

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

History of the German Language 1 Indo-European and Germanic Background

Indo-European Background

It has already been mentioned in this course that German and English are related languages. Two languages can be related to each other in much the same way that two people can be related to each other. If two people share a common ancestor, say their mother or their great-grandfather, then they are genetically related. Similarly, German and English are genetically related because they share a common ancestor, a language which was spoken in what is now northern Germany sometime before the Angles and the Saxons migrated to England. We do not have written records of this language, unfortunately, but we have a good idea of what it must have looked and sounded like. We have arrived at our conclusions as to what it looked and sounded like by comparing the sounds of words and morphemes in earlier written stages of English and German (and Dutch) and in modern-day English and German dialects. As a result of the comparisons we are able to *reconstruct* what the original language, called a *proto-language*, must have been like. This particular proto-language is usually referred to as *Proto-West Germanic*. The method of reconstruction based on comparison is called the *comparative method*. If faced with two languages the comparative method can tell us one of three things: 1) the two languages are related in that both are descended from a common ancestor, e.g. German and English, 2) the two are related in that one is the ancestor of the other, e.g. Old English and Modern English, 3) the two are not related, which is to say that if a genetic relationship exists it is so remote that it cannot be established.

Proto-West Germanic was just one variety of early Germanic. The Scandinavian languages Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish all descended from a common ancestor which was different from Proto-West Germanic. It is usually termed Proto *North*-Germanic. There was also another group of speakers of Germanic languages who lived further to the east and included the Goths, Burgundians and Vandals. The common ancestor from which all of those languages are descended is called Proto-*East* Germanic. Proto-West Germanic, Proto-North Germanic and Proto-East Germanic in turn all descended from a common ancestor usually called *Proto-Germanic*, in German *Urgermanisch*. *Urgermanisch*, in turn, is a descendant of an even older language called *Proto Indo-European* (henceforth PIE), which is the common ancestor of most of the languages spoken in Europe and many of the languages spoken in Asia. Germanic languages are thus related to so-called Romance languages like French, Spanish and Italian, but not as closely related to Romance languages as to each other. Within Germanic English and German are more closely related to each other than German is to Danish, despite the fact that Germany and Denmark share a common border whereas Germany and England do not. The languages of northern India and

the languages of Afghanistan and Iran are also related to the Germanic languages, as are the Slavic languages of eastern Europe. Native speakers of Indo-European languages account for about 44 % of the world's population.

European visitors to Asia had noticed similarities between their languages and those of India and Iran as far back as the 16th century, but it was left to an Englishman, Sir William Jones, to propose that the languages of northern India, in particular the liturgical language Sanskrit, were related to the languages of Europe in that they were all descendants of a common ancestor. Jones made this suggestion, which we can call the **Indo-European hypothesis**, in 1786 in a speech to the Asiatick (sic) Society in Calcutta. Jones was an English jurist who had studied oriental languages and literatures at Oxford before going to India as a judge in 1783. In India he studied the Indian legal code, which was written in Sanskrit. He noticed similarities with Latin and Greek and also with his own language, English. In his "Third Anniversary Discourse, on the Hindus" he wrote:

"The Sanskrit 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 in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer 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 Sanskrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family..." [Jones (1786) in Lehmann (1967), p.15.]

Jones' hypothesis sparked off the study of historical linguistics during the nineteenth century which led to the establishment of the interrelationships among the Indo-European languages. Earlier in this century several more languages came to light, some of them extremely ancient. The Indo-European language family, as it now stands, consists of eleven sub-families.

The family which most concerns us is Germanic, of course, but discussion of this family will be postponed until later in this chapter. We will now briefly discuss the other ten Indo-European families.

Celtic languages were once spoken in most of the western part of Europe. The Gauls whom Julius Caesar wrote about in his accounts of the Gallic Wars were Celts and spoke Celtic languages. We have a few inscriptions dating from about 100 B.C. The Celts also lived in Austria, Bohemia and even in Asia Minor. The Galatians of the New Testament, to whom the Apostle Paul addressed one of his epistles, were a group of Celtic speakers in Asia Minor. The Celtic languages are now at home only in the British Isles and in one area of France. The Celts once had a stronghold in what is now Germany, preceding the Germanic peoples by some centuries. When the Germanic peoples arrived they fought many battles against the Celts, eventually forcing them off the northern part of the continent. The Celts in the south of Europe remained after their defeat by the armies of the Roman Empire, but they absorbed the language and culture of their conquerors, and Celtic languages disappeared from the continent of Europe. The Celtic languages in Britain are divided into two major groups, one of which includes Irish and Scottish Gaelic and Manx, the native language of the Isle of Man. The other group includes Welsh, which is widely spoken in Wales, Cornish (extinct) and Breton, in Brittany in France. Breton was taken back to the continent from the British Isles, probably in the fourth century A.D.

