

# **Studies in Etymology**

**SECOND EDITION**

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Language of England

The English language is not native to England. We do not know what language the earliest inhabitants of the island of Britain spoke, but we do know that sometime in the first millennium B.C. invaders from the European continent crossed the Channel and settled there in large numbers. They brought their language with them. This language is called Celtic and was the speech of the Celts, a people who, by the first millennium B.C., had settled in most of western Europe and in areas to the east. By the time they had arrived in Britain, their language had split into two linguistic groups: Gaelic, spoken today in parts of Ireland and Scotland, and Britannic, spoken in parts of Wales.

Much later, perhaps in the fifth century A.D., some of the Britannic Celts from Wales returned to the place from which their ancestors had come in the northwestern part of France. Their descendants still live there, in the area called Brittany (French Bretagne), where their Celtic language, called Breton, is spoken.

### The Romans Arrive in Britain

In 55 B.C. and again the following year, Julius Caesar led a force of Roman soldiers into the island that the Romans called by its Latin name, *Britannia*. Caesar had been in Gaul, *Gallia* in Latin, the ancient name for France, where he had been waging war against the Gauls. He did not remain long in Britain on either occasion, as he was forced to return to Gaul to continue his efforts there. A further long campaign in that region and his assassination in 44 B.C. left the task of subduing the British to the future.

In A.D. 43 the Roman emperor Claudius sent a huge force against Britain. The disciplined Roman army prevailed over the Celtic natives of the land, and Britain became one of the provinces, or colonies, of the great Roman empire, which now stretched across Europe from the Black Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. Britain remained a Roman province for four hundred years.

The new masters of Britain had come to stay, as attested by the many remains of sumptuous homes built there which archaeologists have found throughout the land. These country homes had elegant marble floors decorated with splendid mosaics; they had indoor heating, a water supply, fine glassware and other accompaniments of wealth. The language of the soldiers and the administrators of Roman Britain

was the language of Rome, Latin, and for four centuries the land had two languages: Celtic, which the conquered natives refused to abandon, and Latin, the language of their conquerors. A few Latin words from this period remain in our language today: wine (*vinum*), mile (*milia passuum*, a thousand paces), and the names of many cities, each of which grew up through the years and centuries around a Roman military camp (*castra*): Winchester, Dorchester, Colchester, Manchester and others.

### Angles, Saxons and Jutes

Historical sources for this crucial period of British history are scarce. One of the most informative of these is a work by a British priest named Bede (A.D. 673-735), later known as The Venerable Bede. This work, written in the early years of the eighth century in Latin, a language that Bede would have learned in his education in the monastery where he lived, is called *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, "The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation." It is a summary of the highlights of British history, focusing on ecclesiastical matters, from the first landing of Julius Caesar in 55 B.C. down to the events of A.D. 731.

Bede writes that from early days Britain had been subject to repeated attacks from the north at the hands of two savage races, the Gaelic Scots and the Picts, a warlike people about whom little is known. The Roman forces in Britain were not spared these sporadic attacks, and in the second century the Roman emperor Hadrian caused a stone wall to be built separating the land controlled by the troops from that of these hostile tribes. This great wall stretched all across Britain, sea to sea, from what is now Newcastle in the east to Carlisle in the west. It was fifteen feet in height and up to nine feet thick with guard towers and forts every three miles; it was over seventy miles long. Stretches of what remains of this mammoth undertaking can still be seen in the north of England, and archaeologists have uncovered treasure troves of Roman artifacts from the areas surrounding it.

Early in the fifth century A.D., uprisings and invasions in other parts of the Roman empire necessitated the withdrawal of the Roman troops from Britain. This abandonment of the island and the protection formerly afforded it and its inhabitants left the British unable to withstand the revival of attacks by the Scots and the Picts from the north, as well as by pirates from the sea who were raiding the coastal regions. Now that the troops had left, the northern invaders had no difficulty in scaling the great wall that Hadrian had built. Help was needed.

In his entries for the year A.D. 449, Bede says that one of the local British kings invited certain Germanic tribes from the continent to come to Britain and help protect the people from their attackers, promising money and grants of land in return for their assistance. The Germanic tribes who answered this call for help, Bede says, came from three of the fiercest of the Germanic races: the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. These Germanic tribes came from Jutland, in Denmark, and from the lowlands of Germany adjacent to the Netherlands.

As time went by, more and more of these Germanic peoples came to the fertile land of Britain, not to defend the country but to take up residence there. They had come to stay. The leaders of the Jutes claimed homes for their people in the south-east of Britain, in the area of the present counties of Kent and Sussex, and do not figure much in future events. But the Angle and Saxon leaders began to carve out little kingdoms for themselves and their followers, and the next four centuries is the story of fierce struggles for leadership. Late in the ninth century, Alfred (ca. 848-899), one of these local kings, claimed all of the "Land of the Angles" as his realm. Later known as Alfred the Great, he was the first king of a united England. The word "English" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *Englisc*, from *Engle*, the Germanic word for the Angles. The dialect of the Angles was the first to be used in literature, and, thus, English came to be the term for the language, and England, "Land of the Engles," for the country. By A.D. 900 there was a new nation with a new language. The Latin name for the island, *Britannia*, continues to live, of course, in the term Great Britain.

The Celtic language had, in effect, been abandoned throughout England by this time, although it remains in the Gaelic languages spoken today in parts of Ireland and Scotland, and in the Welsh language, the remains of Britannic Celtic, now spoken in parts of Wales.

Cornish, a Britannic Celtic language once spoken in Cornwall, the southwestern part of Britain, died out in the eighteenth century. Old Irish, a Gaelic Celtic language, was brought to the Isle of Man, in the Irish Sea between England and Ireland, by colonists from Ireland in the fourth and fifth centuries and evolved into Manx Gaelic. Its use gradually declined during the past few centuries, and the last native speaker of Manx died in 1974.

