THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 27:
BROKEN EMPIRE AND FRACTURED LANGUAGES

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language, This is Episode 27: Broken Empire and Fractured Languages. This time we're going to look at the final years of the Western Roman Empire, and the rise of new Germanic Kingdoms in its place. And these political events coincided with the division of Latin and the Germanic languages into new dialects and languages. And these newly-emerging languages evolved into many of the languages of modern Western Europe – including English.

But before we begin, let me mention a couple of things about the podcast. A couple of listeners have contacted me and indicated that they are having problems downloading the episodes to their iPhone. I'm not exactly sure why this is happening, but I wanted to give you a couple of options if you having this problem. First, you can always go to the main website for the podcast – historyofenglishpodcast.com. Most of the episodes there, especially the most recent episodes, are saved to a different server. So you should be able to listen there without any problem.

Also, there is a separate website for the podcast, and that's historyof englishpodcast.podbean.com. That where the main episodes are hosted, and that's what iTunes uses as well. If you go to that website, there is a link on the main page that says 'mobile.' If you click that link, you can actually add an app to your iPhone for the podcast. So be sure to check that out if you listen to the podcast with an iPhone.

So with all of that out of the way, let's turn to this episode. And I should note that there is a lot of late Roman history in this episode. But I wanted to go through the events which culminated in the collapse of the Western Roman Empire because they really set the stage for everything that happened later including the Anglo-Saxon migrations to Britain.

Of course, we've already started to look at the gradual decline of the Roman Empire over the past few episodes. And as we've seen, there was no single cause for this decline. It was a combination of infighting, civil war, economic disruptions and external pressures from across the borders. All of these factors contributed to the decline of the Empire in the West.

And at the same time that Roman power was declining, the Germanic tribes were becoming more powerful. And some of those tribes were also beginning to learn how to read and write. First, there were those Germanic runes, then the Gothic translation of the Bible. But literacy was still very, very rare within Germania.

But, as we know, literacy was very common across the border in the Roman Empire. The Greeks had been writing with their alphabet since around the year 800 BC, and the Romans had been writing with their version of the same alphabet since about 600 BC. So by this point, writing had been in common use throughout much of the Roman Empire for around 1,000 years, and I'm not even counting the earlier forms of writing like cuneiform and heiroglyphics which had been around for even longer in the eastern Mediterranean.

There are so many different ways to look at the conflicts between the Romans and the Germanic tribes, but we sometimes forget that it was a conflict between a literate world and an illiterate world.

And when we look back at the history of that type of conflict, the literate world has a major advantage. They get to write the history for later generations to read. And that's part of the reason why so many historians of the past lamented the collapse of the Roman Empire, and they described the period that followed as the 'Dark Ages.' These historians made the mistake of equating writing with civilization. So when writing began to decline after the fall of Rome that must have meant that civilization itself had declined, and a dark period of barbarian rule must have been ushered in. Again, we know today that many of those assumptions were false, or at least were greatly exaggerated. But it illustrates how important writing is to our view of history, and especially the events during this period.

So I want to begin this episode by taking a look at the state of literacy and writing within the Roman Empire as we enter the last century of its existence. And during this period, around the end of the fourth century, a significant event related to writing was taking place. And that event was the replacement of scrolls with books.

Up to this point, people generally used papyrus scrolls or parchment for writing. The Romans also sometimes used waxed-covered tablets. But the Romans had figured out a way to tie several tablets together at the side. So you could flip from one tablet to the next. And by the time of Tacitus at the end of the first century, the Romans had started to take several pieces of papyrus or parchment and bind them together in an early version of what we would call a 'book' today. By the fourth century, these early books had largely replaced scrolls. So why did that happen? And why did happen at this point?

Well, for centuries, papyrus had been one of the most common materials used for writing. The process for making papyrus for writing involved cutting strips of the papyrus plant and laying them side by side horizontally, and then adding a second layer on top vertically, and so on. When it was thick enough, it was pressed and left to dry. And this dried-out papryus was rolled into scrolls. When we see references to 'ancient books' from the Mediterranean, this is what they are referring to – papyrus scrolls – not books as we know them today. But as the Roman Empire began to fracture and fall apart, it became increasingly difficult for people in Europe to obtain papyrus from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean.

So they began to switch to parchment which was typically made from calf or sheep skin, but sometimes the skin of other animals as well. Parchment had actually been around for centuries, but only now did it start to replace papyrus as the dominant writing material. Parchment was smoother than papyrus. It was also thin, durable and flexible. It was also much easier to bind pages of parchment together than it was for papyrus. But parchment was also very expensive because it was made from animal skins, and therefore there was a much more limited supply of it. The finest quality of parchment was called ***vellum*** because it came from a calf's skin. The word ***vellum*** comes from an older Latin word ***vel*** which meant 'calf,' and it's the same root word

that gives us the word ***veal*** in Modern English also meaning a 'calf' – usually one that you have for dinner.