Slavic languages cover much of the area to the east of the modern-day Germanic languages. The Slavic languages are divided into three major sub-groups. *West Slavic* includes Polish, Lusatian (also known as Wendish or Sorbian, a language spoken by an ethnic minority in Saxony and Brandenburg in what was, until recently, the German Democratic Republic), and the two major languages of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, namely Czech and Slovak. *East Slavic* consists of Russian, White Russian and Ukrainian, and *South Slavic* consists of Bulgarian/Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian. The oldest written records of Slavic are in Old Bulgarian, often called Old Church Slavonic, and date from the ninth century. Old Church Slavonic has been maintained by the Russian Orthodox Church as its official language, and it therefore occupies a position in eastern Europe similar to that of Latin in the west.

North of the Slavic languages are the *Baltic* languages, the two modern-day representatives being Lithuanian and Latvian. Although our written records of these two languages date only from the sixteenth century, Lithuanian is especially important because it still preserves much of the linguistic structure which is assumed for the original PIE language, including pitch accent, inflection and formal morphological distinctions. Many of its words are identical or practically identical with what we reconstruct for PIE, e.g. the Lithuanian *esi* "you (sg) are". The reconstructed PIE form is *esi¹.

Italic, or Romance, languages are basically those languages which are descended from Latin. Latin appears to have been only one of several Italic languages spoken in Italy, two prominent other Italic languages being Oscan and Umbrian, but Latin had the great advantage of being the dialect of Rome, which became, of course, the seat of the Roman Empire, with the result that Latin was spread throughout the known world. Modern-day *Italic* or Romance languages include French and Provençal in France, Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan in the Iberian peninsula, Rumanian in Rumania, Italian (including a multiplicity of dialects) in Italy, and Romansh in Switzerland. The language of the Sephardic (Spanish) Jews, Ladino, is also a Romance language and stands in much the same relationship to modern Spanish as Yiddish to modern German.

Albanian, spoken chiefly in Albania on the Balkan peninsula, but also in the neighboring former Yugoslavia and in Greece, is a separate branch of Indo-European. Albanian is known in written form only since the seventeenth century, and there was some difficulty establishing whether it is indeed Indo-European or not, since the vocabulary of the language, including much of the so-called "basic" vocabulary, is riddled with loans from other languages.

Greek, or Hellenic, is of special importance because some of the most ancient Indo-European literature is in Mycenaean Greek, spoken on Crete over three thousand years ago. This variety of Greek was deciphered only in the 1950's. *Ancient Greek* is the language of Homer (800 B.C.) and the later classical Greek writers Euripides, Aristotle, Plato, Sophocles, Aristophanes et al. By the beginning of our era Greek, which had existed in a multiplicity of dialects in ancient times, had been more or less levelled out to the dialect of Athens, which became the basis for *Koiné*, a very widespread trade language throughout the entire Mediterranean area during the first centuries of the Christian era and the language in which the New Testament was written. All of the modern varieties descend directly from *Koiné*. Modern Greek has about 10 million speakers.

Armenian, spoken in Armenia at the eastern end of Asia Minor, is known to us since the fifth century A.D. Armenian was once spoken more widely in Asia Minor, and many ethnic Armenians live in Turkey, but use of the language in Turkey is officially discouraged.

¹ A reconstructed, non-attested form is preceded by *.

Another group of languages was once spoken in Asia Minor, but all are now extinct. This group is known as *Anatolian* and its most important member was Hittite. The Hittites were a very powerful people in the ancient world with an empire which flourished from about 1700 to about 1200 B.C. Between 1905 and 1907 a number of clay tablets written in cuneiform were excavated near the Turkish village of Bogaz Köy, tablets which turned out to be the archives of the Hittite empire. The language was readily legible because cuneiform was already well known to scholars of the Middle East. The Hittite texts also contained many Sumerian and Akkadian words, languages well known to scholars. Hittite was identified as Indo-European in 1915. Texts were also found in other Anatolian languages, including Luwian, Lycian, Lydian, Palaic and a language referred to as Hieroglyphic Hittite. Hittite texts are contemporary with the Mycenaean Greek texts mentioned before.

