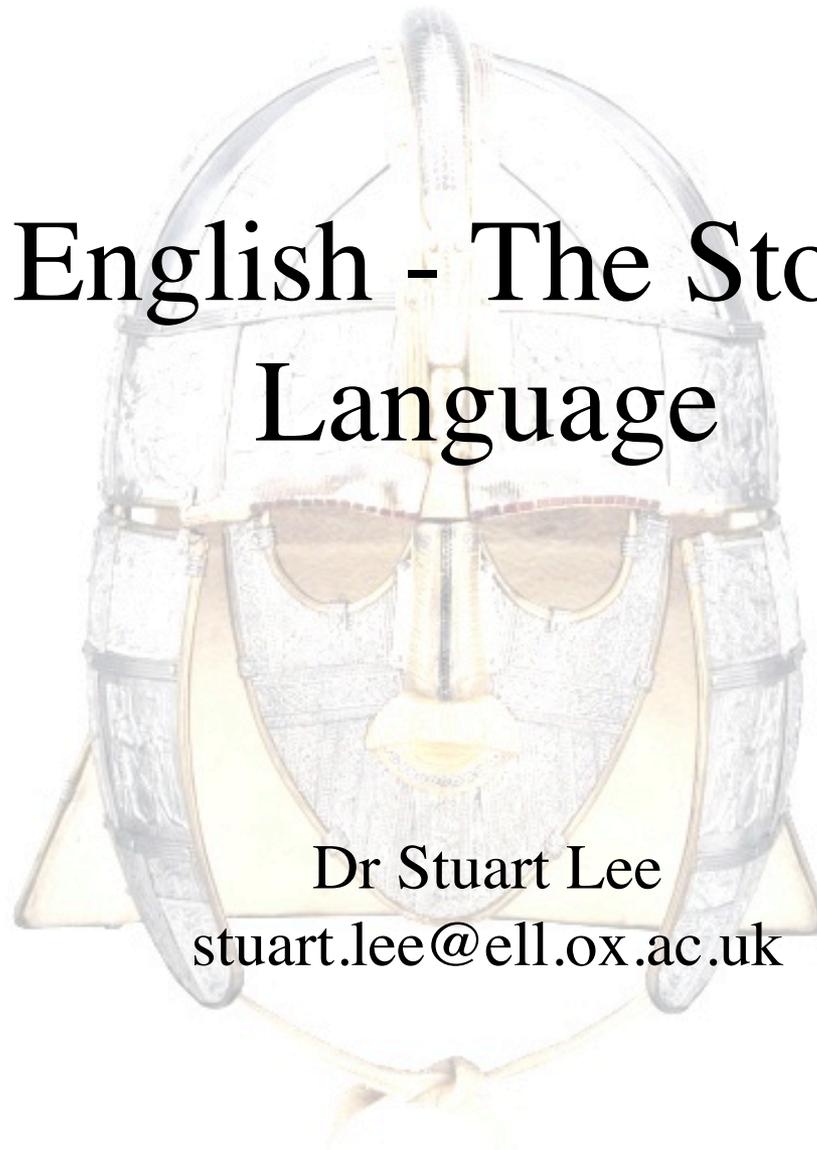




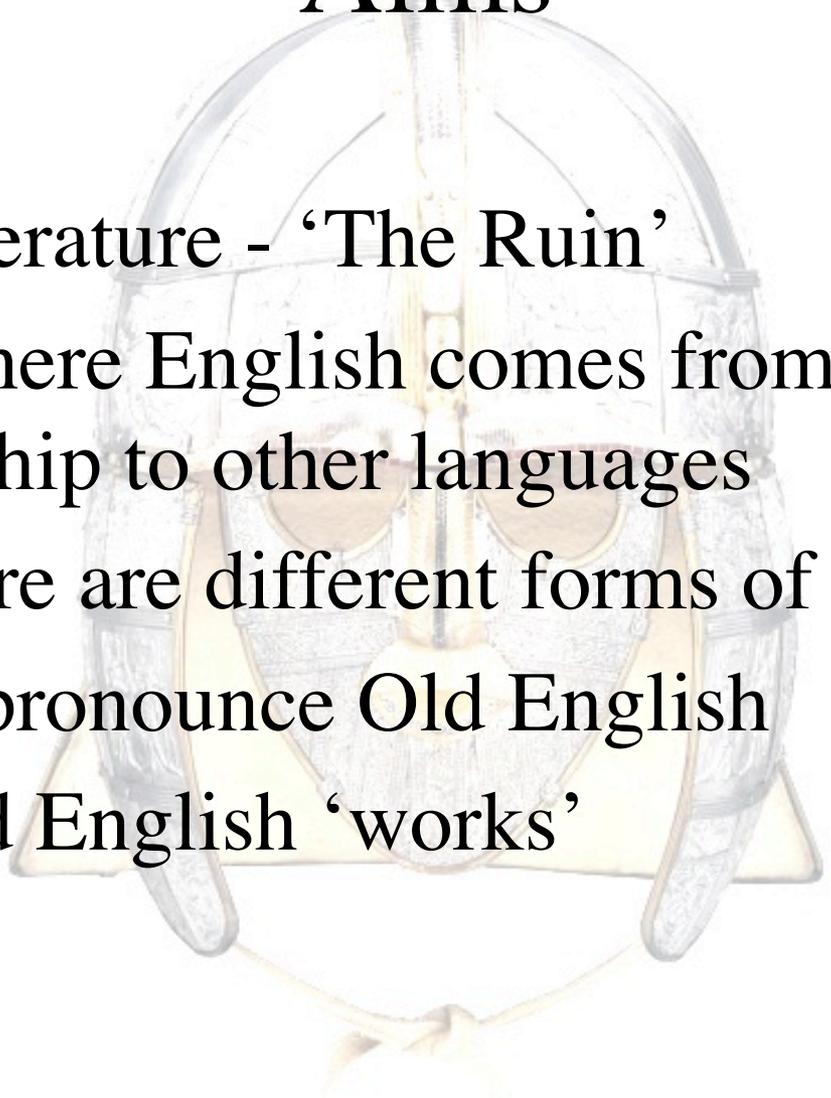
UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

# Old English - The Story of A Language



Dr Stuart Lee  
[stuart.lee@ell.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stuart.lee@ell.ox.ac.uk)

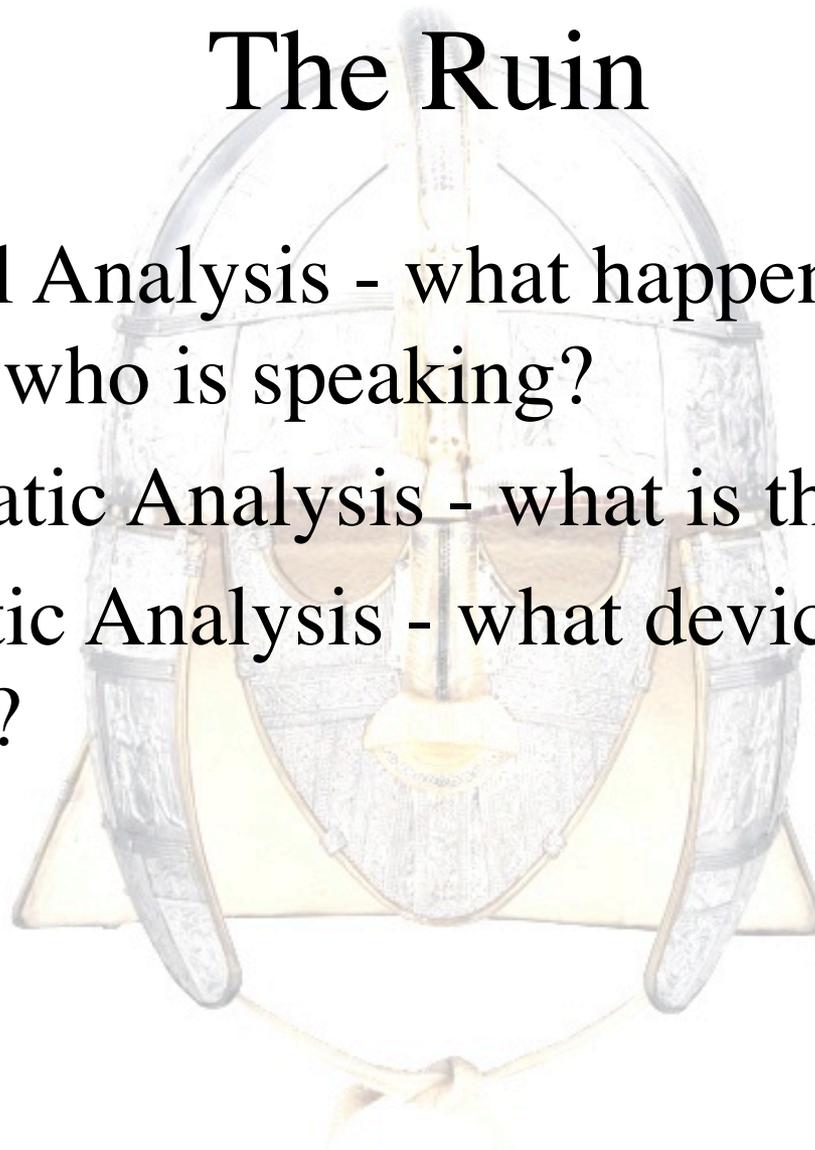
# Aims



- Some literature - ‘The Ruin’
- Show where English comes from, and its relationship to other languages
- Why there are different forms of English
- How to pronounce Old English
- How Old English ‘works’

# The Ruin

- 1. Literal Analysis - what happens, where is it about, who is speaking?
- 2. Thematic Analysis - what is the message?
- 3. Stylistic Analysis - what devices does the poet use?



## The Ruin

Wrætlic is þes wealstān;      wyrde gebræcon,  
burgstede burston,      broснаð enta geweorc.  
Hrōfas sind gehrorene,      hrēorge torras,  
hrungeat berofen,      hrīm on lime,  
5    scearde scūrbeorge      scorene, gedrorene,  
ældo undereotone.      Eorōgrāp hafað  
waldendwyrhtan,      forweorone, geleorene,  
heard gripe hrūsan,      oþ hund cnēa  
werþeoda gewitan.      Oft þæs wāg gebād,  
10    ræghār and rēadfāh,      rīce æfter ðorum,  
ofstonden under stormum;      stēap gēap gedrēas.  
.....  
Mōd monade,      myne swiftne gebrægd;  
hwætrēd in hringas,      hygerōf gebond  
20    weallwalan wīrum      wundrum tōgædre.  
Beorht wæron burgræced,      burnsele monige,  
hēah horngestrēon,      hereswēg micel,  
meodoheall monig      mondrēama full,  
oþpæt pæt onwende      wyrd sēo swīpe.  
25    Crungon walo wīde,      cwōman wōldagas,  
swylt eall fornōm      secgrōfra wera;  
wurdon hyra wigsteal      wēstenstapolas,  
brosnade burgsteall.      Bētend crungon,  
hergas tō hrūsan.      Forþon þās hofu drēorgiað  
30    and þæs tēaforgēapa      tigelum scēadeð

## The Ruin

Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it,  
The city buildings fell apart, the works  
Of giants crumble. Tumbled are the towers,  
Ruined the roofs, and broken the barred gate,  
Frost in the plaster, all the ceilings gape,  
Torn and collapsed and eaten up by age.  
And grit holds in its grip, the hard embrace  
Of earth, the dead departed master-builders,  
Until a hundred generations now  
Of people have passed by. Often this wall  
Stained red and grey with lichen has stood by  
Surviving storms while kingdoms rose and fell.  
And now the high curved wall itself has fallen.  
.....  
The heart inspired, incited to swift action.  
Resolute masons, skilled in rounded building  
Wondrously linked the framework with iron bonds.  
The public halls were bright, with lofty gables,  
Bath-houses many; great the cheerful noise,  
And many mead-halls filled with human pleasures.  
Till mighty fate brought change upon it all.  
Slaughter was widespread, pestilence was rife,  
And death took all those valiant men away.  
The martial halls became deserted places,  
The city crumbled, its repairers fell,  
Its armies to the earth. And so these halls  
Are empty, and this red curved roof now sheds

THE RUIN

hrōstbēages hrōf.      Hryre wong gecrong  
 gebrocen tō beorgum      þær iū beorn monig  
 glædmōd and goldbeorht      gleoma gefrætwed,  
 wlonc and wingāl      wighyrstum scān,  
 35 seah on sinc, on sylfor,      on searogimmas,  
 on ēad, on æht,      on eorcanstān,  
 on þās beorhtan burg      brādan rices.  
 Stānhofu stōdan,      strēam hāte wearp  
 wīdan wylme;      weal eall befeng  
 40 beorhtan bōsme      þær þā baþu wæron,  
 hāt on hreþre;      þæt wæs hyðelic.  
 Lēton þonne gēotan      .....  
 ofer hārne stān      hāte strēamas  
 under .....  
 45 oppæt hringmere.      Hāte .....  
 .....      þær þā baþu wæron.  
 .....

