THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 31:
SAXONS, FRANKS AND OTHER WEST GERMANS

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Welcome to The History of English Podcast, a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 31: Saxons, Franks and Other West Germans. Over the last few episodes, we've explored the Anglo-Saxon migrations to Britain, but the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians were only a few of the tribes in Northern Europe who spoke closely-related languages called the West Germanic languages. The tribes who spoke those other West Germanic languages back in continental Europe, they ultimately gave us modern languages like German, Dutch and Frisian, and they influenced the development of early French as it evolved from Latin. In fact, despite their linguistic differences, the modern nation-states of France and Germany can both be traced back to these West Germanic tribes.

So in this episode, we're going to briefly turn our attention back to the continent to explore what happened to these West German cousins of the Anglo-Saxons. These events will help us to see how English fits in within the sub-family of Germanic languages, and we'll also discover the roots of some modern English words which originated from these tribes. And ultimately the events of this episode will set the stage for later events in France, which will have a huge impact on English after the year 1066. So let's turn our attention to the other West Germans, and let's begin where we left off last time – in Britain.

Over the last couple of episodes, we looked at the fifth and sixth centuries in Britain, and this time frame represents the period during which a large portion of Britain passed from the Romans to the Anglo-Saxons. And the language of the Anglo-Saxons was really just a different version of the West Germanic languages spoken back in northern Germany and Denmark.

The reconstructed versions of those early West Germanic languages reveals that they were all very similar, but we may never know exactly how similar they were because none of them were written down during this period, except for an occasional runic inscription.

But by the year 600, at the end of this two century transitional period, we start to get the first text written in Old English. And for the first time, we can actually read and study the language of the Anglo-Saxons as it existed at that point in history. And while some regional differences can be detected, it's very clear that the Anglo-Saxons were speaking a common language by the end of this transitional period around the year 600.

And for many linguists, this marks the official beginning of the Old English period – the point at which we actually have text to examine and study.

But while the Anglo-Saxons were busy establishing the foundations of Modern England, their West Germanic cousins back on the continent were busy laying the foundations of Modern Germany and France. And just as the roots of English began to emerge during this period, the roots of modern German also began to emerge, specifically the High German dialects in Southern Germany, which we tend to associate with modern German.

And during the same time period, the Frankish kingdom emerged in Gaul and in the region east of Gaul, and the West Germanic language of the Franks began to seep into the Late Latin of Gaul and some of those Frankish words were retained as Latin evolved into French. And from there, those Frankish words passed into English after the Norman conquest of England.

So before we leave the fifth and sixth centuries, we have to consider what was happening during this period in continental Europe. And let's begin our look at continental Europe by focusing on the homeland of the Anglo-Saxons in the North Sea Region.

According to the later Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, the homeland of the Angles was left vacant after the migration to Britain occurred, and this is also confirmed by the archeological evidence from the region. So it appears that virtually all of the people known as the Angles left their homeland and traveled to Britain. But in contrast, only a portion of the Saxons who lived next door made that same migration to Britain. And this is actually a very important point as it relates to the early history of England and the terms that were used to describe it.

The Saxons were a much larger and more powerful tribe in continental Europe, and that's part of the reason why so many of the early sources referred to the Anglo-Saxons invaders as simply "the Saxons." But since all of the Angles apparently made the trip to Britain, but only a portion of the Saxons did, the Angles began to emerge as the more dominant group within Britain itself. And soon all of the various groups within Britain began to refer to their language as English – not Saxon. And that reflects how the balance of power between the Angles and Saxons had shifted from continental Europe to Britain.

But back on the continent, the Saxons who remained continued to be a formidable power, but they were only one of several Germanic powers in central and western Europe. The Saxon's immediate neighbors to the southwest were the Franks, but further south, other Germanic tribes were still in place. And this included remnants of the Alemanni tribe as well as the Burgundians who had established their own kingdom by the sixth century.

It also included tribes like the Lombards and the people who became known as the Bavarians. One of these groups is particularly important to the overall story of the Germanic languages, and that's the Lombards.

The original Saxon tribes had been a coalition of other smaller tribes and groups. One of those groups was the remnants of a tribe called the Langobards or Lombards. Shortly, after the time of Tacitus about four or five centuries earlier, the original Lombard tribe in the region of Northern Europe began to split.

A few of those Lombards stayed put and they became a part of the Saxons, but others headed south. So linguist believe that these early Lombards spoke a Germanic dialect that was very close to the Saxon dialect, and in fact it may have contributed to that original Saxon dialect. But that main group of Lombards headed south.

By the end of the sixth century, they had established their own kingdom in Northern Italy – the origin of the modern Lombardy region. So the Lombards were seizing control of Northern Italy at a time when the Anglo-Saxons were establishing their kingdoms in Britain. But whereas the Old English language of the Anglo-Saxons have remained very similar to that original Saxon dialect, the language of the Lombards in Italy had changed significantly over the centuries.

The earliest Lombard texts revealed that their Germanic language had undergone several specific changes. Specifically, certain consonant sounds had started to shift to new sounds. And we've seen that that's a natural process which happens from time to time, but this change wasn't only present in the Lombardy dialect.

Other Germanic tribes to the immediate north – and in the region of Bavaria, and Switzerland, and Austria – their languages also reflect the same sound shifts. At some point between the third century and the sixth century, the language of all the Germanic tribes in these mountainous regions had become distinct and different from the Germanic languages to the north.

And as the Lombards had migrated through this region during this period, their language had experienced the same changes. So that indicates that all of these various Germanic tribes must have been in regular contact with each other so that all of their dialects experience these same changes.

And these changes mark the early distinction between the Low German dialects in Northern Germany from the High German dialects in and around southern and central Germany and in the surrounding areas. And even though modern German is composed of both Low German and High German dialects, we typically associate the modern German language with the High German dialects. So these changes mark a very basic distinction between modern English and modern German.

In many respects, Old English actually remained closed to the original Proto-Germanic language throughout the original Anglo-Saxon period. But the early version of modern German underwent these specific sound changes, and it gradually began to evolve in its own direction away from the original Proto-Germanic language.

