

7.1.3 The Germanic family

The peoples who were to become the speakers of Old English migrated from continental Europe. Both the texts and the archaeological evidence point us at what is now northern Germany and southern Denmark as their point of origin. As such it's probably not surprising that *Beowulf*, the most famous Old English literary text, is explicitly about the Danes.

We know a few things about the Germanic-speaking peoples of this area and others, but much is lost to the mists of time. Like the pre-Christianization Old English speakers, and like many societies of the world until very recently, the Continental Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe pre-600 didn't do much writing. The main contemporary text dealing with these peoples is by Tacitus, a Roman administrator and politician, and was written around 98 CE. It describes a range of "tribes", the *Germani*, who lived in a large area of central and northern Europe, between the northern borders of the Roman Empire and the North Sea and Baltic coasts. We must treat Tacitus's text with caution, as we know that he himself had never travelled to this area, and all of his information is second- or third-hand. When Tacitus praises the monogamy of the *Germani*, for instance, he's as likely to be making a political point (by contrasting them with what he saw as the immoral practices of his Roman compatriots) as he is to be faithfully reporting the real situation. It's also debatable whether all the groups Tacitus described as *Germani* were really speakers of Germanic languages.

As usual, the archaeological evidence is more tangible, even if it remains silent on many of the most intriguing social details. The peoples living in these areas were skilled wood- and metalworkers, and the organization of their settlements was more complex and sophisticated than the written records imply (Todd 2005), including fortified settlements. Excavations of the settlement at Feddersen Wierde, on the coast of north-western Germany, for instance, show that at its peak as many as fifty families – each with a separate longhouse – may have called it their home. Animal husbandry, especially of cattle, played a central economic role. When they fought, these peoples mostly fought on foot, as infantry. Tacitus and other sources mention a wide range of tribal names – Alamanni, Franks, Goths, Vandals, and more – but recent research has shown that it is a mistake to view them as fixed political, geographic or ethnic groupings with firm pedigrees. Rather, as far as we can tell, these groupings emerged opportunistically and organically, under individual leaders and in response to the circumstances of the times (see e.g. Drinkwater 2007 on the Alamanni). Some of the names mentioned by Tacitus, like *Germani* itself, were never used by the peoples themselves as far as we know, but rather were imposed on them by the Roman world.

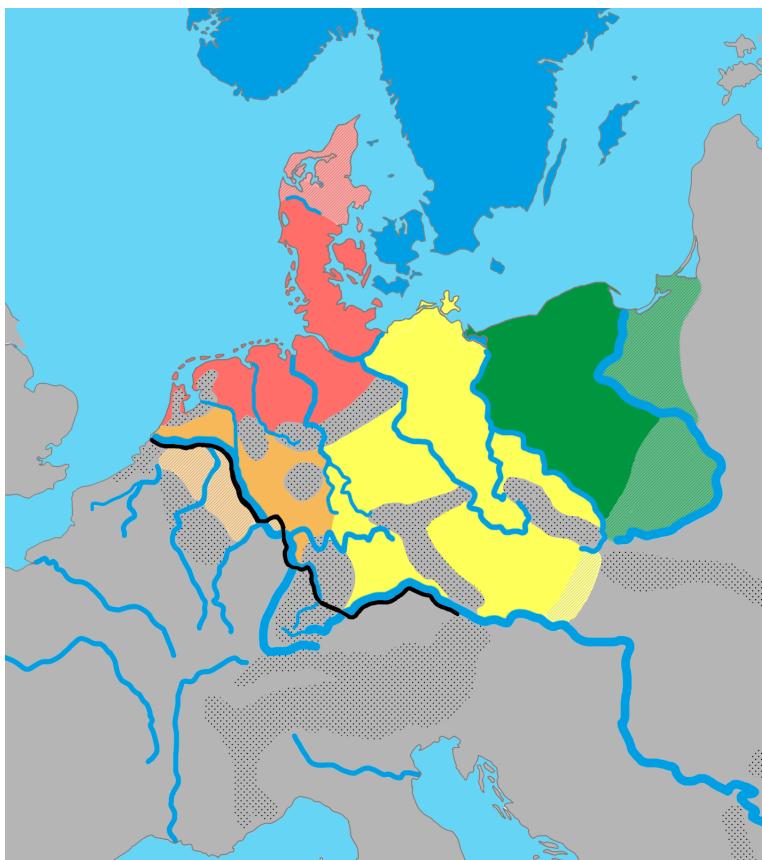


Figure 7.3: Germanic peoples around 1 CE, following Tacitus. The black line is the contemporary Roman border. Different colours represent approximate locations of different groups of Germanic speakers. (Map by AKAKIOS, licensed under CC-BY-SA 2.5)

We can divide the Germanic languages – both present and past – into three groups: East Germanic, North Germanic, and West Germanic. The East Germanic languages are now extinct, and the only language of this group that we know much about is Gothic, which is preserved mainly in a 4th-century translation of parts of the Bible. This translation consists mostly of books of the New Testament, and was supervised by a Gothic bishop with the adorable name of Wulfila ('little wolf'): see the text samples at the end of this chapter. The Goths were major players in the politics of Europe in the first millennium, especially during the twilight of the Roman Empire (see Heather 1996). Because of the age of its attestation, Gothic is the closest of the well-attested early Germanic languages to

Proto-Germanic. Still, Gothic displays several linguistic features that set it apart from all other Germanic languages, and the other two branches – North and West Germanic – are probably more closely related (Kuhn 1955).

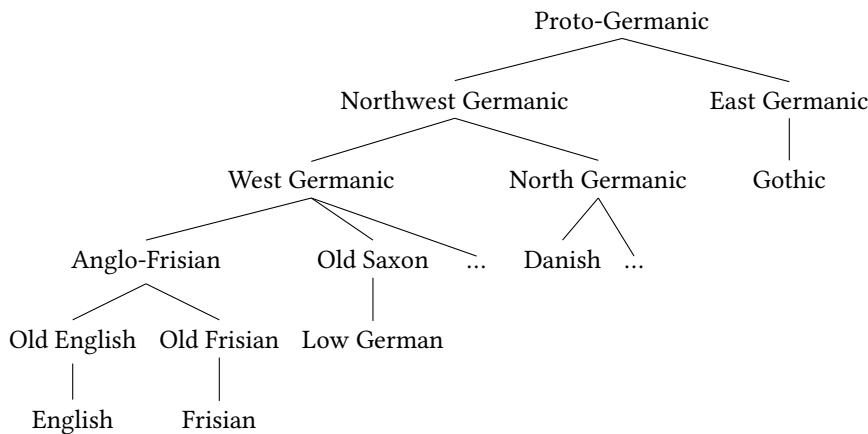


Figure 7.4: Partial Germanic family tree

The North Germanic languages survive robustly to this day, mostly in Scandinavia: varieties of Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish all belong to this group, as did the Norse spoken by the Scandinavians who settled in Britain during the 9th to 11th centuries (see §6.1.1). The West Germanic branch includes Afrikaans, Dutch, Frisian, German, Yiddish, and English. The internal structure of the West Germanic branch is still debated (see Stiles 2013 for a recent overview), though is not too important for our purposes. Within West Germanic, English's closest relative is Frisian, a collection of related varieties currently spoken along the North Sea coast of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, and endangered to some extent.



English as a cuckoo in the nest

The majority view is that English is a West Germanic language, but not everyone shares this view. Recently it has been proposed that modern English is a North Germanic language: see Bech & Walkden (2016) for a sceptical evaluation. Another view is that, due to its extensive history of

language contact, English is now a language without any relatives whatsoever, a creole – which arose through contact with either Norman French (Bailey & Maroldt 1977) or Norse (Poussa 1982). Görlach (1986) presents arguments against both claims. No one disputes that Old English was a West Germanic language, however.