Now even though parchment was expensive, at least there were animals around which could be used to make it. Since it was becoming almost impossible to import papyrus into Europe with the decline of Rome, parchment was the only practical alternative. So parchment gradually replaced papyrus.

And with the shift from papyrus to parchment, another shift occurred. And that was the shift from scrolls to individual pages bound together into a book-form. But the Romans didn't call a bound collection of pages a ***book***. They called it a ***codex***.

The popularity of these very early books quickly became apparent. It was much easier to read a book than a rolled up piece of papyrus, especially for longer works. Books could also be printed on both sides of the page, whereas papyrus could only be printed on one side since it was rolled up and had to be handled on one side. With a book, you could simply flip through the pages rather than trying to manage a series of scrolls.

And Christian monks soon came to prefer this type of document since it was much easier to read scriptures in a book form than in a long scroll. At this point, all documents – both scrolls and books – were handwritten. And as the Roman Empire fell apart, the art and skill of writing became increasingly confined to monks and monasteries. So most writing tended to be religious in nature. And since these monks came to prefer books over scrolls, scrolls were quickly phased out. In fact, the oldest surviving complete book in Greek is a Greek version of the Bible from this very time frame – the fourth century.

As I noted, the Romans called these bound collections a ***codex***. That word had evolved from the Latin word ***caudex*** which meant 'tree trunk.' Which raises an interesting question. If these early books were made from parchment – animal skins – why did the Romans named them after the word for 'tree trunk.' Well, remember that the early Romans used wooden tablets covered with wax for writing as well. And remember that the first version of a book – or codex – was several of these wooden tablets which were tied together at the side. So the Latin word for 'tree trunk' was used for these early books because the 'pages' – if we can call them that – were literally pieces of wood. The name stuck even as the technology later evolved to parchment.

Now within later French, the word ***codex*** came to refer to a specific type of book – a law book. As written laws were gradually adopted, the written collection of laws was called a ***codex***. And from there we got the word ***code*** – as in a legal code – or tax code – or dress code. By the way, the term ***codicil*** also came from this same root word. ***Codicil*** refers to an amendment to a document – usually a Last Will and Testament – and it originally meant a 'small writing tablet,' but it then came to mean a 'short or abbreviated writing,' and later came to mean a short amendment tacked on to on original document. Both ***code*** and ***codicil*** came into English from French after the Normal Invasion in 1066, and as we will see when we get to that period, the Normans had to impose law and order on the Anglo-Saxons. So most of the legal terms in

modern English come from this period of French. And of course, most of those French words originated in Latin.

So the Latin word ***codex*** came from an earlier Latin word for 'tree trunk.' Well, guess what, our Germanic word ***book*** has a similar origin. The English word ***book*** comes from an original Germanic word ***boc***, which is actually cognate with the word ***beech*** as in 'beech tree.' It is believed that the first Germanic tribes carved runes onto beech wood, and they may also have carved runes into actual living beech trees. This seems to be the source of the word ***boc*** meaning something you write on. In Old English, the term ***boc*** meant any written document. It later took the meaning of ***book*** as we know it today.

So speaking of writing materials that come from trees, you may be wondering why I haven't mentioned paper yet. Well, that's because paper technology hadn't found its way to Europe yet. In fact, it would be several more centuries before Europeans began to write on paper. But the knowledge and technology required to make paper did exist at this point in the fourth and fifth centuries. It just happened to exist in far to the east in China.

The process of making paper is a lot more complicated that making papyrus scrolls. Paper is made by breaking down plants into individual fibers, and then through a process of wetting and drying, the fibers bond together to form an entirely new substance – paper – which can be very thin and very smooth. It has characteristics that are similar to parchment, but it doesn't come from animal skins. It comes from trees and other plants, so it can be produced in abundance. And that meant that when paper technology was introduced, it was much cheaper that parchment. And eventually, paper replaced parchment even in Europe. But it took many centuries for that technology to spread westward from China to western Europe.

But interestingly, there was something else spreading from China to Western Europe during this same time frame. Or maybe I should say 'someone' else was spreading from China to Europe. I'm referring to the Huns. And since the Huns were so skilled on horseback, they beat the arrival of paper in Europe by several centuries. In fact, it was arrival of the Huns into Europe that served as the catalyst for many of the events which led to final collapse of the Western Roman Empire. And the Huns brought with them some technological innovations of their own, and their technology is also part of this story. So let's turn our attention the Huns and the events which followed their arrival in Europe.

And to understand the Huns, we should probably think back to the original Indo-Europeans because, like the first Indo-Europeans, the Huns were nomadic people who lived in the Eurasian steppe region. Their overall lifestyle was actually very similar to those first Indo-Europeans. They were nomadic. They were very skilled on horseback. They were proficient at raiding. They were war-like at times, and they were constantly on the move looking for new regions to settle in and conquer if necessary.

