THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 39:
NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 39: Not Lost In Translation. In this episode, we're going to explore how the early Christians in Britain used English words to understand a religion which came to them in Latin. This process required the first large-scale translation of foreign words into English. But this process had to overcome two hurdles – a relatively small English vocabulary and Germanic religious traditions which were very different from those of Christianity.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. You can contact me by email at '[kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com.](mailto:kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com)' And you can follow me on twitter at englishhistpod.

And once again, a big 'thank you' to those of you who have made donations to the podcast through the website. I sincerely appreciate the support. And I have some big ideas planned for later in the year. We're soon going to turn to the Viking Invasions and the Norman Conquest. And then, sometime during the summer, we're going to transition into Middle English. Meanwhile, I'm working on a written verison of the history covered in the podcast. My current plan is to have it available around the time that we conclude the Old English period. The written version will cover everything from the original Indo-European period through the Old English period. And when I eventually complete the entire history of English, I will probably do a second volume covering Middle and Modern English periods. So for those of you who have inquired about a written verison, that's the plan.

Also, in this episode, I'm going to be exploring excerpts from a couple of Old English poems – 'Caedmon's Hymn' and 'Dream of the Rood.' And I'm putting both the Old English and Modern English versions of those poems on the website. Just go to Episode 39 if you want to see the poems written out.

So let's go ahead and turn to this episode. And I concluded last time by noting that the rise of monasteries in Britain ultimately led to a marriage of Latin and English. And for the first time anywhere in western Europe, a local vernacular was starting to be used in conjunction with Latin to bring the message of the Church to the people. But it is important to keep in mind, that prior to this point, Latin and English had been segregated, occupying different worlds. Latin had been the language of the Church, and English had been the language of the people. And those two didn't mix. The Church had considered English a pagan language unfit for Church business.

But that started to change at the end of the seventh century. Many local people were joining those new monasteries that were popping up around Britain, and most of those monks and nuns and support personnel spoke English as their native language. So a degree of bilingualism emerged within those monasteries. And last time, I told the story of the cowherd Caedmon who is the first known poet to use English poetry to promote Christian themes and ideas. And this led to an epiphany within the Anglo-Saxon Church.   English – the local vernacular – could actually be used as tool to spread the message of the Church.

Converting kings and royal courts was essential to this process. But ultimately, the message had to reach the people. And in order to reach the ordinary people, the missionaries needed to be able to speak to them in their own language. Remember, most people were illiterate, and books were very rare. But throughout the Anglo-Saxon culture, poetry was listened to by all classes of society, and that poetry became a very powerful way to spread the message of Christianity. In many ways, it was like the radio or television of its day. It was a way to reach the masses.

And it should be noted that, at this early date, the idea of fusing Christianity with the local vernacular was really unique to Britain and English. In the rest of western Europe, it still strictly Latin as far as the Church was concerned, but Anglo-Saxon Britain was starting to be an exception. And that illustrates how powerful and influential regions like Northumbria had become.

From around the same time as Caedmon, we have another story which illustrates how English was starting to be co-opted by the Church. This particular story comes to us via the 12th century English historian William of Malmesbury. He tells us about Aldhelm who was a scholar and poet in Malmesbury in the south of England. Aldhelm lived around or shortly after the time of Caedmon. He was the first abbot of the monastery at Malmesbury. And he was a very highly regarded poet. Most of his poems were written in Latin. And he was one of the innovators of a particular style of Latin verse called Hermeneneutic Latin which has a very complicated and elaborate structure. And we actually still have some of those Latin poems which he composed. But this is the story of English, and William of Malmesbury tells us that Aldhelm also wrote poems in English. And he set those English poems to music, so they were really songs which he performed. Unfortunately, all of his English poems have been lost to the centuries.

Now being a devout abbot, Aldhelm wanted to spread the Christian message to all of the people in town. So he started hanging out at the end of a bridge which was a major crossing point in town. And he stood there and he sang his religious songs in English. And crowds would gather to hear the songs in their own native language. And we're told that many people were brought to the Church by Aldhelm and his religious songs. So here we have the story of an abbot who was basically a bard or minstrel standing at a bridge using Old English poetic verse to bring people to the Church.

And once again, we see that early marriage of Christianity and English. But in order for English to spread the message of the Church, it meant that Latin terms and Christian concepts had to be translated into English. And that wasn't as simple as you might think. The Germanic Gods and the Christian God were very different. Germanic Gods like Woden and Thor were warrior Gods, and they reflect the importance of the warrior tradition in Germanic culture. But the Christian tradition emphasized forgiveness, altruism and self-sacrifice. Christianity itself evolved out of the Mediterranean religious tradition with many concepts and ideas that very foreign to the Germanic pagans. It was a monotheistic religion with one God, but there were three aspects of that God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So there was a subtlety and complexity in the Christian message which was difficult to convey with traditional Old English words. So those bards and poets had to figure out how to represent those new ideas. Ultimately, they did it in two different ways.

