

Lecture:
A History of English
Literature and Culture

Beginnings:
Anglo - Saxon England

ca. 449 - 1066

1. Administrative Points

- Reader für the lecture: **Copyshop Reckhammerweg**
- Module Exam BA Students (WS 18/19): **TBD**
- Studienleistung students (pre-WS 18/19): **08.07.2019**

1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England
2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture
3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture
4. Anglo-Saxon Literature
 - Anglo-Saxon Language
 - Anglo-Saxon (religious) prose
 - Anglo-Saxon Poetry

1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England

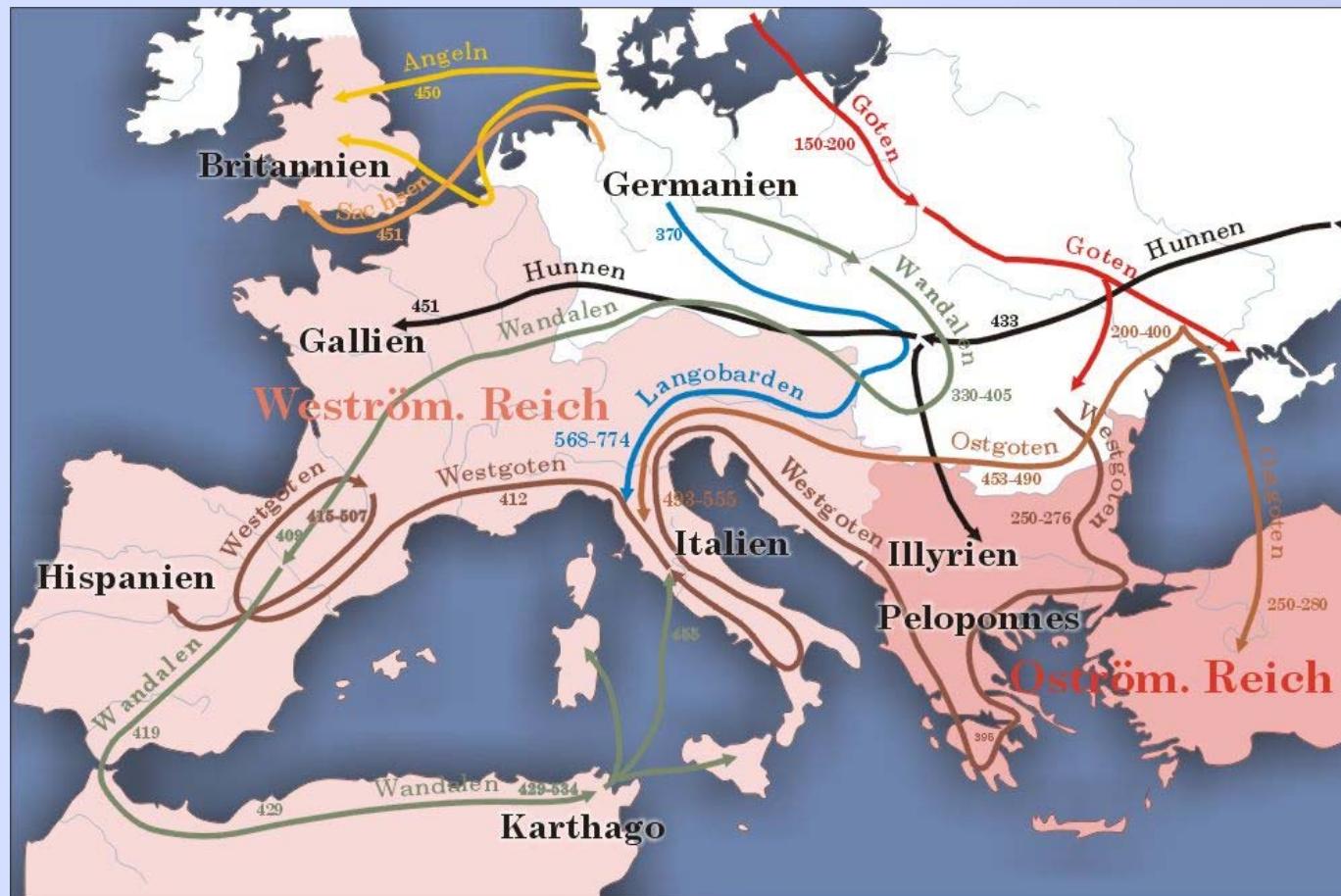
- Britain had been a Roman Province since ca. 42 A.D.

