

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 26:
IMPERIAL CRISIS AND THE GOTHS**

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EPISODE 26: IMPERIAL CRISIS AND THE GOTHIS

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 26: Imperial Crisis and the Goths. This time, we’re going to explore a period of Roman history which is sometimes called the Imperial Crisis. And this period coincides with the rise of a group of Germanic tribes who invaded Rome during the same time frame. And these tribes included the ancient Goths. And the Goths are particularly important to us because they were the first Germanic tribe to provide us with a detailed written account of their own language. And that makes their language very important in the overall context of the Germanic languages.

But before I begin, let me note that this episode turned out a little longer than usual. And that’s part of the reason for the delay in getting it to you. But rather than break it into two separate episodes, I have decided to present it to you in one part. And that’s because the overall subject matter relates to events that were taking place at the same time around the third and the fourth centuries.

By this point in history, the original common Germanic language had begun to fracture into various regional dialects. And for the first time in recorded history, we have references to the Saxons. So by now, we can safely assume that the earliest Saxon dialects were being spoken in and around northern Germany. And remember that what we call Old English was really just a particular Saxon dialect spoken in southwestern England a few centuries later. So we’re very close to Old English.

But let’s begin this episode by picking up where we left off last time in the Danube region at the end of the second century. This is where Germanic tribes began to cross into Roman territory and battle the Romans within the Empire itself. And it’s also where the first Germanic-speakers likely encountered the alphabet.

In terms of political and military history, the events during this period marked a turning point for the Roman Empire. For more than six centuries, Rome had been the aggressor, constantly expanding outward, increasing the size and scope of the Empire. But by the beginning of third century, that expansion had stopped. And now, Rome actually found itself on the defensive. As it turned out, the Germans weren’t content to remain on the other side of the river. And that meant the Romans were going to have to fight if they wanted to maintain what they had acquired over the past few centuries.

And that was the real problem for the Romans. At a time when they were going to have to fight to defend their Empire, they weren’t in a good position to do that. Rome was increasingly racked by problems. And the problems were both internal and external.

We’re now entering the period of the Germanic invasions of the Roman Empire. The events of the next few centuries are very complicated because they involve a lot of moving parts. But the importance of these events can’t be overstated. These events were a major factor in the ultimate fall of the Western Roman Empire, and they set the stage for many of the nation-states of modern Europe. And they also ensured the spread of Germanic culture and language into Roman

territory. This is the backdrop for the migration of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain. So let's take a closer look at what was happening to cause these migrations or invasions.

The first part of this story is what was happening within Rome. Simply stated, Rome was having a lot of internal problems. In the year 235, the Roman Emperor Severus was assassinated. And that set in motion a period of civil wars, rebellions, assassinations and general chaos which lasted for the next 50 years. This was a period in which various Roman leaders fought for power, and it's the period that's sometimes called the "Imperial Crisis." During this period, over 20 different leaders assumed power in various parts of the Empire.

As you might imagine, this created serious instability within the Empire and within the Roman military itself. And as the infighting continued, it also forced troops to be withdrawn from the border regions. And that left the border regions more vulnerable to invasions from across the border.

By the end of the third century, all of these factors meant that there were hardly any Roman troops left along most of the Rhine and Danube border. In their place, the Romans had begun to rely more and more upon foreign tribes as mercenaries. That included Germanic warriors, but it also included peoples on the eastern fringe of the Empire like the Slavs. So, from the Roman perspective, they were hiring barbarians to defend Rome against other barbarians.

Now this trend of relying on foreign armies actually increased over time. And that meant that Rome inevitably lost some of the loyalty and discipline which had been associated with the Roman legions. It also meant that Rome had to maintain the loyalty of these foreign armies by paying them or working out some other type of arrangement with them. One type of arrangement which Rome occasionally implemented was a deal in which the foreign tribe was allowed to cross into Roman territory and remain there in exchange for their agreement to defend the region against other tribes. This was essentially the deal that the Romans made with the Franks in the north. And as we'll see, it was a deal the Romans made with the Goths in the east as well.

But most of the time, Rome simply paid the mercenaries. And this too became a problem in the 3rd century. In an effort to increase the size of the Roman army, and increasingly to pay mercenaries, the Romans had to come up with more money. And they did this by issuing lots of new Roman coins, but there was only so much silver available to put in those coins. So the Romans began to cut back on the amount of silver in the coins, and they replaced the silver with cheaper metals like bronze and copper. And that meant there were lots of new coins available, but they weren't worth as much anymore. So you needed a lot more coins to buy the same goods and services. Economists call this inflation. And when it's really bad, they call it hyperinflation. And that was what Rome had to deal with throughout this period. By the end of the 3rd century, the Roman currency had lost most of its value. And barter had returned as the standard way to pay for goods and services. Not only did those economic problems contribute to the internal disruptions, it also made it more difficult to pay the salaries of mercenaries in the border regions.

So you can see why this period is sometimes called the ‘Imperial Crisis.’ Rome had suddenly become an economic, political and military mess. And all of these internal problems just happened to coincide with new developments which were occurring across the border in Germania. And these developments were going to cause even more problems for the Romans.

Throughout the second and third centuries, many of those smaller tribes mentioned by Tacitus had begun to join together and form much larger tribes or confederations of tribes. So we start to see the emergence of bigger and more powerful Germanic tribes, and therefore, more powerful Germanic armies. And it’s during this period that we have the first mention of tribes like the Saxons and the Franks who were both confederations of tribes that were beginning to emerge as powerful forces in the northern Rhine region.

So why was all of this happening in Germania? Why were these tribes suddenly forming alliances and creating new mega-tribes. Well, a big part of the answer was population growth.

This growth had begun in the Germanic homeland in Scandinavia a few centuries earlier. And that population growth in northern Europe that had caused the initial expansion of Germanic tribes southward out of Scandinavia.

