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**THEME: Writings in old English and problems of
linguodidactics**

*COURSE
PAPER*

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Writings in old English and problems of lingvodidactics

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Introduction

Subject of History of English

In studying the English language of to-day, we are faced with a number of peculiarities which appear unintelligible from the modern point of view. These are found both in the vocabulary and in the phonetic and grammatical structure of the language.

There are some considerations pointing the same way. Study of history of a concrete language is based on applying general principles of linguistics to the language in question. Foundations of our science are studied in introduction to linguistics. Thus, for example, the notion of sound law, familiar from this introductory subject, is to be tested on the facts of English language history. The same may be said about other general notions, such as development of grammatical structure, etc.

The purpose of the subject is a systematic study of the language's development from the earliest times to the present day. Such study enables the student to acquire a more profound understanding of the language of to-day. Besides history of English is an important subsidiary discipline for history of England and of English literature.

In studying history of the language, we can not limit ourselves to stating the facts. We must also find the causal ties between them. Now this is not always easy thing to do. Thus whereas changes much more complicated with phonetic changes. Here there are many questions which still await solution.

In the last few years new methods have been applied to the study of language history-methods which had originally been developed for synchronic language study-namely the phonemic factor in phonetic change, and the theory of oppositions in the sphere of grammatical development of the vowel system in the 15th-16th centuries, can will be presented in the light of these new ideas.

History of the English language is connected with other disciplines. It is based on the history of England, studying the development of the language in connection with the concrete condition in which the English people lived in the several periods of their history. It is also connected with disciplines studying present-day English, theoretical phonetics, theoretical grammar, lexicology. It shows phonetic, grammatical and lexical phenomena as they developed, and states the origins of the present-day system.

In studying the history of the language, the question naturally arises about the general trend of its development. The grammatical structure of English, as of any language, undergoes some changes: what is the essence of these changes? The vocabulary of English develops-what is the tendency of this development? Different scholars have expressed different views concerning these questions. In so far as this is feasible, we will take into account and state the main existing view-points.

In studying the history of a language we are faced with a number of problems concerning the driving forces or causes of changes in the language. These causes can apparently be of two kinds: external and internal. In the first case, language is influenced by factors lying outside it, or extra linguistic factors. Such historic events as social changes, wars, conquests, migrations, cultural contacts, and the like can hardly fail to influence a language, more especially its vocabulary. On the other hand, many changes occur in the history of language which can not be traced to any extra linguistic causes: the driving power in such cases is within the language itself. Most changes in the phonetic structure of a language, and also in its grammatical structure, are due to internal causes.

1. Writings in Old English

In old English two alphabets were used the Runic and the Latin. A few Runic documents have come down to us. We shall mention the two most widely known ones.

One is the Ruthwell Cross, a religious poem engraved on a stone cross near the village of Ruthwell in South-East Scotland.

The other is the Runic Casket, made of whalebone, and found in France near the town of Clermont-Ferrand, now in the British Museum in London. The Runic text is a short poem about whalebone.

Both these texts are probably in the 10th century. After the Anglo-Saxons came into contact with Roman culture the Runic alphabet was surprised by the Latin. As the Old English sound system different materially from the Latin, the Latin alphabet proved insufficient to denote all Old English sounds. To fill this gap Anglo-Saxon scribes borrowed some letters from the Runic alphabet .In other cases a Latin letter was used to denote several sounds.

The oldest English documents available belong to the end of the 7th century: our ideas of the language of the 5th and 6th centuries are based on comparing documents of a later time with date of other languages, mainly Gothic.

Writings in Old English are very numerous and belong to different kinds of literature. On the one hand, there is a great variety of prose texts, part of them translations from the Latin, and on the other a number of poems of different genres and sizes.

Among the prose works, we should first of all note the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a year of year account of the events in English history, starting at 787. This seems to have been compiled in the reign of king Alfred, somewhere in the 880s or 890s. The Chronicle is characterized by a very simple syntax, with very little subordination, mainly consisting of brief statements of events which occurred in this or that particular year.

Then there are a number of texts associated, in one way or another, with name of King Alfred. The work usually called King Alfred's Orosius is a long text based on the *Historia adversus paganos*. However, what makes this text particularly valuable for us is king Alfred's own original additions to the text, containing geographical information which just become available to him. The best known of these is the passage telling of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan, two Scandinavian travellers who arrived in England and told Alfred of their experiences. Ohthere had rounded the North Cape and sailed eastward on to what is now called the Kola peninsula and the White Sea. He had met Finnish tribesmen on his way and was able to converse with them.

Another translation made either by Alfred himself or on his orders is that of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People. Bede gave in his work a detailed account of the early history of England well into the 8th century. The story of the arrival of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in Britain in 449 is one of the most famous passages of the book. Another is the story of the poet Caedmon.

Beowulf is the oldest extant epic poem in any Germanic language. Its author is unknown, and various suggestions have been put forward concerning the authorship. The subject of the epic has nothing to do with England or English people. The scene is laid throughout in various parts of Scandinavia. In the first part of the epic young Beowulf, nephew to Higelac, king of the Geats, arrives at the court of Hrothgar, king of the Danes, to fight Grendel, a sea monster who has been devastating Hrothgar's mead-hall, Heorot for a long time. Beowulf succeeds in overcoming Grendel, and then has a fight with Grendel's mother, a sea monster, whom he also overcomes. The second part of the epic shows Beowulf as an old man. Fifty years have passed since the Grendel fight, and Beowulf has long since succeeded to his uncle as king. He has to fight a fiery dragon who possessed vast treasures. Beowulf kills dragon, but is himself poisoned by the dragon and dies. The epic ends with Beowulf's funeral.

For most other Old English epics we are at least told the names of their authors, though we do not know much about these authors. Two great names stand out here: Caedmon and

Cynewulf. Caedmon is said to be author of Genesis and Exodus, poetical versions of two books of the Bible, written in a highly literary and solemn style.

Cynewulf is the author of a number of poems on religious subjects, such as *Andrew*, which tells of the voyages of the apostle Andrew, and contains a beautiful and impressive description of a storm at sea: *Elene*, which tells the story of Helen, mother of the Roman emperor Constantine going to the Holy Land to find Christ's cross ; also *Christ, the Seafarer*, *Widsith* and others.

Among late Old English texts we must mention the *Homilies Lives, of Saints*, and the *Latin Grammar of Aelfric* and the *Homilies of Wulfstan*, one of which, entitled *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, that is, *The Wolf's Sermon to the English*, was especially famous.

Old English (*Ænglisc, Anglisc, Englisc*) or **Anglo-Saxons** is an early form of the [English language](#) that was spoken and written by the [Anglo-Saxons](#) and their descendants in parts of what are now England and southern and eastern Scotland between at least the mid-5th century and the mid-12th century. What survives through writing represents primarily the literary register of Anglo-Saxon.

It is a [West Germanic language](#) closely related to [Old Frisian](#) and [Old Saxon](#). Old English had a grammar similar in many ways to [Classical Latin](#). In most respects, including its grammar, it was much closer to modern [German](#) and [Icelandic](#) than to modern English. It was fully [inflected](#) with five [grammatical cases](#) ([nominative](#), [accusative](#), [genitive](#), [dative](#), and [instrumental](#)), three [grammatical numbers](#) ([singular](#), [plural](#), and [dual](#)) and three [grammatical genders](#) ([masculine](#), [feminine](#), and [neuter](#)). The dual forms occurred in the first and second persons only and referred to groups of two.

