as their leaders), South Jutland (**Angles**), the Elbe-Rhine area (**Saxons**), and, possibly, from the Frisian Isles (**Frisians**).

Other important facts:

c. 600-800 The **Heptarchy** (7 kingdoms with one ruler, the 'bretwalda'): **Kent** (the principal town: Canterbury), **Sussex** (Chichester), **Wessex** (Winchester), **Essex** (London), **East Anglia** (Cambridge), **Mercia** (Oxford, Chester), and **Northumbria** (York).

597 Baptism of England: St. Augustine's arrival (from Rome) in Kent, followed by the organization of the archbishopric in Canterbury.

c. 700 England converted to Christianity.

735 York becomes second archbishopric.

Approximately at that time England became divided into shires, with sheriffs acting as the king's chief agents (OE *scirgerefa* 'shire reeve'), and the courts of law implemented the system of trial by ordeal as well as the institution of twelve witnesses.

Other political events:

787 First Danish raids on Northumbria (793 Lindisfarne, 794 Jarrow plundered); cf. the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

[Her nom Beorhtric cyning Offan dohtor Eadburge. Ond on his dagum cuomon ærest iii scipu... ðæt wæron ða ærestan scipu Deniscra monna ðe Angelcynnes land gesohton.]

** *niman* 'take' (cf. G *nehmen*), *secan* 'seek', *cynn* 'kin' **

829 West Saxon ruler Egbert becomes the first king over all England.

871-899 **Alfred the Great's** rule.

878 The treaty of Wedmore after the battle of Edington against the Danish leader Guthrum setting up the **Danelaw** (Danish area), approximately across the Watling Street.

899 King Alfred's Death; cf. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

[Her gefor Aelfred Aðulfing syx nihtum ær ealra haligra mæssan. Se wæs cyning ofer eall Ongelcyn butan ðæm dæle ðe under Dena onwalde wæs, ond he heold ðæt rice oðrum healfum læs ðe xxx wintra. Ond ða feng Eadweard his sunu to rice.]

** *gefaran* 'fare' (= 'die'), *æ*r 'ere', *halig* 'holy', *mæsse* 'mass', *onwald* 'rule', *oðer healf* 'one and a half', *xxx* = *ðritig* 'thirty' **

954 The reconquest of the Danelaw, followed by the period of very close contacts between the Englishmen and the Danes.

980 Danish raids renewed.

991 The Danes defeat the English at Maldon (Essex).

994-1013 Sveinn the Forkbeard's (Cnut's father) raids.

1016-35 Cnut becomes king of Norway, Denmark, and England.

1042-66 Reign of Edward the Confessor, who promised the throne of England to Duke William II of Normandy.

1.2. Old English alphabet

The earliest scribes, especially in Northumbria, used **Futhorc** (24 letters; 31 in Northumbria), i.e. Runic alphabet probably based on Latin, with certain additional symbols, such as <ð>, etc. Following Christianization (597), the Latin alphabet replaced the **Runes**, with only a few non-Latin characters remaining in use (<æ, ð>, etc.) Consequently, at the close of Old English the following set of letters was employed (pronunciation variants are enclosed in parentheses):

a, æ, b, c [tʃ k], d, e, f [f v], ȝ ('yogh') [g ʒ (+/- voiced velar fricative) j dʒ], h [ç ʒ h], i, l, m, n, o, p, r, s [s z], t, Þ ('thorn')/ð [θ ð], u, w ('wynn'), y [y]; cg [dʒ], sc [ʃ sk].

Note also that the vowels and the diphthongs <ie, eo, ea [æa]> could be short and long, i.e. vowel length was phonemic in Old English. Similarly, double consonants were fully articulated in medial position, cf. <-bb-, -nn-> etc., pronounced [b: n:] respectively, as in *habban* 'have' and *sunne* 'sun'.

1.3. Old English dialects and the earliest literature

With respect to regional differences, Old English is traditionally divided into the following dialects: **Northumbrian**, **Mercian**, **West-Saxon**, and **Kentish**, this division reflecting speech differences between the nationalities which colonized the British Isles.

The earliest documents in Northumbrian include Runic inscriptions on the **Franks Casket** (c. 650), of whalebone, discovered in France by the archaeologist Franks. The text consists of the fragments of the Bible as well as Germanic and Roman Tales. The inscription on the left side of the Casket says:

[Romulus and Reumwalus, twoegen gibroðær. Afoeddæ hiæ wylif Romæcæstri, oðlæ unneg.]

