THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 44: THE ROMANCE OF OLD FRENCH

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 44: The Romance of Old French. In this episode, we're going to explore the development of Old French from the Latin spoken by the Romans. Together with Old English and Old Norse, French was one of the three fundamental components of Middle English. So those three languages came together to produce the language of Geoffrey Chaucer, and eventually the language of Shakespeare.

Over the last few episodes, we've explored the history of the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians up the point of the Viking invasions. This time, I want to focus on the third part of that story – the Franks and the early history of their French language.

Even though this is a podcast about the history of English, I think it is important to digress as this point to explore the development of French. This part of the story is important for several reasons. As we know, the later Norman Conquest brought a lot of French words into English. Nearly half of the words in normal conversational English come from French. This influence makes English the most Latin of all the Germanic languages. So that alone should justify our look at the early history of French. But French also affected the pronunciation of certain words in English, and it even affected the grammar of English. And it heavily impacted the spelling of English words. So because of that extensive influence, it is important to understand the origins of French.

It is also important to understand how the Frankish kingdom developed into early France. In the same way that English is the most Latin of all the Germanic languages, we can make a similar statement about French. French is considered to be most Germanic of all of the Latin-derived Romance languages. And that's because the Franks were a Germanic tribe closely related to the Anglo-Saxons. So the Germanic language of the Franks actually had a significant influence on the development of Old French. And we've seen in earlier episodes how French brought Frankish words into English that were closely related to Anglo-Saxon words. For example, ***yard*** is a native Anglo-Saxon word. ***Garden*** is the Frankish word from French. Similarly, ***ward*** and ***warden*** are Anglo-Saxons words, but ***guard*** and ***guardian*** are the Frankish equivalents from Old French. So there are deep connections between English and French which might not be obvious at first glance.

But there is another reason why this period of French history is important to our story of English, and that is the common shared influence of that other language – Old Norse. As we're going to see, the history of the Anglo-Saxons, the Franks, and the Scandinavians becomes more and more intertwined as we move forward. And the common link between those the three groups is the Normans.

We know that the Normans were from Normandy in northern France. And we know that they spoke French. And they brought their French language with them to England in 1066. But here's the thing you might not know. The Normans weren't native to France . They were originally Vikings from Scandinavia. Just as the Danes settled in eastern Britain and created a

region called the Danelaw, the Normans did basically the same thing in France. They were originally the 'North Men' – the people from the north in Scandinavia. And the term 'North Men' was later shortened to ***Normans***.

And that is actually a very important point in the overall history of English. The Normans not only brought French to England, but they also brought some Norse influence as well. So Norman French was largely Latin, but it had some of the Germanic influence of the Franks, and it also had some of the Scandinavian influence of the Vikings. And that language became mixed with the Old English of the Anglo-Saxons and the Old Norse of the Danes in Danelaw. So you can start to see how incredibly mixed the languages became during this upcoming period.

Take a word like ***harness*** which you put on a horse. It's a Scandinavian word from Old Norse. And it is tempting to assume that it came from Danish Vikings who invaded and settled in Britain. But it didn't. It came from the Normans after 1066. It was an Old Norse word which they had brought with them to northern France. And it survived in their Norman French dialect when they brought it to Britain.

Sometimes linguists can identify an Old Norse word in English, but they can't identify the source of the word. It's not always clear if the Norse word came from the Vikings or the Normans. A few episodes back, I mentioned that the word ***bait*** is related to the word ***bite***. ***Bait*** is an Old Norse word, but linguists aren't sure if it came from the Vikings or the Normans. It doesn't appear in English texts until after 1066. So it could have come from either source, and it could have come from both.

So as we move forward in the story of English, we're going to have an incredible mixing of languages. And sometimes we'll see sources buried within other sources. But it all revolves around the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings and the Normans. So having explored the early history of Old English and Old Norse, it's time to explore the early history of Old French. So let's turn our attention south across the channel to the area which the Romans called Gaul.

As we know, French is a Romance language. And even though many people consider French to be the language of love, that's not why it's called a Romance language. It's a Romance language because it evolved out of the language of the Romans which of course was Latin. French is one of several Romance languages, including Spanish, Italian, Portugese and Rumanian. But despite their common origins, the modern Romance languages sometimes have very distinct sounds. Most people can easily distinguish the sound of French from the sound of Spanish, even if they've never studied a Romance language. And as we'll see, some of those difference were present from the very beginning.

The first thing to understand is that there is a great deal which is not known about the early development of the Romance languages. Scholars tend to rely up written evidence to trace the development of early languages if they have that written evidence. And that's one of the problems we have with the Germanic languages. They weren't written down until pretty late. English was the earliest attested Germanic language beginning in the early 600s. But believe it or not, written English not only preceded the other Germanic languages, it also preceded the

other Romance languages by several centuries. And that may surprise you since the Romans were literate. You may assume that we can therefore trace the early history of the Romance languages from Latin with some precision, but that's not the case at all. And that's because there was a fundamental split between the Latin that was spoken and the Latin that was written down.