There are no texts longer than a few sentences from either North or West Germanic from pre-600: all we have are brief inscriptions (see §7.2). The closest language to Old English that is attested in the first millennium CE is Old Saxon, a West Germanic language probably spoken between the rivers Elbe and Weser. We have Old Saxon texts from the 9th century onwards, and there's a text sample at the end of this chapter. Modern-day dialects of northern Germany are the living descendants of Old Saxon. Robinson (1992) provides more information on the other early Germanic languages, Old English's closest relatives.

7.1.4 Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans

The Germanic languages descend from Proto-Germanic, which in turn is part of a larger family, Indo-European. The establishment of this family was one of the major achievements of nineteenth-century comparative linguistics (see Clackson 2007 for an accessible overview), and a family tree can be found in Figure 7.5.

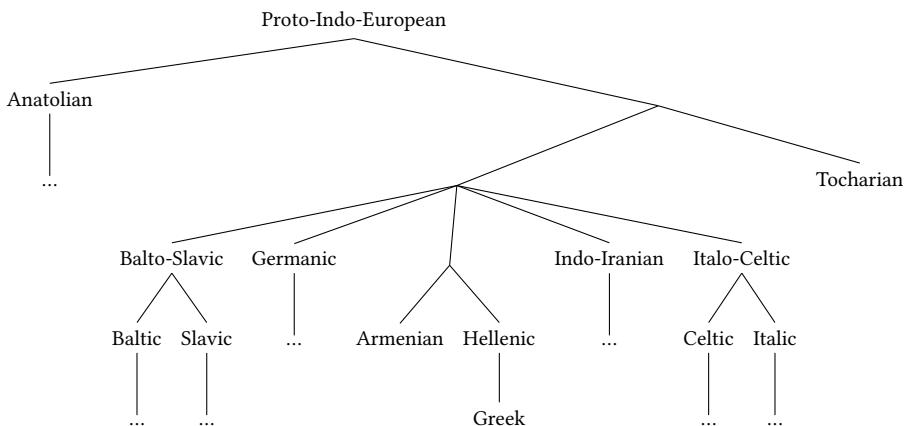


Figure 7.5: Partial Indo-European family tree (loosely based on Ringen et al. 2002: 90, their Figure 8)

Almost all the languages of Europe are demonstrably part of this family. (Basque, Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian are notable exceptions.) This includes all the

languages that had a major influence on English before the colonial period: Latin (part of the Italic branch), French (ultimately descended from Latin), the Celtic languages (which form their own branch), Greek, and of course Norse, as we saw in Chapters 4–6. The family also has several members which are further afield, and perhaps more surprising: Armenian, for instance, and the Indo-Iranian languages spoken in central and southern Asia, including the ancient language Sanskrit.

All Indo-European languages ultimately descend from a single ancestor, Proto-Indo-European. The speakers of Proto-Indo-European are even more of a mystery than the speakers of Proto-Germanic. No texts go back that far, so we are entirely dependent on reconstruction and on the archaeological record to tell us about the people who spoke the language (though evidence from ancient genetic material is starting to play a role as well – see Haak et al. 2015). The usual story (starting with Gimbutas 1970) is that Proto-Indo-European was spoken between 4,000 and roughly 2,000 BCE, and originated in the Pontic-Caspian steppes, in present-day Ukraine and southern Russia: this is labelled the “Kurgan hypothesis” or “steppe hypothesis”. Synthesizing the linguistic and archaeological evidence, Anthony (2007) makes the case that the domestication of the horse and the invention of the wheel, along with new modes of social and political organization, contributed to the spread of the Indo-Europeans and their language across Europe and beyond.³ As these newcomers and their culture fanned out across Europe, the language diversified into varieties that were mutually unintelligible, through exactly the processes of linguistic change that we’ve been exploring throughout this book (see e.g. Chapter 2 on homogeneity and heterogeneity).



Before Proto-Indo-European?

Proto-Indo-European cannot have been spoken before the 7th millennium BCE at the very earliest. However, research on the evolution of the human capacity for language (see Fitch 2010) has demonstrated that this capacity has been around in its modern form since the 50th millennium BCE at the very latest. This book therefore only covers at most 10% of the history of English and its predecessors, and if we disregard the present chapter it’s

³For a recent overview that also takes ancient DNA evidence into account, see Anthony (2019).

more like 1–2%. Can we go any further back? The short answer is “not really”. Some linguists have proposed more distant relationships between Indo-European and other language families such as Afro-Asiatic (including Arabic and Hebrew), Uralic (including Finnish and Hungarian), and Kartvelian (including languages of the Caucasus such as Georgian). However, the consensus in linguistics is that the time depth is too great, and the evidence too weak, to be anything other than suggestive: the usual tools such as the Comparative Method yield inconclusive results (Campbell & Poser 2008). Thus, with Proto-Indo-European we reach the earliest portion of the history of English that is accessible by normal means, and the clouded realm of linguistic prehistory looms before us.

7.2 Sounds

7.2.1 Old English and Frisian vowels

One major feature setting Old English (and also Old Frisian) apart from the other Germanic languages was a series of changes to their vowels, which have the picturesque name of “Anglo-Frisian Brightening”. West Germanic long [a:] became [æ:], and a little later short [a] became [æ] as well. This gives us words like Old English *dæg* ‘day’, *mæg* ‘may’ and *stræt* ‘street’, compared to (for instance) Old Saxon *dag* ‘day’, *mag* ‘may’ and *strāt-* ‘street’, which did not undergo the change.

Nasalized [ã], and [ɑ] followed by /n/ or /m/, were unaffected by Anglo-Frisian Brightening, however. These sounds later raised to [õ] and [o] in both Old English and Old Frisian, giving us words like Old English and Old Frisian *mon* ‘man’ whereas the Old Saxon cognate *man* remained unchanged. The same happened to the long vowels [ã:] and [ɑ:], yielding for instance Old English *mōn-* ‘moon’ rather than Old Saxon *mān-* ‘moon’. It is actually not uncommon for nasal consonants, such as /n/ and /m/, to raise the preceding vowel at various points in time in the history of the English language. Thus, we can observe e.g. the so-called *pin-pen* merger in some dialects of American English, but there are more raising processes taking place before nasals in Present Day English.

Old Frisian later raised [æ] to [ɛ] and [æ:] to [ɛ:], giving us (for instance) *dei* ‘day’ and *strēt-* ‘street’. Thus, the presence of the letter <æ> is a sure-fire way to tell that you’re dealing with an Old English text! However, there is variation between and within dialects with regard to the sound changes discussed in this

section (Ringe & Taylor 2014: 167–170). This variation probably reflects the fact that these sound changes were still in progress at the time of the arrival of Germanic speakers in Britain (Toon 1992), as this sort of variability is exactly what we see in present-day changes in progress (see Chapter 2).

7.2.2 Runes and runic inscriptions

Before 600 CE, we don't find Germanic languages written in the Latin alphabet. Rather, the few surviving Germanic writings from this period (with the exception of some texts in Gothic) use a different writing system: the runic alphabet. We have runic inscriptions from all across the Germanic world, from the 2nd century CE onwards. You'll notice that, unlike the Latin alphabet, the runic characters consist entirely of straight lines. This is because they were designed to be carved into hard surfaces, not scribed with ink: in fact, the English verb *to write* is descended directly from a Proto-Germanic verb meaning 'to carve'.



Futhorc or Futhorc?