Adjectives, pronouns and (sometimes) participles agreed with their antecedent nouns in case, number and gender. Finite verbs agreed with their subject in person and number.

[Nouns](#) came in numerous [declensions](#) (with deep parallels in [Latin](#), [Ancient Greek](#) and [Sanskrit](#)). [Verbs](#) came in nine main [conjugations](#) (seven *strong* and two *weak*), each with numerous subtypes, as well as a few additional smaller conjugations and a handful of irregular verbs. The main difference from other ancient Indo-European languages, such as [Latin](#), is that verbs can be conjugated in only two tenses (vs. the six "tenses" – really tense/aspect combinations – of Latin), and have no synthetic passive voice (although it did still exist in [Gothic](#)).

Gender in [nouns](#) was [grammatical](#), as opposed to the [natural gender](#) that prevails in modern English. That is, the grammatical gender of a given noun did not necessarily correspond to its natural gender, even for nouns referring to people. For example, *sēo sunne* (the [Sun](#)) was feminine, *se mōna* (the [Moon](#)) was masculine, and *þat wīf* "the woman/wife" was neuter. (Compare [German](#) cognates *die Sonne, der Mond, das Weib*.) Pronominal usage could reflect either natural or grammatical gender, when it conflicted.

From the 9th century, Old English experienced heavy influence from [Old Norse](#), a member of the related [North Germanic](#) group of [languages](#).

History

Old English was not static, and its usage covered a period of 700 years, from the [Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain](#) in the 5th century to the late 11th century, some time after the [Norman invasion](#).

Old English is a [West Germanic language](#), developing out of [Ingvaenic](#) (also known as North Sea Germanic) dialects from the 5th century. Anglo-Saxon literacy developed after [Christianisation](#) in the late 7th century. The oldest surviving text of [Old English literature](#) is *Cædmon's Hymn*, composed between 658 and 680. There is a limited corpus of [runic inscriptions](#) from the 5th to 7th centuries, but the oldest coherent runic texts (notably [Franks Casket](#)) date to the 8th century.

The history of Old English can be subdivided into:

- Prehistoric Old English (c. 450 to 650); for this period, Old English is mostly a [reconstructed language](#) as no literary witnesses survive (with the exception of limited [epigraphic evidence](#)). This language, or bloc of languages, spoken by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and pre-dating documented Old English or Anglo-Saxon, has also been called Primitive Old English.^[2]
- Early Old English (c. 650 to 900), the period of the oldest manuscript traditions, with authors such as [Cædmon](#), [Bede](#), [Cynewulf](#) and [Aldhelm](#).
- Late Old English (c. 900 to 1066), the final stage of the language leading up to the [Norman conquest of England](#) and the subsequent transition to [Early Middle English](#).

The Old English period is followed by [Middle English](#) (12th to 15th century), [Early Modern English](#) (c. 1480 to 1650) and finally [Modern English](#) (after 1650).

Influence of other languages

In the course of the [Early Middle Ages](#), Old English assimilated some aspects of a few languages with which it came in contact, such as the two dialects of Old Norse from the contact with the [Norsemen](#) or "Danes" who by the late 9th century controlled large tracts of land in northern and eastern England, which came to be known as the [Danelaw](#).

Latin influence

A large percentage of the educated and literate population of the time were competent in [Latin](#), which was the scholarly and diplomatic *lingua franca* of Europe. It is sometimes possible to give approximate dates for the entry of individual Latin words into Old English based on which patterns of linguistic change they have undergone. There were at least three notable periods of Latin influence. The first occurred before the ancestral [Angles](#) and [Saxons](#) left continental Europe for Britain. The second began when the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity and Latin-speaking priests became widespread. See [Latin influence in English: Dark Ages](#) for details.

The third and largest single transfer of Latin-based words happened after the [Norman Conquest of 1066](#), when an enormous number of [Norman](#) (Old French) words began to influence the language. Most of these [Old language](#) words were themselves derived from [Old French](#) and ultimately from [classical Latin](#), although a notable stock of Norse words were introduced or re-introduced in [Norman](#) form. The Norman Conquest approximately marks the end of Old English and the advent of [Middle English](#).

One of the ways the influence of Latin can be seen is that many Latin words for activities came to also be used to refer to the people engaged in those activities, an idiom carried over from Anglo-Saxon but using Latin words. This can be seen in words like *militia*, *assembly*, *movement*, and *service*.

The language was further altered by the transition away from the [runic alphabet](#) (also known as *futhorc* or futhorc) to the [Latin alphabet](#), which was also a significant factor in the developmental pressures brought to bear on the language. Old English words were spelled, more or less, as they were pronounced. Often, the Latin alphabet fell short of being able to adequately represent Anglo-Saxon phonetics. Spellings, therefore, can be thought of as best-attempt approximations of how the language actually sounded.

The "silent" letters in many Modern English words were pronounced in Old English: for example, the *c* and *h* in [cniht](#), the Old English ancestor of the modern *knight*, were pronounced. Another side-effect of spelling Old English words phonetically using the Latin alphabet was that spelling was extremely variable. A word's spelling could also reflect differences in the phonetics of the writer's regional dialect. Words also endured idiosyncratic spelling choices of individual authors, some of whom varied spellings between works. Thus, for example, the word *and* could be spelt either *and* or *ond*.

Norse influence

The second major source of loanwords to Old English were the Scandinavian words introduced during the Viking invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries. In addition to a great many [place names](#), these consist mainly of items of basic vocabulary, and words concerned with particular administrative aspects of the [Danelaw](#) (that is, the area of land under Viking control, which included extensive holdings all along the eastern coast of England and [Scotland](#)).

The Vikings spoke [Old Norse](#), a language related to Old English in that both derived from the same ancestral Proto-Germanic language. It is very common for the intermixing of speakers of different dialects, such as those that occur during times of political unrest, to result in a [mixed language](#), and one theory holds that exactly such a mixture of Old Norse and Old English helped accelerate the decline of case endings in Old English

Brittonicisms in English

Traditionally, and following the [Anglo-Saxon](#) preference prevalent in the 19th century, many maintain that the influence of [Brythonic](#) Celtic on English has been small, citing the small number of Celtic [loanwords](#) taken into the language. The number of Celtic loanwords is of a lower order than either Latin or [Scandinavian](#). However, a more recent and still minority view is that distinctive Celtic traits can be discerned in syntax from the post-Old English period, such as the regular progressive construction and analytic word order in opposition to the Germanic languages

2.Runic inscriptions

A **runic inscription** is an [inscription](#) made in one of the various [runic alphabets](#). The body of runic inscriptions falls into the three categories of [Elder Futhark](#) (some 350 items, dating

to between the 2nd and 8th centuries AD), [Anglo-Frisian Futhorc](#) (some 100 items, 5th to 11th centuries) and [Younger Futhark](#) (close to 6,000 items, 8th to 12th centuries)

The total 350 known inscriptions in the [Elder Futhark](#) script fall into two main geographical categories, [North Germanic](#) (Scandinavian, c. 267 items) and [Continental or South Germanic](#) ("[German](#)" and Gothic, c. 81 items). These inscriptions are on many types of loose objects, but the North Germanic tradition shows a preference for [bracteates](#), while the South Germanic one has a preference for [fibulae](#). The precise figures are debatable because some inscriptions are very short and/or illegible, so that it is uncertain whether they qualify as an inscription at all.

