

**“Classical” phonemes (surface contrasts) of Early West Saxon, ca. 900.**

Nonsyllabics:

				post-				
	labial	dental	alveolar	alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal	
vls. stops	p		t	č		c		
vcd. stops	b		d	cg		g ( <i>after n</i> )		
vls. fricatives	f	þ/ð	s	sc	h	h	h ( <i>word-initially</i> )	
vcd. frics.	f	þ/ð	s			g		
nasals	m		n			n ( <i>before c or g</i> )		
lateral			l					
trill			r					
vocalics	w				ġ			

Unlike the other labials, /f/ was phonetically labiodental; unlike the other stops, /č/ (č) and /ġ/ (cg) had a delayed release (i.e., they were phonetically affricates).

Unlike the other underlyingly voiced obstruents, /g/ was a fricative except after /n/ and when geminate (usually also written cg, and very rare: the examples known to me are *clucge* ‘bell’, *docga* (some breed of dog; late), *ēarwicga* ‘earwig’, *frocga* ‘frog’, *hogg* ‘hog’ (late), *sceacga* ‘coarse hair’, *sceacgede* ‘shaggy’, *sucga* (bird sp.)).

The voiced postalveolar affricate likewise occurs only as a geminate and after /n/; in the latter position it is better written ġ (e.g. in *mengan* ‘to mix’).

It is likely that the postalveolar fricative was geminate intervocalically (thus e.g. in *fiscas* ‘fish (pl.)’).

/h/ was [h] word-initially, otherwise [ç] or [x] depending on the preceding vowel.

On the voicing alternation of the other fricatives see Moore & Knott.

/n/ had a velar allophone [ŋ] before the velar stops.

Syllabics:

(a) steady-state vowels

(i) short				(ii) long				
front		back		front		back		
unr.	rd.	unr.	rd.	unr.	rd.	unr.	rd.	
i	y		u	ī	ȳ		ū	high
e			o	ē			ō	mid
æ		a		ǣ		ā		low

It seems clear that /a/ had a rounded allophone before nasals (hence the spelling *a ~ o*).

(b) diphthongs (distinguished by height of *first* element and rounding of *second*)

(i) short		(ii) long		
unround	round	unround	round	
ie	io	īe	īo	high
	eo		ēo	mid
ea		ēa		low

The “functional load” of some of these contrasts was very low, but it is clear that the lower short syllabics, at least, did contrast; cf. e.g. *ærn* ‘building’, *arn* ‘ran’, *earn* ‘eagle’, and likewise *beorðor* ‘childbirth’, *þeorf* ‘unleavened’, but *berstan* ‘burst’, *þerscan* ‘thresh’. There was likewise a contrast between *tīon* ‘accuse’ and *tēon* ‘pull’ (though it was already being lost around 900), and between *weorþ* ‘become!’ and *wierþ* ‘becomes’. The most weakly contrastive unit was probably /io/.