Through the eighth century, virtually all Latin texts were written in the standard, educated form of Latin which was taught in Roman schools, and in later monastic schools. This is what we know today as 'Classical Latin.' But by the late Roman period, that wasn't necessarily the language being spoken on the ground in many parts of Western Europe. As we know, all languages are constantly evolving, and that was happening to Latin as well. The language that was being spoken on the ground was changing and evolving. These were the Vulgar Latin dialects. ***Vulgar*** didn't mean crude or ugly. It just meant common. So those were the dialects of the common people. But if you were a scribe in the Latin-speaking world, you didn't write in your local vernacular. You wrote in the proper written language - 'Classical' Latin. So as the spoken language evolved, it became more and more distinct from the written version of the language. And since there were no tape recorders, it was only the written version which survived. So that is why much of the early history of French is vague and uncertain. It wasn't actually written down or documented until it was a completely distinct language.

A good example of this disconnect between written Classical Latin and spoken Vulgar Latin can be seen in the word for 'horse.' As I've noted in prior episodes, the Indo-European word for 'horse' was ***ekwo***, and it produced the Latin word ***equus***. That was the standard Latin word for 'horse' in the surviving texts which were written in Classical Latin. And it ultimately produced ***equine*** and ***equestrian*** in Modern English. But the modern Romance languages don't really use that word as their primary word for 'horse.' They use an altogether different root word which was ***caballus***.

In Classical Latin, it was used – sometimes disdainfully – as a 'nag' or 'work horse,' but it is the original version of the word for 'horse' in Modern French. That word is ***cheval***. Spanish also uses that same Latin word – which is ***caballo***. Portugese, Rumanian, and Italian also use that same root word. And it also found its way into English. It gave us words like ***cavalry*** from French and ***cavalier*** from Italian. That Latin root word ***caballus*** actually comes from an unknown source, it doesn't appear to be Indo-European at all. Some scholars think it came from a Balkan or Anatolian language. But wherever it came from, it was apparently borrowed very early on, and it became the standard word for 'horse' in the local Vulgar Latin dialects as they spread throughout Western Europe. But Classical Latin – the written language – held onto that original word ***equus***. And this in only one small example of the disconnect between the written language and the spoken language throughout the Late Roman period and the early Middle Ages.

Not only was there an early distinction between spoken Latin and written Latin, there were also differences from one region to the next. And those regional differences ultimately led to the modern Romance languages.

But one thing that is interesting about this process is that there were regional differences from the very beginning. It is tempting to assume that a common form of Latin once existed throughout Western Europe, and that the regional differences only began to emerge at a later date. But modern linguists believe that there were never a common uniform language throughout the region.

One of the reasons why there were regional differences is because Latin spread throughout Western Europe at different times. And since languages are always evolving, slightly different versions of Latin entered different places at different times.

The Latin which was spoken when Rome was originally founded was somewhat different from the Latin spoken a few centuries later during the Punic Wars against Hannibal and Carthage. The Punic Wars ultimately led the Romans into Spain around the third century BC. And that was the ultimate origin of Spanish. But Latin continued to evolve. A couple of centuries later, Caesar emerged as the dictator of Rome. And it was Caesar who brought Latin to central and northern Gaul. Over the first couple of centuries AD or the Common Era, Latin gradually spread throughout Gaul as the Romans came to rule the region. So the Latin of Gaul was a slightly later verison of the Latin which had been brought to Spain a few centuries earlier. The regional differences were minimal at the time, but slight differences early on can lead to big differences down the road.

These early differences between the Latin of Spain and early France can be seen in some incredibly common words in both languages. Even if you've never studied Spanish or French, you may know a few common phrases in each language. One of the first phrases which English speakers usually learn is 'Do you speak English?" That's kind of an important question, especially if you don't speak Spanish or French. So you may be familiar with these phrases.

In Spanish, you might ask, "Habla inglés?" And in French you might ask, "Parlez-vouls Anglias?" But even if you don't know much about those two languages, you might already be aware that Spanish and French use different words to mean 'speak.'

The Spanish verb is ***hablar***. And the French verb is ***parler***. But if both Spanish and French derived from Latin, why do they have different words for 'speak.' Well, the answer lies in this early history of Roman expansion. The Spanish ***hablar*** is the older verb which was used in pre-Classical texts. It was in common use when the Romans settled in Spain shortly after the Punic Wars. Roman texts from the period of the Punic Wars show that this was the typical word used in Latin for the verb 'to speak.'

But after the Punic Wars against Carthage, Rome spread to the east and eventually conquered Greece. And that is when they began to pick up a lot of Greek words. And one of those words was ***parabole*** which meant a 'comparison,' and it ultimately gives us the English word ***parable***. Well that word passed from Greek into Latin, and it eventually came to mean 'word.' And this was the Latin word which was carried into northern Italy and Gaul. And that word became ***parler*** in French. So today, French and Italian use that later verb. And that also means that French ***parler*** and the English word ***parable*** are cognate.

Another example of this early division among the Latin dialects can be seen in the respective words for 'cheese.' In Spanish, the word for 'cheese' is ***queso***. But in French, it is ***fromage***. Well, again, Spanish uses the older noun ,which is actually the Classical Latin noun, but French uses a noun which developed at a later date. And there is an interesting connection here to the English word ***cheese***.

As we saw in an earlier episode, the English word ***cheese*** is ultimately derived from the Latin word for 'cheese' which was ***caseus***. It was a very early borrowing by the Germanic tribes on the continent. They apparently encountered the early Romans and borrowed that Latin word. And of course, that same Latin word produced the Spanish word ***queso***. Within later English, the 'K' sound shifted to the 'CH' sound, thereby giving us ***cheese***. So ***queso*** and ***cheese*** are both derived from the same old Latin word. But over time, Latin developed a term which meant 'formed or shaped cheese,' so the type of cheese you might buy in a market. And they actually used the same Latin word which gave us the English word ***form*** or ***formed***. And that word was ***formaticum***. Originally, it was a slang word for cheese which was rarely used in written Latin, but it became the more common word in the Vulgar Latin dialects which spread into Gaul. And it produced the French word ***fromage***. So once again, we see that Spanish uses an earlier Latin word, and French uses a later Latin word.