1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England



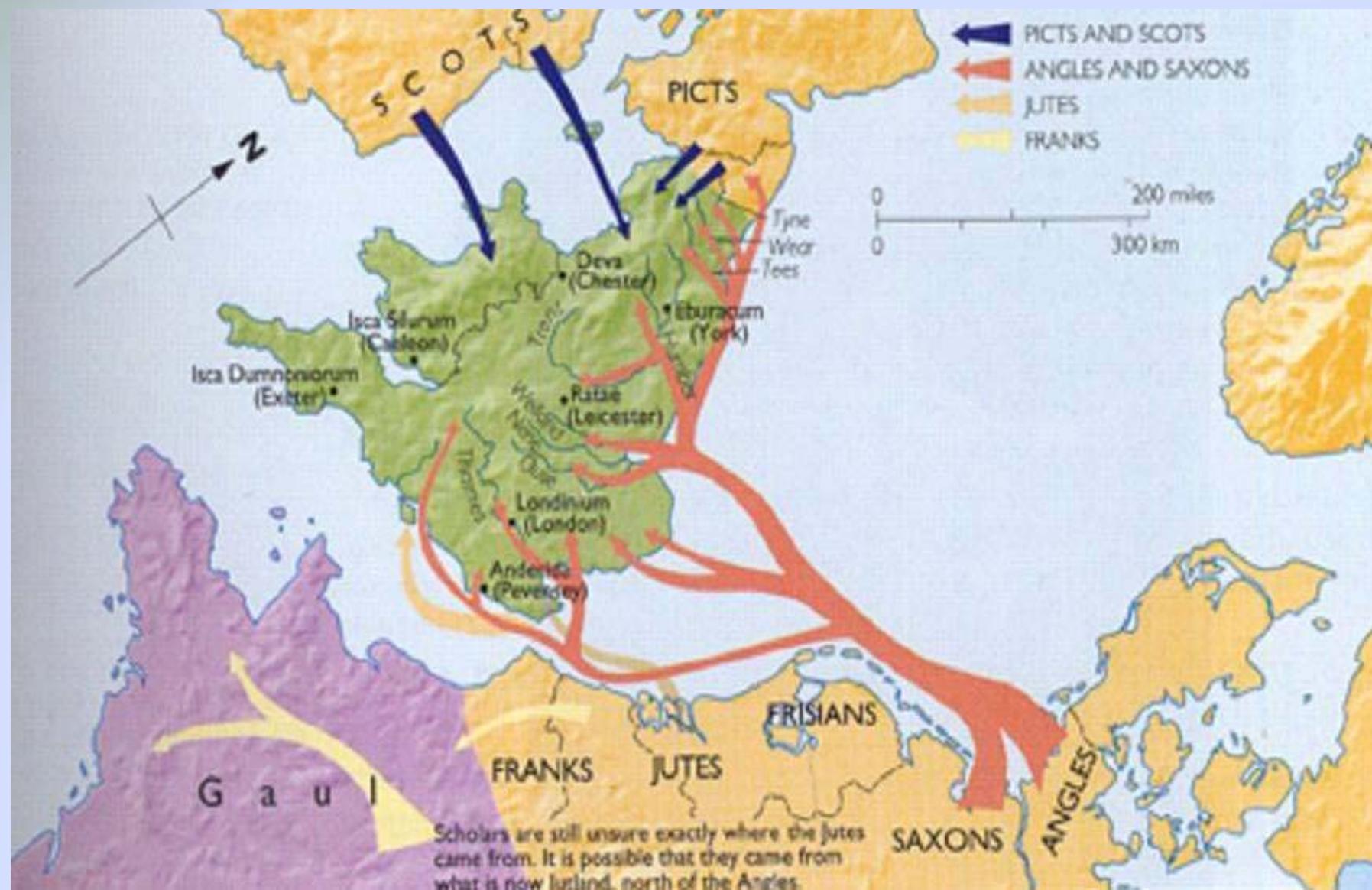
1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England

- ~ 420 A.D. the Roman Legions left Britannia



1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England

- The Britons were faced with attacks from Celtic tribes invading from Wales and Scotland (the Picts)
- Additionally, there was a rising threat from seafaring Germanic tribes.
- The Britons invited Germanic tribes from continental Europe to help fight the invasions.
- For example, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells of King Vortigern who invited the Germanic leaders Hengist and Horsa



1. The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England

- The Germanic mercenaries from the continent
 - eventually decided to stay in Britain
 - they turned against the Britons and settled permanently in Britain
 - The predominant tribes were the **Angles, Saxons** and the **Jutes**.