And of course English underwent its own radical changes after the Normans invaded England in 1066. The net result today is that it's difficult to see and hear the common roots of English and German, but they're still there if you look closely enough.

Now, keep in mind that High German refers to elevation, not latitude. So these High German dialects are spoken in the higher mountainous regions in the South and the Low German dialects are spoken closer to the North Sea in Northern Europe.

This series of High German sound shifts is typically called the Second Germanic Sound Shift. The First Germanic Sound Shift are those changes associated with Grimm's Law which we looked at in some detail in earlier episodes. And those changes affected all of the Germanic languages including Old English. But the Second Germanic Sound Shift occurred much later, and

it only affected these Germanic languages around central and southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Now the Second or High German Sound Shift, it doesn't really impact English, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it here. But it is interesting as an illustration of how certain languages undergo regular sound changes. And in fact many of the specific sound changes associated with this second sound shift are very reminiscent of the earlier changes associated with Grimm's Law or the first sound shift.

For example, under Grimm's Law, many of the Indo-European 'P' sounds had shifted to 'F' sounds. The same thing started to happen again within these specific High German dialects. Some of the Germanic 'P' sounds which had been retained within these dialects began to undergo a completely new shift to the 'F' sound – or in some cases to an in-between 'P-F' sound where the sound just got stuck between the two sounds.

We can see some of these changes by comparing modern English words to modern German words. So in English, we have the word ***help***, and in Old English, it was ***helpan***. So it had that Germanic 'P' sound in the middle. Well the same word in modern German is ***helfen*** with the F sound. So the modern German word reflects this later 'P' to 'F' sound shift which happened around this time in the High German dialects.

We can also see the same change in the English word ***open*** with the 'P' sound and the German version of the same word which is ***ofen*** with the 'F' sound. Another sound change which occurred as part of this second High German sound shift was the 'T' sound which became a sibilant sound, either a 'TS' sound or an 'S' sound or a 'Z' sound. And we can hear that change in the English number ***ten*** and its German equivalent, ***tsin***. And we can hear it in the English word, ***tooth*** as well. The original Proto-Germanic version of the word ***tooth*** was ***tanth***. Well English retained the original 'T' sound at the beginning, but the sound shifted in Old High German, and today the German version of the word is ***Zahn*** with a sibilant at the front instead of the original 'T' sound.

We can also compare the Modern English ***water*** with the 't' sound in the middle with the Modern German word, ***Wasser*** with the 'S' sound in the middle. And by the way, that shift from the 'W' sound at the beginning to the 'V' sound at the beginning – that was an even later sound shift within German.

There were some other sound changes associated with the High German Sound Shift as well. For example, the 'B' sound shifted to a 'P' sound, and the 'D' sound shifted to a 'T' sound, and the 'G' sound shifted to a 'K' sound, and there were some other sound changes mixed in also. And some of these sound changes occurred in certain regions, but not in others.

But the major point here is that these sound changes marked the beginning of the Modern German language and these changes were taking place around the same time that the Anglo-Saxon dialects were emerging as a distinct language up in Britain.

Now, while the High German dialects were incorporating these sound changes, most of the Germanic dialects to the north tended to retain the original Germanic consonants. And this region to the north included the homeland of the Angles and Saxons and Frisians, and it also included the region of the Franks.

And by this point, the Franks had expanded deep into Gaul. This period in the fifth and sixth centuries was the period during which the Germanic tribes were pouring into the formally Roman territory in Western Europe.

As we know, the Germanic languages had traditionally been spoken on one side of the Rhine and the Danube and Latin had been spoken on the other side. But with Germanic tribes pouring across these borders, the Germanic languages began to encroach into Latin territory.

Now, to be fair, the linguistic dividing line between the Germanic languages and Latin can't be defined with any certainty during this early period. The Rhine and the Danube once formed a strong political border, and therefore, it probably presented a linguistic border as well. But when that political border collapsed, the linguistic dividing line also began to collapse. Over the four or five centuries after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the Germanic languages spread westward across the Rhine, about 50 to 100 miles primarily due to the expansion of the Franks and the Alemanni into Gaul.

The Germanic languages also spread southward across the Danube about 100 to 200 miles down into the regions of modern Switzerland and modern Austria, and this expansion was primarily due to the migration of the Bavarians across the Danube.

Now written records are very sparse during this period, so it's difficult to mark the advancement of the Germanic dialects. But in some regions, very old cemeteries mark the change. The oldest names are Latin or Roman names, and then there's a gradual shift to Germanic names. So these cemeteries helped to mark that gradual change which occurred. And in some cases, if the dates of death can be identified or established, it can even provide a general time frame.

Now linguist can't really establish the dividing line with any certainty until around the thirteenth century. But what's really amazing is how little that dividing line has moved over the centuries despite all of the wars and turmoil in Europe from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century.

Now, small fluctuations still occur, but for the most part, the linguistic dividing line between the Latin-based languages and the Germanic languages has changed very little over the past thousand years.

And all of that means that even though Roman territory in western Europe fell to Germanic tribes, the Germanic languages only encroached a few miles across the ancient borders. Most of the Roman territory continued to speak Latin or a local Vulgar Latin dialect, and that was certainly the case in Gaul.

Early on the Visigoths have moved in and taken control of southern and central Gaul, and their kingdom extended all the way down into Spain. And at the same time, the Franks had moved into northern Gaul and taken control there. So around the fifth century when the Anglo-Saxon conquest began in Britain, Gaul was divided between the Franks in the north and the Visigoths in the south. But the Franks eventually pushed the Visigoths all the way down into Spain where the Visigothic Kingdom was established.

Now initially, even though the Franks were expanding throughout Gaul, there was no unified control of the region. The Franks were a confederation of tribes, so there were actually several different Frankish tribes in control of much of Gaul. And this was actually similar to the situation back in Britain.