As some of those tribes migrated to the region around the Rhine, they ran up against the Roman Empire and couldn’t expand any further. So those tribes settled down, and they began to switch from nomadic herding to crop farming. As their populations continued to grow, their settlements grew larger and larger. Small settlements turned into villages. And the surrounding farms were expanded outward further and further to sustain the population. This process continued until – one day – small isolated tribes suddenly became next door neighbors. And eventually these neighboring tribes began to coalesce and form alliances. These new tribal confederations eventually grew into mega-tribes. And that meant these tribes were much more powerful. And when you combine this process which was taking place in Germania with the ‘Imperial Crisis’ taking place in Rome, you can see the balance of power shifting from the Romans to the Germans.

And as I noted, this process produced the first mention of tribes like the Franks and the Saxons around this time. But just to the south of the emerging Franks and Saxons, there was another new tribe emerging. This was in the region where the Rhine and the Danube both originate in southwestern Germany. And this new confederation of tribes was called the *Alamanni*. And that name – *Alamanni* – actually tells us a lot about what was happening at this time.

It is generally believed that *Alamanni* meant ‘all men’ – *ala* meaning ‘all’ and *manni* meaning ‘men.’ So the name of this *Alamanni* tribe reflects the fact that it was a group of different tribes which had banded together into a new confederation. Modern scholars are still not entirely sure which tribes contributed to this new group, but many believe that it included remnants of the Marcomanni and Quadi tribes that I mentioned in the last episode. As I noted last time, these tribes eventually migrated from the region which had become known as Bohemia, and they moved westward along the Danube into the region which came to be known as Bavaria. Well

this happens to be the same general region where the Alamanni tribe began to emerge during the third century.

Now if you've studied French or Spanish, that name *Alamanni* may seem a bit familiar to you. It is actually the root of the name of the modern nation of Germany in both of those languages. In French, Germany is called *Allemagne*, and in Spanish it's *Alemania*. This same Germanic tribe is also the root of the name of Germany in Portuguese, Welsh, Turkish, Arabic and Persian, as well as a variety of other languages. And that should give you an idea of how powerful and important this tribe was for a period of time in the third century.

And in fact, if you're a fan of square dancing, you've probably danced to the name of this tribe. You might 'docey doe,' but you also probably *allemande* left or right. And this particular square dancing step comes from the name of this ancient Germanic tribe – the Alamanni. It actually comes from a dance which originated in Germany and passed to France in the seventeenth century. Since the French name for Germany was *Allemagne*, the French called this particular German dance the *allemande*. And when the French colonized the region of Louisiana, the name passed to North America. And from there, one of the steps in the *allemande* was incorporated into square dancing.

So the name of the Alamanni tribe is still with us today. And in the third century, the Alamanni became a major problem for the Roman army. In the year 260, the Alamanni crossed the Roman border and invaded deep into Roman territory. In fact, they crossed the Alps and passed all the way down to Milan. As a result, they forced the Romans to abandon the traditional frontier which ran along the Rhine and the Danube. And this actually created a wedge in the Roman border.

During this period, the Romans were distracted by other invading tribes which I'm going to talk about later. But eventually, the Romans were able to push the Alamanni back across the border. And for a while, it looked like the Alamanni threat was over. But in the fourth century, their invasions began again. And in fact, it wasn't until the early eighth century – long after the fall of the Western Roman Empire – that they were finally defeated by the Franks. And it was only then that they ceased to be an independent kingdom. And even today, Alemannic German is a prominent dialect of the modern High German languages.

Now as I noted, it was ultimately the Franks, not the Romans, who permanently defeated the Alamanni. Both of these tribes were new confederations formed by uniting smaller tribes together. In fact, during the third century, the Alamanni appeared to be a bigger threat to Rome than the Frankish tribes further north along the Rhine. But over the next couple of centuries, the power of the Franks would eventually eclipse the Alamanni, as well as most of the other Germanic tribes in the region.

Around the time of that first great invasion by the Alamanni, the Franks were a brand new confederation which had just appeared on the scene. One theory is that the various tribes which came together to become the Franks did so because of the rising power of the Alamanni to their south. The first references to the name *Franks* actually occurred shortly before that great

Alamanni invasion in 260. The name appeared in a Roman army marching song from that period. But by the time the Alamanni were invading the Roman Empire, it had become evident that the new Franks also wanted to settle across the Rhine in Roman territory. And they sought to do that by taking advantage of Rome's gradual loss of control over its borders.

Around the year 250, a group of Franks crossed the Rhine and penetrated deep into Gaul – all the way to modern-day Spain. And from that point on, the Franks were a constant threat in the northern Rhine region. And as I've noted before, the Franks would eventually succeed in this objective. They would eventually establish a Frankish kingdom in northeastern Gaul, and as Roman power in Gaul waned, it was the Franks who filled that vacuum and came to dominate the entire region. And of course, they thereby provided us with the name of the modern nation of 'France.'

But the origin of the name *Franks* is uncertain. Lots of theories have been suggested by etymologists, but no one knows for certain what the original name meant. Links have been made to the Old Norse word *frakka* and the Old English word *franca* which meant 'hunting spear, or lance or javelin.' But many scholars think that these words came from the name of the Frankish tribe, not the other way around.

The name of the Franks also resulted in the Late Latin word *francus* which initially meant 'free or unrestrained.' This meaning is probably derived from the fact that the Franks cut that deal with the Romans that I mentioned earlier. They were eventually permitted to settle across the Rhine where they lived as free tribe in exchange for their agreement to defend the border. So *francus* came to mean 'free and unrestrained.' This word later passed into early French as *franc*. And over time, the meaning of the word expanded from its original sense of 'free' to a much broader sense of being 'open, sincere and genuine' as in 'to speak freely.' And that's the version which we still have in modern English in the word *frank* as in "Let me be frank with you" or "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

If you're familiar with politics, especially American politics, you may have heard of 'franking privileges.' That term basically refers to the right of politicians to send mail from their office to their constituents without having to pay postage, which is a nice benefit if you happen to hold a political office.