The original twenty-four-character runic alphabet is known as the FUTHARK, after its first six characters – much like the QWERTY keyboard, the usual layout for keyboards in the Latin alphabet. It is sometimes known as the Older Futhark to distinguish it from its descendant the Younger Futhark, which developed in Scandinavia from the 7th century onwards. In Britain, at around the same time, the FUTHORC, a slightly expanded set of runes, came into use. The futhorc better reflected the new vowel system of Old English (see §7.2.1 above): the rune <þ> came to represent [æ], and the new runes <ȝ> for [ɑ], <ȝ> for [ã] (later [ð]), and <ȝ> for [œ] are found for the first time.

The runic alphabet in fact tells us a few interesting things about the phonological system of the early Germanic languages. For instance, the rune <þ>, called THORN, represents the PHONEME /θ/. The Latin alphabet had no convenient way to represent this sound – unsurprisingly, as the Latin language itself didn't have the sound. The thorn rune was so useful that scribes of Old English kept using it even when they were otherwise writing in the Latin alphabet, and that's where the Old English letter <þ> comes from. Thorn was lost in Middle English,

Table 7.1: The runic alphabet (Older Futhark), from Findell (2014: 18)

Rune	Transliteration	Sound value
ᚠ	f	[f]
ᚢ	u	[u]
ᚦ	þ	[θ]
ᚠ	a	[a]
ᚱ	r	[r]
ᚲ	k	[k]
ᚴ	g	[g]
ᚷ	w	[w]
ᚷ	h	[h]
ᚾ	n	[n]
ᛁ	i	[i]
ᛄ	j	[j]
᷃	p	[p]
᷄	í	[i] (?)
᷅	z	[z]
᷆	s	[s]
᷈	t	[t]
᷉	b	[b]
᷊	e	[e]
᷋	m	[m]
᷌	l	[l]
᷎	ŋ	[ŋ], [ŋg], [iŋg]
᷍	d	[d]
᷎	o	[o]

and nowadays we write this sound as *<th>*, but that's a poor substitute (try pronouncing [t] and [h] together and you'll see that it's nothing like [θ]).

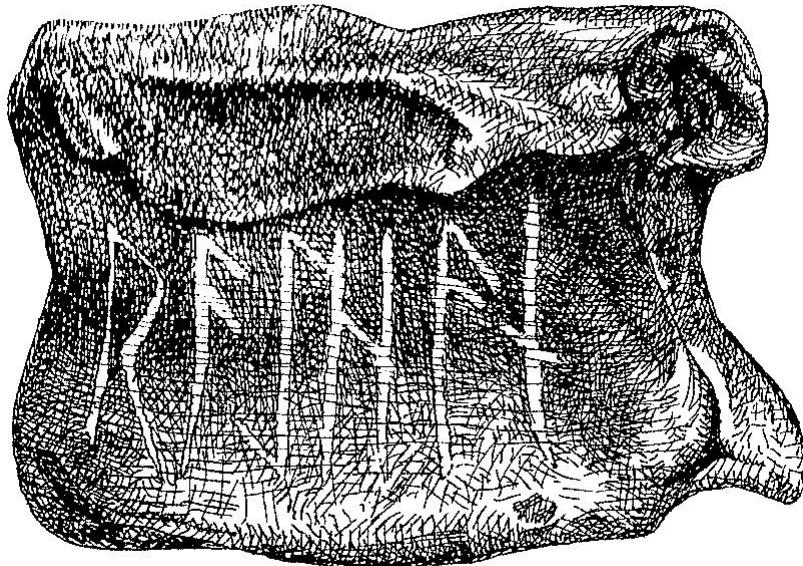


Figure 7.6: The anklebone of a roe deer, found in Caistor-by-Norwich and dated to the 5th century. This is the earliest runic inscription yet found in England. The word written here means 'roe'. Try transliterating it yourself!



Bluetooth

The logo of the wireless technology standard Bluetooth (Figure 7.7) is a rune! In fact, it's two runes used together: *<*>* and *<Þ>*, which in the Younger Futhark stand for /h/ and /b/ respectively. These are the initials of Harald Bluetooth, the tenth-century Danish king who the technology is named after. When two runes are written together like this, the result is called a **BIND RUNE**.



Figure 7.7: The Bluetooth logo

7.2.3 The First Sound Shift

We've just seen that the early Germanic languages had the PHONEME /θ/, but that Latin – another Indo-European language – didn't. What happened here? Does Latin better reflect the inherited Proto-Indo-European situation, or does Germanic?

Using the Comparative Method it's possible to establish that it's Germanic that's the innovator. In fact, the change that Proto-Germanic underwent, some time after 500 BCE, is probably the single most important feature setting the Germanic languages apart from all the other Indo-European languages. This makes it important evidence that the Germanic languages belong together as a group. The change is known as the First Sound Shift, or as Grimm's Law, because it is associated with the 19th-century linguist and mythologist Jacob Grimm (part of the famous German "Brothers Grimm" duo, along with his brother Wilhelm). In fact, the much less famous Danish linguist Rasmus Rask had got there first, in the year 1818. In any case, the First Sound Shift is the second of the two famous sound changes mentioned in Chapter 2 (the other being the Great Vowel Shift discussed in §4.2.1).

What Rask and Grimm noticed was that there were systematic correspondences between certain consonants in the Germanic languages and their counterparts in the other Indo-European languages. For example, where we find a /p/ in other Indo-European languages, we often find a /f/ in Germanic languages, as shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Indo-European /p/ & Germanic /f/ (based on Ringe 2017: 114)

Meaning	Latin	Greek	Sanskrit	Gothic	Old English	Old Saxon
'foot'	ped-	pod-	pád-	fōt-	fōt	fōt
'fish'	pisc-			fish-	fisc	fisk
'five'		pénte	páñca	fimf	fif	fif

The full set of changes that make up the First Sound Shift is given in Table 7.3. Similar corresponding sets of examples can be found for each of these changes. For instance, Sanskrit *bhrātr* 'brother', which starts with a voiced aspirated /bʰ/ and contains a voiceless /t/, corresponds to Gothic *brōþar* and Old English *brōþor*, which start with a voiced unaspirated /b/ and contain a voiceless fricative /θ/. The First Sound Shift is a regular sound change with far-reaching consequences, and is one of the most striking and characteristic features of the Germanic lan-

Table 7.3: The First Sound Shift (after Campbell 2013: 42)

	Labial	Coronal	Velar
voiceless stops > fricatives	p > f	t > θ	k > x
voiced stops > voiceless stops	b > p	d > t	g > k
voiced aspirated stops > plain voiced stops	b ^h > b	d ^h > d	g ^h > g

guages.⁴ You may like to think about whether the First Sound Shift is also a chain shift, in the sense that was discussed in §2.2.2 for the Northern Cities Shift and in §4.2.1 for the Great Vowel Shift.



Making linguistic history: Rask, Grimm, and Verner

The version of the First Sound Shift given in Table 7.3 is almost exceptionless, but not quite: for instance, Sanskrit *pitṛ* ‘father’ contains a /t/ that seems to correspond to a /d/ in Gothic *fadar* and Old English *fæder*, rather than the expected /θ/. Rask and Grimm were working in an era before the regularity of sound change was postulated, and were aware of some exceptions to their generalization. It wasn’t until 1875 that another Danish linguist, Karl Verner, was able to show that these exceptions were themselves governed by a robust rule. In fact, Verner’s discovery played an important role in the establishment of the regularity of sound change as a guiding principle in historical linguistics during the 19th century. See Campbell (2013: 140–142) for the details of “Verner’s Law”, and Lass (1997: 132–135) for a critical assessment of Verner and regular sound change. (Search for Verner’s Law and the Studies in Germanic Philology on YouTube if you’d like to watch a highly amusing film on these linguistic discoveries.)

⁴For more detail on the First Sound Shift, see Ringe (2017: §3.2.4) and Fulk (2018: §6.4–§6.7).