But I should note that the Huns were not Indo-Europeans. We're now about 3,000 years beyond the period in which the original Indo-Europeans lived. And the Huns spoke a completely different language. But culturally, not much had changed on the Eurasian steppes over the

centuries. So, as we look at the expansion of the Huns, we can draw some parallels with the expansion of the Indo-Europeans from the same region about 3,000 years earlier.

Now the Huns – and for that matter the original Indo-Europeans – they were not unique. The steppe region was home to many powerful nomadic tribes over the centuries. In fact, as late as the thirteenth century, we have the rise of the Mongol Empire under Ghengis Khan which originated in the same region. And that Empire would eventually include much of modern China and stretch westward all the way into Eastern Europe making it the largest Empire the world has ever known in terms of contiguous land mass. So the peoples of this steppe region were a constant threat throughout much of human history – really until the rise of modern nation-states with standing armies equipped with gunpowder. Until then though, the nomadic tribes of the steppes were a never-ending problem for people who lived in adjacent areas, and that included not only the people of Eastern Europe, it also included the early Chinese kingdoms.

In the third century BC, the first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty in China began the construction of huge wall to protect themselves from nomadic tribes from the steppe region. Of course, we know that wall today as the Great Wall of China. And it had mixed success against those tribes. But over time, the steppe tribes found it increasingly difficult to penetrate the wall, and they began to turn westward. They moved westward across the steppes until they finally found themselves in the western steppe region in the fourth century. That put them in the area north of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. And these people came to be known as the Hunni by the Romans, and of course we know them today as the Huns.

There is another interesting parallel between the Huns and the original Indo-Europeans. As we know, small technological innovations gave the Indo-Europeans huge advantages relative to their neighbors. So horse domestication, dairy farming, wheeled wagons and horse-riding – all of these innovations gave the early Indo-Europeans an advantage which they exploited over time. Well, another technological innovation had been developed on the steppes, and the Huns had mastered this little bit of technology. And with it, the Huns became one of the most feared peoples from Asia all the way to central Europe. And in fact, a compelling argument can be made that this little piece of technology was indirectly responsible for the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, and with it, the expansion of Germanic tribes into the region to fill the vacuum. So in a way, it's ultimately responsible for the spread of Anglo-Saxons and their Old English language into southern Britain. And what was this little innovation? Believe it or not, it was the stirrup.

Now you may say, so what. But it's important to keep in mind that horse-riding was now very common. So the fact that someone could ride a horse wasn't a big deal anymore. Even the Romans had a cavalry, but they relied on their foot soldiers – their infantry. And over time, the Germanic tribes mimicked the Roman military strategies. So the Germans also relied primarily on their infantry. Now a cavalry was good for support, but part of the reason why the Europeans didn't generally wage war on horseback is because they didn't have stirrups. Without them, it was hard to brace yourself or support yourself on horseback. So you had to avoid a sudden turn or sharp contact because you would fall off. So fighting on horseback against an infantry was limited. But all of that changed once you had the stirrup.

Now you could brace yourself, and when necessary, you could literally stand up while riding. You could shoot arrows with deadly aim. And you could maneuver your horse in ways that were impossible before. Once the Huns had mastered this technology, they would attack quickly, and they could retreat just as quickly, and sometimes that sudden retreat would turn into another quick attack. The Europeans had never experienced that kind of warfare before.

The stirrup had actually been developed a few centuries earlier in the steppe region, and it began as a way to make it easier to mount a horse. It was basically a loop which extended on one side of the horse, and it enabled the rider to step into the loop and then pull himself up onto the saddle. So it was like a step. But over time, this innovation was added to both sides of the saddle, and that was really the key to use of the stirrup in warfare. And the first archaeological evidence of the stirrup on both sides of the saddle comes from a tomb in China which dates to the early part of the fourth century.

So the use of stirrups on both sides of the horse was a brand new innovation when the Huns arrived in eastern Europe a few decades later – late in the fourth century.

After arriving in the western steppe region, the Huns spread over southern Russia. And they then turned southward where they encountered the Goths who had been living in the region north of the Black Sea for about a century. Remember that these were the eastern Goths – the group which came to be known as the Ostrogoths. And by this point, the Goths had become settled farmers in this region. But they were no match for the powerful Huns and their cavalry. When the Huns arrived from the east, they tore through the Ostrogothic Kingdom, and they quickly conquered it. They actually slaughtered many of the Gothic people who were living in the region. Some Goths fled, and some remained. The ones that remained became part of a new Hunnic Empire. And many of those Goths ended up fighting with the Huns in later battles, including battles several decades later under the Hunnic leader Attila. But the one's who fled went in the only direction they could go – to the west. And that set in motion a chain reaction.

