Study questions on Chapter 2 "Old English: early Germanic Britain (450–700)"

1. What was the social position of the Celtic-speaking population of Britain like in the period after the Anglo-Saxon conquest? What consequences did this have for the Celtic languages? for English?

    The Celts were in a position of relative powerlessness. They were driven off the land or were treated like slaves. The consequence of this was the extreme dearth of words of Celtic origin in English. Furthermore, this resulted in the spread of English at the expense of Celtic, an expansion visible even in our own times, where Scottish Gaelic is dying out; Irish Gaelic is a distinctly minority language; Cornish and Manx are for all intents and purposes dead languages; only Welsh continues to be spoken by a larger speech community.

2. What kind of contact did the Romans and the Germanic peoples have in Britain?

    The Germanic peoples were active chiefly as mercenaries. When they settled, it was generally outside of the (Roman) towns.

3. Why did conversion to Christianity take place so rapidly? What effect did Christianization have on the society of early Germanic England?

    Christianization took place at the top of society. As the kings of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Heptarchy) converted, they took their peoples with them. The major effect of Christianity was the spread of learning, which took place chiefly in the monasteries.

4. What kind of literature is available to us from the OE period?

    The literature of the OE period is chiefly of two types: (a) religious and (b) historiographic. Both reflect the function of the written word in supporting Church and State. This included The Dream of the Rood, *"The Wanderer," "Cædmon's Hymn," on the one hand, and "Æðelbriht's Laws" and the* Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *on the other. There was, in addition, a certain amount of poetry, e.g. non-religious* Beowulf *and patriotic "The Battle of Burganburh" and "The Battle of Maldon" as well as the riddles in the Exeter Book.*

5. What is the effect of the limitations in the literature which we have from the OE period on our knowledge of the language?

    Because of the limited number of registers available we have no real examples of everyday language. Much of what was written may have been outdated, if not directly archaic at the time of composition. Furthermore, it did not represent spoken language, but rather the expectations of written genres (laws, religious homilies, poetry).

| Linguistic background

1. Characterize the influence of Celtic on OE and give some examples.

There was little borrowing of vocabulary from the Celtic languages. But a number of place-names come from Celtic or contain Celtic elements.

In the area of place-names we find Bernicia, Devon, *both tribal names, but also* Kent *"border" and the kingdom of* Deira < *Celtic* Deifr *"water" as well as the rivers* Avon *"river,"* Esk *and* Exe < isca *"water,"* Ouse *"stream,"* Thames *"dark river"* < tamesis *"darkness," and* Trent, *possibly meaning "strongly flooding" or from a contraction of,* tros *"over" and* hynt *"way."*

Examples of hybrid forms include both Celtic-Latin and Celtic-Germanic combinations. Lincoln combines lindon, a Celtic word for "pool" with Latin colonia "colony, settlement," both shortened to Lin + coln. Lancaster combines the Celtic name for the River Lune, possibly meaning "pure" or "healthy," with -caster, which like -cester and -chester are all ultimately derived from Latin castrum "camp, fort" via OE ceaster. Germanic-Celtic hybrids give us Cornwall < cornovii, a Celtic tribe, + Germanic wealas "foreigner, servant, slave," from which the name Wales also stems. A further example is Cumberland < Celtic Cymry "Welsh" and Germanic land.

Besides place-names we find a few examples in the general vocabulary:

> brat *"cloak"*
> bin *"manger"*
> bannock *"small Scottish cake"* < *OE* bannuc *"bit, small piece"* < *Old British/Cornish* banna *"drop"*
> brock *"badger"* < *OE* brocc < *Old British* broc
> clock < *OE* clugge, *cf. Middle Irish* clocc *"bell"*
> curse < *OE* cursian < *OIr* cūrsagim *"I blame"*
> dun *"dull grayish brown"* < *OE* dunn < *OIr* donn *"dark"*

According to Schrijver (2012) when Celtic-speakers adopted English they would have unconsciously carried over into English some of their L1 predispositions, and this would have influenced the nature of their English such as the use of Celtic features of pronunciation in English.

In a similar way Celtic grammatical categories and structures would also have been retained in Celtic-influenced OE. This would include the double present tense paradigm of the verb be, bēon (singular ic bēo, ðū bist, hē/hēo bið and plural we, ge, hie bēoð) for the habitual and wesan (singular ic eom, ðū eart, hē/hēo is and plural we, ge, hie sind(on)) for the "actual." While probably no other Germanic language ever such a double paradigm, early Celtic did. Hence, its source might well have lain in the linguistic predispositions of Celtic speakers of OE (Lutz 2009).

