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Essay:

**The Development of the Germanic Script**

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**Content**

1. Introduction
2. Runic Inscriptions

2.1 Characteristics

2.2 Types of runic inscriptions

2.3 Written records

1. Ulfila`s Gothic alphabet
2. Latin alphabet

4.1 General information

4.2 Written records

1. Conclusion
2. Sources

**1. Introduction**

When we speak about written language of germanic tribes, we mean, firstly, alphabets, which used those tribes; secondly, the main written records [1, 22]. An alphabet is a standardized set of letters – basic written symbols – each of which roughly represents a phoneme, a spoken language, either as it exists now or as it was in the past. There are other systems, such as logographies, in which each character represents a word, morpheme, or semanic unit, and syllabaries, in which each character represents a syllable [3, 22].

The Germans, while creating their written records, used three different alphabets, which chronically changed each other [1, 22].

**2. Runic Inscriptions**

**2.1** **Characteristics**

The records of Old English writing embrace a variety of matter: they are dated in different centuries, represent various dialects, belong to diverse genres and are written in different scripts. The earliest written records of English are inscriptions on hard material made in a special alphabet known as the runes. The word rune originally meant “secret”, “mystery” and hence came to denote inscriptions believed to be magic. Later the word “rune” was applied to the characters used in writing these inscriptions.

There is no doubt that the art of runic writing was known to the Germanic tribes long before they came to Britain, since runic inscriptions have also been found in Scandinavia. The runes were used as letters, each symbol to indicate a separate sound [2, 63]. This principle, however, was not always observed, even at the earliest stages of phonetic spelling. Some OE letters indicated two or more sounds, even distinct phonemes. The letters could indicate short and long sounds [4].

The runic alphabet is a specifically Germanic alphabet, not to be found in languages of other groups. Runic letters are angular; straight lines are preferred, curved lines avoided; this is due to the fact that runic inscriptions were cut in hard material: stone, bone or wood. The shapes of some letters resemble those of Greek or Latin, other have not been traced to any known alphabet, and the order of the runes in the alphabet is certainly original. To this day the origin of the runes is a matter of conjecture [2, 64].

The number of runes in different OG languages varied. As compared to continental, the number of runes in England was larger: new runes were added as new sounds appeared in English (from 28 to 33 runes in Britain against 16 or 24 on the continent). The main use of runes was to make short inscriptions on objects, often to bestow on them some special power or magic.

The runic alphabets are a set of related alphabets using letters known as runes to write various Germanic languages prior to the adoption of the Latin alphabet and for specialized purposes thereafter. The Scandinavian variants are also known as futhark (or fuþark, derived from their first six letters of the alphabet: F, U, Þ, A, R, and K); the Anglo-Saxon variant is futhorc (due to sound changes undergone in Old English by the same six letters). Runology is the study of the runic alphabets, runic inscriptions, runestones, and their history. Runology forms a specialized branch of Germanic linguistics.

The earliest runic inscriptions date from around 150 AD, and the characters was generally replaced by the Latin alphabet along with Christianization by around 700 AD in central Europe and by around 1100 AD in Northern Europe; however, the use of runes persisted for specialized purposes in Northern Europe, longest in rural Sweden until the early twentieth century (used mainly for decoration as runes in Dalarna and on Runic calendars).

The three best-known runic alphabets are the Elder Futhark (around 150 to 800 AD), the Old English Futhorc (400 to 1100 AD), and the Younger Futhark (800–1100). The Younger Futhark is further divided into the long-branch runes (also called Danish, although they were also used in Norway and Sweden), short-branch or Rök runes (also called Swedish-Norwegian, although they were also used in Denmark), and the stavesyle or Hälsinge runes (staveless runes). The Younger Futhark developed further into the Marcomannic runes, the Medieval runes (1100 AD to 1500 AD), and the Dalecarlian runes (around 1500 to 1800 AD).

**2.2** **Types of runic inscriptions**

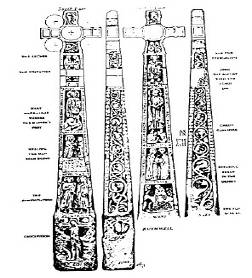
* 'Kilroy was here' type inscriptions on cliff walls, large rocks and buildings
* grave stone inscriptions, often with who carved the runes and who was buried, and also who made sure the stone was raised. (Later grave slabs or stone coffins were sometimes inscribed with Christian texts carved in runes)
* religious/magic inscriptions: prayers and curses, formulas on charms, etc.
* inscriptions related to trade and politics: There are many examples of trade communication: stock orders and descriptions, excuses for not having payed on time, trade name tags for bags or cases of produce, etc. The trade inscriptions are often carved on wooden rune sticks. Political inscriptions are to do with matters of the law, historical figures state that they were somewhere hiding from the enemy, secret messages to do with the fighting of wars, etc.
* personal letters: love letters, greetings between friends, proposals, etc.
* rude messages, similar to modern graffiti or sms today
* Art and craft-signatures: Goldsmiths, blacksmiths, wood carvers, church builders, etc., often put their name on what they made. Objects also somtimes had names carved onto them – either the name of the object itself, or the name of the person who owned it.