## The Vikings

For most of the reign of Alfred, his efforts were directed against invasions by waves of people from Norway and Denmark, who made successive attacks against Scotland, England and, on the continent, France. The first recorded appearance of these invaders in England was in 789, when three pirate ships from Denmark landed on the southern coast of what is now Dorset. After seizing some plunder, they sailed away. Raids like this became more frequent and of greater intensity, affecting the towns and monasteries of the coastal areas. The sea-raiders came to be known as the Vikings, a word probably from Old Norse (an early language of Scandinavia) *vikigr*, meaning "pirates" or simply "traders."

In the year 878, Alfred succeeded in making a treaty with the Danes which gave them a large area of eastern England where they were allowed to live. A hundred years later the peace was broken when the kings of Norway and Denmark joined together in a concerted attack. The king of Denmark succeeded in driving the English king from the throne, and England was ruled by Danish kings from 1014 to 1042, when the throne was regained by Edward, later known as Edward the Confessor.

The result of all of this, was that by now thousands of Danes and Norwegians had settled in England and Scotland in communities whose populations were steadily increased by newcomers from abroad, brought there by news of the beauty and fertility of the land. These newcomers eventually adopted the English language, but a number of words from their languages had entered the English vocabulary. Since both Norse and Danish were Germanic languages, related to and not too different from those of the Angles and Saxons, it is often difficult to identify these new words. What is certain is that hundreds of towns, cities, rivers and other place-names in Ireland, England, Scotland, and in the islands north of mainland Scotland, Orkney and Shetland, bear Scandinavian names.

During the period described above, these same Scandinavian warriors had descended on France, and, not long after Alfred had made peace with them in England, land was granted to them in the northwestern coastal area of France. There, they were known as the Men from the North, Northmen, now called Normans. The part of France that they occupied lay directly across the Channel from England, and has been named after its occupants: Normandy.

### Old English

As we examine the literature from this period in England, it is clear that the early examples are in a language that is foreign to us. This language is called Old English, and the period in England from A.D. 450 to 1150 is called the Old English period. This language must be studied just as we have to study German, Russian or Japanese if we wish to read and understand a work in one of these languages.

Old English was a fully inflected language, just as modern German is today, with two numbers: singular and plural, three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, and four cases: nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative (the nominative and accusative usually being identical).

An inflected language is one in which words assume different endings to indicate their grammatical function in a sentence or to indicate person and number in the verb. Modern English has almost completely lost these inflectional endings, their function being replaced by the use of prepositions with nouns; for verbs, we do without them almost altogether. We can say, for example, "The king is tall," "This is the crown of the king," "I gave the crown to the king." In an inflected language like Old English (or Latin or modern German), the form of the word for "king" would change by the addition of inflectional endings to indicate the fact that the word is used in the nominative case as the subject of the sentence (The king is tall), or the word is used in the genitive case to show possession (This is the crown of the king), or is used in the dative case to indicate the indirect object of the verb (I gave the crown to the king). Similarly, the Old English verb was fully inflected. That is, the form of the verb was altered by the addition of inflectional endings to indicate whether the subject of the verb was singular or plural, or whether the subject was in the first person (I, we), the second person



(you), or the third person (he, she, it, they). In modern English it is usually only the third person singular that has retained an inflection (the letter -s).

I see	I run	I sing
you (singular) see	you (singular) run	you (singular) sing
he/she <i>sees</i>	he/she <i>runs</i>	he/she <i>sings</i>
we see	we run	we sing
you (plural) see	you (plural) run	you (plural) sing
they see	they run	they sing

For the noun, modern English inflects only the genitive case and the plural forms: "The king is tall," "I see the king's crown," "There were many kings there."

Following is a paradigm (an example showing a word in all its inflectional forms) of the Old English masculine noun *cyning*, "king":

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	<i>cyning</i>	<i>cyningas</i>
Genitive	<i>cyninges</i>	<i>cyninga</i>
Dative	<i>cyninge</i>	<i>cyningum</i>
Accusative	<i>cyning</i>	<i>cyningas</i>

The literary remains from the Old English period are rather scarce, but we can single out two outstanding examples. First, the epic poem *Beowulf*, of unknown authorship, which survives in a single manuscript from around the year 1000. This poem of some 3,000 lines tells of the adventures of a young Scandinavian warrior, how he fought the monster Grendel and, after many other adventures, how he met his death while driving a fire-breathing dragon out of the land.

The other work is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This is actually several distinct chronicles, or records, composed in successive stages and at different places. All together, they present us with a continuous history of England from the first landing of the Romans in 55 B.C. down to the year A.D. 1154. The manuscript that we have here is from Peterborough, a city about a hundred miles north of London. The short section below is from the preface to the manuscript and may have been translated from the Latin of Bede's *History*. King Alfred is said to have learned Latin and to have translated Bede's work into his own language, Old English, and this may have been his work.

Old English manuscripts employed two different characters to represent the sound of our *th*, either voiced, as in **that**, or unvoiced, as in **thin**. There was also a character called a ligature, representing the union of the letters *a* and *e*. These Old English characters were dropped in the fifteenth century by the first English printer, a man named William Caxton (ca. 1422-1491), and not used subsequently. In the example from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* below, conventional letters will be used instead of the Old English characters found in the manuscript.

Brytene igland is ehta hund mila lang & twa hund mila brad, & her synd on tham iglande fif getheodu, Aenglisc, Brytwylsc, Scottysc, Pihhtisc & Boclaeden. Aerest waeron buend thysses landes Bryttas, tha comen of Armenia, & gesaeton suthonwearde Brytene aerost. Tha gelamp hit thaet Pehtas comon suthon of Scithian mid langum scipum na manegum, & tha comon aerest on north Ybernian up, & thaer baedon Scottas thaet hi thaer moston wunian. Ac hig noldon heom lyfan, forthonthe hig cwaedon thaet hi ne mihton ealle aetgaedere gewunian thaer. & tha cwaedon tha Scottas, 'We magon eow hwaethere raed gelaeron. We witon other igland her beeastan, thaer ge magon eardian gyf ge wyllath, & gyf hwa eow withstent, we eow fultumiath thaet ge hit magon gegangan.'