Another extinct group of Indo-European languages is known as *Tocharian*. Extensive Buddhist writings dating from about 500 to about 700 A.D. were discovered relatively recently in Chinese Turkestan. They were readily decipherable since they used the same script as was used in the ancient Sanskrit texts, and the subject matter was also well known. Who the Tocharians were and how they came to be so far east remain mysteries.

The final group of Indo-European languages is a family known as *Indo-Iranian*, which subdivides into Indic and Iranian.

Indic languages include a large number of languages spoken in Pakistan, Bangladesh and northern India, including the major national languages of the three countries, Urdu, Bengali and Hindi respectively. The major language of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) is Singhalese, also an Indic language. Other Indic languages include Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Panjabi and Romany, the language of the Gypsies. All of these languages are descendants of Sanskrit. The earliest stage of Sanskrit is known to us as *Vedic Sanskrit* from the *Vedas*, books of Hindu scripture. Due to their sacred nature the texts, dating from 1200 - 800 B.C., were carefully passed on from generation to generation. By 800 B.C. the spoken language had obviously undergone many changes and Vedic was becoming a relic. This resulted in a spate of grammars and commentaries which give us an extremely precise description of Sanskrit grammar. The best known of these is ascribed to Panini, and many consider it the most complete grammar ever to have been written of any language. It dates from 400 B.C. Important later Indic languages include Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, dating from about the time of Christ.

The Iranian subgroup of Indo-Iranian includes as its two most ancient dialects Avestan and Old Persian, with texts dating from before 300 B.C. The *Avesta* is the holy book of Zoroastrianism. Old Persian is preserved primarily in inscriptions from the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. A long trilingual inscription in Old Persian, Akkadian (a Semitic language) and Elamite (a language not related to either of the other two or to anything else, apparently) was chiselled on a cliff at Behistan, Iran, recounting the feats of Darius (521-486 B.C.). The text is in cuneiform and provided the key to understanding cuneiform. It thus ranks in importance with the Rosetta Stone, with the aid of which Egyptian hieroglyphics were deciphered. Modern Iranian languages include Farsi or Persian (the official language of Iran), Pashtu (the official language of Afghanistan), and several others including Kurdish, the language of a stateless people who live in scattered groups in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and the former Soviet Union. There are other modern Iranian languages, such as Balochi, spoken in Pakistan, and Ossetic, spoken in the northern Caucasus. Other ancient Iranian languages include Sogdian and Scythian.

The Indo-European language family was reconstructed by, in the main, nineteenth century German scholars. Despite the somewhat negative remarks made about Romanticism in the last

chapter, it is at least reasonably doubtful that so much could have been done in such a short time on the establishment of linguistic relationships if Romanticism had not predisposed an entire generation to be interested in other places and other times. The first systematic comparison of Indo-European languages was a comparison of inflectional endings on verbs in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Persian and Germanic by Franz Bopp, published in 1816. Other famous names in the history of Indo-European studies are the Dane Rasmus Rask, the Germans Jakob Grimm, August Schleicher, Karl Brugmann, Berthold Delbrück and Hermann Paul, the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure and the American William Dwight Whitney.

Indo-European is one of the great language families of the world. Some other, apparently unrelated, language families are *Finno-Ugric*, comprising (at least) Finnish, Estonian, Lapp and Hungarian, *Semitic*, including present-day Arabic and Hebrew and a number of ancient languages including Akkadian, Phoenician (the written form of which is the source of both the Greek, and therefore the Russian, alphabets and the Roman, therefore the German and English, alphabets) and Aramaic, which was apparently the native language of Jesus. *Australian aboriginal* languages are apparently all related to each other, but no relationship with other languages has been established. Also in this part of the world is the very large *Austronesian* language family, sometimes known as Malayo-Polynesian. It includes languages ranging from Malagasy, spoken on Madagascar, through Indonesian/Malay, the languages of the Philippines, of Micronesia and Melanesia (not including, however, the languages of Papua and New Guinea), to the Polynesian languages of New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Rarotonga, Tahiti, the Marquesas, Hawaii and Easter Island. *Sino-Tibetan* includes the Chinese languages and Tibetan. *Bantu* includes a number of African languages. *Altaic* languages include Turkish and a number of other languages spoken in the eastern portion of the former Soviet Union. *Dravidian* languages are the non Indo-European languages of the Indian subcontinent. The best known of these is Tamil. There are also other African and Asian language families too numerous to mention. *American Indian* languages of North and South America fall into a bewildering number of linguistic groupings, with many families apparently unrelated to anything else. *Japanese* and *Korean* appear to be related, although the evidence is far from certain. Finally, there are a few languages known as *isolates*, where no relationship with any other language can be established by the comparative method. The Basque language of Spain is an example. Many North American Indian languages appear to be isolates, and a number of languages from the ancient Middle East were isolates, including Sumerian, Hurrian and Elamite.