Two further features of English which may ultimately have had Celtic roots are periphrastic do (Poussa 1990) and the progressive (Coates 2010; Miller 2012; Hickey 2012), both of which, however, appear in English much later. The late emergence of do-periphrasis and the progressive has been explained by the dominance of the (old Wessex) standard in the OE period. Only after it was gone, i.e. in early Middle English, could these structures gradually percolate to the surface (cf. Coates 2010).

2. What do place-names tell us about the settlement of England and the ethnic heritage of the various regions? Give examples.

Place-names are predominantly West Germanic in the Southeast; Norse in the East Midlands and Northeast; Celtic in the far West. Throughout there is a scattering of Latin names. This reflects early settlement patterns. Examples can be found in HoE *§2.1.3.*

3. How was the Latin alphabet adapted for use in writing OE? What other writing tradition was drawn on for the writing of OE?

    The Latin alphabet was adopted with the phonetic values of Latin. In the case of sounds which had no near parallel in Latin non-Latin characters were selected. These were chiefly runes (<þ> "thorn" and <ƿ> "wynn"), but also Celtic (<ð> "eth"). Ash (<æ>) is of Latin origin.

4. Both OE and ModE have the category of gender in their grammars. In ModE gender is based largely on "natural gender," by which people mean the biological sex of what is referred to. For reference to a man we use *he*; for a woman, *she*; and for a house, *it*. Explain how this differs in OE and give examples.

    *Grammatical gender in OE was assigned to all nouns in a manner inherited from Indo-European. In its basic outline this was – in the distant past – a **count** vs. **mass** distinction, where animate was masculine with the subcategory feminine for female humans; and both stood in contrast to with masculine with the subcategory feminine for female humans; and both stood in contrast to inanimate, which was neuter (Wagner 2004: 481f; cf. also Luraghi 2011). This still seems to be the case in the traditional dialect of the English southwest (see HoE 7.3.1), where count nouns are masculine and famine, but mass nouns are neuter.*

    Some OE examples of grammatical gender are (1) masculine dryhten *"lord, ruler,"* drinc *"drink"; (2) feminine* hlǣfdige *"lady,"* duguð *"retainer, people, nobles,"* dūce *"duck," or* duru *"door"; and (3) neuter* drincfæt *"drinking vessel,"* dūst *"dust," but also* wīf *"woman" or* cild *"child." As we can easily see, the older Indo-European basis is no long clear, but there was a certain, though somewhat narrow basis for identifying grammatical gender with biological sex. For even in OE times there are instances in which a non-feminine antecedent with reference to a female person was referred to by a feminine pronoun. As Strang remarks, "By 1170 it was broadly true that if reference to a person was involved, natural gender took priority; …. By 1370 the conception of grammatical gender was hardly relevant to English" (1970: 265). The following OE passage may represent such a case, where* wælgæst *"death sprite" is masculine but further reference is feminine (*hēo*) because the deeper textual reference is to Grendel's mother:*

Wearð him on Heorote to handbanan	*It happened to him in Heorot at the hand of a killer,*
***wælgæst** wæfre; ic ne wat hwæder*	*A wandering **death sprite**; I don't know where*
atol æse wlanc eftsiðas teah,	*Boasting of the horrible prey (she) went (her) way back to*
*fylle gefægnod. **Heo** þa fæhðe wræc*	*Full of joy. **She** then wreaked vengeance*
þe þu gystran niht Grendel cwealdest	*That thou yesterday night didst Grendel kill …*

(*Beowulf*, ll. 1330–1337)

Eventually there was a fundamental shift from the traditional gender system to one based on the feature [±human]. This led to a loss of the old masculine-feminine-neuter distinction and the establishment of a personal-non-personal one, as shows up in the new distinction between who *and* which *or between* somebody *and* something. *Within the personal category sex-based reference further distinguished masculine and feminine. From a purely linguistic perspective it is only possible to confirm these changes and to attribute them to some underlying and somewhat mystic (or mystifying) force of linguistic drift.*

5. What is the relationship of the Germanic kingdoms to the dialect areas of Anglo-Saxon England?

    There is an astonishingly great correlation between the boundaries of the kingdoms and the extent of the Old English dialects: Northumbrian; Mercian (Mercia, East Anglia, Essex); West Saxon (Wessex, Sussex); Kentish.

Map: The Heptarchy (c. 700) reflects in very general terms the dialect areas of Old English

Topics of interest for further study

1. Look into blood-type and DNA-evidence on the numerical relations between Anglo-Saxons and Celts. Literature: Weale et al. (2003), Capelli et al. (2003), Thomas, Stumpf, and Härke (2006), Pattison (2008), Schiffels et al. (2016), Oppenheimer (2006).

