

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SEVENTH EDITION

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Based on the original work of
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CHAPTER

5

The Old English Period (449–1100)

The recorded history of the English language begins, not on the Continent, where we know its speakers once lived, but in the British Isles, where they eventually settled. During the period when the language was spoken in Europe, it is known as pre-Old English, for it was only after the English separated themselves from their Germanic cousins that we recognize their speech as a distinct language and begin to have records of it.

SOME KEY EVENTS IN THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

The following events during the Old English period significantly influenced the development of the English language.

- 449 Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians began to occupy Great Britain, thus changing its major population to English speakers and separating the early English language from its Continental relatives. This is a traditional date; the actual migrations doubtless began earlier.
- 597 Saint Augustine of Canterbury arrived in England to begin the conversion of the English by baptizing King Ethelbert of Kent, thus introducing the influence of the Latin language.
- 664 The Synod of Whitby aligned the English with Roman rather than Celtic Christianity, thus linking English culture with mainstream Europe.
- 730 The Venerable Bede produced his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, recording the early history of the English people.
- 787 The Scandinavian invasion began with raids along the northeast seacoast.
- 865 The Scandinavians occupied northeastern Britain and began a campaign to conquer all of England.
- 871 Alfred became king of Wessex and reigned until his death in 899, rallying the English against the Scandinavians, retaking the city of London, establishing the Danelaw, securing the kingship of all England for himself and his successors, and producing or sponsoring the translation of Latin works into English.

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- 987 Ælfric, the homilist and grammarian, went to the abbey of Cerne, where he became the major prose writer of the Old English period and of its Benedictine Revival, producing a model of prose style that influenced following centuries.
- 991 Olaf Tryggvason invaded England, and the English were defeated at the Battle of Maldon.
- 1000 The manuscript of the Old English epic *Beowulf* was written about this time.
- 1016 Canute became king of England, establishing a Danish dynasty in Britain.
- 1042 The Danish dynasty ended with the death of King Hardicanute, and Edward the Confessor became king of England.
- 1066 Edward the Confessor died and was succeeded by Harold, last of the Anglo-Saxon kings, who died at the Battle of Hastings while fighting against the invading army of William, duke of Normandy, who was crowned king of England on December 25.

HISTORY OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS

BRITAIN BEFORE THE ENGLISH

When the English migrated from the Continent to Britain in the fifth century or perhaps even earlier, they found the island already inhabited. A Celtic people had been there for many centuries before Julius Caesar's invasion of the island in 55 B.C. And before them, other peoples, about whom we know very little, had lived on the islands. The Roman occupation, not really begun in earnest until the time of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 43), was to make Britain—that is, Britannia—a part of the Roman Empire for nearly as long as the time between the first permanent English settlement in America and our own day. It is therefore not surprising that there are so many Roman remains in modern England. Despite the long occupation, the British Celts continued to speak their own language, though many of them, particularly those in urban centers who wanted to “get on,” learned the language of their Roman rulers. However, only after the Anglo-Saxons arrived was the survival of the British Celtic language seriously threatened.

After the Roman legionnaires were withdrawn from Britain in the early fifth century (by 410), Picts from the north and Scots from the west savagely attacked the unprotected British Celts, who after generations of foreign domination had neither the heart nor the skill in weapons to put up much resistance. These same Picts and Scots, as well as ferocious Germanic sea raiders whom the Romans called Saxons, had been a considerable nuisance to the Romans in Britain during the latter half of the fourth century.

THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH

The Roman army included many non-Italians who were hired to help keep the Empire in order. The Roman forces in Britain in the late fourth century probably included some Angles and Saxons brought from the Continent. Tradition

says, however, that the main body of the English arrived later. According to the Venerable Bede's account in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*), written in Latin and completed around 730, almost three centuries after the event, the Britons appealed to Rome for help against the Picts and Scots. What relief they got, a single legion, was only temporarily effective. When Rome could or would help no more, the wretched Britons—still according to Bede—ironically enough called the “Saxons” to their aid “from the parts beyond the sea.” As a result of their appeal, shiploads of Germanic warrior-adventurers began to arrive.

The date that Bede gives for the first landing of those Saxons is 449. With it the Old English period begins. With it, too, we may in a sense begin thinking of Britain as England—the land of the Angles—for, even though the longships carried Jutes, Saxons, Frisians, and doubtless members of other tribes as well, their descendants a century and a half later were already beginning to think of themselves and their speech as English. (They naturally had no suspicion that it was “Old” English.) The name of a single tribe was thus adopted as a national name (prehistoric Old English **Angli* becoming *Engle*). The term Anglo-Saxon is also sometimes used for either the language of this period or its speakers.

These Germanic sea raiders, ancestors of the English, settled the Pictish and Scottish aggressors' business in short order. Then, with eyes ever on the main chance (a 1699 cant phrase likely from the medieval game of hazard, meaning “to keep in view that which will result in advantage”; see volume 2 of Farmer and Henley's *Dictionary of Slang and Its Analogues* 69), with a complete lack of any sense of international morality, and with no fear whatever of being prosecuted as war criminals, they very un-idealistically proceeded to subjugate and ultimately to dispossess the Britons whom they had come ostensibly to help. They sent word to their Continental kinsmen and friends about the cowardice of the Britons and the fertility of the island; and in the course of the next hundred years or so, more and more Saxons, Angles, and Jutes arrived “from the three most powerful nations of Germania,” as Bede says, to seek their fortunes in a new land.

We can be certain about only a few things in those exciting times. The invading newcomers came from various Germanic tribes in northern Germany, including the southern part of the Jutland peninsula (modern Schleswig-Holstein). So they spoke a number of closely related and hence very similar Germanic dialects. By the time Saint Augustine arrived in Britain to convert them to Christianity at the end of the sixth century, they dominated practically all of what is now known as England. As for the ill-advised Britons, their plight was hopeless. Some fled to Wales and Cornwall, some crossed the Channel to Brittany, and others were ultimately assimilated to the English by marriage or otherwise. Many doubtless lost their lives in the long-drawn-out fighting.

The Germanic tribes that came first—Bede's Jutes—were led by the synonymously named brothers Hengest and Horsa (both names mean ‘horse,’ an important animal in Indo-European culture and religion). These brothers were reputed to be great-grandsons of Woden, the chief Germanic god, an appropriate genealogy for tribal headmen. Those first-comers settled principally in the southeastern part of the island, still called by its Celtic name of Kent.

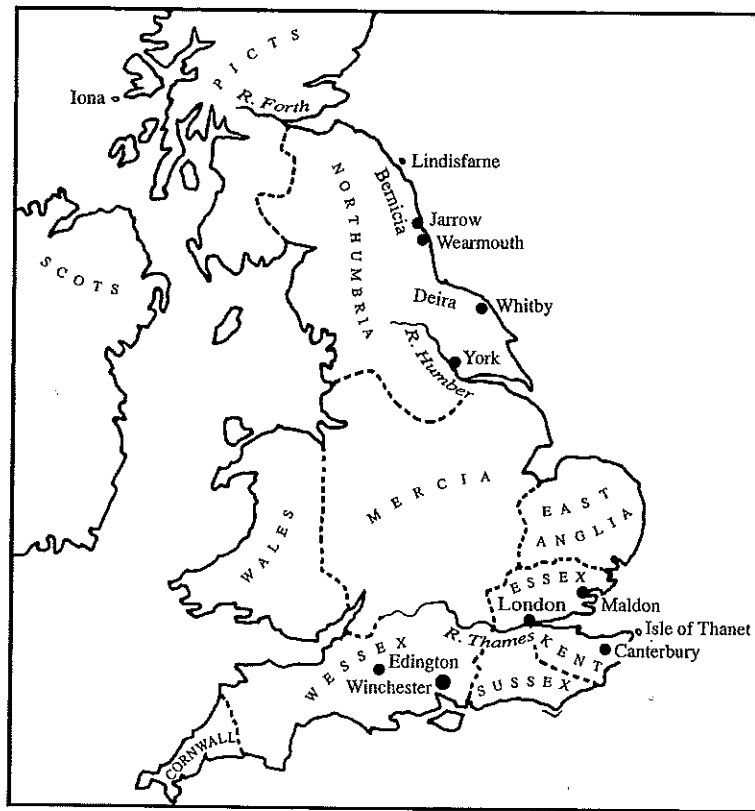
Subsequently, Continental Saxons were to occupy the rest of the region south of the Thames, and Angles, coming presumably from the hook-shaped peninsula in Schleswig known as Angeln, settled the large area stretching from the Thames northward to the Scottish highlands, except for the extreme western portion (Wales).

THE ENGLISH IN BRITAIN

The Germanic settlement comprised seven kingdoms, the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy: Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria—the last, the land north of the Humber estuary, being an amalgamation of two earlier kingdoms, Bernicia and Deira (see the accompanying map). Kent early became the chief center of culture and wealth, and by the end of the sixth century its king, Ethelbert (Æðelberht), could lay claim to hegemony over all the other kingdoms south of the Humber. Later, in the seventh and eighth centuries, this supremacy was to pass to Northumbria, with its great centers of learning at Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, and Jarrow (Bede's own monastery); then to Mercia; and finally to Wessex, with its brilliant line of kings beginning with Egbert (Ecgbert), who overthrew the Mercian king in 825, and culminating in his grandson, the superlatively great Alfred, whose successors after his death in 899 took for themselves the title *Rex Anglorum* 'King of the English.'

The most important event in the history of Anglo-Saxon culture (which is the ancestor of both British and American) occurred in 597, when Pope Gregory I dispatched a band of missionaries to the Angles (*Angli*, as he called them, thereby departing from the usual Continental designation of them as *Saxones*), in accordance with a resolve he had made some years before. The leader of this band was Saint Augustine—not to be confused with the African-born bishop of Hippo of the same name who wrote *The City of God* more than a century earlier. The apostle to the English and his fellow bringers of the Gospel, who landed on the Isle of Thanet in Kent, were received by King Ethelbert courteously, if at the beginning a trifle warily. Already ripe for conversion through his marriage to a Christian Frankish princess, Bertha, in a matter of months Ethelbert was himself baptized. Four years later, in 601, Augustine was consecrated first archbishop of Canterbury, and there was a church in England.

Christianity had actually come to the Anglo-Saxons from two directions—from Rome with Saint Augustine and from the Celtic Church with Irish missionaries. Christianity had been introduced to the British Isles, and particularly to Ireland, much earlier, before the year 400. And in Ireland Christianity had developed into a distinctive form, quite different from that of Rome. Irish missionaries went to Iona and Lindisfarne and made converts in Northumbria and Mercia, where they introduced their style of writing (the *Insular hand*) to the English. For a time it was uncertain whether England would go with Rome or the Celts. That question was resolved at a Synod held at Whitby in 664, where preference was given to the Roman customs of when to celebrate Easter and of how monks should shave their heads. Those apparently trivial decisions were symbolic of the important alignment of the English Church with Rome and the Continent.



Britain in Old English Times

Bede, who lived at the end of the seventh century and on into the first third of the next, wrote about Christianity in England and contributed significantly to the growing cultural importance of the land. He was a Benedictine monk who spent his life in scholarly pursuits at the monastery of Jarrow and became the most learned person in Europe of his day. He was a theologian, a scientist, a biographer, and a historian. It is in the last capacity that we remember him most, for his *Ecclesiastical History*, cited above, is the fullest and most accurate account we have of the early years of the English nation.

THE FIRST VIKING CONQUEST

The Christian descendants of Germanic raiders who had looted, pillaged, and finally taken the land of Britain by force of arms were themselves to undergo harassment from other Germanic invaders, beginning late in the eighth century, when pagan Viking raiders sacked various churches and monasteries, including Lindisfarne and Bede's own beloved Jarrow. During the first half of the following century, other disastrous raids took place in the south.