The division into Scandinavian, North Sea (Anglo-Frisian) and South Germanic inscription makes sense from the 5th century. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, the Elder Futhark script is still in its early phase of development, with inscriptions concentrated in what is now [Denmark](#) and [Northern Germany](#).

The tradition of runic literacy continues in Scandinavia into the [Viking Age](#), developing into the [Younger Futhark](#) script. Close to 6,000 Younger Futhark inscriptions are known, many of them on [runestones](#).

Number of known inscriptions

The following table lists the number of known inscriptions (in any alphabet variant) by geographical region:^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Area	Number of runic inscriptions
Sweden	3,432
Norway	1,552
Denmark	844
Scandinavian total	5,826
Continental Europe except Scandinavia and Frisia	80
Frisia	20
The British Isles except Ireland	> 200

Greenland	> 100
Iceland	< 100
Ireland	16
Faroes	9
Non-Scandinavian total	> 500
Total	> 6,400

Estimates of total number of inscriptions produced

Elder Futhark inscriptions were rare, with very few active literati, in relation to the total population, at any time, so that knowledge of the runes was probably an actual "secret" throughout the Migration period. Of 366 lances excavated at [Illerup](#), only 2 bore inscriptions. A similar ratio is estimated for Alemannia, with an estimated 170 excavated graves to every inscription found (Lüthi 2004:323) Estimates of the total number of inscriptions produced are based on the "minimal runological estimate" of 40,000 (ten individuals making ten inscriptions per year for four centuries). The actual number was probably considerably higher, maybe close to 400,000 in total, so that of the order of 0.1% of the corpus has come down to us), and Fischer (2004:281) estimates a population of several hundred active literati throughout the period, with as many as 1,600 during the Alamannic "runic boom" of the 6th century.

Types of inscribed objects

Especially the earliest inscriptions are found on all types of everyday objects. Later, a preference for valuable or prestigious objects (jewelry or weapons) seems to develop, inscriptions often indicating ownership.

- jewelry
 - [bracteates](#): some 133 Elder Futhark inscriptions, popular during the Scandinavian [Germanic Iron Age](#) / [Vendel era](#)
 - [fibulae](#): some 50 Elder Futhark inscriptions, popular in 6th to 7th century
- [Alemannia](#)
 - brooches: Boarley (Kent), Harford (Norfolk) brooch, West Heslerton (North Yorkshire), Wakerley (Northamptonshire), Dover (Kent)
 - belt parts (plaques, buckles, strap.ends): Vimose buckle, [Pforzen buckle](#), Heilbronn-Böckingen, Szabadbattyan

- rings: six known [Anglo-Saxon runic rings](#), a few examples from Alemannia (Vörstetten-Schupfholz, Pforzen, Aalen neck-ring)
- amber: Weingarten amber-pearl
- Weapon parts
- [seaxes](#): [Thames scramasax](#), Steindorf, Hailfingen
- [spearheads](#): Vimose, Kovel, Dahmsdorf-Müncheberg, Wurmlingen
- [swords](#) and sword-sheaths Vimose chape, Vimose sheathplate, [Thorsberg chape](#), Schretzheim ring-sword, Ash Gilton (Kent) gilt silver sword pommel, Chessel Down II (Isle of Wight) silver plate (attached to the scabbard mouthpiece of a ring-sword), [Sæbø sword](#)
- coins: Skanomody solidus, Harlingen solidus, Schweindorf solidus, Folkestone tremissis, Midlum sceat, Kent II coins (some 30 items), Kent III, IV silver sceattas, Suffolk gold shillings (three items), Upper Thames Valley gold coins (four items)
- boxes or containers: [Franks Casket](#), Schretzheim capsule, Gammertingen case, Ferwerd combcase, Kantens combcase
- [runestones](#): from about AD 400, very popular for [Viking Age Younger Futhark](#) inscriptions
- bone: [Caistor-by-Norwich astragalus](#), Rasquert swordhandle (whalebone handle of a symbolic sword), Hantum whalebone plate, Bernsterburen whalebone staff, Hamwick horse knucklebone, Wijnaldum A antler piece
- pieces of wood: Vimose woodplane, Neudingen/Baar, Arum sword (a yew-wood miniature sword), [Westeremden yew-stick](#)
- cremation urns: Loveden Hill (Lincolnshire), Spong Hill (Norfolk)
- the [Kleines Schulerloch inscription](#) is a singular example of an inscription on a cave wall

Early period (2nd to 4th centuries) *Further information:* [Alu \(runic\)](#) and [Erlaz](#)

The earliest period of Elder Futhark (2nd to 4th centuries) predates the division in regional script variants, and linguistically essentially still reflect the [Common Germanic](#) stage. Their distribution is mostly limited to southern Scandinavia, northern Germany and Frisia (the "North Sea Germanic runic *Koine*"), with stray finds associated with the [Goths](#) from [Romania](#) and [Ukraine](#). Linguistically, the 3rd and 4th centuries correspond to the formation of [Proto-Norse](#), just predating the separation of [West Germanic](#) into [Anglo-Frisian](#), [Low German](#) and [High German](#).

- [Vimose inscriptions](#)

- [Ovre Stabu spearhead](#)
- [Thorsberg chape](#)
- Mos spearhead
- Nydam axe-handle (4th century):
- [Caistor-by-Norwich astragalus](#)
- [Illerup inscriptions](#)

Scandinavian

Further information: [Sveriges runinskrifter](#), [bracteate](#), and [Runestone](#)

About 260 items in Elder Futhark, and close to 6,000 items (mostly runestones) in Younger Futhark. The highest concentration of Elder Futhark inscriptions is in Denmark.

An important [Proto-Norse](#) inscription was on one of the [Golden horns of Gallehus](#) (early 5th century).

A total of 133 known inscriptions on bracteates.

The oldest known [runestones](#) date to the early 5th century ([Einang stone](#), [Kylver Stone](#)). The longest known inscription in the Elder Futhark, and one of the youngest, consists of some 200 characters and is found on the early 8th-century [Eggjum stone](#), and may even contain a stanza of [Old Norse poetry](#).

The transition to [Younger Futhark](#) begins from the 6th century, with transitional examples like the [Björketorp](#) or [Stentofte](#) stones. In the early 9th century, both the older and the younger futhark were known and used, which is shown on the [Rök Runestone](#). By the 10th century, only Younger Futhark remained in use.

Anglo-Frisian

Main article: [Futhorc#Inscriptions](#)

Some 100 items spanning the 5th to 11th centuries. The 5th-century [Undley bracteate](#) is considered the earliest known Anglo-Frisian inscription.