The island of Britain is 800 miles long and 200 miles broad, and here in the island there are five languages, English, British, Scottish, Pictish, and (book) Latin. At first the inhabitants of this island were Britons, who came from Armenia<sup>1</sup> and first occupied southern Britain. Then it happened that the Picts came from the south, from Scythia,<sup>2</sup> with a few warships, and landed first in North Ireland. They asked the Scots<sup>3</sup> to allow them to dwell there, but they would not permit them, for they said that they could not all dwell there together. And then the Scots said: 'We can, however, give you advice. We know of another island, east from here, where you can settle if you wish; and if anyone resists you, we will help you to conquer it.'<sup>4</sup>

### The Norman Conquest

In the year 1066, there occurred an event which changed many things in England, including the English language. In January of that year Edward, the English king, died childless. A man named Harold, who was the eldest son of an influential nobleman, was chosen as king. Through intermarriage between the royal families of England and the families of the Dukes of Normandy, the present Duke, William, was a relative of the late Edward. He decided to seize the throne by force, and, raising an army of followers to whom he promised rich rewards when England had fallen to the Normans, crossed the English Channel at the head of his men. His landing was unopposed, as Harold was occupied in the north of England. The king

<sup>1</sup> A mistake in the MS for *Armoricana*, an ancient name for Brittany.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the land of the Scythians, north of the Black Sea.

<sup>3</sup> At the time that this manuscript was written, the word Scot usually referred to an inhabitant of Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Dorothy Whitelock, editor, with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1953.

hurried south to meet the Normans, and near the town of Hastings, the two armies met. Harold was killed in the fighting, and his men became disorganized and soon fled. On Christmas day, 1066, William was crowned king of England.

William, Duke of Normandy and King of England, could speak no English, as the “Northmen,” the Vikings who had settled in Normandy, had ceased speaking their Scandinavian language and had adopted the language of the land, which we call Norman French. William had come at the head of an army of faithful followers, mercenaries and adventurers, none of whom could speak English. The new king quickly appointed his Norman French friends and relatives to high positions in government, and began a systematic program of confiscation of land to parcel out to his faithful followers as rewards for their service. The result of this was the creation, almost overnight, of a new, French-speaking aristocracy of landholders. The same policy was transferred to the Church, and in 1070, the Archbishop of Canterbury was replaced with a French prelate. As a consequence of all this, Norman French became the language of the rulers of the land and of the aristocracy; English was relegated to the position of the language of a subject race.

During the time of the Norman occupation of England, it was inevitable that many words from Norman French would enter the English language—names of objects for which there was no word in the English vocabulary, for example. The French language spoken by the Normans was not much different from the French spoken anywhere else in France. It had developed from the Latin spoken by the Roman soldiers who had been stationed in Gaul, Latin *Gallia*, the Roman name for France, during the long time that that nation had been part of the Roman empire. The Roman soldiers had left, but while they were there, the native population of Gaul had gradually abandoned their Celtic language and adopted the speech of their conquerors, Latin, just as the Celtic Britons had abandoned their language and adopted the speech of their conquerors, Anglo-Saxon.

One of the early Greek philosophers, a man named Heraclitus (ca. 600 B.C.), is quoted by later writers as asserting that, as a universal principle, all things are in a state of constant flux: everything changes. This principle applies to language as well as to the weather. The Latin language adopted by the Celts in France following the Roman occupation of that land began to change, and over the course of several centuries the change was so dramatic as to create a new language: French. In Spain the Latin became Spanish, and in other areas of Europe conquered by the Romans it became other Romance (from Latin *Romanus*, “Roman”) languages.

### **The Middle English Period: 1150-1500**

The language of the Old English Period also changed, and when we see examples of Middle English we are looking at a language that we can understand. We may need some help with the meaning of a word here and there, and many of the words will be spelled in a peculiar manner, but we can read and understand the language.



One of the prominent writers of this period was William Caxton (ca. 1422-1491). He was the first printer in England and, in addition to composing his own poetry, he translated many works from the French of his day into English. One of these was Vergil's *Aeneid*, which a French scholar had translated from Vergil's Latin into French. In the prologue to his English translation, Caxton writes:

after dyverse werkes made translated and achieved hauyng noo werke in hande, I, sittynge in my studye where as laye many dyverse paunflettis and bookys, happened that to my hande came a lytyl booke in frenshe whiche late was translated oute of latyn by some noble clerke of fraunce, whiche booke is named Eneydos made in latyn by that noble poete & grete clerke vyrgyle.

Somewhat later in this same prologue, Caxton writes that he had been asked by the Abbot of Westminster to translate a certain work that had been written in Old English into "our Englysshe now used." He goes on to say that this work was "wreton in suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe."

In another passage, Caxton complains about the changing condition of the English language and relates an anecdote concerning a Scandinavian word.

And certaynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that whiche was vsed and spoken when I was borne / For we englysshe men / ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone, which is neuer stedfaste / but euer wauerynge / wexynge one season / and waneth & dyscreaseth another season / And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchauntes were in a shippe in taymse, for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande / and for lacke of wynde, thei taryed atte forlond, and wente to lande for to refreshe them; And one of theym named sheffelde, a mercer, cam in-to an hows and axed for mete; and specyally he axyd after eggys; And the goode wyf answerde, that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaunt was angry, for he also coude speke no frenshe, but wolde haue hadde egges / and she vnderstode hym not / And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren / then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel / Loo, what sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryte, egges or eyren / certaynly it is harde to playse euery man / by cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage.

Another work in Middle English that is better known than Caxton's translation of the *Aeneid* is *The Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1342-1400). This lengthy poem tells the story of twenty-nine men and women who were travelling

on a pilgrimage to the city of Canterbury. He begins his work by describing each of these pilgrims. The first one to be mentioned was a Knight.