These are just a couple of examples using words or phrases that are familiar to many English speakers. But the larger point here is that there were basic differences between the Latin dialects within the Roman Empire from the very beginning. And those minor differences became more significant over time as the language of each region evolved in its own unique direction.

The early Latin dialect spoken in Gaul is known by linguists as 'Gallo-Roman.' So this was the earliest version of the regional dialect that would later become French. Again, this was just a spoken dialect – not a written dialect. Only about one percent (1%) of the population was literate. And again, when they wrote, they wrote in the standard Classical Latin dialect.

Over the first four or five centuries, Latin gradually replaced the native Celtic languages in most of Gaul. And much like English, the native Celtic languages contributed very little to French. Some linguists estimate that about 100 Celtic words survive from the original Celtic-speaking Gauls. And also like English, much of that Celtic influence comes in the form of place names. Just as London is a Celtic name which survives in English, Paris is a Celtic name which survives in French.

And there was one event which occurred during this early period of Gallo-Roman which was destined to confuse English speakers in much later generations. And that was the loss of the 'H' sound in Gallo-Roman, and for that matter in most of the Romance languages. The letter 'H' became a silent letter, and it's still silent in Modern French. And a lot of those words passed into English. That's why words like ***honor***, ***honest***, ***hour*** (H-O-U-R), and ***heir*** (H-E-I-R) all have those silent H's at the beginning. They're all Latin words which passed through Gallo-Roman and lost their 'H' sound in the process.

But those silent H's sometimes confused later English speakers. So today, do you pronounce H-E-R-B – the plant – as /herb/ or /erb/? Well, it probably depends on which side of the Atlantic you're on. In Latin, the H was pronounced, but it disappeared throughout the Latin dialects in around the third century. So in Gallo-Roman – the ancestor of French – it was /erb/, not /herb/. And that was still the pronunciation when the Normans arrived in Britain. So the initial H was still silent in Middle English and early Modern English. And when English speakers settled parts of the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they brought that pronunciation with them. That's why it's still /erb/ in American English. But in the nineteenth century, the pronunciation changed in England, and the word finally got its original 'H' sound back. And there is an interesting story about why that happened, but we'll have to wait until Modern English to discuss that. Or you can just check out the History of the Alphabet series where I briefly discuss that change.

But the point here is that some of the changes which happened in Gallo-Roman ultimately impacted English as well. And it can still create some confusion in Modern English.

Around the time the 'H' sound was disappearing from Gaul, something else was also beginning to disappear from Gaul – specifically, the Romans. As we saw in earlier episodes, the Western Roman Empire gradually collapsed, and a variety of Germanic tribes began to pour into Gaul. Early on, the region became divided between Visigoths, Franks and Burgundians. All of these groups eventually began to speak Gallo-Roman, but these groups also contributed to regional variations within Gaul itself.

The Visigoths had initially settled in southern Gaul, but the rising power of the Franks in the north eventually pushed the Goths down into Spain. The last time we looked at the Franks in any detail, we saw that Clovis was the first king to unify the Frankish tribes and rule most of modern France, as well as a large portion of modern Germany. So by the late 500s, the Franks controlled most of modern France, and the Visigoths controlled most of modern Spain and Portugal. And this also contributed to some of the differences between modern Spanish and French.

In Gaul, the Franks initially retained their Germanic language and their Germanic culture. So there was a mixing of Roman and Germanic elements there. But down in Spain, the Germanic influence was much more limited.

So let's take a minute a look at what was happening down in Spain. In Spain, the Germanic Visigoths were in control, but remember that they had a long history of fighting both against Rome and on behalf of Rome as federates. So the Visigoths had been partially Romanized before the conquest of Spain. So they embraced the Latin culture there, and they didn't seek to impose Germanic culture in the same way that the Franks did to the north. It's believed that the Visigoths in Spain were bilingual in both Latin and Gothic. So they just continued to use Latin for most government and other literary purposes. Gothic was never a written language in Spain. So the Germanic language of the Visigoths had very little influence on Spanish.

In an earlier episode, I noted that the word ***rix*** was borrowed from Gothic and appears in the modern Spanish word ***rico*** meaning 'rich.' The Germanic word ***banda*** meaning a group of soldiers also passed into Spanish. It's basically the equivalent of the native English word ***band***.

Espia meaning a spy also came from Gothic. A few others also passed to Spanish, but the best example of Gothic influence in Spanish can be found in family surnames. ***Ruiz***, ***Rodriguez***, ***Fernandez***, ***Hernandez***, ***Muñoz***, and ***Gonzalez*** are all names derived from a Latinized form of an original Gothic name. And the fact that these names are so common in Spain and Latin America indicates the early influence of the Visigothic rulers and their Gothic surnames.

But in the year 711, the Islamic Moors from northern Africa crossed the Mediterranean and invaded southern Spain. Even though the Moors never ruled all of Spain, they did eventually control about three-quarters (3/4) of the peninsula (excluding the extreme north and northwest). And during this period, early Spanish and Portugese adopted a lot of Arabic words which don't appear in the other Romance languages. So that marks another distinction between those languages and French.