In 865 a great and expertly organized army landed in East Anglia, led by the unforgettably named Ivar the Boneless and his brother Halfdan, sons of Ragnar Lothbrok (*Loðbrók* 'Shaggy-pants'). According to legend, Ragnar had refused his bewitched bride's plea for a deferment of the consummation of their marriage for three nights. As a consequence, his son Ivar was born with gristle instead of bone. This unique physique seems to have been no handicap to a brilliant if rascally career as a warrior. Father Ragnar was eventually put to death in a snake pit in York. On this occasion his wife, the lovely Kraka, who felt no resentment toward him, had furnished him with a magical snake-proof coat; but it was of no avail, for his executioners made him remove his outer garment.

During the following years, the Vikings gained possession of practically the whole eastern part of England. In 870 they attacked Wessex, ruled by the first Ethelred (*Æðelræd*) with the able assistance of his brother Alfred, who was to succeed him in the following year. After years of crushing defeats, in 878 Alfred won a signal victory at Edington. He defeated Guthrum, the Danish king of East Anglia, who agreed not only to depart from Wessex but also to be baptized. Alfred was his godfather for the sacrament. Viking dominance was thus confined to Northumbria and East Anglia, where Danish law held sway, an area therefore known as the Danelaw.

Alfred is the only English king to be honored with the sobriquet "the Great," and deservedly so. In addition to his military victories over the Vikings, Alfred reorganized the laws and government of the kingdom and revived learning among the clergy. His greatest fame, however, was as a scholar in his own right. He translated Latin books into English: Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, Orosius's *History*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and Saint Augustine's *Soliloquies*. He was also responsible for a translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and for the compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—the two major sources of our knowledge of early English history.

Alfred became the subject of folklore, some probably based on fact, such as the story that, during a bad period in the Danish wars, he took refuge incognito in the hut of a poor Anglo-Saxon peasant woman, who, needing to go out, instructed him to look after some cakes she had in the oven. But Alfred was so preoccupied by his own problems that he forgot the cakes and let them burn. When the good wife returned, she soundly berated him as a lazy good-for-nothing, and the king humbly accepted the rebuke.

The troubles with the Danes, as the Vikings were called by the English, though they included Norwegians and Swedes, were by no means over. But the English so successfully repulsed further attacks that, in the tenth century, Alfred's son and grandsons (three of whom became kings) were able to carry out his plans for consolidating England, which by then had a sizable and peaceful Scandinavian population.

THE SECOND VIKING CONQUEST

In the later years of the tenth century, however, trouble started again with the arrival of a fleet of warriors led by Olaf Tryggvason, later king of Norway, who was soon joined by the Danish king, Svein Forkbeard. For more than



twenty years there were repeated attacks, most of them crushing defeats for the English, beginning with the glorious if unsuccessful stand made by the men of Essex under the valiant Byrhtnoth in 991, celebrated in the fine Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, which crystallizes the Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos in Byrhtwold's two famous lines:

Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað. (312–3)

Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder,
spirit the greater as our strength lessens (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son*).

As a rule, however, the onslaughts of the later Northmen were not met with such vigorous resistance, for these were the bad days of the second Ethelred, called *Umræd* ('ill-advised'). (*Ræd* means 'advice,' but the epithet is popularly translated as 'the Unready'.)

After the deaths in 1016 of Ethelred and his son Edmund Ironside, who survived his father by little more than half a year, Canute, son of Svein Forkbeard, came to the throne and was eventually succeeded by two sons: Harold Harefoot and Hardicanute ('Canute the Hardy'). The line of Alfred was not to be restored until 1042, with the accession of Edward the Confessor, though Canute in a sense allied himself with that line by marrying Ethelred's widow, Emma of Normandy. She thus became the mother of two English kings by different fathers: by Ethelred, of Edward the Confessor, and by Canute, of Hardicanute. (She was not the mother of either Edmund Ironside or Harold Harefoot.)

The Scandinavian tongues of those days were enough like Old English to make communication possible between the English and the Danes who were their neighbors. The English were quite aware of their kinship with Scandinavians: the Old English epic *Beowulf* is all about events of Scandinavian legend and history. And approximately a century and a half after the composition of that literary masterpiece, Alfred, who certainly had no reason to love the Danes, interpolated in his translation of the *History* of Orosius the first geographical account of the countries of northern Europe in his famous story of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan.

THE SCANDINAVIANS BECOME ENGLISH

Despite the enmity and the bloodshed, then, there was a feeling among the English that, when all was said and done, the Northmen belonged to the same "family" as themselves—a feeling that their ancestors could never have had regarding the British Celts. Although a good many Scandinavians settled in England after the earlier raids, they had been motivated largely by the desire to pillage and loot. However, the northern invaders of the tenth and early eleventh centuries seem to have been much more interested in colonizing, especially in East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk), Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Westmorland, Cumberland, and Northumberland. So the Danes settled down peaceably enough in time and lived side by side with the English; they were good colonizers, willing to assimilate themselves to their new homes. As John Richard

Green eloquently sums it up, "England still remained England; the conquerors sank quietly into the mass of those around them; and Woden yielded without a struggle to Christ" (cited by Jespersen, *Growth and Structure* 58).

What of the impact of that assimilation on the English language, which is our main concern here? Old English and Old Norse (the language of the Scandinavians) had a whole host of frequently used words in common, among others, *man*, *wife*, *mother*, *folk*, *house*, *thing*, *winter*, *summer*, *will*, *can*, *come*, *hear*, *see*, *think*, *ride*, *over*, *under*, *mine*, and *thine*. In some instances where related words differed noticeably in form, the Scandinavian form has won out—for example, *sister* (ON *systir*, OE *sweostor*). Scandinavian contributions to the English word stock are discussed in more detail in Chapter 12 (281–3).

THE GOLDEN AGE OF OLD ENGLISH

It is frequently supposed that the Old English period was somehow gray, dull, and crude. Nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone who has seen the Sutton Hoo treasure exhibit in the British Museum knows differently. This collection of finely crafted gold jewelry, garnet cloisonné decoration, weapons, helmet and other armor, as well as luxurious household furnishings such as a huge silver dish, drinking horns, and a beautiful lyre dates from the seventh century and was discovered in Suffolk in 1939. *Hoo* is a topographical term, from Old English *hōh* 'spur of land,' and more about this important archeological find can be learned online at The Sutton Hoo Society website (<http://www.suttonhoo.org/>) or at the British Museum website (<http://www.britishmuseum.org/>).

In addition to creating such exquisite craftsmanship, England after its conversion to Christianity at the end of the sixth century became a veritable beehive of scholarly activity. The famous monasteries at Canterbury, Glastonbury, Wearmouth, Lindisfarne, Jarrow, and York were great centers of learning where men such as Aldhelm, Benedict Biscop, Bede, and Alcuin pursued their studies. The great scholarly movement to which Bede belonged is largely responsible for the preservation of classical culture for us. The cathedral school at York, founded by one of Bede's pupils, provided Charlemagne with leadership in his Carolingian Renaissance, in the person of the illustrious English scholar Alcuin (Ealhwine), who introduced the tradition of Anglo-Saxon humanism to western Europe.

The culture of the north of England in the seventh and eighth centuries spread over the entire country, despite the decline that it suffered as a result of the hammering onslaughts of the Danes. Luckily, because of the tremendous energy and ability of Alfred the Great, that culture was not lost; and Alfred's able successors in the royal house of Wessex down to the time of the second Ethelred consolidated the cultural and political contributions made by their distinguished ancestor.

Literature in the Old English period was rich in poetry. Caedmon, the first English poet we know by name, was a seventh-century herdsman whose visionary encounter with an angel produced a new genre of poetry that expressed Christian subject matter in the style of the old pagan scopos or bards. The epic

poem *Beowulf*, probably composed in the early eighth century (though not written down until much later), embodied traditions that go back to the Anglo-Saxons' origins on the Continent in a sophisticated blending of pagan and Christian themes. Its account of the life and death of its hero sums up the ethos of the Anglo-Saxon people and combines a philosophical view of life with fairy-story elements that still resonate, for example, in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *Lord of the Rings*. Cynewulf was an early ninth-century writer who signed four of his poems by working his name, in runic letters, into their texts as a clue to his authorship.

Prose was not neglected either. Bede's contributions to scholarship and literature in the early eighth century and King Alfred's in the late ninth are mentioned earlier in this chapter. Ælfric was a tenth- and early eleventh-century Benedictine monk who devoted himself to the revival of learning among both clergy and laity. He was the most important prose stylist of classical Old English. His saints' lives, sermons, and scriptural paraphrases were models for English prose long after his death and were the basis for the continuity of English prose through the years following the Norman Conquest (Butcher 1-2). To help students learn Latin, Ælfric composed the first vernacular grammar of Latin, a glossary, and a humorous colloquy (or dialogue between teacher and pupil) about Anglo-Saxon occupations; these well-written monastic texts were used for teaching Latin long after his death.

As for the English language, which is our main concern here, it was certainly one of the earliest highly developed vernacular tongues in Europe—French did not become a literary language until well after the period of the Conquest. The English word stock was capable of expressing subtleties of thought as well as Latin. English culture was more advanced than any other in western Europe, so the notion that Anglo-Saxondom was a barbarian culture is very far from the reality.

DIALECTS OF OLD ENGLISH

Four principal dialects were spoken in Anglo-Saxon England: Kentish, the speech of the Jutes who settled in Kent; West Saxon, spoken in the region south of the Thames exclusive of Kent; Mercian, spoken from the Thames to the Humber exclusive of Wales; and Northumbrian, whose localization (north of the Humber) is indicated by its name. Mercian and Northumbrian have certain characteristics in common that distinguish them from West Saxon and Kentish, so they are sometimes grouped together as *Anglian*, those who spoke these dialects being predominantly Angles. The records of Anglian and Kentish are scant, but much West Saxon writing has come down to us, though probably only a fraction of what once existed.

Although standard Modern English is primarily a descendant of Mercian speech, the dialect of Old English that will be described in this chapter is West Saxon. During the time of Alfred and for a long time thereafter, Winchester, the capital of Wessex and therefore in a sense of all England, was a center of English culture, thanks to the encouragement given by Alfred himself to learning. Though London was at the time a thriving commercial city, it did not acquire its cultural or political importance until later.

Most of the extant Old English manuscripts—all in fact that may be regarded as literature—are written in the West Saxon dialect. However, we are at no great disadvantage when we compare the West Saxon dialect with Modern English because differences between Old English dialects were not great. Occasionally a distinctive Mercian form (labeled Anglian if it happens to be identical with the Northumbrian form) is cited as more obviously similar to the standard modern form—for instance, Anglian *ald*, which regularly developed into Modern English *old*. The West Saxon form was *eald*.

The Old English described here is that of about the year 1000—roughly that of the period during which Ælfric, the most representative writer of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, was flourishing. This development of English, in which most of the surviving literature is preserved, is called late West Saxon or classical Old English. That of the Age of Alfred, who reigned in the later years of the ninth century, is early West Saxon, though it is actually rather late in the early period.

The Old English period spans somewhat more than six centuries. In a period of more than 600 years many changes are bound to occur in sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. The view of the language presented here is a snapshot of it toward the end of that period.

PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING

Our knowledge of the pronunciation of Old English can be only approximate. The precise quality of any older speech sound from the era before sound recordings cannot be determined with absolute certainty. Moreover, in Old English times, as today, there were regional and individual differences, and doubtless social differences as well. At no time do all members of any linguistic community, especially an entire nation, speak exactly alike. Whatever were its variations, however, Old English differed in some striking ways from our English, and those ways are noted below.