Even though the Anglo-Saxons conquered a large portion of Britain, they were initially divided between several independent kingdoms, but the Frankish tribes in Gaul became unified much earlier than the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. In fact the Anglo-Saxons didn't really begin to unify until the Vikings began to invade in the ninth and tenth centuries. But the Franks became unified soon after they conquered the Visigothic territory in Southern Gaul around the sixth century, and they became unified under the leadership of the first great Frankish leader, Clovis.

Of course, Clovis didn't simply convince the other Franks that he would be a good leader for them. I mean these were the Dark Ages or early Middle Ages as some prefer to call it. And leaders didn't ask for power, they took it, and Clovis was no exception. He became the leader of the unified Frankish kingdom by defeating or killing his other Frankish rivals, most of whom were probably cousins or close relatives.

As we know by now, the Frankish kingdom ultimately gave us the nation state of France. And since France was ruled by kings until the nineteenth century, French history is typically divided into family dynasties, just as English history is divided into family dynasties like the Normans and Plantagenets, Tudors and so on.

The very first family dynasty in French history were the Merovingians, and Clovis was one of the first of the Merovingians. I say he was 'one of the first' because within his own Frankish tribe, he was preceded by his father, Childeric and his father, Merovech and his father, Chlodio.

Now, Clovis's grandfather, Merovech, was the source of the family line, the Merovingians. So you may ask why they chose to name the family dynasty after Merovech, the grandfather, and not Chlodio, the great grandfather – after all family dynasties are usually named after the first or oldest ancestor.

Well, the answer may lie in the name of Merovech and what it meant in the Frankish language. Now, very little is known about those two first kings, Chlodio and Merovech, and in fact it's very possible that neither of them actually existed. The later Franks developed a mythology about the founding of the Merovingian dynasty, so it's very possible that the limited information that we have about these two early kings was the stuff of later legend.

But we do know that the name of the son, Merovech, meant 'Son of the Sea' in the Frankish language. In fact, you might remember that ***mer*** was the Old English word for sea, and we still have it in the Modern English word ***mermaid***. Well the Franks were early neighbors of the Saxons, and their West Germanic language was very similar to the language of the Saxons. So the Franks had essentially the same word for sea. And that word ***mer*** was the root of ***Merovech***, meaning 'Son of the Sea.'

So what's the significance of that name? Well, it appears that the later Franks developed a legend to explain why the name meant 'Son of the Sea.' They said that Merovech's father was not actually Chlodio. It was actually the god of the sea, so that's why ***Merovech*** meant 'Son of the Sea.' And according to the legend, the god married Merovech's mother, the queen, and they had a child, Merovech. So Merovech's father was a god, and therefore not Chlodio. So if Chlodio wasn't really Merovech's father, you can't name the family dynasty after him, so you had to name it after Merovech, since he was the oldest male ancestor in the family line. So it appears that the name of the Merovingian dynasty was based upon this later legend developed around the meaning of the name ***Merovech***.

Again, when it comes to these early Frankish leaders, Chlodio and Merovech, we're mostly dealing with the stuff of legend. If they were real people, they lived in the fifth century around the same time that the Anglo-Saxons were beginning to invade Britain, and at the same time the Franks were expanding throughout Northern Gaul.

And the last time, we looked at how the Welsh and the Bretons developed a legend around a purported military leader named Arthur, and the Franks did the same type of thing here with respect to the early ancestors of Clovis.

So this was a period in which stories passed in the oral tradition. And sometimes these stories, and poems and songs were embellished along the way, and they developed into these legendary stories.

By the year 457, Merovech's son, Childeric, was in place as a Frankish king. In fact, he was one of the several Frankish kings who were all related by blood. Each king ruled over his own tribe within the larger confederation of Frankish tribes.

You might recall that the Franks were federates of Rome, meaning that they had been allowed into the Roman territory of Gaul in exchange for their agreement to fight on Rome's behalf. Well, pursuant to that agreement, Childeric led his Franks in battle against the Visigoths around the year 463, and this was part of that larger effort to force the Goths out of Gaul and to push them down into Spain.

And surely after the battles against the Goths, Childeric turned his attention to the neighboring Saxons to the east. And these were the Saxons who were still living on the continent, and this was around the same time that the Saxons were starting to migrate to Britain in large numbers.

The Saxons were looking to expand out of northern Germany and they were looking at two options, either across the North Sea to Britain, or westward across the Rhine into Northern Gaul. Of course the problem with that land route was the fact that it took them right into the Frankish territory. And the Franks were not inclined to share.

Childeric led his Frankish troops against the invading Saxons, and he repelled them. And that's actually important to the story of English, because it meant that northern Gaul was not really going to be an option for the continental Saxons. So if Childeric and the Franks had not defeated the Saxons, the Saxons may have focused their migrations more on Gaul. It certainly would have been easier for them to travel across land to the west, but with Gaul blocked by Childeric and the Franks, the Saxons had to focus on expansion by sea to the island of Britain. And this was a major factor in the migration of Saxons to Britain and the ultimate rise of Anglo-Saxon power in Britain. So you can see how all of these pieces are connected.

In the year 481, Childeric died, and at that point, the Franks were still a confederation of scattered tribes and chieftains. But Childeric's son, Clovis, changed all of that. As I noted earlier, it was Clovis who welded the various Frankish factions into a single unified Frankish kingdom. It was sometimes a brutal business, but when all was said and done, Clovis emerged as the first leader of a unified Frankish kingdom, and it was also a very powerful kingdom once it was unified under a single strong leader like Clovis.

Under his leadership, the Franks expanded their territory throughout Gaul. They battled other Germanic tribes like the Thuringians, the Alemanni, the Burgundians and the Visigoths. And by the time of Clovis's death, the Franks controlled most of Gaul. The Burgundians were actually still in place in the southeast and the Bretons were still in control of Brittany in the far northwest. But most of the rest of modern France was under Frankish control by the time Clovis died. And Clovis had been baptized a Christian, and therefore the Franks embraced Christianity as the state religion.

So Clovis is one of those very important leaders of this period because he unified the Franks, he conquered most of Gaul, and he established the Frankish kingdom as a Christian kingdom rather than a pagan kingdom. And this was in contrast to the Anglo-Saxons over in Britain who were also busy conquering much of that area but they did so while continuing to worship their Germanic gods. And this will come very important in the next episode when we turn our attention back to Britain.