Now you would think that the use of stirrups would have quickly spread to the Romans and the Germans. But it actually took a couple of centuries before Europeans began to realize the effectiveness of the technology. And by that point, the Western Roman Empire was long gone, and the feudal system was just starting to emerge. And in fact, many historians believe that the adoption of stirrups by the Europeans was an essential part of the development of the later feudal system because the feudal system relied heavily on knights in armor mounted on horseback. And of course that required stirrups.

But it appears that the first Romans and Germans to encounter the stirrup didn't actually understand the full effectiveness of the technology. Apparently, they only saw it as a way to help the rider mount the horse. They didn't fully understand how it could be used in warfare. And part of the reason why we think the early Germans had this simplistic view of the technology is based upon the word they created to describe it. ***Stirrup*** is a Germanic word. And it's actually a combination of the early Germanic words for ***stair*** – as in a step – and ***rope***. And of course we can still hear the roots of ***stair*** and ***rope*** in ***stirrup***. So they simply viewed the technology in its original use as a step to enable the rider to get into the saddle. And by the time they realized the

full potential of the technology, and began to use it themselves, well they were already overrun by the Huns by that point.

The one exception to this rule was the Goths, specifically the Visigoths in Dacia in southeastern Europe. They had observed the destruction of their cousins to the east – the Ostrogoths. And many of those Ostrogoths had fled into the Visigothic territory as refugees. The Visigoths soon encountered the Huns on the eastern fringes of Dacia. Apparently, the Visigoths quickly realized two things. First, stirrups gave the Huns a major advantage in battle. And second, there was no way they were going to defeat the Huns in warfare. So did two things in response. They began using stirrups, and they asked the Romans if they could cross the Danube into Roman territory to avoid annihilation by the Huns. And both of these decisions ultimately changed the face of Western Europe.

The Romans were faced with a dilemma of their own. Did they let the Visigoths into the Empire, or did they refuse them entry and leave them to be carved to pieces by the Huns?

As the Romans pondered this decision – a decision which would have major long-term implications – its important to consider the situation in Rome since the death of Constantine about 40 years earlier. Constantine had brought an end to the Imperial Crisis which I discussed in the last episode. And his reign provided a brief reprieve from the general decline of the Empire in the west.

And when Constantine died in the year 337, new fighting broke out within the Empire, and new fighting also broke out along the Rhine and Danube borders. In the Rhine region, the Romans had some success in the middle part of the fourth century. The Franks and the Alamanni were on the move again, but the Romans scored some victories and fortified their defenses along the Rhine. It was around this time that Rome allowed the Franks to settle across the Rhine as 'federates.' That meant that the Franks were free to live within Roman territory, and they would now serve in the Roman army and fight to defend Rome.

So the situation with the Visigoths was similar to that of the Franks. The Romans could just bring in the Visigoths as federates. In other words, let the Visigoths come in and fight for Rome. And in fact, as far as the Roman army was concerned, the lines between the Romans and the Germans was already becoming blurred. The Franks were fighting in defense of the Empire. And as I've noted before, the Romans were relying more and more on Germanic mercenaries for troops. And increasingly, these Germans were rising to the highest ranks of the Roman army, and they were starting to hold many of the top military commands. At least with respect to the military, the old distinction between 'Romans' and 'Germans' had largely disappeared. The Roman army wasn't really all that Roman anymore. And that meant that the Roman population had become accustomed to relying on Germans for their defense.

So the Romans realized that a group like the Visigoths could be a potential asset to the Empire – especially at a time when they needed new soldiers. And so, the Romans agreed to let the Visigoths cross the Danube into Roman territory. And they basically worked out the same arrangement that they had made with the Franks a few years earlier. The Visigoths were settled

legally into Roman territory, and they agreed to become Roman subjects and all that that meant – including paying taxes and serving in the Roman army. In exchange, the Romans agreed to provide the Goths with food and supplies and eventually new farmlands. The only problem was that the Romans didn't keep their side of the bargain. They weren't prepared to accept 80,000 or more Goths into the Empire. All of this had happened very quickly and Rome couldn't – or wouldn't – provide adequate food and shelter. Within a few months, the Visigoths were beginning to starve, and the conditions started to become unbearable. They had avoided a quick destruction at the hands of the Huns only to experience a slow starvation at the hands of the Romans.

The Visigoths were eventually forced to sell themselves and their children into Roman slavery for food. The Romans even established a price for these sacrifices. For each child offered to Rome as a slave, Rome would provide a dog in return. The dog to be used for food.

The Visigoths finally reached a breaking point in the year 378 – a couple of years after crossing into Roman territory. With nothing left to lose, the Visigoths rose in rebellion throughout the Balkans. The Roman army led by the Emperor Valens engaged the Visigothic army at Adrianople in modern-day Turkey.