VOWELS

One striking difference between the Anglo-Saxons' pronunciation and ours is that vowel length was a significant distinction in Old English. Corresponding long and short vowels probably differed also in quality, but the length of time it took to say them seems to have been of primary importance. We conventionally mark the spellings of Old English long vowels with a macron and leave short vowels unmarked, thus: *gōd* 'good' versus *god* 'god.' In phonetic transcriptions, different vowel symbols will be used where we believe different qualities occurred, but vowel length will be indicated by a colon, thus for the same two Old English words: *gōd* is [go:d] versus *god* is [gɔd] (in Modern English [gɒd]).

The vowel letters in Old English were *a*, *æ*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and *y*. They represented either long or short sounds, though sometimes scribes wrote a slanting line above long vowels, particularly where confusion was likely, for example,

gód for [go:d] 'good,' but that practice was not consistent. The five vowel letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u* represented what are sometimes referred to as "Continental" values—approximately those of Italian, Spanish, German, and to some extent of French as well. The letter *æ* represented the same sound for which we use it in phonetic transcriptions: [æ]. The letter *y*, used exclusively as a vowel symbol in Old English, usually indicated a rounded front vowel, long as in German *Bühne*, short as in *fünf*. This sound, which has not survived in Modern English, was made with the tongue position of [i] (long) or [ɪ] (short) but with the lips rounded as for [u] or [ʊ] respectively. The sounds are represented phonetically as [y:] and [ʏ].

In the examples that follow, the Modern English form in parentheses illustrates a typical Modern English development of the Old English sound:

<i>a</i> as in <i>habban</i> (have)	<i>ā</i> as in <i>hām</i> (home)
<i>æ</i> as in <i>þæt</i> (that)	<i>ǣ</i> as in <i>dǣl</i> (deal)
<i>e</i> as in <i>settan</i> (set)	<i>ē</i> as in <i>fēdan</i> (feed)
<i>i</i> as in <i>sittan</i> (sit)	<i>ī</i> as in <i>ridan</i> (ride)
<i>o</i> as in <i>moððe</i> (moth)	<i>ō</i> as in <i>fōda</i> (food)
<i>u</i> as in <i>sundor</i> (sunder)	<i>ū</i> as in <i>mūs</i> (mouse)
<i>y</i> as in <i>fyllan</i> (fill)	<i>ȳ</i> as in <i>mȳs</i> (mice)

Late West Saxon had two long diphthongs, *ēa* and *ēo*, the first elements of which were respectively [æ:] and [e:]. The second elements of both, once differentiated, had been reduced to unstressed [ə]. In the course of the eleventh century the [ə] was lost; consequently these long diphthongs became monophthongs that continued to be differentiated, at least in the standard pronunciation, until well into the Modern English period but ultimately fell together as [i:], as in *beat* from Old English *bēatan* and *creep* from *crēopan*.

Short *ea* and *eo* in such words as *eall* 'all,' *geard* 'yard,' *seah* 'saw' and *eoh* 'horse,' *meolc* 'milk,' *weorc* 'work' indicated short diphthongs of similar quality to the identically written long ones, approximately [æə] and [eə]. In early Old English, there were other diphthongs written *ie* and *io*, but they had disappeared by the time of classical Old English, being replaced usually by *y* and *eo*, respectively.

CONSONANTS

The consonant letters in Old English were *b*, *c*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *r*, *s*, *t*, *þ* or *ð*, *w*, *x*, and *z*. (The letters *j*, *q*, and *v* were not used for writing Old English, and *y* was always a vowel.) The symbols *b*, *d*, *k* (rarely used), *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *t*, *w* (which had a much different shape, namely, *p*), and *x* had the values these letters typically represent in Modern English.

The sound represented by *c* depended on contiguous sounds. Before another consonant, *c* was always [k], as in *cnāwan* 'to know,' *cræt* 'cart,' and *cwellan* 'to kill.' If *c* was next to a back vowel, it was also [k], as in *camp*

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'battle,' *corn* 'corn,' *cūð* 'known,' *lūcan* 'to lock,' *acan* 'to ache,' *bōc* 'book.' If it was next to a front vowel (or one that had been front in early Old English), the sound indicated was [č], as in *cild* 'child,' *cēosan* 'to choose,' *ic* 'I,' *læce* 'physician,' *rice* 'kingdom,' *mēce* 'sword.'

To be sure of the pronunciation of Old English *c*, it is often necessary to know the history of the word in which it appears. In *cēpan* 'to keep,' *cynn* 'race, kin,' and a number of other words, the first vowels were originally back ones (Germanic **kōpyan*, **kunnyō*), so the original [k] did not palatalize into [č], as it did before front vowels. Later, these originally back vowels mutated into front ones under the influence of the following *y*, but that was after the time of the palatalization of [k] to [č].

Mutation is a change in a vowel sound caused by a sound in the following syllable. The mutation of a vowel by a following *i* or *y* (as in the examples above) is called *i*-mutation or *i*-umlaut. In *bēc* 'books' from prehistoric Old English **bōci* and *sēcan* 'to seek' from prehistoric Old English **sōcyan*, the immediately following *i* and *y* brought about both palatalization of the original [k] (written *c* in Old English) and mutation of the original vowel. Thus, they were pronounced [be:č] and [se:čan]. For the latter word, Old English scribes frequently wrote *secean*, the extra *e* functioning merely as a diacritic to indicate that the preceding *c* symbolized [č] rather than [k]. Compare the Italian use of *i* after *c* preceding *a*, *o*, or *u* to indicate precisely the same thing, as in *ciao* 'good-bye' and *cioccolata* 'chocolate.'

In *swylc* 'such,' *ælc* 'each,' and *hwylc* 'which,' an earlier *i* before the *c* has been lost; but even without this information, we have a guide in the pronunciation of the modern forms cited as definitions. Similarly we may know from modern *keep* and *kin* that the Old English initial sound was [k]. Unfortunately for easy tests, the mutated plural of *book* has not survived (it would be "beech"). Also the [k] in modern *seek* probably comes from the Old Norse verb, in which palatalization of [k] did not happen; the native English form continues in *beseech*.

The Old English digraphs *cg* and *sc* were later replaced by *dg* and *sh*, respectively—spellings that indicate to the modern reader exactly the sounds the older spellings represented, [j] and [š]—for example, *ecg* 'edge,' *scīr* 'shire,' *scacan* 'to shake,' and *fisc* 'fish.'

The pronunciation of *g* (usually written with a form like *ȝ*) also depended on neighboring sounds. In late Old English the symbol indicated the voiced velar stop [g] before consonants (*gnēað* 'niggardly,' *glæd* 'glad, gracious'), initially before back vowels (*galan* 'to sing,' *gōs* 'goose,' *gūð* 'war'), and initially before front vowels that had resulted from the mutation of back vowels (*gēs* 'geese' from prehistoric Old English **gōsi*, *gæst* 'goest' from **gāis*). In the combination *ng* (as in *bringan* 'to bring' and *hring* 'ring'), the letter *g* indicated the same [g] sound—that of Modern English *linger* as contrasted with *ringer*. Consequently, [ŋ] was not a phoneme in Old English, but merely an allophone of *n*. There were no contrastive pairs like *sin*–*sing* and *thin*–*thing*, nor were there to be any until the Modern English loss of [g] in what had previously been a consonant sequence [ŋg].

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The letter *g* indicated the semivowel [y] initially before *e*, *i*, and the vowel *y* that was usual in late West Saxon for earlier *ie* (*gecoren* 'chosen,' *gēar* 'year,' *giftian* 'to give a woman in marriage,' *gydd* 'song'), medially between front vowels (*slægen* 'slain,' *twēgen* 'twain'), and after a front vowel at the end of a syllable (*dæg* 'day,' *mægden* 'maiden,' *legde* 'laid,' *stigrāp* 'stirrup,' *manig* 'many').

In practically all other circumstances *g* indicated the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] referred to in Chapter 4 as the earliest Germanic development of Indo-European *gh*—a sound difficult for English-speaking people nowadays. It is made like [g] except that the back of the tongue does not quite touch the velum (*dragan* 'to draw,' *lagu* 'law,' *hogu* 'care,' *folgian* 'to follow,' *sorgian* 'to sorrow,' *swelgan* 'to swallow'). It later became [w], as in Middle English *drawen*, *lawe*, *howe*, and so on.

In Old English, [v], [z], and [ð] were not phonemes; they occurred only between voiced sounds. There were thus no contrastive pairs like *feel-veal*, *leaf-leave*, *thigh-thy*, *mouth* (n.)-*mouth* (v.), *seal-zeal*, *face-phase*, and hence there were no distinctive symbols for the voiceless and voiced sounds. The symbols *f*, *s*, and *þ* (or *ð*, the two used more or less interchangeably) thus indicated both the voiceless fricatives [f], [s], [θ] (as in *fōda* 'food,' *lof* 'praise'; *sunu* 'son,' *mūs* 'mouse'; *þorn* 'thorn,' *þæð* 'path') and the corresponding voiced fricatives [v], [z], [ð] (between voiced sounds, as in *cnafa* 'boy,' *hæfde* 'had'; *lēosan* 'to lose,' *hūsl* 'Holy Communion'; *brōðor* 'brother,' *fæðm* 'fathom'). Some scribes in late Old English times preferred to write *þ* initially and *ð* elsewhere, but generally the letters were interchangeable. (Note that, although the Old English letter *ð* could represent either the voiceless or voiced fricative, the phonetic symbol [ð] represents the voiced sound only.)

At the beginning of words, *r* may have been a trill, but after vowels in West Saxon it was probably similar to the so-called retroflex *r* that is usual in American English.

Initial *h* was about as in Modern English, but elsewhere *h* stood for the velar fricative [x] or the palatal fricative [ç], depending on the neighboring vowel. Thus *h* was [x] after back vowels in *seah* 'saw,' *þurh* 'through,' and *þōhte* 'thought' (verb), but was [ç] after front vowels in *syhð* 'sees,' *miht* 'might,' and *fēhð* 'takes.' Of the sequences *hl* (*hlāf* 'loaf'), *hn* (*hnutu* 'nut'), *hr* (*hræfn* 'raven'), and *hw* (*hwæl* 'whale'), only the last survives, now less accurately spelled *wh*, and even in that combination, the [h] has been lost in the pronunciation of many present-day English speakers. In Old English, both consonants were pronounced in all these combinations.

The letter *z* was rare but when used, it had the value [ts], as indicated by the variant spellings *miltse* and *milze* 'mercy.'

The doubling of consonant symbols between vowels indicated a double or long consonant; thus the two *t*'s of *sittan* indicated the double or long [t] sound in *hot tamale*, in contrast to the single consonant [t] in Modern English *hotter*. Similarly *ll* in *fyllan* indicated the lengthened medial *l* of *full-length*, in contrast to the single or short *l* of *fully*. The *cc* in *racca* 'part of a ship's rigging' was a

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long [k], as in *bookkeeper*, in contrast to *beekeeper*, and hence *racca* was distinguished from *raca* 'rake,' and so on.

HANDWRITING

The writing of the Anglo-Saxons looked quite different from ours. The chief reason for the difference is that the Anglo-Saxons learned from the Irish to write in the Insular hand (as noted earlier). The following sample of that handwriting consists of the first three lines of the epic *Beowulf* as an Anglo-Saxon scribe might have written it (with some concessions to our practices of using spaces between words, inserting punctuation, and putting each verse on a separate line):

hƿæt, ƿe ƿarðena in ƿearðazum,
 þeodcýninga, þrým ƿepƿunon,
 hu ða æfelinƿar ellen ƿremedon!