THE RUIN

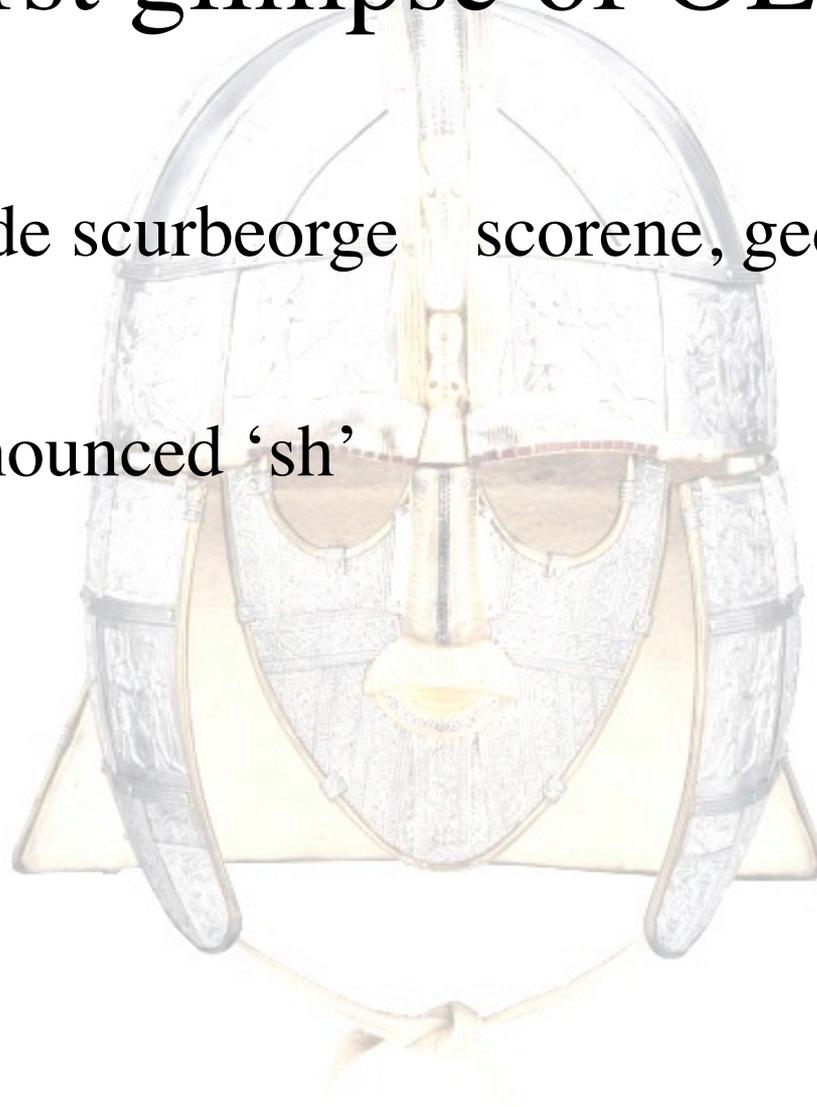
Its tiles, decay has brought it to the ground,  
 Smashed it to piles of rubble, where long since  
 A host of heroes, glorious, gold-adorned,  
 Gleaming in splendour, proud and flushed with wine,  
 Shone in their armour, gazed on gems and treasure,  
 On silver, riches, wealth and jewellery,  
 On this bright city with its wide domains.  
 Stone buildings stood, and the hot stream cast forth  
 Wide sprays of water, which a wall enclosed  
 In its bright compass, where convenient  
 Stood hot baths ready for them at the centre.  
 Hot streams poured forth over the clear grey stone,  
 To the round pool and down into the baths.

# The Ruin

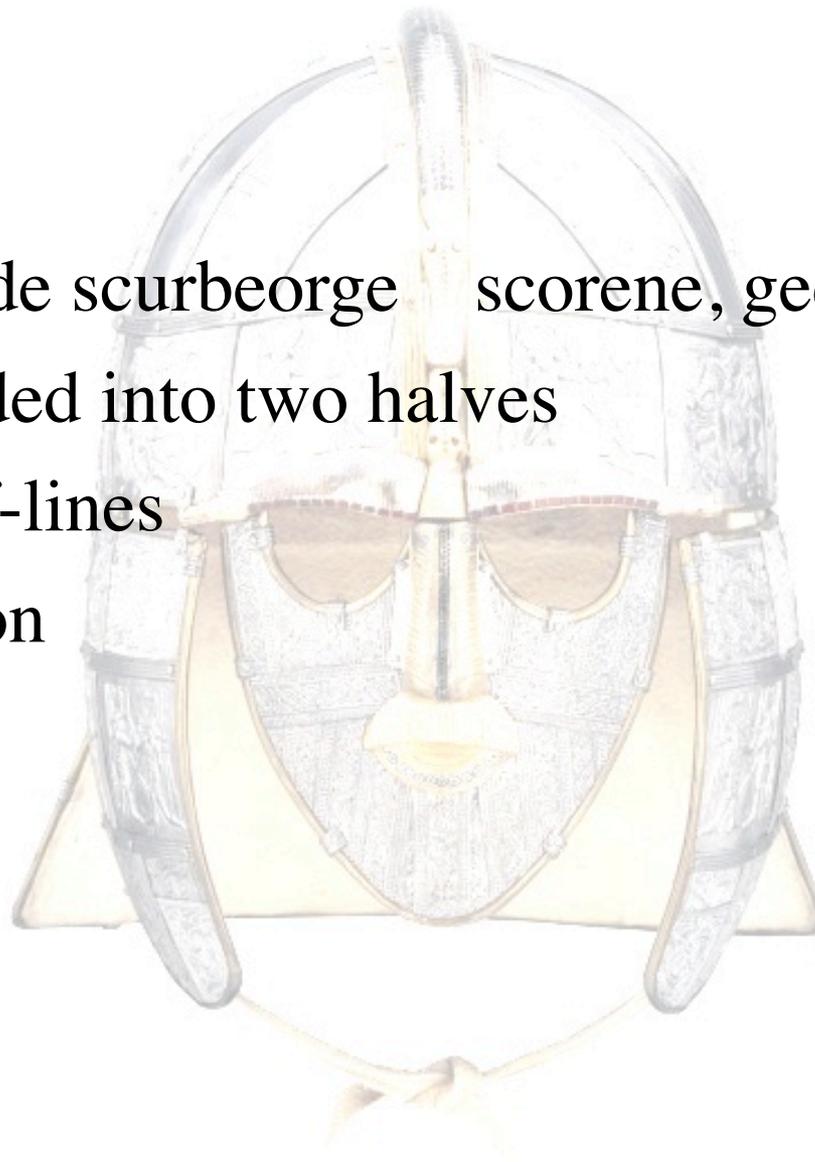
- 1. Literal Analysis - what happens, where is it about, who is speaking? *A single person looking at a Roman ruin, possibly Bath*
- 2. Thematic Analysis - *what is the message? That worldly glory passes away, 'lif is læne'*
- 3. Stylistic Analysis - what devices does the poet use? *Compares past with present using images of colour, sound, weather*
- 4. Language analysis - *for the future*

# Our first glimpse of OE Poetry

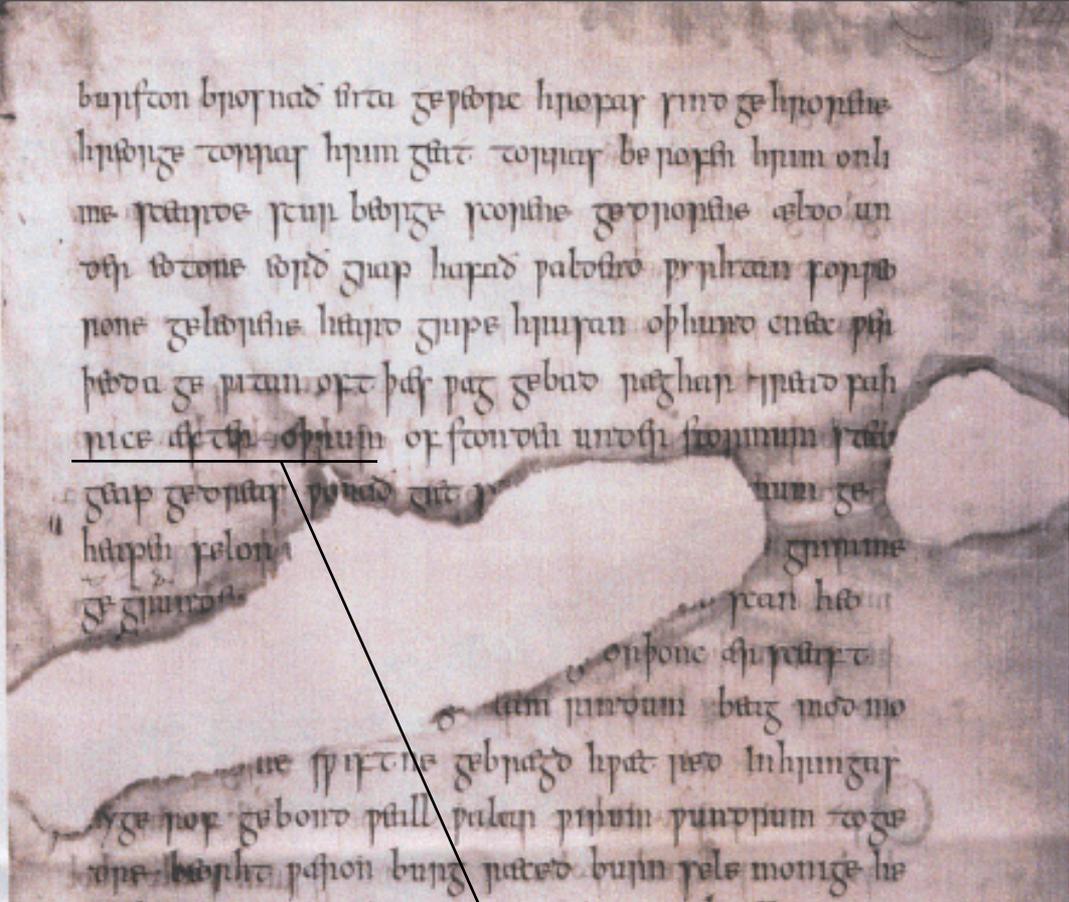
- L5 ‘scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene’
- ‘sc’ - pronounced ‘sh’



- L5 ‘scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene’
- Line divided into two halves
- Short half-lines
- Alliteration
- Rhyme







nearu gripe nrasan,                      of nra cneca  
 werpēoda gewitan.                      Oft þæs wāg gebād,  
 10    ræghār and rēadfāh,                      rice æfter ðprum,  
 ofstonden under stormum;                      stēap gēap gedrēas.

.....  
 Mōd monade,                      myne swiftne gebrægd;  
 hwætrēd in hringas,                      hygerōf gebond  
 20    weallwalan wīrum                      wundrum tōgædre.