Comparative linguistics, meaning the reconstruction of proto-languages by means of comparing forms in latter-day languages, is a rigorous and rewarding field of study. It is easier for languages which have long written histories, such as many of the Indo-European languages. It is more difficult, but still attainable, in languages which have had no written records until modern times.

Germanic Background

We will now look more closely at the relationships between PIE and Proto-Germanic (PGmc) and at the relationships among the various Germanic languages, both living and dead.

PIE seems to have had a consonant system which consisted mainly of stops. From the various IE languages we can reconstruct the following consonant system.

		Labial	Dental	Velar	Labio-velar ²
STOPS	+				
	* Voiceless	p	t	k	k ^w
	*				
	* Voiced	b	d	g	g ^w
	*				
FRICATIVE	* Voiced	bh	dh	gh	g ^w h
	* Aspirated				
	.		s		

Figure 17.1 - The consonant phonemes of Proto Indo-European

In 1818, two years after the appearance of Franz Bopp's previously referred to *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache*, the Danish scholar Rasmus Kristian Rask showed that there was a consistent relationship between the sounds of words in Germanic languages and the sounds of related words in other Indo-European languages. For instance, where other languages have *p*, Germanic languages have *f*: Latin *pater*, English *father*; Latin *pedem*, English *foot*. In 1822, in the second edition of his *Deutsche Grammatik* (Deutsch = Germanisch), Jakob Grimm published a full account of the correspondences between consonants in Germanic and the other Indo-European languages. This set of correspondences has come to be known as *Grimm's Law* in English. In German it is usually referred to as *die erste Lautverschiebung* (the first sound shift). What was especially important about Grimm's detailed sets of correspondences is that they showed that sound change is extremely regular, not sporadic and unprincipled as had been previously assumed. The notion of the regularity of sound change is one of the fundamental principles of historical linguistics.

What Grimm found was that the voiceless *stops* of the other Indo-European languages corresponded to voiceless *fricatives* in Germanic languages, that the *voiced* stops of other Indo-European languages corresponded to *voiceless* stops in Germanic languages, and that the sounds which developed from the voiced *aspirated* stops of PIE in the other Indo-European languages corresponded to voiced *unaspirated* stops in Germanic languages. In other words, the integrity of the three series of consonants was maintained in Germanic in that the three original series continued to exist separately and apart from each other. The difference was that they were now all pronounced differently.

The correspondences look like this:

PIE *p, *t, *k, *k^w became Germanic *f, *þ, *x, x^w respectively³. Note that each consonant maintains its *position* of articulation. All that changes is the *manner* of articulation, i.e. voiceless stops become voiceless fricatives pronounced in the same place.

²Labio-velar sounds are articulated simultaneously at the velum and at the lips. This results usually in velarised consonants with lip-rounding. *k^w and *g^w were probably pronounced much as the sequences *qu* and *Gw* in "queen" and "Gwen" respectively.

³The symbol þ is called "thorn" and represents a voiceless interdental fricative identical with the *th* in English "thorn".

PIE *b, *d, *g, *g^w became Germanic *p, *t, *k, *k^w respectively. Note that each consonant maintains its position of articulation. What changes is the voicing of the consonants.

PIE *bh, *dh, *gh, *g^wh became Germanic *b, *d, *g, *g^w respectively. Note that again the position of articulation is maintained. What changes here is that the aspiration has disappeared.

These correspondences are really quite remarkable, because they show that the Germanic languages as a group evolved in a very simple and very regular way from the parent PIE language. In each change only one feature of articulation is altered.

