



INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS Section No. **OLD (AND NOT SO OLD) ENGLISH** 218

The name given to the first period of the English Language, Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, spans the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain during the 5th century to the Norman Conquest in 1066.

The earliest writings in English consist of a few scattered inscriptions in the runic alphabet. With the introduction of Christian-

ity in 597 by Saint Augustine of Canterbury, the Anglo-Saxons began using the Latin alphabet.

Of the three Germanic tribes that invaded Britain, the Angles settled the middle and north of England, the Jutes colonized the south-east, and the Saxons took the rest. These ethnic and political divisions correspond well with the earliest

distinguishable dialect areas.

Documents of the 8th and 9th centuries indicate the existence of two Anglian dialects: Northumbrian—the variety of Old English spoken north of the Humber estuary—and Mercian—spoken in an area stretching from East Anglia to the West Midlands, but centered on the kingdom of Mercia. Kentish was the dialect of southeastern England, and West Saxon was used elsewhere in the south, including what is now London.

English prose came into its own only during the last quarter of the 9th century, with the educational program of King Alfred. Earlier records are limited mainly to charters, inscriptions and English glossaries of Latin words.

Nevertheless, with the assistance of a small group of scholars gathered from all parts of England and from Wales and the Europe, Alfred produced a series of translations and original prose works in his own dialect of Old English, so-called Early West-Saxon.

After a 50-year pause English prose took another leap forward as a result of the 10th-century monastic revival led by Saints Aethelwold, Dunstan, and Oswald.

Hundreds of homilies, saints' lives, and other religious pieces were composed in all parts of England, from York to Winchester, in a remarkably uniform written language known as Late West-Saxon. Still, more than enough evidence survives to demonstrate that the spoken dialects of Old English remained as distinct as ever.

14TH CENTURY RUNES—FROM THE CODEX RUSICUS.

17: þ þ R: * 1 1: þ þ 1 1 R: þ þ 1: þ þ R þ:
þ 1 1 þ 1 1 1 1 1 1: þ þ 1 1 R: R þ 1 1 1 1 1:
þ R: 1 1 1 1 R: * þ 1 1 * þ R: 7 1 *: 1: 1 1 1 1:

THE "FUTHARK" ALPHABET — THERE ACTUALLY IS A RELATION TO THE GREEK LETTERS.

F U T H A R K G W H N I J E P Z S T B E M L N G

O D

*Q*uædam prægnantibus &
nutriantibus in illis diebus :
*Q*uædam ut non fiat iuga
uestra hinc uel sabbato
*Q*uoniam in tribulatione magna
quædam non potest abire in
diesque modo neque fia :
*Q*uasi breuiata fuissent dies



Æ
dxz

UNICALS WERE WRITTEN WITH A REED PEN, SLIGHTLY SLANTED. THE INITIALS ARE CAREFULLY DRAWN.

LETTERS NOT IN TEXT SAMPLE.