

3. Old English II

The History of English (Ling 390)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

What We'll Cover

1. Quiz #2
2. Bald's Leechbook Discussion
3. Letters and Sounds
4. For Next Week

Bald's Leechbook

- Over the last few weeks, each of you, working in groups, read a selection from Bald's Leechbook.
- You will tell the class about some of the diseases or infirmities treated, and the remedies that the text provided.
- You will also identify five Old English words that are recognizable to you, and explain how each word has changed. (Five OE words per group, not per person.)
- Example: in Leechdom LXVIII, we find the word *hunige* meaning “honey.” The words are very similar, but we don't have a final -e at the end. The second syllable ends with the [i] sound – there's no consonant after the [n].*

* As we learned in this week's reading, *hunige* would not have had a [g] sound at all, but would've been said as [huniʝə]



Bald's Leechbook

- Since it's been a couple of weeks, take the next 10 minutes to talk with your group about what you'll be discussing with the class.
- Choose who'll speak up and who'll be writing the five words (in Old English, then, beneath them, in English) on the board.



Group 1

- Leechdoms VI through XV
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?



Group 2

- Leechdoms XVI through XXV
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?



Group 3

- Leechdoms XLIV through XLVII
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?



Group 4

- Leechdoms XLVIII through LVIII
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?

Why the alphabet looked like that

- Old English was written essentially with the Latin alphabet, but in a particular handwriting style called the “Insular hand.”

“[...] which was an Irish modification of the Roman alphabet. The Irish, who had been converted to Christianity before the English came to Britain, taught their new neighbors how to write in their style.” (p.40)

- But the Anglo-Saxons had some speech sounds that this alphabet didn't have letters for.
- Before they were taught the Latin alphabet, Anglo-Saxons used a runic writing-system called Futhorc. What are runes?



The 8th-century “Franks casket”—actually a small chest—is inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes (and, in some parts, Latin letters).

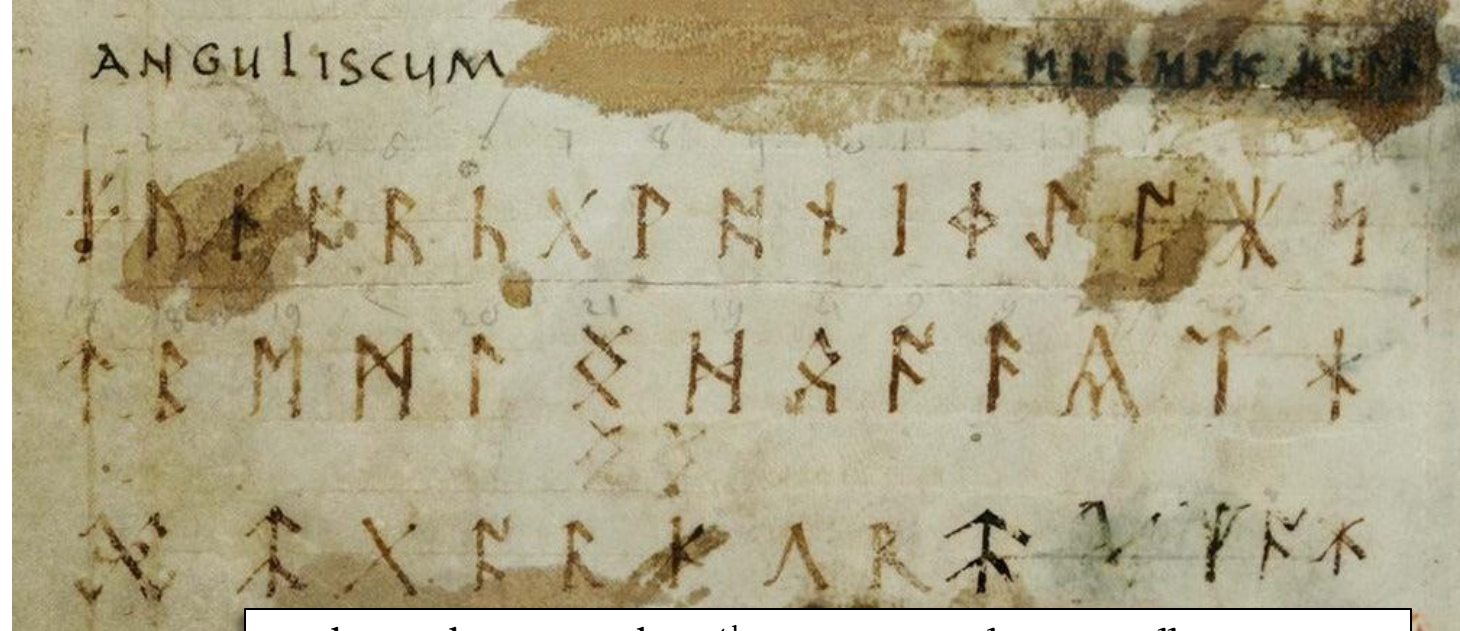


ƿɪsk • ƿlodu

FISC • FLODU

Futhorc

- Futhorc is a retrospective name based on the pronunciations of the first six runes.