But for now, in Gaul, we can start to see the formation of the modern nation-state of France, and Clovis is generally considered the first king of what would become France. Originally, it was the Frankish kingdom. It later became known as ***Frankia*** and thanks to the French assibilation of the 'K' sound, it later became ***Francia***, and then later ***France***. And this means that the ultimate political roots of both England and France lie in Germany, among a group of tribes speaking closely-related West Germanic languages.

And there's no better example of the Germanic roots of France than the name ***Clovis***. It's a name which provides a direct connection between the later series of German kings named ***Ludwig*** and all of those French kings names ***Louis***.

So let's take a closer look at the name ***Clovis***. In the last episode, I mentioned that the names of a lot prominent leaders from this period weren't originally personal names, they were actually titles. And over time, the original meaning of the title was lost, and later generations just assumed the name was a personal name. And ***Arthur*** may have been an example of that process. Well ***Clovis*** is another example. And as we'll see, related names like ***Ludwig*** and ***Louis*** were all derived from a Germanic title. It's important to keep in mind that Clovis wasn't actually known as ***Clovis*** during his lifetime. He was actually ***Clodevic***. The later French shortened the name, and it eventually evolved into ***Clovis***, but the original name was that full name or full title – ***Clodevic***. And ***Clodevic*** was a Germanic title which meant 'famous or well-known warrior.' It was composed of two separate Germanic words, ***hlud*** meaning famous and ***wig*** meaning warrior.

Hlud was an old word with Indo-European roots. The original Indo-European version of the word was a verb which meant 'to hear', but it evolved into a sense of 'something heard', especially 'something praised or celebrated'. Now the Germanic version of the word also existed in Old English where it eventually evolved into the modern English word ***loud***, again with the sense of 'something heard.' It's also actually the ultimate root of the modern English word ***listen***. Well within the Germanic language of the Franks, the word ***hlud*** had taken on a meaning of 'something praised or celebrated'. So it came to mean famous or prominent. So that was ***hlud***.

The second part of the Germanic title was ***wig*** which meant warrior. So ***hlud*** plus ***wig*** gave us the word ***Hludwig*** – the Germanic title meaning famous or prominent warrior. And Hludwig eventually evolved into ***Ludwig*** in German. And it was used as the name for several later Germanic kings, and it was also adopted as a personal name – for example, Ludwig van Beethoven.

Well within a Germanic language of the Franks, ***Ludwig*** became ***Clodevic***, and that was what Clovis was originally called. And by that time of later French, the name ***Clodevic*** was simply considered a personal name, and as I said, it was eventually shortened into ***Clovis***.

But that original Germanic title ***Hludwig*** was borrowed into the Late Latin language which was being spoken in the Frankish kingdom. And in the Late Latin translation, ***Hludwig*** became ***Ludovicus***, and in early French, ***Ludovicus*** was shortened to ***Lewis***. And this was the same process that had shorted ***Clodevic*** into ***Clovis***. So ***Ludovicus*** became ***Lewis***, and then as the French language continues to evolve, ***Lewis*** became ***Louis***, and ***Louis*** became a popular name for French kings. In fact there were eighteen French kings named ***Louis***.

Now part of the reason for this exercise was to see the Germanic influence in early France. The name ***Louie***, which is probably the most regal of all French names, is actually a Germanic name in origin.

As I noted in earlier episodes, even though the Franks were a Germanic tribe or group of tribes, they were heavily influenced by Rome. They saw themselves as the successors of Rome in Gaul, so they were inclined to borrow heavily from Roman culture. They adopted Roman laws, and when they wrote them down, they wrote them down in Latin.

As we know, the Germanic tribes were illiterate except for a few basic runic inscriptions. So Frankish scribes tended to write in the written language of the Romans. And since the Franks were a minority ruling class, their Germanic language soon gave way to the early Medieval Latin and local Vulgar Latin dialects which were spoken throughout Gaul.

Within a few generations, the Germanic language of the Franks had largely disappeared in Gaul as it became consumed within the evolving language of French. And in the process, about 500 Frankish words passed into French, and as we'll see shortly, a few of those later passed into English.

Within two or three centuries, this synthesis of Frankish culture and Roman culture became fully realized under the rule of Charlemagne – the first leader to bear the dual title of King of the Franks and Emperor of the Romans. But early on, we basically had Germanic rulers governing a Roman society.

But before we turn to the Frankish influence on English, let's take a minute and explore the evolution of the early Frankish kingdom from the time of Clovis. Now Clovis not only expanded the Frankish kingdom southward by defeating the Visigoths, he also expanded the territory eastward into the Germanic regions.

By the year 496, the Franks under Clovis battled the Alemanni kingdom on the upper Rhine. And the Franks defeated the Alemanni and as a result, the Frankish territory expanded across the Rhine into western Germany. And this was the beginning of a general expansion into Germany, and as a result, the beginning of a process which ultimately brought much of Germany under Frankish control as well. Around this same time, Clovis moved his residence to a small city called Paris, and this city soon became the center of the Frankish government. And of course, it also emerged as the most prominent city in the kingdom.

In the year 511, Clovis died, but his successors continued to expand the territory of the kingdom. The Burgundian kingdom in the southeast was soon conquered and annexed, and with the addition of that region, most of Gaul was now under the control of the Franks except the Brittany region in the far northwest and a small region along the southern coast.

They also added much of Germania across the Rhine all the way up to the middle Danube around Bohemia. And now for the first time, much of Germania was being ruled by a power west of the Rhine.

Now even though they conquered the region, the early Franks actually took little interest in their German territories. They didn't bother to expand Christianity into Germania, and they didn't bother to establish mints there either. The Germans did use coins, which found their way in from

the outside, but they didn't mint their own coins, and they didn't generally use them in their economy. And in fact, the runic script, which the very early Germanic tribes had used for writing, it also died out in much of Germania in the seventh century. But the alphabet had not spread there from the area west of the Rhine. So from the seventh century until around the ninth century, there was essentially no writing at all in Germania, and this process continued through the centuries.

