

4. Old English III

The History of English (Ling 390)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

What We'll Cover

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

Bald's Leechbook

- Over the last week, 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, pronounce them accurately, and explain how each word has changed. (Five OE words per group, not per person.)



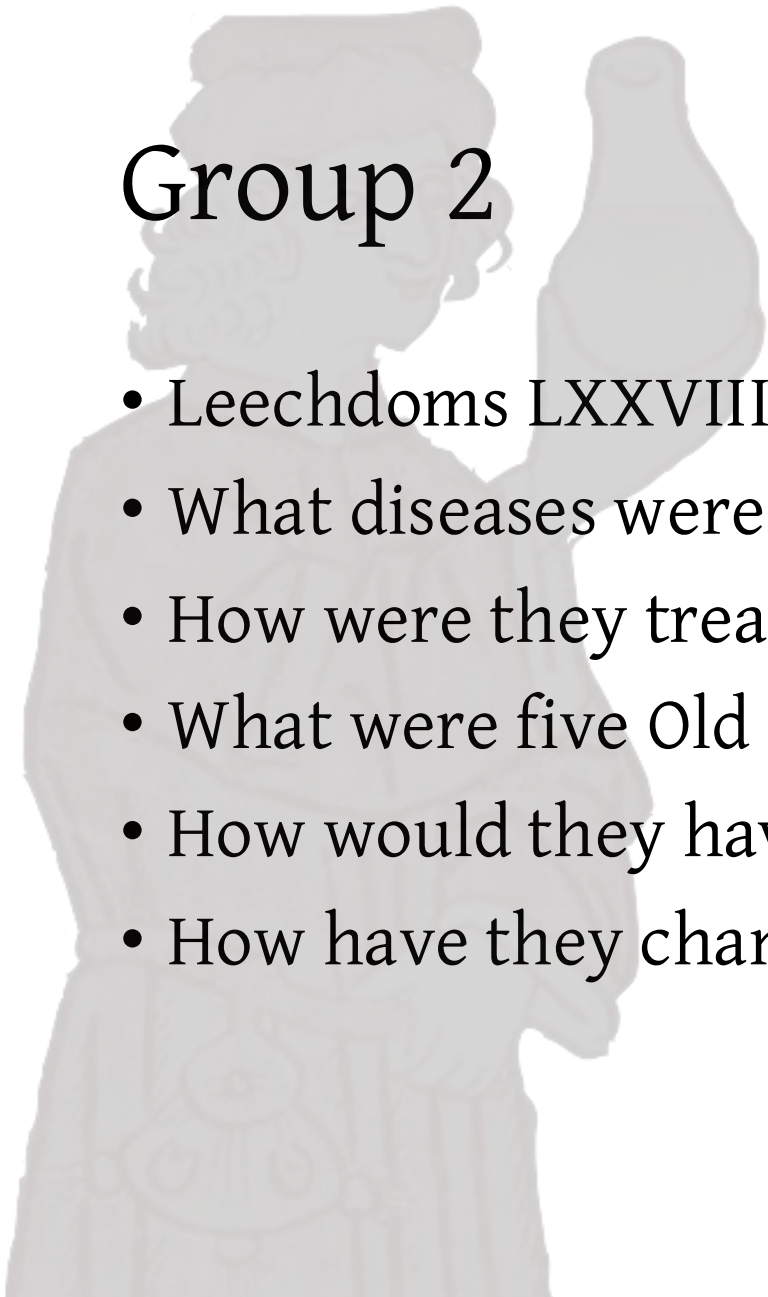
Bald's Leechbook

- 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 LXXI through LXXVIII.
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How would they have been pronounced?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?