Well, that use of the term *frank* or *franking* can also be traced back to this same French root word, and it originally meant that a letter 'free to be sent or delivered' because the postage had been paid for it. So it didn't mean 'free' as in no cost. It meant 'free' as in ready to be delivered. But again, it ultimately comes from the name of this Germanic tribe – the Franks.

The old French word *franchise* meant that you were 'free to do something without legal restriction.' This term eventually passed into English as *franchise* and its meaning shifted to mean a particular legal right – specially the right to vote. So today when we speak of someone being *disenfranchised*, we mean that they have had their vote or rights taken away.

It wasn't until the twentieth century that the term *franchise* came to refer to a different type of legal right, specifically the 'right to sell a company's products or services.' And this is the source of the modern sense of the word *franchise* as a type of business. So if you buy a franchise, you are 'free to sell a particular company's goods and services,' and you are usually free to use the company's name and logos. All of that originating from the sense of the word *franc* – meaning 'free.'

The same use of the word *franc* as 'free' also appears in the family name *Franklin*. That name first appeared in the twelfth century after the Norman French invaded England, and it meant a land-owner who was free by means other than noble birth.

And the name of the Franks also appears in the name of the modern city of *Frankfurt* in Germany which originally mean the 'Frank's ford' – or shallow river crossing – on the river Main. And Frankfurt also gave us the *frankfurter*. And even today, we sometimes call a *frankfurter* a *frank*. So we're right back at the beginning. By the way, that's the same way we get *hamburger* in Modern English as well. Hamburgers are not made from ham, but they come from, or at least the name comes from, Hamburg in Germany.

So the name of the Frankish tribe ultimately gives us the words *France*, *French*, *frank*, *franking*, *franchise*, *disenfranchise*, *Franklin*, *Frankfurt* and *frankfurter*.

Now, as I've noted, the Franks and the Alamanni we're making life very difficult for the Romans along the Rhine in the third and fourth centuries. But further east along the Danube, there were even bigger problems brewing.

In fact, the ultimate cause of a lot of these problems along the Roman border could be found much further away in eastern Europe in places like modern-day Poland, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. I've noted in past episodes that there was a very early division of the Germanic tribes into the Northern tribes, the Western tribes and the Eastern tribes. Well, by this point, those Eastern Germanic tribes were spread throughout this part of eastern Europe. And they had also developed a very distinct dialect by this point. These tribes included tribes like the Vandals and the Goths. By the third century, these tribes had migrated down into the Balkans and the lower Danube region.

And as some of these Eastern Germanic tribes began to move westward, a domino effect ensued. So this was indirectly pushing those western tribes that I just mentioned like the Franks and the Alamanni into the Rhine and across the Rhine into Roman territory. And this process would actually accelerate over the next couple of centuries as a new group arrived from the Eurasian steppes to the east, and that was the Huns. But more about them later.

Now at this point, around the same time the Alamanni and the Franks were crossing the Rhine in the west, the Vandals were threatening middle Danube region in the south. Remember that the Vandals were an eastern Germanic tribe speaking an eastern Germanic dialect. They had migrated out of Scandinavia a few centuries earlier, and now they were sitting along the middle Danube. The Romans encountered the Vandals, and for now, they were able to hold the Vandals

back. And they even made a temporary peace. But as with many of these tribes, peace treaties didn't tend to last very long.

Over the next couple of centuries, the Vandals would re-group and head west straight for Gaul. This time they were spurred on by the Huns who were pouring in from the east and causing a chain-reaction. The Vandals eventually reached the Rhine, where they busted through the Romans defenses and traveled straight through Gaul itself. They eventually traveled south into modern-day Spain, and from there they crossed into North Africa where they set up a kingdom there. And in fact, this Germanic tribe – the Vandals – maintained a very powerful kingdom in North Africa in the fifth Century. They even launched an invasion from the site of ancient Carthage, and they did something that Carthage was never able to do. They crossed the Mediterranean and sacked Rome. This happened around the same time that the Anglo-Saxons began migrating to Britain, so it's a little later in our story. But I wanted you to get a sense of the territory covered by this tribe – the Vandals. They started out in Scandinavia, traveled into eastern Europe, encountered the Romans in the Balkans, invaded modern-day France and Spain, conquered North Africa, and then invaded and sacked Rome from across the Mediterranean.

So from all of that, you might be able to see why we still have the name of the Vandals in modern English. And in fact, unlike the names of other Germanic tribes, their name comes too us virtually unchanged from the use of the name by the Romans.

Like many of the Germanic tribes, the Romans considered the Vandals to be very dangerous barbarians. But after the Vandals sacked Rome, the name of the *Vandals* came to mean looters, robbers and pillagers. As we're going to see, the Vandals weren't the first to sack and loot Rome during this period, the Goths beat them to it. But for some reason, the later Romans writers had a particular distaste for the Vandals. And they seemed to blame the Vandals more than any other group for the destruction of the city of Rome itself. The term *vandalism* was actually coined in France after the French Revolution to describe the destruction and violence which occurred in France during that period. The term harkened back to the fall of Rome, and it probably seemed quite appropriate at the time. From the French, the term spread into English where it still retains it meaning as the "willful destruction of property."

By the way, if you're curious, the origin of the name *Vandals* was an original Germanic word **Wandal* which meant 'wanderer.' And that Germanic word ultimately gives us the modern English word *wander* as in to 'roam around.' So that name was very appropriate for this tribe. And that also makes the term *wander* and *vandal* cognate, both coming from the same Germanic root word.