# Old English: Where does it come



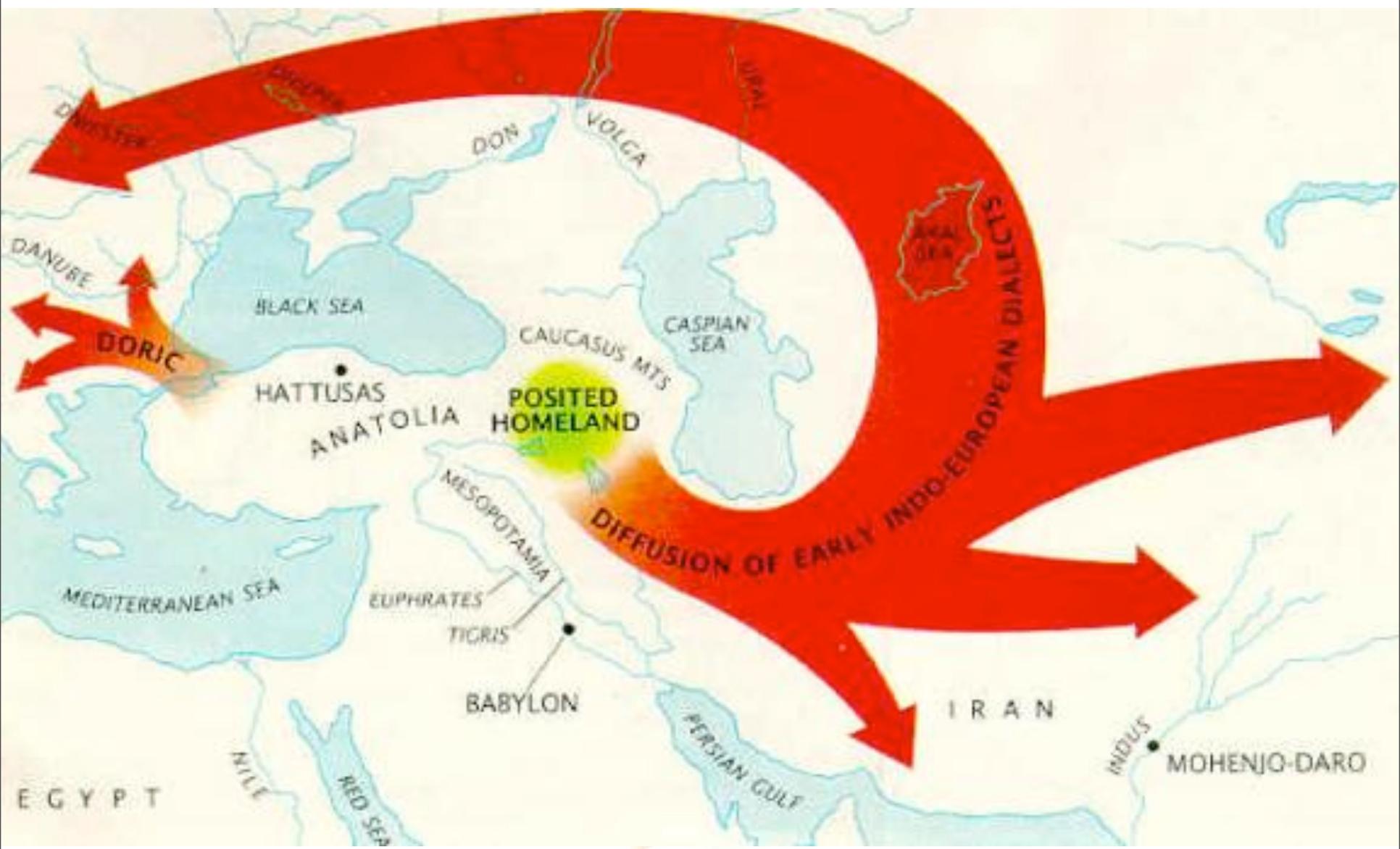
# The Success Story of English

- No 'Germanic language' was spoken in Oxford or 'England' until 1,600 years ago.
- BUT English is now spoken by 3-400 million native speakers and used by millions more
- Of the c. 2,700 world languages and dialects it is the dominant language of commerce, international diplomacy, and the internet