7.2.4 The Germanic stress shift

Another change that divides the Germanic languages from many of their more distant Indo-European family members has to do with the positioning of lexical stress within a word. We can reconstruct earlier Indo-European, before Germanic branched off, as having a stress system that was lexically variable (similarly to Present Day English: compare *photo*, *photography*, and *photographic*, with the stress on the first, second, and third syllables respectively). This system was present in Vedic Sanskrit, for instance. Different words have their primary stress on different syllables: for example, *bhráty* ‘brother’ is stressed on the first syllable, while *pitr* ‘father’ is stressed on the second (a syllabic /r/). In Proto-Germanic, by contrast, the stress became fixed on the first lexical MORPHEME of the word, which usually corresponded to the first syllable of the word. Thus, in the early Germanic languages, all words have initial stress, with the exception of some unstressed verbal prefixes such as Old English *ge-*.⁵

Fixing the stress on the first syllable of the word had various consequences. For one thing, a tradition of ALLITERATIVE POETRY developed in Germanic, and some of these poems are preserved in many of the early Germanic languages – including Old English, Old Saxon, Old High German and Old Norse. The most famous example of Old English alliterative verse is *Beowulf*, but there is much more.

Alliterative verse differs from rhyming verse in that what’s important is not the end of the syllable (as in rhyming verse, e.g. *pill* vs. *fill*) but rather the first consonant of the first syllable of the word. This sort of verse survives into Middle English, and the first line of William Langland’s poem *Piers Plowman* is an accessible example: *In a somer seson, whan soft was the sonne* ‘In summer, when the sun was soft’. Here the alliteration is on the phoneme /s/. Clearly, word-initial stress and alliterative verse are a match made in heaven, and linguistically it’s no surprise that in Present Day English, with its more complex stress system, alliterative verse is not the dominant tradition any more. If you want to learn more about Old English alliterative poetry, McCully & Hilles (2005: unit 5) is a great introduction.

The fixation of stress on the initial syllable also may have had consequences for the morphology of the Germanic languages. Proto-Germanic had a variety of vowels in unstressed syllables, similar to (early) Old English (Chapter 6), and these can still be seen in the Gothic Bible and the earliest runic inscriptions,

⁵Similar stress-fixation changes affected other branches of the Indo-European language families at different stages of their historical paths.

as well as to some extent in Old English and Old Saxon texts. A common tendency across all the Germanic languages was to lose these vowels entirely, or for them to lose their distinctiveness and merge together as schwa /ə/. These unstressed syllables, however, often carried important morphological distinctions, especially when word-final: different cases, for instance, or different person and number forms of the verb. The only difference between the Old English past tense plural forms of the verb 'to help', *hulpon* (indicative MOOD) and *hulpen* (subjunctive mood), for example, is the vowel in the unstressed syllable: /o/ in the indicative and /e/ in the subjunctive. When the distinctive vowel quality was lost, the morphological distinction it conveyed was often also lost. Thus, a change that dates back to the birth of the Germanic family was still making itself felt many centuries later. Note, though, that the fixation of stress can't by itself explain why some Germanic languages (like English and Afrikaans) ended up losing almost all their morphological endings while others (like Icelandic and German) were much more conservative.⁶ For that, a different story is needed: see §6.3.4.

Yet another consequence of fixing the stress was related to the fate of ablaut. More on this in §7.3.2.

7.3 Morphology

7.3.1 The Germanic weak past tense

Alongside the First Sound Shift and Germanic stress shift, a third major change characterizing the Germanic languages but not other Indo-European relatives was the development of a new type of past tense for weak verbs.

In all of these present-day Germanic languages, and in all the early Germanic languages as well, the regular past tense is formed using a suffix containing some sort of coronal consonant – usually /d/.⁷ But this type of past tense formation is not found elsewhere in the Indo-European family.⁸ How did it arise?

As usual with changes that predate the textual record, there are different theories, and we have to decide which is the most plausible. Here we'll briefly illustrate the dominant contender (as summarized in Ringe 2017: 191–192), which is

⁶There are also other languages where the stress is fixed on the first syllable, such as Finnish, which show no signs of vowel reductions in unstressed syllables, again suggesting that the fixation of stress isn't the whole story.

⁷See §5.3.2 if you need a reminder of what weak, strong, regular, and irregular mean.

⁸This is a bit of a simplification. Some Iranian languages – also belonging to Indo-European – have undergone a very similar development independently. See Kümmel (2020).

Table 7.4: Forms of the past tense of ‘play’ in present-day Germanic languages

Language	Infinitive	Past (3rd Singular)
English	play	played
Danish	lege	legede
Dutch	spelen	speelde
Faroese	spæla	spældi
German	spielen	spielte
Norwegian	leke	lekte

that the Germanic weak past in /d/ arose when a sequence consisting of a non-finite verb form and a past tense form of the verb **dōnq* ‘to do’ was reinterpreted as a single word. Basically, two originally independent words got stuck together. Thus, in essence, a form like *played* originated as something like *play did*. This sort of happening is well known in the literature on GRAMMATICALIZATION (Hopper & Traugott 2003), where it’s usually known as UNIVERBATION. See also the discussion of the Modern English semi-modals in §3.4.2.

This theory receives direct support from a set of plural forms in Gothic. In this language, the past tense of weak verbs in the plural ends in *-dēdun*, e.g. *nasidēdun* ‘they saved/healed’, *sōkidēdun* ‘they sought, looked for’. This reflects exactly the reconstructed Proto-Germanic past tense of the verb **dōnq*, which is **dēdun* in the third person plural.⁹ These forms are the only place in Germanic where the assumed historical development is reflected so precisely, and indicate that the verb **dōnq* has to be at least part of the story.

We can’t be sure that this is what happened in the prehistory of Germanic. But it does fit with what we know about common pathways of grammatical change, without needing to wave a magic wand and propose a historical development that has no parallel elsewhere. See Ringe (2017: 191–192) for a much more detailed version of the story. This sort of evidence might not stand up in a court of law, but it’s good linguistic detective work nonetheless.

⁹Note that the /d/ at the end of the form **dēdun* is part of the stem, not part of the ending. If it were part of the ending, the theory would be circular, as it would require there to have already been a weak past in /d/ in Proto-Germanic, and so its origin would remain unexplained.

7.3.2 The Germanic strong verbs

Alongside the weak verbs, the strong verbs constituted the other big group of verbs in early Germanic. As we've seen in §6.3,¹⁰ the endings on strong verbs in Old English were very similar to those of weak verbs, but they differed in how they formed their past tense: where the weak verbs added an ending containing a /d/, the strong verbs changed the vowel in the stem.

For Present Day English, and to a certain extent for Middle and Old English, the dominant approach to the vowel alternations in the strong verbs is simply to treat them as irregular and lexically listed. In other words, for each strong verb, the language user simply has to memorize the relevant past tense forms in their entirety (Pinker 1999). However, things weren't always like this. The further we go back in time, the more we find that the strong verbs follow a neat, orderly system that actually makes sense.

Table 7.5 gives some illustrative forms for the first three classes of strong verbs in Old English (there are seven in total; we'll leave aside classes IV–VII). The column "1st past" gives the vowel used in the first and third persons singular of the past tense; "2nd past" gives the vowel used elsewhere in the past tense.

Table 7.5: Strong verb classes in Old English

Class	Sample verb	1st past	2nd past
I	<i>drīfan</i> 'to drive'	<i>drāf</i>	<i>drifon</i>
II	<i>crēopan</i> 'to creep'	<i>crēap</i>	<i>crupon</i>
III	<i>helpan</i> 'to help'	<i>healp</i>	<i>hulpon</i>

Reducing this to its essentials gives us the vowel system in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6: Vowels in strong verbs in Old English

Class	Present	1st past	2nd past
I	<i>ī</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>i</i>
II	<i>ēo</i>	<i>ēa</i>	<i>u</i>
III	<i>e</i>	<i>ea</i>	<i>u</i>

Things are even more transparent if we consider the Proto-Germanic ancestors of these vowels: see Table 7.7.