The origins of the runic alphabet are uncertain. Many characters of the Elder Futhark bear a close resemblance to characters from the Latin alphabet. Other candidates are the 5th to 1st century BC Northern Italic alphabets: Lepontic, Rhaetic and Venetic, all of which are closely related to each other and descend from the Old Italic alphabet [5].

**2.3** **Written records**

The best known runic insctiptions in England are the earliest extant OE written records. One of them is an inscription on a box called the “Franks Casket”, the other is a short text on a stone cross in Dumfriesshire near the village of Ruthwell known as the “Ruthwell Cross”. Both records are in the Northumbrian dialect.

The Franks Casket eas discovered in the early years of the 19th c. in France, and was presented to the British Museum by a British archeologist. A. W. Franks. The Casket is a small box made of whale bone; its four sides are carved: there are pictures in the centre and runic inscriptions around. The around them, in alliterative verse, tellsthe story of the whale bone, of which the Cascet is made [2, 65].



The Ruthwell Cross is a 15ft tall stone cross inscribed and ornamented on all sides. The principal inscription has been reconstructed into a passage from an OE religious poem, THE DREAM OF THE ROOD, which was also found in another version in a later manuscript.

Many runic inscriptions have been preserved on weapons, coins, amulets, tombstones, rings, various cross fragments. Some runic insertions occur in OE manuscripts written in Latin characters. The total number of runic inscriptions in OE is about forty; the last of them belong to the end of the OE period.

**3. Ulfila`s Gothic alphabet**

We cannot leave unnoticed such important stage of RA development as Ulfila`s Gothic alphabet. It has got nothing in common with “gothic” variants of Romanticism period. The real Gothic writing system was used by the Goths on Gothland Island and later on the territory of Poland, Lithuania and even North Black Sea coast.



The Gothic alphabet is an alphabetic writing system attributed to Ulfilas (or Wulfila) which was used exclusively for writing the ancient Gothic language. Before its creation in the 4th century, the Goths had used runes to write their language. The new alphabet was created by Ulfilas for the purpose of translating the Christian Bible into Gothic, and it is largely derived from an uncial form of the Greek alphabet, though some elements have been borrowed from the Latin and Runic alphabets as well. Ulfilas is thought to have consciously chosen to avoid the use of the older Runic alphabet for this purpose, as it was heavily connected with ancient heathen beliefs and customs. Also, the Greek-based script probably helped to integrate of the Gothic nation into the dominant Greco-Roman culture around the Black Sea. The individual letters, however, still bore names derived from those of their Runic equivalents. During 5 following centuries it was used by west Goths in Spain and in the South of France [6].

The best preserved Gothic manuscript, the Codex Argenteus, dates from the 6th century and was preserved and transmitted by northern Ostrogoths in modern Italy. It contains a large part of the four Gospels. Since it is a translation from Greek, the language of the Codex Argenteus is replete with borrowed Greek words and Greek usages. The syntax in particular is often copied directly from the Greek.

**4.** **Latin alphabet**

**4.1** **General information**

Our knowledge of the OE language comes mainly from manuscripts written in Latin characters. The Latin alphabet, introduced by Irish Christian missionaries, began to replace the Anglo-Saxon futhorc from about the seventh century. First the scripts shifted to a half-incial script of the Latin alphabet. This was replaced by insular script, a cursive and pointed version of the half-uncial script. This was used until the end of the 12th century when continental carolingian minuscule replaced the insular [3, 22]. Like elsewhere in Western Europe Latin in England was the language of the church and also the language if writing and education. The monks were practically the only literate people; they read and wrote Latin and therefore began to use Latin letters to write down English words. Like the scribes of other countries, British scribes modified the Latin script to suit their needs: they changed the shape of some letters, added new symbols to indicate sounds, for which Latin had no equivalents, attached new sound values to Latin letters [2, 65].

The first English words to be written down with the help of Latin characters were personal names and place names insrted I latin texts; then came glosses and longer textual insertions.

All over the country, in the kingdoms of England, all kinds of legel documents were written and copied. At first they ere made in Latin letters, later they erer made in the local dialects. Many documents have survived on single sheets or have been copied into large manuscripts: various wills, grants, deals of purchase, agreements, proceedings of church councils, laws, etc. Most of them are commonly known under the general heading of “Anglo-Saxon Charters”, the earliest are in Kentish and Mercian (8-9th c.); later laws and characters are written in West Saxon though they do not necessarily come from Wessex: West Saxon as the written form of language was used in different regions.