These lines are transcribed into our alphabet and translated at the end of this chapter.

STRESS

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Old English words of more than one syllable, like those in all Germanic languages, were regularly stressed on their first syllables. Exceptions to this rule were verbs with prefixes, which were generally stressed on the first syllable of their main element: *wiðféohtan* 'to fight against,' *onbíndan* 'to unbind.' *Be-*, *for-*, and *ge-* were not stressed in any part of speech: *bebód* 'commandment,' *forsóð* 'forsooth,' *geháƿ* 'convenient.' Compounds had the customary Germanic stress on the first syllable, with a secondary stress on the first syllable of their second element: *lárhūs* 'school' (literally 'lore house'), *híldedêor* 'fierce in battle.'

This heavy stressing of the first syllable of practically all words has had a far-reaching effect on the development of English. Because of it, the vowels of final syllables began to be reduced to a uniform [ə] sound as early as the tenth century, as frequent interchanges of one letter for another in the texts indicate, though many scribes continued to spell according to tradition. In general, the stress system of Old English was simple as compared to that of Modern English, with its many loanwords of non-Germanic origin, like *maternal*, *philosophy*, *sublime*, and *taboo*.

VOCABULARY

The vocabulary of Old English differed from that of later historical stages of our language in two main ways: it included relatively few loanwords, and the gender of nouns was more or less arbitrary rather than determined by the sex or sexlessness of the thing named.

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THE GERMANIC WORD STOCK

The influence of Latin on the Old English vocabulary is treated in Chapter 12 (277–80), along with the lesser influence of Celtic (281) and Scandinavian (281–83). The Scandinavian influence certainly began during the Old English period, although it is not apparent until later. Yet, despite these foreign influences, the word stock of Old English was far more thoroughly Germanic than is our present-day vocabulary.

Many Old English words of Germanic origin were identical, or at least highly similar, in both form and meaning to the corresponding Modern English words—for example, *god*, *gold*, *hand*, *helm*, *land*, *oft*, *under*, *winter*, and *word*. Others, although their Modern English forms continue to be similar in shape, have changed drastically in meaning. Thus, Old English *brēad* meant ‘bit, piece’ rather than ‘bread’; similarly, *drēam* was ‘joy’ not ‘dream,’ *dreorig* ‘bloody’ not ‘dreary,’ *hlāf* ‘bread’ not ‘loaf,’ *mōd* ‘heart, mind, courage’ not ‘mood,’ *scēawian* ‘look at’ not ‘show,’ *sellan* ‘give’ not ‘sell,’ *tīd* ‘time’ not ‘tide,’ *winman* ‘fight’ not ‘win,’ and *wip* ‘against’ not ‘with.’

Some Old English words and meanings have survived in Modern English only in disguised form or in set expressions. Thus, Old English *guma* ‘man’ (cognate with the Latin word from which we have borrowed *human*) survives in the compound *bridegroom*, literally ‘bride’s man,’ where it has been remodeled under the influence of the unrelated word *groom*. Another Old English word for ‘man,’ *wer*, appears today in *werewolf* ‘man-wolf’ and in the archaic *wergild* ‘man money, the fine to be paid for killing a person.’ *Tīd*, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, when used in the proverb “Time and tide wait for no man,” preserves an echo of its earlier sense. Doubtless most persons today who use the proverb think of it as describing the inexorable rise and fall of the sea, which mere humans cannot alter; originally, however, *time* and *tide* were just synonyms. *Līc* ‘body’ continues feebly in compounds like *lich-house* ‘mortuary’ and *lych-gate* ‘roofed gate of a graveyard, where a corpse awaits burial,’ and vigorously in the *-ly* endings of adverbs and some adjectives; what was once an independent word has been reduced to a suffix marking parts of speech.

Other Old English words have not survived at all: *blīcan* ‘to shine, gleam,’ *cāf* ‘quick, bold,’ *duguþ* ‘band of noble retainers,’ *frætwā* ‘ornaments, treasure,’ *galdor* ‘song, incantation,’ *here* ‘army, marauders (especially Danish ones),’ *leax* ‘salmon’ (*lox* is a recent borrowing from Yiddish), *mund* ‘palm of the hand,’ *hence* ‘protection, trust,’ *nīþ* ‘war, evil, trouble,’ *racu* ‘account, explanation,’ *scēat* ‘region, surface of the earth, bosom,’ *tela* ‘good,’ and *ymbe* ‘around.’ Some of these words continued for a while after the Old English period (for example, *nīþ* lasted through the fifteenth century in forms like *nithe*), but they gradually disappeared and were replaced by other native expressions or, more often, by loanwords.

Old English also made extensive use of compounds that we have now replaced by borrowing: *āþwedd* ‘oath-promise, vow,’ *bōchord* ‘book-hoard, library,’ *cræftspræc* ‘craft-speech, technical language,’ *dēorwurþe* ‘dear-worth, precious,’ *folcriht* ‘folk-right, common law,’ *galdorcræft* ‘incantation-skill,

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magic,' *lustbære* 'pleasure-bearing, desirable,' *nīfara* 'new-farer, stranger,' *rīmcræft* 'counting-skill, computation,' *wīferwinna* 'against-fighter, enemy.'

If Germanic words like these had continued to our own time and if English had not borrowed the very great number of foreign words that it has in fact adopted, English today would be very different.

GENDER IN OLD ENGLISH

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Aside from its pronunciation and its word stock, Old English differs markedly from Modern English in having grammatical gender in contrast to the Modern English system of natural gender, based on sex or sexlessness. Grammatical gender, which put every noun into one of three categories (masculine, feminine, or neuter), was characteristic of Indo-European, as can be seen from its presence in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and other Indo-European languages. The three genders were preserved in Germanic and survived in English well into the Middle English period; they survive in German and Icelandic to this day.

Doubtless the gender of a noun originally had nothing to do with sex, nor does it necessarily have sexual connotations in those languages that have retained grammatical gender. Old English *wīf* 'wife, women' is neuter, as is its German cognate *Weib*; so is *mægden* 'maiden,' like German *Mädchen*. *Bridd* 'young bird' is masculine; *bearn* 'son, bairn' is neuter. *Brēost* 'breast' and *hēafod* 'head' are neuter, but *brū* 'eyebrow,' *wamb* 'belly,' and *eaxl* 'shoulder' are feminine. *Strengþu* 'strength' is feminine, *broc* 'affliction' is neuter, and *drēam* 'joy' is masculine.

Where sex was patently involved, however, this complicated and to us illogical system was beginning to break down even in Old English times. It must have come to be difficult, for instance, to refer to one who was obviously a woman—that is, a *wīf*—with the pronoun *hit* 'it,' since *wīf* is neuter; or to a *wīfmann*—the compound from which our word *woman* is derived—with *he* 'he,' the compound being masculine because of its second element. There are in fact a number of instances in Old English of the conflict of grammatical gender with the developing concept of natural gender.

GRAMMAR, CONCORD, AND INFLECTION

Grammatical gender is not a matter of vocabulary only; it also has an effect on grammar through what is called concord. Old English had an elaborate system of inflection for nouns, adjectives, and verbs; and words that went closely together had to agree in certain respects, as signaled by their inflectional endings. If a noun was singular or plural, adjectives modifying it had to be singular or plural as well; and similarly, if a noun was masculine or feminine, adjectives modifying it had to be in masculine or feminine forms also. So if Anglo-Saxons wanted to say they had seen a foolish man and a foolish woman, they might have said, "Wē sāwon *sumne dolne* mann ond *sume dole* idese," using for *sum* 'some' and *dol* 'foolish' the masculine ending *-ne* with *mann* and the feminine ending *-e* with *ides* 'woman.'

The major difference between the grammars of Old English and Modern English is that our language has become less inflective and more isolating. Old English used more grammatical endings on words and so was less dependent on word order and function words than Modern English. These matters are discussed generally in Chapter 1 and are further illustrated below for Old English.

INFLECTION

Old English had far more inflection in nouns, adjectives, and demonstrative and interrogative pronouns than Modern English does. Personal pronouns, however, have preserved much of their ancient complexity in Modern English and even, in one respect, increased it.

Old English nouns, pronouns, and adjectives had four cases, used according to the word's function in the sentence. The **nominative** case was used for the subject, the complement of linking verbs like *bēon* 'be,' and direct address. The **accusative** case was used for the direct object, the objects of some prepositions, and certain adverbial functions (like those of the italicized expressions of duration and direction in Modern English "They stayed there *the whole day*, but finally went *home*"). The **genitive** case was used for most of the meanings of Modern English 's and *of* phrases, the objects of a few prepositions and of some verbs, and in certain adverbial functions (like the time expression of Modern English "He works *nights*," in which *nights* was originally a genitive singular equivalent to "of a night"). The **dative** case was used for the indirect object and the only object of some verbs, the object of many prepositions, and a variety of other functions that can be grouped together loosely as adverbial (like the time expression of Modern English "I'll see you *some day*").

Adjectives and the demonstrative and interrogative pronouns had a fifth case, the **instrumental**, replaced in nouns by the dative case. A typical example of the instrumental is the italicized phrase in the following sentence: "Worhte Ælfred cyning *lýtle werede* geweorc" (literally 'Built Alfred King [with a] *little troop* [a] work,' that is, 'King Alfred *by means of a small troop* built a fortification'). The final letters *-e* in the expression for 'small troop,' *lýtle werede*, mark the adjective as instrumental and the noun as dative, used in an instrumental sense. The concord of the endings of the adjective and noun also showed that the words went together. Because the instrumental was used to express the means or manner of an action, it was also used adverbially: "folc þe *hlūde* singeþ" ('people that *loud[ly]* sing').

Adjectives and adverbs were compared much like Modern English *fast, faster, fastest*. Adjectives were inflected for definiteness as well as for gender, number, and case. The so-called **weak declension** of adjectives was used to indicate that the modified noun was definite—that it named an object whose identity was known or expected or had already been mentioned. Generally speaking, the weak form occurred after a demonstrative or a possessive pronoun, as in "se *gōda dæl*" ('that *good* part') or "hire *geonga* sunu" ('her *young* son'). The **strong declension** was used when the modified noun was indefinite because not preceded by a demonstrative or possessive or when the adjective was in the predicate, as in "*gōd dæl*" ('[a] *good* part') or "se dæl wæs *gōd*" ('that part was *good*').

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NOUNS

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Old English will inevitably seem to the modern reader a crabbed and difficult language full of needless complexities. Actually, Old English noun inflection was somewhat less complex than that of Germanic, Latin, and Greek and much less so than that of Indo-European, which had eight cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, instrumental, locative, and vocative). No Old English noun had more than six distinct forms, counting both singular and plural; but even this number will seem exorbitant to the speaker of Modern English, who uses only two forms for all but a few nouns: a general form without ending and a form ending in *-s*. The fact that three modern forms ending in *-s* are written differently is quite irrelevant; the apostrophe for the genitive is a fairly recent convention. As far as speech is concerned, *guys*, *guy's*, and *guys'* are all the same.

Old English had a large number of patterns for declining its nouns, each of which is called a declension. Only the most common of the declensions or those that have survived somehow in Modern English are illustrated here. The most important of the Old English declensions was that of the *a*-stems, so called because *a* was the sound with which their stems ended in Proto-Germanic. They corresponded to the *o*-stems of Indo-European, as exemplified by nouns of the Greek and Latin second declensions: Greek *philos* 'friend' and Latin *servus* (later *servus*) 'slave.' Indo-European *o* had become Germanic *a* (as noted in Chapter 4). The name for the declension has only historical significance as far as Old English is concerned. For example, Germanic **wulfaz* (nominative singular) and **wulfan* (accusative singular) had an *a* in their endings, but both those forms appeared in Old English simply as *wulf* 'wolf,' having lost the *a* of their stem as well as the grammatical endings *-z* and *-n*. The *a*-stems are illustrated in Table 5.1 of Old English noun declensions by the masculine *hund* 'dog' and the neuter *dēor* 'animal.'