2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture

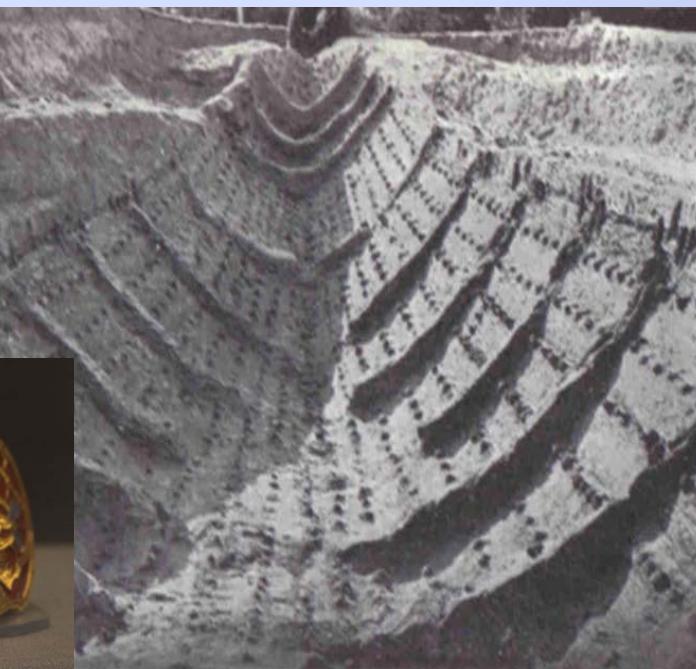
- The Germanic tribes established kingdoms in Britain
- ~ 650 A.D. seven kingdoms had consolidated which would remain more or less stable for 200 years
- In this what we call the **Heptarchy**.
- The power-relations between the kingdoms were always in flux with various kingdoms gaining dominance throughout the centuries.

2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture



2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- Most of what we know of Anglo-Saxon art today is derived from the archaeological excavation of the Sutton Hoo Burial:

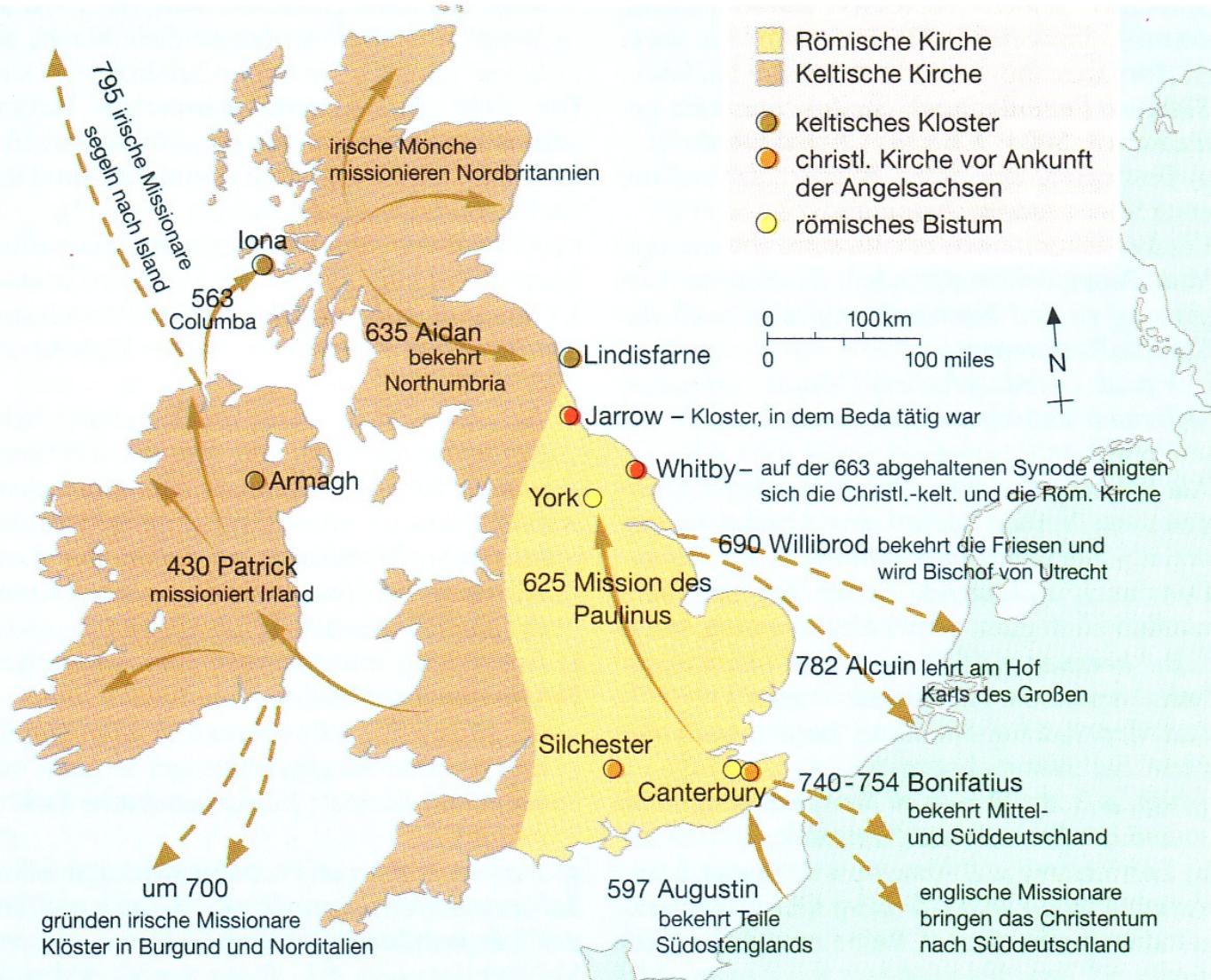


2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture



2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- The burial at Sutton Hoo represents a strange mixture of pagan and Christian ritual
- This is evidence of the influence of **Christianisation** of Anglo-Saxon Britain.
- The Christianisation took place by way of Ireland and from continental missionaries send by Rome
- 597: St Augustine arrived in Kent and ~ 75 years later all the major kingdoms were Christian.



B Die Christianisierung Englands

3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- In 793, the first Viking ships appeared along the British coast
- This marks the beginning of a time of repeated Viking incursions.
- In 852, the Vikings stayed the whole winter. In the end, Viking lords settled permanently in Britain.

3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- The Vikings destabilised the Heptarchy and established their own kingdom, **the Danelaw**
- All Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms perished, except Wessex.
 - King Alfred the Great

3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture



3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- In the 9th century, Wessex became the predominant Anglo-Saxon dialect and most of the texts we know are in that dialect
- The Vikings did not push the Anglo-Saxons out as these had done with the Roman Britons.
- Rather, they took on the Anglo-Saxon traditions and lived side-by-side. In time, the Vikings were incorporated into Anglo-Saxon culture

3. The Decline of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- In the 10th century Britain became part of the Viking kingdom of Sweyn of Denmark and later Knut (Canute)
- In 1066, King Edward the Confessor died and his succession was disputed among 1) Harald Godwinson, 2) Harald of Norway and 3) William of Normandy
- **1066:** In the Battle of Hastings William of Normandy successfully secured for himself the throne of Britain

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

- Old English Literature consists mostly of poetry
- Anonymous
- The poetry which has survived is **elegaic** and **religious**
 - *Caedmon's Hymn* as the earliest extant Old English poem (a prayer), (~ 660-680)
 - *The Wanderer, The Seafarer*
 - *Beowulf* (~800), a heroic epic in alliterative verse
- Old English prose writings are mainly **religious** texts and **chronicles**

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

The Lord's Prayer (West Saxon Dialect)

Fæder úre, ðú ðe eart on heofonum,
Sí ðín nama gehálgod.
Tóbecume ðín rice.
Gewurde ðín willa
On eorþan swá swá on heofonum.
Urne dægwhamlícan hlaf syle ús tódæg.
And forgyf ús úre gyltas,
Swá swá wé forgyfaþ úrum gyltendum.
And ne gelæd ðu ús on costnunge,
Ac álýs ús of yfele. Sóþlice.

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Examples from Old English:

Do you recognize any of these? ☺

On smeal steppe for a mænne,
On giante leap for mancynde.

(Neil Armstrong, Moon, 1969)

Ic wylle þine hand healdan,
Ic wylle þine hand healdan,

(The Beatles, „I wanna hold your hand“)

Ond æfter eallum, þu eart min wundorweal.

(Oasis, „Wonderwall“)

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

449: On hiera dagum Hengest 7 Horsa from Wyrtgeorne geleabade Bretta cyninge gesohton Bretene on þam staþe þe is genemned Ypwinesfleot, ærest Brettum to fultume, ac hie eft on hie fuhton.

455: Her Hengest 7 Horsa fuhton wiþ Wyrtgeorne þam cyninge, in þære stowe þe is gecueden Agælesþrep, 7 his broþur Horsan man ofslog; 7 æfter þam Hengest feng ^{to} rice 7 Æsc his sunu.