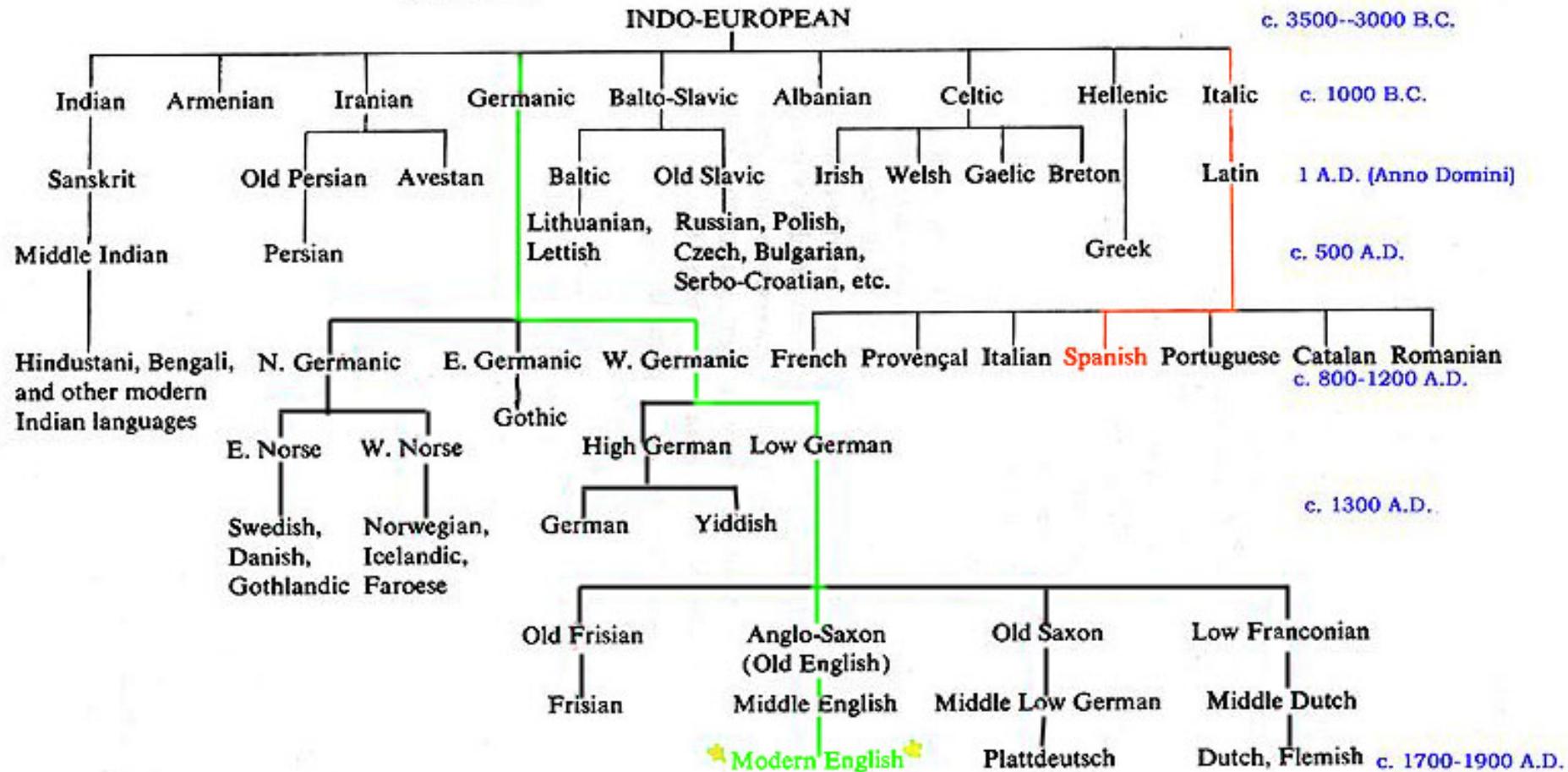
*Once upon a time ...*

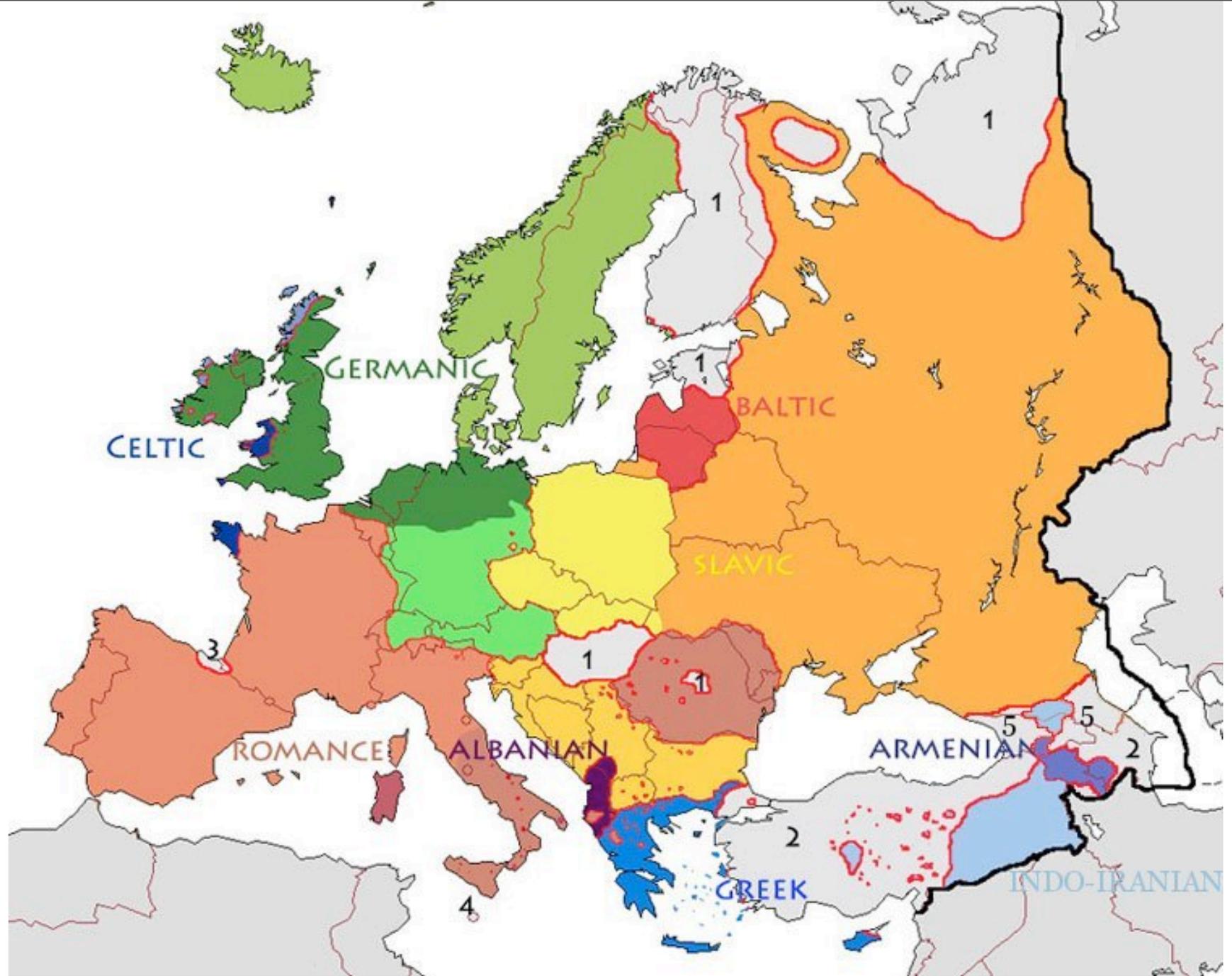
*... about 1,800 BC*





# THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES

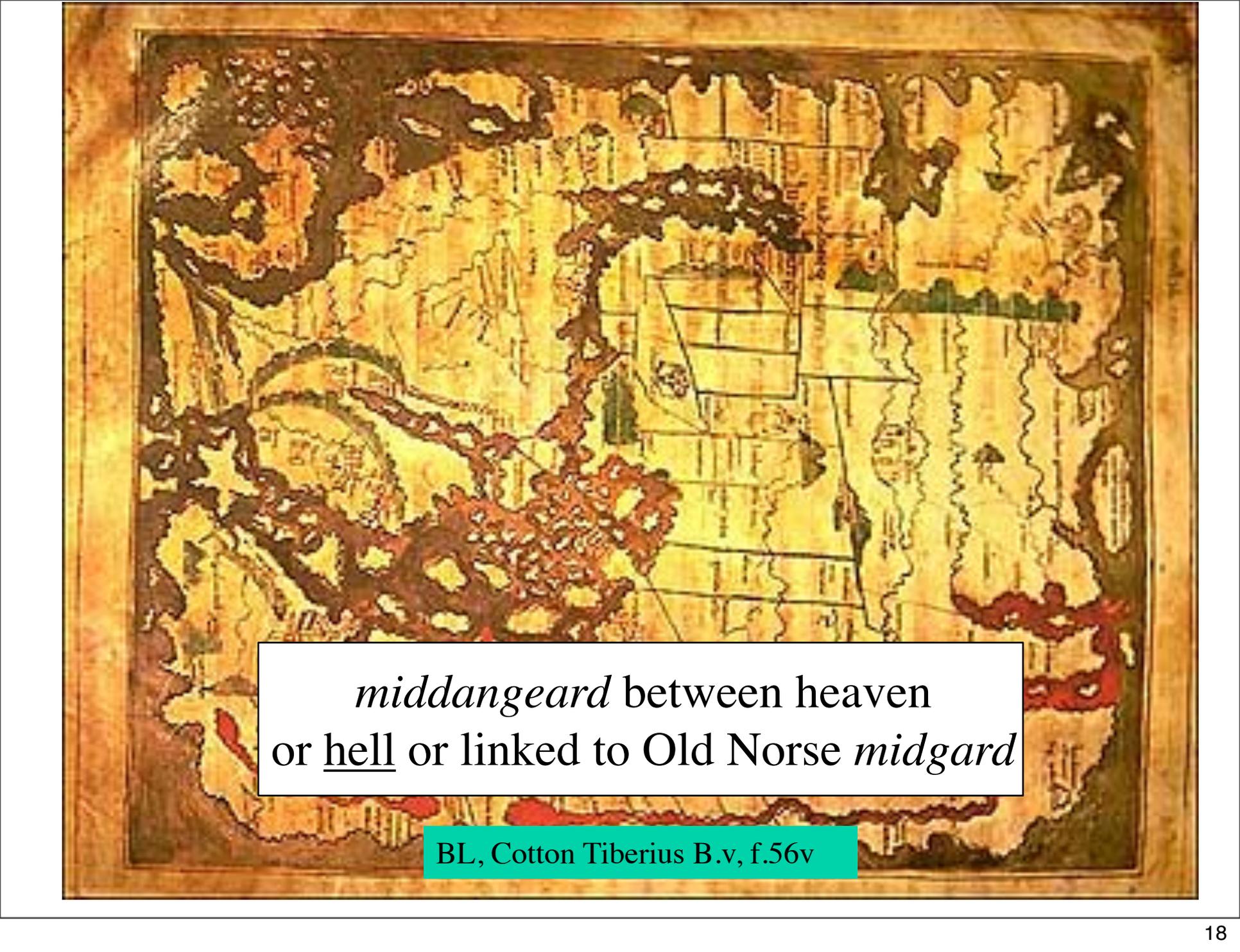








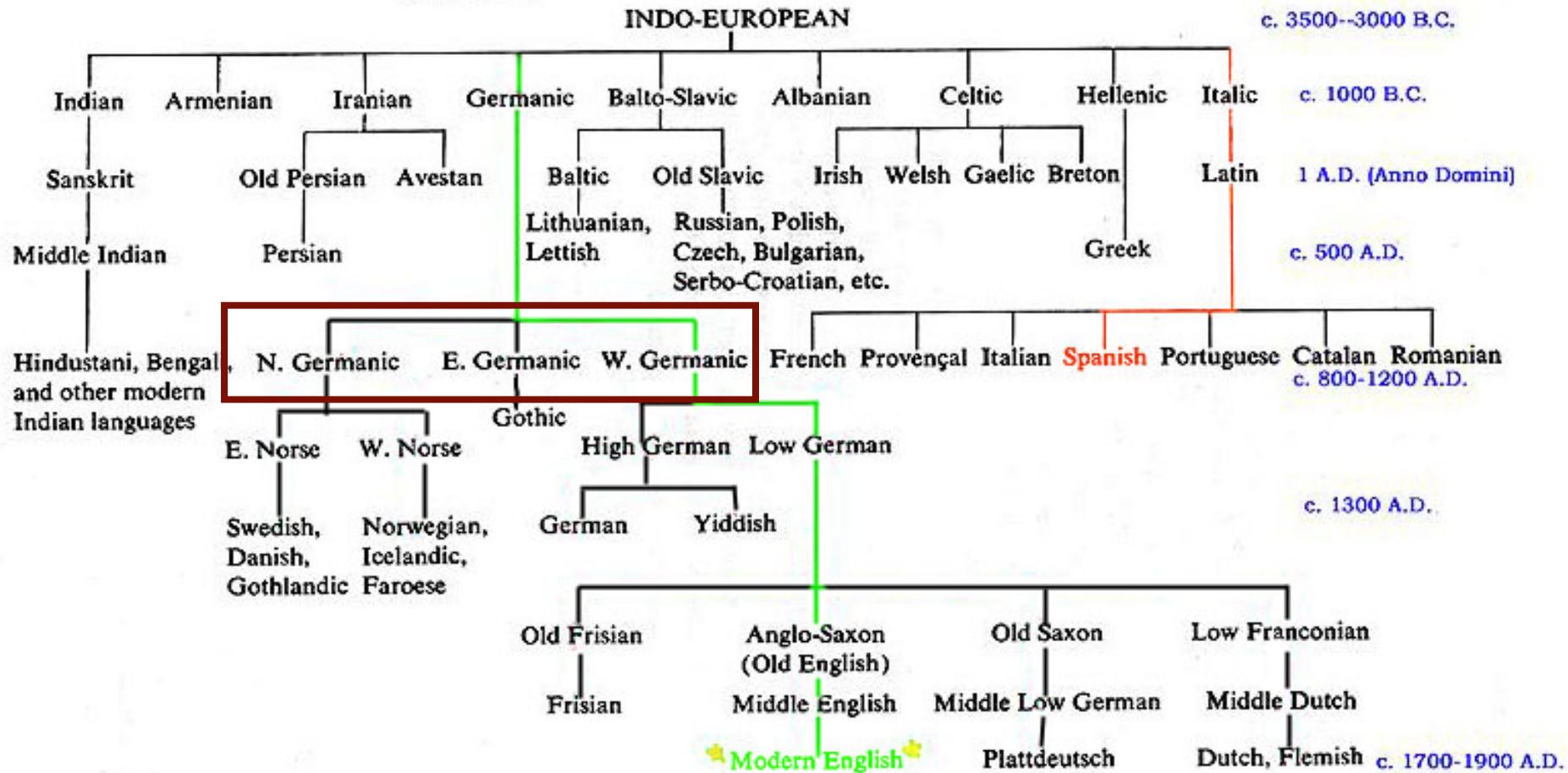
BL, Cotton Tiberius B.v, f.56v

A medieval manuscript illumination from the Cotton Tiberius B. v. folio 56v. The illustration depicts a landscape with a central building, possibly a church or a castle, and a winding path or river. The scene is rendered in a style characteristic of the 12th-century English manuscript tradition, with a focus on architectural details and naturalistic elements. The colors used are primarily earthy tones like brown, green, and red, with some gold leaf accents. The overall composition is framed by a simple border.

*middangeard* between heaven  
or hell or linked to Old Norse *midgard*

BL, Cotton Tiberius B.v, f.56v

# THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES



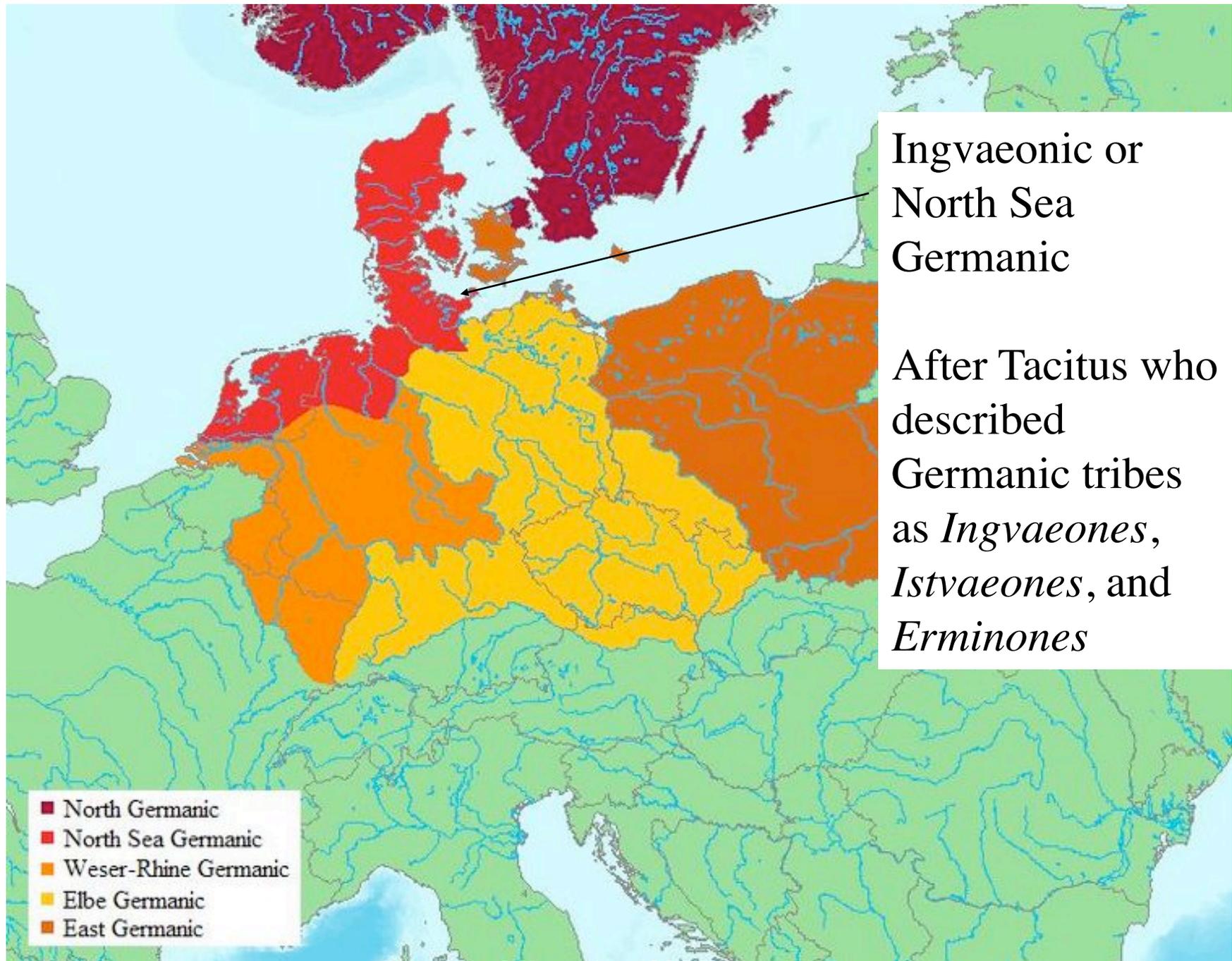
# So where were they speaking



Angles = Angeln  
Saxons = Lower Saxony  
Jutes = Jutland

# Thus English = German

- The first ‘English’ was spoken in an area near southern Denmark/northern Germany
- Part of the languages spoken around that area hence the term ‘Germanic’
- Mann/man, Maus/mouse, haben/have, singen/sing, Hund/hound, Herz/heart ...





# A Bit of Old Frisian

God made Adam and ....

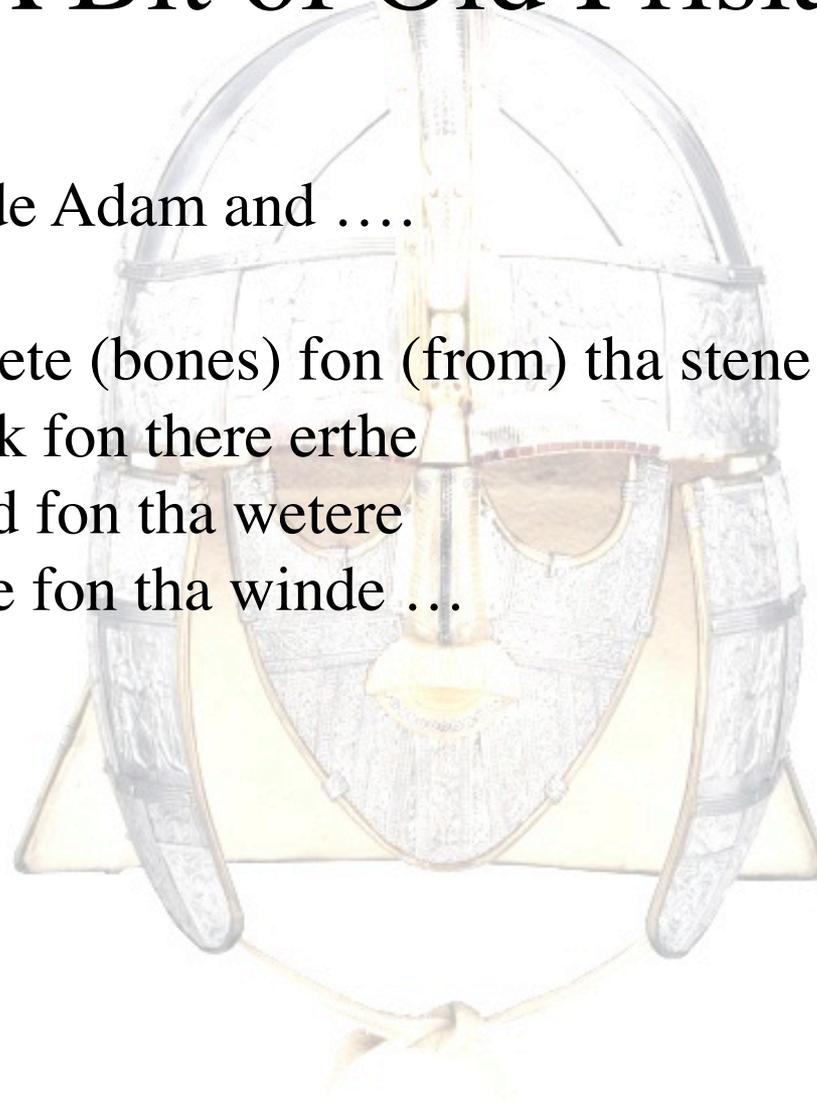
Thet benete (bones) fon (from) tha stene