Germania would continue to be underdeveloped compared to France to the west. It wasn't really until the Franco-Persian was in the late 1800s that the balance of power began to shift to the Germans.

And the last part of this story as it relates to the fifth and sixth centuries is the relationship between the Franks and the Saxons. In the year 531, the Saxons who remained in northern Germany joined with the Franks to fight another Germanic tribe called the Thuringians. As a result of the victory, the Saxons got the northern part of the Thuringian territory, but they were also forced to pay a yearly tribute to the Franks. And this appears to have been a source of resentment and future conflict between the Saxons and the Franks. The Saxons had considered the Franks to be their ally, so they didn't really feel that they owed the Franks a tribute.

Around the year 555, the Saxons revolted against the Franks, and for the next few centuries, the Saxons and the Franks fought intermittent battles and wars. Together with the Frisians, the Saxons remained one of the few independent territories in Western Europe, at least for awhile.

Over time, as the conflicts between the Saxons and the Franks raged on, the Franks started to get the upper hand. Part of the problem for the Saxons is that they lacked a strong central government. They were organized into groups of local villages. Each of those groups was a called a ***gau*** – a Saxon word which was also used by the Saxons in Britain. But the Saxons in Britain preferred a separate Old English word ***scir***, which later was pronounced /shire/. And the top official of the shire was the ***sheriff***, a term derived from ***shire***. But when the Normans conquered England, they introduced their own term. The territory of a count was a ***county***, and that term eventually replaced ***shire***. But that's why, in the United States today, the top police official in a county is called a ***sheriff***. ***County*** and ***shire*** were once the same thing. The Anglo-Saxons called it a ***shire***, and the Normans called it a ***county***, but neither used that original Saxon term ***gau***, which was actually pronounced ***gea*** in Old English. Since the Anglo-Saxons preferred ***shire***, the term ***gea*** basically disappeared from Old English, but some linguists actually believe that it still exists in the word ***yeoman***. In Old English, the 'G' sound shifted to a 'Y' sound in a lot of words, so that a word like ***gea*** would have been pronounced /yay-ah/. And some linguists think that a person who lived in a village was a ***geaman*** – or later ***yeoman***.

But other than that possible etymology, the original Saxon word has disappeared from English. But within the language of the Saxons who remained back on the continent, the word remained as ***gau***, and that's what they called their shires or counties. But those gaus had a lot of power in Saxon society, and so the Saxons didn't really have a strong central government. In fact, the Saxons didn't have a monarchy. They were a republic overseen by an assembly.

The Saxon assembly consisted of 36 members from each gau, and that assembly only met once a year. So the power in Saxon society wasn't really centralized. It was spread out to these gaus which retained a lot of independence. And the head of each gau was called a ***fuirst***. He was a political, military and religious leader, and he was the local leader in a time of war.

Now the Saxon title ***fuirst*** is cognate with the Anglo-Saxon word ***first*** as in the top or primary person or thing. And that title ***fuirst*** is also reflected in the later German word ***fuhrer*** meaning leader, a term which was adopted by Adolf Hitler in the twentieth century, and which therefore has a very negative connotation today. But that means that the German term ***fuhrer*** and the English term ***first*** are both cognate. And both are also directly related to the Saxon term ***fuirst*** meaning the leader of the local gau or county.

Again, these local gaus retained a lot of power in old Saxony, and that meant that there was a general lack of unity and cohesion within the Saxon government. And that proved to be a major disadvantage against the highly unified Franks. And it was also a disadvantage for the Franks because they found it difficult to achieve a decisive victory against the Saxons without a centralized authority to acknowledge defeat.

The fighting between the Saxons and the Franks lingered on for generations. After Charlemagne came to power in the eighth century, he launched an attack directly into the Saxon heartland, and he secured a significant victory. But again, the lack of centralized Saxon authority meant that not all Saxons recognized Charlemagne's victory.

In the year 775, Charlemagne invaded Saxony again with the intention of permanently solving the Saxon problem. The Saxons were soundly defeated this time, and Charlemagne thought he had finally won a decisive victory over the Saxons. But shortly afterward, a few rogue Saxons begun conducting raids into Frankish territory.

In fact, the Saxon resistance movement continued for several years, and they also battled other Saxons who had sided with the Franks. But Charlemagne finally put down the resistance movement, and he brought Saxony under Frankish control. And by the year 782, Saxony was effectively part of the Frankish empire.

Now, after the death of Charlemagne, the massive Frankish empire was divided between his three grandsons. And this three-way division basically gave us the earliest political division between the regions that would come to be known as France, Germany and Italy.

The region west of the Rhine came to be known simply as France, and the German region east of the Rhine remained distinct until the tenth century when its leader Otto the First revived the title which have been granted to Charlemagne by the Pope. The title was Holy Roman Emperor. And from that point on the Eastern German region became known as the Holy Roman Empire. So all of that means that the Germanic Franks laid the foundations of both modern France and modern Germany.

But even though the Franks once ruled much of western Europe, it doesn't mean that their language became the language of western Europe. As we know Latin remained the dominant language in the heart of the Frankish kingdom in what would become France. And as I noted earlier, the Franks weren't terribly concerned with their Germanic territories. So the native languages continued on there as well.

And I began this episode by looking at the Old High German sound shifts which marked the beginnings of Modern German in central and southern Germany. And up in northern Germany, the Franks and Saxons and Frisians, well they continued to speak their own languages. The Frisian language continued on and it remains a distinct language to this day. The language of the Saxons was called Old Saxon by the time the Franks conquered them. And the Old Saxon language continued on, and it forms the basis of many of the Low German dialects which are spoken in Northern Germany today. So just like English, many of these Low German dialects are directly descended from the Saxons.

To the immediate west of the Saxons was the original homeland of the Franks in and around the modern Netherlands and the surrounding regions. The Frankish language continued to be spoken there, and over time it evolved into a language called Old Frankonian which forms a major component of Modern Dutch, as well as most of the other Low German dialects.