The 8th-century [Franks Casket](#), preserved during the Middle Ages in [Brioude](#), central France, exhibits the longest coherent inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon runes by far, including five alliterating long-lines, qualifying as the oldest preserved Anglo-Saxon poetry.

While the Nordic bracteates are jewelry imitating Roman gold coins, there were a number of actual coins (currency) in Anglo-Saxon England inscribed with runes, notably the coins from Kent, inscribed with *pada*, *æpa* and *epa* (early 7th century).

There are a number of Christian inscriptions from the time of [Christianization](#). [St. Cuthbert's coffin](#), dated to 698, even has a runic [monogram of Christ](#), and the Whitby II bone comb (7th century) has a pious plea for God's help, *deus meus, god aluwaldo, helpæ Cy...* "my God, almighty God, help Cy...". The [Ruthwell Cross](#) inscription could also be mentioned, but its authenticity is dubious.

Unlike the situation on the continent, the tradition of runic writing does not disappear in England after English alphabet

The modern **English alphabet** is a [Latin alphabet](#) consisting of 26 letters – the same letters that are found in the [ISO basic Latin alphabet](#):

[Majuscule forms](#) (also called **uppercase** or **capital letters**)

[Minuscule forms](#) (also called **lowercase** or **small letters**)

The exact shape of printed letters varies depending on the [typeface](#). The shape of [handwritten](#) letters can differ significantly from the standard printed form (and between individuals), especially when written in [cursive](#) style. See the individual letter articles for information about letter shapes and origins (follow the links on any of the uppercase letters above).

Written English uses a number of [digraphs](#), such as *ch*, *sh*, *th*, *wh*, *qu*, etc., but they are not considered separate letters of the alphabet. Some traditions also use two [ligatures](#), *æ* and *œ*,^[1] or consider the [ampersand](#) (&) part of the alphabet.

Old English

Main article: [Old English Latin alphabet](#)

The [English language](#) was first written in the [Anglo-Saxon futhorc](#) runic alphabet, in use from the 5th century. This alphabet was brought to what is now England, along with the proto-form of the language itself, by [Anglo-Saxon](#) settlers. Very few examples of this form of written Old English have survived, these being mostly short inscriptions or fragments

The [Latin script](#), introduced by Christian missionaries, began to replace the Anglo-Saxon futhorc from about the 7th century, although the two continued in parallel for some time. Futhorc influenced the emerging English alphabet by providing it with the letters [thorn](#) (ƿ þ) and [wynn](#) (ƿ p). The letter [eth](#) (Ð ð) was later devised as a modification of [dee](#) (D d), and finally [yogh](#) (ȝ ȝ) was created by Norman scribes from the [insular g](#) in Old English and [Irish](#), and used alongside their [Carolingian g](#).

The a-e [ligature ash](#) (Æ æ) was adopted as a letter its own right, named after a futhorc rune [æsc](#). In very early Old English the o-e ligature [ethel](#) (Ʒ Ʒ) also appeared as a distinct letter, likewise named after a rune, [æðel](#). Additionally, the v-v or u-u ligature [double-u](#) (W w) was in use.

In the year 1011, a writer named [Byrhtferð](#) ordered the Old English alphabet for numerological purposes.^[2] He listed the 24 letters of the Latin alphabet (including [ampersand](#)) first, then 5 additional English letters, starting with the [Tironian note](#) *ond* (Ꝁ) an insular symbol for *and*:

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z & Ꝁ ꝑ ꝑ Ð Æ

Modern English

In the [orthography](#) of [Modern English](#), [thorn](#) (þ), [eth](#) (ð), [wynn](#) (ƿ), [yogh](#) (ȝ), [ash](#) (æ), and [ethel](#) (Ʒ) are obsolete. [Latin](#) borrowings reintroduced homographs of ash and ethel into [Middle English](#) and [Early Modern English](#), though they are not considered to be the same letters^[citation needed] but rather [ligatures](#), and in any case are somewhat old-fashioned. Thorn and eth were both replaced by [th](#), though thorn continued in existence for some time, its lowercase form gradually becoming graphically indistinguishable from the [minuscule y](#) in most handwriting. *Y* for *th* can still be seen in pseudo-archaisms such as "Ye Olde Booke Shoppe". The letters þ and ð are still used in present-day [Icelandic](#) and [Faroese](#). Wynn disappeared from English around the 14th century when it was supplanted by *uu*, which ultimately developed into the modern *w*. Yogh disappeared around the 15th century and was typically replaced by *gh*.

The letters u and j, as distinct from y and i, were introduced in the 16th century, and *w* assumed the status of an independent letter, so that the English alphabet is now considered to consist of the following 26 letters:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

The variant lowercase form long s (*ſ*) lasted into early modern English, and was used in non-final position up to the early 19th century.

The ligatures æ and œ were until the 19th century (slightly later in USA) used in formal writing for certain words of Greek or Latin origin, such as encyclopædia and cœlom, although such ligatures were not used in either classical Latin or ancient Greek. These are now rendered as "ae" and "oe" in all types of writing, although in American English, a lone *e* has mostly supplanted both (for example, *encyclopedia* for *encyclopaedia*, and *fetus* for *foetus*).

Diacritics

Main article: [English terms with diacritical marks](#)

Diacritic marks mainly appear in loanwords such as *naïve* and *façade*. As such words become naturalised in English, there is a tendency to drop the diacritics, as has happened with old borrowings such as *hôtel*, from French. Informal English writing tends to omit diacritics because of their absence from the keyboard, while professional copywriters and typesetters tend to include them. Words that are still perceived as foreign tend to retain them; for example, the only spelling of *souçon* found in English dictionaries (the OED and others) uses the diacritic. Diacritics are also more likely to be retained where there would otherwise be confusion with another word (for example, *résumé* rather than *resume*), and, rarely, even added (as in *maté*, from Spanish *yerba mate*, but following the pattern of *café*, from French).

Occasionally, especially in older writing, diacritics are used to indicate the syllables of a word: *cursed* (verb) is pronounced with one syllable, while *cursèd* (adjective) is pronounced with two. *È* is used widely in poetry, e.g. in Shakespeare's sonnets. Similarly, while in *chicken coop* the letters *-oo-* represent a single vowel sound (a digraph), in obsolete spellings such as *zoölogist* and *coöperation*, they represent two. An acute, grave or diaeresis may also be placed over an 'e' at the end of a word to indicate that it is not silent, as in *saké*. However, these devices are often not used even where they would serve to alleviate some degree of confusion.

Ampersand

The [&](#) has sometimes appeared at the end of the English alphabet, as in Byrhtferð's list of letters in 1011. Historically, the figure is a [ligature](#) for the letters *Et*. In English and many other languages it is used to represent the word *and* and occasionally the Latin word *et*, as in the abbreviation *&c* (et cetera). In 2013, Australian restaurateur Paul Mathis proposed the symbol ᠞ , similar in appearance to the [Cyrillic character Tshe](#), as a letter in the alphabet to replace the word *The*, primarily as a means to save character space when sending messages on phones or on Twitter

Apostrophe

The [apostrophe](#), while not considered part of the English alphabet, is used to abbreviate English words. A few pairs of words, such as *its* (belonging to *it*) and *it's* (*it is* or *it has*), *were* (plural of *was*) and *we're* (we are), and *shed* (to get rid of) and *she'd* (*she would* or *she had*) are distinguished in writing only by the presence or absence of an apostrophe. The apostrophe also distinguishes the [possessive](#) endings *'s* and *'s'* from the common [plural](#) ending *-s*, a practice introduced in the 18th century; before, all three endings were written *-s*, which could lead to confusion (as in, *the Apostles words*).