Whereas the Visigoths tended to be bilingual and routinely used Latin, the early Franks in Gaul spoke their native West Germanic language, which remember is closely related to Old English. But soon after the establishment of the Frankish kingdom under Clovis, the Frankish rulers did start to become bilingual. They spoke both Frankish and the local Gallo-Roman dialect of Latin. But unlike the Goths down in Spain who were replaced by the Arabic-speaking Moors, the Franks were never forced out of Gaul. So the Germanic influence in Spain was limited to a couple of centuries, but the Germanic influence in Gaul was uninterrupted until it finally merged into the native Latin language. So that pervasive and long-term influence explains why the modern French language is considered to be the most Germanic of all of the Romance languages. About ten percent (10%) of the modern French vocabulary can be traced back to the Germanic language of the Franks. This percentage is the largest percentage of Germanic words in any Romance language.

Another somewhat unique aspect of the Frankish kingdom was the way that it dealt with succession following the death of a king. It was the tradition of the Franks that a kingdom would be divided among the king's descendants when the king died. And that is part of a recurring theme in Frankish history. From time to time a powerful king would emerge and unify the various Frankish kingdoms, but when that king died, the unified kingdom would be divided among his children or grandchildren. And there would be a period of disunity for a while until another strong king emerged, and the whole process would start all over again. And we see the first example of this process with the death of Clovis in the year 511.

When Clovis died, the kingdom was divided among his four children, and then eventually among their children and so on. Within a few generations, the Frankish kings had become so divided, and their kingdoms had become so fractured, that none of them had any real power. Much of the practical governance was left to prominent nobles who were called 'Mayors of the Palace.' During the first couple of centuries of the Frankish kingdom, many of the regional kings were minors who were under the control of their mother or under the control of the local Mayor of the

Palace. When an adult king did emerge, his power was usually limited. Since the nobles were basically running the government, the early Frankish kings were entirely dependent upon those nobles to carry out any action or to enforce any degree. And the nobles were willing to break with the king if they disagreed with him. It was the nobles who could actually raise an army and provide protection. So they became the real power behind the throne. And the kings were generally viewed as ineffective figureheads.

Clovis was the founder of what was called the Merovingian Dynasty – the first ruling family of what would become France. During the time in which they ruled, they were sometimes referred to as the 'long-haired kings' because they tended to grow their hair very long. But later French historians gave them another nickname. Due to the fractured and weakened state of the kingdom, the Merovingian kings became known as the 'Do Nothing Kings.' In fact, the kings had become so weakened, that the nobles actually began to ignore them.

Over time, several aristocratic families started to vie for power among themselves. One of those families was led by a man named Pepin of Herstal, or sometimes called 'Pepin II' since there was an earlier leader also named Pepin. Through alliances and military defeats, Pepin emerged as the most powerful Mayor of the Palace within the Frankish territory. From that point on, his family could have done away with the actual Merovingian king at any time, but Germanic tradition still honored and respected the position of the king, even if the king had no real power.

Pepin ruled as Mayor of the Palace in the late 600s during the emergence of the Northumbrian Renaissance up in Britain. And Pepin soon took note of what was going on in Northumbria. He was a Christian, and he decided that it was important for the Franks to convert their Germanic cousins back in Germania. He also sought to expand Frankish control into Germania, so the conversion of the Germanic peoples in that region was an important part of that overall plan.

But he didn't really send Frankish missionaries to carry out those conversions. Since the Franks were seen as rivals, Frankish missionaries weren't likely to be welcomed with opened arms. But there was another problem. And that problem concerned language. We get a sense at this point as to how much the Gallo-Roman language – that Latin dialect – had taken over in the Frankish Kingdom. Even though some of the Frankish nobles still spoke their native Germanic language, most of the people in the kingdom were speaking Gallo-Roman, but Pepin needed missionaries who could speak the language of the Germans. So in order to find Christian missionaries who could speak directly with the Germans, Pepin reached out to the Anglo-Saxons.

The Anglo-Saxon missionaries solved several of the problems he had with the conversion of the Germans. First, unlike the Franks, they were more likely to be welcomed in the Germanic regions. Also, the Christian culture of the Anglo-Saxons had become so advanced that they were seen as a good source of missionaries. And then there was that language issue.

The Anglo-Saxons still spoke a language closely related to that of the Frisians and Old Saxons. It was likely that the British missionaries could still communicate directly with the northern Germans without too much difficulty. And this is actually the period in which the term ***Anglo-Saxon*** first began to be used, and it was used to distinguish the British Saxons from the

continental Saxons. But they were still seen as distant relatives in the minds of the Franks. And their respective languages were still seen as very similar. And all of this is kind of important to our story because it shows that the language of the Anglo-Saxons was still fundamentally a Germanic language, but the Germanic language of the Franks had been largely abandoned within the Frankish kingdom having been absorbed within the Gallo-Roman dialects.

As the Franks began to rely upon Anglo-Saxon missionaries in northern Germany, vital links were being established between the Anglo-Saxon churches and the Frankish churches. And those links are going to be very important when we get to Charlemagne in a few decades.