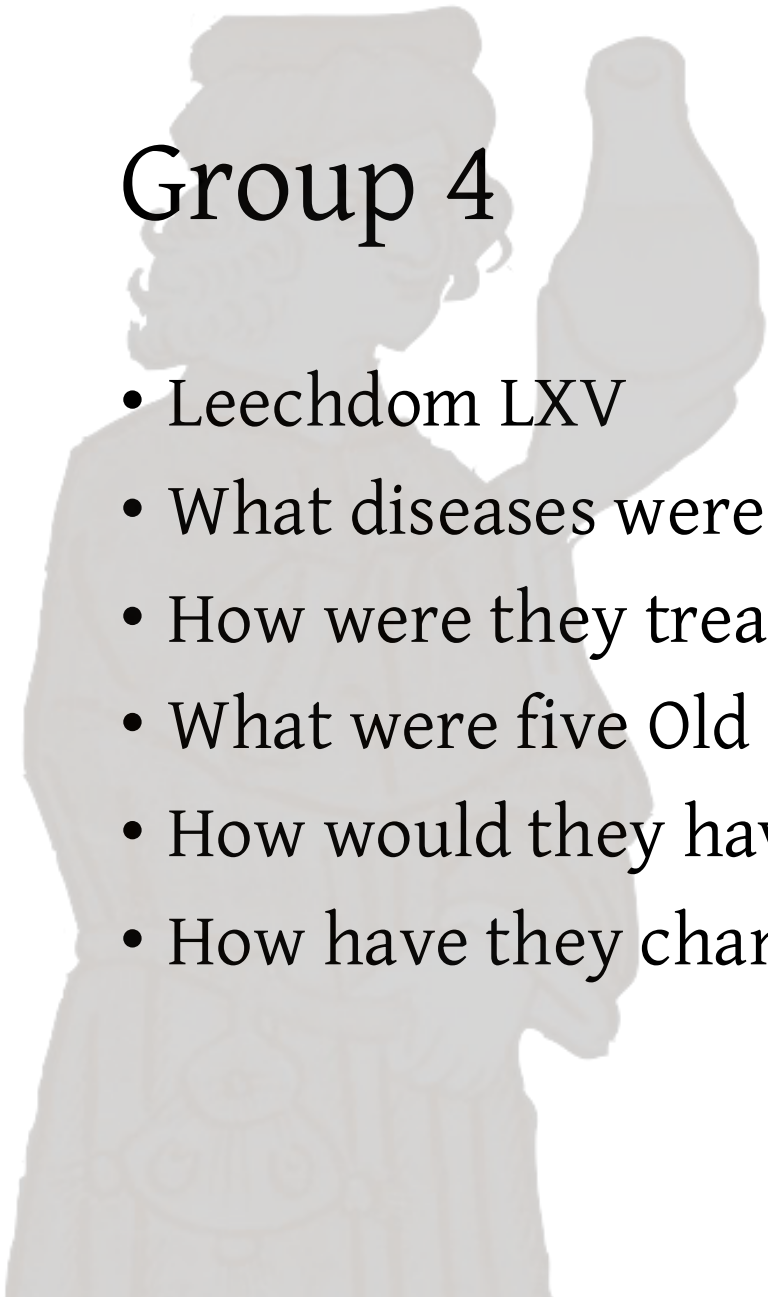
Group 2

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



Group 3

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



Group 4

- Leechdom LXV
- What diseases were treated here?
- How were they treated?
- What were five Old English words that you could recognize?
- How would they have been pronounced?
- How have they changed from then (mid-10th century) to today?

Questions

- Where did “the” come from?
- And “that”?
- “those”?
- How did adjectives in Old English function differently than in Modern English?
- What were dual pronouns?
- How have the 2nd person singular pronouns changed?
- Where did we get “they,” “them,” and “their” from?

Questions

- What's the difference between weak verbs and strong verbs?
- What is gradation (or ablaut)?
- This is found in many irregular verb forms in English, coming from a source far more ancient than the i-Umlaut we talked about last week. In fact, gradation dates all the way back to P.I.E. What's that again?
- *ride-rode-ridden, choose-chose, bind-bound, come-came, eat-ate, shake-shook*
- These irregulars are not a quirk of English—all Indo-European languages have irregulars like these.