Valens underestimated the size of the Visigothic army. He also underestimated a new technology which the Visigoths had picked up from the Huns – the stirrup. And the result was the complete annihilation of the Roman army by the Gothic cavalry. Rough estimates suggest that about 2/3 of the Roman soldiers were killed in the battle including the Emperor Valens himself. It was the worst defeat for the Roman army in 400 years. And it was one of those landmark battles in world history as well because it was the first time that a foreign army was able to permanently occupy Roman territory. Other Germanic tribes had invaded, but the Romans had always been able to eventually turn them back. But the Goths were here to stay.

After the defeat of the Romans by the Visigoths, a cycle ensured which was repeated over and over again for the next 30 years. The Goths and the Romans would fight for a while. They would then agree to a treaty in which the Goths agreed to provide service and troops to the Romans in exchange for land and autonomy. But the Romans would always fail to provide the agreed upon land, or resources, or autonomy. Or sometimes the Romans would just use the Gothic solders as disposable troops on the front line to thereby preserve the Romans troops. Over time, the Goths lost thousands of soldiers fighting Rome's wars. Eventually, the Goths would reach a breaking point and rise in rebellion – and the cycle would repeat itself. This happened over and over again until the Goths finally decided to head for Italy itself.

In the year 402, the Visigoths and the Romans fought each other in northern Italy. The off and on battles extended into the following year when Rome finally began to withdraw troops from the Rhine region and brought them home to protect Rome. And that was the really the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire in the West. With the Rhine border left undefended, the Germanic tribes were basically free to cross the Rhine directly into Roman Gaul. And that is exactly what they did. Without the Rhine border to hold them back, a collection of Germanic tribes began to storm across the Rhine. And this may ultimately be the most significant

consequence of the Visigoth invasion of Italy. The tribes which bolted across the Rhine into Gaul included West Germanic tribes like the Sueves. It included East Germanic tribes like the Vandals. And it even included non-Germanic tribes like the Alans who had been driven westward by the Huns.

These tribes invaded northern Gaul and plundered the region before turning southward and heading towards southern Gaul. I noted in the last episode that the Vandals traveled southward into modern-day Spain, and then crossed into northern Africa where they established their own kingdom there.

And while all of this was going on, another Germanic tribe called the Burgundians took advantage of all these distractions, and they too crossed the Rhine. In time, they came to occupy a significant portion of eastern Gaul. They eventually established their own Burgundian Kingdom there which later became the region of Burgundy in France. So that French 'Burgundy' wine is actually named after a Germanic tribe.

The Roman army was simply unable to deal with all of these incursions. Revolts began to break out within the Roman army itself. Many Romans blamed the declining state of the Empire on the invading Germans. And in retaliation, a large number of Germans were slaughtered in the border regions and within Italy itself.

In the aftermath of this turn of events, many Germans and other non-Romans joined the Gothic army for protection. And by the year 408, the Gothic army was big enough and powerful enough that it began to set his sights on the city of Rome itself.

Under the Gothic king Alaric, the Goths made camp outside of Rome, but the Romans paid them off with gold and silver, and the Goths withdrew. But they were back again two years later, and this time they didn't withdraw. They invaded and sacked Rome which had been unconquered for 800 years. You might remember the episode about the ancient Celts, and how the very early city of Rome was sacked by Celtic-speaking tribes, and how that invasion forever changed the way the Romans viewed the people they considered to be barbarians in the north. Well for 800 years, the city of Rome had defended itself against those barbarians. And in the process, Rome had emerged as one of the most powerful Empires in the history of the world. But now, in the year 410, all of that ended. And it ended at the hands of the Visigoths.

The Visigoths assailed Rome and burned and plundered the city. It was a devastating blow to the psyche of the Romans. The Visigoths actually only stayed for three days, and they carried away as much wealth as possible. In that same year – 410 – the Roman military leaders who were left in Britain requested assistance to fend off invaders from northern Britain – groups like the Scots and the Picts from the region of modern-day Scotland. Rome denied the request. Britain was too far away, and there were too few troops to spare. So 410 was an extremely important year in the crumbling of the Empire. It saw Rome sacked by the Goths, and it also saw Rome basically give up on Britain. A few Roman troops were left behind in Britain, but they were only a token force, and there was no way for them to fend off the invaders which would soon be coming from all directions.

After they sacked Rome, the Visigoths left and eventually migrated northward across the Alps, and then moved westward into southwestern Gaul. Remember that the Romans had abandoned the Rhine defenses by this point. So those Germanic tribes that had poured across the Rhine a few years earlier like the Vandals, the Sueves and the Alans – well they had made it down into modern-day Spain.

The Romans actually enlisted the Visigoths to help them regain control of the Spanish peninsula. The Visigoths agreed and had some success against the various Germanic tribes in the region. In the year 418, the Romans rewarded the Visigoths by giving them land in Aquitania in southern Gaul – or southern France as we know it today. Though Rome considered the Visigoths to be federates of the Empire – living with Roman permission on Roman soil – the Visigoths didn't view it that way at all. They viewed the territory as a new independent Visigothic Kingdom.