Thet flask fon there erthe

Thet blod fon tha wetere

Tha herte fon tha winde ...

c. 1300



# Comparing with other Older

Old English	Old High German	Old Norse	Gothic	Modern English
Fæder	Fater	Faðir	Fadar	father
Fot	Fuoz	Fotr	Fotus	Foot
þrie	Dri	þrir	þreis	Three
þu	Du	þu	þu	thou

O.W Robinson, *Old English and its Closest Relatives* (Routledge, 1992)

Note:

Latin - pater / Germanic ‘father’  
 Latin - pes, Sanskrit - pada etc/ Germanic ‘foot’

So ‘p’ to ‘f’

Also ‘t’ to ‘th’  
 Latin ‘tertius’, Greek ‘tritos’,  
 Sanskrit ‘treta’, Irish ‘tri’ / Germanic ‘three’  
 WHY? See [Grimm’s Law and Verner’s Law](#)

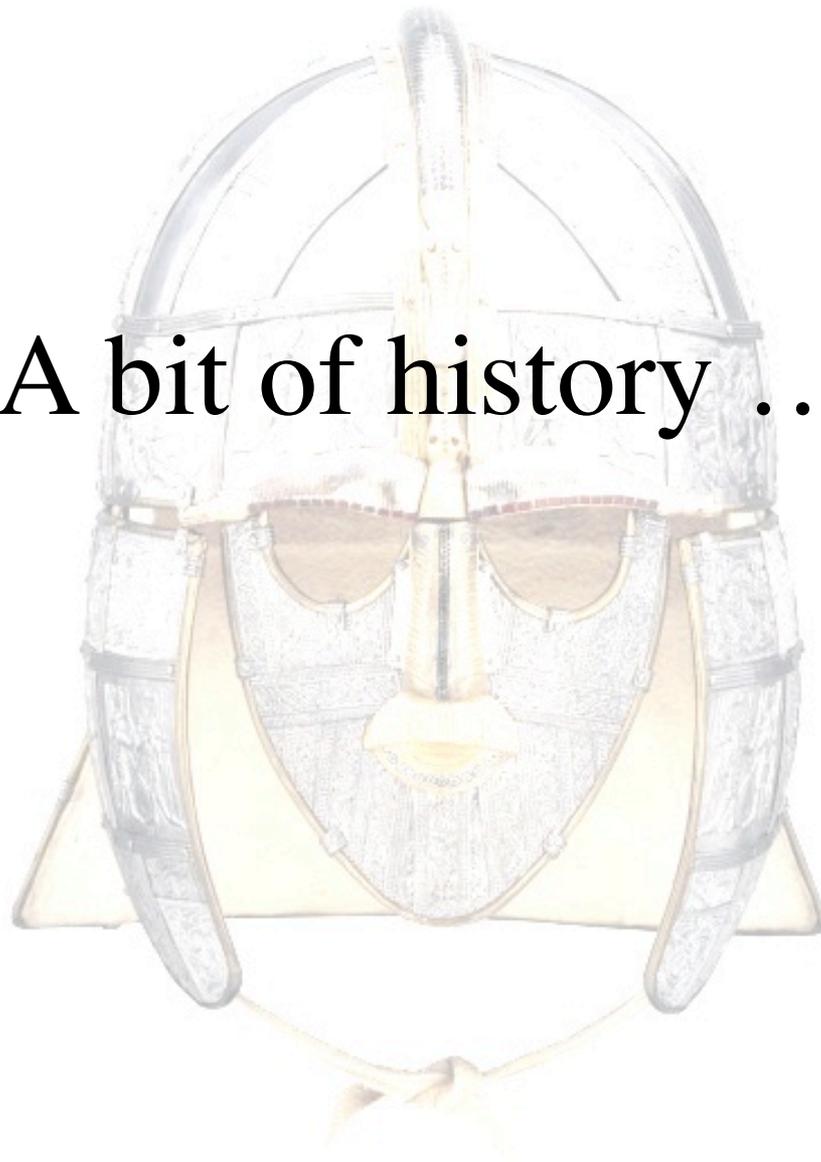
O.W Robinson, *Old English and its Closest Relatives* (Routledge, 1992)

# ‘The Pity of It’ (1915)

‘I walked in loamy Wessex Lanes, afar  
From rail-track and from highway, and I heard  
In field and farmstead many an ancient word  
Of local lineage like ‘Thu bist,’ ‘Er war’  
‘Ich woll,’ ‘Er sholl,’ and bytalk similar  
Nigh as they speak who in this month’s moon gird  
At England’s very loins...’

Thomas Hardy

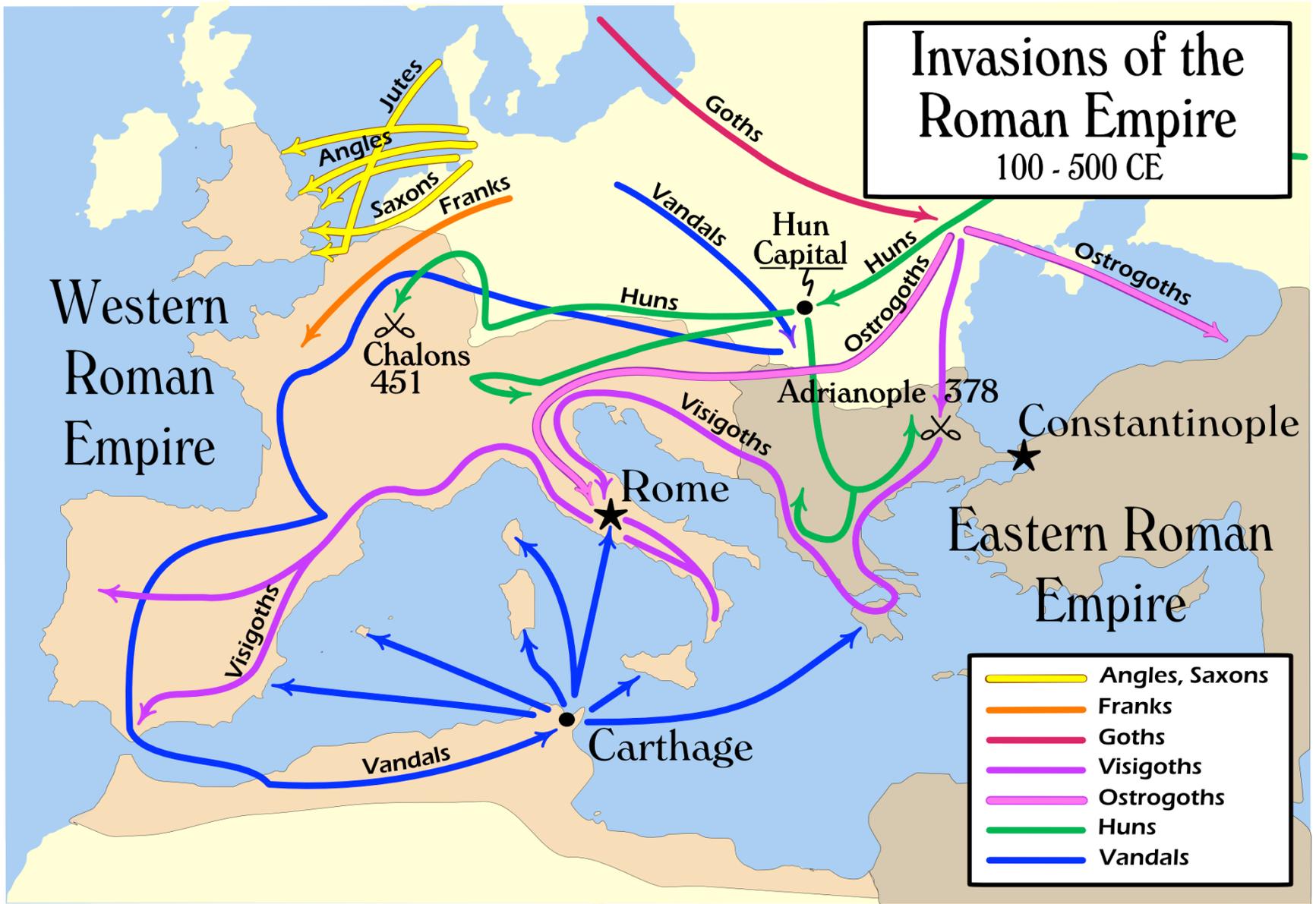
A bit of history ...



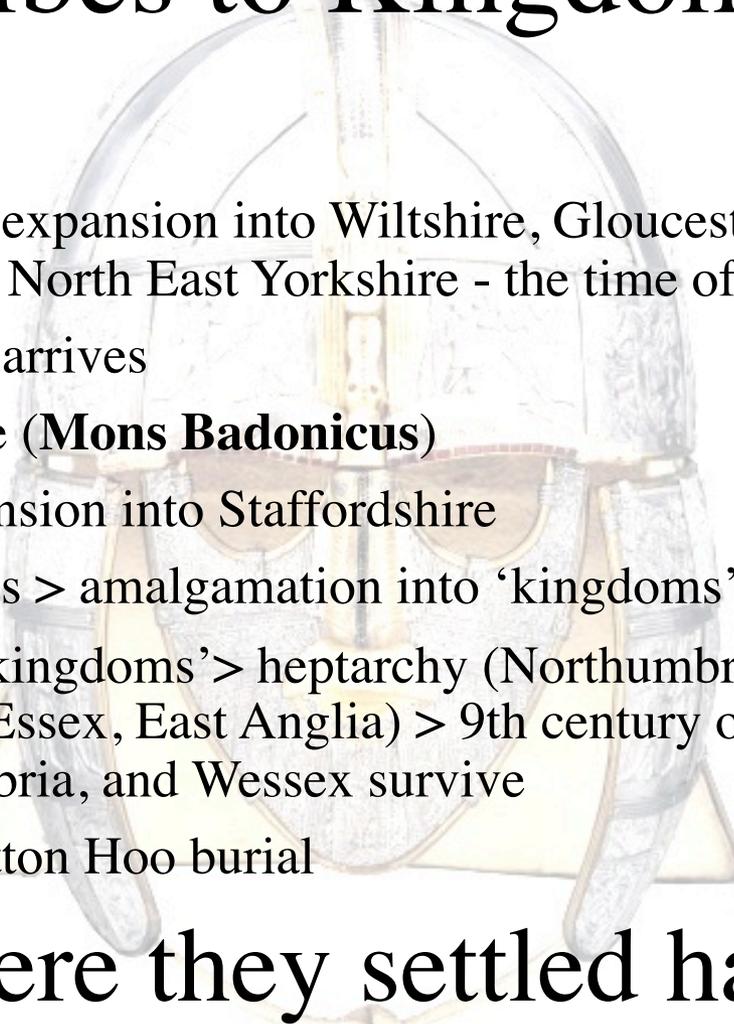
# The 'migration' period

- Collapse of Roman Britain (early 5th century) > raids by Picts, Scoti, Saxons
- Romano-British isolated
- 'adventus Saxonum' 449 AD (Bede)
- 'migration' not invasion - but not how the 'British' saw them > Gildas *De Excidio Britanniae*

*Beowulf*, Bede's Ecclesiastical History, ASC ...