Letter names

The names of the letters are rarely spelled out, except when used in derivations or compound words (for example *tee-shirt*, *deejay*, *emcee*, *okay*, *aitchless*, *wye-level*, etc.), derived forms (for example *exed out*, *effing*, *to eff and blind*, etc.), and in the names of objects named after letters (for example *em* (*space*) in printing and *wye* (*junction*) in railroading). The forms listed below are from the [Oxford English Dictionary](#). Vowels stand for themselves, and consonants usually have the form *consonant + ee* or *e + consonant* (e.g. *bee* and *ef*). The exceptions are the letters *aitch*, *jay*, *kay*, *cue*, *ar*, *ess* (but *es-* in compounds), *wye*, and *zed*. Plurals of consonants end in *-s* (*bees*, *efs*, *ems*) or, in the cases of *aitch*, *ess*, and *ex*, in *-es* (*aitches*, *esses*, *exes*). Plurals of vowels end in *-es* (*aes*, *ees*, *ies*, *oes*, *ues*); these are rare. Of course, all letters may stand for themselves, generally in capitalized form (*okay* or *OK*, *emcee* or *MC*), and plurals may be based on these (*aes* or *As*, *cees* or *Cs*, etc.)

Letter	Pronu
--------	-----------------------

etter	name	<u>nciation</u>
	<i>a</i>	/'eɪ/ ^[4]
	<i>bee</i>	/'bi:/
	<i>cee</i>	/'si:/
	<i>dee</i>	/'di:/
	<i>e</i>	/'i:/
a verb)	<i>ef</i> (<i>eff</i> as	/'ɛf/
	<i>gee</i>	/'dʒi:/
	<i>aitch</i>	/'eɪtʃ/
	<i>haitch</i> ^[5]	/'heɪtʃ/
	<i>i</i>	/'aɪ/
	<i>jay</i>	/'dʒeɪ/
	<i>jy</i> ^[6]	/'dʒaɪ/
	<i>kay</i>	/'keɪ/
	<i>el</i> or <i>ell</i>	/'ɛl/
	<i>em</i>	/'ɛm/
	<i>en</i>	/'ɛn/
	<i>o</i>	/'oʊ/
	<i>pee</i>	/'pi:/

	<i>cue</i> ^[7]	/'kju:/
	<i>ar</i>	/'ɑr/ ^[8]
) ^[9]	<i>ess</i> (<i>es-</i>)	/'ɛs/
	<i>tee</i>	/'ti:/
	<i>u</i>	/'ju:/
	<i>vee</i>	/'vi:/
	<i>double-</i>	/'dʌbəl.
<i>u</i>	<i>ju:</i> ^[10]	
	<i>ex</i>	/'ɛks/
	<i>wy</i> or	/'wai/
<i>wye</i>		
	<i>zed</i> ^[11]	/'zɛd/
	<i>zee</i> ^[12]	/'zi:/
	<i>izzard</i> ^[13]	/'ɪzərd/
1		

Some groups of letters, such as *pee* and *bee*, or *em* and *en*, are easily confused in speech, especially when heard over the telephone or a radio communications link. [Spelling alphabets](#) such as the [ICAO spelling alphabet](#), used by [aircraft](#) pilots, police and others, are designed to eliminate this potential confusion by giving each letter a name that sounds quite different from any other.

Etymology

The names of the letters are for the most part direct descendents, via French, of the Latin (and Etruscan) names.

Letter	Latin	Old French	Middle English	Modern English
	<i>é</i>			
	/a:/ a:/ a:/ eɪ/	be:/ be:/ bi:/		
	/be:/			
<u>C</u>	<i>cé</i>	/tʃe:/	/se:/	/si:/
	> /tse:/ >	/		
	/ke:/	/se:/		
<u>D</u>	<i>dé</i>	/de:/	/de:/	/di:/
	/de:/	/		
<u>E</u>	<i>é</i> /e:/	/e:/	/e:/	/i:/
<u>F</u>	<i>ef</i> /ɛf/	/ɛf/	/ɛf/	/ɛf/
<u>G</u>	<i>gé</i>	/dʒe:/	/dʒ	/dʒi:/
	/ge:/	e:/		
<u>H</u>	<i>há</i>		/a:t	/eɪtʃ/
	/ha:/ > /aha/	/a:tʃ/	/ʃ/	
	> /ak:a/			
<u>I</u>	<i>í</i> /i:/	/i:/	/i:/	/aɪ/
<u>J</u>	–	–	–	/dʒeɪ/
<u>K</u>	<i>ká</i>	/ka:/	/ka:/	/keɪ/
	/ka:/	/		
<u>L</u>	<i>el</i> /ɛl/	/ɛl/	/ɛl/	/ɛl/
<u>M</u>	<i>em</i>	/ɛm/	/ɛm	/ɛm/
	/ɛm/	/		
<u>N</u>	<i>en</i>	/ɛn/	/ɛn/	/ɛn/
	/ɛn/			
<u>O</u>	<i>ó</i> /o:/	/o:/	/o:/	/oo/
<u>P</u>	<i>pé</i>	/pe:/	/pe:/	/pi:/
	/pe:/	/		
<u>Q</u>	<i>quí</i>	/ky:/	/ki	/kju:/

	/ku:/		w/	
<u>R</u>	<i>er</i> /ɛr/	/ɛr/	> /ar/	/ar/
<u>S</u>	<i>es</i> /ɛs/	/ɛs/		/ɛs/
<u>T</u>	<i>té</i>	/te:/	/	/ti:/
	/te:/			
<u>U</u>	<i>ú</i> /u:/	/y:/	/iw	/ju:/
		/		
<u>V</u>	–	–	–	/vi:/
<u>W</u>	–	–	–	/'dʌb əl.ju:/
<u>X</u>	<i>ex</i>	/iks/	/ɛk	/ɛks/
	/ɛks, iks/	s/		
	<i>hý</i>	<i>ui,</i>		
<u>Y</u>	/hy:, i:/	<i>gui</i> ?	/wi	/wai/
	<i>i graeca</i> /i:	<i>i grec</i> /i:	:/ ?	
	'graika/	grɛ:k/		
		<i>zed</i>		
<u>Z</u>	<i>zéta</i>	/zɛ:d/	/zɛ	/zɛd,
	/ze:ta/	<i>et zed</i> /et	d/	zi:/
		ze:d/ > /e	/ɛ'zɛd/	/'ɪzəd/
		<i>zed</i> /		

The regular phonological developments (in rough chronological order) are:

- palatalization before front vowels of Latin /k/ successively to /tʃ/, /ts/, and finally to Middle French /s/. Affects C.
- palatalization before front vowels of Latin /g/ to Proto-Romance and Middle French /dʒ/. Affects G.
- fronting of Latin /u:/ to Middle French /y:/, becoming Middle English /iw/ and then Modern English /ju:/. Affects Q, U.
- the inconsistent lowering of Middle English /ɛr/ to /ar/. Affects R.