Glosses to the Gospels and other religious texts were made in many English monasteries, for the benefit of those who did not know enough Latin. Their chronology, is uncertain but, undoubtedly, they constitute early samples of written English glossaries in the 8th c. Mercian, consisting of words to the Latin text arranged alphabetically, the interlinear glosses to the Lindisfarne Gospels; sepaate words and word-for-word translations scribbed betweeen the Latin lines of beautifully ornamented manuscripts, and the glosses in the Durham Ritual, both in the 10th c. Northumbrian; and also the Gospels in Mercian and Northumbrian of the same century.

**4.2** **Written records**

Among the earliest insertions in Latin texts are pieces of OE poetry. Bede’s HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA GENRIS ANGLORUM (written in Latin in the 8th c.) contains an English fragment of five lines known as “Bede’s Deaht Song” and a religious poem of nine lines, “Cadmon’s Hymn”.

OE poetry constitutes a most precious literary relic and quite a substantial portion of the records in the vernacular. All in all we have about 30, 000 lines of OE verse from many poets of some three centuries. The names of the poets are unknown except Cadmon and Cynewulf, two early Northumbrian authors.

OE poetry manily restricted to three subjects: heroic, religious and lyrical. It is believed that many OE poems, espacially those dealing with heroic subjects, ere composed a long time before they were written down; they were handed down from generation to generation in oral form. Perhaps, they were first recorded in Northumbria some time in the 8th c., but have survived onle in West Saxon copies made a long time after-wards – the 10th or 11th c.

The greatest poem of the time was BEOWULF, an epic of the 7th or 8th c. It was originally composed in the Mercian or Northumbrian dialect, but has come down to us in a 10th c. West Saxon copy. It is valued both as a source of linguistic material and as a work of art; it is the oldest poem in Germanic literature. An Old English poem such as Beowulf is very different from modern poetry. Anglo-Saxon poets typically used alliterative verse, a form of verse that uses alliteration as the principal structuring device to unify lines of poetry, as opposed to other devices such as rhyme. This is a technique in which the first half of the line (the a-verse) is linked to the second half (the b-verse) through similarity in initial sound. In addition, the two halves are divided by a caesura: "Oft Scyld Scefing \\ sceaþena þreatum".

Beowulf is considered an epic poem in that the main character is a hero who travels great distances to prove his strength at impossible odds against supernatural demons and beasts. The poet who composed Beowulf, while objective in telling the tale, nonetheless utilizes a certain style to maintain excitement and adventure within the story. An elaborate history of characters and their lineages are spoken of, as well as their interactions with each other, debts owed and repaid, and deeds of valor.

Beowulf is built up of several songs arranged in three chapters. It is based on old legends about the tribal life of the ancient Teutons. The author depict vividly the adventures and fights of legendary heroes some of which can be traced to historical events.

In the 10th century, when the old heroic verses were already declining, some new war poems were composed and inserted in the prose historical chronicles: THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH, THE BATTLE OF MALDON. They bear resemblance to the ancient heroic poems but deal with contemporary events: the wars with the Scots, the Picts and the raiders from Scandinavia.

Another group of poems are OE elegiac (lyrical) poems: WIDSITH (“The Travelle’s Song”), THE WANDERER, THE SEAFARER, and others. THE WANDERER depicts the sorrows and bereavement of a poet in exile: he laments the death of his protectors and friends and expresses his resignation to the gloomy fate. THE SEAFARER is considered to be the most original of the poems; it gives a mournful picture of the dark northen seas and sings joy at the return of the spring. Most of those poems are ascribed to Cynewufl.

Religious poems paraphrase, more or less closely, the books of the Bible – GENESIS, EXODUS (written by Cadmon). ELENE, ANDREAS, CHRIST, FATE OF THE APOSTLES tel the life-stories of apostles and saints or deal with various subjects associated with the Gospels [2, 66].

OE prose is a most valuable sources of information for the history of the language. The earliest samples of continuous prose are the first pages of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles: brief annals of the year’s happenings made at various monasteries. In the 9th c. the chronicles were unified at Winchester, the capital of Wessex. Though sometimes dropped or started again, the chronicles developed into a fairly complete prose history of England; the Winchester annals were copied and continued in other monasteries.

**5. Conclusion**

Old English scribes used two kindes of letters: the runes and the letters of the Latin alphabet. The bulk of the OE material – OE manuscripts – is written in the latin script. The use of Latin letters in English differed in some points from their use in Latin, for the scribes made certain modifications and additions in order to indicate OE sounds.

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