Futhorc shown in the 9th-century *Codex Sangallensis* 878.

𐰚
'æsc'
/æ/
Æ

𐰛
'þorn'
/ð/ or /θ/
Þ

𐰜
'wyn'
/w/
ƿ

- Three runes were borrowed from Futhorc to represent sounds that were not present in the Latin alphabet.

Ð / ð was a modified version of D, not a borrowing from Futhorc.

Pronunciation

- What is vowel length?
- Vowels: a æ e i o u y
- Diphthongs: ea and eo
- Most consonants were more or less the same as the modern sounds*
- What about:

a, e, i, o, u were basically the sounds in other European languages
æ was /æ/ (like in modern *apple*)
y was /y/ – say “ee” but with your lips rounded like for “oo”

ea = /æə/ “aa-uh”
eo = /eə/ “ey-uh”

þ ð ŋ ƿ cȝ r̄c c ȝ

*But [v], [z], and [ð] were not contrastive. f, s, and þ were just voiced between vowels.

- c was pronounced as [k] in most places but usually as [tʃ] when adjacent to i, e, æ, or y.
- ȝ was pronounced as [g] before consonants, after n, and at the start of a word before u, o, and a. And as [j] “y” before e, i, y, between front vowels, and after a front vowel at the end of a syllable. And as [ɣ] in most other places.

Activity!

- In your groups, work on question 1 on your activity sheets.
- Now do question 2.

Vocabulary

- Do all Modern English words come from Old English?
- Are there some Modern English words that mean the same thing as their ancestral forms did in OE?
- Are there some that don't?
- In Modern English, the majority of our vocabulary is actually from Latin, mostly by way of French. But this influx didn't happen in a major way until after the Norman conquest in 1066 AD.
- Old English is the stage of English from *before* the Norman conquest, so it is markedly more Germanic, with very few borrowings at all.
- Even today, most *everyday* Modern English words do come from OE.

Gender and Inflection

- What's grammatical gender?
- Does Modern English have grammatical gender?
- Did Old English?
- What is concord?
- In O.E., determiners, nouns and adjectives had to agree in gender and number.
- They also had one of four cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative. Adjectives and pronouns also had the instrumental case.
- How were gender, number, and case shown?

OLD ENGLISH NOUN DECLENSIONS

	Masculine <i>a</i>-Stem	Neuter <i>a</i>-Stem	<i>r</i>-Stem	<i>n</i>-Stem	<i>ō</i>-Stem	Root- Consonant Stem
	‘hound’	‘deer’	‘child’	‘ox’	‘love’	‘foot’
<i>Singular</i>						
Nom.	hund	dēor	cild	oxa	lufu	fōt
Acc.	hund	dēor	cild	oxan	lufe	fōt
Gen.	hundes	dēores	cildes	oxan	lufe	fōtes
Dat.	hunde	dēore	cilde	oxan	lufe	fēt
<i>Plural</i>						
N.-Ac.	hundas	dēor	cildru	oxan	lufa	fēt
Gen.	hunda	dēora	cildra	oxena	lufa	fōta
Dat.	hundum	dēorum	cildrum	oxum	lufum	fōtum

p.94

a-stems were by far the most common

i-Umlaut

- Where a word took a suffix with an [i] or [j] in it, it sometimes caused the vowel in the root to change by moving to the front.
- foot > feet
- goose > geese
- tooth > teeth
- mouse >
- louse >
- man >

For next time

- Read pp.96–108 in Algeo. There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of class.
- With your groups, read again from Cockayne:
- Group 1: pp.146–151 (Leechdoms LXXI through LXXVIII)
- Group 2: pp.150–157 (Leechdoms LXXVIII through LXXXVIII)
- Group 3: pp.238–245 (Leechdoms XXXIV through XXXVI)
- Group 4: pp.290–297 (Leechdom LXV)
- You will again discuss with the class. What diseases are treated here? As you read, identify five Old English words that are recognizable to you. How would they have been pronounced? In what ways have they changed from Old English to today?