So if I can make some very broad generalizations here, the Angles and Saxons who left Britain gave us English. The Saxons who remained in northern Germany gave us the Eastern Low German dialects. The Franks who remained in and around the Netherlands gave us Dutch, and the western Low Dialects. And the Frisians retained a distinct language along the North Sea coast.

Now again, this is a very broad generalization because in many of these regions the various dialects have blended together over the centuries, but it gives you a general idea of how the modern Germanic languages of northern Europe evolved from the original West Germanic tribes.

So that's the modern Germanic languages. But what about the language spoken west of the Rhine in Gaul or in what we now can call Francia? Well, we know that Latin remained the dominant language there, but the Germanic language of the Franks did influence Latin as it evolved into Old French. And that influence can be seen most prominently in the relatively large number of Frankish words which found their way into early French. In fact about 500 Frankish words were adopted into French, and when the Norman French conquered England in 1066, quite a few of those Frankish words passed into English as well. So I want to conclude this episode by looking at some of the Frankish words in Modern English.

Before I begin, I should note that a lot of these words have Indo-European roots and, in many cases, there are several possible cognates within both the Germanic languages and within Latin. So it isn't always entirely clear if French took the word from the Latin speaking Romans or the Germanic speaking Franks. And very often both groups had similar words for the same thing because of those common Indo-European roots.

So in those cases, I'm going to focus on the words which are more likely to have come from the Franks. Now a few of those Frankish words which made their way into English have been covered in earlier episodes of the podcast. So let's begin by reviewing those.

The Frankish word ***gardo*** meant 'an enclosed area,' and it passed into French and later into English as ***garden***. The early Anglo-Saxon version of the word was ***geard***, but you might remember from earlier episode that the 'G' sound shifted to a 'Y' sound in a lot of Old English words. And that's why some linguists believe that the Old English word ***gea*** may be the root of the word ***yeoman***. Well that same sound shift affected the Old English word ***geard***. The 'G' shifted to a 'Y,' and it became ***yard***. So ***yard*** is the Anglo-Saxon version of the word, and ***garden*** is the Frankish version via French.

I also noted in the earlier episode that the Germanic name ***Carl*** passed from the Frankish language to French. ***Carl*** became ***Charles*** in much the same way that ***Ludovic*** became ***Louis***. And just as ***Ludovic*** and ***Louis*** are directly related to the name ***Clovis***, ***Carl*** and ***Charles*** are directly related to the name ***Charlemagne***. ***Charlemagne*** is simply French for 'Charles the Great.'

One intriguing word which was borrowed from the Franks is from the word ***spy*** and its related term ***espionage***. It isn't entirely clear what the circumstances were which led to the adoption of the term, but it definitely came from the Franks. The word ***spy*** has deep Indo-European roots. The Indo-European root word was ****spec*** which meant 'to look.' And we've seen that word before via Latin. It gave us words like ***spectate*** and ***spectator***, ***spectacle***, ***speculate***, ***inspect***, ***aspect***, ***suspect***, ***conspicuous*** – a lot of words. Via Greek, we get words like ***scope*** and ***skeptic***, but that Indo-European root word also passed into the Germanic languages as ***spehon***, and the Frankish version of that word was borrowed into early French and from there, we get the word ***spy*** and ***espionage***.

Again, we don't know what the circumstances were which led to those words passing into French, but the words have an obvious political or military connotation. And there were other words borrowed from the Franks with those same connotations.

The word ***dart*** came into English after the Norman Conquest, and it originally meant a 'throwing spear or arrow'. But the word was originally a Germanic word, and French definitely borrowed the word from the Germanic languages, and for obvious reasons many scholars think the Franks were the mostly likely source of the word.

A similar word in modern English is ***harpoon***. The English word comes from the French word ***harpon*** which meant a 'clamp' or 'clasp'. And that word came from the Frankish word ***harpan*** which was a verb meaning 'to see something.' And the modern pronunciation with 'un' at the end was likely influenced by the Dutch version of the word. The Dutch were some of the first people to engage in whaling, and the English apparently picked up this particularly use of the weapon, as well as the pronunciation of the weapon, from those early Dutch whalers. But the word was already in English as a general term for spear or grappling hook. So darts and

harpoons are the types of weapons which could have been used in hunting, but they also could have been used by soldiers in battle.

And whether or not the Frankish soldiers actually use those weapons in battle, one thing they certainly did do was march, and ***march*** is another Frankish word borrowed by the French. Its Germanic roots go back to that Germanic word ***marco*** which I discussed back in Episode 25. You might remember that ***marco*** meant 'borderland', and it gave us words like ***mark*** and ***marker***. Well it also produced the word ***march***, which originally meant 'to trample or tread under foot.'

So the connection could be related to the fact that the terrain in the borderland was rougher, and you have to trample through thick brush in those regions. That's just a theory, but ***march*** eventually came to mean 'a regular steady procession by foot.' And that word gets to us via the Franks and the French.

Now, both Old English and the Frankish language had a Germanic word ***ban*** which meant to 'command or forbid something'. Thanks to the late Middle English vowel shifts, we have the word today as ***ban*** meaning 'to prohibit something.'

And you might think that ***banish*** is just another version of the word ***ban***, but it's not quite that simple. ***Banish*** is the version which came from the Franks, thanks to the French. In fact, it appears that the Frankish version of ***ban*** was borrowed very early on, probably while the Romans were still in partial control of Gaul.

Remember that ***ban*** could mean 'to prohibit something,' but it could also be used in a more general sense as 'to command or command something.' Well, the late Romans put the Latin suffix ***contra*** meaning 'against' in front of that Frankish word. The new word ***contraband*** meant 'something that was against the command or orders of government officials.' Of course ***contraband*** was banned by those officials, so there's an obvious linguistic connection there.

And the word ***bandit*** also comes from the same Germanic root word, but the word ***bandit*** originated within early Italian. Again, it was based on this very early borrowing of the Germanic word ***ban*** by the Romans, but it's very likely that the word was borrowed on multiple occasions from a variety of Germanic tribes which all had basically the same word in their languages, so we can't say if the word ***bandit*** comes from the Frankish version of the word or from another Germanic tribe's version.