And once again, we see that Late Latin sound shift which converted the 'w' sound into the 'v' sound in many Latin words. So just as *weenum* meaning 'wine' became *vinum*, the same thing happened here. The *wandals* became the *vandals*.

The later French also used this same Germanic root word, now pronounced with the 'v' at the beginning. And they used it to create another word – *vagrant*. *Vagrant* still has that same meaning as a 'wanderer,' but it's now acquired a more negative sense as in 'a beggar or tramp.'

And in Medieval Latin, if you wandered around outside of a specific place where you were supposed to be, you were *extra vagrant*, or as we know it today – *extravagant*. Of course, today the term refers to anything that is ‘excessive’ or ‘beyond the normal expectations.’

The Medieval French also created another word from this same root word which was very similar to *vagrant*, and that’s the word *vagabond*. And that word also has made it’s way into Modern English.

And if you’re trying to explain something and your thoughts wander around without being specific and to the point, well you’re being *vague*, another word the French created from that same Germanic root.

So all of that means the words *wander*, *vandal*, *vandalism*, *vagrant*, *vagabond*, *extravagant* and *vague* are all cognate. They all came from the same Germanic root word. And also note that all of those words except for *wander* came through French or Latin before they got to English. And that’s why they all have a V at the beginning instead of a W. But it also shows that borrowing is a two-way street. The Romans sometimes borrowed Germanic words, and over time the Romans and French created lots of new words from those original Germanic words. So some of our Latin words in modern English are actually Germanic words if we trace them back far enough.

So we’ve looked at the Alamanni, the Franks and the Vandals. And we’ve seen how they took advantage of the deteriorating situation in Rome, and they made repeated efforts to invade Roman territory. But now we need to turn our attention even farther east – all the way to the Black Sea region and the Eurasian steppes. The same region which was once the home of the first Indo-Europeans.

A completely separate Germanic tribe had found its way to this region. This tribe was the Goths. The important thing to understand about the Goths is their longevity. The Greek traveler Pytheas wrote about a tribe called the *Gutones* in northern Europe in the fourth century BC. Tacitus then mentions them in the region of modern-day Poland in the first century AD. He called them the *Gotones*. By the time of the ‘Imperial Crisis’ in the third century, they were in the area north of the Black Sea, and they were called the *Goths*. Over the next five centuries they would expand across southern Europe. They would fight for the Romans. They would fight against the Romans. They would sack Rome for the first time since the creation of the Roman Empire. They would control a large portion of Gaul. They would establish a kingdom in Italy that lasted until the sixth century. And they would establish a kingdom in Spain which would last until the Moors arrived in the eighth century. By the time these Gothic kingdoms finally collapsed, the Goths had left a recorded legacy which lasted for more than a thousand years. So they have a long and fascinating history. In terms of their political and military history, I’m just going to cover the first part of their story in this episode. And we’ll look at the rest of that history next time when we wind up our look at the Germanic tribes.

But for our purposes, the real importance of the Goths was their language and the fact that it was written down in the fourth century. A Gothic translation of the Bible and other religious texts from this period still survive to this very day. And that makes Gothic the first Germanic

language to be written down in detail. And since these Gothic texts are a translation of the Bible, linguists have found it relatively easy to translate the language and compare it – word for word – with Latin and Greek.

This research enables scholars to essentially go back in time and examine this particular Germanic language as it existed in the fourth century. And since this period is only three or four centuries removed from the common proto-Germanic period, it allows linguists to examine the evolution of the Germanic languages over time. So we can actually examine the vocabulary, and syntax, and grammar of a Germanic language for the first time without having to rely on reconstructions.

Now before we look closer at the Goths, it is important to keep in mind that their language was not an early version of English. The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths were separate groups of tribes who lived in different parts of Europe at the same time. The Angles and Saxons spoke West Germanic languages, and the Goths spoke an East Germanic language. But their respective languages were still very similar at this early point.

Now in terms of the history of English, if we had Anglo-Saxons texts from the same time frame as the Gothic Bible, we probably wouldn't find the Gothic language all that interesting. It would be interesting to compare the languages, just like it's interesting to compare the early High German dialects with Old English, but it would really be more of an academic exercise. But the problem is we don't have Anglo-Saxon texts from this period. And we don't have texts in any other Germanic language from this period either. And we won't have texts in any other Germanic languages for several more centuries.

So you can see why historical linguists are so fascinated with the Gothic language. It is the 'missing link' between the original common proto-Germanic language and the later Germanic languages that were written down from around the seventh century onwards. But again, it's not the mother of English. It is really more like a sister of English.

So let's take a closer look at the Goths. Having migrated from Scandinavia through eastern Europe, the Goths arrived in the region north of the Black Sea shortly after the time of Tacitus.

We should keep in mind that it is probably a mistake to think of the Goths as some kind of completely unified and homogenous tribe. The Goths were likely a collection of tribes, war bands, and other nomadic peoples who were collectively referred to as *Goths* by the Romans. So in many respects, they were similar to the Alamanni and the Franks in the west. They were sort of like a snowball rolling down a hill and getting bigger and bigger as they moved southward.

The first Goths reached an area north of the Black Sea by around the year 170, so around the time of Marcomannic Wars which is described in the last episode. Over the next century, other Goths continued to move into this region, and they became well entrenched around the northern and western side of the Black Sea. And that put them just north of the Roman border.

Once in place, the Goths were joined by waves of other migrating peoples. So there was no single migration. It was a series of migrations over a period of several decades. And despite the label, there was probably no distinctive ‘Gothic’ culture at this point. It was really just a collection of culturally-mixed groups. But the sheer size of the group made it a potentially powerful force. And that coincided with the Imperial Crisis in Rome, so Rome was distracted by events within the Empire and along other portions of the border.

