Cultural History of Early England

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English Linguistics
Campus Essen
Presumed locations of early Indo-European groups

Indo-European groups in the 2nd millenium BC
The Germanic languages today
# Main divisions of Germanic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLDEST STAGE</th>
<th>PRESENT-DAY LANGUAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Germanic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runes (3/4c)</td>
<td>Icelandic, Faroese, Swedish,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse (13c)</td>
<td>Norwegian (Bokmål &amp; Nynorsk) and Danish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Germanic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic (4c)</td>
<td>(none)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Germanic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High German (8c)</td>
<td>High German (Yiddish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English (7c)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon (8c)</td>
<td>Low German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Frisian (14c)</td>
<td>Frisian (North and West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Low Franconian (12c)</td>
<td>Dutch, Flemish, Afrikaans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Celtic Britain

Historical distribution of Celtis in Europe
Celts came to Britain and Ireland between 500 and 300 BC and settled throughout the islands. They were Christianised in the 4th century AD, probably first in Ireland, then in Scotland and the north of England. Many monasteries were found in these areas and testify to the vitality of the Celtic church.
Because the Celtic church was already established in the north of Britain by the time the Germanic tribes were Christianised from the south, there was tension between the Celtic and the Roman church.
In Irish monasteries, a form of the Latin alphabet (Uncial script) evolved which was later adapted and used in English monasteries for copying texts in Latin and later in English.
Literature on Celtic Britain and on language questions involving the Celtic peoples.
The Romans in Britain

In 55 BC the emperor Julius Caesar invades Britain establishing Roman rule in the south and south-east.

The Romans build roads and viaducts as well as baths in centres in England. The most famous of these is the city of Bath itself.

In 410 the Romans leave Britain because of pressure in Italy from Germanic raiders.

The departure of the Romans left a political vacuum in England which was eventually filled by the Germanic tribes who came from the North Sea coastal areas around 450 AD.
Hadrian’s Wall was a fortification built by the Romans along the approximate border between England and Scotland (somewhat north of the present-day border). It serves as defence against raiders from the north.
Before the coming of the Germanic tribes in 450, there were raids along the southern shore of England by Saxons.

Porchester Castle, near Fareham in Hampshire, is a very well preserved example of the Saxon Shore Forts which the Romans built in the 4th century.

Roman Empire in first centuries AD.
The source areas of Germanic tribes who came to England in the middle of the 5th century AD.
Routes taken across the North Sea by Germanic tribes in the 5c. The Jutes came from Jutland and settled in Kent. The Saxons came from the area of present-day (Lower) Saxony and settled largely south of the River Thames. The Angles came from the lower part of the Jutland peninsula which is now Schleswig Holstein in Germany and settled in central and northern England.

The lines in the above map are very approximate. Many of the settlers may have crossed the North Sea from the area of present-day Belgium as this would have involved the shortest sea journey.
England at the time of the Germanic invasions
Dialects of Old English

West Saxon (south of the River Thames)
Kentish (in the area of present-day Kent)
Mercian (in the central and eastern part of England)
Northumbrian (north of the River Humber)
Scots (in the lowland area of present-day Scotland)

Because of common linguistic features, Merician, Northumbrian and possibly Scots are often grouped together as Anglian.
The dialects of Old English
The seven kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England (heptarchy)
The approximate distribution of English groupings around 600 AD.
## English monarchs of the Old English period

### West Saxon Kings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>802-839</td>
<td>Egbert</td>
<td>924-939</td>
<td>Athelstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>839-858</td>
<td>Æthelwulf</td>
<td>939-946</td>
<td>Edmund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>858-860</td>
<td>Æthelbald</td>
<td>946-955</td>
<td>Edred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>860-865</td>
<td>Æthelbert</td>
<td>955-959</td>
<td>Edwy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>866-871</td>
<td>Æthelred</td>
<td>959-975</td>
<td>Edgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>871-899</td>
<td>Alfred</td>
<td>975-978</td>
<td>Edward (the Martyr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>899-924</td>
<td>Edward (the Elder)</td>
<td>978-1016</td>
<td>Æthelred (the Unready)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Edmund (Ironside)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Danish Kings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1016-1035</td>
<td>Cnut (Canute)</td>
<td>1040-1042</td>
<td>Harthacnut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1035-1037</td>
<td>Harold (Regent)</td>
<td>1042-1066</td>
<td>Edward (the Confessor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1037-1040</td>
<td>Harold I (Harefoot)</td>
<td>1066</td>
<td>Harold II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Christianisation of England
The Anglo-Saxons lands of England began to be christianised in 597 when St Augustine arrived on a mission initiated by Pope Gregory. Augustine established his centre in the south, in Canterbury, Kent.
Centuries before that the north of England and Scotland had been christianised from Ireland. By 600 the centre of the northern church was in Iona in the west of Scotland.
The Synod of Whitby (664) brought large parts of the north of England under the influence of the Roman rather than the Celtic church as was hitherto the case.
The Sutton Hoo burial site where a sunken ship and many artefacts were found in 1938.
Some artefacts from the Sutton Hoo hoard
Anglo-Saxon art is best seen in the illustrated manuscripts of holy scripts (here: Lindisfarne Gospels)
The largest ever hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold was found near Lichfield, south Staffordshire in July 2009. It is believed that the roughly 1,500 items stem from the 7th to 8th centuries in an area once in the Kingdom of Mercia.
England during the Viking period