First, where they could, they translated Latin words and concepts into English. So in the process, they had to re-invent and re-imagine the language. They had to find ways to make English words express all of those new Christian concepts.

But sometimes, there simply was no way translate a word or concept into English. Remember that the original English vocabulary was a tiny fraction of what it is today. So in many cases, the Anglo-Saxons began to do something which they had previously been very reluctant to do. They began to borrow outside words into English. Now this is a very important point because one of the defining characteristics of Modern English is its willingness to borrow words from other languages. But up to this point in the history of English, it appears that English speakers were reluctant to borrow words from other languages. We've already seen that the Anglo-Saxons borrowed only a small handful of words from the native Celtic speakers. The original Old English language was a fundamentally Germanic language with very few non-Germanic words. Their ancestors back on the continent had borrowed a few Latin words from the Romans in earlier centuries, but by this point, most Anglo-Saxons probably had no idea that words like *street* and *sack* and *wall* had been borrowed from another language. So it appears that the Anglo-Saxons were inclined to rely upon their own native word-stock as much as could. But that started to change around this time late in the seventh century when English poets began to borrow Latin words to express these new Christian concepts.

So at this point we have these two fundamental events occurring within the language. In the remainder of this episode, I'm going to focus on the first of these two events - the translation of Latin words and concepts into English. And in the next episode, I'm going to focus on all of those new Latin words which were borrowed into English at this point. But together, both of those events fundamentally changed the English language.

So let's look at how English poets and minstrels used the limited vocabulary of Old English to make it fit those new philosophical ideas. And the best place to begin is with the poem which started it all – Caedmon's Hymn. I concluded the last episode by reading the poem in Old English. This time, I want to take you through the poem to show how Caedmon used Old English words in new ways.

The first line of the poem was "Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard." The line can be literally translated as "Now we must praise the heavenly-kingdom's Guardian." *Nu* is 'now.' *scylun* is 'shall.' *hergan* is an Old English verb which meant 'to praise.' So "Nu scylun hergan" is 'Now shall praise.'

The poem is actually missing the pronoun *we* which was not unusual. Old English poems often omitted a word here and there to make the rhythm work properly. So the actual translation is 'Now WE shall praise.' So all of that is very traditional Old English. But what are we praising? In the second half-line, Caedmon tells us that it is "hefaenricaes uard" – the Heavenly Kingdom's Guardian. In other words, God. And this is a really good example of an Old English poet using a traditional Germanic stock phrase to describe the Christian God.

So let's look a little closer at that phrase – "hefaenricaes uard." *hefaen* is 'heaven,' *ricaes* is 'kingdom.' That's the same Germanic root word that we keep coming across in the podcast. *ricaes* (/ree-kas/) eventually became *riche* (/ree-che/) and then *rich* in Modern English, and it's cognate with *rex* in Latin and *reich* in German. So *hefaenricaes* is 'Heavenly Kingdom.'

And the last word is *uard*, which later became *ward* and then *warden* in Modern English. Again we've seen that word before. Remember that the French borrowed that word from the Franks, and they had a problem with the 'w' sound at the beginning of the word. So in French, the word went from *warden* to *guardian*. So Modern English actually has both versions of the word – *warden* and *guardian*.

So "hefaenricaes uard" is 'Heavenly Kingdom's Guardian.'

Now the reason why this particular phrase is so significant is because it was derived from a common stock phrase in Germanic poetry. A couple of episodes back I discussed how poets used stock phrases, and they would fill in the blank with a word which satisfied the required alliteration. Well "_____ weard" was one of those stock phrases meaning '_____ warden' or '_____ guardian.'

In Beowulf, the Danish King Hrothgar is referred to as "beahhorda weard" which was the 'ring-hoard warden' or 'guardian of the ring-hoards.' Beowulf describes himself as "folces weard" which was 'folk's warden' or 'guardian of the folk or people.' The monster in the Beowulf poem is described as "beorges weard" – the 'barrow warden' or 'guardian of the barrow'). In the poem the Seafarer, the cuckoo bird is described as "sumeres weard" – 'Summer's guardian.'

