

The Emergence of the Germanic Languages in Northern Europe

Seán Vrieland

Den Arnamagnæanske Samling
Københavns Universitet

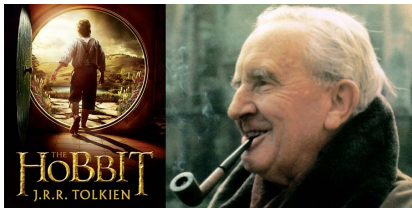
9 August 2018

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Germanic in Popular Culture





Indo-European Languages by number of speakers today

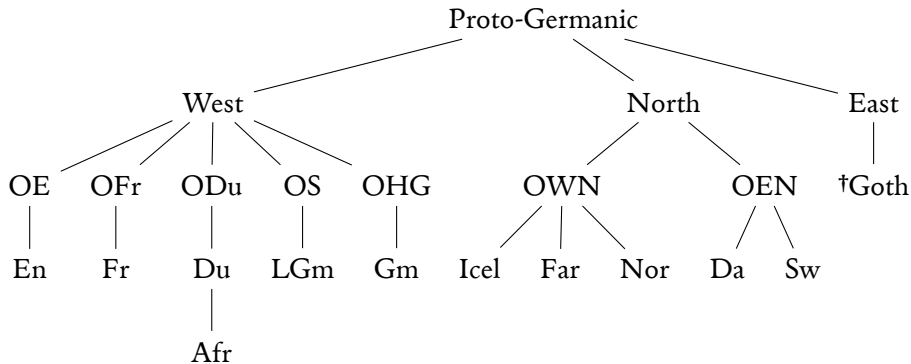
Rank	Language	Total Speakers	Native Speakers
1	English	1.12 billion	378.2 million
2	Hindustani	679.4 million	329.1 million
3	Spanish	512.9 million	442.3 million
4	French	284.9 million	76.7 million
5	Russian	264.3 million	153.9 million
6	Bengali	261.8 million	242.6 million
7	Portuguese	236.5 million	222.7 million
8	Punjabi	148.3 million	148.3 million
9	German	132 million	76 million
10	Persian	110 million	60 million

Modern Germanic languages by native speakers

	Language	Native Speakers
<hr/>		
West Germanic		
	English	378 million
	German	76 million
	Dutch	22 million
	Afrikaans	7 million
	Frisian	0.5 million
<hr/>		
North Germanic		
	Swedish	10 million
	Danish	6 million
	Norwegian	5 million
	Icelandic	350 000
	Faroese	66 000



A (Simplified) Family Tree



The Early Days of Germanic

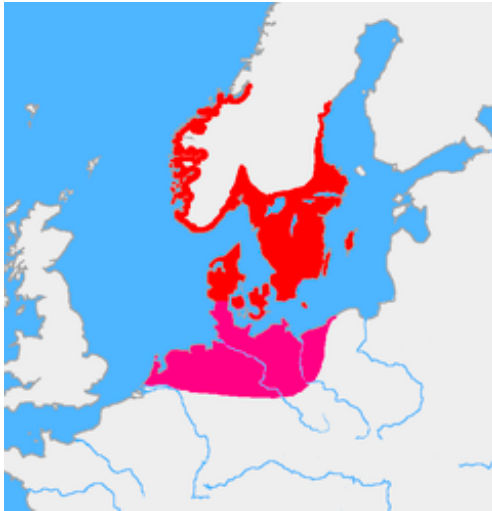


Figure: Distribution of Proto-Germanic ca. 500 BC. Wikimedia Commons



Why Germanic?



The Race to the Roots



Figure: The Silver Bible (*Codex Argenteus*) containing the Gothic translation.
©Uppsala University Library

Peder Syv (1663):

Some Thoughts on the Cimbric (Danish) Language

Should we see how various languages largely correspond with each other, then we cannot help but wonder about it. In Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (without even comparing them to each other) are many words and ways of speaking which resemble our speech. Examples can be found at the end of the book.