TABLE 5.1 OLD ENGLISH NOUN DECLENSIONS

	Masculine <i>a</i> -Stem	Neuter <i>a</i> -Stem	<i>r</i> -Stem	<i>n</i> -Stem	<i>ō</i> -Stem	Root- Consonant Stem
	'hound'	'deer'	'child'	'ox'	'love'	'foot'
<i>Singular</i>						
Nom.	hund	dēor	cild	oxa	lufu	fōt
Acc.	hund	dēor	cild	oxan	lufe	fōt
Gen.	hundes	dēores	cildes	oxan	lufe	fōtes
Dat.	hunde	dēore	cilde	oxan	lufe	fēt
<i>Plural</i>						
N.-Ac.	hundas	dēor	cildru	oxan	lufa	fēt
Gen.	hunda	dēora	cildra	oxena	lufa	fōta
Dat.	hundum	dēorum	cildrum	oxum	lufum	fōtum

More than half of all commonly used nouns were inflected according to the *a*-stem pattern, which was in time to be extended to practically all nouns. The Modern English possessive singular and general plural forms in *-s* come directly from the Old English genitive singular (*-es*) and the masculine nominative-accusative plural (*-as*) forms—two different forms until very late Old English, when they fell together because the unstressed vowels had merged as schwa. In Middle English both endings were spelled *-es*. Only in Modern English have they again been differentiated in spelling by the use of the apostrophe. Nowadays, new words invariably conform to what survives of the *a*-stem declension—for example, *hobbits*, *hobbit's*, *hobbits'*—so that we may truly say it is the only living declension.

Neuter *a*-stems differed from masculines only in the nominative-accusative plural, which was without an ending in nouns like *dēor*. Such “endless plurals” survive in Modern English for a few words like *deer*.

A very few neuter nouns, of which *cild* ‘child’ is an example, had an *r* in the plural. Such nouns are known as *z*-stems in Germanic but *r*-stems in Old English; the *z*, which became *r* by rhotacism, corresponds to the *s* of Latin neuters like *genus*, which also rhotacized to *r* in oblique forms like *genera*. The historically expected plural of *child* in Modern English is *childer*, and that form indeed survives in the northern dialects of British English. In standard use, however, *children* acquired a second plural ending from the nouns discussed in the next paragraph.

An important declension in Old English was the *n*-stem. Nouns that follow this pattern were masculine (for example, *oxa* ‘ox,’ illustrated in the table) or feminine (such as *tunge* ‘tongue’); the two genders differed only in the endings for the nominative singular, *-a* versus *-e*. There were also two neuter nouns in the declension, *ēage* ‘eye’ and *ēare* ‘ear.’ For a time, *-n* rivaled *-s* (from the *a*-stems) as a typical plural ending in English. Plurals like *eyen* ‘eyes,’ *fon* ‘foes,’ *housen* ‘houses,’ *shoen* ‘shoes,’ and *treen* ‘trees’ continued well into the Modern English period. The only original *n*-plural to survive as standard today, however, is *oxen*. *Children*, as noted above, has its *-n* by analogy rather than by historical development. Similarly *brethren* and the poetic *kine* for ‘cows’ are post-Old English developments. The *n*-stem pattern is also sometimes called the weak declension, in contrast with the strong declensions, which have stems that originally ended in a vowel, such as the *a*-stems.

Somewhat fewer than a third of all commonly used nouns were feminine, most of them *ō*-stems (corresponding to the *ā*-stems, or first declension, of Latin). In the nominative singular, these had *-u* after a short syllable, as in *lufu* ‘love,’ and no ending at all after a long syllable, as in *lār* ‘learning.’ They and a variety of other smaller classes of nouns are not further considered here because they had no important effect on Modern English.

Another declension whose nouns were frequently used in Old English and whose forms have contributed to the irregularities of Modern English consisted of the root-consonant stems. In early stages of the language, the case endings of these nouns were attached directly to their roots without an intervening stem-forming suffix (like the *-a*, *-r*, and *-n* of the declensions already discussed). The most striking characteristic of these nouns was the change of root vowel in

several of their forms. This declension is exemplified by the masculine noun *fōt* 'foot,' with dative singular and the nominative-accusative plural forms *fēt*.

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The vowel of a root-consonant stem changes because in prehistoric Old English several of the forms of such a stem (which originally had the same root vowel as all its forms) had an *i* in their endings. For example, *fōt* originally had dative singular **fōti* and nominative-accusative plural **fōtiz*. Anticipation of the *i*-sound caused mutation of the root vowel—a kind of assimilation, with the vowel of the root moving in the direction of the *i*-sound, but stopping somewhat short of it, resulting in **fēti* and **fētiz*, both later reduced to *fēt*. English *man-men*, *foot-feet* show the same development as German *Mann-Männer*, *Fuss-Füsse*, though German writes the mutated vowel with a dieresis over the same symbol used for the unmutated vowel, whereas English uses an altogether different letter. The process, which Jacob Grimm called *umlaut*, occurred in different periods and in varying degrees in the various languages of the Germanic group, in English beginning probably in the sixth century. The fourth-century Gothic recorded by Bishop Wulfila shows no evidence of it.

Vowel mutation was originally a phonetic phenomenon only; but after the endings that caused the change had been lost, the mutated vowels served as markers for the two case forms. Mutation was not a sign of the plural in Old English, because it occurred also in the dative singular and not all plural forms had it. Only later did it become a distinctive indication of plurality for those nouns like *feet*, *geese*, *teeth*, *mice*, *lice*, and *men* that have retained mutated forms into Modern English. Modern English *breeches* is a double plural (OE nominative singular *brōc* 'trouser,' nominative plural *brēc*), as is the already cited *kine* (OE nominative singular *cū* 'cow,' nominative plural *cȳ* with the addition of the plural *-n* from words like *oxen*).

Mutation is not limited to nouns. Its effects can be seen also in such pairs as *strong-strength*, *old-elder*, and *doom-deem*. In all these pairs the second word originally had an ending containing an *i*-sound (either a vowel or its consonantal equivalent [y]) that caused the mutation of the root vowel but was lost afterwards.

MODERN SURVIVALS OF CASE AND NUMBER

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In all declensions, the genitive plural form ended in *-a*. This ending survived as [ə] (written *-e*) in Middle English in a construction called the "genitive of measure," and its effects continue in Modern English (with loss of [ə], which dropped away in all final positions) in such phrases as *a sixty-mile drive* and *six-foot tall* (rather than *miles* and *feet*). Though *feet* may often occur in the latter construction, only *foot* is idiomatic in *three-foot board* and *six-foot man*. *Mile* and *foot* in such expressions are historically genitive plurals derived from the Old English forms *mila* and *fōta*, rather than the irregular forms they now appear to be.

The dative plural, which was *-um* for all declensions, survives in the antiquated form *whilom*, from Old English *hwilum* 'at times,' and in the analogical *seldom* (earlier *seldan*). The dative singular ending *-e*, characteristic of the majority of Old English nouns, survives in the word *alive*, from Old English *on life*. The Old English voiced *f* between vowels, later spelled *v*, is preserved in the Modern English form, though the final vowel is no longer pronounced.

There are only a very few relics of Old English feminine genitives without *-s*, for instance, *Lady Chapel* and *ladybird*, for *Our Lady's Chapel* and *Our Lady's bird*. The feminine *ō*-stem genitive singular ended in *-e*, which was completely lost in pronunciation by the end of the fourteenth century, along with all other final *e*'s of whatever origin.

The forms discussed in these paragraphs are about the only traces left of Old English noun inflections, other than the plural and genitive singular forms in *-s* (along with a few mutated plurals). One of the most significant differences between Old English and Modern English nouns is that Old English had no device for indicating plurality alone—apart from case. It was not until Middle English times that the plural nominative-accusative *-es* (from OE *-as*) drove out the other case forms of the plural (save for the comparatively rare genitive of measure construction discussed above).

MODIFIERS

DEMONSTRATIVES

There were two demonstratives in Old English. The more frequent was that used where we might have a definite article; it can be translated as either 'the' or 'that, those.' Its forms were as follows:

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nom.	sē, se	þæt	sēo	þā
Acc.	þone	þæt	þā	þā
Gen.	þæs	þæs	þære	þāra
Dat.	þām, þān	þām, þān	þære	þām, þān
Ins.	þȳ, þon, þē	þȳ, þon, þē		

Genders were distinguished only in the singular; in the plural no gender distinction was made. The masculine and neuter forms were alike in the genitive, dative, and instrumental. There was no distinct instrumental in the feminine or the plural, the dative being used in that function instead. By analogy with the other forms of the word, *sēse* and *sēo* were superseded in late Old English by the variants *þe/þe* and *þeo*.

The Modern English definite article *the* developed from the masculine-nominative *þe*, remodeled by analogy from *se*. When we use *the* in comparisons, however, as in "The sooner, the better," it is a development of the neuter instrumental form *þē*, the literal sense being something like 'By this [much]

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sooner, by this [much] better.' The Modern English demonstrative *that* is from the neuter nominative-accusative *þæt*, and its plural *those* has been borrowed from the other demonstrative.

The other, less frequently used Old English demonstrative (usually translated 'this, *pl.* these') had the nominative singular forms *þēs* (masculine), *þis* (neuter, whence ModE *this*), and *þeos* (feminine). Its nominative-accusative plural, *þās*, developed into *those* and was confused with *tho* (from *þā*), the earlier plural of *that*. Consequently in Middle English a new plural was developed for *this*, namely *these*.

ADJECTIVES

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The adjective in Old English, like that in Latin, agreed with the noun it modified in gender, case, and number; but Germanic, as noted in Chapter 4, had developed a distinctive adjective declension—the weak declension, used after the two demonstratives and after possessive pronouns, which made the following noun definite in its reference. In this declension *-an* predominated as an ending, as shown in Table 5.2 for *se dola cyning* 'that foolish king,' and in Table 5.3 for *þæt dole bearn* 'that foolish child,' and *sēo dole ides* 'that foolish woman.' Like the demonstratives, weak adjectives did not vary for gender in the plural.

The strong declension was used when the adjective was not preceded by a demonstrative or a possessive pronoun and when it was predicative. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 show the strong adjective in the phrases *dol cyning* 'a foolish king' and *dol bearn* 'a foolish child,' and *dolu ides* 'a foolish woman.' The genders of the plural forms differed only in the nominative-accusative.