And in Germanic culture, a king was often referred to as a 'rices weard' – a 'kingdom's guardian.' So this was a very Germanic term. And it reflects the notion of a king as a warrior and guardian who protects the people of his kingdom. In fact, Beowulf uses that specific phrase to describe Hrothgar in the Beowulf poem.

But Caedmon took this standard Germanic term for a 'king,' and he applied it to the Christian God. So 'rices weard' became "hefaenricaes uard" – 'Heavenly Kingdom's Guardian.' And again, this was the first instance of that Germanic term for a 'king' being applied in a Christian context.

In the third line of the poem, Caedmon describes the universe created by God as the "uerc uuldurfadur" – the 'work of the wonder-father' or the 'father of wonder.' And this is another new term for God using native Old English words – the 'wonder-father.'

In the next line, Caedmon looks for another way to describe the Christian God. The original Germanic tribes back on the continent had developed a word which referred to military service which as you might imagine was a common undertaking. The word was very old because the Goths had a version of the same word. The Gothic version was *driugan*. Since a soldier's life was hard and difficult – the word came to mean 'suffering or enduring.' It came into English as *dree* which is a word that has long-since disappeared, but it passed from the Germanic tribes on

the continent into French, and it re-entered English after the Normans invaded. This later borrowing gave us the modern word *drudge*.   But that original Germanic word meaning 'military service' created another important word in Old English. The word was '*dryctin*.' And it meant a military leader or chief. That very old, very Germanic word for a warrior chief was borrowed by Caedmon.

Caedmon described God as "eci dryctin." *Eci* meant 'eternal,' and it's actually cognate with the English word *ever*, as well as that French word *eternal*. All of those words came from the same Indo-European root word. So the term "eci dryctin" meant 'Eternal Chief,' and is usually translated as 'Eternal Lord.' In fact, this became a very common term in Christian literature written in Old English. Caedmon actually used the phrase twice in the nine lines of his short poem, but the term quickly died out after the Normans arrived.   But again, in this term, we see the Germanic concept of a warrior chief being applied to the Christian God. And he became an 'eternal chief.'

In the next couple of lines, Caedmon wants to express the idea that God created the sky and the heavens. Now *heaven* is an Old English word, but the pre-Christian version of the word just meant 'sky' in the same way that we refer to the 'heavens' today to mean the sky and the stars. So Caedmon says that God created "heofon to hrofe' – 'Heaven as a roof.' This particular phrase was a direct reference to the traditional Germanic religions which often describes Woden's Valhalla as a great hall in the sky, and the creation of Valhalla is often described in detail with the final piece being the roof placed on top. So Caedmon harkens back to that idea when he says God created 'heaven as a roof.'

But in creating that roof, Caedmon couldn't use the term *create*, and he couldn't describe God as a '*creator*,' because *create* is a Latin word that didn't come into English until after the Normans. So he used the word *scop* – the original version of our word *shape*. Remember that this was the same word used for a poet in Old English. A poet was a 'shaper' of words. So God created the heavens by shaping them in much the same way that a Germanic poet shaped words to create poems. And this connection was certainly no coincidence.

Caedmon was clearly playing with words here because he then describes God as a "halig scyppend" – the Holy Shaper.

By the way, the general Anglo-Saxon word for 'creation' was a compound word *frumsceaft* – literally 'from shaping.' *frum* was an early variation of our modern word *from*, but in this particular compound it referred to a place or point of origin. So *frumsceaft* was 'origin shaping.'

So in Caedmon's Hymn, God 'shaped' the heavens, but then he needed to create the Earth, or more specifically, the material world. So Caedmon expressed that idea in the next couple of lines. And once again, he borrowed from the traditional Germanic notions of the Middle Earth. Now *Earth* is an Old English word, but it simply meant 'soil or dirt or ground.' So Caedmon needed to express the idea that the material world which surrounds us is distinct from the heavens above us and the underworld of spirits below us. So he used the term *middungeard* – literally the 'Middle Garden or Middle Yard.' *Middun* was 'middle,' and *geard* was the original

version of the word *yard*. We've also seen that word before. The 'g' at the beginning shifted to a 'y' as so often happened in Old English words, and that gave us the word *yard*. You might remember that the Frankish version of that word passed through French into English. And the French retained that original 'g' sound and gave us the word *garden*. So *middungeard* was the 'Middle Garden.' But in many Modern English versions of the poem it is often translated as 'Middle Dwelling' or 'Middle Earth.' So here you can see how Tolkien's later concept of Middle Earth was influenced by these early Anglo-Saxon traditions, but for Caedmon, it was simply his way of using native Old English words to describe the material world caught between Heaven and Hell.

