ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE AND BEOWULF LECTURE

1. The Anglo-Saxon Period
2. Anglo-Saxon Culture
3. Paganism vs Christianity
4. Warrior Culture
5. Old English Literature
6. Beowulf
OLD ENGLISH – WHAT IS IT?

RECOGNIZE THIS?

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum;
Si þin nama gehalgod
to became þin rice
Gewurþe þin willa
on eordan swa swa on heofonum.
Urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg
and forgýf us ure gyltas
swa swa we forgýfaþ urum gyltendum
and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge
ac alys us of yfele soplice
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Middle English</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fæder ure șu șe eart on heofonum, si șîn nama gehalgod.</td>
<td>Oure fadir șat art in heuenes halwid be șî name; șî reume or kyangdom come to be.</td>
<td>Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to becumë șîn rice, gewurșe șîn willa, on eorðan swa swa on heofonum.</td>
<td>Be șî wille don in herșe as it is dounin heuene. yeue to us today oure eche dayes bred.</td>
<td>Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg, and forgfyf us ure gyltas, swa swa we forgfyfag urum gyltendum.</td>
<td>And forgyeue to us oure dettis șat is oure synnys as we forgyeuen to oure dettouris șat is to men șat han synned in us.</td>
<td>And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and ne gelæd șu us on costnunge, ac alys us of yfele soșlice.</td>
<td>And lede us not into temptacion but delyuere us from euyl.</td>
<td>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fun fact: Your favorite guy Shakespeare is considered Modern English.
I. THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD (449-1066)

THE ANGLO Saxon Invasion

- **428 CE** – Briton ruler (Vortigern) hires Germanic (Saxon) troops to repel invasions from Picts (“Painted Ones” - Scotland); Vortigen fails

- **449 CE** – considered the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period
  - Angles (modern Southern Denmark)
  - Saxon (coastlands of modern Germany)
  - Jutes (modern mainland Denmark)

- By 600 CE, Germanic speech of England has become unique from continental Germanic languages.
II. ANGLO SAXON CULTURE (449-1066)

- **CULTURE (GERMANIC TRIBES EITHER DROVE OUT THE NATIVES OR MIXED WITH THEM)**
  - Kinship
  - Lordship
    - Comitatus
  - Heroic virtues
    - Courage - Absolute and Reckless)
    - Honor – Aim is glory, the fame of a “Good Name”
    - Loyalty to One’s Chieftan
    - Prowess in battle
    - Drinking at a feast
PAGANISM VS CHRISTIANITY

• Religion
  • View of life is fatalistic; you have a fate and it is going to happen
  • Gods (based on Germanic gods)
  • Wyrd – Fate, Everyone, Even the gods had a fixed, and unavoidable fate.
• 597 CE – Gregorian Mission
• A Clash of Religions
  • Most of Southern England to Christianity by 650.
CULTURAL ARTIFACTS AND SUTTON HOO

• Sutton Hoo – 7th century burial mounds
  • The ship-burial discovered under Mound 1 in 1939 contained one of the most magnificent archaeological finds in England for its size and completeness.

• From Sutton Hoo we learned
  • Burial practices
  • Belief in an afterlife
  • Mixing of pagan and Christian traditions

• As we read Beowulf, two funerals are described for us. Consider the similarities of Sutton Hoo to the burials in the poem. How are these important to the intermingling of Christian and Pagan Traditions?
Model of the ships outline and how it might have appeared with the chamber area outlined in white.
Recreation of the burial chamber, which was designed like a room in the king’s house.
Mystery spoons – read “Salvos” (Saul) and “Pavlos” (Paul) – No one knows why they’re there, but it reveals the co-existence of pagan religion and Christianity at this point in Anglo-Saxon history.

Warrior and horse buried with the king (horse sacrificed to travel with him into the afterlife)
Purse lid and shoulder clasp from Sutton Hoo, 7th century

Belt buckles from Sutton Hoo, 7th century
• 871 CE – Alfred the Great takes the throne
• Battles with the Danes (Vikings)
• Importance of Christianity in Unification of Anglo Saxons and the Danes
• 1066 – Norman Invasion – defeats both the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes; end of the Anglo-Saxon period
OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

- Still seeing oral traditions as discussed with the Ancient Greeks
  - Scops – The bard or poet telling the story
  - What has been lost or added in translation?
- Runes – primarily used in inscriptions
- Anglo-Saxon verse
  - Heroic - Beowulf
  - Historical – “The Battle of Maldon”
  - There are others, but we will not study them.
TRAITS OF ANGLO-SAXON VERSE AND OTHER O.E. POETRY TERMS

- **Alliteration**
- **Caesura**
- **Comitatus**
- **Kenning**
- **Litotes**
- **Ubi Sant**

**Caesura Example**

Then the Scylding warrior savage and grim,
Seized the ring-hilt and swung the sword
Struck with fury despairing of life
Thrust at the throat broke through the bone rings:
The stout blade stabbed through her fated flesh.
Beowulf only survives in one manuscript, called the Cotton Vitellius

It was damaged in the Ashburnham House (part of Westminster School in London) fire of 1731. (A unique copy of “The Battle of Maldon” was destroyed)

The manuscript contains other Old English poems, a sermon, a work about Aristotle, and an illustrated collection of beasts and monsters.
The original composition of Beowulf is also a matter of controversy. Who? When? Where? We don’t know precisely.

The date is a subject of controversy, but it is at least 1,000 years old. Some scholars argue the 8th century; others the 10th or 11th.

The problematic Pagan/Christian nature of the poem is also a matter of much scholarly debate.
As you we read we will examine...

- Epic hero/poetry elements (refer to *Iliad* notes as necessary)
- The virtues of Anglo Saxon culture
- Look for Pagan and Christian elements
- Look for what the poet celebrates (What is seen as heroic? What is seen as honorable behavior? What is criticized and why?)
- Look for connections that can be made to other texts
- Look for style elements (repetition, theme, epic conventions, etc.)
- Consider STRUCTURE (We will be examining different elements of ring structure in this poem)
“THE BATTLE OF MALDON”

• You will be working in groups to create a storyboard of "The Battle of Maldon" based on your group’s assigned element of Anglo Saxon Poetry.
  - Comitatus
  - Honorable vs Dishonorable Behavior in Battle
  - Elements of Paganism vs Christianity
  - Important Battle Moments (You may want to read the bit of historical information at the beginning to help you make connections)
  - Connections (Similarities/Differences) of “The Battle of Maldon” to “The Seafarer,” “The Wanderer,” AND the Iliad.