The thorn (þ) was still in use in Chaucer's time to represent the sound of our letters *th*, as can be seen in the following selection.

#### The Knight

A Knight þere was and þat a worthy man  
 þat fro þe tyme þat he first began  
 To ryde out he loued chivalrye  
 Trewth honour fredome and curtesye  
 And there-to hade he ryden no man so ferre  
 ffull worthy was he in his lordes werre  
 As wele in cristendome as in hethnesse  
 And euer honour for his worthynesse

*ferre*: far  
*werre*: war

#### Modern English

The period of Modern English is said to have begun in 1500. It continues, of course, down to the present day. Just as Old English changed dramatically over a few centuries to become Middle English, so that, too, changed into a language which looks almost like the English of today. Exemplars of early Modern English are works of the dramatist William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Here is the beginning of Portia's speech to Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* (Act IV. Sc. i.).

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:  
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
 The throned monarch better than his crown;

As the years passed, the Normans became assimilated into the culture of the English, ties between England and France had been severed and French had ceased to be the language of the Court, the Church and the schools. Now there began to arrive a new European influence, and in a manner quite different from military conquest.

### The Renaissance

The Renaissance (French, *renaissance*, rebirth, from Latin *re-* again, and *nasci*, be born) was a period in Europe, beginning in the 14th century in Italy and lasting into the 17th century, marked by a revival of interest in the literature of the classical periods of ancient Rome and Greece, and by the beginning of what was to be modern science.

During the Middle Ages, the period from ca. A.D. 500 to ca. 1500, knowledge of the language and literature of ancient Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the classical period of Greece, had been all but forgotten. Now, interest revived in the works of the dramatists Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, and the scientific treatises of Archimedes and others. The language of the ancient Greeks began to be taught in the schools, and translations of their works were made into French and Italian, as well as English.

Knowledge of the Latin language had never died out, however, and had been kept alive in the monasteries. It, too, now began to be taught in the schools. Latin, considered to be the true language of learning, became the literary vehicle for scientific treatises and other scholarly works. In England, Sir Isaac Newton wrote his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy," in 1687. In 1628 William Harvey, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in London, published his great work on the circulation of blood in the human body, *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguis*, "An Anatomical Treatise on the Movement of the Heart and Blood." The Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus wrote his great work in 1543, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, "Concerning the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies." The Dutch theologian Erasmus (1466-1536) wrote his works in Latin, and the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné, better known as Linnaeus (1707-1778), wrote *Genera Plantarum*, "The Genera of Plants," and *Classes Plantarum*, "The Classes of Plants."

During and after the period when England was ruled by Norman French kings, many words had entered the English language from French, a process that continued and blossomed during the Renaissance. When British scholars undertook to translate the works of the Latin and Greek writers that had come to light during the Renaissance, they found that there were no appropriate equivalents of many of the words in the works that they were translating, so they did the obvious: they simply borrowed the Greek or Latin word and made it into an English word.

### Borrowed Words

The process of borrowing words from other languages and making English words from them has continued down to the present day. To cite just a few, from Arabic we get zero and alcohol; from the Inuit language of the Native Americans of North America and Greenland we have taken kayak and igloo; we have borrowed kindergarten and sauerkraut from German, and we have taken kimono from Japanese, and vodka from Russian.

By far, most of the borrowed words in our language, perhaps half of our entire vocabulary, have been borrowed from Latin, either directly or indirectly through French, with a substantially smaller portion coming from ancient Greek. The rest of our vocabulary, the words that have been inherited from Anglo-Saxon, are called **native words**, as opposed to **borrowed words**. Sometimes we can see, side-by-side, pairs of words, one native and the other borrowed. "Calf" is a native word, while the part of the animal that we eat, "veal," is borrowed from French *veau*, from Latin *vitellus*, calf. "Pig" is a native word, while the part that we eat, "pork," is from Latin *porcus*, pig. We may call a person who rides a horse a "horseman," a native word, while others might call him an "equestrian," or her, an "equestrienne," from Latin *equus*, horse.

In the following pages we shall see how we borrow words from Latin and Greek. But first, we should take a look at the origin of the English language far beyond Anglo-Saxon, and back to the beginning of most of the languages of Europe.

### Indo-European

As far back as Classical antiquity, it had been recognized that there were similarities between the Greek and Latin languages. This was explained by considering Latin to be a descendant of Greek. However, a different way of looking at the relationship between these two languages emerged in the eighteenth century.

In 1788, a British scholar and student of oriental languages, Sir William Jones, after studying Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, published an article in the journal *Asiatic Researches* in which he stated his view that similarities in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin could be explained only if these three languages were all descended from another, earlier language. Furthermore, he added, it was most likely that Gothic (a Germanic language, now extinct) and Celtic (surviving in the Gaelic languages) should be added to this group of related languages.

This theory inspired other European scholars to apply themselves to it, and before long, other languages and groups of languages were gradually added to Jones' list. In the nineteenth century, a name was found for this entire group of related languages: Indo-European, abbreviated IE. This name was chosen because, at that time, the languages identified as belonging to this group, or family, as it is now called, were spread across Europe and into India. The parent language of all these related languages was also given a name: Proto-Indo-European (from the Greek adjective *prōtos*, "first"), abbreviated PIE. The people themselves who spoke this proto-language are known as Proto-Indo-Europeans.

The discovery in the twentieth century of Indo-European languages in Anatolia, a part of ancient Turkey, and in western China, expanded the geographic extent of these related languages, but the name Indo-European persists.