Examples to illustrate each of the correspondences follow:

PIE *p, Gmc *f	Latin <u>p</u> ater	English <u>f</u> ather
PIE *t, Gmc *þ	Latin <u>t</u> res	English <u>th</u> ree
PIE *k, Gmc *x	Latin <u>c</u> entum	English <u>h</u> undred
PIE *k ^w , Gmc *x ^w	Latin <u>q</u> uod	English <u>w</u> hat (Old English <u>hw</u> æt)
PIE *b, Gmc *p	Lithuanian <u>b</u> alà "swamp"	English <u>p</u> ool
PIE *d, Gmc *t	Latin <u>d</u> ecem	English <u>t</u> en
PIE *g, Gmc *k	Latin <u>g</u> enu	English <u>k</u> nee, German <u>K</u> nie
PIE *g ^w , Gmc *k ^w	Latin <u>y</u> eto	English <u>q</u> uote (Old English <u>q</u> uedan "speak")
PIE *bh, Gmc *b	Sanskrit <u>b</u> hrata	English <u>b</u> rother
PIE *dh, Gmc *d	Sanskrit <u>d</u> ha	English <u>d</u> o
PIE *gh, Gmc *g	Latin <u>h</u> omo "man" (PIE *ghomo-)	Old English <u>g</u> umo "man", compare German <i>Bräutigam</i> "bridegroom" ⁴
PIE *g ^w h, Gmc *g ^w	Greek om <u>ph</u> é (PIE *song ^w há-)	Gothic sing <u>w</u> an

Some of the examples, particularly the examples for PIE *gh and *g^wh, may seem a bit difficult to believe, but we must take into account that the proto-language did not stand still. It changed during its development into *all* of its daughter languages. Latin h was a regular development from PIE *gh. It was also quite regular for PIE initial *s to be lost in Greek and for the PIE labio-velars to develop to labial stops in Greek. Another regular development was PIE *g^w to Latin *v* /w/.

It is now time to look at Germanic and the various branches of the Germanic languages⁵.

The prehistoric homeland (*Urheimat*) of the Germanic people was in the southern part of Sweden (from about Stockholm southwards), Denmark and present-day Schleswig-Holstein. We have archaeological evidence of human habitation in the *Urheimat* from about 10,000 B.C. We know that the people who lived there were hunters and fishers, and archaeologists have found primitive

⁴The Old English form was *brydgumo* "bride + man". Note the lack of -r- in the second part of *brydgumo*. *Gumo* "man" had become obsolete in English by the 16th century, having disappeared everywhere except in this compound word. It was therefore no longer understood, even in this word, and was first confused with and then replaced by *groom* "lad". This type of change, which is not at all uncommon, is called *folk etymology*.

⁵I am indebted for much of the information about the Germanic homeland and about the histories of the various peoples to Waterman (1976), particularly chapter two, from which much of the information given in the rest of this chapter is taken.

weapons made of reindeer horn, bone and stone, but there is no evidence to indicate what kind of language they spoke. This was the early post-glacial age, and these inhabitants seem to have lived in Denmark and southern Sweden undisturbed by other peoples throughout the Paleolithic and Mesolithic ages, up to about 2500 B.C., when a group of newcomers arrived. This was the Late Stone Age, and over the next 1000 years three distinct groups of people took up residence in Scandinavia. The first group to arrive are referred to as the "food gatherers", and they were not hunters and fishermen like the earlier inhabitants, but farmers. They raised domestic animals and planted grain, which they stored for later use.

A second group arrived somewhat later, a group archaeologists refer to as the "megalithic (large stone) builders". This group is called that because they made communal graves with huge flat boulders. They had their own distinctive style of pottery, and they were farmers like the food gatherers. They kept dairy cattle and sheep and could weave sheep's wool into cloth.

The third group of people to arrive, somewhat later than the megalithic builders, are distinguished archaeologically because they buried their dead in single graves. They were stock breeders and not tillers of the soil. They had a different style of pottery, and they introduced a new weapon into that part of Europe, the battle axe, for which reason they are known as the "battle-axe people". They had little in common with the food gatherers and the megalithic builders and eventually dominated and absorbed the other groups, with the result that their culture was the dominant culture in this area, and indeed in most of eastern and central Europe, by the beginning of the Bronze Age, about 1500 B.C. The battle-axe culture was followed about 300 to 400 years later by another culture referred to as the "urnfield culture". We do not know whether this was brought in by a new race or whether it was introduced somewhere else and spread to the Germanic homeland. The urnfield culture was distinguished by the practice of decorating the graves of an urnfield (cemetery) with headstones and bronze decorations. The urnfield culture dominated most of central and northern Europe, including the British Isles, by 1100 B.C. It is probable that the first "Germanic" peoples were one of the last two groups, either the "battle-axe people" or the "urnfield people", if these were indeed two distinct groups.