He then gives us a final euphemism for 'God,' and he returns to that stock phrase which I began with – '_____ weard.' Well he had just used that term *middungeard* for 'Middle Garden,' so he needed to maintain the required alliteration with a word which began with the 'm' sound. So with the use of that stock phrase, he created the term 'moncynnæs uard' – literally 'mankind's guardian.' But again, in that term 'mankind's guardian,' we see the Germanic notion of a protector of the people – someone who defended the people from external dangers and threats. It's really the same idea as Beowulf who arrived to protect the Danes by killing the monster Grendel. That's what Germanic heroes did. They were glorious and brave protectors. And Caedmon describes God as not just the protector of a specific tribe or nation, but a protector of all of mankind.

So you can see how Caedmon used his English words to convey the ideas associated with the Biblical creation story, and also how he mixed traditional Germanic notions of heroism with the new religious concepts introduced by the Christian Church. And note that he didn't use any Latin or Greek words. It was strictly English. And it showed that English could be used to convey those ideas, at least in the hands of a gifted poet or word shaper.

As I noted last time, Caedmon lived in the early part of a period known as the Northumbrian Renaissance. This was the period when literacy and arts and culture were exploding around this northernmost kingdom. And literacy was a relatively new concept, so even artists sought to incorporate writing into their artwork. So it's not surprising that many of the artifacts produced during this period reflect a combination of both artistry and literacy. I discussed the Lindisfarne Gospels in the last episode, and that 'book' was also a work of art.

Another example of this fusion of artwork and literacy is the Ruthwell Cross – a large elaborate stone cross which was produced in the northern parts of Northumbria in what is today southern Scotland. I mentioned the Ruthwell Cross back in Episode 25 about the Germanic runes. The cross was constructed shortly after the time of Caedmon – late in the seventh century or early in the eighth century. And it contains inscriptions in both Latin and the Germanic runes. The runic symbols follow along the edges of the vertical base of the cross. And the runic inscription is written in Old English. It is actually a short except from an Anglo-Saxon poem called 'The Dream of the Rood.' And the timing here is kind of important. When the runes were deciphered a few centuries back, scholars recognized the passage as part of the 'Dream of the Rood' poem. But our only surviving copy of that poem comes from the Vercelli Book – one of those four surviving manuscripts which I discussed last time. The Vercelli Book is that book located in

Vercelli, Italy. And like the other books, it was compiled around the year 1000. So our only full version of the poem was written down about two or three centuries after the inscription on this particular cross. So this cross confirms that the poem was a much older poem which had been around for a long time before the full version was written down in the Vercilli Book.

Now I should note that some scholars think the runic inscription was added a little later after the cross was constructed, but runic writing gradually disappeared as the alphabet became the standard way of writing English. So even if the inscription was added a few years later, it was probably added much closer to the date of the cross itself than the date of the Vercelli Book. Also, the version of the poem on the cross is somewhat different from the later written version in the Vercelli Book. So that also suggests that a period of time had elapsed between the cross inscription and the final written version.

But either way, the inscription is another example of the fusion of English verse and the new Christian message. In fact, there are some scholars who think Caedmon was the poet who actually wrote the 'Dream of the Rood' poem, but there is simply no way to know that for certain.

Before we look at the inscription, I should tell you a little more about the history of that cross because that history impacted the inscription. After Scotland became a Protestant nation, the Church of Scotland General Assembly passed an Act to demolish what it considered to be 'Idolatrous Monuments.' That was in the seventeenth century. As a result, many of these old crosses were destroyed including the Ruthwell Cross. It was broken into pieces and scattered around the church grounds. But in the early 1800s, the cross was pieced back together. Unfortunately, some of the pieces were never recovered, and some of the pieces that were recovered were damaged and worn down. So even though most of runic inscription survives, a few parts of it are damaged or missing. But since we have the full version of the poem in the Vercelli Book, scholars have been able to decipher the missing pieces.

I should also note that the poem is like most Old English poems in that it doesn't have a title. 'The Dream of the Rood' was invented in later centuries, but it is also sometimes called 'A Vision of the Cross.'

The word *rood* in the title is derived from the Old English word for *cross*. It was spelled R-O-O-D – at least in the West Saxon dialect which was the dialect used for the Vercelli Book. You might remember that the poem is written from the perspective of the cross, and it describes the crucifixion of Christ. But *cross* is a Latin word which wasn't in the English language at that point. So the Anglo-Saxons used their native word *rood* which may be cognate with the Modern English word *rod*, but there is some disagreement about that.