TABLE 5.2 WEAK SINGULAR ADJECTIVE DECLENSION

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nom.	<i>se dola cyning</i>	<i>þæt dole bearn</i>	<i>sēo dole ides</i>
Acc.	<i>þone dolan cyning</i>	<i>þæt dole bearn</i>	<i>þā dolan idese</i>
Gen.	<i>þæs dolan cyninges</i>	<i>þæs dolan bearnes</i>	<i>þære dolan idese</i>
Dat.	<i>þām dolan cyninge</i>	<i>þām dolan bearne</i>	<i>þære dolan idese</i>
Ins.	<i>þy dolan cyninge</i>	<i>þy dolan bearne</i>	

TABLE 5.3 WEAK PLURAL ADJECTIVE DECLENSION

Nom., Acc.	<i>þā dolan cyningas, bearn, idesa</i>
Gen.	<i>þāra dola (or dolena) cyninga, bearna, idesa</i>
Dat.	<i>þām dolum cyningum, bearnum, idesum</i>

TABLE 5.4 | STRONG SINGULAR ADJECTIVE DECLENSION

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nom.	dol cyning	dol bearn	dolu ides
Acc.	dolne cyning	dol bearn	dole idese
Gen.	doles cyninges	doles bearnes	dolre idese
Dat.	dolum cyninge	dolum bearne	dolre idese
Ins.	dole cyninge	dole bearne	dolre idese

TABLE 5.5 | STRONG PLURAL ADJECTIVE DECLENSION

Nom., Acc.	dole cyningas	dolu bearn	dola idesa
Gen.	dolra cyninga	dolra bearna	dolra idesa
Dat.	dolum cyningum	dolum bearnum	dolum idesum

The comparative of adjectives was regularly formed by adding *-ra*, as in *heardra* 'harder,' and the superlative by adding *-ost*, as in *heardost* 'hardest.' A few adjectives originally used the alternative suffixes **-ira*, **-ist* and consequently had mutated vowels. In attested Old English they took the endings *-ra* and *-est* but retained mutated vowels—for example, *lang* 'long,' *lengra*, *lengest*, and *eald* 'old,' *yldra*, *yldest* (Anglian *ald*, *eldra*, *eldest*). A very few others had comparative and superlative forms from a different root than that of the positive, among them *gōd* 'good,' *betra* 'better,' *betst* 'best' and *micel* 'great,' *māra* 'more,' *māest* 'most.'

Certain superlatives were formed originally with an alternative suffix *-(u)ma*—for example, *forma* (from *fore* 'before'). When the ending with *m* ceased to be felt as having superlative force, these words and some others took by analogy the additional ending *-est*. Thus double superlatives (though not recognized as such) like *formest*, *midmest*, *ūtemest*, and *innemest* came into being. The ending appeared to be *-mest* (rather than *-est*), which even in late Old English times was misunderstood as 'most'; hence our Modern English forms *foremost*, *midmost*, *utmost*, and *inmost*, in which the final syllable is and has long been equated with *most*, though it has no historical connection with it. Beginning thus as a blunder, this *-most* has subsequently been affixed to other words—for example, *uppermost*, *furthermost*, and *topmost*.

ADVERBS

The great majority of Old English adverbs were formed from adjectives by adding the suffix *-e* (historically, the instrumental case ending for 'with' or 'through')—for example, *wrāp* 'angry,' *wrāpe* 'angrily.' This *-e* was lost along with all other final *e*'s by the end of the fourteenth century, with the result that some Modern English adjectives and adverbs are identical in form—for instance, *loud*, *deep*, and *slow*—though Modern English idiom sometimes prefers adverbial forms with *-ly* over those without this suffix ("He plunged deep into the ocean" but "He thought deeply about religious matters"; "Drive slow" (which is indeed standard English) but "He proceeded slowly").

H. L. Mencken dubbed these *-ly*-less adverbs “bob-tailed,” and today we refer to them as “flat adverbs.” Flat adverbs are often enthusiastically singled out by language purists as “mistakes”—it is not uncommon to see a Facebook wall blown up with a long derisory thread when someone spots a road sign that “wrongly” reads, “Drive slow”—but pedants may ever be gently reminded by equally enthusiastic students of English language history that adverbs not ending in *-ly* have a long and storied history in English, as a quick look into the *Oxford English Dictionary* proves; one wonders why these same purists do not protest the “missing” *-ly* when they hear the common affirmative expressions “mighty kind” and “sure enough,” as H. W. Fowler deftly pointed out in the entry for “Unidiomatic *-ly*” in his *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (see also “Adverb is as adverb does,” Jan Freeman, *The Boston Globe*, September 17, 2006).

In addition, other case forms of nouns and adjectives might be used adverbially, notably the genitive and the dative. The adverbial genitive is used in “He hwearf *dæges* and *nihtes*” ‘He wandered of a day and of a night (that is, by day and by night),’ in which *dæges* and *nihtes* are genitive singulars. The construction survives in “He worked nights” (labeled “dialect” and U.S.” by the *Oxford English Dictionary*), sometimes rendered analytically as “He worked of a night.” The usage is, as the OED says, “in later use prob[ably] apprehended as a plural,” though historically, as we have seen, it is not so. The *-s* of *homewards* (OE *hāmweardes*), *towards* (*tōweardes*), *besides*, *betimes*, and *needs* (as in *must needs be*, sometimes rendered analytically as *must of necessity be*) is also from the genitive singular ending *-es*. The same ending is merely written differently in *once*, *twice*, *thrice*, *hence*, and *since*. Modern, if archaic, *whilom* ‘at times, formerly,’ from the dative plural *hwilum* has already been cited, but Old English used other datives similarly.

Adverbs regularly formed the comparative with *-or* and the superlative with *-ost* or *-est* (*wrāþor* ‘more angrily,’ *wrāþost* ‘most angrily’).

PRONOUNS

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Except for the loss of the dual number and the old second person singular forms, the personal pronouns are almost as complex today as they were in Old English times. In one respect (the two genitive forms of Modern English), they are more complex today. The Old English forms of the pronouns for the first two persons are as follows:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nom.	ic ‘I’	wit ‘we both’	wē ‘we all’
Ac.–D.	mē ‘me’	unc ‘us both’	ūs ‘us all’
Gen.	mīn ‘my/mine’	uncer ‘our(s) (both)’	ūre ‘our(s) (all)’
Nom.	þū ‘thou, you’	git ‘you both’	gē ‘ye, you all’
Ac.–D.	þē ‘thee, you’	inc ‘you both’	ēow ‘you all’
Gen.	þīn ‘thy/thine, your(s)’	uncer ‘your(s) (both)’	ēower ‘your(s) (all)’

The dual forms, which were used to talk about exactly two persons, were disappearing even by late Old English times. The second person singular (*th*-forms) and the second person plural nominative (*ye*) survived well into the Modern English period, especially in religious and poetic language, but they are seldom used today and almost never with traditional correctness. When used as modifiers, the genitives of the first and second persons were declined like the strong adjectives.

Gender appeared only in the third person singular forms, exactly as in Modern English:

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nom.	<i>hē</i> 'he'	<i>hit</i> 'it'	<i>hēo</i> 'she'	<i>hi</i> 'they'
Acc.	<i>hine</i> 'him'	<i>hit</i> 'it'	<i>hī</i> 'her'	<i>hī</i> 'them'
Dat.	<i>him</i> 'him'	<i>him</i> 'it'	<i>hire</i> 'her'	<i>him, heom</i> 'them'
Gen.	<i>his</i> 'his'	<i>his</i> 'its'	<i>hire</i> 'her(s)'	<i>hire, heora</i> 'their(s)'

The masculine accusative *hine* has survived only in southwestern dialects of British English as [ən], as in "Didst thee zee un?" that is, "Did you see him?" (OED, s.v. *hin*, *hine*).

Modern English *she* has an unclear history, but it is perhaps a development of the demonstrative *sēo* rather than of the personal pronoun *hēo*. A new form was needed because *hēo* became by regular sound change identical in pronunciation with the masculine *he*—an obviously unsatisfactory state of affairs. The feminine accusative *hī* has not survived.

The neuter *hit* has survived when stressed, notably at the beginning of a sentence, in some types of nonstandard Modern English. The loss of [h-] in standard English was due to lack of stress and is paralleled by a similar loss in the other *h*-pronouns when they are unstressed, as for example, "Give her his book," which in the natural speech of people at all cultural levels would show no trace of either [h]: "Give 'er 'is book"; compare also "raise her up" and "razor up," "rub her gloves" and "rubber gloves." In the neuter, however, [h] has been lost completely in standard English, even in writing, whereas in the other *h*-pronouns we always write the *h*, but pronounce it only when the pronoun is stressed. The genitive *its* is obviously not a development of the Old English form *his*, but a new analogical form occurring first in Modern English.

Of the third person plural forms only the dative has survived; it is the regular spoken, unstressed, objective form in Modern English, with loss of *h*- as in the other *h*-pronouns—for example, "I told 'em what to do." The Modern English stressed form *them*, like *they* and *their*, is of Scandinavian origin.

For all the personal pronouns except *hit*, as well as for the interrogative *hwā* 'who,' considered in the next section, the accusative form has been replaced by the dative. In the first and second persons, that replacement began very early; for example, *mec*, an earlier accusative for the first person singular, had been lost by the time of classical Old English and its functions assumed by the original dative *mē*.

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INTERROGATIVE AND RELATIVE PRONOUNS

The interrogative pronoun *hwā* ‘who’ was declined only in the singular and had only two gender forms:

	Masculine/ Feminine	Neuter
Nom.	<i>hwā</i>	<i>hwæt</i>
Acc.	<i>hwone</i>	<i>hwæt</i>
Gen.	<i>hwæs</i>	<i>hwæs</i>
Dat.	<i>hwæm</i> , <i>hwām</i>	<i>hwæm</i> , <i>hwām</i>
Ins.	<i>hwæm</i> , <i>hwām</i>	<i>hwȳ</i>

Hwā is the source of our *who*, *hwām* of *whom*, and *hwæt* of *what*. *Hwone* did not survive beyond the Middle English period, its functions being taken over by the dative. *Whose* is from *hwæs* with its vowel influenced by *who* and *whom*. The distinctive neuter instrumental *hwȳ* is the source of our *why*. Other Old English interrogatives included *hwæðer* ‘which of two’ and *hwilc* ‘which of many.’ They were both declined like strong adjectives.

Hwā was exclusively interrogative in Old English. The particle *þe* was the usual relative pronoun. Since this word had only a single form, it is a great pity that we ever lost it; it involved no choice such as that which we must make—in writing, at least—between *who* and *whom*, now that these have come to be used as relatives. Sometimes, however, *þe* was preceded by the appropriate form of the demonstrative *sē* to make a compound relative.

VERBS

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Like their Modern English counterparts, Old English verbs were either weak, adding a *-d* or *-t* to form their preterits and past participles (as in modern *talk-talked*), or strong, changing their stressed vowel for the same purpose (as in modern *sing-sang-sung*). Old English had several kinds of weak verbs and seven groups of strong verbs distinguished by their patterns of vowel change; and it had a considerably larger number of strong verbs than does Modern English. Old English also had a fair number of irregular verbs in both the weak and strong categories—grammatical irregularity being frequent at all periods in the history of language, rather than a recent “corruption.”

The conjugation of a typical weak verb, *cēpan* ‘to keep,’ and of a typical strong verb, *helpan* ‘to help,’ is as follows:

PRESENT SYSTEM

Infinitive

Simple

cēpan ‘to keep’*helpan* ‘to help’

Inflected

tō cēpenne ‘to keep’*tō helpenne* ‘to help’

Indicative

ic	cēpe 'I keep'	helpe 'I help'
þū	cēpest 'you keep'	hilpst 'you help'
hē, hēo, hit	cēpeþ 'he, she, it keeps'	hilpþ 'he, she, it helps'
wē, gē, hī	cēpaþ 'we, you, they keep'	helpaþ 'we, you, they help'

Subjunctive

Singular	cēpe 'I, you, he, she, it keep'	helpe 'I, you, he, she, it help'
Plural	cēpen 'we, you, they keep'	helpen 'we, you, they help'

Imperative

Singular	cēp '(you) keep!'	help '(you) help!'
Plural	cēpaþ '(you all) keep!'	helpaþ '(you all) help!'
<i>Participle</i>	cēpende 'keeping'	helpende 'helping'

PRETERIT SYSTEM

Indicative

ic	cēpte 'I kept'	healp 'I helped'
þū	cēptest 'you kept'	hulpe 'you helped'
hē, hēo, hit	cēpte 'he, she, it kept'	healp 'he, she, it helped'
wē, gē, hī	cēpton 'we, you, they kept'	hulpon 'we, you, they helped'

Subjunctive

Singular	cēpte 'I, you, he, she, it kept'	hulpe 'I, you, he, she, it helped'
Plural	cēpten 'we, you, they kept'	hulpen 'we, you, they helped'
<i>Past Participle</i>	gecēped 'kept'	geholpen 'helped'

This Old English verb *helpan* for 'to help' turns up as a linguistic fossil, though more and more rarely now, in the North American Appalachian mountains in forms such as "May I holp you?"