    The evidence from these sources has grown in significance over the past several decades. All the same, definite results are hard to come by since Y-chromosomal DNA and mitochondrial evidence from ancient sources are often defective (more the former than the latter). In general, however, most sources (cf. Pattison 2008) indicate relatively low numbers of immigrants in the Roman period (480 per year on average between 43 and 410), somewhat higher ones for the Anglo-Saxon period (580 per year from 430 to 730), and very low numbers for the Viking period (170 per year from 793–1066). The general facet from this is that the autochthonous population (Celtic) made up the vast majority of the total population.

2. Substrate influence of Celtic on Old English is a hotly debated topic. One of the basic assumptions is that Celtic speakers shifted relatively rapidly to Old English thereby carrying into OE their Celtic speech habits (see Poussa 1990; Lutz 2009; Filppula and Klemola 2009; Schrijver 2012). You might look more closely either at pronunciation or at grammar.

2a. Pronunciation habits prominently involved what is known as *i*-umlaut,[1] which refers to the fronting of back vowels in the first syllable when followed by front **i* or **j* in the second syllable. Schrijver (2012) sees this as phonetically similar to Irish palatalization in which a back consonant palatalizes (or fronts) when the second syllable contains a front vowel. The fronting is focused on the vowel in OE but on the consonant in Celtic (Schrijver 2012: 88). This still leaves the problem of accounting for *i*-umlaut in other West Germanic languages. Collect arguments for and against the two ways of understanding *i*-umlaut.

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1 Also a/u umlaut, which will not be treated here (cf. Schrijver 2012: 63ff).

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The approach that emphasizes the similarity between Germanic i-*umlaut and Celtic palatalization is highly attractive. Let us look at this first:*

First of all OE i-*umlaut (fronting in a front-context):* *bankiz > benc *"bench",* *kuningaz > cyning *"king";* *dōmijanan > dǣman *(later* dēman*) "to judge, deem."*

The counterpart is Old Irish palatalization, in which consonants become palatalized by a following front vowel, e.g. *kannīnā *"leek" >* *kańńīnā*, where* ń *is* /ŋ/.

> *"Old English* i-*umlaut and Irish palatalization are similar in the sense that the front vowel* i *is drawn from a non-initial syllable towards the preceding syllable, with the effect of making that syllable more like* i*. The difference is that English* i-*umlaut affects a preceding vowel, while Irish palatalization affects a preceding consonant. But if we take a closer look at what happens, that difference turns out to be a phonological (psychological) rather than a phonetic difference: in English, original* *kuningaz *became a phonetic* [kyńingaz] *with fronting of both* *u > y *and* *n > ń *as a result of the following* *i*. And in Irish,* *kannīnā *became phonetic* [kæńńīnā]*, with the fronting of both the consonant and vowel. The difference between English and Irish arose by the process of phonemicization: psychologically, speakers of English assigned the fronting effect in* [kyńingaz] *only to* [y]*, while the fronting of* [ń] *was considered to be an automatic consequence of standing after the front vowel* [y]*. … Before phonemicization the phonetic effects of English* i-*umlaut and Irish palatalization would have been identical."*

> *(Schrijver 2012: 88)*

As for the pros and cons, this argument presupposes the presence of some sort of disposition for change in Proto-Germanic. Explanations of predispositions and innateness still need to be presented (ibid.: 66). What speaks against this are (1) the differences in the various West Germanic languages and (2) the presence of umlaut in the Celtic languages (ibid.: 68f).

2b. The Celtic grammatical substrate is seen as the basis for the adoption of the double paradigm of the verb *be* in OE (Filppula, Klemola, and Paulasto 2008; Lutz 2009; Schrijver 2012). Find out where the *wesan* forms and the *bēon* forms show up in other Germanic languages and how this differs from OE. How might this have come about? What are the arguments pro and con in regard to the possible Celtic origins of the double paradigm?