Apparently some of the Germanic peoples began to leave the homeland and spread out across the north German plain during the early Bronze Age, about 1500 B.C., perhaps reaching as far eastwards as the Oder, which today forms part of the boundary between Germany and Poland. During the next few centuries they spread further east and west until by the late Bronze Age (about 800 B.C.) they had covered the area from the Ems (roughly the border between north Germany and the Netherlands) to the Vistula (in present-day Eastern Poland). This is the historical linguistic territory of Low German.

Around 600 B.C. the tribes inhabiting the area around the mouth of the Elbe on the western side of Jutland moved southeast along the river until they reached the area around what is now Leipzig in Saxony.

Some 500 years later, around 100 B.C., a group of tribes left Scandinavia and migrated eastward. These are the tribes known collectively as the East Germanic peoples, the ancestors of the later Goths, Vandals and Burgundians. By 100 A.D. the Germanic peoples had formed themselves into five identifiable tribal groupings, for which I will use the traditional German names (see map, p.101). In Scandinavia were the *Nordgermanen*. These were the linguistic ancestors of the present-day Norwegians, Swedes, Danes and, as a result of later migrations, the Icelanders, the Faroe Islanders and the Shetland Islanders.

To the east, between the Oder and Vistula (German *Weichsel*) rivers, were the *Ostgermanen*, sometimes known collectively as the *Oder-Weichsel-Germanen*. The other three groups were the *Nordseegermanen*, the *Weser-Rhein-Germanen* and the *Elbgermanen*, who are often lumped together as the *Westgermanen*. The *Nordseegermanen* lived on the North Sea, on the western side of Jutland. The *Weser-Rhein-Germanen* lived between the Weser and the Rhine, and the *Elbgermanen* were in upper Saxon territory along the Elbe.

We begin to get historical allusions to the Germanic peoples in the works of Greek and Roman historians in about 200 B.C., but it was to be another five and a half centuries before any extensive written records were produced in Germanic languages. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote his *Germania* in 98 A.D. In it he mentioned the *Nordseegermanen*, the *Weser-Rhein-Germanen* and the *Elbgermanen*. He referred to the *Elbgermanen* as the *Suebi* (akin to German *Schwaben* and *schwäbisch*) and divided them into distinct tribes, of which we will mention the *Alemanni*, the *Langobardi*, the *Hermunduri*, the *Marcomanni* and the *Quadi*. The *Alemanni*, from whose name come the French, Spanish and Italian words for Germany, moved southwards into what is now southwest Germany in the third century A.D. This was part of the beginning of the massive migrations of Germanic tribes known as the *Völkerwanderung*. Two centuries later they were driven further south by the Frankish king Chlodowig, usually known as Clovis. Some of the *Alemanni* were to go as far south as Spain and Portugal, which they occupied from 411 to 584. The remainder of the *Alemanni* spread across what is now German-speaking Switzerland, southern Baden-Württemberg in southwest Germany and the adjoining areas of France, with the result that the *Alemanni* were the linguistic ancestors of the present-day Swabians, German-speaking Swiss and Alsatians.

The *Hermunduri* settled in Thuringia and apparently remained there. The *Langobardi* ("long beards"), on the other hand, travelled through Hungary into northern Italy, where they established the kingdom of Lombardy in the second half of the sixth century A.D. By the tenth century they had assimilated linguistically to the Italic language around them, with the result that they disappeared as a separate linguistic entity, although they gave their name to a region of Italy.

The *Marcomanni* and the *Quadi* lived in the area roughly northeast of the Main. In 8 B.C. the *Quadi* departed for Hungary and were never heard of again. The *Marcomanni* were defeated in a battle with the Romans in 9 B.C. and withdrew into the Bohemian forests along the border between Czechoslovakia and Bavaria, where they remained for about 500 years before migrating into southern Bavaria. They were the ancestors of the present-day Bavarians and Austrians.

As a result of these migrations, three groups of *Elbgermanen* ended up in the Alpine areas of Europe - the *Alemanni*, the *Marcomanni* and the *Langobardi*. These three groups are sometimes referred to collectively as *Alpengermanen*.

The *Weser-Rhein-Germanen* emerged as the Franks and the Hessians, occupying present-day Franconian territory in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and northern France.

The *Nordseegermanen* appear later as the Frisians, the Angles and the Saxons. Some of the Angles and some of the Saxons invaded England in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., merging there into the Anglo-Saxons. The present-day linguistic descendants of the *Nordseegermanen* are the Frisians, who live on the Frisian islands in the North Sea off the coasts of Germany and the Netherlands and also on the north German and Dutch mainland, the English-speaking peoples and the *Niedersachsen* or Lower Saxons, who live in northern Germany primarily in the state called *Niedersachsen*, in Schleswig-Holstein, in Bremen and in Hamburg.