Pepin died in the year 714. At the time of his death, his two legitimate children were both deceased. There were also some legitimate grandchildren, but they were very young. Meanwhile, Pepin also had a couple of illegitimate children. And one of them was named Karl, but thanks to a later sound shift in French, we know him today as Charles – specifically Charles Martel. And after a brief war against the legitimate heirs of Pepin, Charles quickly emerged as Pepin's successor. Again, Charles was still not the actual king. He just succeeded his illegitimate father, Pepin, as Mayor of the Palace. And just like his father, Charles was the real power behind the Frankish throne. But about 15 years after he emerged as Pepin's successor, and as the de factor ruler of the Franks, he faced his greatest threat.

I noted earlier that the Visigoths down in Spain had been defeated by the Muslim Moors from northern Africa. Well, now that kingdom down in Spain was starting to spread into the southern part of the Frankish kingdom. This was considered both a political threat and a religious threat. Not only did the invaders threaten the power of Franks, but as Muslims, they also threatened Christianity in Western Europe. In the year 732, Charles Martel led an army against the Muslin invaders and defeated them in a battle known as the Battle of Tours. And this is one of those landmark battles in European history because it ended the Muslim advance into western Europe.

Not only did Charles block the advance of the invaders from the south, he also re-conquered much of the territory that had been lost during the later rule of the Merovingians. He extended Frankish control to parts of the Germanic territory east of the Rhine. To build up his army, Charles gave out land titles to his nobles in exchange for their pledge of loyalty to him. By this point, the stirrup was finally being used in western Europe. That was the technology which had been brought by the Huns a few centuries earlier. Now Charles's army was using that technology, and he began to build up a sizeable cavalry. The era of the mounted knight had finally arrived, and Charles was laying the foundation of the later feudal system, which was later imported into Britain with the Norman Conquest in 1066. He also mastered the technique of the feigned retreat where he would appear to retreat in battle, and when the enemy let down its guard, he would launch another attack. He was considered a brilliant military leader, and he reportedly lost only one battle throughout his entire career.

Charle's military prowess led to his modern name Charles Martel, which literally meant 'Charles the Hammer.' ***Marteau*** is the French word for 'hammer.' So that produced the name Charles Martel.

But while Charles may have been 'The Hammer,' he was not the King. The traditional Merovingian King was still there in the background, and Charles continued to rule in the king's name. But with the power accumulated by Charles, the king's days were numbered.

The culture of the Franks had become much less Germanic, so that old loyalty to the King's title and line of descent was fading. But Charles never formally crossed that line. He proclaimed himself 'Savior of Christendom' and 'Duke of the Franks,' but he never took the title of King. That would be reserved for his son.

When Charles Martel died in 741, his son – another Pepin – became the Mayor of the Palace. This Pepin is sometimes known as Pepin III – or Pepin the Short. And this Pepin decided that it was finally time to do away with the facade of Merovingian kings. Since Pepin was effectively the king in everything but the actual title, he decided to go ahead and take the title as well.

But in order to be recognized as the king, Pepin needed the blessing of the Pope. And as it turned out, the Pope was under threat from the Germanic Lombards who had settled in northern Italy. So Pepin and the Pope worked out an exchange. The Pope recognized Pepin as king of the Franks, and Pepin assembled an army and defeated the Lombards in northern Italy. From that point on, Pepin and his descendants were the official rulers of the Frankish Kingdom, and the Merovingians passed into history.

Since Pepin was the son of Charles Martel, the new ruling dynasty was actually named after Charles who was still actually known as Karl. The new ruling family was called the Carolingians. ***Carolingian*** is based on a Latin version of the name ***Karl***. But during this period of early Carolingian rule, the name ***Karl*** was starting to becoming ***Charles***. And that's because of a standard sound shift which occurred in this intermediate period between Latin and French.

So I want to digress for a moment and discuss that sound change because Modern English is basically a time capsule which captures this sound change. So let me explain what I mean by that.

As we know, Latin has the 'K' sound which was almost always represented by the letter C. So the Germanic name ***Karl*** was usually rendered in Latin as ***Carolus*** - C-A-R-O-L-U-S. And we saw in earlier episodes that the 'K' sound shifted to the 'S' sound in early French when it appeared from a front vowel – so basically the sounds represented by the letters E and I. Well, this was the period in which that sound change was occurring. And a Latin word like ***centum*** meaning 'hundred' was becoming ***cent*** – the original version of our modern English word ***cent***. And this type of change was actually happening throughout western Europe. The other Latin dialects in Spain and Italy were experiencing similar changes. And even Old English was experiencing some similar changes as the 'K' sound became a 'CH' sound in the same contexts. So ***rice*** (/ree-kuh/) be came /ree-chuh/ and eventually ***rich***.

So all of these languages were getting softer by replacing some of the hard /k/ and /g/ sounds – which are known as stops – with smoother sibilant sounds like /s/ or /ch/. You might remember that linguists call this process is called assibilation or palatalization. But Gallo-Roman or very

early French was taking this process even further. It was sometimes making a similar change even before a front vowel like 'A'.   So ***Karl*** became ***Charles***. And this was really unique in the languages which we've been exploring.

And it was part of an overall process which was occurring within the Gallo-Roman language that was making the language very soft and smooth. And it was this overall process that later gave French it's smooth and flowing sound – the sound that so many people consider to be romantic and has caused it to be described as the 'Language of Love.'

During this intermediate period between Latin and Old French, Frankish speakers were busy slurring all kinds of sounds. The 'CH' sound (/ch/) was created for the first time in the language, and the 'V' sound (/v/) and the 'J' sound (/j/) were also created for the first time.