Now, up to this point, I have noted that the Danube was the border between Rome and the Germania, but that’s really a simplified version of events. In reality, shortly after the time of Tacitus, the Romans had crossed the eastern Danube nearer the Black Sea, around modern-day Romania. And there they had established a Roman territory there called Dacia. But Roman control of this region had always been tenuous. And now the Goths were sitting right on the northern border of Dacia.

In the third century, the Goths unleashed an ongoing assault on Dacia, and in fact the entire Black Sea region. They actually built ships and crossed the Black Sea itself where they raided the Black Sea coast, including the coast of modern-day Turkey. They even traveled through the Bosphorus Strait and attacked Greece and the Aegean. And this is very important because remember that Greek was the dominant language in Black Sea region during this period. It was basically the lingua franca of the region. Well, after a few years – and a lot of success – the Goths decided to re-focus on expansion by land, and they largely abandoned their maritime campaigns across the Black Sea and the Aegean. But they returned to their Gothic base with a large number of Greek-speaking captives, included many from central Anatolia – modern-day Turkey.

And some of those captives ultimately served as mediators between the Goths and the Greek world to the south. And one of the descendants of those captives was a man named Wulfilas. And he is the person who translated the Greek Bible into Gothic.

Now throughout this period of the third century, the Romans were able to score some occasional victories, but they weren’t able to keep the Goths out of Dacia north of the Danube, especially after the Goths began to focus more and more on campaigns by land. And remember that all of this Gothic expansion was taking place at the same time as the Imperial Crisis in Rome, and at the same time as the invasions of the Alamanni and the Franks along the Rhine in the west. So it was all too much for the Romans to deal with. And in the year 270, the Romans finally retreated back across the Danube, thereby leaving Dacia to the Goths.

As I noted, Dacia was part of modern-day Romania. And even though the borders of Dacia varied over time, it was generally centered around the region we know today as Transylvania. So keep that little bit of information in the back of your mind because the Goths now called it home.

And with Dacia occupied by the Goths, there were now two separate groups of Goths. The group which had remained north of the Black Sea further east were called the Ostrogoths. And the group which settled along the north side of the Danube in Dacia were called the Visigoths. Both of these groups shared a common language – the Gothic language. But from this point forward,

their history and their culture will start to diverge, and we can begin to think of them as separate and distinct tribes.

Now the name *Ostrogoths* meant “Eastern Goths.’ If fact that Germanic prefix *Ostro* may seem a little familiar to you. You might remember from the episode on Germanic mythology that the Indo-Europeans has a word **aus* which meant "to shine" – especially ‘shining at dawn.’ And so, this word came to be associated with the sun rising in the morning and eventually came to be associated with the direction in which the sun rose. And that Indo-European root word produced the original Germanic word **austra* meaning ‘east towards the sunrise.’ In English, that Germanic word eventually produced the word *east* that we have today. But in the separate Gothic language it produced the word *Ostro*. So the *Ostro-Goths* were the Goths in the east along the northern Black Sea in the steppe region.

So if *Ostrogoths* means ‘Eastern Goths,’ you might assume that *Visigoths* means ‘Western Goths.’ But the etymology here is a bit more complicated. Originally, this Dacian group were simply called the *Visi* – not the *Visigoths*. And it wasn’t until the sixth century that the Romans coined the term *Visigoths* apparently influenced by the term *Ostrogoths*. And many assumed that this term *Visigoths* meant ‘Western Goths,’ just like *Ostrogoths* meant ‘Eastern Goths.’ But the prefix *Visi* actually came from the original tribal name of this Dacian group of Goths. So what did that name *Visi* mean? Well, the ‘v’ at the beginning appears to be another example of that later Latin sound shift from the ‘w’ sound to the ‘v’ sound because the tribe was called the *Wisi* by earlier Roman sources and *Visi* by later sources after the sound change. So there are some scholars who think that the original name *Wisi* meant ‘west,’ and therefore, *Visigoths* does in fact mean ‘Western Goths’ if we trace the name back to its original meaning. But there are other scholars who think that *Wisi* simply meant ‘good,’ and that the name of the original tribe meant ‘good or worthy people.’

At any rate, it is very common today to see the term *Visigoth* interpreted as ‘Western Goth,’ but I just wanted to note that there is still some debate about that name.

Now shortly after the Goths – or more specifically the Visigoths – took control of Dacia from the Romans, Rome finally started to get it’s house in order. The Imperial Crisis in Rome, and all of the chaos of the preceding 50 years, finally came to an end, at least for a while.

And the key to ending this crisis was a new Emperor in Rome named Diocletian. He became Emperor in the year 284, fourteen years after the Romans abandoned Dacia which had been the first Roman province to fall to the Germans. Under Diocletian’s leadership, Rome began to reorganize the way its provinces were administered. It had become obvious that centralized power in Rome was no longer effective. The Empire was too big, and it faced too many challenges. So Diocletian decided to abandon the idea of centralized rule in Rome. There was a natural linguistic division within the Empire. To the west, Latin was the dominant language. In the East, Greek was the dominant language. And this provided the basis for dividing the Empire into separate western and eastern sections.

The Empire was ultimately divided into four regions, each having its own capital and its own emperor. Two regions were established in the east, and two regions were established in the west. So at this early point, we can begin to see the division of the Empire into the eastern and western portions. And at this point, the city of Rome ceased to be the capital of the Empire. After Diocletian retired, the Empire actually devolved into civil war again for a couple of decades. But by the year 324, Constantine had emerged as the sole Emperor of the Roman Empire. The Empire was briefly re-united under his leadership, and thanks to his religious conversion, the Empire now had a new official religion – Christianity. Constantine also settled in the Greek city of Byzantium in western Anatolia, and he made it his new capital. It came to be known as *Constantinople* after Constantine. And of course when the Empire was permanently split, it became the capital of the east.