** *afoedan* 'feed', *hiæ* 'them', *wylif* 'she-wolf', *oðel* 'native land', *unneg* 'far' (= 'not nigh') **

Another Runic inscription is carved on the **Ruthwell Cross**, made of stone (c. 750), located in a church in Dumfries, Scotland. The poetical text corresponds to the West-Saxon version of the 'Dream of the Rood'; cf.:

[...ic wæs mið blodæ bistemid.]

** *mið* 'with' (cf. G mit), *bestieman* 'bedew' **

The dative ending *-æ* in this fragment is normally matched by the ending *-e* in West-Saxon.

The earliest non-Runic texts are **Mercian Glossaries**, i.e. collections of glosses:

Épinal (the MS in Épinal, France), c. 695 [117 anser = gos, 399 fiber = bebr, 608 lepus = hara, 726 perfidia = treulesnis, 817 papilio = buturfliogae, 910 sardinas = heringas].

Corpus (MS in the Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) c. 700 [102 affricus = westsuðwind, 106 agitatio = unstillnis, 173 anus = ald uuif].

Erfurt (transcript by a German scribe) c. 800.

Mercian **interlinear glosses** (9-10c.) are Old English renderings of Latin sentences in:

The **Vespasian Psalter** (c. 800) [Usque quo exaltabitur inimicus meus super me? = Hu longe bið upahefen se feond min ofer mec?]

** *upahebban* 'lift', *feond* 'enemy' (E fiend; cf. G Feind) **

The **Rushworth Gospel** of St. Matthew (Ru¹; c. 975) [nolite iudicare, ut non iudicemini = ne doemed ge ðyles ge sien doemed].

** *doeman* 'doom' ('judge'), *ðyles* 'lest' **

The earliest non-Runic **Northumbrian** texts include the first poetical compositions written around 750, **Bede's Death Song** and **Caedmon's Hymn**:

[He aerist scop aelda barnum
heben til hrofe, halig scepem.]

** *scieppan* 'shape', *aelde* 'people', *barn* 'child', *scepen* 'shaper' ('creator') **

From a later period come the glosses in **The Durham Ritual**, **Lin-disfarne Gospels**, and **Rushworth Gospels** of St. Mark, Luke, and John (Ru²; c. 975).

Kentish writings include collections of not only religious texts, such as psalms and hymns (c. 750), but also documents, e.g. wills, and charters. Cf. the sample below, of c. 831:

[And suelc mon se ðet lond hebbe eghwylce sunnandege λ gesuflra hlafa to ðare cirican for Ealdredes saule and for Ealhburge agiefe.]

** *eghwylce* 'each', λ = *tien* 'ten', *gesufl hlaf* 'loaf of fine flour', *saul* 'soul' **

West-Saxon was the dialect of the majority of prose compositions of the period, such as:

(1) The **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**, initiated by King Alfred, a document depicting events from the birth of Christ until 1170. Of the surviving seven manuscripts the most important are the **Peterborough Chronicle** (up to 1154; copied at Peterborough) and, first of all, the **Parker Chronicle** (events up to 1170; owned in the 16th century by Archbishop Matthew Parker), whose fragments are quoted below:

409 [Her Gotan abraecon Rome burg, ond næfre siðan Romane ne ricsodon on Bretone.]

838 [Her Herebryht aldormon wæs ofslægen from hæðnum monnum, ond monige mid him on Merscwarum, ond ðy ilcan geare eft on Lindesse, ond on East Englum, ond on Cantwarum wurdon monige men ofslægene from ðam herige.]

** *siðan* 'since', *ricsian* 'rule', *eft* 'again', *here* 'army' **

(2) King Alfred's translations of:

(a) **Cura Pastoralis** (The Pastoral Care; c. 893), by Pope Gregory (540-604). It contained Alfred's original preface which was followed by an account of the political and cultural events of the period. A greeting opens the preface:

[Ælfred cyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep his wordum luflice ond freondlice...]

** *hatan* 'command' **

(b) **Historia Mundi adversus Paganos**, by **Orosius** (c. 380-420), a history of the world, including Wulfstan's report of his travel to the Baltic Sea (Estmere):