### The Indo-European Language Groups and Their Principal Modern Descendants

<b>Albanian</b>	Albanian		
<b>Anatolian</b>	extinct		
<b>Armenian</b>	Armenian		
<b>Balto-Slavic</b>	<b>Baltic</b>		<b>Slavic</b>
	Lithuanian	Russian	Slovak
	Latvian	Ukrainian	Bulgarian
		Belarusian	Macedonian
		Polish	Slovene
		Czech	Serbo-Croatian
<b>Celtic</b>	<b>Goidelic (Gaelic)</b>		<b>Brythonic (Britannic)</b>
	Irish Gaelic		Welsh
	Scottish Gaelic		Breton
<b>Germanic</b>	<b>North Germanic</b>		<b>West Germanic</b>
	Swedish	High German	Frisian
	Norwegian	Low German	Flemish
	Danish	English	Afrikaans
	Icelandic	Dutch	Yiddish
	Faroese		
<b>Hellenic</b>	Greek		
<b>Indo-Iranian</b>	<b>Indic</b>		<b>Iranian</b>
	Hindi	Assamese	Persian (Farsi)
	Bengali	Marathi	Kurdish
	Urdu	Sinhalese	Pashto
	Gujarati	Sindhi	Baluchi
	Punjabi	Romany	Ossetic
<b>Italic</b>	French	Romanian	
	Spanish	Catalan	
	Italian	Provençal	
	Portuguese	Romansch	
<b>Tocharian</b>	extinct		



## The Homeland of the Proto-Indo-Europeans

Since the speakers of Proto-Indo-European left no written archaeological remains, it is difficult to say exactly where and when they lived. One workable theory is that they lived about five or six millennia ago, scattered through areas north and east of the Black Sea. It seems likely that later, in the fourth millennium, they split apart and began to move, some to the southern and western areas of Europe, some to the southeast into India, with groups of them stopping along the way in ancient Persia, now Iran. Others entered the land south of the Black Sea, and still others went farther east into what is now western China.

By the time that they had finally settled down, probably during the period 1500-1000 B.C., their PIE language had already begun to change in each of the areas in which they now lived, and in each area, their language changed in its own way.

We can now speak of the original PIE as having split into ten groups, some of which can be split into sub-divisions. These ten groups represent the members, both ancient and modern, of the Indo-European family of languages.

## The Indo-European Language Groups

Following are the ten recognized groups of the Indo-European languages arranged alphabetically. The discussion here of these groups of languages will not be all-inclusive, as this is not the place for an exhaustive study of this important subject. Students wishing a fully comprehensive work on Indo-European are referred to the excellent *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction* by Benjamin W. Fortson IV. Blackwell Publishing. Oxford, 2004.

### 1. Albanian

Albanian, the modern language of Albania, is spoken in two dialects: *Geg* and *Tosk*. It is the last member of the IE family to make its appearance in written records. The earliest of these date to the fifteenth century A.D. Modern Albanian contains a great number of words borrowed from Latin, Bulgarian, and Turkish. Little is known of the early history of the language.

### 2. Anatolian

The Anatolian languages represent the earliest attested IE languages known. In the year 1906, excavations in central Turkey in the area known as Anatolia unearthed thousands of clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform (wedge-shaped marks incised into the clay). When deciphered, they were found to be in Hittite and were dated to the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. Other Anatolian languages have since been found and identified, including Luvian and Lycian. All of these languages died out in antiquity.

### 3. Armenian

In the late 4th century A.D., the king of Armenia asked Mesrop Mashtots, a prominent scholar, to create a new alphabet for the Armenian language, which up to then had been written in the cuneiform (Latin *cuneus*, "wedge-shaped") script. In the year 405, Mashtots presented the king with his new creation, which has been used ever since for this language. It was probably based upon the Greek alphabet, although opinions differ on this point.

Later in the year 405, an Armenian translation of the Bible was published, using the new alphabet. The language of that time is known as Classical Armenian, and it remained the literary language of the land until the nineteenth century, when two modern dialects were recognized: Western Armenian, based upon the spoken language in the area of Istanbul in Turkey, and Eastern Armenian, the official language of the country, spoken in the area of its capital, Yerevan. Armenian is now spoken in Armenia, Iran, Georgia, Turkey, and other countries.

In the late nineteenth century, a German scholar showed conclusively that Armenian was an Indo-European language, but the relationship of Armenian to the IE languages is still under discussion. The creator of this alphabet is now known as Saint Mesrop Mashtots.

### 4. Balto-Slavic

The two Baltic languages (so-named because of the proximity of their speakers to the area of the Baltic Sea) spoken today are Lithuanian, spoken in Lithuania, and Latvian, spoken in Latvia. Old Prussian, once spoken in the area of East Prussia, is now extinct, having been replaced in the eighteenth century by German, when the kingdom of Prussia became part of the German empire.

The Slavic languages spoken now include Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovene, Serbo-Croatian, Polish, Czech and Slovak.

The earliest documents in a Slavic language are parts of the Bible which were translated by the Greek missionaries Constantine and his brother Methodius in the ninth century into the dialect that is now called Old Church Slavonic. The form of the Greek alphabet used by these church brothers and adapted to suit the sounds of the Slavic language is now known as the Cyrillic alphabet, named after Cyril, the name by which Constantine is better known. The languages spoken by the Slavic peoples who were converted to Christianity by missionaries from the Eastern Byzantine Church at Constantinople (modern Istanbul), e.g., Russian, are now written in the Cyrillic alphabet. The languages of those peoples whose conversion was a result of missionaries sent from Rome, e.g., Polish, are now written in the Latin alphabet. Old Church Slavonic has survived to the present day in the liturgical language of the Eastern Orthodox Church (in just the same way that Latin survived in the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church).

## 5. Celtic

The Celts, or Kelts, in ancient times were spread over a large territory and inhabited Gaul (France), much of Spain, northern Italy, southern Germany, Austria, the British Isles, and the western Czech Republic (the land formerly known as Bohemia, named after the Boii, a Celtic tribe who lived there). One group, the Galatians, moved into Asia Minor, where they occupied the area known as Galatia, near Ankara in Turkey.

It is not known precisely when the Celts crossed the English Channel to Great Britain, but it seems likely that they were there by 1000 B.C. They occupied most of that island until they were driven to the remote districts of western and northern Britain under successive onslaughts, first by the Romans, early in the Christian era, and, later, in the fifth century A.D., by the Angles and Saxons. Ireland was settled by Celtic-speaking peoples from mainland Europe somewhat later than Britain, probably by 600 B.C.