- the [Great Vowel Shift](#), shifting all Middle English long vowels. Affects A, B, C, D, E, G, H, I, K, O, P, T, and presumably Y.

The novel forms are *aitch*, a regular development of Medieval Latin *acca*; *jay*, a new letter presumably vocalized like neighboring *kay* to avoid confusion with established *gee* (the other name, *gy*, was taken from French); *vee*, a new letter named by analogy with the majority; *double-u*, a new letter, self-explanatory (the name of Latin V was *ū*); *wye*, of obscure origin but with an antecedent in Old French *wi*; *zee*, an American leveling of *zed* by analogy with the majority; and *izzard*, from the Romance phrase *i zed* or *i zeto* "and Z" said when reciting the alphabet.

Phonology

The letters A, E, I, O, and U are considered vowel letters, since (except when silent) they represent [vowels](#); the remaining letters are considered consonant letters, since when not silent they generally represent [consonants](#). However, Y commonly represents vowels as well as a consonant (e.g., "myth"), as very rarely does W (e.g., "cwm"). Conversely, U sometimes represents a consonant (e.g., "quiz").

Letter frequencies

Main article: [Letter frequency](#)

The letter most frequently used in English is E. The least frequently used letter is Z.

The list below shows the frequency of letter use in a particular sample of English, although the frequencies vary somewhat according to the type of text

Letter	Frequency
A	8.17%
B	1.49%
C	2.78%
D	4.25%
E	12.70%
F	2.23%
G	2.02%

Letter	Frequency
H	6.09%
I	6.97%
J	0.15%
K	0.77%
L	4.03%
M	2.41%
N	6.75%
O	7.51%
P	1.93%
Q	0.10%
R	5.99%
S	6.33%
T	9.06%
U	2.76%
V	0.98%
W	2.36%
X	0.15%
Y	1.97%
Z	0.07%

Christianization but continues for a full three centuries, disappearing after the [Norman conquest](#). A type of object unique to Christianized Anglo-Saxon England are the six known [Anglo-Saxon runic rings](#) of the 9th to 10th centuries

Further information: [Elder Futhark#Continental inscriptions](#)

Apart from the earliest inscriptions found on the continent along the North Sea coast (the "North Germanic *Koine*", Martin 2004:173), continental inscriptions can be divided in those of the "Alemannic runic province" (Martin 2004), with a few dozen examples dating to the 6th and 7th centuries, and those associated with the [Goths](#), loosely scattered along the Oder to south-eastern Poland, as far as the [Carpathian Mountains](#) (e.g. the [ring of Pietroassa](#) in Romania),

dating to the 4th and 5th centuries. The cessation of both the Gothic and Alemannic runic tradition coincides with the Christianization of the respective peoples.

Lüthi (2004:321) identifies a total of about 81 continental inscriptions found south of the "North Germanic Koine". Most of these originate in southern Germany ([Baden-Württemberg](#) and [Bavaria](#)), with a single one found south of the [Rhine](#) ([Bülach fibula](#), found in [Bülach, Switzerland](#)), and a handful from Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, Ukraine).

A silver-plated copper disk, originally part of a sword-belt, found at [Liebenau, Lower Saxony](#) with an early 5th-century runic inscription (mostly illegible, interpreted as possibly reading *rauzwih*) is classed as the earliest South Germanic (German) inscription known by the [RGA](#) (vol. 6, p. 576); the location of Liebenau is close to the boundary of the North Sea and South Germanic zones.

[Siglas Poveiras](#) in [Povoa de Varzim, Portugal](#) are also a type of writing based on the Viking runes. The siglas were first studied by António de Santos Graça in his book *Epopeia dos Humildes* ("The Odyssey of the Humble"). Published in 1952, the book contains hundreds of siglas and the history and maritime tragedy of Póvoa. Other works of his are "O Poveiro" (The Poveiro, 1932), "A Crença do Poveiro nas Almas Penadas" (Poveiro Beliefs Regarding Dead Souls, 1933) e "Inscrições Tumulares por Siglas" (Tomb Inscriptions Using Siglas, 1942).

After a visit to the National Museet in Copenhagen, Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, by accident, found objects marked with "home-marks" from Funen in Denmark. Moreover, the complex hereditary mark system of Póvoa de Varzim was also found in Funen.

Out of about a dozen candidate inscriptions, only three are widely accepted to be of Gothic origin: the [gold ring of Pietroassa](#), bearing a votive inscription, part of a larger treasure found in the [Romanian Carpathians](#), and two spearheads inscribed with what is probably the weapon's name, one found in the [Ukrainian Carpathians](#), and the other in eastern Germany, near the [Oder](#).

Chapter 2

1. Writings in West-Saxon.

West Saxon was one of four distinct dialects of [Old English](#). The three others were [Kentish](#), [Mercian](#) and [Northumbrian](#) (the latter two known as the [Anglian dialects](#)).

There were two stages of the West Saxon [dialect](#): **Early West Saxon** and **Late West Saxon**.

Early West Saxon was the language of [King Alfred](#) (849–899). By the eleventh century, the language had evolved into Late West Saxon.

Late West Saxon was the dialect that became the first "standardised" written English ("Winchester standard"). This dialect was spoken mostly in the south and west of England around the important [monastery](#) at [Winchester](#), which was also the capital city of the English kings. However, while other Old English dialects were still spoken in other parts of the country, it seems that all scribes wrote and copied manuscripts in this prestigious written form. Well-known [poems](#) recorded in this language include [Beowulf](#) and [Judith](#). However, both these poems appear to have been written originally in other Old English dialects, but they were later "translated" into the standard Late West Saxon literary language when they were copied by scribes.

In the [Wessex Gospels](#) from around 990, the text of [Matthew 6:9–13](#), the [Lord's Prayer](#), is as follows:

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum,
si þin nama gehalgot.
To becume þin rice,
gewurþe ðin willa,
on eorðan swa swa on heofonum.
Urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg,
and forgyf us ure gyltas,
swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum.
And ne gelæd þu us on costnunge,
ac alys us of yfele.
Soþlice.

The "Winchester standard" gradually fell out of use after the [Norman Conquest](#) in 1066. Monasteries did not keep the standard going because English [bishops](#) were soon replaced by [Norman](#) bishops who brought their own [Latin](#) textbooks and scribal conventions, and there was less need to copy or write in Old English. Latin soon became the "language for all serious writing", with [Anglo-Norman](#) as the language of the aristocracy, and any standard written English became a distant memory by the mid-twelfth century as the last scribes trained as boys before the conquest in West Saxon, died as old men.

Low Late West Saxon is the distant ancestor of the [West Country dialects](#).

THE WEST SAXON

Wessex

West Saxon (in West Saxon "Wessexisc") is the name of the West Germanic language that is the national language of the Kingdom of Wessex (in West Saxon "Deo Wessexne Rice," literally meaning "The Realm of the West Saxons" or more commonly, just "Do Wessexen," meaning "The West Saxons"). The country found in the South-West portion of Britain, stretching from just east of the Isle of Wight, up north to the Thames (which forms much of Wessex's northern border with England). Wessex stretches west until it runs into the Bristol Channel, just south of the mouth of the River Severn, and continues down the length of the Cornish Peninsula.