But it does appear that the word ***abandon*** can be traced back to the Franks. Of course, if you abandon something, you basically have to give it up or surrender it. And here's where I could make some cheap joke about the fact that the words ***abandon*** and ***surrender*** both come from French, but I'm not going to do that. I will note though that the word ***abandon*** is based on that original Frankish word ***ban***. From the original sense of the word ***ban***, meaning something that was commanded or prohibited, there was an obvious connection to government edicts and proclamations. The word ***bandon*** came to mean 'government power or jurisdiction.' In French, '***a***' means 'at' or 'to', so ***abandon*** meant that something was turned over to the government or

some other power. So you were basically surrendering it and letting it go to someone else or somewhere else. And that phrase passed into English as ***abandon***.

Of course sometimes, your property may be seized by the government or someone else, even if you don't abandon it. Well ***seize*** is another Frankish word that passed through French and then into English. And by the way the Anglo-Saxon version of that word gave us the modern English words ***seek*** and ***beseech***.

So I've mentioned words related to government and warfare and it's not surprising that some of those words would have passed from the Franks to later French. In fact, the Latin word for war was ***bellum***. But during this period, the later Romans in Gaul adopted the Frankish word for war. And no one knows why the Romans adopted a Germanic word for war, but it was likely because the Romans found themselves in a more or less constant state of warfare with those Germanic tribes. The Frankish word borrowed by the later Romans in Gaul was ***werra***. The Old English word was almost identical – ***werre***. And that's the original version of the word ***war*** in Modern English. So the Romans borrowed that Frankish version of the word, and it passed into French as ***guerre***. Now, we don't actually have that French word in Modern English, but the same Germanic root word passed into Spanish and gave us the word ***guerilla*** as in 'guerilla warfare.' But the major point here is that the French version of the word, ***guerre*** is derived from the Frankish word ***werra*** which is cognate with the English word ***war***.

But you may be asking an obvious question, why did ***war*** with a 'W' sound become '***guerre***' with a 'G' sound? In fact, if you think about it, we have a lot of related words in Modern English where one word begins with a 'W' and the other begins with a 'G'. Think about ***guarantee*** and ***warranty***, or ***guard*** and ***ward*** as in 'to ward off a threat,' or ***guardian*** and ***warden***, or the French name ***Guillaume*** and the English name ***William***.

There are actually quite a few of these pairs in English. And usually, the 'W' version represents an original Germanic version of the word and the 'G' version represents a French alteration of the word. So why did French and the other Romance languages changed this initial consonant to a 'G'?

Well the answer lies in the fact that the 'W' sound was very rare in Late Latin and early French. And it never really occurred at the beginning of words. So when late Romans and early French borrowed these Germanic words which began with a 'W' sound, they had to figure out a way to pronounce them.

So let's go back to classical Latin for a second, during the heyday of the Roman Republic and the early empire. During that period Latin did have a 'W' sound. But as you may recall from prior episodes, the 'W' sound generally shifted to a 'V' sound in Latin. And this was especially true when the 'W' sound occurred at the beginning of a word or a syllable.

So ***winum*** meaning 'wine' became ***vinum***. Well, when all of those 'W' sounds shifted to 'V' sounds, that left Latin with very few words with the 'W' sound, especially at the beginning of words. So all of that meant that early French didn't really have words that began with a 'W'

sound. And as a result, early French speakers actually had a problem pronouncing the 'W' sound when it was at the front of a word.

It's sort of like the 'X' sound in modern English. The 'X' sound is a 'KS' sound like an ***ox*** and ***ax***. But when it appears at the front of a word, English speakers have a hard time pronouncing it. So English simply shifts that sound to a 'Z' sound, which is easier to pronounce. So ***xylophone*** has a 'Z' sound at the front instead of a traditional 'X' sound. And ***Xerox*** has two 'X's. The one at the end gets the traditional 'X' pronunciation, but the one at the beginning is shifted to a 'Z' sound. The 'X' actually originated within Greek, and the Greeks pronounced it as an 'X' sound when it appeared at the front of words. But English speakers have a problem making their mouths do that, so it just gets shifted to a different sound at the beginning.

Well, early French speakers had the same type of problem with the 'W' sound. They couldn't quite pronounce it at the beginning of a word. Think about the modern French word for 'yes' which of course is ***oui***, but note that it's spelled with an 'O' at the beginning. At least early on, that 'O' represented a sound which preceded the 'W' sound in the word, even if that sound was very subtle, because the French needed a sound before the 'W' sound, otherwise it was difficult for them to pronounce it.

But the Frankish language was a Germanic language, and like all of the Germanic languages at that time, the Frankish language had a lot of words which began with a 'W' sound. So when the early French speakers began to borrow those Frankish words, they had to find a way to mimic that 'W' sound at the front. And they did that by converting the sound to a 'GW' sound /gw/ which was spelled 'GU' because the letter 'W' didn't exist yet. The 'W' was used for the 'W' sound.

Now, the use of this 'GW' sound /gw/ may seem a little odd, but apparently, the French barely pronounced the 'G' part. They just needed that 'G' consonant in there to help them get to the 'W' sound at the front of the word.

And by the way this method of using the 'GU' combination to produce a 'W' sound, it still exists in modern romance languages. Think about the Spanish word for water, 'A-G-U-A'. It isn't pronounced /ag-u-ah/, and it isn't even really pronounced /ag-wah/. The 'G' is barely pronounced at all, and it comes out more like /agua/. Well, this is what the early French speakers were doing to those Germanic words which they were borrowing from the Franks. And since they were using this 'GU' combination to mimic the sound they needed, that's how they spelled those words. But even though that 'G' sound may have been pronounced very subtly at first, that original pronunciation was lost on later French speakers. And eventually, the 'G' was given its normal hard pronunciation in all of those borrowed words.