¹⁰ And also in Chapter 5 for Middle English: §5.3.2.

Table 7.7: Stems in strong verbs in Proto-Germanic

Class	Present	1st past	2nd past
I	<i>ei</i> > <i>i</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>i</i>
II	<i>eu</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>u</i>
III	<i>e</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>u</i>

And we can go back even further in time and reconstruct how the precursors of this system must have worked in Proto-Indo-European: see Table 7.8. In this table, Ø stands for no vowel at all, S stands for a sonorant consonant (/r/, /l/, or a nasal), and C stands for any consonant.

Table 7.8: Stems of Germanic strong verbs in Proto-Indo-European

Class	Present	1st perfect	2nd perfect
I	<i>ei</i>	<i>oi</i>	<i>Øi</i>
II	<i>eu</i>	<i>ou</i>	<i>Øu</i>
III	<i>eSC</i>	<i>oSC</i>	<i>ØSC</i>

Here we see that the vowels used in the different tense forms (these are traditionally termed **ABLAUT GRADES**) are exactly the same across classes: the “*e*-grade” in the present, the “*o*-grade” in the 1st past, and the “zero grade” in the 2nd past. What differs is the structure of the verb stem only. What then happened in the transition from Proto-Indo-European to Old English via Proto-Germanic is that a series of regular sound changes destroyed the neatness of this morphological system by creating more differences between classes. The diphthong /ei/, for example, becomes long /i:/, as reflected in the present tense form of Class I.

It is likely that sound changes like these made the new forms extremely intransparent to learners, and hence over time caused the strong verbs to stop being productive and instead become completely irregular. Certainly almost all verbs introduced from Old English onwards (for instance, via borrowing) are **INFLECTED** as weak rather than strong.



Sturtevant's paradox

Regular sound change operates “with blind necessity” – meaning without regard for semantics, morphological structure, etc. As a consequence, just as in the case of the Germanic strong verbs, regular sound changes can wreak havoc on an otherwise well-behaved morphological system – paradoxically, disrupting their “regularity”. This is known as Sturtevant’s paradox: sound change is regular, but creates irregularity. Morphological analogy, on the other hand, is irregular (in the sense that it affects only specific words, usually not whole classes of words), but creates regularity.

7.4 Syntax

7.4.1 Expressing the subject

A lot of the phonology, morphology and lexicon of Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European can be confidently reconstructed using the Comparative Method. Things haven’t gone as smoothly with reconstructing the syntax of these languages. Still, progress has been made in syntactic reconstruction, especially in recent years. This section will present just one tiny case study: the expression of subjects.

Present Day English is a language that loves to express its subjects. So much so, in fact, that a sentence without a subject is simply not possible or grammatical in most normal contexts: **speaks English*, or **is here*.¹¹ This even extends to sentences like *It is raining* or *It seems that ...*, in which the *It* doesn’t refer to anything at all. We can thus say that both non-referential and referential subjects must be overtly expressed in English. One way to analyse this is to say that Present Day English has a requirement that the specifier of IP in the tree (recall our tree structure introduced in §1.2.3) must be present and filled by some overt element.

Not all languages are like this, though. In Italian and Chinese, for example, there’s no such requirement to express the subject. An Italian sentence like *Parlo*

¹¹Leaving out subjects in Present Day English is only possible in very restricted contexts, as mentioned briefly in §1.2.3, and more in writing than in speech.

italiano ‘Speak.1SG Italian’, meaning ‘I speak Italian’, with no subject pronoun, is perfectly grammatical, as long as the context allows us to infer who or what the subject is. In earlier stages of English, too, the expression of the subject was optional: Rusten (2019) has carried out a detailed investigation. Middle English, on the whole, was a language in which referential subjects (like *I, he, she* ...) had to be expressed, but non-referential subjects (like the *It* of *It seems that* ...) could be left out. For the most part, Old English is like this too, but in the very earliest Old English texts, and especially the poetry, we also find that referential subjects could be left out, particularly in the third person. Here’s an example from *Beowulf*, in which the understood subject is a wealthy man:

- (1) þonne bið on hreþre under helm drepen biteran stræle
 then is in heart.DAT under helmet.ACC hit bitter.DAT dart.DAT
 ‘Then he is hit in the heart, under his helmet, by the bitter dart’ (*Beowulf*
 lines 1745–1746)

This kind of subject omission is found in all the other early Germanic languages too, especially Gothic. Walkden (2014: Chapter 5) argues that on this basis we can reconstruct subject omission as a property of Proto-Germanic, affecting both referential and non-referential subjects. Looking across at other early Indo-European languages such as Sanskrit, Latin and Greek, all of which can omit subjects very freely, it seems likely that subject omission was also a property of Proto-Indo-European.

7.4.2 Analytic and synthetic languages

You’ve probably noticed a trend: the further back in time we go, the more morphology we see. While Present Day English varieties are very morphologically impoverished, Old English has a relatively rich INFLECTIONAL morphology for both nouns and verbs, and Proto-Germanic – as far as we can tell – must have been even richer.

In §6.3, for instance, we discussed the Old English case system for nouns. There we were able to identify four cases: nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive. In fact, there are also traces of a fifth case in Old English, the instrumental, which is used for the instrument or means by which an action is achieved. Here’s an example:

- (2) hē wāre getogen mid þon īsnan hōce on þāre pičenan
 he was.SBJV pulled with the.INST iron hook into the.DAT pitchlike

ēa
water

'He was dragged with the iron hook into the murky water'
(Blickling Homilies, The Third Sunday in Lent)

The instrumental is already dying out gradually during the Old English period, and we find variation (see Freeman 2018), with the instrumental being replaced by the dative. In Old English, distinctive instrumental endings are only really found on pronouns and occasionally adjectives. (In the example above, the adjective *īsnan* 'iron' and the noun *hōce* 'hook' have ambiguous endings.)



Why?

The word *why* is the only surviving trace of the instrumental in Present Day standard Englishes. It originated as the instrumental form of the pronoun *hwæt*, meaning 'what'.

The instrumental is found in the other early Germanic languages too, and if we look at Gothic, we find traces of a sixth case, the vocative, used for people (or things) being directly addressed. This means that Proto-Germanic is usually reconstructed with all six of these cases. Proto-Indo-European, meanwhile, is usually reconstructed with two additional cases, the ablative and the locative (Clackson 2007: 90–100). The further we go back, it seems, the more cases and the more case morphology we find. The same is true for verbal tenses and moods, and verbal morphology in general.

Languages that rely heavily on inflections to code grammatical information are known as **SYNTHETIC**, and languages that use function words and strict word order to code the same information are known as **ANALYTIC** ([, anə'lɪtɪk]). To take the case study discussed in the previous subsection, the strict use of subject pronouns (a type of function word) in most Present Day Englishes can be said to be an analytic feature, as opposed to the possibility of subject omission in earlier English, more characteristic of synthetic languages. Analytic and synthetic are not strict classes of language, but rather there's a continuum between synthetic and analytic languages: a language can be more or less synthetic.

Sometimes it's said that the history of English involves a transition from synthetic (Old English) to analytic (Present Day English), but that's only partially

true: Old English had a relatively rigid word order, only two morphological tenses, and a lot of syncretism in person and case endings (as we saw in Chapter 6). Also, by some measures, English has actually become *more synthetic* since the Early Modern period: see Szemrecsányi (2012). In general it's a good idea to be wary of any story that says that the history of English involves a straightforward progression from one thing to another thing. When it comes to language history, to quote Algernon in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "The truth is rarely pure and never simple."