Though one should not immediately think that the words which bear some resemblance to another language should ultimately have come from it; instead, one should follow this rule: no word truly belongs to the language for which there is no rightful reason. If a word has the same meaning in more languages, then it most likely belongs to the language from which the others are derived.

Peder Syv (1663):

Some Thoughts on the Cimbric (Danish) Language

Many are successful cognates

Δύο	Duo	Tu
Τρεῖς	Tres	Tre
Ἑξ	Sex	Sex
Ἐγώ	Ego	Eg (paa Norsk)
Πατήρ	Pater	Fader
Μῦς	Mus	Muus
Ἀγρός	Ager	Ager
Ἄλς	Sal	Salt
Ὠλένη	Ulna	Alne

Some are loanwords

Πάπυρος	Papyrus	Papiir
Ἐλέφας	Elephas	Elefant
Θρόνος	Thronus	Trone

Some are not so successful

Ἡρώς	Herus	Herre
Φορῶ	Fero	Fører

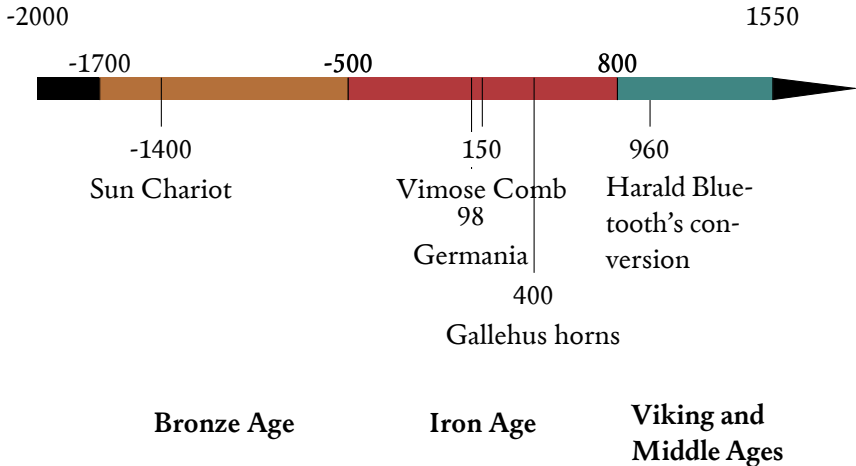


Sir William Jones (1786)

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothic* and the *Celtic*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family.

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

A Timeline of Early Germanic





The Bronze Age The Birth of Germanic?



The Horse, the Wheel, and Language



Figure: The Sun Chariot, ca. 1400 BC. ©Nationalmuseet

**h₁ekʷos* ON *jór*,
OE *eoh*

**ueǵʰnos* En *wagon*,
Da *vogn*

**kʷekʷlom* En *wheel*,
Da *hjul*

**roth₂o/eh₂-* Gm *Rad*

**yugom* En *yoke*,
Da *åg*



Figure: Viksø-Helmet and
Bronze-age shields.
©Nationalmuseet

*kel-mo- En *helm(et)*,
Da *hjælm*

*skelH-tu- En *shield*,
Da *skjold*

*suer-d^hro- En *sword*,
Da *sværd*

*ǵnh₁-(e)nko- En *king*,
Da *konge*

Beowulf

ālēdon þā lēofne þēoden
bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes
*they then laid down the beloved prince,
the giver of rings, in the bosom of the boat*

Innsteinskviða

mun ekki baugbroti við bana kvíða
The ring-breaker will not fear death

Guta saga

Alt ir baugum bundit
Everything is bound in rings



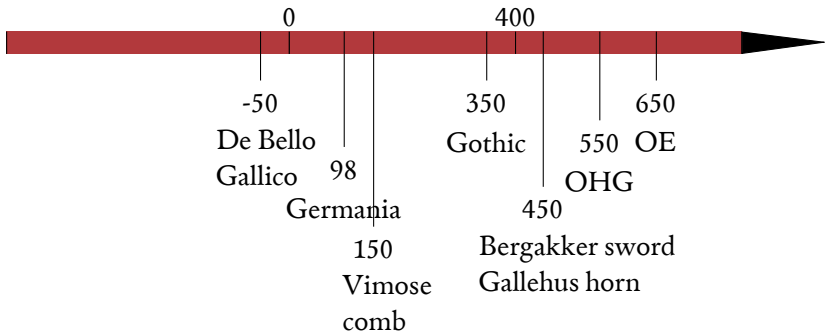
Figure: Arm rings and other golden offerings.
©Nationalmuseet