Questions

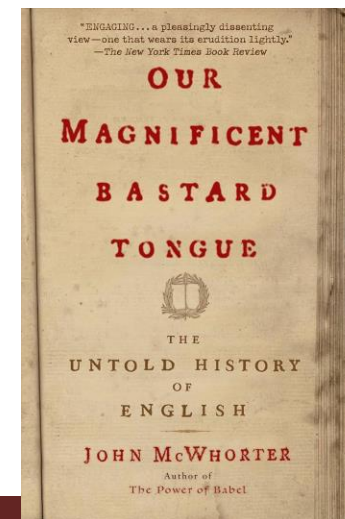
- What's a suppletive verb?
- Suppletion is where basically two or more verbal paradigms combine into a single one, like in the verb for 'to be.' *Be, am, are, and was* each came from separate verbs originally.
- What's another example of this? *go and went*

Do-support

- What does 'do' mean?
- Hæfst þu ænigne geferan?
- Hast thou any companion?
- Do you have any companion?
- What is 'do' doing here?
- Where does this weird 'do' come from?



What do you say when you pick the petals off a flower one-by-one to see if someone loves you?



Healing Texts and Folklore

- Remember that we discussed how Bald's Leechbook included remedies from around the Mediterranean and Near East, giving it a somewhat cosmopolitan perspective.
- Another Old English healing text, the Lacnunga, was less worldly and is thus more valuable for learning about domestic English beliefs.
- Two remedies, *ƿið dƿeoƿh* is especially interesting for what it shows us about supernatural beliefs in early medieval England.

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 Hƿið ðeow þ h manyceal
 Inman .vii. lytle of lætan
 ƿpylec man mid ofrað 7 ƿpita
 tan þaynaman on ælcne
 of lætan maximian mal
 chuy . iohanneſ . martini
 anuy . dioniyuy . conſtan
 tinuy . ſeraſion . þenne
 eft þæt galdor þæt her eft
 eƿerced manyceal ƿingān . æ
 ƿeſt on þæt ƿynſcne aſne .
 þenne on þæt ƿpideſcne aſne
 þenne hufan þæt manney
 moldan . 7 ga þenne anmædta
 manto 7 hoht on huy ƿp
 ran 7 doman ƿpa þuy da
 zar .

hi bið ſona ƿel her com in
 zangan . in ƿpideſcne hær
 dehi huy haman on handa
 ƿæð þæt þu huy hæncgeſcne
 lege þe huy teagan ƿp
 ran on zunnan hio þæt
 lande liþan . ƿna ƿpa hy
 of þæt lande coman þa on
 zunnan hi þæt colian þæt
 in zangan deowey ƿp
 þæt endode heo . 7 ad a ƿ
 ðæt ne ƿp þæt adlegan de
 ne moſt þæt þæt ƿp
 begytan mihte . 7 de þæt
 zaldor on galan cuþe . am
 ƿið þæt her ƿynd on læc
 domay .

“Against a Dwarf” from the Lacnunga

Wið dweorh: man ſceal niman .VII. lytle oflætān swylce man mid ofrað 7 wri[t]jan þas naman on ælcne oflætān: maximianus malchus. iohannes. Martinianus. dionisius. con-stantinus. serafion. þænne eft þæt galdor þæt [man] her æfter cwæð[ed] man ſceal ſingan, ærest on þæt wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne [b]ufan þæs mannes moldan; 7 ga þænne an mædenman to 7 ho hit on his sweoran, 7 do man swa þry dagas. him bið sona sel.

Her com ingangan inſpiden wiht. Hæfde him his haman on handa; cwæð þæt þu his hæncgeſt wære. Leg[d]e þe his teage [o]n sweoran; ongunnan him of þæt lande liþan. Sona swa hy of þæt lande coman þa ongunnan him þa [leomu] colian. Þa com ingangan deores sweoſtar. Þa geændode heo 7 adas ſwor ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan [eg]lian ne moſte ne þæt þe þis galdor begytan mihte oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuðe. Amen fia[t].

—Old English text^[2]

Against dwarf: one must take seven small wafers such as are used for Communion, and write these names on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martinianus, Dionysius, Constantinus, Seraphion. Then, next, the spell that is quoted hereafter is to be sung, first in the left ear then in the right ear, then above the man’s head; and then let a virgin approach and hang it on his neck, and let this been done in this way for three days. It will go better with him directly.