457: Her Hengest 7 Æsc fuhton wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is gecueden Crecganford 7 þær ofslogen .iiiim. wera, 7 þa Brettas þa forleton Centlond 7 mid micle ege flugon to Lundenbyrg.

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

- Poetry:
 - Mostly oral poetry
 - Performed in the **mead hall** by a minstrel call the **scop**
 - Poetry does not rhyme; alliteration is the central principle

*A fair field full of folk || found I there between,
Of all manner of men || the mean and the rich,
Working and wandering || as the world asketh.*

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Poetry: Caedmon's Hymn

*Nu sculon herigean heofonrices Weward
Meotodes meahte and his modgepanc,
weorc Wulder-Fæder, swa he wundra gehwæs
ece Drihten or onstéalde
He ærest sceop ielda bearnum
Heofon to hrofe halig Scyppend
ða middangeard moncynnes Weward,
ece Drihten æfter teode
firum foldan Frea ælmihtig*

Now we must praise the protector of the heavenly kingdom
the might of the measurer and his mind's purpose,
the work of the father of glory, as he for each of his wonders,
the eternal Lord, established a beginning.
He shaped first for the sons of the earth
heaven as a roof, the holy maker;
then the middle-world, mankind's guardian,
the eternal Lord, made afterwards,
solid ground for men, the almighty Lord.

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Poetry: Beowulf

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

- **Poetry: Beowulf**
 - Epic heroic poem
 - depicts a warrior society in Northern Europe (Denmark and Sweden)
 - is set in a pagan world, depicting its waning culture (elegaic)
 - Although set in a pagan world, it has a definitive Christian strain
 - Story: **Beowulf**, a Geat, comes to the rescue of King **Hrothgar**, a Dane, whose lands are haunted by the monster **Grendel**. After killing Grendel, Beowulf slays **Grendel's Mother** and, later in life, a **dragon**.

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Poetry: Beowulf

Hwæt! Wé Gárdena in géardagum

þéodcyninga þrym gefrúnon·

hú ðá aþèlingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scéfing sceabena þréatum

monegum maégbum meodosetla oftéah·

Listen! We --of the Spear-Danes in the days of
yore,
of those clan-kings-- heard of their glory.

how those nobles performed courageous
deeds.

Often Scyld, Scef's son, from enemy hosts
from many peoples seized mead-benches;

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Sic transit Gloria mundi – Topos

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg
geond þas woruld
for hwan modsefa
min ne gesweorce
þonne ic eorla lif
eal geondbence,
hu hi færlice
flet ofgeafon,
modge maguþegnas.
Swa þes middangeard
ealra dogra gehwama
dreoseð ond fealleð;

Indeed I cannot think
why my spirit
does not darken
when I ponder on the whole
life of men
throughout the world,
How they suddenly
left the floor (hall),
the proud thanes.
So this middle-earth,
bit each day,
droops and decays –

(The Wanderer)

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

Ubi sunt -- Topos

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago?

Where is the horse gone? Where the rider?

Hwær cwom mæþumgyfa?

Where the giver of treasure?

Hwær cwom symbla gesetu?

Where are the seats at the feast?

Hwær sindon seledreamas?

Where are the revels in the hall?

Eala beorht bune!

Alas for the bright cup!

Eala byrnwiga!

Alas for the mailed warrior!

Eala þeodnes þrym!

Alas for the splendour of the prince!

Hu seo þrag gewat,

How that time has passed away,

(The Wanderer)

Wyrd is Ece – Lif is læne

Wyrd biþ swiþre,
Meotud meahtigra,
þonne ænges monnes gehygd.

...

Forþon me hatran sind
Dryhtnes dreamas
þonne þis deade **lif**
læne on londe.
Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eorðwelan
ece stondað.
Simle þeora sum
þinga gehwylce
ær his tiddege
to tweon weorþeð:
adl oþþe yldo
oþþe ecghete
fægum fromweardum
feorh oðþringed.

Fate is greater
And God is mightier
than any man's thought.

Indeed hotter for me are
the joys of the Lord
than this dead life
 fleeting on the land.
I do not believe
that the riches of the world
will stand forever.
Always and invariably,
one of three things
will turn to uncertainty
before his fated hour:
disease, or old age,
or the sword's hatred
will tear out the life
from those doomed to die.

From *The Seafarer*

Ic þancunge eow ac eower onmunan

Ic þancunge eow ac eower onmunan

I thank you for your attention