By the year 423, Roman control of Western Europe had largely collapsed. There were now three separate Germanic kingdoms in Gaul. There was the new Visigothic kingdom in Aquitaine. There was the Burgundian kingdom in southeastern Gaul. And there was the Frankish kingdom in the northeast along the Rhine. Meanwhile, down in modern-day Spain, there were two other Germanic kingdoms: the Suevians in the northwest, and the Alans had merged with the Vandals in the south.

Roman power was quickly collapsing and Germanic tribes were filling the void. As Roman power collapsed, the Franks took advantage of the situation, and they began to expand southward from northern Gaul. As the Franks expanded southward, they began to push the Visigoths southward as well. Increasingly, the Visigoths settled in northern Spain. And that eventually forced the Vandals from southern Spain into north Africa as I mentioned in the last episode. So we can see how this type of chain reaction would occur. When one tribe moved, it caused a domino effect, and ended up pushing many other tribes out in front of it.

For the next three centuries, the Goths in Spain flourished under a succession of kings in what would come to be known as the Visigothic Kingdom. The Visigothic kingdom expanded over time to include most of Spain, as well as Aquitania in southern Gaul. But the expanding Franks eventually took Aquitania back from the Goths. But in Spain, the Goths continued to rule for a couple of more centuries until the Muslim Moors invaded from northern Africa.

At this point, we have to return to the Huns. They had conquered the territory of the Goths in Eastern Europe a few decades earlier, and they had set in motion a chain-reaction of their own. And they now had a new leader named Attila, and they were beginning to look to the west. The Eastern Roman Empire was still relatively strong, but the Western Empire was falling apart. So the West was the place to be if you a were a Hun looking to expand into a new territory.

In the middle of the fifth Century, the Huns moved westward into the Germania. And by the year 451, they had actually crossed the Rhine, and they were now in Roman territory in Gaul. By this point, the Empire of the Huns almost equaled the Roman Empire in physical size. And Attila's army included not only Huns, but many other Germanic allies, including many Ostrogoths who were now forced to provide service to the Huns.

Atilla laid waste to the northern region of Gaul. In response, the Romans enlisted the Visigoths and the Franks to form a unified front in order to repel the Huns. After all, the Huns were a threat to everybody in the region. Together, the Romans, the Visigoths and Franks were able to force Attila to withdraw from the region and return back across the Rhine. In the following year, Attila set his sights on Italy. He was headed straight for Rome when Leo, the bishop of Rome, intervened. The exact details are unknown, but Leo persuaded Attila to spare Rome and retreat. Maybe Attila was too superstitious to attack the home of the Catholic Church. Or maybe he was paid off. We may never know. But we do know that Rome was spared from the Huns. And we also know that Attila died the following year. In his absence, and without his strong leadership, the Hunnic Empire quickly collapsed. The Empire was divided among Attila's brothers and son, and then, the divided Empire had to deal with an uprising by Germanic peoples who saw an opportunity to overthrow the Huns with the death of Attila. Within a year after Attila's death, the Hunnic Empire was gone.

Though Rome was spared from attack by the Huns, it was of little consequence. Because the Vandals arrived from Northern Africa just three years later. And they remained for two weeks and basically stripped the city bare of everything movable and valuable. To deal with the Vandals, the Romans had to withdraw even more troops from Gaul. And that allowed the Germans – especially the Franks – to expand even further throughout Gaul.

By this point, the Roman imperial government in the West was just a nominal government. It no longer had any real power. The real power in Western Europe lay with the Germanic kingdoms that had taken over.

The only vestige of Roman power in the West was within Italy itself. And most of the remaining Roman troops there was composed of Germanic mercenaries. At some point, around the year 476, these troops apparently decided , 'What's the point?' Why are we fighting for the Romans.' There wasn't really an Empire left anymore. All the benefit of fighting for Rome was gone. So in that year – 476 – the Germanic soldier Odoacer overthrew the completely powerless teenage Roman Emperor. Technically, Odoacer became the last Roman emperor in the west. But he had no use for the title. It was really just a hollow title at that point. He recognized the Eastern Roman Emperor in Constantinople as the true successor to the original Roman Empire. He sent the imperial cloak and crown to Constantinople. And that was it. The official end of the Roman Empire in the West.

But there's a little more history beyond this date of 476 which is often cited as the official end of the Empire. The Eastern Empire wasn't exactly happy that the Western Roman Emperor had been overthrown by Odoacer. Meanwhile, after the collapse of the Huns, the Ostrogoths had once again emerged as an independent tribe. And over time, they followed basically the same path that their cousins – the Visigoths – had followed a few decades earlier. They traveled throughout southeastern Europe. And found themselves on the border of the Eastern Roman Empire.

It was at this point that the Eastern Empire offered the Ostrogoths a deal. If they went to Italy and removed Odoacer from power, then they could rule Italy in his absence. This allowed the Eastern Empire to kill two birds with one stone. They could get rid of Odoacer in Italy, and they could get rid of the Ostrogothic threat at the same time.