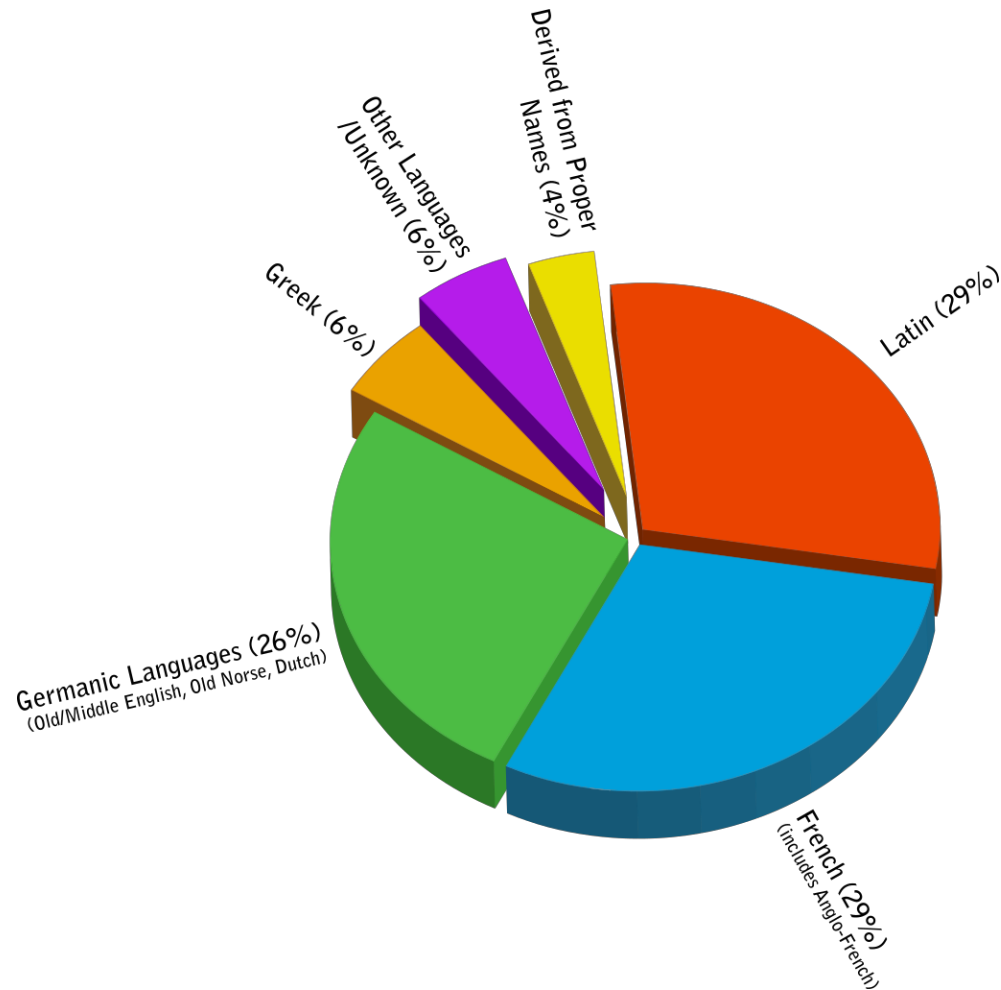
Here came to enter an inspiden creature. He had his harness in his hand; said that you were his steed. Laid his reins upon your neck; they began then to depart from the land. As soon as they had come from the land then his [limbs] began to cool. Then there came to enter the sister of the beast. Then she made an end of it, and swore oaths, that never should this thing [afflict] the patient, or the one who was able to obtain this spell or who knows how to chant this spell. Amen, let it be’.