INDICATIVE FORMS OF VERBS

The indicative forms of the verbs, present and preterit, were used for making statements and asking questions; they are the most frequent of the verb forms and the most straightforward and ordinary in their uses. The Old English preterit was used for events that happened in the past, and the present tense was used for all other times, that is, for present and future events and for habitual actions.

In the present indicative, the *-t* of the second person singular was not a part of the original ending; it came from the frequent use of *þū* as an enclitic, that is, an unstressed word following a stressed word (here the verb) and spoken as if it were a part of the stressed word. For example, *cēpes þū* became *cēpesþu*, then dissimilated to *cēpestu*, and later lost the unstressed *-u*.

SUBJUNCTIVE AND IMPERATIVE FORMS

The subjunctive did not indicate person but only tense and number. The endings were alike for both tenses: singular *-e* and plural *-en*.

The subjunctive was used in main clauses to express wishes and commands: *God ūs helpe* '(May) God help us'; *Ne hēo hundas cēpe* 'She shall not keep dogs.' It was also used in a wide variety of subordinate clauses, including constructions in which we still use it: *swelce hē tam wære* 'as if he were tame.' But it also occurred in many subordinate clauses where we would no longer use it: *lc heom sægde þæt hēo blīðe wære* 'I told them that she was happy.'

The imperative singular of *cēpan* and *helpan* was without ending, but for some verbs it ended in *-e* or *-a*. As in Modern English, imperatives were used for making commands.

NONFINITE FORMS

In addition to their finite forms (those having personal endings), Old English verbs had four nonfinite forms: two infinitives and two participles. The simple infinitive ended in *-an* for most verbs; for some weak verbs, its ending was *-ian* (*bodian* 'to proclaim,' *nerian* 'to save'), and for some verbs that underwent contraction, the ending was *-n* (*fōn* 'to seize,' *gān* 'to go'). The inflected infinitive was a relic of an earlier time when infinitives were declined like nouns. The two infinitives were often, but not always, interchangeable. The inflected infinitive was especially used when the infinitive had a noun function, like a Modern English gerund: *Is blīðe tō helpenne* 'It is joyful to help,' or, 'Helping is joyful.'

The participles were used much like those of Modern English, as parts of verb phrases and as modifiers. The usual ending of the present participle was *-ende*. The ending of the strong past participle, *-en*, has survived in many strong verbs to the present day: *bitten*, *eaten*, *frozen*, *swollen*. The ending of weak past participles, *-d* or *-t*, was, of course, the source for all regular past participle endings in Modern English. The prefix *ge-* was fairly general for past participles but occurred sometimes as a prefix in all forms. It survived in the past participle throughout the Middle English period as *y-* (or *i-*), as in Milton's archaic use in "L'Allegro": "In heaven ycleped Euphrosyne . . ." (from OE *geclypod* 'called').

WEAK VERBS

There were three main classes of weak verbs in Old English. The three classes can be illustrated by citing the principal parts for one or two verbs of each class. Principal parts are forms from which the whole conjugation can be predicted:

	Infinitive	Preterit	Past Participle
<i>Class I</i>	fremman 'to do'	fremede 'did'	gefremed 'done'
	cēpan 'to keep'	cēpte 'kept'	gecēped 'kept'
<i>Class II</i>	endian 'to end'	endode 'ended'	geendod 'ended'
<i>Class III</i>	habban 'to have'	hæfde 'had'	gehæfd 'had'
	secgan 'to say'	sægde 'said'	gesægd 'said'

Many of the weak verbs were originally causative verbs derived from nouns, adjectives, or other verbs by the addition of a suffix with an *i*-sound that mutated the stem vowel of the word. Thus, *fyllan* 'to fill, cause to be full' is from the adjective *full*, and *settan* 'to set, cause to sit' is from the verb *sæt*, the preterit singular of *sittan*. Other pairs of words of the same sort are, in their Modern English forms, *feed* 'cause to have food,' *fell* 'cause to fall,' and *lay* 'cause to lie.'

STRONG VERBS

Most of the other Old English verbs—all others, in fact, except for a few very frequently used ones discussed in the next two sections—formed their preterits by a vowel change called *gradation* (also called *ablaut* by Jacob Grimm), which was perhaps due to Indo-European variations in pitch and stress. Gradation is by no means confined to these strong verbs, but it is best illustrated by them. Gradation should not be confused with mutation (umlaut), which is the approximation of a vowel in a stressed syllable to another vowel (or semivowel) in a following syllable. Gradation, which is much more ancient, is an Indo-European phenomenon common to all the languages derived from Proto-Indo-European. The vowel gradations in Modern English *ride-rod-ridden*, *choose-chose*, *bind-bound*, *come-came*, *eat-ate*, and *shake-shook* are thus an Indo-European inheritance.

Like other Germanic languages, Old English had seven classes of strong verbs. These classes differed in the vowel alternations of their four principal parts. Like the Modern English preterit of *be*, which distinguishes between the singular *I was* and the plural *we were*, most strong verbs had differing stems for their singular and plural preterits. Had that number distinction survived into present-day English, we would be saying *I rode* but *we rid*, and *I fond* but *we found*. Sometimes the old singular has survived into current use and sometimes the old plural (and sometimes neither, but a different form altogether). Examples, one of each of the seven strong classes and their main subclasses, with their principal parts, follow:

		Infinitive	Preterit Singular	Preterit Plural	Past Participle
Class I		writan 'write'	wrāt	writon	gewriten
Class II	(1)	clēofan 'cleave'	clēaf	clufon	geclofen
	(2)	scūfan 'shove'	scēaf	scufon	gescofen
	(3)	frēosan 'freeze'	frēas	fruron	gefroren
Class III	(1)	drincan 'drink'	dranc	druncon	gedruncen
	(2)	helpan 'help'	healp	hulpon	geholpen
	(3)	ceorfan 'carve'	cearf	curfon	gecorfen
Class IV		beran 'bear'	bær	bæron	geboren
Class V	(1)	sprecan 'speak'	spræc	spræcon	gesprecen
	(2)	gifan 'give'	geaf	gēafon	gegifen
Class VI		scacan 'shake'	scōc	scōcon	gescacen
Class VII	(1)	cnāwan 'know'	cnēow	cnēowon	gecnāwen
	(2)	hātan 'be called'	hēt	hēton	gehāten

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The change from *s* to *r* in the last two principal parts of the class II (3) verb *frēosan* was the result of Verner's Law. The Indo-European accent was on the ending of these forms rather than on the stem of the word, as in the first two principal parts, thus creating the necessary conditions for the operation of Verner's Law. The consonant alternation is not preserved in Modern English.

PRETERIT-PRESENT VERBS

Old English had a few verbs that were originally strong but whose strong preterit had come to be used with a present-time sense; consequently, they had to form new weak preterits. They are called preterit-present verbs and are the main source for the important group of modal verbs in Modern English. The following are ones that survive as present-day modals:

Infinitive	Present	Preterit
āgan 'owe'	āh	āhte (<i>ought</i>)
cunnan 'know how'	cann (<i>can</i>)	cūðe (<i>could</i>)
magan 'be able'	mæg (<i>may</i>)	meahte (<i>might</i>)
*mōtan 'be allowed'	mōt	mōste (<i>must</i>)
sculan 'be obliged'	sceal (<i>shall</i>)	sceolde (<i>should</i>)

Although not a part of this group in Old English, the verb *willan* 'wish, want,' whose preterit was *wolde*, also became a part of the present-day modal system as *will* and *would*.

SUPPLETIVE VERBS

It is not surprising that frequently used verbs develop irregularities. *Bēon* 'to be' was in Old English, as its modern descendant still is, to some extent a badly mixed-up verb, with alternative forms from several different roots, as follows (with appropriate pronouns):

(ic) eom or bēo	'I am'
(þū) eart or bist	'you (sg.) are'
(hē, hēo, hit) is or bið	'he, she, it is'
(wē, gē, hī) sindon, sind, sint, or bēoð	'we, you, they are'

The forms *eom*, *is*, and *sind(on)* or *sint* were from an Indo-European root **es-*, whose forms **esmi*, **esti*, and **senti* are seen in Sanskrit *asmi*, *asti*, and *santi* and in Latin *sum*, *est*, and *sunt*. The second person *eart* was from a different Indo-European root: **er-* with the original meaning 'arise.' The Modern English plural *are* is from an Anglian form of that root. The forms beginning with *b* were from a third root **bheu-*, from which came also Sanskrit *bhavati* 'becomes' and Latin *fuī* 'have been.' The preterit forms

were from yet another verb, whose infinitive in Old English was *wesan* (a class V strong verb):

- (ic) wæs
- (þū) wære
- (hē, hēo, hit) wæs
- (wē, gē, hi) wæron

The alternation of *s* and *r* in the preterit was the result of Verner's Law. Thus the Old English verb for 'be' (like its Modern English counterpart) combined forms of what were originally four different verbs—seen in the present-day forms *be*, *am*, *are*, *was*. Paradigms which thus combine historically unrelated forms are called *suppletive*.

Another suppletive verb is *gān* 'go,' whose preterit *ēode* was doubtless from the same Indo-European root as the Latin verb *ēo* 'go.' Modern English has lost the *ēode* preterit but has found a new suppletive form for *go* in *went*, the irregular preterit of *wend* (compare *send*–*sent*). Also irregular, although not suppletive, is *dōn* 'do' with the preterit *dyde* 'did.'

It is notable that *to be* alone has preserved distinctive singular and plural preterit forms (*was* and *were*) in standard Modern English. Nonstandard speakers have carried through the tendency that has reduced the preterit forms of all other verbs to a single form, and they get along very nicely by using *you was*, *we was*, and *they was*, which are certainly no more inherently "bad" than *you sang*, *we sang*, and *they sang*—for *sung* in the plural would be the historically "correct" development of Old English *gē*, *wē*, *hī sungon*.



SYNTAX

Old English syntax has an easily recognizable kinship with that of Modern English. There are, of course, differences—and some striking ones—but they do not disguise the close similarity between an Old English sentence and its Modern English counterpart. Many of those differences have already been treated in this chapter, but they may be summarized as follows:

PODEL
5.20

1. Nouns, adjectives, and most pronouns had fuller inflection for case than their modern developments do; the inflected forms were used to signal a word's function in its sentence.
2. Adjectives agreed in case, number, and gender with the nouns they modified.
3. Adjectives were also inflected for "definiteness" in the so-called strong and weak declensions.
4. Numbers could be used either as we use them, to modify a noun, as in *þritig scyllingas* 'thirty shillings,' or as nominals, with the accompanying word in the genitive case, as in *þritig rihtwīsa*, literally 'thirty of righteous men.' Such use of the genitive was regular with the indeclinable noun *fela* 'much, many': *fela goldes* 'much [of] gold' or *fela folca* 'many [of] people.'
5. Old English used the genitive inflection in many circumstances that would call for an *of* phrase in Modern English—for example, *þæs īglandes micel dæl* 'a great deal of the island,' literally, 'that island's great deal.'