7.4.3 Tense, aspect and the verbal system

The Germanic languages inherited a two-way opposition between present (or nonpast) and past tense from Proto-Germanic, and morphologically this is the only tense distinction to be found in any Germanic language. However, several early Germanic languages, including Old English, can be seen to develop new ways of expressing different nuances of temporal, aspectual and modal meaning. Usually these are analytic in the sense of the previous subsection: they are constructed by means of a non-finite form and an auxiliary verb. One of these is a new **PERFECT** construction, which involves a past participle and a form of *have* or *be*. Here's an example from Old English:

- (3) Pā hīe ... þær tō ȝewicod hæfdon. þā ongēt se here ...
when they there to encamped had then realized the host
'When they had made camp for this, then the army realized ...'
(Old English Chronicle, year 896)

Because all the early Germanic languages develop a new perfect construction in the same way, it has been argued that this should be reconstructed for Proto-Germanic too (Brinton 1988). However, Drinka (2017: Chapter 9) argues that it is a later development, and is introduced into the Northwest Germanic languages through contact with Latin, after Proto-Germanic had already diverged into distinct languages.

7.5 Lexicon

7.5.1 Sources of the lexicon

Just as a large proportion of the vocabulary of Old English was inherited from Proto-Germanic, so a large proportion of the vocabulary of Proto-Germanic was

inherited straight from Proto-Indo-European. At one point, it was thought that around a third of Proto-Germanic lexical items had a non-Indo-European origin (Feist 1924: 88), and that massive contact influence was needed to explain the Proto-Germanic lexicon. However, more recent research has cast doubt on this (see Roberge 2010: 407–409). There must certainly have been a population speaking non-Indo-European languages in contact with Germanic during its early development, and we've seen throughout this book that language contact is almost ubiquitous in language history. However, on the whole the Germanic lexicon is not more innovative than that of other branches of Indo-European, and so there's no need for special pleading.

7.5.2 Word formation

Like Old English, Proto-Germanic was fond of COMPOUNDING as a source of new words. This is the origin of the Present Day English days of the week, for instance: see Table 7.9. Tiw, Odin, Thor and Frigg are part of the pre-Christian pantheon of gods attested in Germanic sources (best known from Norse mythology; see Gaiman 2017), and Monday and Sunday are named for the moon and the sun respectively. Saturn is a Roman god, and in fact betrays the origin of the whole system: Tiw, Odin, Thor and Frigg correspond to Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus from the Roman pantheon, and the days of the week in many Germanic languages are simply translations of these.

Table 7.9: The days of the week in Present Day English and in Proto-Germanic

English	Proto-Germanic	Meaning
Monday	*mēniniz dagaz	'Moon's day'
Tuesday	*tīwasa dagaz	'Tiw (god of war)'s day'
Wednesday	*wōdanasa dagaz	'Odin's day'
Thursday	*þunarasa dagaz	'Thor's day'
Friday	*frijjōz dagaz	'Frigg's day'
Saturday	*saturnasa dagaz	'Saturn's day'
Sunday	*sunnōniz dagaz	'Sun's day'

Ablaut (discussed in connection with strong verbs in §7.3.2 above) could also be used for word-formation in Proto-Germanic and early Germanic. This gives rise to whole families of related words. For instance, the Old English strong verb

beran ‘to bear, to carry’ reflects the *e*-grade in Proto-Indo-European. Some DERIVED nouns, like *bearm* ‘lap, bosom’ and *bearwe* ‘barrow, basket’, reflect the Proto-Indo-European *o*-grade. Other derived nouns, such as *bora* ‘bearer, carrier’ and *byrele* ‘cup-bearer’, reflect the zero-grade (see Lass 1994: 191). These different ablaut variants are still found in Present Day English, e.g. *to ride* vs. *a road*, *to sing* vs. *a song*. So Proto-Germanic had a variety of language-internal ways of coining new words.

7.5.3 Borrowing

Speakers of Proto-Germanic were also perfectly happy to borrow words from speakers of other languages, either consciously or subconsciously. At an early stage these speakers were in contact with speakers of Proto-Finnic, the ancestor language of modern Finnish and Estonian (Koivulehto 1980). Old English *healf* ‘half’, for instance, goes back to Proto-Germanic **halbaz*, and may originate in Proto-Finnic *halpa* meaning ‘reduced’ (Hyllested 2014: 103–105). It’s even more certain that there were borrowings the other way round, too: Finnish and Estonian *kuningas* ‘king’ directly reflect the Proto-Finnic form, which must have been borrowed from Proto-Germanic **kuningaz*. What’s neat about this borrowing is that it reflects the nominative singular *-az* ending, which is reconstructed for Proto-Germanic using the Comparative Method but which isn’t directly attested in any Germanic language. The word must have been borrowed into Proto-Finnic straight from Proto-Germanic, before it split up into its daughters and the ending was lost.

In what’s traditionally known as the “migration period” (200–600 CE), the language that played the most important role for the lexicon of pre-Old English was Latin. Many Latin words must have been borrowed in continental Europe, before the speakers of what was to be Old English arrived in Britain. We can spot these very early borrowings because they have undergone the same sound changes as Old English words themselves, and because they are found in the other Northwest Germanic languages. For instance, Old English *sæcc* ‘sackcloth’, from Latin *saccus*, has cognates in Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Old Norse, etc., and the presence of the /æ/ is an unmistakable sign that it’s undergone Anglo-Frisian Brightening (§7.2.1) – which means that it must have already been in the language by the time this sound change happened. By contrast, later Latin loanwords in Old English, such as those associated with Christianization from the 7th century onwards, do not show the effects of these early sound changes.

7.6 Final note

Here you are at the end – or is it the beginning? More than any other period, this prehistoric era shows us just how difficult the work of the practising historian really is, regardless of whether they are investigating language, society, biology, material culture, or something else entirely. When it comes to language, we can reconstruct prehistoric language stages using relatively reliable methods, but even these shed less and less light on the situation the further we go back in time. Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European, the ancestors of English, are within our grasp. Beyond that, we can only speculate.

Suggested exercises



E.1 The dark arts

In this exercise, try to use your knowledge of the sound changes that the West Germanic languages have undergone in order to reconstruct proto-forms for Proto-West-Germanic words. You'll need to take into account the sound changes that we've discussed in this chapter and in §6.2 of Chapter 6. Here are two additional changes that will help you with your reconstructions:

- In Old Frisian, word-final nasal consonants were lost in infinitives.
- In Old High German, /p/ became /f/ in some phonetic environments.

Here are the sets of cognates for you to work with:

1. Old English *slēpan*, Old Frisian *slēpa*, Old High German *slāfan* ‘to sleep’
2. Old English *scip*, Old Frisian *skip*, Old High German *skif* ‘ship’
3. Old English *mȳs*, Old Saxon *mūsi*, Old High German *mūsi* ‘mice’
4. Old Frisian *skēp*, Old Saxon *skāp*, Old High German *skāf* ‘sheep’
5. Old English *hond*, Old Frisian *hond*, Old Saxon *hand* ‘hand’

6. Old English *scīnan*, Old Frisian *skīna*, Old High German *skīnan* 'to shine'



E.2 Completely futharked

Decode, by transliterating, the messages below written in Present Day English using the Older Futhark alphabet.

1. ዘጥዣ፡የጥሪያዣ፡፤፤፡የሰት
 - 2.፤፤፡የጥሪያዣ፡የጥሪያዣ፡የጥሪያዣ
 - 3.፤፤፡የጥሪያዣ፡፤፤፡የጥሪያዣ፡የጥሪያዣ
 - 4.፤፤፡የጥሪያዣ፡፤፤፡የጥሪያዣ፡የጥሪያዣ



E.3 Sound change does come to an end...

