

Lesson 3

3.1 Reading

This third and last section of the Preface to the Peterborough Chronicle again is a 12th-century composition summarizing older material derived ultimately from Bede's account of the prehistory of Britain; owing to its syntactic complexities and orthographic/lexical anomalies, the paragraph may exceed the capabilities or the patience of first-time learners of Old English. Some help might be provided by the following simple parsing of the clauses for subjects (underlined) and verbs/verb phrases (double underlined):

Sixtigum wintrum ær þam þe Crist were acenned, | Gaius Iulius Romana Kasere mid hund ehtatigum scipum gesohte Brytene. Per he wes ærost geswenced mid grimmum gefeohte, ond micelne dæl his heres forlædde. Ond þa he forlet his here abidan mid Scottum ond gewat into Galwalum and þer gégadorode six hund scipa | mid þam he gewat eft into Brytene. Ond þa hi ærost togedore geræsdon, þa | man ofsloh ðes Caseres gerefan, | se wes Labienus gehaten. Da genamon þa Walas ond adrifon sumre ea ford ealne mid scearpum pilum greatum innan þam wetere; | sy ea hatte Temese. Pa þæt onfundon ða Romani, | þa noldon hi faron ofer þone ford. Pa flugon þa Brytwalas to þam wudufæstenum, | ond se Kasere geeode wel manega hehburh mid mycelum gewinne ond eft gewat into Galwalum.

A translation of the passage follows:

Sixty years before Christ was born, Julius Caesar the Roman emperor sought Britain with 180 ships, where he was first overwhelmed with grim fighting, and he abandoned a large portion of his army. And then he left his army to wait with the Scots and went into Gaul and there gathered 600 ships with which he went back into Britain. And when they came together first, then the emperor's steward was slain, who was named Labienus. Then the Welsh took and drove the ford of a certain river with large sharpened stakes in the water; which river was called Thames. When the romans disovered it, then they did not wish to go over the ford. Then the British fled into the protection of the forest, and the emperor overran a great many chief cities with much fighting and afterward departed into Gaul.