The question is whether the rather unique form-function distinction in West Saxon may be due to Cymric, the Celtic language of ancient Britain. Certainly, there is a superficial resemblance between the two habitual paradigms (including the identity of the third person singular forms). Note that Old Saxon and Old High German (OHG) have first and second person singular b-*forms while Old Norse and Gothic have* wesan-*forms in these slots. All four have* wesan-*forms in the third person singular. The plural reveals differing* wesan-*forms (s-forms) in Old Saxon and Gothic (all persons), on the one hand, and e-forms in ON (the future English* are-*forms), on the other. OHG has a mixed plural paradigm. All this makes the OE double paradigm extraordinary among the Germanic languages.*

	West Saxon		Cymric	
	habitual *(bēan)*	actual *(wesan)*	habitual	actual
1st p. sg.	bīo	eom	byðaf	wyf
2nd p. sg.	bist	eart	byðy	wyt
3rd p. sg.	bið	is	byð	yw
1st p. plur.	bīoð	sind(on)	byðwn	ym
2nd p. plur.	bīoð	sind(on)	byðwch	ywch
3rd p. plur.	bīoð	sind(on)	byðant	ynt

Old Saxon	OHG	ON	Gothic
bium	*bim*	*em*	*im*
bis	*bist*	*est*	*is*
is(t)	*ist*	*es*	*ist*
sind(un)	*birum*	*erom*	*sijum*
sind(un)	*birut*	*eroþ*	*sijuþ*
sind(un)	*sint*	*ero*	*sind*

(Lutz 2009: 232)

The arguments Lutz uses are based on the double system of the verb be. *She also points out that OE had double exposure to Celtic, once as a pre-invasion Germanic language and again in Britain.*

(1) **"Habitual"** *refers to the use of* bēon *for four different but related meanings:*
    generic: þone se mona wexeþ, he **biþ** gelic ðæm godum men[1]
        As the moon waxes, it is like those good men
    habitual-durative: simle þu **bist** halig, dryhtna dryhten[2]
        Always thou art holy, Lord of Lords
    future: He wæs æfre soð Godd & **is** & aa **bið**[3]
        He was ever true God and is and always will be
    subjunctive: dyslic **bið** þæt hwa woruldlice speda forhogie for manna herunge[4]
        Foolish is he who worldly fortune despises for men's praise

[1]*Blickl. Hom. 17, 22;* [2]*ChristA 404;* [3]*Wulfstan, Hom. VI, 138;* [4]*ÆCHom I, 4 60.32*

(2) **"Actual"** *refers to the use of* wesan *for what happens or is the case at the moment:*
    actual*:* Ic **eam** soð win-eard & min fader **ys** eorð-tilia[5]
        I am the true vinyard & my father is the husbandman

    However, the wesan-*paradigm is also used as*

    generic: mare **is** ðæt mod ðonne se mete[6]
        stronger is the spirit than the flesh
    habitual-durative: Be eastan Rine **sindon** Eastfrancan[7]
        By the eastern Rhine are the East Franks
    subjunctive: sī þīn nama gehālgod[8]
        be Thy name hallowed ("hallowed be Thy name")

[5]*John 15.1;*[6]*Ælfric Saints' Lives, 362, 370;*[7]*Ælfred, Oros. I.i 12;*[8]*Lord's Prayer*

So what speaks for and what against the hypothesis of Celtic influence on the double paradigm in OE?
For

- *the uniqueness of the double paradigm in West Saxon, but not in other Germanic languages*
- *the renewed contact of West Saxon with Cymric*
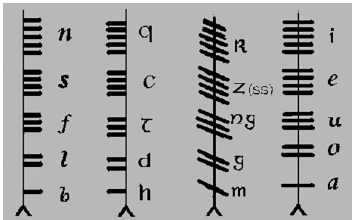- *perhaps a functional distinction between* wesan *and* bēon

Against

- *the lack of past tense* b-*forms in West Saxon*
- *the presence of* b-*forms (though mixed in a single paradigm) in other West Germanic languages*
- *the restricted nature of the differing functionality, which consists in the end in the* b-*forms for future-subjunctive (vs. present-actual) more than for imperfective (vs. perfective)*

3. In this chapter the runic alphabet (futhorc) was introduced. Find out about further writing systems used in the history of writing in the British Isles, such as the Ogham Alphabet (for Celtic) or the Lodwick's universal alphabet (§12.5.1). What similarities in approach do they share? How do they differ? How widely used were these alternative systems?

    The **Ogham alphabet** *uses straight lines in various constellations for the letters of the Latin alphabet. This was more practical when chiseling a text onto stone.*

Lodwick's universal alphabet *was conceived of phonetically and made use of the symbols as on the chart.*

The Ogham alphabet is attested on approximately 400 extant Ogham stones in Ireland, Wales, and western England which were produced from about the fifth to the ninth century. Lodwick developed his universal alphabet in the late sevneteenth century. Both use the alphabetic principle, and both make do with symbols which do not resemble Latin letters. No one knows for sure what the Ogham inscriptions (mostly proper names) were used for, but a good guess would be as territory markers or grave stones. Lodwick's system was in part developed within the project of the Royal Society to develop a philosophical language. It was never earnestly or regularly used to write texts.