

Смирнова К.С., студ. гр.202а ФК и СКД  
БГУ культуры и искусств  
Научный руководитель – Платонова Э.Е.,  
ст. преподаватель

## OLD ENGLISH AS A SOURCE OF MODERN ENGLISH

The historical development of a language is a continuous uninterrupted process without sudden breaks or rapid transformations. Therefore, any periodization imposed on language history by linguists, with precise dates. The commonly accepted, traditional periodization divides English history into three periods: *Old English* (OE), *Middle English* (ME) and *New English* (NE), with boundaries attached to definite dates and historical events affecting the language. OE begins with the Germanic settlement of Britain (5<sup>th</sup> c.) or with the beginning of writing (7<sup>th</sup> c.) and ends with the Norman Conquest (1066); ME begins with the Norman Conquest and ends on the introduction on printing (1475), which is the start of the Modern or New English (ModE or NE); the New period lasts to the present day [3, 49].



Old English was the West Germanic language spoken in the area now known as England between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. 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* [3, 61].

*Kentish*, a dialect spoken in the area known now as Kent and Surrey and in the Isle of Wight. It had developed from the tongue of the Jutes and Frisians. *West Saxon*, the main dialect of the Saxon group, spoken in the rest of England south of the Thames and the Bristol Channel, except Wales and Cornwall, where Celtic tongues were preserved. Other Saxon dialects in England have not survived in written form and are not known to modern scholars. *Mercian*, a dialect derived from the speech of southern Angles and spoken chiefly in the kingdom of Mercia, that is, in the central

























region, from the Thames to the Humber. *Northumbrian*, another Anglian dialect, spoken from the Humber north to the river Forth (hence the name - North-Humbrian).

The records of OE are dated in different centuries, represent various local dialects, belong to diverse genres and are written in different scripts. The earliest written records of English are inscriptions on hard material made in a special alphabet known as the *runes*. The word *rune* originally meant “secret”, “mystery” and hence came to denote inscriptions believed to be magic. Later the word “rune” was applied to the characters used in writing these inscriptions.

Old English or Anglo-Saxon was sometimes written with a version of the Runic alphabet, brought to Britain by the Anglo-Saxons until about the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

There is no doubt that the art of runic writing was known to the Germanic tribes long before they came to Britain, since runic inscriptions have also been found in Scandinavia. The runes were used as letters, each symbol to indicate a separate sound. Besides, a rune could also represent a word beginning with that sound and was called by that word, e.g. the rune  denoting the sound [θ] and [p] was called “thorn” and could stand for OE *þorn* (NE *thorn*). In some inscriptions the runes were found arranged in a fixed order making a sort of alphabet. After the first six letters this alphabet is called *futhorc*  [3, 64].

#### Anglo-Saxon Futhorc

							
feoh (cattle, weath)	ur (aurochs)	þorn (thorn)	ōs (god)	rād (journey/riding)	cen (torch)	giefu (gift)	wyn (joy)
f	u	þ	o	r	c	g[ ]	ƿ
							
hægł (hail)	nied (necessity/trouble)	is (ice)	gear (year)	ēoh (yew)	peor (?)	eolh (sedge?)	sigel (sun)
h	n	i	j	Ʒ	ƿ	x	s
							
tiw/tir (Tiw - a god)	beorc (birch)	eoh (horse)	man (man)	lagu (water/sea)	lng (a god)	epel (land/estate)	dæg (day)
t	b	e	m	l	ng	ce	d

The letters of runic alphabet are angular; straight lines are preferred, curved lines avoided; this is due to the fact that runic inscriptions were cut in hard material: stone, bone or wood. The shapes of some letters resemble those of Greek or Latin, others have not been traced to any known alphabet, and the order of the runes in the alphabet is certainly original. To this day the origin of the runes is a matter of conjecture.

The number of runes in different OG languages varied. As compared to continental, the number of runes in England was larger: new runes were added as new sounds appeared in English (from 28 to 33 runes in Britain against 16 or 24 on the continent).

Neither on the mainland nor in Britain were the runes ever used for everyday writing or for putting down poetry and prose works. Their main function was to make short inscriptions on objects, often to give them some special power or magic.

The two best known runic inscriptions in England are the earliest extant OE written records. One of them is an inscription on a box called the “Franks Casket”, the other is a short text on a stone cross near the village of Ruthwell known as the “Ruthwell Cross”. Both records are in the Northumbrian dialect.

The Franks Casket was discovered in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. in France, and was presented to the British Museum by a British archeologist A. W. Franks. The Casket is a small box made of whale bone; its four sides are carved: there are pictures in the centre and runic inscriptions around. The longest among them, in alliterative verse, tells the story of the whale bone, of which the Casket is made. The Ruthwell Cross is a stone cross inscribed and ornamented on all sides. The principal inscription has been reconstructed into a passage from an OE religious poem, *The dream of the rood*, which was also found in another version in a later manuscript [1, 87].

Many runic inscriptions have been preserved on weapons, coins, amulets, tombstones, rings, various cross fragments. Some runic insertions occur in OE manuscripts written in Latin characters. The total number of runic inscriptions in OE is about forty; the last of them belong to the end of the period.

Later OE scribes used not only runes, but the letters of the Latin alphabet. The bulk of the OE material - OE manuscripts - is written in the Latin script. The use of Latin letters in English differed in some points from their use in Latin, for the scribes made certain modifications and additions in order to indicate OE sounds.

#### Old English alphabet

<b>A</b> <sub>a</sub>	<b>Æ</b> <sub>æ</sub>	<b>B</b> <sub>b</sub>	<b>C</b> <sub>c</sub>	<b>D</b> <sub>d</sub>	<b>Ð</b> <sub>ð</sub>	<b>E</b> <sub>e</sub>	<b>F</b> <sub>f</sub>	<b>Ʒ</b> <sub>ȝ</sub>	<b>h</b> <sub>h</sub>	<b>I</b> <sub>i</sub>	<b>L</b> <sub>l</sub>
a	ash	be	c	de	eth	e	eff	yogh	há	i	ell
a	æ	b	c	d	ð	e	f	ȝ (g)	h	i	l
<b>M</b> <sub>m</sub>	<b>N</b> <sub>n</sub>	<b>O</b> <sub>o</sub>	<b>P</b> <sub>p</sub>	<b>R</b> <sub>r</sub>	<b>S</b> <sub>s</sub>	<b>T</b> <sub>t</sub>	<b>U</b> <sub>u</sub>	<b>ƿ</b> <sub>ƿ</sub>	<b>X</b> <sub>x</sub>	<b>Y</b> <sub>y</sub>	<b>þ</b> <sub>þ</sub>
emm	enn	o	pe	err	ess	te	u	wynn	eks	yr	thorn
m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u	ƿ (w)	x	y	þ

Like any alphabetic writing, OE writing was based on a phonetic principle: every letter indicated a separate sound. This principle, however, was not always observed, even at the earliest stages of phonetic spelling. Some OE letters indicated two or more sounds, even distinct phonemes; some letters, indicating distinct sounds stood for

positional variants of phonemes - *a* and *ж*. The letters could indicate short and long sounds. The length of vowels is shown by a macron: *bōt* [ba:t], NE *boat* or by a line above the letter; long consonants are indicated by the double letters.

Thus, Old English had its specific roots and sources of appearing and was an ancestor of Modern English.

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