As we saw in this chapter, Grimm's Law took centuries to complete. This is not unusual. Nevertheless, the change did come to an end. Here are some words that underwent Grimm's Law: *corn, cool, eat, foot, fish, hearty, horn, kin, knee, teach, tooth, three.*

Below is a table with Latin words and existing English words borrowed from Latin after Grimm's Law came to an end, sometimes via French or other Romance languages. This means that the consonantal changes are nowhere to be seen in these loanwords. Use the third column to match the words above with those that were borrowed from Latin later.

Latin word	Borrowed from Latin	PDE Germanic word
<i>ped-</i>	<i>pedal</i> [p]	
<i>genu</i>	<i>genuflect</i> [g]	
<i>dens</i>	<i>dental</i> [d]	
<i>cor</i>	<i>cordial</i> [k]	
<i>piscis</i>	<i>Pisces</i> [f]	
<i>granum</i>	<i>granular</i> [g]	
<i>glaces</i>	<i>glacial</i> [g]	
<i>dicere</i>	<i>dictate</i> [d]	
<i>cornu</i>	<i>cornet</i> [k]	
<i>tres</i>	<i>trio</i> [t]	
<i>genus</i>	<i>genus</i> [g]	
<i>edo</i>	<i>edible</i> [d]	

Acknowledgement: This exercise is taken from Johanna Wood's 2016 teaching materials.



E.4 Umlaut

The following Old English words and their reconstructed Germanic sources illustrate some mutations:

Proto-West-Germanic	Old English	Present Day English
*gōs-i (plural noun)	> <i>gēs</i>	'geese'
*fōd-jan (verb from noun)	> <i>fēdan</i>	'to feed'
*stel-idi (3SG verb form)	> <i>stilp</i>	'steals'

1. Describe how the vowels changed between Proto-West-Germanic and Old English in each of these three words.

2. What were the conditions that caused the mutations?
3. Why is the cause of mutation not clear in written Old English?

Acknowledgement: This exercise is based on Johanna Wood's 2016 teaching materials.



E.5 How do we decide what's regular and what's irregular?

Recall that regular is not the same as weak, and irregular is not the same as strong. In this chapter we've talked about the origins of weak verbs and their distinctive feature (§7.3.1). Your task in this exercise is to look at the sets of Old English verb forms given and decide whether each verb is a) weak or strong and b) regular or irregular.

1. *dropian* 'to drop': *dropast* (2SG.PRES), *dropode* (3SG.PAST)
2. *metan* 'to measure': *mitst* (2SG.PRES), *mæt* (3SG.PAST)
3. *stincan* 'to smell bad': *stincst* (2SG.PRES), *stanc* (3SG.PAST)
4. *bringan* 'to bring': *bringest* (2SG.PRES), *brōhte* (3SG.PAST)



E.6 Essay topics

Write a short essay in which you critically discuss one of the following claims.

- “Bede’s story of the *aduentus Saxonum* is oversimplified, but basically correct.”

- “Old English is a typical Germanic language.”
- “Whereas Present Day English is a typical analytic language, Old English is a prime example of a synthetic language.”
- “The Germanic weak past tense arose through univerbation.”
- “Sound changes obscure the underlying systematicity of ablaut.”
- “Old English poetry is subject to both literary and linguistic constraints.”

Texts

The text samples for this chapter are a mixed bag, due to the fact that there simply aren't any substantial English texts from the period up to 600 CE. The first two texts are actually from later than 600, the third is from circa 600, and only the first and third can reasonably be said to be in English! Still, all of them should help to shed some light on the development of English from Proto-Indo-European via Proto-Germanic. Glosses and translations are provided for all texts in this chapter.



T.1 Franks Casket

This text is in Old English of the early 8th century. It's featured in this chapter rather than the previous chapter because it's written in the runic (futhorc) alphabet. Note that the material aspect of this object is important: Figure 7.8 shows just one side of a small whalebone casket, probably of Northumbrian origin, that can now be seen in the British Museum. Starting at the top left and working its way round clockwise, the text on this panel is a riddle, relating to the material the casket is made of. Can you see how the transcription (below) relates to the runes in the image?

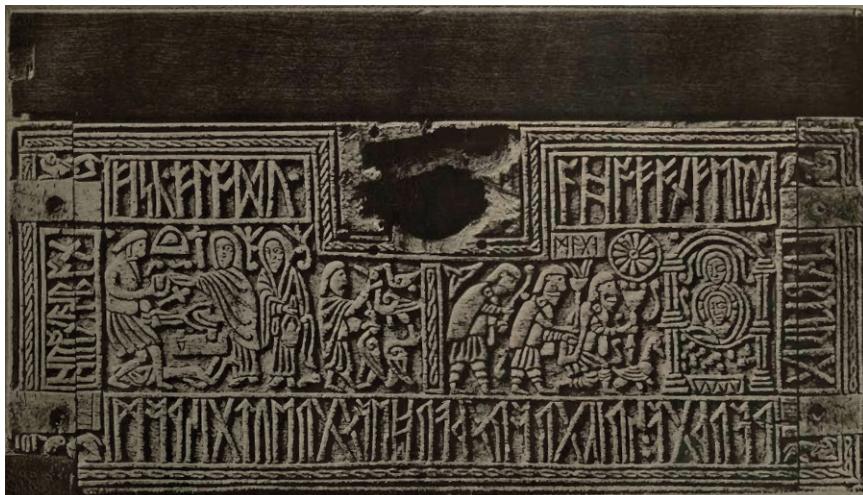


Figure 7.8: The Franks casket

fisc . flodu . ahof on ferg | enberig | warþ ga:sric grorn
fish flood.NOM lifted on mountain became rage-beast sad
þær he on great giswom | hronæs ban
where he on grit swam whale.GEN bone

'The flood lifted a fish onto the cliffs. The angry beast became sad where he swam in the sand. Whalebone.'



T.2 Old Saxon worm charm: *Contra vermes* 'Against worms'

This text is also later, written in the 10th century. It's in Old Saxon, the closest first-millennium relative of Old English. See if you can spot alliteration! You may also notice the absence of Anglo-Frisian Brightening.

Gang út nesso. mid nignum. nessiklinon.
 go out worm with nine worm-small-DAT.PL
 út fana themo. marge. | an that. ben.
 out from the.DAT marrow.DAT to the.ACC bone.ACC
 fan themo. bene. an that. flesg
 from the.DAT bone.DAT to the.ACC flesh.ACC
 ut fan themo. | flesgke. an thia hud.
 out from the.DAT flesh to the.ACC skin.ACC
 ut fan thera. hud. an thesa strala.
 out from the.DAT skin.DAT to this.ACC arrow.ACC
 drohtin uuerthe so.
 lord become.SBJV so

'Get out, worm, with nine little worms! Out from the marrow to the bone, from the bone to the flesh, out from the flesh to the skin, out from the skin to this arrow. Lord, may it be so!'



T.3 The Law of Æþelberht

King Æþelberht of Kent ('æðelberxt') lived between 550–616. One of the things he is known for is being one of the very first Old English kings who converted to Christianity. Another thing he's known for, more relevant here, is his famous law code, which provides a lot of detail on what sort of fines applied under what circumstances at the time. This code is actually the earliest such work attested in any Germanic language. We give you a few lines below. If you'd like to know what the punishment was for making someone lose their tooth or the ability to speak, read on!^a

31 Gif fri man pið fries mannes pif zelizeþ · his perzelde
 if free man with free.GEN man.GEN wife lies his wergild
 abicze. 7 oðer pif his azenum scætte bezete · 7
 pay-off.SBJV and other wife his own.DAT money.DAT get.SBJV and

ðæm oðrum æt þam ȝebrenȝe·
the.DAT other.DAT at that.DAT bring.SBJV

‘If a free man sleeps with another free man’s wife, he should pay his wergild and pay for another wife with his own money and bring her to the other man at home.’

