

Lesson 1

1.1 Reading

Since the paragraphs appearing in sections 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1 are from the Preface to the Peterborough Chronicle, which was written in 1122, it presents certain anomalies that make it linguistically inconsistent with much of the Chronicle itself—at least, until the annals written as part of the First Continuation (and certain interpolated passages throughout the manuscript that date not from the inception of the Chronicle in 9th-century Alfredian Wessex). Therefore, the best practice might not require students to begin translating these passages but, instead, to allow an instructor to guide them through a translation of the text with ad-hoc commentary on grammatical aspects and other features. In lieu of a guided tour through the passage, it might at least be helpful for users of the book to read and contemplate the relationship between the OE material that appears in the book and the following plausible translation.

A translation of the passage follows:

The Island of Britain is eight hundred miles long and two hundred wide. And here there are in this island five languages: English and British and Welsh and Scottish and Pictish and Book-language. The first dwellers in this land were the Britons, who came from Armenia and first settled southward in Britain. Then it transpired that the Picts came from the south from Scithia with not many long-ships, and then landed first in northern Ireland and there asked the Scots that they might dwell there. But they would not allow them, because they said that they could not all dwell there together. And then the Scots said, “However, we can give you advice. We know another island here to the east where you may dwell if you wish. And if anyone resist you, we will help you so that you may conquer it.”

Vocabulary

Translation passages in Lessons 1-25 are presented as they appear in the Peterborough MS. with minimal alteration, except for occasional changes to word-division, capitalization, and punctuation. Spellings are given as they appear in the MS., including variants. The vocabulary section in each lesson up through Lesson 25 lists all words appearing in the passage which have not been cited previously. Anomalous forms and alternate or variant spellings are glossed with forms in square brackets representing forms normalized to modern glossaries, lexicons, and dictionaries or indicating alternative spellings under which they may also be found in the glossary to this book. Though indications of vowel length normally do not appear in the MS. and thus are not represented in the passage quoted from the MS., diacritical marks have been added in vocabulary lists, including macrons for long vowels and superscript dots for ȝ.

and ȝ as guides to pronunciation (see sections A and B in the Grammatical Appendix). Conjugated verbs are followed by abbreviations indicating person, tense, number, and verb class, citing the infinitive form. Inflected forms of bēon/wesan are normally referred to as either present or preterite forms of “to be,” except where more detail is needed for clarity. The oblique cases of nouns are followed by the nominative-singular citation form under which they may be found in the Glossary and in standard lexicons and dictionaries. Inflected forms of pronouns are often glossed by the nom.sg. form but sometimes are translated in detail.

1.4 Discussion of the semantic value, or the syntactic function, of the Tironian ampersand transcribed as ond/and may be found in Bruce Mitchell, Old English Syntax (1985), vol. 1, pp. 711-12.

1.6 Exercise.

1. bist, eart.
2. mē.
3. 2nd person, singular.
4. 2nd person, genitive singular.
5. mīn.
6. ūre.
7. singular subject, singular direct object.
8. 3rd person, genitive, plural.
9. wæs.
10. ēow.

1.7 The sentences in 1.7 illustrate various forms of bēon / wesan. Sentence 4 cites the first instance in which the character Beowulf is named. Sentence 5 is from the West-Saxon translation of the opening paragraph of the Ecclesiastical History to which the Peterborough Chronicle “Preface” is related. See Advanced Readings, no. I.