Since the time of Diocletian a few decades earlier, the relationship between Rome and the Germanic tribes had started to settle down somewhat. As Rome became more stable, it was a less inviting target for the Germans. So for example, once the Goths took control of Dacia, there was no significant battle between them and the Romans for several decades. In fact, this was a period in which the Romans were increasingly relying upon Germanic mercenaries. So many Goths actually sided with Rome during this period.

After Constantine became Emperor, conflicts between the Empire and the Goths briefly re-occurred, but a treaty was negotiated in the year 332 which stabilized the relationship. Rome agreed to make annual payments to the Goths in return for the resumption of trade across the Danube, and in return for the Goth's agreement to provide Rome with troops as needed. In fact, Rome was busy cutting similar deals with other tribes like the Franks and the Alamanni and the Saxons.

Throughout this period, and especially the treaty in 332, trade became much more regular between the Goths and the Romans across the Danube. And that movement of goods also meant there was a corresponding movement of people back and forth. And with the movement of people, there was an exchange of cultures, and part of that exchange included that new official Roman religion – Christianity.

As I noted earlier, the Gothic missionary Wulfilas had been born to a family of Anatolian origin that had been taken into captivity by the Visigoths as part of an earlier raid. But Wulfilas was born among the Visigoths, and he was reared as a Goth speaking the Gothic language. As a boy, he was sent to Constantinople as a hostage. And there he was exposed to Christianity, and he was eventually consecrated a bishop for the purpose of spreading Christianity back to the Goths. Wulfilas then traveled to Dacia. And there, he converted many Goths to Christianity.

In order to secure the conversion of Goths to Christianity, Wulfilas needed a Gothic version of the Bible. Very few Goths spoke Latin or Greek. So he undertook the translation of the Bible. We know that the Germanic runic symbols had started to be used for brief inscriptions by this period, but they weren't really suited for translating the Bible. And even if they were, many Greek religious names and other terms were going to have to be maintained. And the runes couldn't capture all of the sounds of the Greek language. So Wulfilas created his own Gothic

alphabet which was a combination of the runic alphabet and the Greek alphabet. And the final product of all of his work was the Gothic Bible. Unfortunately, the entire Bible didn't survive the ages, but much of it did. And a few other miscellaneous religious texts also exist in Gothic.

As I've noted, the Gothic translation of the Bible preserved the Gothic language of the fourth century for future generations to examine. So that makes Gothic the oldest attested Germanic language. And given its age, it gives us a glimpse of what the Germanic languages looked and sounded like shortly after the end of the original proto-Germanic period.

So let's take a closer look at the Gothic language. In the last episode, I noted that the original Germanic language had a 'z' sound which eventually shifted to an 'r' sound. Linguists call this tendency of certain sounds to shift to an 'r' sound *rhotacism*. Well, this sound never shifted within the Gothic language. So the Goths held on to that original sibilant sound, and it appears as a /s/ or /z/ in many Gothic words where we have an 'r' sound in other Germanic languages.

So for example, the Goths had a word which meant to 'accumulate or store something' And that word was pronounced *huzd*. The Old English equivalent of that word was *hord*. And that word had actually changed very little over the years within English. We still have it as 'hoard' (H-O-A-R-D), as in 'to hoard food'. So between Gothic *huzd* and Old English *hord*, you can hear that shift to the 'r' sound that never occurred within Gothic.

And I'll give you another example. The Goths had a word which meant 'to acquire knowledge or skills.' That word was *lāisjan* (/lays-yan/). And the Old English version of that word was *læran*. And *læran* is the Old English version of 'learn.' So between *lāisjan* and *læran*, you can hear the newer 'r' sound in Old English. And again, as we look at other early Germanic languages, we also see the 'r' sound. It's only Gothic which held on to the original sibilant.

Also, the Gothic word *maiza* is equivalent to the Old English word *māra*. And that word eventually became *more* in Modern English. So we can see in the Modern English words *most* and *more* that one retains an original sibilant sound – the 's' sound (/s/) – and the other has the later 'r' sound.

And Gothic *wēsun* is equivalent to Old English *wæron* which eventually became *were* (W-E-R-E) in Modern English. So again, in Modern English we have two variations of this word. In the case of *was*, we see an original sibilant sound – the 's' sound. And in *were*, we see the later 'r' sound which developed prior to Old English.

So Gothic never developed that particular sound shift. But outside of that sound difference, you'll note that the Gothic words and the Old English words are very similar.

The Gothic language also had a unique consonant sound that didn't exist in other Germanic languages. It was basically a combination of the 'th' sound the 'l' sound. So it came out as a 'thl' sound. And it's a little hard to represent that sound in Modern English, but think about the name 'Kathleen.' That group of consonants in the middle - /thl/ - is a rough example of this sound. But within Gothic words, the sound could appear anywhere, even at the beginning. Now

in other Germanic languages including Old English, the tendency was to use an ‘fl’ sound instead of this Gothic ‘thl’ sound.

So the Goths had a word which meant ‘to run away’ and it was pronounced *þliuhan*. But in Old English the word was *fleon*. And that word eventually became *flee* (F-L-E-E) in Modern English. So you can hear the difference in sounds at the beginning of those two words – Gothic *þliuhan* and Old English *fleon*.

And not to make this sound too technical, but Gothic had a dual pronoun form in first person and second person which doesn’t generally exist in any other Germanic languages except Old Norse. So for example, in English we have a first person singular pronoun (‘I’) and a plural pronoun (‘we’). But Gothic also had a dual version which only applied to two people – me and someone else. So it basically meant ‘we two’ or ‘the two of us.’ In Gothic, the dual version was *wit* and the plural version was *weis*.

Now what we see here is a simplification of the original Indo-European pronouns that was taking place within the early Germanic languages. The original Indo-European language had those dual forms as well. But most of the early Germanic languages were getting rid of the dual versions and only using a singular and a plural version. But Gothic held on to that Indo-European dual form in first person.