The Ostrogoths accepted the offer, and they invaded northern Italy in the year 488 – about twelve years after Odoacer had taken over there. The Ostrogoths eventually emerged victorious, and they established a kingdom in Northern Italy. In the end, that kingdom was short-lived. It only lasted about fifty years. The Eastern Roman Empire under the Emperor Justinian eventually swept in took the region back from the Goths around the middle of the sixth century. An official in Justinian's court named Procopius wrote three histories during his lifetime. All of them were written in Greek which was the language of the Eastern Empire. One dealt specifically with the Eastern Empire's wars against the Ostrogoths in Italy as well as the Vandals in North Africa. Another one dealt with the buildings built during Justinian's reign. But the third one was titled ***Anekdota***, which literally meant 'unpublished things' in Greek. This collection wasn't published during the lifetime of Procopius because it contained attacks on the Emperor Justinian, the Emperor's wife, and other officials. It also contained a lot of scandalous stories and allegations. But this third book was published after Procopius died. And its title – ***Anekdota*** – came to mean a short story about someone or something, usually an amusing story. And of course, we know it today as ***anecdote*** in Modern English.

So all of this history basically takes us to the end of the fifth century around the year 500. And we can finally stop and catch our breath.

Over the preceding century, we've seen the fall of Western Rome. We've seen the rise of the Gothic and other Germanic kingdoms, and we've seen the rise and fall of the Huns.

Needless to say, the political and military changes during this period were enormous. And there were linguistic changes as well. But compared to the political changes, the linguistic changes were not as great as you might expect. With Germanic kingdoms now in control of much of the Latin-speaking territory in Western Europe, we might expect Germanic languages to gradually replace Latin there. But with one notable exception, that's not what happened. Of course, that one exception is notable because it's English. We'll look at why the Anglo-Saxon dialects took root in Britain in the next few episodes, but in continental Europe, the Germanic languages didn't replace Latin.

The new Germanic kingdoms like the Visigoths in Spain, the Franks in Gaul and the Ostrogoths in Italy – they were all ruled by an elite Germanic-speaking ruling class. But they ruled over a native population that spoke Latin. Latin was too ingrained by this point. But there was more to it than that.

Though the Roman Empire had collapsed, Latin was still held in very high regard. It was still associated with the glory days of Rome. It was the language of Roman culture and Roman scholarship. In most of these cases, the new Germanic rulers saw themselves as extensions of the

earlier Romans rulers. And the evidence suggests that rulers like the Visigoths actually sought to learn Latin since it held such a high status and was associated with Roman culture and power.

Of course, there were other factors at work as well. The rapidly expanding Catholic Church was centered in Rome. Early on, most Christian texts had been written in Greek. But since the Catholic Church was headquartered in Rome, the Roman Church chose to translate the Greek texts into Latin. By the end of the fourth century, Latin was the official language of the Catholic Church, and that meant that all Church business was being conducted in Latin. This gave a Latin an additional prestige above regional Germanic languages.

But there was also another factor at work. With so much turmoil in Europe, and with so many people on the move, it became important for people in different regions to find a common language for communication. And for all the reasons which I just mentioned, Latin was the obvious choice as a lingua franca. In fact, it was already a lingua franca due to the power and prestige of the Roman Empire. So it was natural for people to gravitate to Latin as a common international language.

The need for a common language was further heightened by the fact that both Latin and the Germanic languages were beginning to fracture into distinct regional dialects and languages.

As we know by now, languages are constantly evolving. And as people become isolated from each other, the natural process of language change means that regional variations start to emerge. And over time these differences will continue to evolve until the dialects cannot be mutually understood, and we can then call them distinct languages.

Well that process can be slowed if there is an education system that imposes a standard version of the language on everyone – or almost everyone. So if everyone is required to study a common standardized form of English in school, that tends to keep us all on the same page speaking the same language. Regional variations will still occur and develop over time, but we all have a common anchor which slows that process down a bit.

And that was what had helped to preserve a standardized form Latin throughout the Roman Empire. As long as the Roman educational system was in place, a standardized form of Latin was taught and regional variations were minimized. But when the Roman Empire collapsed in the west, the Roman educational system also collapsed. And when that went away, the anchor that was holding a common form of Latin in place also gave way. And as we might expect, with the fall of Rome, those regional Vulgar Latin dialects quickly evolved in separate and distinct languages. Within three or four centuries, we'll start to refer to these regional dialects by new names – French, Spanish, Portugese, Italian, and so on.

Of course, the Germanic regions never had a standardized education system akin to the Roman system. So there was never anything in place to keep the Germanic dialects from rapidly evolving into new languages. So that process was well under way within the Germanic regions as well.