The Celtic language, once spoken over such vast territories, now survives as a spoken tongue only in the language called Irish, or Gaelic, in Ireland, in the Gaelic language of the highlands of Scotland and parts of the Hebridean islands, in the Gaelic language of Wales, and in Breton, the Celtic language spoken in the French province of Brittany. Breton is not a survival of the Celtic language formerly spoken in Gaul but is an importation brought to this region in the fifth century A.D. by Celts of England who were driven out by invading Angles and Saxons.

The surviving languages are the remains of two great, early divisions in Celtic. The Gaelic language spoken in Ireland and Scotland is called *Goidelic*<sup>5</sup> or Gaelic Celtic, while Welsh, the language of Wales, along with Breton, the language of Brittany, is called *Brythonic*<sup>6</sup> or Britannic Celtic. Thus, in respect to language, every Celt is either a *Goidel* or a *Brython*. Cornish, the Brythonic language of Cornwall in southwest England, ceased to be spoken in the eighteenth century, and Manx, the Goidelic language of the Isle of Man, lying in the Irish Sea between England and Northern Ireland, has been almost completely replaced by English in this century, as most of the Celtic spoken in Ireland and Great Britain already had been.

The earliest surviving documents in Celtic in Ireland and Britain are some brief prose works and a few hymns dating from the eighth century A.D. or earlier. These are written in Old Irish, as the Irish (Goidelic) Gaelic from this early period is called. But there are inscriptions in the Ogham alphabet, mostly on tombstones in Ireland, dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D. The most important remains are the glosses found scattered in numerous manuscripts, mostly concerned with the New Testament and dating from the eighth and ninth centuries. These glosses

<sup>5</sup> Named from the Old Irish word *Goidel*, a Gael, or Celtic inhabitant of Ireland or Scotland.

<sup>6</sup> From Welsh *Brython*, Briton, any Celtic inhabitant of the British Isles.

are explanations, interpretations, and translations of the Latin text inserted in the margins of the manuscripts by Irish scribes and written in Old Irish.

## 6. Germanic

Modern Germanic languages include English, German, Yiddish, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese (spoken in the Faroe Islands), and Flemish, the language of the Flemings spoken in southwestern Belgium and a small area of northern France. There is a large body of literature extant in the written records of these languages dating from different periods, the earliest from the fourth century A.D. These remains make it possible not only to see the clear division of the Germanic branch of Indo-European into three distinct groups, but from the early remains of these three groups to reconstruct the original form of this language, usually called Proto-Germanic, before its division. That is, this reconstructed Proto-Germanic represents the earliest form of the Germanic language at the point when it had first separated from and become distinct from Proto-Indo-European. There are no written records in this language, and the date at which it had become a language distinct from Indo-European can only be assumed to have been sometime between 2500 and 1500 B.C., sometime after the beginning of the Indo-European migrations.

The three divisions of Proto-Germanic are called East Germanic, West Germanic, and North Germanic. The principal (and sole) literary document in East Germanic survives in fragments of a translation of the Bible into Gothic, the language of the Goths. In the first century A.D., these people were settled in what is now Poland and represented the easternmost of the Germanic peoples. Shortly after this time, they began to move to the east and, by the third century, had reached the shores of the Black Sea. In the fourth century, some of them were converted to Christianity and, as an aid to conversion, the Bible was translated into the Gothic language by a missionary named Ulfilas (or Wulfilas). This is the earliest document in any Germanic language. By the fifth century, the Gothic language was in use over much of Europe and North Africa in the great kingdoms of the Goths of the east and west—the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths—as well as in the kingdom of the Vandals, a people who, a contemporary historian says, spoke the language of the Goths.<sup>7</sup> With the collapse of these great kingdoms, however, Gothic gradually ceased to be spoken, and the last literary reference to it as a spoken tongue is found in the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The most extensive early Germanic literature is found in North Germanic, the language of the Scandinavian peninsula which, before its division into the modern tongues of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic, is known as Old Norse.

<sup>7</sup> Procopius, a Greek historian during the time of the Roman emperor Justinian in the fifth century. Reference to the Vandals speaking the Gothic language is found in his *History of the Wars of Justinian* in the section dealing with the war against the Vandals in North Africa.

<sup>8</sup> In a collection of words and phrases spoken by the Goths of the Crimea, compiled by an envoy (Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq) at the court of the emperor at Constantinople.

Iceland was colonized by peoples from Norway in the late ninth century A.D., and these settlers brought with them a huge body of heroic literature preserved in the dialect of Old Norse that is called Old Icelandic.<sup>9</sup>

West Germanic is represented today by modern German,<sup>10</sup> Dutch, which developed from a form of the language called Low German,<sup>11</sup> and English. High German, reinforced by Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into that tongue in the sixteenth century, has become the literary language of the Germans, while Low German has maintained itself only as a local spoken dialect in the northern parts of Germany. The linguistic ancestors of English are three of the members of the West Germanic group: the languages of the Angles, Saxons, and (to a lesser degree) the Jutes.