Now in many respects, the Ruthwell Cross is perfect example of the blend of Christianity and pagan Germanic cultures. The cross has inscriptions in both Latin and English. The Latin inscriptions are in the Roman alphabet, and the English inscriptions are in the native Germanic runes – the closest thing the Anglo-Saxons had to a native alphabet.

And the poem is also a blend of the two cultural traditions. The subject matter of the poem is the crucifixion of Christ, but the story is told in the poetic tradition of the Anglo-Saxons.

It is important to put the excerpt contained on the cross into the larger context of the full poem. The full version of the poem contained in the Vercelli Book begins with a first person narrative. In one modern translation, it begins: "Listen, I will tell the best of visions, what came to me in the middle of the night, when voice-bearers dwelled in rest." So initially, the narrator is unknown. But slowly, it is revealed that the narrator is not in fact a person. It's a cross – an inanimate object. The full version of the poem reads: "That was very long ago, I remember it still, that I was cut down from the edge of the wood, ripped up by my roots. They seized me there, strong enemies, made me a spectacle for themselves there, commanded me to raise up their criminals." Now this technique of telling a story from the perspective of an inanimate object is part of the Germanic tradition. As we'll see in a future episode, the Old English poets loved to compose riddles where an object would describe itself in very general terms and the reader or listener had to guess what the object was. So the poet who composed 'The Dream of the Rood' was following that same tradition.

Once it is revealed that the narrator is a cross used for the crucifixion of criminals, we begin to see the Christian elements fusing with the Germanic structure of the poem. And at that point, Christ is introduced in the poem. And that also happens to be the portion which is written on the Ruthwell Cross.

The first part of the inscription is damaged, but it describes Christ disrobing and climbing upon the cross. Then the inscription includes the following passage in Old English:

... [Ahof] ic riicnæ Kyningc,
heafunæs Hlafard, hælda ic ni dorstæ.
Bismærædu ungket men ba ærgad[re];
ic [wæs] miþ blodæ [b]istemi[d],
bi[goten of þæs guman sidan]

In Modern English, the passage reads:

I held high the powerful King,
heaven's Lord. I dared not bend.
Men mocked us both together.
I was slick with blood
sprung from the Man's side…

Now this passage is a good example of the synthesis between Germanic poetry and Christian themes. First, we get the description of Christ. And once again, we see Germanic terms for nobility being used in a religious context. So Christ is described as the 'powerful king' – "riicnæ Kyningc" ('rich king') – but we know that the word *rich* originally meant powerful, not necessarily wealthy.

And the poet follows that term with the phrase – "heafunæs Hlafard" (Heavenly Lord). And this term is also very notable because it is the first known example of the word *lord* being used in a Christian context. The word *lord* is an Old English word. And it was yet another name for a noble in the sense of 'lords and ladies.' So, much like *guardian*, *king*, and *drychtin*, it was another secular term applied to Christian use.

The version of the word *lord* which appears in the Ruthwell Cross inscription is *hlafard*, and over the centuries the two syllable word has been slurred and shortened to a single syllable. But the word *lord* was originally a compound word. It combined the original version of the word *loaf* – as in a loaf of bread – with that same word *weard* meaning 'ward or guardian.' So it was *hlaf-weard* – loaf guardian. So this is yet another example of that stock phrase '_____ guardian.' And *hlaf-weard* had slurred to *hlafard* by the time of the Ruthwell Cross inscription. And *hlafard* later slurred to *lord*. So how did the compound word 'loaf guardian' come to mean a noble?

Well the answer lies in the first part of that compound – the word *loaf*. Old English actually had the word *loaf*, which was *hlaf*, and the word *bread*, which was *bread* (/bray-od). *Bread* is one of the few English words which has actually retains its original spelling, but in Old English, *loaf* was actually the more common term. After the Norman Conquest, the word *loaf* kind of fell out of use for some reason, and the word *bread* became the more common and more general word.

Now bread was very, very important to the Anglo-Saxons, like most ancient peoples. It could be cooked all year long, so it wasn't seasonal like most foods. And it was a staple of the Anglo-Saxon diet. So it was important to protect and secure the bread once it was baked. So the 'loaf guardian' was the head of the household – usually the husband or father. And if that sounds kind of crazy, think about the modern term 'breadwinner' which is a more modern term but it has a very similar meaning. So *hlafard* came to mean 'head of household.' And from there it was extended to mean a prominent or noble person.

Today when we think of the word *lord* in its secular sense, we often think of the word *lady*, as in 'lords and ladies.' And that association is not an accident because the word *lady* is formed from that same word meaning 'loaf.'