The *Nordgermanen* remained in Scandinavia except for some who migrated to Iceland via the Shetland Islands and the Faroe Islands, with the result that distinct north Germanic languages are spoken on the Faroes, the Shetlands and in Iceland, as well as in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and some parts of Finland.

The *Ostgermanen* were the most spectacular in their wanderings. By the middle of the third century A.D. one group, the Goths, had reached the Black Sea. In 348 some of the Goths moved into Bulgaria. This group came to be known as the Visigoths or western Goths. A century later the Visigoths migrated further westward as far as France and Spain, sacking Rome on the way. Their empire in Spain lasted until 711, when it was overthrown by the Saracens. A number of Gothic loanwords survive in Spanish and Portuguese. The other group of Goths, the Ostrogoths ("eastern Goths") eventually set up an empire in Italy under their leader Theodorich. This empire lasted from 493 to 554. Some of the Goths stayed in the Black Sea area, in the Balkans and the Crimea, where their language survived as late as the seventeenth century. Gothic is particularly important for the study of Germanic languages because Visigothic is the source of our first extensive text in a Germanic language, a translation of the Bible. The translation was done by a Visigoth named *Wulfila* "little wolf", sometimes referred to as *Ulfilas*. Wulfila was a Visigoth who lived from 311 to 383. He was born in Dacia, in present-day Rumania. At some point in his early life he was kidnapped and taken to Greece, where he was converted to Christianity. He was then sent back in 341 as bishop to the Goths, where he proceeded to translate the Bible and to convert his tribe. The Goths were instrumental in the spreading of Christianity in Europe. Not all of the Bible translation survives, unfortunately. In addition to the Bible there are fragments of a commentary on the Gospel of John. In Ostrogothic we have only a few names.

The other two important groups of *Ostgermanen* are the Vandals and the Burgundians, and, as with Ostrogothic, we have only names. The Vandals settled originally in northern Hungary, leaving there in about 400 A.D. for parts west. Over the next thirty years they went through Italy, Gaul (France) and Spain, and then down into northern Africa, where they set up an empire in what is now Tunisia under their ruler Geiserich. The empire lasted from 429 to 533, when it was crushed by the Byzantines, at which point the Vandals disappear from history.

The Burgundians had settled along the upper reaches of the Rhine in the third century, moving northwards to what is now Worms, between Speyer and Mainz, which they made their capital. In 437 the Burgundians fought a war with Attila the Hun and lost, after which those of them who were left fled to southeastern France, where they became thoroughly Romanised, losing their language in the process. They have given their name to a region of France, *Bourgogne* "Burgundy". The Burgundians and their sad history are known to us from literary sources including the Middle High German verse epic *Der Nibelunge Nôt*, often called *Das Nibelungenlied*, which concerns the fall of the Burgundians to Attila.

All of the languages of the East Germanic group are now extinct.