Invasions start at the end of late 8th century, first plunderings, later settlement in Scotland and the north of England.
Main Viking expansion routes from the 8th to the 11th centuries
Viking longship ‘Hugin’ (Ramsgate, Kent)
The Oseberg Viking longship in the Oslo museum, on the bottom left a model is shown.
During the Viking period, the territory of England was divided into a Scandinavian and a West Saxon sphere of influence. The former was known as the Danelaw. In this region the greatest influence of the Vikings on the Old English was felt. Many Scandinavian place names are attested in the north of England.
Areas of Scandinavian settlement in Britain and Ireland in the 9th and 10th centuries
King Alfred (849-899) was the most important Old English king and responsible for inflicting decisive military victories on the Vikings in the 870s (sometimes referred to by the label Treaty of Wedmore (878), an event for which there is no direct evidence). The containment of the Viking forces halted their advance further south. This insured that England remained Anglo-Saxon not Norse in character. Alfred is also credited with a revival in learning and he commissioned a number of works including translations from Latin.
The Venerable Bede’s

*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

The main historical document for the early Old English period
The Venerable Bede (672-735) was a monk at the monastery at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. His history is the main source of information about England prior to the 8th century. How much is factually accurate is difficult to determine today.
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The main historical document for the later Old English period
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a collection of entries from documents written in various monasteries in England throughout the Old English period and slightly beyond. They deal with the political and military events of the years they cover. The documents began in the late 9th century and continued (in the Peterborough Chronicle, see image on right) until at least 1154.
Different sections of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Original text

Æthelweard's Chronicle

Annals of St. Neot's

Asser's Life of Alfred

Northern version

[A] Winchester (Parker)

[A2] Winchester (Parker) (copy)

[F] Bilingual Canterbury Epitome

[E] Peterborough

[D] Worcester

[B] Abingdon I

[C] Abingdon II
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Chronicle name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Manuscript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>The Parker Chronicle or The Winchester Chronicle</td>
<td>Parker Library, Corpus Christi College</td>
<td>MS. 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The Abingdon Chronicle II</td>
<td>British Library</td>
<td>Cotton MS. Tiberius B i.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The Laud Chronicle or The Peterborough Chronicle</td>
<td>Bodleian Library</td>
<td>MS Laud 636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G or A² or W</td>
<td>A copy of The Winchester Chronicle</td>
<td>British Library</td>
<td>Cotton MS. Otho B xi., 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Cottonian Fragment</td>
<td>British Library</td>
<td>Cotton MS. Domitian A ix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>An Easter Table Chronicle</td>
<td>British Library</td>
<td>Cotton MS. Caligula A xv.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main locations where part of the chronicle were written
Entry for the year 871 from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle when several battles between the West Saxons and the Vikings took place.
Old English Literature and Language
On the right you see the opening lines of Beowulf. Click on the speaker symbols below to hear sections of the text spoken in what we assume was the West Saxon pronunciation of Old English.

First section

Second section

Third section
Modern translation (1999) of *Beowulf*
English has been spoken in England since around 450. To be more precise a set of varieties of West Germanic have been spoken. After the Anglo-Saxon invasion no-one had an awareness of England as such let alone of English. With the establishment of the West Saxon kingdom in later centuries and with the court which formed the pivot point of this kingdom a first inkling of the idea of English developed. With the invasion of England by the Danes (after 800) it became more clear that the Germanic tribes in England were separate from their fellows on the Continent and in Scandinavia. Among the different groupings in England in the Old English period different dialects (that is purely geographical variants) are recognizable: Northumbrian in the north, Anglian in the middle and West-Saxon in the south. Due to the political significance of West-Saxon in the late Old English period (after the 9th century) the written form of this dialect developed into something like a standard. Note that at this time it was Winchester and not London which was the political centre of the country. The term used for the West Saxon 'standard' is *koiné* which derives from Greek and means a common dialect, that is a variety which was used in monastaries in parts of England outside of West Saxony for the purpose of writing.
Old English dialect areas
The dialects of Old English

It is common to divide England into four dialect areas for the Old English period. First of all note that by England that part of mainland Britain is meant which does not include Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. These three areas were Celtic from the time of the arrival of the Celts some number of centuries BC and remained so well into the Middle English period.

The dialect areas of England can be traced back quite clearly to the Germanic tribes which came and settled in Britain from the middle of the 5th century onwards. There were basically three tribal groups among the earlier settlers in England: the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. The Angles came from the area of Angeln (roughly the Schleswig-Holstein of today), the Saxons from the area of east and central Lower Saxony and the Jutes from the Jutland peninsula which forms west Denmark today.

Of these three groups the most important are the Saxons as they established themselves as the politically dominant force in the Old English period. A number of factors contributed to this not least the strong position of the West Saxon kings, chief among these being Alfred (late 9th century). The West Saxon dialect was also strongest in the scriptoriums (i.e. those places where manuscripts were copied and/or written originally) so that for written communication West Saxon was the natural choice.
The dialects of Old English (continued)

A variety of documents have nonetheless been handed down in the language of the remaining areas. Notably from Northumbria a number of documents are extant which offer us a fairly clear picture of this dialect area. At this point one should also note that the central and northern part of England is linguistically fairly homogeneous in the Old English period and is termed Anglia. To differentiate sections within this area one speaks of Mercia which is the central region and Northumbria which is the northern part (i.e. north of the river Humber).

A few documents are available to us in the dialect of Kent (notably a set of sermons). This offers us a brief glimpse at the characteristics of this dialect which in the Middle English period was of considerable significance. Notable in Kentish is the fact that Old English /yː/ was pronounced /eː/ thus giving us words like evil in Modern English where one would expect something like ivil.
The *Our Father* in Old English

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum;
Si þin nama gehalgod
to become 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 soplice.

Click to listen:
Wolfstan’s Sermon to the English is a homily (religious document intended to edify its readers) written by Wulfstan II (d. 1023) who was Archbishop of York in his later life.
There is a considerable body of poetry from the Old English period. The monk Caedmon (7th century) was the first to compose a hymn. Later poetry was both of a religious and a secular nature.