Lady was originally *hlæfdige* – derived from *hlaf* meaning 'loaf' and *-dige* meaning 'maid.' So it meant 'loaf maiden.' But the connection to 'bread' actually goes back even further than that. The word *-dige* meaning 'maiden' originally referred to 'a person who makes dough.' In fact, that word *-dige*'is cognate with the word *dough*. So it originally meant a 'dough maker.' But it later took on a more general sense as a maiden. So the term *hlæfdige* meaning 'loaf maiden' was actually kind of redundant. In the original sense of the words, it literally meant a 'loaf - dough maker.' But you can see how important bread was to the culture.

So in early Anglo-Saxon culture each household had a 'loaf maker' and a 'loaf guardian.' The wife made the bread and the husband protected it. And the word for 'loaf maker' or 'loaf maiden' became *lady*. And the word for loaf guardian became *lord*. So to the Anglo-Saxons,

the word *lord* always had an implied sense of a 'guardian' because it was actually part of what was originally a compound word.

And the poet who composed the Dream of the Rood was well-aware of the sense of the word as 'guardian.' So *hlafard* – or loaf guardian – became the 'Heavenly hlafard' – the Heavenly Lord. And from there, we get the modern Christian usage of the term *lord* in its Christian context. By the way, since I am discussing the importance of bread in ancient societies – I should note that the word *companion* from Latin is literally the person with whom you share bread. In Latin, *com-* meant 'with' and *pan* meant 'bread.' So a *companion* was a person who was 'with' you while you ate your 'bread.'

So let's return to the 'Dream of the Rood.' After using terms like 'powerful King' and 'Heavenly Lord,' the poet then uses a line which is one of the most quoted lines in the poem.

ic [wæs] miþ blodæ [b]istemi[d],
bi[goten of þæs guman sidan]

If we break it down, it reads:

ic [wæs] miþ	'I was with'
blodæ [b]istemi[d]	'blood be-steamed,' but it meant 'moist or wet with blood'
bi[goten of	'begotten of'
þæs guman sidan	the man's side (remember *guman* was another word for 'man' in Old English, as in *brid-guman* meaning 'bride's man').

So if we break down, we can actually start to recognize it in Modern English.

So the whole line in Modern English reads 'I was wet with blood sprung from the man's side.' Now this line is important because is also shows how the poet combined elements of Germanic paganism with Christianity. Germanic heros were warriors. They battled their enemies, and they often found themselves covered with blood.

Let's compare this passage about Christ on the Cross to the story of Beowulf. At the end of the Beowulf poem, Beowulf battles a dragon, and in his last moment of victory having defeated the dragon, he finds himself covered with blood and dying, and he is attended to by a loyal thane. In the so-called 'Donaldson' translation of the poem, the passage reads, "Then with his hands the thane, good without limit, washed him with water, blood-besmeared, the famous prince, his beloved lord, sated with battle. He knew well he had lived out his days, death very near." So we see that Germanic heros sometimes faced a great battle, where they were battered and bloodied and eventually died. So the Dream of the Rood alludes to this tradition when Christ is described as a 'powerful king' – a 'heavenly lord' – and he is 'bloodied on the cross' before dying.

But the image of a bloodied cross has another significance in Germanic religious culture. In native Anglo-Saxon religions, it was common to sacrifice an animal and spread the animal's

blood on an object to ward off evil spirits. A word developed from this practice. The word **blood** was an Old English word – **blod** – with deep Indo-European roots. And the process of sprinkling blood on an object as part of a religious ritual was called **bletsian**. And this word became **blessen** in Middle English and **bless** in Modern English. So the word **bless** is actually a native English word which is derived from the word **blood**, and specifically derived from the process of sprinkling blood on an object as part of a religious ritual. And in Old English, the word **bless** was extended to the new concepts introduced by Christianity. It was used to translate the Latin word **benedicere** which meant 'to consecrate by religious rite or word.' So instead of consecrating with blood, it came to mean 'consecrating with words or other rituals.'

By the way, another Old English word for 'blood' was **dreor** which specifically meant 'blood dripping from a cut or wound.' It actually originated from the same Indo-European root which produced words like **drip, drop** and **droop**. So the word **dreorig** meant something that was bloody or dripping with blood. And it still survives in Modern English as the word **dreary**. Over time, it has come to mean something 'dark, gloomy or melancholy,' but it still retains that original sense of something 'dripping,' so we speak of 'a dreary day' meaning a wet and gloomy day.

So as you can see, the Ruthwell Cross is good example of this early marriage of Germanic and Christian philosophies. And we can see how native English words were being appropriated to new religious uses.