With respect to that new 'CH' sound in a name like Charles, it was originally more like the modern English 'CH' sound – /ch/. But that sound continued to evolve within later French, and it became even softer over time. And today it's pronounced as an 'SH' sound in French. So 'Charles' is actually /sharles/ in Modern French. And since English has borrowed Latin and French words over the centuries, those sound changes are actually preserved as relics in Modern English.

In order to see this process in English, let's consider the Latin word ***caput*** which meant 'head.' You might remember that it's actually cognate with the English word ***head*** thanks to Grimm's Law. Well, that Latin word produced another Latin word ***cappa*** which meant a head covering or cloak. And the Anglo-Saxons borrowed that Latin word during the period of Old English. It produced the words ***cap*** and ***cape***. So those words arrived in Old English shortly after the Church arrived in Britain and well before the Normans arrived. And ***cap*** and ***cape*** retain that original Latin 'K' sound at the beginning.

Well, back in the Frankish Kingdom, you might remember that St. Martin had a famous cape or cloak which became a holy relic. The building that was constructed to house the cloak – or ***cappa*** – was called a ***cappella***. But then that sound change happened in the language. And ***cappella*** became ***chappella***, and then ***chapel***. And that word arrived in English in the thirteenth century shortly after the Normans arrived. And the related word ***chaplain*** also arrived in English around that time. And the word ***chief***, meaning 'the head person' from that same word '***caput***' also came in during that period. But notice that those post-Norman words came into English with the 'CH' sound because that reflected the French pronunciation of that initial consonant at the time.

But in the sixteenth century, near the beginning of the Modern English period, English borrowed other variations of that same root word from French. That included words like ***chapeau*** for a type of cap, and the word ***chef*** meaning the head or chief of a kitchen. And notice that even though words like ***chapeau*** and ***chef*** retain the same 'CH' spelling, they came into English with their later 'SH' pronunciation - /shapeau/ and /shef/. So from ***cap*** and ***cape*** in Old English, to ***chapel*** and ***chaplain*** and ***chief*** in Middle English, to ***chapeau*** and ***chef*** in Modern English, we can actually trace the history of that French sound change within English.

In fact, as a general rule, French words that came into English during the first three centuries of Norman rule tend to have that earlier 'CH' pronunciation. That includes words like ***charge, charm, chance, chase, champion, chapter, charity*** and ***chattel***.

But French words that came in during or after the 1400s tend to have that newer 'SH' sound. That includes words like ***chapeau, chaperon, charade, chateau, chauffeur, champagne, chardonnay, chandelier*** and ***chauvinist***. So you can see how the pronunciation is affected by timing.

In fact, we can take this one step further. We've seen that the 'CH' letter combination usually represents the /ch/ sound. That sound existed in Old French and it also exited in Old English – in words like ***rich***, and ***church*** and ***cheese***. So after 1066, the Norman French scribes applied that same 'CH' letter combination to all of those native English words as well. So when we use the letter combination 'CH' for the /ch/ sound, we can thank French for that. And when we see the letter combination 'CH' being used for the /sh/ sound in words like ***chapeau*** and ***champagne***, we now know that that probably represents a later borrowing from Middle French or Modern French where that sound had changed to the /sh/ sound.

But what about words ***choir, character, chaos, chrome, chronic*** and ***chameleon***. All of those words also have a 'CH' spelling at the beginning, but that spelling represents the 'K' sound. So what's going on there? Well that's another legacy of Latin in Modern English. And those words actually reflect the original use of the 'CH' letter combination. Interestingly, when the 'CH' letter combination was invented by Roman scribes, it didn't represent the /ch/ sound. In fact, as I just noted, the /ch/ sound didn't even exit in Latin at the time. It developed within the later Vulgar Latin dialects like Gallo-Roman. So the 'CH' letter combination was originally used for a completely different sound. And that sound came from Greek.

After Rome conquered Greece, all of those Greek words started to come into Latin. And Greek had certain sounds which didn't exist in Latin. One of those sounds was that guttural consonant sound in the back of the throat – the /x/ sound – which Latin didn't have. It was similar to a 'K' sound, but the air didn't stop like it does for a 'K' sound. It continued to flow through, so it was a fricative. We've seen that sound before in Old English and other Germanic languages. And it's still a common feature of many languages, but it didn't exist in Latin.

Since this sound was sort of like a very breathy 'K' sound, the Roman scribes represented it in those Greek words by combining the letter C for the 'K' sound and the letter H which represented a breathy sound. And that was the origin of the 'CH' letter combination. And initially, it was just used for those Greek words in Latin. But since Latin didn't have that specific sound, those words ended up being pronounced with the traditional Latin 'K' sound. So all of those words were spelled with a 'CH' for the /x/ sound, but they were just pronounced with a regular /k/. And that's the origin of those words I mentioned – words like ***choir, character, chaos*** and ***chameleon***. They're all Greek words with that original Latin 'CH' spelling. So any time we see an English word which is spelled with 'CH' at the beginning, and that 'CH' represents the 'K' sound like ***choir*** or ***character***, that's a clue that we're probably looking at a Greek word that passed through Latin into English.

The main point of that discussion was to show that English is kind of like a time capsule. Once we know the history of certain sound changes, and the way the alphabet was applied to those sounds, we can make reasonable guesses about the history of a word just based on its spelling and pronunciation. And that's kind of neat, but it also means that modern English spellings are very convoluted. All of that history is buried within those spellings, so it drives us crazy in school, but its actually a valuable tool once you discover the history of the language.