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6. Old English had no articles, properly speaking. Where we would use a definite article, the Anglo-Saxons often used one of the demonstratives (such as *se* 'that' or *þes* 'this'); and, where we would use an indefinite article, they sometimes used either the numeral *ān* 'one' or *sum* 'a certain.' But all of those words had stronger meanings than the Modern English definite and indefinite articles; thus frequently Old English had no word at all where we would expect an article.
7. Although Old English could form verb phrases just as we do by combining the verbs for 'have' and 'be' with participles (as in Modern English *has run* and *is running*), it did so less frequently, and the system of such combinations was less fully developed. Combinations using both those auxiliary verbs, such as *has been running*, did not occur in Old English, and one-word forms of the verb (like *runs* and *ran*) were used more often than today. Thus, although Old and Modern English are alike in having just two inflected tenses, the present and the preterit, Old English used those tenses to cover a wider range of meanings than does Modern English, which has frequent recourse to verb phrases. Old English often relied on adverbs to convey nuances of meaning that we would express by verb phrases; for example, Modern English *He had come* corresponds to Old English *Hē ær cōm*, literally 'He earlier came.'
8. Old English formed passive verb phrases much as we do, but it often used the simple infinitive in a passive sense as we do not—for example, *Hēo hēht hine lēran* 'She ordered him to be taught,' literally 'She ordered him to teach' but meaning 'She ordered (someone) to teach him,' in which *hine* 'him' is the object of the infinitive *lēran* 'to teach,' not of the verb *hēht* 'ordered.' Another Old English alternative for the Modern English passive was the indefinite pronoun *man* 'one,' as in *Hine man hēng* 'Him one hanged,' that is, 'He was hanged.'
9. The subjunctive mood was more common in Old English. It was used, for example, after some verbs that do not require it in Modern English, as in *Sume men cweðaþ þæt hit sý feaxede steorra* 'Some men say that it [a comet] be a long-haired star.' The subjunctive mood was also used in constructions where conservative present-day usage has it: *swilce hē wære* 'as if he were' or *þeah hē ealne middangeard gestryne* 'though he [the] whole world gain.'
10. Old English had a number of impersonal verbs that were used without a subject: *Mē lyst rædan* '[It] pleases me to read' and *Swā mē þyncþ* 'So [it] seems to me.' The object of the verb (in these examples, *mē*) comes before it and in the second example gave rise to the now archaic expression *methinks* (literally 'to me seems'), which the modern reader is likely to misinterpret as an odd combination of *me* as subject of the present-day verb *think*.
11. The subject of any Old English verb could be omitted if it was implied by the context, especially when the verb followed a clause that expressed the subject: *Hē þē æt sunde oferflāt, hæfde mære mægen* 'He outstripped you at swimming, [he] had more strength.'

12. On the other hand, the subject of an Old English verb might be expressed twice—once as a pronoun at its appropriate place in the structure of the sentence and once as a phrase or clause in anticipation: *And þā þe þær tō lāfe wæron, hī cōmon to þæs carcernes dura* ‘And those that were there as survivors, they came to that prison’s door.’ This construction occurs in Modern English but is often considered inelegant; it is frequent in Old English.
13. The Old English negative adverb *ne* came before (rather than after) the verb it modified: *Ic ne dyde* ‘I did not.’ Consequently it contracted with certain following verbs: *nis* (*ne is* ‘is not’), *nille* (*ne wille* ‘will not’), *naefþ* (*ne hæfþ* ‘has not’); contrast the Modern English contraction of *not* with certain preceding verbs: *isn’t*, *won’t*, *hasn’t*.
14. Old English word order was somewhat less fixed than that of Modern English but in general was similar. Old English declarative sentences tended to fall into the subject-verb-complement order usual in Modern English—for example, *Hē wæs swiðe spēdig man* ‘He was a very successful man’ and *Eadwine eorl cōm mid landfyrde and drāf hine ut* ‘Earl Edwin came with a land army and drove him out.’ However, declarative sentences might have a pronoun object before the verb instead of after it: *Se hālga Andreas him andswarode* ‘The holy Andrew him answered.’ (Notice also the order of objects in the sentences in numbered paragraph 8 above.) When a sentence began with *þā* ‘then, when’ or *ne* ‘not,’ the verb usually preceded the subject: *Þā sealde se cyning him sweord* ‘Then gave the king him a sword’; *Ne can ic nōht singan* ‘Not can I nought sing [I cannot sing anything].’ In dependent clauses the verb usually came last, as it does also in Modern German: *God geseah þā þæt hit gōd wæs* ‘God saw then that it good was’; *Sē micla here, þe wē gefyrn ymbe spræcon . . .* ‘The great army, which we before about spoke . . .’ Old English interrogative sentences had a verb-subject-complement order, but did not use auxiliary verbs as Modern English does: *Hæfst þū ænigne gefēran?* ‘Hast thou any companion?’ rather than ‘Do you have any companion?’
15. Old English had a variety of ways of subordinating one clause to another, but it favored what grammarians call *parataxis* (‘arranging side-by-side’)—the juxtaposing of clauses with no formal subordination one to the other, although the adverb *ðā* (‘then’) was often used. These three clauses describe how Orpheus lost his wife, Eurydice, in an Old English retelling of the Greek legend: *Ðā hē forð on ðæt leoht cōm, ðā beseah he hine under bæc wið ðæs wifes; ðā losode heo him sōna* ‘Then he forth into that light came, then looked he him backward toward that woman; then slipped she from him immediately.’

A good many other syntactic differences could be listed, as Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson do so well in their classic *Guide to Old English*; however, if all of them were given here, the resulting list would suggest that Old English was far removed in structure from its modern development. But the suggestion would be misleading, for the two stages of the language are much more united by their similarities than divided by their differences.

OLD ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED

POEEL
5.21

The first two of the following passages in late West Saxon are from a translation of the Old Testament by Ælfric, the greatest prose writer of the Old English period, the first translator of parts of the Bible into English, and in fact one of the greatest prose writers of English that the language has ever known. The opening verses from Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis are printed here from the edition of the Early English Text Society (O.S. 160), with abbreviations expanded, modern punctuation and capitalization added, some obvious scribal errors corrected, and a few unusual forms regularized. The third passage is the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), edited by Walter W. Skeat (*The Holy Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, and Old Mercian Versions*), also slightly regularized. The fourth passage consists of the opening and closing lines of the epic poem *Beowulf*.

I. Genesis 1.1-5.

1. On angynne gescēop God heofonan and eorðan. 2. Sēo eorðe
In [the] beginning created God heavens and earth. The earth
 wæs sōðlice idel and æmtig, and þeostra wæron ofer ðære
was truly void and empty, and darknesses were over the
 nywelnysse brādnysse; and Godes gāst wæs gefeod ofer wæteru.
abyss's surface; and God's spirit was brought over [the] water.
 3. God cwæð ðā: Gewurðe leoht, and leoht wearð geworht. 4. God
God said then: Be light, and light was made. God
 geseah ðā ðæt hit gōd wæs, and hē tōdælde ðæt leoht fram ðam
saw then that it good was, and he divided the light from the
 ðeostrum. 5. And hēt ðæt leoht dæg and þā ðeostru niht: ðā
darkness. And called the light day and the darkness night: then
 wæs geworden æfen and morgen ān dæg.
was made evening and morning one day.

II. Genesis 2.1-3.

1. Eornostlice ðā wæron fullfremode heofonas and eorðe and
Indeed then were completed heavens and earth and
 eall heora frætewung. 2. And God ðā gefylde on ðone seofodan dæg
all their ornaments. And God then finished on the seventh day
 fram eallum ðām weorcum ðe hē gefremode. 3. And God geblētsode
from all the works that he made. And God blessed
 ðone seofodan dæg and hine gehālgode, for ðan ðe hē on ðone dæg
the seventh day and it hallowed, because he on that day
 geswāc his weorces, ðe hē gescēop tō wyrccenne.
ceased from his work, that he made to be done.

III. Luke 15.11-17, 20-24.

11. Sōðlice sum man hæfde twēgen suna. 12. Þā cwæð se
Truly a certain man had two sons. Then said the
gingra tō his fæder, "Fæder, syle mē minne dæl minre æhte
younger to his father, "Father, give me my portion of my inheritance
þe mē tō gebyrþ." Þā dælde hē him his æhta. 13. Ðā
that me to belongs." Then distributed he to them his possessions. Then
æfter fēawum dagum ealle his þing gegaderode se gingra sunu and
after a few days all his things gathered the younger son and
fērde wræclice on feorlen rīce and forspilde þær his æhta,
went abroad into a distant land and utterly lost there his riches,
lybbende on his gælsan. 14. Ðā hē hȳ hæfde ealle āmyrrede, þā
living in his extravagance. When he them had all squandered, then
wearð mycel hunger on þām rīce and hē wearð wædla. 15. Þā fērde
came great famine on the land and he was indigent. Then went
hē and folgode ānum burhsittendum men þæs rīces; ðā sende hē
he and served a city-dwelling man of that land; then sent he
hine tō his tūne þæt hē hēolde his swīn. 16. Ðā gewilnode hē
him to his estate that he should keep his swine. Then wanted he
his wambe gefyllan of þām bēancoddum þe ðā swȳn æton, and him
his belly to fill with the bean husks that the swine ate, and to him
man ne sealde. 17. Þā bepōhte hē hine and cwæð, "Ealā hū
no one gave. Then thought he to himself and said, "Alas how
fela yrðlinga on mines fæder hūse hlāf genōhne habbað, and ic
many farm workers in my father's house bread enough have, and I
hēr on hungre forwurðe! ..." 20. And hē ārās þā and cōm tō his
here in hunger perish! ..." And he arose then and came to his
fæder. And þā gȳt þā hē wæs feorr his fæder, hē hine geseah and
father. And then yet when he was far from his father, he him saw and
wearð mid mildheortnesse āstyred and ongēan hine arn and hine beclypte
became with compassion stirred and toward him ran and him embraced
and cyste hine. 21. Ðā cwæð his sunu, "Fæder, ic syngode on
and kissed him. Then said his son, "Father, I sinned against
heofon and beforan ðē. Nū ic ne eom wyrþe þæt ic þīn sunu bēo
heaven and before thee. Now I not am worthy that I thy son be
genemned." 22. Ðā cwæþ se fæder tō his þēowum, "Bringað hræðe
named." Then said the father to his servants, "Bring quickly
þone sēlestan gegyrelan and scrȳdað hine, and syllað him hring on his
the best garments and clothe him, and give him a ring on his

IV.

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hand and gescȳ tō his fōtum.
hand and shoes for his feet.

and uton etan and gewistfullian. 24. For þām þēs mīn sunu wæs dēad,
and let us eat and feast.

and hē geedcucode; hē forwearð, and hē is gemēt."
and he returned to life; he was lost, and he is found."

23. And bringað ān fætt styric and ofslēað,
And bring a fat calf and slay (it),

Because this my son was dead,

IV. *Beowulf*, 1-3, 3178-82.

Hwæt, wē Gār-Dena
Lo! we of Spear-Danes

þēodcyniga
of the people's kings,
 hū ða æþelingas
how the princes

.....
 Swā begnornodon
So lamented
 hlāfordes hryre,
the lord's fall,
 cwædon þæt hē wære
they said that he had been
 manna mildest
of men mildest
 lēodum liðost
to people gentlest

in gēardagum,
in old days,
 þrym gefrūnon,
glory have heard,
 ellen fremedon!
courage accomplished!

Gēata lēode
Geats' people
 heorð genēatas;
hearth-companions;
 wyruldcyniga
of world-kings
 ond monðwærust,
and kindest,
 ond lofgèornost.
and most eager for honor.

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