Outside of Caedmon's Hymn and the Ruthwell Cross, we have lots of other examples of this process which have survived into Modern English.

One o f the best examples is the word **God** – a native Old English word. Its original meaning was simply a deity, and of course there many Gods in the original Germanic culture – Woden, Thor, Tiu and many others. But within Christianity – a monotheist religion – it became THE God – THE Supreme Being. Apparently the Anglo-Saxons didn't feel the need to borrow the Latin word **deus**. Their native word would do just fine.

Now a common myth or misunderstanding is that the word **God** is cognate with the word **good**. It seems like a reasonable assumption, but it's not true. The word **good** derives from a completely different Germanic and Indo-European root, but the similarity can create some confusions.

A good example of this confusion is one of the most common words in the English language – **good-bye**. We naturally assume that the 'good' in **goodbye** means, well, 'good' – as in 'good day' or 'good evening.'   But it actually means 'God.' It derives from an early Middle English saying 'God be With You.' As you may know, French has the word **adieu**. And there were see the Latin word for God – **deus**. So **adieu** literally meant 'to God' in French, but that was actually a shortened version of the original French phrase which was ' a dieu (vous) commant,' which was 'I command you to God.' And after the Normans arrived in Britain, the phrase was translated into English as 'God be With You.'

In the same way the French ultimately shortened the French version to just *adieu*, English speakers did the same thing. 'God be with you' was shortened to simply 'God be,' and later 'Good bye.' The change from *God* to *good* was probably influenced by phrases like 'good day,' 'good night' and 'good evening' which were already in the language.

Another example of the common confusion of *good* and *God* is the word *gospel*. A lot of people think that the word derives from the word *God*, but actually it comes from the word *good*. And it represents a literal translation of the Greco-Roman term *evangelium*, which gives us words like *evangelist* and *evangelical*. The original Greek word meant 'good news.' So the Anglo-Saxons adopted a literal translation of the word – *good* and *spell* which meant 'story or message' in Old English. So *goodspel* meant 'good message' or 'good tidings.' But later English speakers were once again confused with the similarity between *good* and *God*. They thought that the word was derived from the word *God*, so the pronunciation shifted from /gude-spel/ to /god-spel/ to /gah-spel/.

The newly Christian Anglo-Saxons also had to translate the Latin word *sanctus* which gives us later words like *sanctify* and *sanctuary*, as well as words like *sacred* and *saint*. So they decided to use an old Germanic word which had deep Indo-European roots. The original Indo-European word *kailo* meant 'undamaged or undiminished.' The word passed into the Germanic languages, and under Grimm's Law, the 'k' sound at the front shifted to an 'h' sound. And it produced two very closely related words in Old English. One word was *hal* – the original version of our modern word *whole* – W-H-O-L-E. The other English word was *hælan* – the original version of our word *heal*. To 'heal' something was to 'fix it', 'cure it' or 'make it whole.' And that is the word which the Anglo-Saxons decided to use for the Latin word *sanctus*. In the same way that a healthy person was in tact and whole, and unviolated by sickness or disease, something that was sacred was also 'whole' and unviolated. So the word *holy* was appropriated to describe something sacred. So *holy* meant pure or uncontaminated. And in that sense we can see the connections between *holy*, *whole*, *heal*, and *health*. All of those words being closely connected Old English words derived from the same ultimate root.

I should also note that the word *holy* was pronounced /holly/ in Old English. And that original pronunciation has survived in the word *holiday* which is literally a 'holy day.'

I should also remind you here that the word *Catholic* comes from a Greek phrase which meant 'on the whole' or 'about the whole,' and later came to mean universal. So we see the same idea within the original Greek terms as well.

The Anglo-Saxons also had to translate the Latin word for 'un-Christian' or 'un-holy' behavior. So they used a native Germanic word which meant a transgression or improper act. The word was *sin*. And it thereafter took on a very specific religious meaning.

In the Christian church, it was important to confess one's sins. This was the confession. But *confess* and *confession* are Latin terms which entered English after the Norman Conquest. So the Anglo-Saxons had to find a way to express the concept of making confessions and receiving absolutions. So they used the native word *scrifan*, which basically meant the process of writing

something down or documenting it. So a person making a confession to a priest was documenting or publishing his sins in much the same way that a writer documents or publishes his ideas when he writes them down. Now you may have noticed that the Old English word *scrifan* resembles our modern word *scrivener*. And that is not a coincidence. *Scrivener* comes from Lati, but it appears that the Old English word *scrifan* was derived from an earlier Germanic word, and that original Germanic word was likely borrowed from the early Romans who were much more accustomed to writing. So *scrifan* is ultimately cognate with Latin-derived terms *scrivener*, as well as *scribe* and *script*.