The Iron Age A Family Divided

-500

800



Pre-Roman

Roman

Germanic

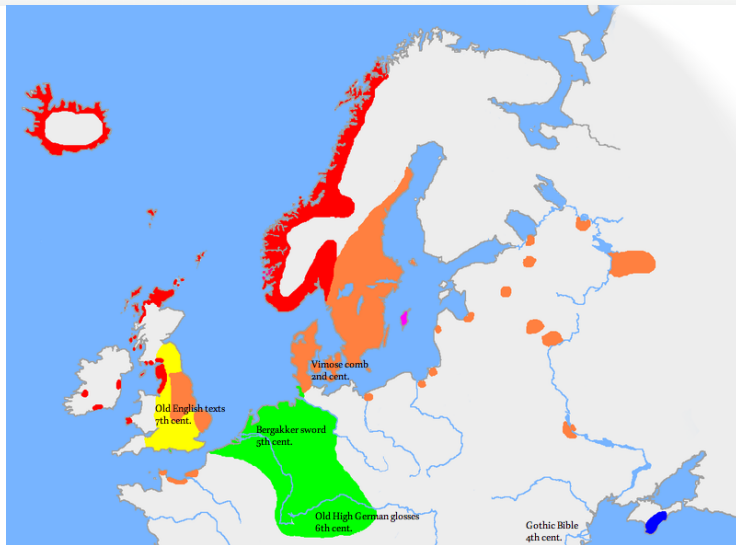


Figure: Spread of Germanic (10th cent.) with approximate locations of earliest attestations. Wikimedia Commons (modified)



The Vimose Comb (DK 207/Fyn 19)



Figure: Vimose comb, ca. 150.

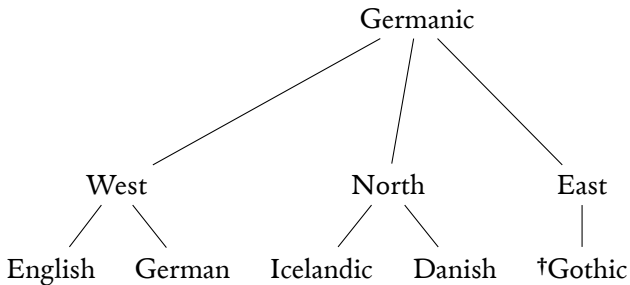
©Nationalmuseet

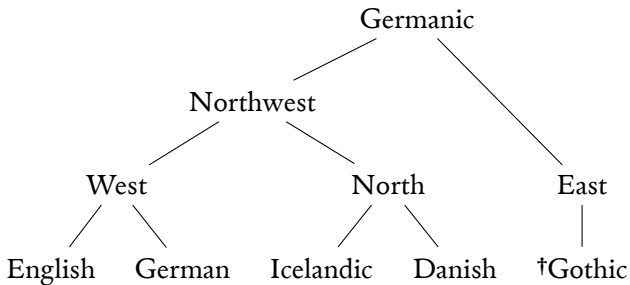
𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌵𐌰

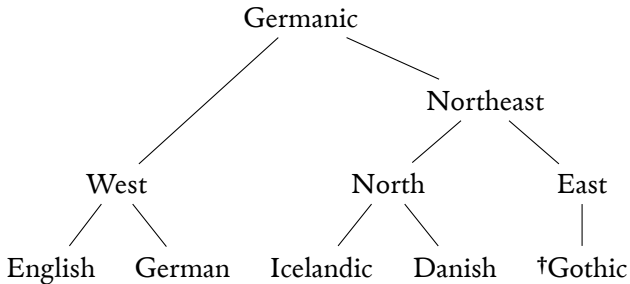
harja

Interpreted either as a personal name or simply 'comb'