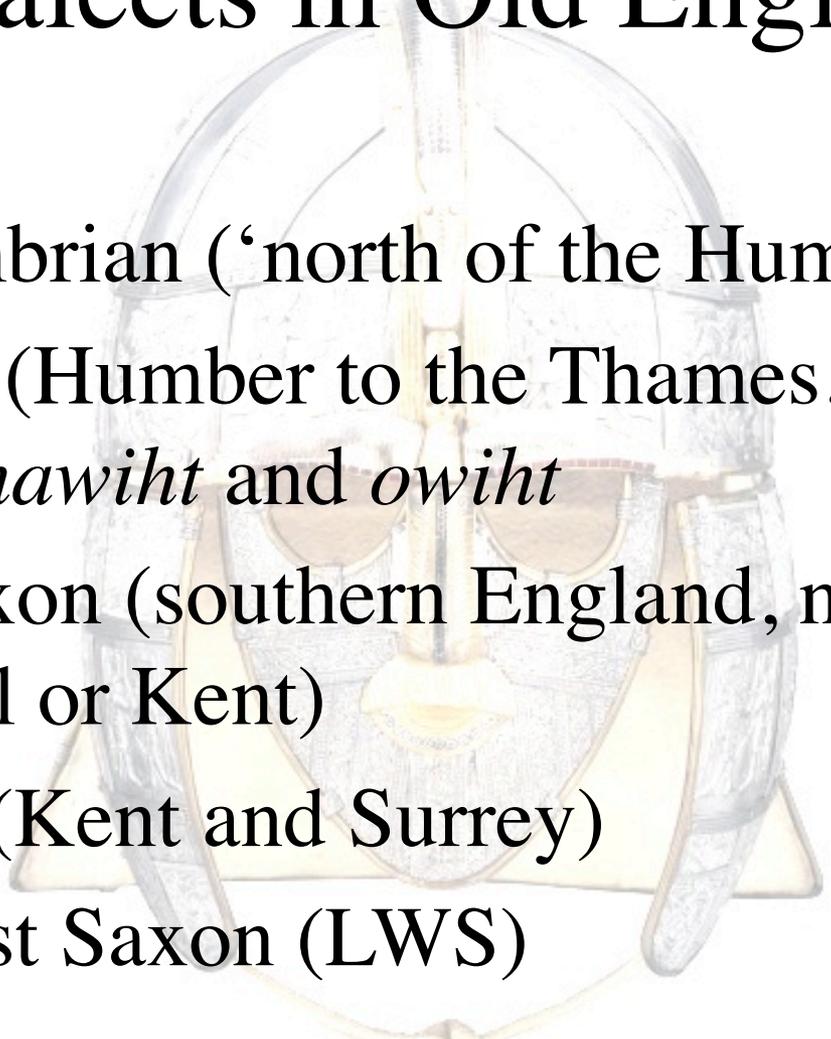
# Tribes to Kingdoms



- e6th century sees expansion into Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, and North East Yorkshire - the time of *Beowulf*?
- 597 St Augustine arrives
- British Resistance (**Mons Badonicus**)
- 16th century expansion into Staffordshire
- War bands > tribes > amalgamation into ‘kingdoms’
- e7th century 12 ‘kingdoms’ > heptarchy (Northumbria, Mercia, Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia) > 9th century only East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex survive
- e7th century - Sutton Hoo burial
- **BUT** where they settled has a direct effect on **LANGUAGE**

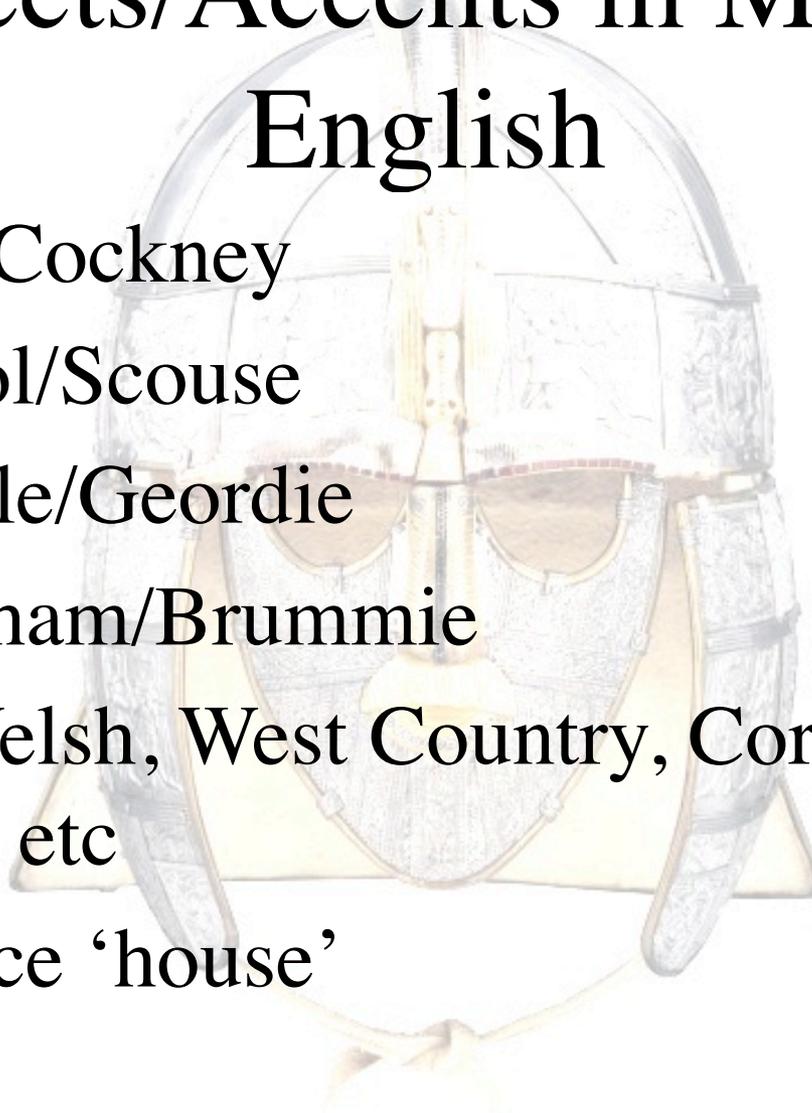


# Dialects in Old English



- Northumbrian (‘north of the Humber’)
- Mercian (Humber to the Thames, not Essex), *nawiht* and *owiht*
- West Saxon (southern England, not Cornwall or Kent)
- Kentish (Kent and Surrey)
- Late West Saxon (LWS)

# Dialects/Accents in Modern English



- London/Cockney
- Liverpool/Scouse
- Newcastle/Geordie
- Birmingham/Brummie
- Scots, Welsh, West Country, Cornish, Manx, Irish, etc etc
- Pronounce 'house'

# Northumbrian dialect words

Bearn	Bairn	Child
Gan	Gan	Go
Geomrian	Yammer	Complain
Micel	Muckel	Big
Na	Nah	No
Ocusta	Oxter	Armpit
Stæþ	Staithe	Jetty
Tom	Toom	Empty

And remember - toon (OE tun), hoose (OE hus), knaa (OE cnawan)

# The story continues ...

- Pre-migration from Latin *belt, butter, street*
- From the 'British' *avon, combe, brock*
- During the Anglo-Saxon period from Latin *candle, angel, cowl*
- During the Anglo-Saxon period from the Danes and Norwegians *awe, call, outlaw*
- In the late Anglo-Saxon period from French *capon, proud*
- Post-conquest from French *castle, crown*
- Keeps doing this - Americanisms, and  
C U L8R

# Après Le Deluge: French Battle Anglo Terms in Web Age

*Experts struggle to create equivalents for terms like 'cloud computing'*

Posted Oct 14, 09 4:27 AM CDT in [Business](#), [Technology](#), [World](#) |     Share

[IMAGES \(2\)](#) [ [QUOTES \(1\)](#) ]

“

Our citizens have a right to communicate without speaking English.

- Xavier North, head of France's General Commission of Terminology and Neology

(Newser) – Defenders of the French language are fighting a rear-guard action against a flood of Anglo-Saxon computing terms. In a process that lags far behind advances in technology, experts are tasked with finding French equivalents for new computing technology. The terms must then be passed by a panel of linguists and professors, who are often puzzled by the concepts involved. The new term must *then* be approved by the Academie Française, the official authority on the French language.

4

tweets

retweet

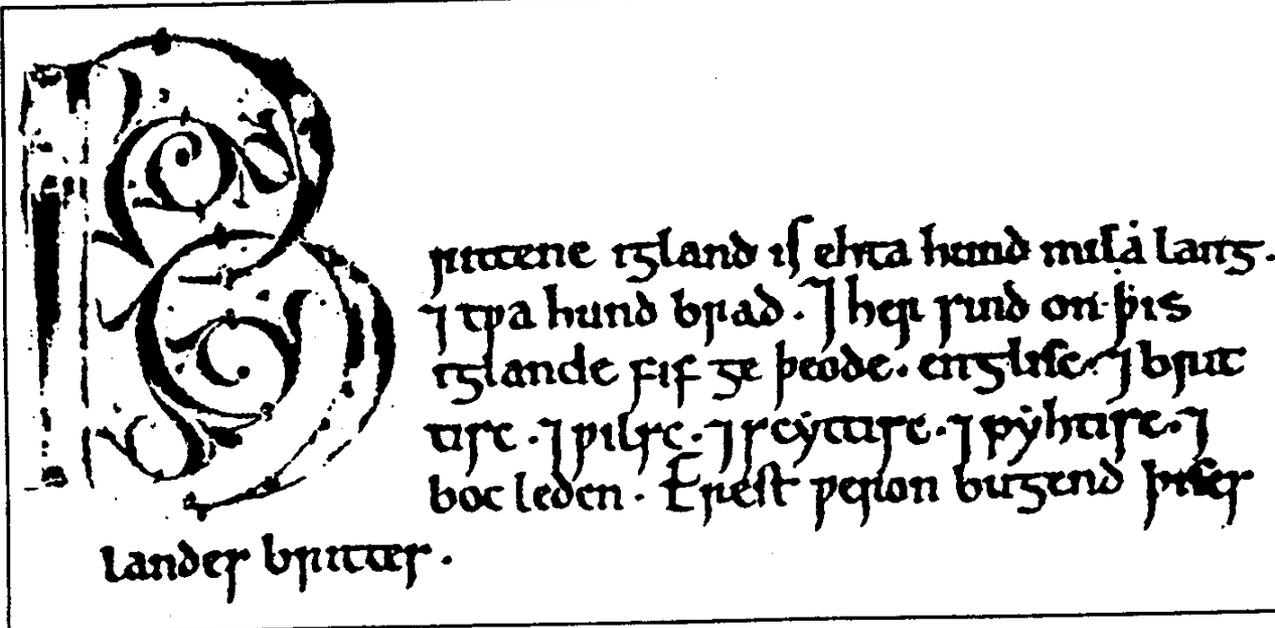


post

<http://www.newser.com/story/71627/apres-le-deluge-french-battle-anglo-terms-in-web-age.html>

But remember ...





Œ

B

rittene ȳland is ehta hund mila lang.  
 7 tpa hund brad. 7 her sind on þis  
 ȳlande fif ȳeþeode. engliſc. 7 brit  
 tiſc. 7 pilſc. 7 ſcyttiſc. 7 pyhtiſc. 7  
 boc leden. Ereſt peron buȳend þiſer

lander britten.

(See section 3.1.2.1 for a description of the letter shapes.)

WW

of-Britain island is eight hundred miles long.  
 & two hundred broad. & here are in this  
 island five languages. english. & brit-  
 ish. & welsh. & scottish. & pictish. &  
 book latin. First were inhabitants of-this  
 land britons.