As I noted earlier, during this transitional period between Latin and French, the language was experiencing several different sound changes. And as a general rule, these sound changes were making the Frankish language sound softer and smoother. And we see lots of new sibilant sounds. Just as the /k/ sound was shifting forward in the mouth to the /s/ sound and /ch/ sounds, a similar change was occurring to the 'hard G' sound.

That 'hard G' sound (/g/) was becoming a 'soft G' sound (/j/) before the front vowels – E and I. As its name suggests, when you replace a 'hard G' with a 'soft G,' you get a softer sound. And of course many of those French words with the 'soft G' eventually found their way into English. And this accounts for some of the modern confusion over the pronunciation of the letter G in English.

When a G appears before a back vowel like A, O or U, the sound is almost always the original 'hard G' sound. Just like the 'K' sound, the 'hard G' is in the back of the throat. So it fits together nicely with those vowel sounds in the back of the throat – like /ah/, /oh/ and /oo/. So the 'hard G' rarely changes before back vowels. And that is true for Germanic words like ***game***, ***got***, ***gone*** and ***gun***. And its also true for borrowed French words like ***gain***, ***gallant***, ***goblet***, ***gulf*** and ***gum***.

But things get complicated before the front vowels E and I because that's where the French sound change occurred. Since modern English has a mixture of Germanic and French words, the G before an E or I can be pronounced either hard or soft depending on the word, but here is a very general rule for you. If the word is an old word – so an Old English word or a Middle English word – the pronunciation of the G is generally determined by where it came from. If it came from a Germanic language like Old English or Old Norse, it retains its original hard Germanic G sound. So that includes words like ***gear***, ***geese***, ***get***, ***giddy***, ***gift***, ***gill***, ***girl***, ***girth*** and ***give***.

But if it came from French, it has that early French sound shift to the soft G. So for example, the following words came from French: ***gender***, ***general***, ***genie***, ***gentle***, ***gentry***, ***Geoffrey***, ***germ***, ***German***, ***giant***, ***gigolo*** and ***gist***. And words like ***geometry*** and ***geography*** are of Greek origin, but they came in to English directly from French, so that have that same sound change. So that soft G is usually a clue that we have a French word. Now these are obviously general rules. There are exceptions. Sometimes the exceptions occur because the pronunciation and spelling of the word has changed over the centuries. So the original heritage is lost. And these rules just apply to older words within Old English, Old Norse or Old French, they don't necessarily apply to words borrowed from other languages.

But in the case of those old words, a 'hard G' before E or I usually means a Germanic word. And 'soft G' before E or I usually means a French word. So once again, our language is a time capsule. If we know a few basic rules, we can make some reasonable guesses about the history of a word based simply on its spelling and pronunciation.

Now we just looked at the 'soft G' sound which is really the same as the 'J' sound. So you might go the 'gym' (G-Y-M) with a friend named Jim (J-I-M). Same sound – two different letters. Well, the early French speakers apparently loved this sound because this was when words like /yoo-piter/ and /yoo-lius/ became ***Jupiter*** and ***Julius***. This new 'J' sound was finally emerging during this transition period between Latin and Old French. And once again, this represented a shift of the sound forward in the mouth. This sound had been represented by the letter I – but a 'fancy I' with a tail on the bottom began to be used to represent this new /J/ sound. And that 'fancy I' eventually became our letter J. In fact, that letter J didn't really become a formal letter of the alphabet distinct from I until the 1800s.

But that /j/ sound which developed in early French had a long-lasting influence on English. That /j/ sound isn't really a Germanic sound. Old English had developed the sound in some situations, but it was very limited in Old English. But when the Normans arrived, that sound poured into English. And it's a very prominent feature of English to this day, much more so than any other Germanic language. And I have some research which states that English is the only Germanic language that has the /j/ sound today. I'm not sure if that's accurate, but of all the Germanic languages, it is most prominent within English. And that is another example of the heavy French influence on English.

So the net result of what we've seen so far in early French is that sounds like /k/, /g/, and /y/ were shifting to newer sounds like /s/, /ch/, /sh/ and /j/. A slurred 'Z' sound – /z/ – also began to appear in the language and became very prominent. So the sound of modern French was starting to emerge.

There was at least one other sound shift which was completed during this transitional period. The Latin 'W' sound was finally being pronounced as a 'V' sound – from /w/ to /v/. We've come across this particular sound change a lot in the podcast. And this was one of those sound changes that was pretty common throughout the early Romance languages. So when we look at cognate words, the Old English version usually has the original 'W' sound, and the Romance words tend to have the later 'V' sound.

So we have Old English ***wisdom*** and French ***vision***.

We have English ***wine***, which was a very early borrowing by the Germanic tribes from Latin – ***vinum*** (/wee-num/). But then we have Italian ***vino*** and French ***vine***, ***vineyard***, and ***vintage***. We also have French ***vinegar*** which is literally 'sour wine.' Inexperienced wine makers sometimes end up with vinegar instead of wine. Well this result produced the word ***vinegar*** – a combination the word ***vine*** and the Latin word which gives us ***acrid***. So it is literally bitter or sour wine.

This sound change also gave us English ***wagon*** and French ***vehicle***.

Another example is the English word ***word*** and the French word ***verb***. ***Word*** and ***verb*** are both cognate. The French version has the 'V' sound.