32 Gif man rihthamsyld þurh stinð. mid peorðe forzeldē·
if man rihthamsyld through pierces with worth.DAT pay.SBJV

‘If someone pierces the *rihthamsyld*,^b let him pay with its worth.’

33 Gif feaxfanȝ ȝeweord. l. sceatta to bote·
if hair-grip happens 50 sceattas to restitution

‘If there is seizing of hair, 50 sceattas should be paid as restitution.’

34 Gif banes blice peorðeþ. iii. scillinȝum ȝebete·
if bone.GEN exposure happens 3 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If a bone is exposed, 3 shillings should be paid.’

35 Gif banes bite peorð. III. scillinȝum ȝebete·
if bone.GEN bite happens 4 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If a bone is cut, 4 shillings should be paid.’

36 Gif sio uterre hion ȝebrocen peorðeþ. x. scillinȝum ȝebete·
if the outer hion broken becomes 10 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If the outer bone of the head is broken, 10 shillings should be paid.’

36.1 Gif butu sien. xx. scillinȝum ȝebete·
if both be.SBJV 20 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If both are (broken), 20 shillings should be paid.’

37 Gif eaxle ȝelæmed peorþeð. xxx. scill ȝebete·
if shoulder lamed becomes 30 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If a shoulder is lamed, 30 shillings should be paid.’

38 Gif oþer eare napiht ȝehereð. xxv. scill ȝebete·
if either ear nothing hears 25 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If either ear loses hearing, 25 shillings should be paid.’

39 Gif eare of peorð aslazen. xii. scill ȝebete.
 if ear off becomes cut 12 shillings pay.SBJV

'If an ear is cut off, 12 shillings should be paid.'

40 Gif eare þirel peorðeþ. iii. scill ȝebete.
 if ear pierced becomes 3 shillings pay.SBJV

'If an ear is pierced, 3 shillings should be paid.'

41 Gif eare sceard peorðeþ. vi. scill ȝebete.
 if ear gashed becomes 6 shillings pay.SBJV

'If an ear is gashed, 6 shillings should be paid.'

42 Gif eaze of peorð. l. scillinum ȝebete.
 if eye off becomes 50 shillings pay.SBJV

'If an eye is cut out, 50 shillings should be paid.'

43 Gif muð oppe eaze poh peorðeþ. xii. scill ȝebete.
 if mouth or eye damaged becomes 12 shillings pay.SBJV

'If the mouth or eye is damaged, 12 shillings should be paid.'

44 Gif nasu ȝyrel peorð. viii. scillinum ȝebete.
 if nose pierced becomes 9 shillings pay.SBJV

'If the nose is pierced, 9 shillings should be paid.'

44.1 Gif hit sio an hleore iii. scill ȝebete.
 if it be.SBJV on cheek.DAT 3 shillings pay.SBJV

'If it (the piercing) is on the cheek, 3 shillings should be paid.'

44.2 Gif butu ȝyrele sien. vi. scill ȝebete.
 if both pierced be.SBJV 6 shillings pay.SBJV

'If both are pierced, 6 shillings should be paid.'

45 Gif nasu ælcor sceard peorð zehwylc. vi. scill
 if nose otherwise gashed becomes each 6 shillings
 ȝebete.
 pay.SBJV

‘If the nose otherwise becomes gashed, 6 shillings should be paid for each.’

46 Gif ðirel peorþ. vi· scill ȝebete.
if pierced becomes 6 shillings pay.SBJV

‘If it becomes pierced, 6 shillings should be paid.’

47 Se þe cinban forslæhð mid· xx· scillinzung forzelde.
he who chin-bone breaks with 20 shillings pay.SBJV

‘He who breaks the jawbone should pay 20 shillings.’

48 Ȑet þam feoper toðum fyrestum æt zehpylcum· vi·
at the.DAT four teeth.DAT first.DAT at each 6
scillinzas.
shillings

‘The four front teeth are worth 6 shillings each.’

48.1 Se toþ se þanne bi standeþ· iii· sci·
the tooth that then by stands 4 shillings

‘The tooth next to them is worth 4 shillings.’

48.2 Se þe ðonne bi ðam standeþ. iii· scill.
that which then by that.DAT stands 3 shillings

‘The one next to that one is worth 3 shillings.’

48.3 And þon siþfan zehpylc scillinȝ.
and then after each shilling

‘And one shilling for each one (tooth) after.’

49 Gif spræc apyrd peorþ. xii· scillinȝas.
if speech damaged becomes 12 shillings

‘If speech becomes damaged, 12 shillings should be paid.’

^aFrom the manuscript at <https://earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/manuscripts/h/?tp=s&nb=69, ff. 2r-2v>; accessed May 2020; punctuation kept as in the original. A Present Day English translation as well as a transliteration of the entire work can be found here: <https://earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/texts/abt/>. The line numbering follows this version for ease of comparison, but in the Old English manuscript the different fines

start and begin at different points of the individual lines, marked by a red capital letter in the manuscript.

^bThe word *hamscyld* is extremely difficult to translate, and scholars have been speculating as to what this might mean exactly. See e.g. Ammon (2002) for some ideas.



T.4 The Gothic Bible

This text is from the 4th-century Gothic Bible translation. It's an excerpt of the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Mark 4, verses 3–4), like the one we saw in Exercise 1 of Chapter 1. Gothic is an East Germanic language, and is often thought to be the closest Germanic language to Proto-Germanic because of its early attestation and complex morphology.

hauseiþ! Sai, urrann sa saiands du saian fraiwa
 hear.2PL.IMP see out.ran the sower.NOM to sow seed.DAT
 seinamma.
 his.DAT

Jah warþ, miþpanei saiso, sum raihtis gadraus faur wig,
 and became while sowed some though fell to way
 jah qemun fuglos jah fretun þata.
 and came.3PL bird.NOM.PL and ate that.ACC

'Listen! The sower went out to sow his seed. And it happened that, while he sowed, some fell onto the road, and birds came and ate it.'



T.5 The Golden Horn of Gallehus

Another runic inscription, this time in something close to Proto-Norse, the ancestor language of the North Germanic branch. This one was found

on a drinking horn made of sheet gold, one of a pair, in Gallehus, Denmark. It dates to the early 5th century CE. Discovered in 1734, the horn was stolen and melted down in 1802. Fortunately, detailed drawings had been made, so that a replica could be constructed, and the ancient inscription itself was not lost.



Figure 7.9: The Golden Horn of Gallehus replica (Photo by Bloodofox, licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0)

The inscription is in the Older Futhark, and consists of a single clause. The verb in this clause is a characteristically Germanic weak past tense form!

‘I, Hlewagastiz Holtijaz, made this horn.’



Recommended further reading

If you're interested in the history and archaeology of Britain, Fleming (2010) is a recent and masterful overview, starting before the *aduentus Saxonum* and covering the whole period up to 1070 CE. For Indo-European history and archaeology, Anthony (2007) should be the first place to look.

Robinson (1992) is a great introduction to the early Germanic languages,

and Clackson (2007) introduces comparative Indo-European linguistics. On the general methodology of historical linguistics and linguistic reconstruction, there are many good textbooks available: we'd recommend Campbell (2013).

Findell (2014) is a handy guide to the world of Germanic and Old English runes. There is a substantial literature on Germanic and Old English alliterative verse, but from a linguistic perspective the clearest overview is to be found in McCully & Hilles (2005). Finally, if you'd like to find out more about the specific phonological, morphological and syntactic changes that characterized the prehistory of English, the first two volumes of Ringe's *Linguistic History of English* (Ringe 2017; Ringe & Taylor 2014) are treasure troves of information, as is Fulk (2018) – though be warned that they are not exactly light bedtime reading.