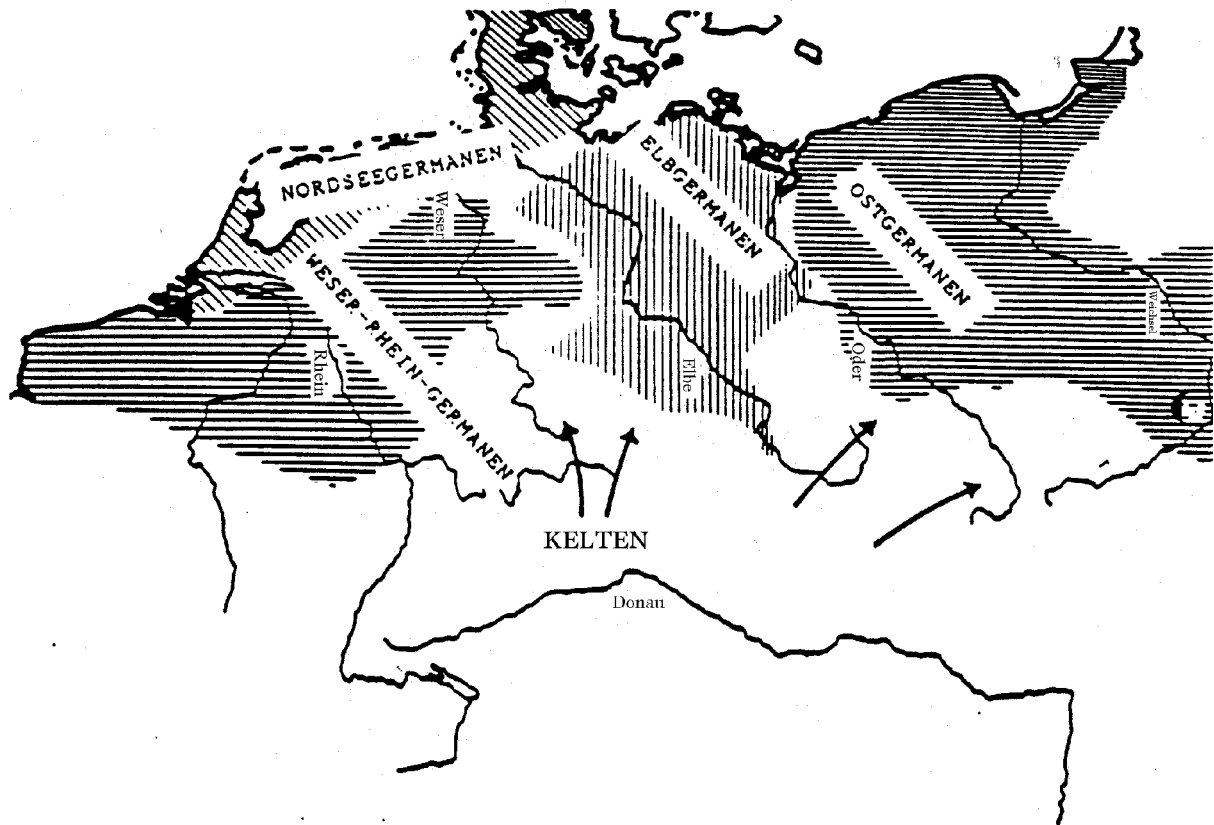
The earliest Germanic written records predate Gothic, but not by much. There are a few Runic inscriptions carved on rocks, sword hilts, helmets and drinking horns. They are not extensive, usually consisting of short inscriptions along the lines of "I X of Y made this". One Runic inscription of great importance is that on a golden drinking horn which was found in 1734 near the Danish village of Gallehus. Around the lip was a Runic inscription *ek hlewagastiR holtigaR horna tawido*, which translates as "I Hlewagast of the Holting clan made the horn". This inscription is very important because of the archaic nature of the language. For instance, the name *HlewagastiR* contains the form *gastiR*, which is precisely what is reconstructed for the Proto-Germanic word for "guest", although it appears in that form in none of the later Germanic

languages. The -R of the runic inscription represents a Germanic *z from PIE *s, which was devoiced at the ends of words in Gothic but which became /r/ in North and West Germanic when it was not lost, as it was in West Germanic in unstressed syllables at the ends of words. The word is cognate with (descended from the same common word as) Latin *hostis* "enemy" from PIE **ghostis*, but the *i* of the second syllable does not show up in any other Germanic language. Gothic has *gasts*, Old High German has *gast*, Old Norse has *gestr*. Similarly, no other Germanic language shows a final vowel in *horna*, which is cognate with Latin *cornu*, (compare English cornet, cornucopia, unicorn).

In recent times there have been many arguments among scholars about the subgrouping of the Germanic languages. Some argue for three separate groupings, namely East, North and West. Some argue for two, combining North Germanic with either East Germanic or West Germanic. Some argue for five, namely North Germanic, East Germanic, Elbe Germanic, Weser-Rhine Germanic and North Sea Germanic. Good arguments can be brought both for and against any of these groupings. It is certain that all of these groups were in contact with each other, which resulted in mutual borrowings and the spread of certain changes. Hence the Elbgermanen, who were in reasonably close proximity to the Ostgermanen prior to the *Völkerwanderung*, shared a number of words and morphological forms with the Ostgermanen but not with other Germanic groups. The Nordseegermanen were in close proximity to the Weser-Rhein-Germanen and the Nordgermanen, and all three groups share certain features which are not present in any of the other groups. And the Nordgermanen and the Ostgermanen share certain features at the expense of the other groups.

What is important for our purposes is that the German language resulted from blending of the dialects of the three groups of *Westgermanen*, a blending which took place from the fifth century onwards.

NORDGERMANEN



The location of the Germanic tribes around 100 A.D. Adapted from Waterman (1976).