West Saxon is the native language of about eight million people, most of whom are native born West Saxons. This makes West Saxon the second mostly widely spoken language in

the British Isles, after English. West Saxon also has a literary tradition which dates ultimately back to the very end of the Anglo-Saxon Period (450-900 AD), with the writings of King Alfred. This literary tradition continues through to today, with the writings of such authors as Rhopger Mylnre and Elfwin Kyng.

The Classification and Development of West Saxon

West Saxon is the only representative of the Saxon Branch of the Insular Ingvaemonic Branch of the West Germanic language family. Its closest relatives are English and Scots (which make up the Anglic branch of Insular Ingvaemonic), more distant relatives include members of Continental Ingvaemonic, most notably the Frisian dialects, and further still, the other West Germanic languages, such as Dutch, Low German, and High German.

The Anglo-Saxon Period (450-900)

The Anglo-Saxon period refers to the period stretching from the arrival of Ingvaemonic Germanic speakers to the British isles in the mid fifth century to the beginning of the the Norse invasions and the establishment of the Danelaw. The early part of this period is largely preliterate, until the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh and eighth centuries. During this period, the differences between the Anglic and Saxon branches were only dialectical. This situation is broken by the Norse and Norman invasions, beginning in the ninth century.

Old West Saxon (900-1250)

With the settlement of Scandinavians on the British Isles beginning in the mid ninth century, a Scandinavian influence began to be felt on the Anglic dialects of Anglo-Saxon, which was not felt in the more southerly Saxon speaking areas. Though the West Saxons would rule Anglic speaking areas as late as 1066, the language spoken in the Anglic areas was sufficiently different by about 900 to make it possible to speak of distinct Old English (ancestor of Modern English and Scots) and Old West Saxon languages.

Old West Saxon (OWS) was characterized by extensive literary output, beginning with the writings and translations of King Alfred at the very beginning of the Old West Saxon period, continuing through the writings of Ælfric of Eynsham in the late tenth century and ending with the establishment of the "Winchester Standard" by King Peter in 1261, a remarkably early attempt to establish a standardized language.

Grammatically, Old West Saxon had a much more intricate inflectional morphology than either Middle or Modern West Saxon, and was characterized by several different strong nominal declensions and full inflectional endings, which had reduced to schwa by the beginning of the Middle West Saxon period. Later Old West Saxon also saw the beginnings of the verbal periphrastic constructions that would characterize later West Saxon. The end of the Old West Saxon period saw the influx of a large number of Welsh loanwords, primarily related to military matters (especially archery), due to the close ties that Wessex and Wales shared during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Middle West Saxon (1250-1650)

The Middle West Saxon (MiWS) period is traditionally defined as the period of the Winchester Standard, which was in force from 1261 until 1664, when England's Charles II conquers Wessex.

Grammatically, Middle West Saxon was a closer to Modern West Saxon than to Old West Saxon, and (given an overview of Middle West Saxon orthography) most modern speakers of West Saxon would be able to read Middle West Saxon with only some difficulty.

Late in the Middle West Saxon period, a number of French, Latin, and loans began to enter West Saxon with the advent of the Renaissance. However, this was not as pronounced as in English, as West Saxon writers more typically calqued new terminology than borrowing it directly. With the coming of the Reformation, a number of German words began to enter West Saxon, especially relating to theology.

Modern West Saxon (1650-Present)

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Modern West Saxon (ModWS) has proven fairly stable, both phonetically and, to a lesser extent grammatically. The main evolutionary trends have been the development of inflected prepositions early in the Modern period, the development the demonstrative pronouns as default inanimate pronouns, the beginnings of the expansion of the e/a plural form in strong nouns, and the beginnings of a what may be a collapse of the masculine and neuter into a single masculine ge Old English Latin alphabet

2. Old English Latin alphabet

The **Old English Latin alphabet**—though it had no standard **orthography**—generally consisted of 24 letters, and was used for writing **Old English** from the 9th to the 12th centuries. Of these letters, 20 were directly adopted from the **Latin alphabet**, two were modified Latin letters (**Æ**, **Ð**), and two developed from the **runic alphabet** (**ƿ**, **ƿ**). The letters **K**, **Q** and **Z** were not in the spelling of native English words.

Majuscule forms (also called uppercase or capital letters)																													

script. This was used until the end of the 12th century when continental [Carolingian minuscule](#) (also known as *Caroline*) replaced the insular.

The letter [ðæt](#) ⟨ð⟩ (called *eth* or *edh* in modern English) was an alteration of Latin ⟨d⟩, and the runic letters [thorn](#) ⟨þ⟩ and [wynn](#) ⟨ƿ⟩ are borrowings from futhorc. Also used was a symbol for the [conjunction](#) *and*, a character similar to the number seven (⟨☐⟩), called a [Tironian note](#), and a symbol for the [relative pronoun](#) *þæt*, a thorn with a crossbar through the ascender (⟨☐⟩). [Macrons](#) ⟨¯⟩ over vowels were rarely used to indicate long vowels. Also used occasionally were abbreviations for following *m*'s or *n*'s.

A number of changes are traditionally made in published modern editions of the original Old English manuscripts. Some of these conventions include the introduction of punctuation and the substitutions of symbols. The symbols ⟨e⟩, ⟨f⟩, ⟨g⟩, ⟨r⟩, ⟨s⟩ are used in modern editions, although their shapes in the insular script are considerably different. The [long s](#) ⟨ſ⟩ is substituted by its modern counterpart ⟨s⟩. [Insular](#) ⟨ȝ⟩ is usually substituted with its modern counterpart ⟨g⟩ (which is ultimately a Carolingian symbol). The /w/ phoneme was occasionally spelled ⟨uu⟩ in Old English manuscripts, but [p](#) was more common. The consistent use of [w](#) developed in the early Middle English period, during the 12th to 13th centuries.

Additionally, modern manuscripts often distinguish between a [velar](#) and [palatal](#) ⟨c⟩ and ⟨g⟩ with diacritic dots above the putative palatals: ⟨ċ⟩, ⟨ġ⟩. The *wynn* symbol ⟨ƿ⟩ is usually substituted with ⟨w⟩. [Macrons](#) ⟨¯⟩ are usually found in modern editions to indicate putative long vowels, while they are usually lacking in the originals. In older printed editions of Old English works, an [acute accent](#) mark was used to maintain cohesion between Old English and [Old Norse](#) printing.

See also

The Origin of the English Alphabet

Often considered one of the more difficult languages to master thanks to the incredible amount of inconsistencies in the language, it should come as no surprise that the development of the modern English alphabet involved several languages, hundreds of years and a variety of conquerors, missionaries and scholars.

Origins of Alphabetic Writing

Dating back nearly four thousand years, early alphabetic writing, as opposed to other early forms of writing like [cuneiform](#) (which employed the use of different wedge shapes) or [hieroglyphics](#) (which primarily used pictographic symbols), relied on simple lines to represent

spoken sounds. Scholars attribute its origin to a little known **Proto-Sinatic**, Semitic form of writing developed in Egypt between 1800 and 1900 BC.