And it also held on to that dual version in third person. And in third person, we can see how Modern English has taken this idea of simplifying the pronouns even further. In fact, it may have taken it a little too far, because many modern English speakers still struggle with that change.

In modern English, we have third person singular *you* and third person plural *you* (as in ‘all of you’). So we use the same word for singular and plural. And many Modern English speakers seem to have an innate sense that this is a little awkward. So some dialects have a tendency to want to change that plural version to make it distinctive. So in some English dialects, it becomes *you all*, or *y’all*, or *you-ins*, or *youse guys* or some other stereotype. We sometimes make fun of these regionalisms, but it really represents Modern English speakers trying to make a distinction between singular and plural that was always made in earlier forms of English, and is still made in most other European languages.

Now back to Gothic. While other Germanic languages like Old English were busy simplifying the pronouns by getting rid of the dual third person pronoun, as I said Gothic held onto it. So Gothic had a singular version of *you*, a dual version meaning ‘you too’ or ‘the two of you,’ and a plural version meaning ‘you all’ or ‘all of you.’

So we’ve looked at some differences between Gothic and Old English. But, as you might imagine, there were also lots of similarities. So let’s compare some of the vocabulary of the two languages. And let’s begin by listening to the basic numbers ‘1 through 10’ in both languages.

In Gothic the number 1 was *ains*. In Old English it was *an*. So between *ains* and *an*, you can hear the similarities.

Now the number 2 in Gothic was *twai*. In Old English, it was *twegen*. So again, *twai* – *twegen*, you can see the similarities.

The number 3 in Gothic was *þreis*. In Old English, it was *þrie*.

The number 4 in Gothic was *fidwor*. In Old English, it was *feower*).

The number 5 in Gothic was *fimf*. In Old English, it was *fif*.

The number 6 in Gothic was *saihs*. In Old English, it was *siex*.

The number 7 in Gothic was *sibun*. In Old English, it was *seofon*.

The number 8 in Gothic was *ahtau*. In Old English, it was *eahta*.

The number 9 in Gothic was *niun*. In Old English, it was *nigon*.

The number 10 in Gothic was *taihun*. And in Old English, it was *tien*.

So as you can hear, the numbers in Gothic and Old English were very similar.

We can also compare Gothic to Old English by listening to portions of their respective versions of the Lord's Prayer. As you may recall from way back in Episode 1, the Lord's Prayer exists in many ancient languages. So the various versions of the Prayer provides a convenient way to compare the structure of those early languages. But we have to keep in mind that even though Gothic and Old English were sister languages, the attested version of the Gothic Prayer pre-dates the Old English version by three or four centuries. So the differences between the two versions of the Prayer are a combination of dialect differences and time differences.

And I should also note that I can be somewhat generous in my pronunciation of Gothic because no one knows for certain how it pronounced. Obviously, the spelling of the words in the original Gothic alphabet provides strong evidence. But unlike later languages like Old English, the material we have in Gothic is much more limited. So the actual Gothic speakers of the fourth century may well have had some unique pronunciations or sounds which we can't detect in the written language.

So with that caveat out of the way, let's look at the first line of the Lord's Prayer. In Modern English, it's, "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed by they name."

In Old English, the same passage was, "Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum, si þin nama gehalgod."

In Gothic, that passage was, "Atta unsar, þu in himinam, weihnai namo þein."

So let's look a little closer at those passages. In Modern English, we say "Our Father" with the pronoun *our* before *father*. But early Germanic languages reversed that order and put *father* first. So it was *father our*.

In Old English, that was "Fæder ure." In Gothic, it was "Atta unsar." So between *ure* and *unsar*, you can hear the differences between the word *our* in both of those languages.

But what about *father*? Well, Old English was *faeder*, as we've seen before. But the Gothic word was *atta*. By now we know that the original Indo-European word for 'father' had a 'p' sound represented in the Latin and Greek forms of the word – *pater*. And that 'p' switched to an 'f' in the Germanic languages. But for some reason, Gothic had lost that consonant altogether in the word *father*. The resulting word was *atta*. And a 'little father' in Gothic was *attila*. And when the Huns invaded the Ostrogoths from the Eurasian steppes, many of the Ostrogoths fled to the west. But some of the Ostrogoths joined the Huns as mercenaries. And the Ostrogoths called the Hunnic leader 'little father' – *Attila*. And of course, we know him today as Attila the Hun. And we'll talk more about Attila and the Huns in the next episode. Because their invasion of central Europe was one of the primary causes for the mass invasion of western Europe by Germanic tribes, which we will discuss next time.

Before we move on, let's look at a few of the other words in the passage I just read.

The word *heaven* in Old English was *heofonum*. In Gothic, it was *himinam*. And the word *name* in Old English was *nama*. In Gothic, it was *namo*.

So we can definitely see the similarities. But as we look at the second line of the Lord's Prayer, the differences between the two versions become more apparent.

The second line in Modern English is, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven."

In Old English, the passage read, "to becume þin rice, gewurþe ðin willa, on eorðan swa swa on heofonum."

In Gothic, that passage was: "qimai þiudinassus þeins, wairþai wilja þeins, swe in himina jah ana airþai."

Now all of that may sound completely foreign too you, and they may not even sound similar. But if we listen closely, we can detect the similarities. For example, take the portion that reads 'in earth as it is in heaven.' In Old English, *Earth* was *eorðan*. And roughly speaking, Old English used the Middle English word order for this passage. So it was, "on eorðan swa swa on heofonum" – 'on earth as it is in heaven.'

In Gothic, the word for 'Earth' was similar to Old English. It was *airþai*. But Gothic reversed the word order of the passage, so it read more like "as it is in Heaven, it is on Earth" – 'swe in himina jah ana airþai.'