—Hines Translation^[2]

Elves, dwarves, and hags

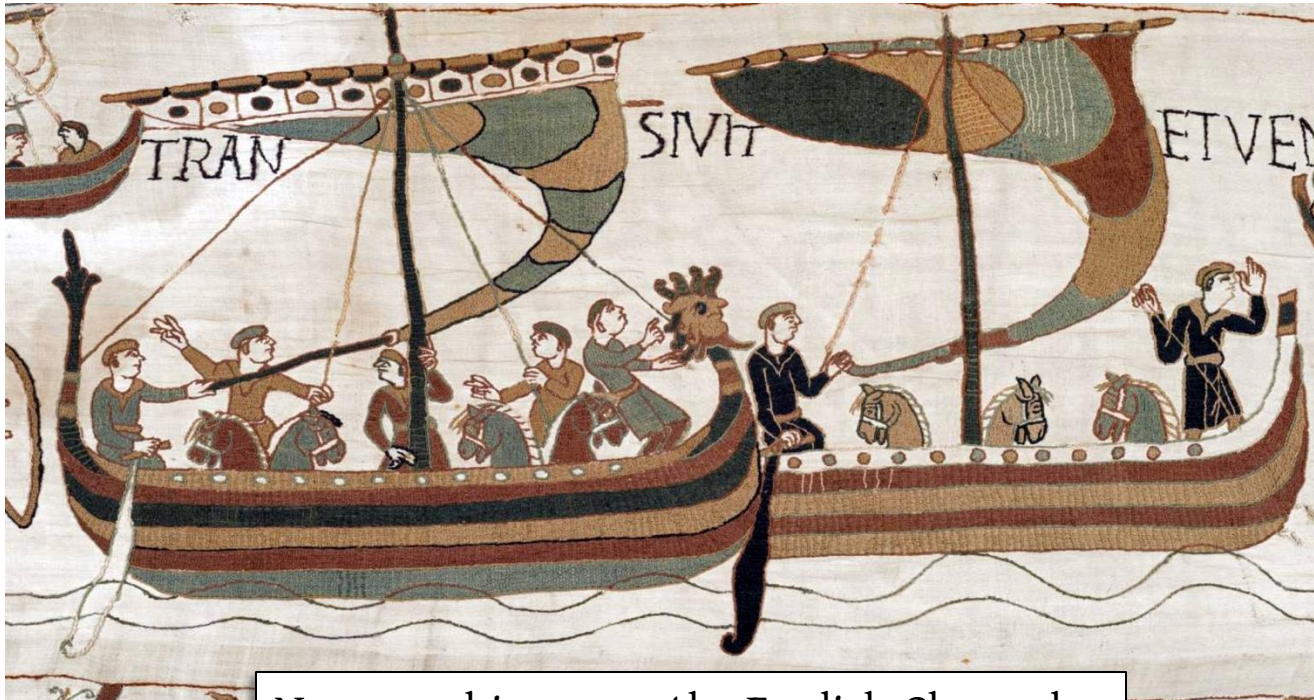
- What do you notice about the remedy in “Against a Dwarf”?
- How is it different from the remedies you’ve seen so far?
- How is it similar?
- What role does religion play in it?
- (Are mystical dwarves a thing in Christianity?)

Modern English



- This is weird, right?
- Where did we get all these French and Latin words from?
- Remember, most of the Latin words used in Roman Britain did not persist into Old English, and Old English had very few words borrowed from non-Germanic languages.
- So what happened?
- The Norman Conquest.

Middle English



Norman ships cross the English Channel.



"King Harold is slain."

- The Norman view of the Battle of Hastings (1066), where William the Conqueror had a decisive victory over the Anglo-Saxon King Harold, is depicted in the magnificent Bayeux Tapestry.

Middle English

- Norman French (or “Anglo-Norman”) came to predominate culturally after the conquest.
- Middle English is thus not especially well documented until a few centuries after the Norman Conquest took place.
- One of the most significant Middle English authors to know is Geoffrey Chaucer.
- England to this day uses French in certain circumstances, e.g. in the Royal coat of arms and on coinage.



For next time (Tues, Oct 14)

- Read pp.112–119 in Algeo and lines 1–162 in Chaucer's General Prologue.
- There will be a quiz on these readings at the start of class.