- ▶ Frisian inscription **ko[m]bu** 'comb'
- ▶ Shows sound shift $h < \text{PIE } *k$
- ▶ Could be any branch of Germanic



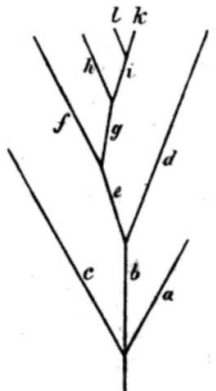






Competing Theories

Schleicher (1860)



Deutsche Grundsprache.

Figure: Schleicher's tripartite division

Wimmer (1867)

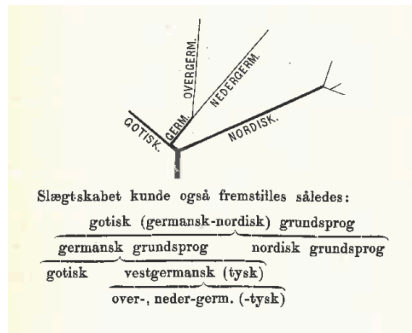


Figure: Wimmer combines East and West Germanic



Golden Horn of Gallehus (DR †12/SJy 60)



Figure: Gallehus horns. ©Nationalmuseet



Golden Horn of Gallehus (DR †12/SJy 60)

M< HlmpfxfetiY : HXlTiGfY : HXRtF : TfPiMx :
 ek hlewagastiz holtijaz horna tawidō

Common Germanic Elements

- ▶ Sound shift $*p \ t \ k > *f \ b \ h$
- ▶ Weak verb *tawi-dō*

Northwest Germanic Elements

- ▶ Both *holtijaz* and *horna* show *a*-umlaut

Ik Hliugasts Hulteis haúrn tawida



Golden Horn of Gallehus (DR †12/SJy 60)

M< HlmpfxfetiY : HXlTiGfY : HXRtF : TFPIMX :
 ek hlewagastiz holtijaz horna tawidō

Common Germanic Elements

- ▶ Sound shift $*p \ t \ k > *f \ b \ h$
- ▶ Weak verb *tawi-dō*

Northwest Germanic Elements

- ▶ Both *holtijaz* and *horna* show *a*-umlaut

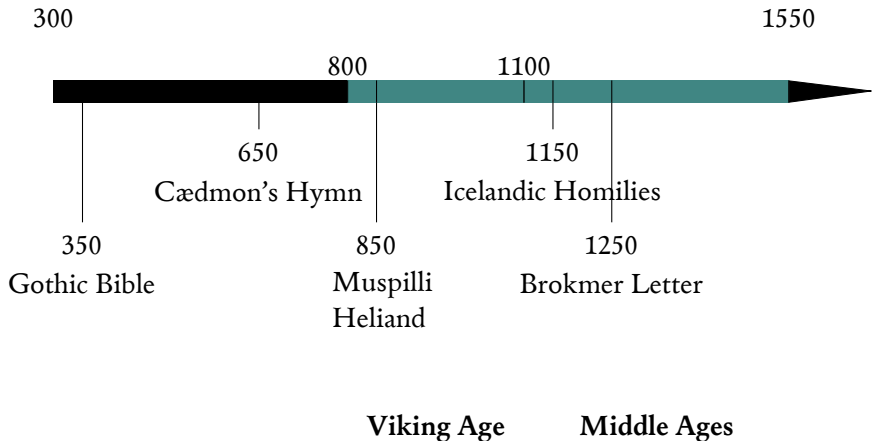
Ik Hliugasts Hulteis haurn tawida



Viking and Middle Ages

Germanic enters the literary stage

Beginnings of Germanic Literature



UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

The Earliest Manuscripts

Gothic: 6th cent.