Now, as if all of that wasn't complicated enough, there's one more aspect to all of this, the French spoken by the Normans in and around Normandy was somewhat of an exception to this rule. The Normans didn't really have a problem pronouncing the 'W' sound at the beginning of words. And it isn't really clear why the Norman dialect was different, but they may have had greater contacts with the Germanic speaking peoples and were therefore more comfortable with

that ‘W’ pronunciation at the beginning of words. And of course the Normans themselves were actually descended from Viking invaders. Their original name was the ***Northmen***, so they spoke a Germanic language when they arrived in Northern France, and much like the Franks, the Normans were a Germanic ruling class governing a French speaking population. So maybe the Old Norse influences were at work as well.

But regardless of the reason why, Norman-French tended to retain the initial ‘W’ sound at the beginning of those borrowed words. And of course, it was those same Normans who conquered England in 1066. And when they arrived in England, they often had a traditional French version of the word with the ‘G’ sound and a Norman-French version of the same word with the ‘W’ sound, and both came into English.

And that’s how we got ***guarantee*** and ***warranty***. ***Guarantee*** was the traditional French version and ***warranty*** was the Norman French version, but both versions came from a Frankish word ***warant***. And that’s also how we got ***guardian*** and ***warden***. ***Guardian*** was the traditional French version and ***warden*** was the Norman-French version, but both came from a Frankish word – ***warding***. As noted earlier, the English word ***ward*** as in to ‘ward off something’ or someone who is protected like ‘a ward of the court,’ that’s an Anglo-Saxon version of the same Germanic word. So that version is actually native to English.

Now, this same process is also how we got the names ***William*** and ***Guillaume***. ***Guillaume*** is the traditional French version with the ‘G’ sound, and ***William*** is obviously the Norman French version as in William the Conqueror, but both versions were borrowed from the Germanic languages. The modern German equivalent if ***Wilhelm***. The original Germanic name probably meant ‘protector of the kingdom.’ It was comprised of two separate words which have actually changed very little through the year in English. The first part was ***will*** as in the modern English word ***will*** meaning ‘desire.’ The second part was ***helm*** as in ***helmet***. So ***William*** was originally ***Willhelm***, literally meaning ‘will helmet.’ But again, this has been interpreted as meaning a defender or protector of the kingdom.

Now, before I leave this particular topic, there are a couple of other similar word pairs which I wanted to mention. In Modern English, we have ***garnish*** and ***warn***. These two words are cognate, thanks to the same basic process. ***Warn*** is a Germanic word which is native to English, and the original Old English version also produced the words ***warning*** and ***wary***. The original sense of the word was ‘to protect or provide for someone’ – in other words, ‘to look after someone.’ Well, later English emphasized the ‘protection’ aspect of that word, so when we ***warn*** someone today, we’re trying to protect them.

Well, the French borrowed that same word from the Germanic tribes on the continent. It may have been the Franks or some other Germanic group, linguists are not entirely sure, but the French emphasized the aspect of the word related to ‘providing for someone.’ In other words, it meant ‘to provide protection or comfort or support,’ and it later meant to provide something extra. And even later it came to mean ‘to enhance or embellish something’.

Well, again, the French couldn't pronounce 'W' in ***warn*** very well, so it became ***garnir*** and later ***garnish*** in French. So in a kitchen, a garnish is something that enhances the appearance or flavor of a dish. And we also have the word ***garnish*** in the sense of garnishing someone's wages if they owe a debt. And this is another variation of the French version of the word, but here, the meaning is more closely related to the traditional English meaning as a warning. In its legal sense, a ***garnishment*** was originally a summons or a warning that a particular legal action was going to be taken. But today, we think of it as an action that's already been authorized, specifically the seizing of wages or other property to pay a debt.

I have one last example of this process which I wanted to mention but, admittedly it's a little tough to hear. The Franks and Anglo-Saxons both had a Germanic word, which meant 'stranger or exile person. The Anglo-Saxon version was ***wrecca***. The Frankish version was ***wrakjo***. The Anglo-Saxon version ***wrecca*** eventually produced the Modern English word ***wretch*** meaning 'a miserable or despicable person.' But the Frankish version ***wrakjo*** passed into French, and in doing so, the 'W' sound became a 'G' sound, and the word became ***gars***. And through a later derivative of the word, it became ***garçon*** meaning a 'servant boy'. Now today, ***garçon*** can still refer to a boy in French, but it can also be used to mean 'a waiter.' And it's in this sense that English speakers sometimes use the word. Now hopefully, you won't ever have a waiter or ***garçon*** who is a ***wretch***, but if you do, now you know that both words come from the same Germanic root word.

So I hope you found all of that etymology interesting. There are actually quite a few other words in English which can ultimately be traced back to the Franks via French. This includes incredibly common English words like ***blue*** as in the color. And similarly the word ***blonde*** also comes to us via the same root. So what about a 'bleached blonde'? Well both words have Germanic roots, and they both actually have the same original Indo-European root. But ***bleach*** comes in via Old English, and ***blonde*** took the trip through France to get to us. By the way, ***blend*** and ***blind*** are closely related Old English words.

The word ***buoy*** as in 'a floating marker' came into English via French. The French took it from Germanic sources and many linguists think it was probably borrowed from the Franks. The Old English version of that Germanic root word gives us the word ***beacon***. So ***beacon*** is the native English word, and ***bouy*** is the French word which was likely borrowed from the Franks.

The words ***felon*** and ***felony*** have Frankish roots, as does the word ***towel***. And words like ***park*** and ***blemish*** and even the word ***dance*** may have originated with the Franks. All of those words passed through French with West Germanic roots.

So we've seen how the West Germanic cousins of the Anglo-Saxons influenced Modern English. But now, we need to turn our attention back to Britain. By the end of the sixth century, the Anglo-Saxons were firmly entrenched there, but up to this point, we don't have any written text in their early version of English. But at the beginning of the seventh century, some of those Anglo-Saxons began to write down their language. So for many scholars, the 7th century marks the real beginning of English because it's the first time the language was written down in a way that we can read it and study it today.

So next time, we're going to explore the events of the seventh century, and we'll look at and listen to some of those early Old English writings. So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.