The close relationship among modern Germanic languages can be shown in the chart below, which gives words in six of these languages, all with the same meaning, and all ultimately descended from the same Proto-Indo-European word:

English	German	Dutch	Danish	Norwegian	Swedish
mother	<i>Mutter</i>	<i>moeder</i>	<i>moder</i>	<i>moder</i>	<i>moder</i>
night	<i>Nacht</i>	<i>nacht</i>	<i>nat</i>	<i>natt</i>	<i>natt</i>
father	<i>Vater</i>	<i>vader</i>	<i>fader</i>	<i>fader</i>	<i>fader</i>
stone	<i>Stein</i>	<i>steen</i>	<i>sten</i>	<i>stein</i>	<i>sten</i>
cow	<i>Kuh</i>	<i>koe</i>	<i>ko</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ko</i>
hot	<i>heiss</i>	<i>hect</i>	<i>hed</i>	<i>het</i>	<i>het</i>
cold	<i>kalt</i>	<i>koud</i>	<i>kulde</i>	<i>kald</i>	<i>kall</i>

## 7. Hellenic

The ancestors of the historical Greeks, who called themselves *Hellenes*, entered the Greek peninsula around 1900 B.C. as part of the Indo-European migrations, bringing with them the Greek language. A secondary wave of Greek-speaking invaders came around 1100 B.C., and the fusion of these two groups with the pre-Hellenic inhabitants of that land produced the Greeks of the historical period: the Athenians, Spartans, and others. In early records, four principal dialects of Greek can be recognized: Attic-Ionic, Aeolic, Arcado-Cypriot, and Doric (the dialect of the

<sup>9</sup> This heroic literature, known collectively as the Icelandic Sagas, recounts the lives and deeds of traditional early heroes of the Norse people. Outstanding among these sagas are the *Elder Edda*, a collection of poems probably of the tenth century, and the *Younger Edda*, a prose work of the twelfth.

<sup>10</sup> Also called New High German, abbreviated NHG, to differentiate it from earlier forms of the language, known as MHG and OHG, Middle and Old High German.

<sup>11</sup> The terms "high" and "low," referring to the Germanic language, apply to the high, mountainous regions of southern Germany where the "High" dialect is spoken, as opposed to the flat, low-lying areas of the northern coastal region where Low German, or *Plattdeutsch*, is spoken.



invaders of 1100 B.C.). Attic Greek, a sub-division of Attic-Ionic that was spoken in Attica (i.e., Athens), came to be recognized as the literary language of the Greeks at an early period, since almost all of the great literary figures of ancient Greece were Athenian and wrote in the Attic dialect: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Plato, to name but a few. Because of the prestige that these and other writers bestowed upon Attic Greek, this dialect became the basis for a common Greek language, called *koine* (from the Greek word meaning "common"), which, by the Christian era, was spoken over much of the Mediterranean world. It is the language of the writers of the New Testament, for example, and through its use in Constantinople, the eastern capitol of the Roman empire, it has formed the basis of the language of Byzantine literature.

But the *koine* was gradually replaced by other languages of the Mediterranean, particularly Latin in the west and Arabic in the east, and today the Greek as spoken in modern Athens remains the sole survivor of this ancient language, although Latin, and through it the Romance languages and, eventually, English have all been greatly enriched by borrowings from the ancient tongue.

### Linear B: A Mystery

In the year 1900, a team of British archaeologists led by Sir Arthur Evans began excavations at a site on the northern coast of Crete, a place known as Cnossus. They came to investigate the ruins of a huge Bronze-Age palace there, thought to be the home of the fabled King Minos, the one who had the Minotaur, "Minos's Bull," imprisoned in the Labyrinth, according to the myth.

The ruins showed signs of destruction by fire sometime around 1400 B.C., so that anything that was found there had been there before this date. Evans did not find any evidence of anyone named "Minos," but he did find something else quite unexpected: around three thousand clay tablets incised with strange symbols never seen anywhere before. He began to study these tablets, hoping to decipher their meaning. He was unsuccessful in this, but he did realize one fact about them: by certain obvious characteristics, they could be separated into two groups. He thought that these symbols must represent writing, and he named his two groups Linear A and Linear B, thinking, correctly as it turned out, that they represented two different languages.

Scholars in the United States and in England had been trying to decipher the tablets, when interest became heightened in 1939 by the discovery at Pylos in western Greece, in the ruins of a Bronze-Age palace there, of hundreds of clay tablets incised with symbols identical to those on the Linear B tablets of Cnossus. This new find was able to be dated to about 1400-1200 B.C.

A few years after this, tablets similarly inscribed were revealed at other sites in Greece, but it wasn't until 1952 and 1953 that two British scholars, Michael Ventris and John Chadwick, published articles showing irrefutable proof that the writing

on the Linear B tablets was an early form of the Greek language. The Bronze Age Greeks about whom we read in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were literate, after all.

Great movements of people and cataclysmic events in the Greek world around 1100 B.C. or a little earlier caused the destruction of practically all of the great palaces of the Bronze-Age civilization, and the land was plunged into what the historians call "The Greek Dark Ages."

Two questions remain unanswered by the decipherment of Linear B: What were the Greeks doing in Cnossus (or what were the people of Cnossus doing in Greece) in the fifteenth century B.C.? and what is on the Linear A tablets?

There are no conclusive answers to either question. The Linear A tablets are partly understood, but the language of the tablets remains unknown. As for the Linear B tablets, when they were deciphered and translated they yielded much interesting information, but there was neither history nor narrative. The tablets were inscribed in a syllabary: each symbol represented the sound of a consonant plus a vowel, or often just a single vowel. They were mostly records of what was in the royal storehouses and households: how many swords, spears and arrows, names of male and female workers, how much grain and spices, how many rowers, troops, flocks of sheep and goats, how many chariots with wheels and how many without, and so forth.

The invasions of ca. 1100 B.C. put an end to Linear B writing, and the land of Greece is silent until the introduction of the alphabet (probably in the eighth century B.C.), when it emerges from the "Greek Dark Ages," and we begin to have written records of events that we can call history.

### 8a. Indo-Iranian: Indic

The term Indo-Iranian (or Indo-Aryan) refers to the languages spoken by the IE peoples whose migrations took them to the east during the IE migrations. They settled in what was called ancient Persia (modern Iran) and in northern India. The Indic branch is represented by Sanskrit, the oldest in terms of linguistic development of the members of the Indo-Iranian Group.

The oldest literature in Sanskrit is found in a collection of hymns called the Vedas, the oldest of which is the *Rig-veda*, which was composed and transmitted orally from around 1500 B.C. The first written examples of this text are from the third century B.C. Other writings from this early period include the epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Modern descendants of Sanskrit include Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Romany (the language of the Gypsies), and others.