So *scrifan* was now used by the Anglo-Saxons to meant the process of making a confession. The noun form was *shrift* meaning the actual confession and giving of absolution. A 'short shrift' was a confession that was cut short. And this was particularly the case with condemned prisoners who were often given on a few seconds to make their confession to a priest before they were executed. And that phrase has survived into Modern English. Today the term 'short shrift' means any activity or event which is cut short or which receives insufficient attention.

Now when a person converted to Christianity, they were usually baptized, but Old English didn't have the word *baptize*. Instead, the Anglo-Saxons chose to use the word *dyppan* which meant 'to immerse.' Even though *baptize* was later borrowed into English after the Normans, the original word *dyppan* survives in the modern word *dip*.

And speaking of *baptize*, there is a connection between the word *baptize* and the word *epiphany*. In Modern English, an *epiphany* is a sudden insight or realization about something, but it was originally the name of the Christian festival which commemorated the baptism of Christ. The festival was typically held on January 6, but rather than borrow the very un-Germanic word *epiphany*, the Anglo-Saxons came up with a very English way of expressing the same idea. Since the festival commemorated the day Christ was dipped in water, the holiday came to be called *baethdaeg* ('bath day') – pronounced almost exactly the same way in Old English. Between *epiphany* and *baethdaeg* ('bath day'), we can see how one term sounds very sophisticated and the other sounds very – well – unsophisticated, but that just reflects how the Anglo-Saxons had to translate these Latin concepts with their somewhat limited English vocabulary.

Now in addition to baptism, prayer is also a very important part of Christianity, but again *pray* is another Latin word which arrived with the Normans. The Anglo-Saxons used their own word *biddan* which meant to ask or request something. And that word survives in the modern word *bid* – in some cases. *Bid* actually has two different meanings in Modern English. Usually we think of it as an offer or proclamation. So if we 'bid' on something at an auction, we are using the word in that sense. And if we 'forbid' something, we're using it in the same sense as a 'proclamation.' But this sense of the word *bid* comes from a different Old English word – the word *beodan*.

But we also have the word *bid* in the sense of 'bidding someone farewell.' And that use of the word *bid* comes from a different Old English word – the same word which the Anglo-Saxons used for 'pray.' To 'bid someone farewell' originally meant 'to ask or request permission to

leave.' So in earlier English you might 'bid someone farewell,' or you might 'bid' to God for good health or good fortune.

Sometimes worshipers would maintain a string of round stones or metal balls, and they would use that string to count their prayers, but remember they weren't called *prayers* in Old English. They were called *bids* – or 'beads.' So you didn't count your 'prayers' on the string, you counted your 'beads.' And that is the ultimate origin of the word *bead* – B-E-A-D. So an incredibly common English word like *bead* derives from this process of converting Latin words and Christian concepts into Old English.

Now earlier in the episode, I mentioned the word *heaven* which originally meant the sky. And that word was appropriated for the Christian concept of the place where Christians go when the die. And you might remember from my discussion about the early Germanic tribes that the word *hell* was a Germanic word for the watery underworld of the dead. The Old Testament had used the Greek word *Hades*, but the Anglo-Saxons chose to appropriate that Germanic word *hell*, and over time, the concept evolved from its original notion of a dark watery underworld to its Christian notion of a place of fire and brimstone.

Of course, Hell's most famous resident is the Devil – another Germanic word converted to Christian use. The original Hebrew version of the Old Testament used the word *Satan* – or /sah-tahn/. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, *Satan* was translated as *diabolos* which meant 'slanderer.' The Latin translation basically just used the same Greek word. And that word gives us a modern word like *diabolic*. But the Anglo-Saxons looked for a native word to described the fallen angel. So they used *deofol* which meant an "evil spirit or a devious person." And the Devil got his modern English name.

A few episodes back, we looked at Aethelbert's Laws of Kent which were called the "Domas" because the words *law* and *judgment* hadn't entered English yet. So when the Anglo-Saxons had to translate the word 'Judgement Day,' they used their native word for 'judgment.' And 'Judgment Day' became 'doomsday' – a word which still survives in Modern English.

So as you can see, the Anglo-Saxons were originally inclined to use native English words where they could. But the limited vocabulary of Old English could only do so much. And gradually, the Anglo-Saxons began to adopt Latin words rather than trying to find English ways of saying the same thing. Next time, we'll look at that process, and we'll explore a lot of the Latin words which came into English long before the Normans arrived. And this will mark the first large-scale borrowing of foreign words into the English language.

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