Manuscript

To

Transcription

To

Modern English

# Which of the following are not found in Old English?

His, he, him, it, the, that, this, come,  
go, why, who, quick, where, ride,  
choose, drink, fall, kiss, fill, over, under,  
in, bath, beam, bear, bid, fast, flood,  
fiend, little, most, lust, many, queen,  
soul, sea, sharp, other, often, new, old,  
mead, gate, wall, gem, young, friendly,

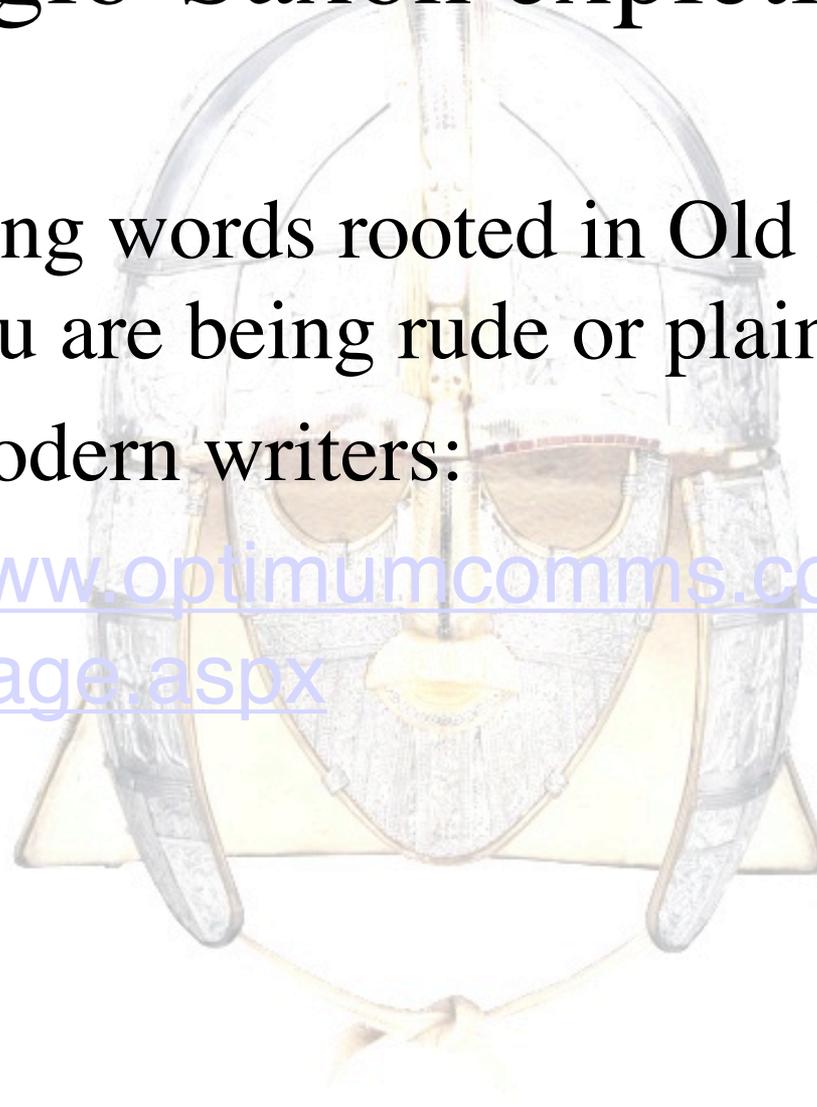
# Which of the following are not found in Old English?

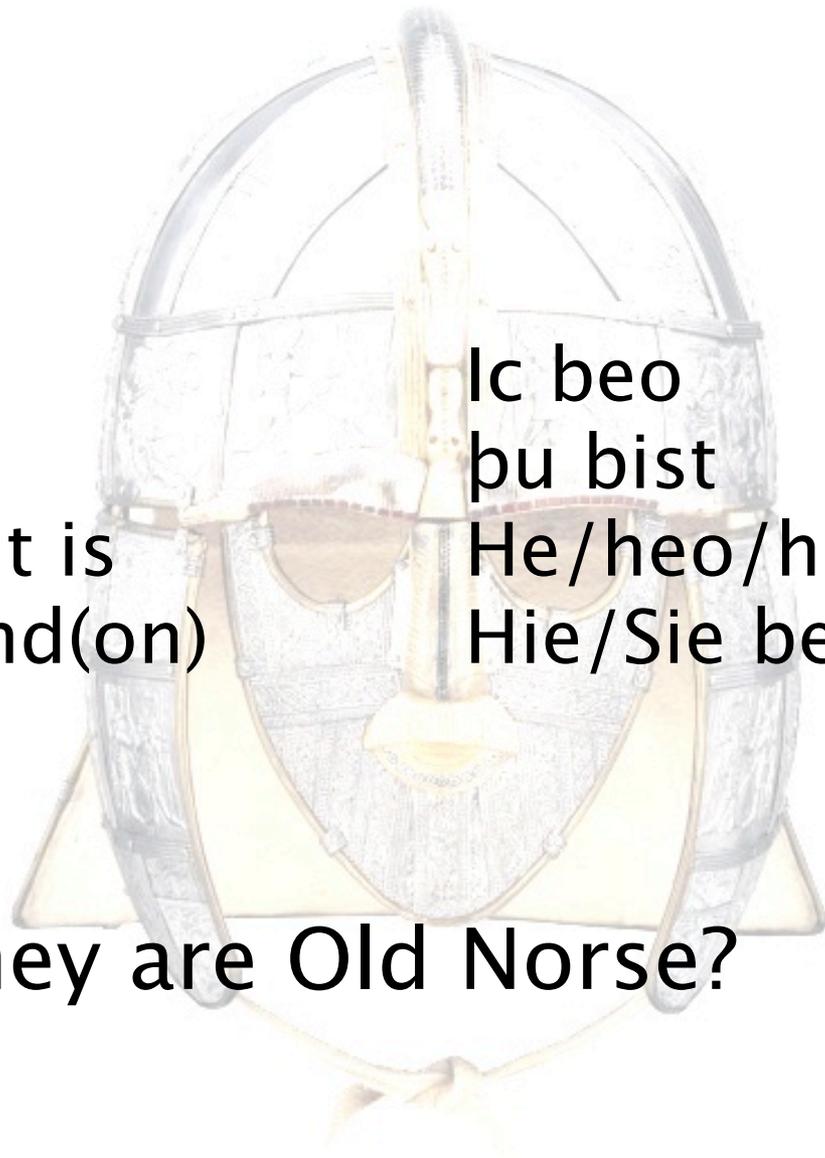
His, he, him, hit, se/þe, þat, þis, cume,  
ga, hwy, hwa, cwic, hwær, ride,  
geceose, drince, fealle, cysse, fyller, ofer,  
under, in, baþ, beam, bera, bidde, fæst,  
flod, feond, litle, mæst, lust, mænig,  
cwen, sawol, sæ, scearp, oþer, oft,  
niwe, eald, mede, geat, weal, gimm,



# Anglo-Saxon expletives!

- Does using words rooted in Old English mean you are being rude or plain talking?
- Some modern writers:
- [http://www.optimumcomms.co.uk/  
Homepage.aspx](http://www.optimumcomms.co.uk/Homepage.aspx)





Ic eom  
þu eart

He/heo/hit is  
Hie/Sie sind(on)

Ic beo  
þu bist

He/heo/hit biþ  
Hie/Sie beoþ

They are Old Norse?

# Speaking Old English



# Old English: How does it sound?

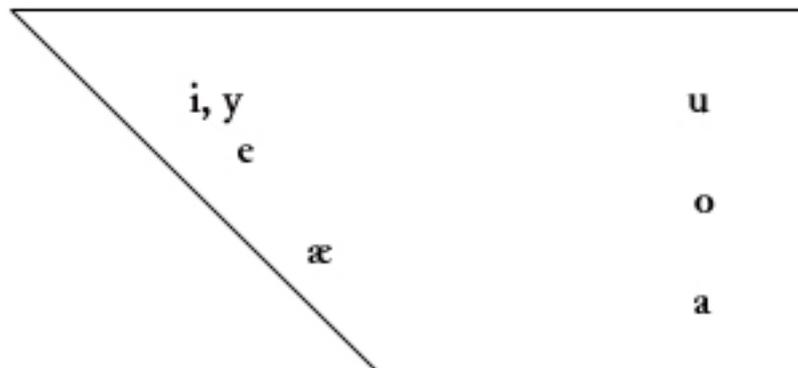
- Pronounce everything!
- G g = hard as in OE *God*, soft as in *geard*
- C c = hard as in OE *cyning*, soft as *ceorl*
- Helped in text books as they put a ‘dot’ above soft letters e.g. *ċild*
- ‘sc’ = ‘sh’ (as in OE *scip*)
- ‘cg’ = ‘dg’ (as in OE *ecg*)
- *God* and *gōd*

# Old English: How does it sound?

- Pronounce everything!
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Front  
or  
Light



Back  
or  
Dark



Nose (OE nosu)

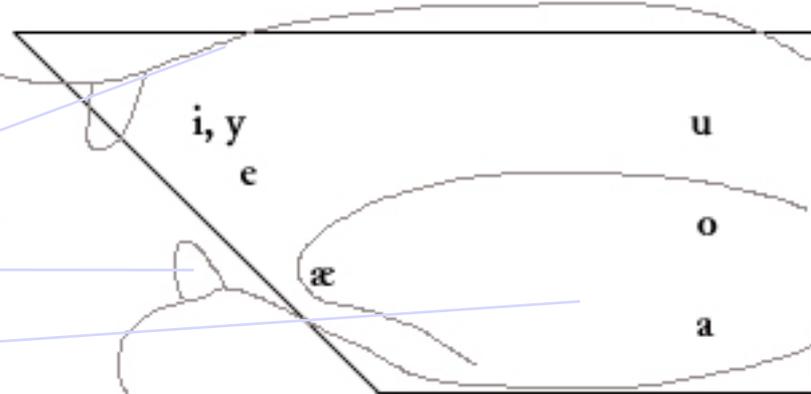
Lips (OE weler)

Gums (OE goma)

Tooth (OE toþ)

Tongue (OE tunge)

Throat (OE þrotu)



\* Front vowels tend to collocate with soft c's and g's

\* Back vowels tend to collocate with hard c's and g's

# Problems with Old English

- Apart from the endings there is the issue of syntax (word order)

‘So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say’  
‘If any of the Wise should with this Ring  
overthrow the Lord of Mordor...’

Last Updated: Friday, 4 June, 2004, 16:31 GMT 17:31 UK

[E-mail this to a friend](#)

[Printable version](#)

## Yoda 'speaks like Anglo-Saxon'

By **Finlo Rohrer**  
BBC News Online staff

**Star Wars character Yoda's sentence structure is similar to old Anglo-Saxon, a linguistics expert has said.**

Author David Crystal also says a number of characters in the Lord of the Rings are excellent examples of non-standard English for children to study.

In his book *The Stories of English*, the academic even discusses the effect on pronunciation of the BBC and on vocabulary by the Sun.

He said he wanted to attack purists who would not tolerate non-standard English



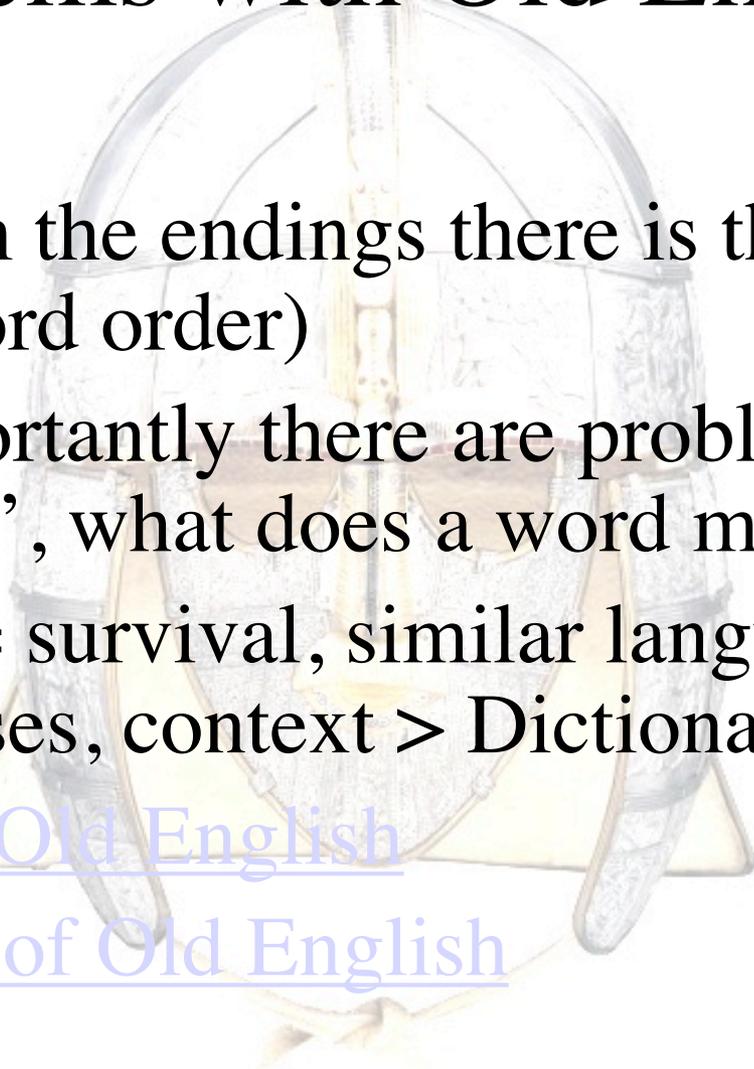
'A speaker of non-standard English I am'

• Ap  
syr

‘So n  
‘If ar  
overt

e of

# Problems with Old English



- Apart from the endings there is the issue of syntax (word order)
- More importantly there are problems of ‘semantics’, what does a word mean?
- Meaning = survival, similar languages, Latin glosses, context > Dictionaries
- [Corpus of Old English](#)
- [Thesaurus of Old English](#)

Harold is swift. His hand is strong and his word  
grim.