The alphabet used in extant Sanskrit literature, and today in Hindi and other Indic languages, is called *Devanagari* or *Nagari*, and was developed during the 7th-9th centuries A.D. from an earlier script called *Brahmi*.

### 8b. Indo-Iranian: Iranian

The Iranian branch of Indo-Iranian is represented in antiquity by the language of the ancient Persians spoken in the land now called Iran. The earliest monuments are in the language called Old Persian. These consist of cuneiform ("wedge-shaped") inscriptions, mostly on stone, which record the accomplishments of some of the ancient kings of Persia, notably Darius I and his son, Xerxes, rulers during the great wars fought between the Persians and the Greek states during the early part of the fifth century B.C. The principal inscription is a long text in three languages: Old Persian, Akkadian (a Semitic language of ancient Babylonia), and Elamite, a language not completely understood today. This text records the rise to power and the achievements of Darius I. In addition to its linguistic value, it is an important historical document. This monument is found at the modern site of Behistun and is engraved on a stone cliff alongside the old caravan route between Baghdad and Tehran, with the lowest portion of it some two hundred feet above the road below.

A dialect of Old Persian called Avestan is represented in the Avesta, the book of sacred writings of the Zoroastrian religion. Only a small portion of the original work survives and is thought to date to the time of the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), who probably lived around 600 B.C., although his dates are in dispute.

The modern descendants of Old Persian include Modern Persian, called Farsi, the national language of Iran, Kurdish, the language of the Kurds, and Pashto, spoken in Afghanistan. All of these languages are written in the Arabic script and contain a large number of Arabic loan words.

### 9. Italic

The ancestors of the historical Romans entered the peninsula of Italy about 1000 B.C. as part of the final phase of the original Indo-European migrations, which had begun some two thousand years earlier. In the light of available evidence, it is not possible to determine just where these peoples had been living prior to their crossing of the Alps and their entry into northern Italy. The Italic dialect later known as Latin was one of several that these newcomers brought with them. But due to the later, dominant position of those who settled in the plain of Latium in northern Italy, their language, Latin, gradually replaced the others as the Romans asserted their political mastery over the entire Italian peninsula. All that remains of other dialects is scanty documents, mostly inscriptions, the two principal dialects being those of the peoples known as Oscans and Umbrians.

With the expansion of the Roman empire, which reached its greatest size under the emperor Trajan in the early part of the second century A.D., soldiers, administrators, merchants, and travelers carried the Latin language to all parts of this vast domain. So thoroughly were the inhabitants of these areas "Romanized," that for political expediency and for ease in commercial transactions Latin gradually replaced the languages of the natives in many of these areas.

The Latin that was carried through the empire, however, was not the classical literary language of Rome, but the spoken language of the soldiers, merchants, and others. This language, called "Vulgar Latin" (from Latin *vulgus*, meaning "the common people"), was different in many ways from the literary tongue, and now the trends to linguistic change were accelerated. As was noted earlier, all living things change, and Vulgar Latin, the living language, was no exception, and there came a time when the literary language of earlier days, Classical Latin, was kept alive only artificially in written literature (and as the language of the Church), while the spoken tongue continued its unhampered change. The change progressed until the Latin spoken in distant areas became mutually unintelligible. This is the point at which we can say that the Romance languages have begun their existence. No definite date can be assigned to this linguistic event, and it occurred at different times in different places. But it can be said that, in all likelihood, Latin was a "dead" language—that is, it was no longer the native, spoken tongue of any people—by A.D. 700, probably earlier.

### The Romance Languages

It is obvious that the modern languages French, Italian, and Spanish, to name three, are similar to each other in many ways. This is because all three have developed out of Latin. As large areas of Europe became part of the Roman empire in the early years of this era, armies of occupation had to be stationed throughout these new provinces, as they were called. Over the centuries, the natives of these different areas gradually abandoned their native tongues and adopted the language of their conquerors, Latin.

The same linguistic forces that impelled Proto-Indo-European to change into the diverse languages of the members of the IE family now caused the Latin spoken in the various areas of occupation to gradually change, until now we can distinguish not only French, Italian and Spanish as descendants of Latin, but the rest of the languages that we call the Romance languages: Portuguese, Catalan, Romanian, Romansch, spoken in parts of Switzerland, Provençal, a dialect of Occitan spoken in southern France, and a few other languages.

The term "Romance" is from Middle English *romans*, from medieval Latin *Romanice*, from Late Latin and Latin *Romanus*, "Roman."

### 10. Tocharian

In the early decades of the twentieth century, archaeological excavations in the area then known as Chinese Turkestan, a region of western China on the ancient Silk Road in the Tarim basin, unearthed documents in languages that, at the time, were unknown.

When deciphered, some of these documents were found to be in two different dialects of an Indo-Iranian language, not completely understood. Other documents were recognized as being in two versions of a language called Tocharian and were

named Tocharian A and B, and shown to be Indo-European languages. Their translation was helped by the fact that many turned out to be translations of Buddhist works, which could be read. The differences between Tocharian A and B are not fully understood. None of the documents in either A or B reveals anything about the Tocharians themselves and how or when these speakers of an IE language came to have traveled into lands so far to the east of their homeland.

### Cognate Languages

All of the languages above are called **cognate** languages, from Latin *cognatus*, "related," from *co-*, "together," and (*g*)*natus*, "born," because they are all descended from a single parent-language, Proto-Indo-European. Words in two or more of these languages can be cognates, too, if they are all derived from the same parent-word. Thus, English *mother*, Dutch *moeder*, and Danish *moder* are all cognates, and all three are cognates of Latin *mater* and Greek *mētēr*.

There are some languages of Europe that are not Indo-European: Basque, spoken in northern Spain, is not related to any known language, ancient or modern; Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, and the Sami languages spoken by the Lapps of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola peninsula of northwestern Russia belong to a family of languages known as Finno-Ugric.