So I hope you found that interesting. As you can probably hear, the original Germanic dialects that evolved from that common Proto-Germanic language were very similar. It is essentially that same process that was beginning to happen to Latin at the same time. As Rome began to falter and fall apart, it began to break into regional entities. And without a strong central government in Rome, the factors that held Roman Latin in place were also disappearing. Now, regional variations of Latin were beginning to take root.

And those dialects would eventually evolve into the modern Romance languages. But they would also retain some basic similarities. And the same thing was happening within the Germanic languages as well.

Before I wrap up this episode, I wanted to explore the ultimate evolution of the word **Gothic** from its original reference to this particular Germanic tribe, to a specific type of architecture, and now a certain sub-culture or lifestyle which was called ‘Gothic.’

To understand the evolution of the word, we have to begin with the Germanic period that we looked at in this episode, and that we will continue to explore in the next episode. As we now know, there were lots of Germanic tribes. But the Goths had a particularly long history. Remember that the Goths were attested in written histories for over 1,000 years. And the Goths actually became two separate tribes – the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths. And when the Roman Empire eventually collapsed in the west, the Germanic tribes rushed in and filled the vacuum. And that included the Goths.

The Ostrogoths, you’ll remember, eventually established a kingdom in Italy. And the Visigoths established a completely separate kingdom in Spain. But after those two kingdoms eventually collapsed and disappeared, the term **Goth** basically fell out of use. And when it was used, it was used to refer to these specific Germanic tribes.

And during the following centuries, Christianity spread throughout Europe. And during the 11th and 12 century, a new style of fancy, ornate architecture developed. It was primarily used for churches and cathedrals, and it featured pointed arches, flying buttresses, large stain glass windows, and so on. Think about the Notre Dame in Paris. And this architectural style was meant to impress and overwhelm worshippers. And this style of architecture spread to castles and other buildings during the Medieval period.

But in Medieval Europe, this particular style of architecture wasn’t called **Gothic**. The architectural style had developed in France, so it was often called **French work**.

Now even though the Western Roman Empire had collapsed and given way to various Germanic kingdoms, the Eastern Roman Empire had continued on as the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople – in western Turkey.

But in 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire. And that led to the disbursement of Greek scholars in Constantinople throughout western Europe. They brought with them manuscripts which had been written in ancient Greek and which were previously unknown in the

West. And that discovery of this pre-Christian Greek and Roman culture caused an intellectual and cultural revolution in the West which we call the Renaissance. Suddenly, everything associated with Classical Greece and Rome was fashionable, and everything associated with the period after the fall of the Western Roman Empire was considered crude, uncultured and uncivilized. And that included architecture. Greco-Roman architecture was the way to go. Large white columns, arches and domes. This reflected the Greek emphasis on geometry and proportions. And all those older Medieval castles and cathedrals were considered old-fashioned and part of a 'Darker Age.'

And this is where we start to get terms like the *Dark Ages* and the *Middle Ages*. There was that wonderful Greco-Roman Period, and there was this Modern Renaissance, and then there was all that barbaric stuff in the 'middle' – that 'Dark' Period. And it's kind of hard to believe that all those beautiful cathedrals were now considered barbaric or primitive, but they were because they weren't Greco-Roman. And you can see why some modern historians are still reluctant to use the term 'Dark Ages.' But nevertheless, that's what they were considered at the time.

Well, since the Goths were such a prominent Germanic tribe during the later Roman period and the period after the fall of Rome, some people during the Renaissance began to use the term *Gothic* to refer to certain things associated with this middle period – the period before the Renaissance. This supposedly darker, primitive, uncivilized period. And all of those beautiful castles and cathedrals began to be called *Gothic* because they were built during that earlier period.

We can now skip forward a couple of centuries to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when a new style of literature began to appear. These novels and stories were often set in dark Gothic castles and cathedrals. They typically involved dark or eerie themes. They relied on suspense, and often featured supernatural elements. But it was the setting of the stories which was really the key. Castles, cathedrals, dungeons, dark corridors, winding stairs, darkness, moonlight, candlelight. And because of the darkness of the literature, and its associated with Gothic castles and cathedrals, it came to be called Gothic literature. This included the writings of Horace Walpole, Edgar Allen Poe and even the Brothers Grimm. It also included works like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde, and Gaston Leroux's The Phantom of the Opera, and Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

It also included Bran Stoker's Dracula. And that novel was particularly influential. Of course, it featured a vampire who lived in Transylvania, which as we know from earlier in this episode was once called Dacia and had been the home of the original Visigoths. And of course, Dracula was famously portrayed in the motion pictures by Bela Lugosi from Hungary – the same general region of Eastern Europe.

So we now have the use of the term *Gothic* to describe this particular type of literature – primarily because of its dark, gloomy Gothic settings. But the term now came to refer to actual subject matter of those novels as well, so it came to refer to vampires, monsters, ghouls, and other creepy characters.

And that takes us to the twentieth century, specifically the year 1979. In that year, a band called Bauhaus released a song called “Bela Lugosi’s Dead.” This is considered one of the first – and arguably the very first – example of a musical style called Gothic. It was dark and creepy kind of like Gothic novels and movies. Soon, music critics were using the term to refer to bands like Joy Division and The Cure who were also producing music in that style.

And thanks to the popularity of those Gothic bands – at least the underground popularity of those bands – it sparked a whole-new generation of ‘Goths’ who listened to the music, and dressed in black, and wore make-up to make themselves look like characters out of Gothic novels. So that’s how we got from the ancient Germanic Goths to the modern Goths.

So with the modern part of the Gothic story out of the way, next time, we’ll finish looking at the ancient Goths. And we’ll look at the Angles and Saxons as well. Because, next time I’m going to focus on the fall of Rome and the establishment of Germanic kingdoms in western Europe. And of course, one of this kingdoms was in Britain. So the next episode may very well be the final episode in our look at the development of Pre-English. And then we’ll be able to begin Volume 2 – Old English.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.