Building on this ancient foundation, the first widely used alphabet was developed by the Phoenicians about seven hundred years later. Consisting of 22 letters, all consonants, this Semitic language became used throughout the Mediterranean, including in the **Levant**, the **Iberian peninsula**, North Africa and southern Europe.

The **Greeks** built on the Phoenician alphabet by adding vowels sometime around 750 BC. Considered the first true alphabet, it was later appropriated by the **Latins** (later to become the Romans) who combined it with notable Etruscan characters including the letters “F” and “S”. Although ancient Latin omitted G, J, V (or U)*, W, Y and Z, by about the third century, the **Roman alphabet** looked very similar to our modern English, containing every letter except J, U (or V)* and W.

[*V and U have a complicated shared history. Both were used throughout the Middle Ages, although they were considered a single letter until quite recently.]

Old English

The history of writing in Britain begins with the Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century AD. With ties to Scandinavia and other North Seas cultures, ancient Anglo-Saxon writing, called **futhorc**, was a runic language. Flexible, new runes were routinely added such that, although it first appeared in England with 26 characters, by the time of its demise (by the 11th century AD), it had 33.

In the seventh century AD, the Latin alphabet introduced by Christian missionaries had begun to take hold. By 1011, a formal list of the Old English alphabet was made and included all of our present letters except J, U (or V)* and W. The ampersand and five uniquely English letters, designated *ond*, *wynn*, *thorn*, *eth* and *dash*, were included.

As far from Modern English as **Public Enemy**, Old English continues to be taught in high schools and colleges when our young people are forced to grapple with things like ***Beowulf*** (translated):

HWÆT, WE GAR-DEna in geardagum, þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon, hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon! oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum, monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah, egsode eorlas, syððanærest wearð feascraft funden; he þæs frofre gebad, weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah, oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra ofer hronrade hyran scolde, gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning! Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned geong in geardum, þone God sende folce to frofre; fyrenðearfe ongeat, þe hie ær drugon aldrlease lange hwile; him þæs Liffrea, wuldres Wealdend woroldare forgeaf, Beowulf wæs breme — blæd wide

sprang— *Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in. Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean, fromum feohgiftumon fæder bearme . . .*

Middle English

Shortly after the Old English alphabet was first set down, the Normans invaded (1066 AD). English as a language was relegated primarily to the low born, with the nobility, clergy and scholars speaking and/or writing in Norman or Latin.

By the 13th century when writing in English began to become more prominent again, the language reflected two centuries of Norman rule. The Old English letters *thorn* and *eth* were replaced by “th”; *wynn* eventually became u-u or “w”; and the other English letters were discarded.

This form of the language, called Middle English, while still difficult at times, is comprehensible to the modern English reader. Recall Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath* from *Canterbury Tales* (translated):

*Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, were right ynogh to me
To speke of wo that is in marriage;
For, lordynges, sith I twelf yeer was of age
Thonked be God, that is eterne on lyve,
Housebondes at chirche-dore I have had five-
For I so ofte have ywedded bee-
And alle were worthy men in hir degree.
But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is,
That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis
To weddyng in the Cane of Galilee,
That by the same ensample, taughte he me,
That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.
Herkne eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,*

Modern English

With the introduction of the printing press (invented by **Johann Gutenberg** in 1448) to Great Britain in the mid 15th century by William Caxton, English became more standardized and modern English appeared. Sometime in the mid-16th century, V and U were split into two letters, with U becoming the vowel, and V, the consonant. In 1604, Robert Cawdrey published the first English dictionary, the *Table Alphabeticall*, and about this time, **J was added** to create the modern English alphabet we know today. And the rest, as they say, is history.

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Old English / Anglo-Saxon

Old English was the West Germanic language spoken in the area now known as England between the 5th and 11th centuries. Speakers of Old English called their language *Englisc*, themselves *Angle*, *Angelcynn* or *Angelfolc* and their home *Angelcynn* or *Englaland*.

Old English began to appear in writing during the early 8th century. Most texts were written in West Saxon, one of the four main dialects. The other dialects were Mercian, Northumbrian and Kentish.

The Anglo-Saxons adopted the styles of script used by Irish missionaries, such as Insular half-uncial, which was used for books in Latin. A less formal version of minuscule was used for to write both Latin and Old English. From the 10th century Anglo-Saxon scribes began to use Caroline Minuscule for Latin while continuing to write Old English in Insular minuscule. Thereafter Old English script was increasingly influenced by Caroline Minuscule even though it retained a number of distinctive Insular letter-forms.

Anglo-Saxon runes (futhorc/futhorc)

Old English / Anglo-Saxon was first written with a version of the Runic alphabet known as Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Frisian runes, or futhorc/futhorc. This alphabet was an extended version of [Elder Futhark](#) with between 26 and 33 letters. Anglo-Saxon runes were used probably from the 5th century AD until about the 10th century. They started to be replaced by the Latin alphabet from the 7th century, and after the 9th century the runes were used mainly in manuscripts and were mainly of interest to antiquarians. Their use ceased not long after the Norman conquest.

Conclusion

Let us now pose several questions about its development and try to find the most convincing answers, attempting to be free from such prejudices and preconceived opinions as were the fashion in the early 19th century.

Briefly, these preconceived opinions may be summarized under two main headings: theories of “decline”, and theories of “progress”.

Theories of decline were common in the early 19th century, among romantic language philosophers, who dreamt of an ideal past in the history of mankind, of a “paradise lost”, from which mankind, as they supposed, had gradually slipped down to its 19th century undignified state. Seen from this angle, the history of the grammatical system of Indo-European languages appeared as a steady decline from a well-developed morphological system, as represented by Sanscrit and Ancient Greek, with its well-developed system of morphological categories to the modern state, as represented, for example, by Present-Day English, with no case system to speak of, with hardly any synthetic verb tenses etc. The beauty and richness of the old system appeared destroyed and replaced by poor makeshifts, such as prepositions and auxiliary verbs, which were certainly unable to compensate for the losses sustained by language in the destruction of its morphological system.

It is quite obvious now that this view of language development is no more than a romantic “fantasia”, certainly not borne out by any unprejudiced study of facts. It was a position taken up in advance which made facts of language history appear in this light.

Thus, in drawing general conclusions concerning the tendencies and results of language development, we should distinguish as carefully as possible between that which is established and can be proved, and that which remains a matter of opinion, depending on certain premises, which often have not been properly formulated and, which is worse, may have remained unconscious. It will certainly be one of the main tasks of diachronic linguistics to enlarge the sphere of that which can be proved at the expense of that which is bound to remain a matter of opinion. New ways and methods of assessing linguistic changes will have to be worked out and properly tested before they can be accepted as reliable and objective. The work done so far by many generations of scholars has paved the way for a successful solution of these problems.

Recommended literature:

1. "History of the English language" by B. Ilyish
2. "History of English" by Rastorgueva T.
3. "Istoriya angliyskogo yazika" by Simirniskiy A.
4. "History of the English language" Matkarimova`s lecture
5. "Origins of the English language" by Williams J.