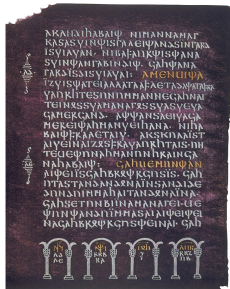


Figure: Codex
Argenteus (Uppsala,
University Library,
DG1)

Old High German:
9th cent.

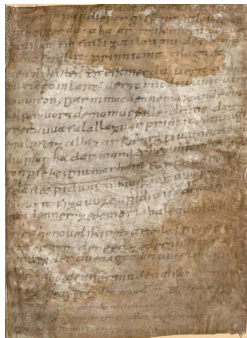


Figure: Muspilli
(Munich, Bavarian
State Library, Clm
14098)

Old Saxon: 10th
cent.

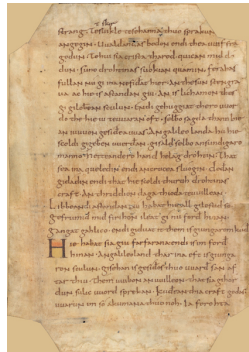


Figure: Heliand
(Leipzig, University
Library, Ms Thomas
4073)

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

The Earliest Manuscripts

Old English: 8th
cent.

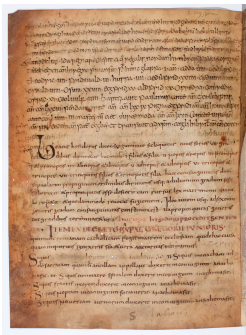


Figure: Moore Bede
(Cambridge,
University Library,
Kk. 5. 16)

Old Norse: 12th
cent.

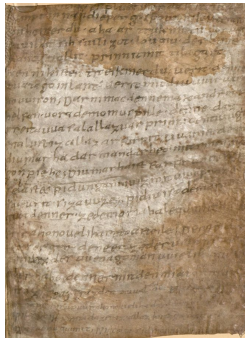


Figure: Homilies
(Reykjavík,
Arnarnagðæan
Collection, AM 237 α
fol.)

Old Frisian: 13th
cent.

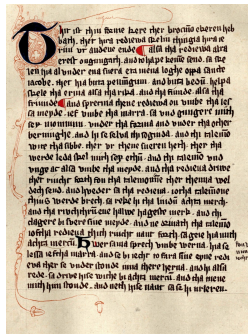


Figure: First Brokmer
Codex (Oldenburg,
Niedersächsisches
Staatsarchiv, Bestand
24-1, Ab. Nr. 3)

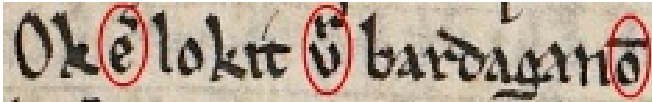


Figure: Abbreviations in AM 45 fol. ©The Arnamagnæan Collection
manuscript.ku.dk

Ok er lokit *var* bardaganom
'And when the battle was finished'

Icelandic Homily Book (Stock. Perg. 15 4to)

en þess es lítel vón of þan man es
hann virþer her vettergess helgar
tíþer

‘But there is little hope of that man
when he respects here no sacred
times’

vátt-ir+gi-s *vátt* ‘thing, wight’-GEN + *-gi* (negative suffix)-GEN

Only evidence for GEN SG *-ir* in *i*-stems (PGmc. **wihti-*)

- ▶ Manuscript *er*-abbreviation also used for *-ar*
- ▶ Form should be expanded ‘vettargess’

Bronze Age

1700 BC - 500 BC

Material culture in Northern Europe

Iron Age

500 BC - 800 AD

Germanic begins to appear in writing - from both inside and out

Viking and Middle Ages

800 AD - 1550 AD

Having spread far from the southern Scandinavian homeland,
Germanic literature begins to flourish and be put to parchment

Modern Era

1550 AD - Present

Germanic becomes a study in its own right and contributes to the
development of Comparative Indo-European Linguistics