Late in life he went to his wife in Rome

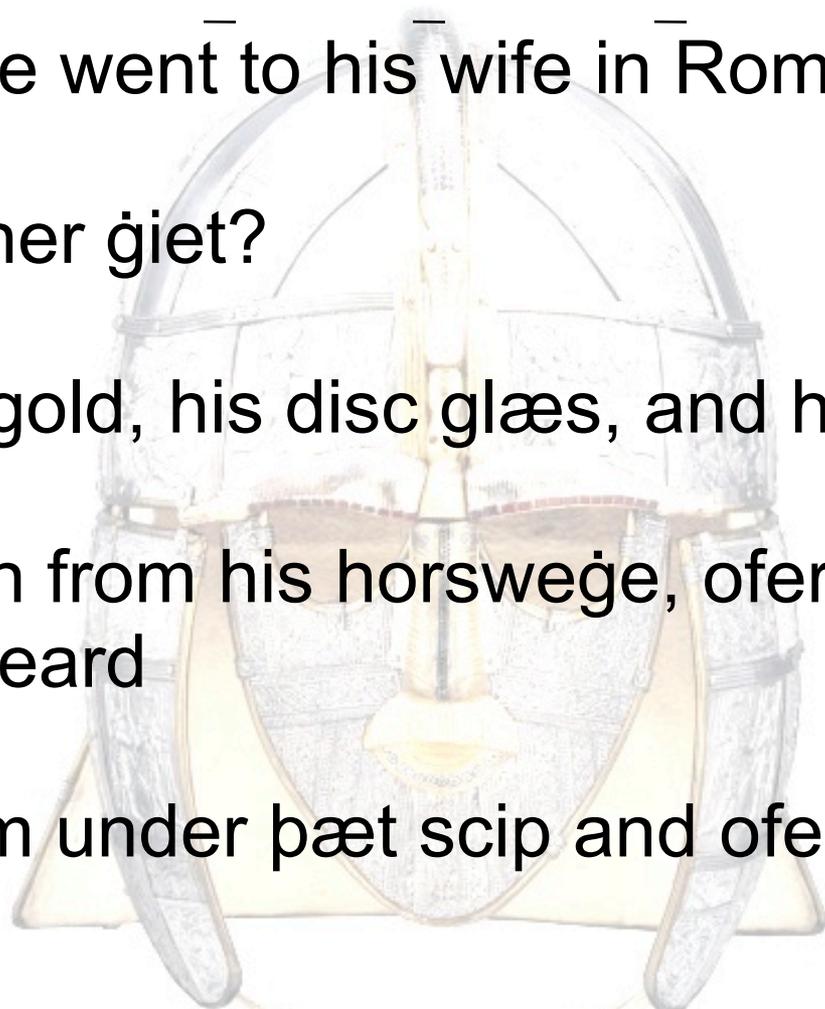
Is his þegn her giet?

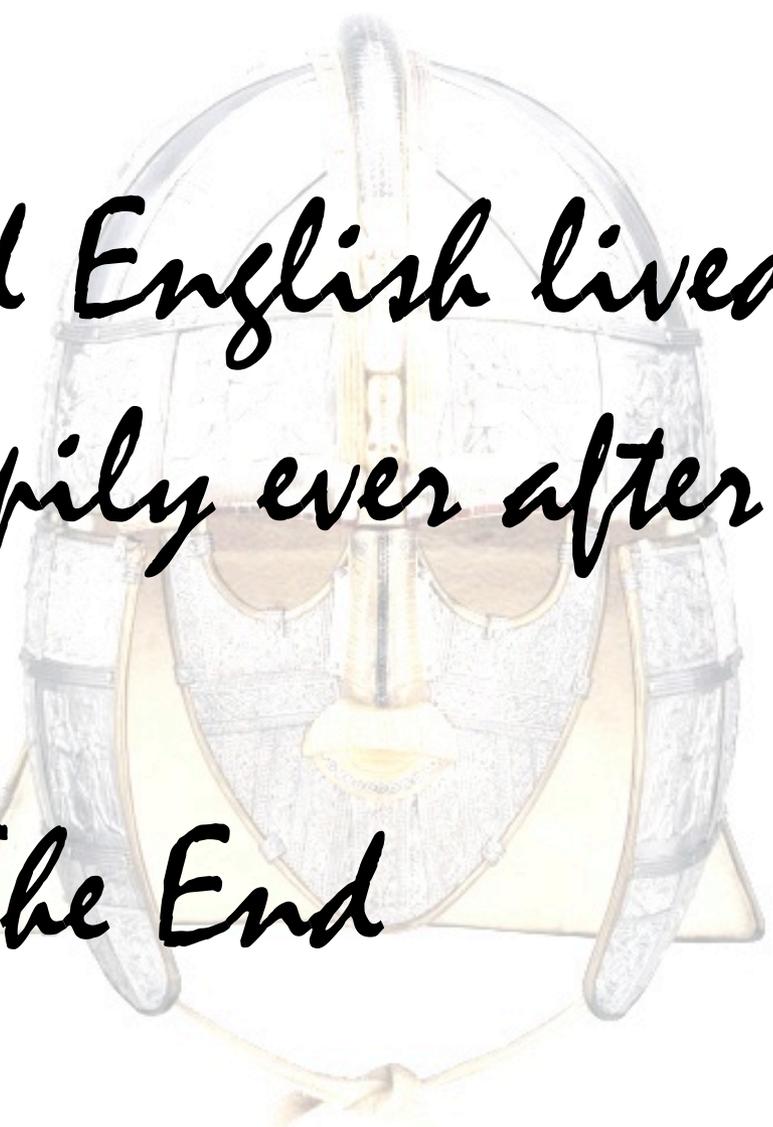
His hring is gold, his disc glæs, and his belt leþer

His cīcen ran from his horsweġe, ofer his pæþ,  
and in his ġeard

Se fisc swam under þæt scip and ofer þone  
sciellfisc

Se cniht is on þære brycge



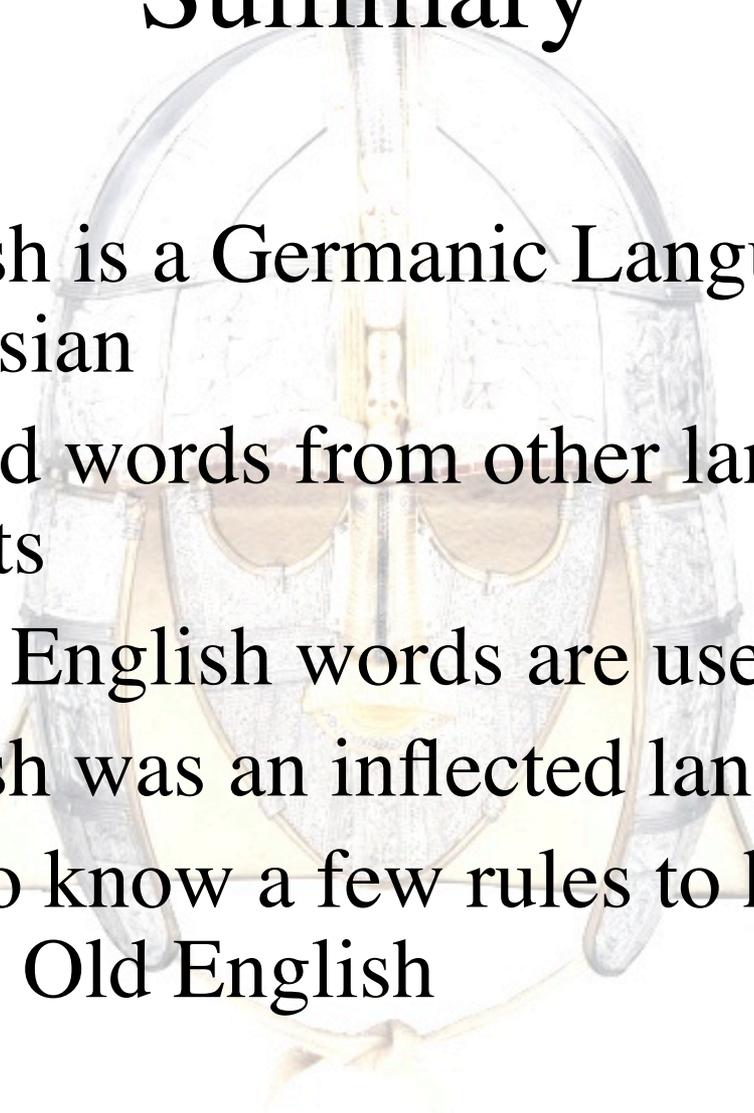


*And English lived  
happily ever after ...*

*... The End*

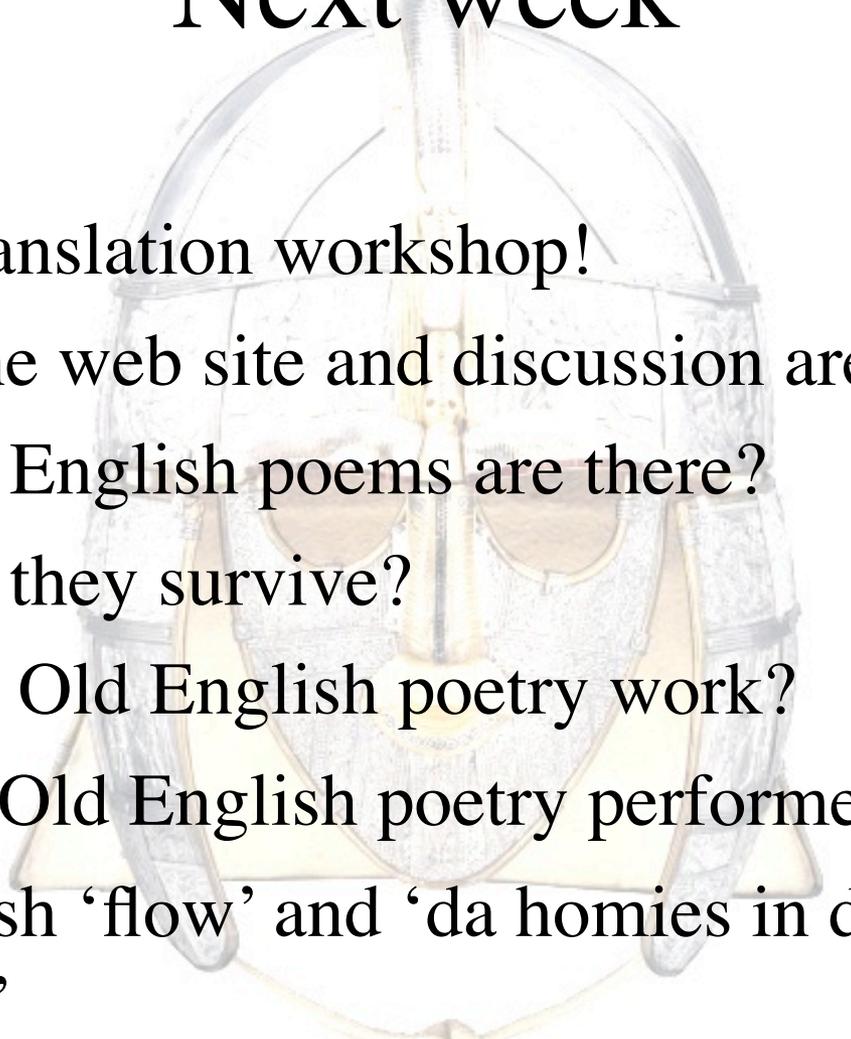


# Summary



- Old English is a Germanic Language, most akin to Frisian
- It borrowed words from other languages and had dialects
- Many Old English words are used today
- Old English was an inflected language
- We need to know a few rules to help us pronounce Old English

# Next week



- Second translation workshop!
- Look at the web site and discussion area
- What Old English poems are there?
- Where do they survive?
- How does Old English poetry work?
- How was Old English poetry performed?
- Old English ‘flow’ and ‘da homies in da hood’, it’s ‘bumping’



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[www.ox.ac.uk/welcome](http://www.ox.ac.uk/welcome)