So linguistic diversity was increasingly common throughout Western Europe. And as each region began to evolve its own dialect and its own language, it became even more important for these people to find ways to communicate with each other. And that brings us back to Latin. The standardized form of Latin remained a useful lingua franca even as the language itself was in the process of fracturing and evolving out of existence. The early French speakers could still communicate with the early Spanish speakers and the early Italian speakers, as long as they all reverted back to the original Latin.

So we can see how Latin maintained its footing in Western Europe. And we can see why the new Germanic rulers in this region ultimately learned to speak Latin rather than trying to force the natives to learn a foreign Germanic language.

But if we look close enough, we can see that some of the words from those Germanic languages did filter down into the various Romance languages. And the number of Germanic words which survived in the respective Romance languages is directly related to the amount of time in which the Germanic kingdoms were in place in those regions.

For example, the Franks established the modern nation of France. So their influence on early French was substantial. We'll look a little more closely at the Franks in the next episode. With respect to the Goths, the Ostrogoths were only in charge of Italy for a few decades. So the influence of the Gothic language in Italy is very limited. Perhaps only a handful of Gothic words survive into modern Italian. And even then, it's difficult to determine if the Germanic words which passed into early Italian came from the Goths or from another Germanic tribe. As we'll see next time, the Gothic kingdom in Italy was later succeeded by another Germanic kingdom – the Lombards. And Germanic tribes were a regular presence in and around Italy during this period. So the etymology of those Italian words is tricky.

But in Spain, the Visigothic kingdom was in place for over two centuries. So it's a little easier to identify Gothic words in modern Spanish.

In earlier episodes, I discussed the fact that the Goths had a word – ***reiks*** – which meant 'powerful, ruler, or kingdom'. The Old English version of that word was ***rice*** (/ree-kuh/), and it eventually evolved into the word ***rice*** (/ree-chuh/). And it later evolved into the word ***rich*** in Modern English. Well, the Gothic version of that word – ***reiks*** – passed into the Latin spoken in Spain during the time of the Visigoths. And from there, it passed into later Spanish.

We see it in the word ***rico*** which means ***rich*** in Spanish. For example, ***Puerto Rico*** means 'rich port.' Well, Spanish ***rico*** sounds similar to English ***rich*** because they have a common Germanic origin – not a common Latin origin.

That word was also part of the name of the last Visigoth ruler of Spain. His name was ***Roderic***. It was a combination of the Gothic word ***hrod*** meaning 'renown' and ***reiks*** meaning 'powerful or ruler.' Well, the name ***Roderick*** passed into Spanish, and we see it in modern Spanish names like ***Rodrigo***, and very common surnames like ***Rodriguez*** and ***Ruiz***. Again, those names have Gothic origins.

There was another Gothic name that used this suffix ***ric*** or ***reek***. It was ***Amalric***. And that name passed into both Italian and Spanish. The Spanish name was ***Americo***, and the Italian version of the name was ***Amerigo***. And you might know that an Italian explorer with the name Amerigo Vespucci concluded shortly after Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic that Columbus didn't actually reach eastern Asia as originally thought. Vespucci realized that Columbus had actually discovered a new continent – what ended up being two continents. And both of those continents were named after him – North and South America. So ***America*** is a word derived from an Italian name which ultimately came from a Gothic name. So if the Ostrogoths hadn't established a kingdom in Italy in the fifth century, we probably wouldn't have the name ***America*** today.

By the way, the Spanish words ***guardia*** meaning 'guard,' ***ganso*** meaning 'goose,' ***banda*** meaning 'band or group,' and ***atacar*** meaning 'attack,' all came from Gothic words. And that's why all of those word resemble the modern English version of those words.

Ultimately, the Gothic language disappeared after the collapse of the Ostrogoth and Visigoth kingdoms. In fact, it may have disappeared before then because, as we've seen, Latin remained the dominant language within those kingdoms.

But there is one little footnote to this story. In the 1500s, a Flemish ambassador in the Crimean region in the northern part of the Black Sea claimed to have discovered people speaking Gothic. He believed it to be a vestige of the original Ostrogthic language from the time when the Ostrogths had lived there over a thousand years earlier. He recorded about a hundred words from the language in a letter which was published a few years later. The words are actually very similar to the words used by Wulfilas in the Gothic translation of the Bible. Linguists later traveled to the region to investigate the purported language, but none of them were able to confirm that it actually existed. So this still remains a bit of a mystery. But it is certainly possible that the Gothic language survived in some form in the northern Black Sea region as recently as five centuries ago.

So that concludes our look at Gothic and the end of the Roman Empire in the West. Next time, we going to begin the transition to Old English. We're going to turn our attention northward to the coastal regions around northern Germany and Demark. It is here that a handful of Germanic tribes known as the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians sought to take advantage of the Roman collapse in the West. And one of their targets was the formerly Roman territory of southern Britain. So we'll look at who these tribes were and how their continental languages became the language we know as Old English.

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