We also can see this sound change in the phrase 'vast wasteland.' ***Vast*** and ***waste*** are cognate – both coming from the Latin word ***vastus*** (/was-toos/) meaning desolate or empty. Old English already had a Germanic version of the word ***waste*** which was ***westen*** with an initial 'W' sound. So the French version basically merged with the Old English version, and the word ***waste*** retained its 'W' sound at the beginning in English. But the word ***vast*** was borrowed from French in the 1500s, and it came in with its newer 'V' sound.

So as we've seen, all of these sound changes gave the Gallo-Roman dialect much of the smoother, flowing sound that we associate with Modern French. But it wasn't just the sounds or phonemes which were changing. The vocabulary was also changing.

By the early 700s, it appears that even the Latin-speaking clergy in the Frankish kingdom were speaking a new language. During that period, monks in Picardy north of Paris produced a glossary which translated over 1,000 Classical Latin words into the local vernacular which was being spoken at the time. And those translations show that the vocabulary of the language had changed considerably. For example, the Classical Latin word ***forum*** had been replaced by ***mercatum*** which gives us the French words ***market*** and ***merchant*** and ***merchandise***. And Classical Latin ***liberi*** meaning 'children' had become ***infantes***, which gives us the French words ***infant*** and ***infantry***.

In addition to changes in pronunciation and vocabulary, the third basic element of language was also changing – specifically the grammar. Throughout the former Roman territories, the Latin system of inflections and inflexive endings was eroding. The six different noun inflections of Latin (subject, direct object, indirect object, addressee, possessive and adverbial) were now being reduced to just two (subject and object). The loss of inflections would continue as French evolved, and specific word order began to take its place. And the new word order was generally subject-verb-object. And if that sounds familiar to you, it should, because English experienced many similar changes during Middle English.

By the late 700s, the Gallo-Roman vernacular spoken in the Frankish kingdom was starting to be called ***Romance*** meaning 'Roman.' So some of the literature from this period uses that term ***Romance***, but it didn't mean all Latin languages at the time. It specifically meant the Latin dialects spoken in the Frankish kingdom. By the year 813, the language of the people had diverged so much from Latin, that the Classical Latin of the Church could no longer be understood by many congregations. So in that year 813, priests were encouraged by the Council of Tours to preach in "the rustic Roman language," by which they meant the regular vernacular of the people. And this illustrates how much the language had changed outside of the Church.

During this same time period in the eighth and ninth centuries, several distinct dialects were in place throughout the Frankish kingdom. And the dialects within those regions were becoming increasingly distinct from each other. One of the most obvious distinctions between those regions was the way they pronounced the word for 'yes.'

And in much the same way that the Centum-Satem split in the early Indo-European languages was based on the way the word for 'hundred' was pronounced in the different regions, the same thing basically happened here. The regional pronunciation of the word for 'yes' was a shorthand way of marking the distinction between the two regions.

The word for 'yes' had originated with the Latin word ***hoc*** which meant 'this' or 'that.' As I noted earlier, the 'H' sound had largely disappeared in Late Latin. So in the south of France, the word for 'yes' was simply ***hoc*** without the 'H' at the beginning. So it became ***oc***. And these southern dialects were called the 'langues d'oc' meaning the 'languages of oc' or the 'oc languages.'

But in the north, speakers also used that Latin word ***hoc*** but they didn't just drop the 'H' sound at the beginning. They also dropped the 'K' sound at the end. So it was just 'O' (/oh/). And they would add a specific pronoun to the end, depending on the context of the question. So if I wanted to say 'yes' to a question you asked me, I would say '***o-je***.' ***Je*** means 'I' in French. So '***o-je***' meant 'yes for me.' But if I was answering a question on behalf of a group of people, I would say '***o-nos***' meaning 'yes for us.' And if I was answering 'yes for you,' I would have to say '***o-vos***.' Well, that got complicated, so speakers eventually dropped the various pronouns at the end, and they just used the generic pronoun ***il*** which meant 'that.' And it produced the word '***o-il***' (/oy-il/), which meant 'yes for that' or 'that is correct.' And these northern dialects came to be known as the 'langues d'oil.' Of course, '***o-il***' eventually lost that 'L' sound at the end. And it just became /oy-ee/, and then it lost the 'O' sound at the beginning, and it just became ***oui*** (/wee/), but it retained that older spelling – O-U-I. That 'O' at the beginning is a holdover form the original Latin word ***hoc*** – H-O-C. But the pronunciation of the word ***oui*** today is really based on that pronoun ***il*** meaning 'that' which was added to the end of the word during this period of early French.

But the important point here is that there was a general north-south division in the dialects. And that division could be signified by the way the word 'yes' was pronounced. The northern dialects were spoken in and around Paris, so they eventually emerged as the standard dialect of French. Those northern dialects also influenced the language of the Viking Normans when they arrived in northern France. And so the Norman French also spoke a northern variety of French.

Since English was influenced by Norman French, and since it was a northen dialect, we won't concern ourselves very much with the southern dialects of French. However, those southern dialects are notable for a couple of reasons. First, those dialects were spoken along the Mediterranean coast where they also mixed in some Italian elements. Those dialects became a standard vernacular used by sailors, traders and merchants. This particular trading dialect was called the 'lingua franca' – the language of the Franks. But over time, that term came to be

applied as a generic term for any common language used by a variety of people to facilitate communication.

Those southern French dialects are also notable because one region where they were spoken was Aquitaine – a very important region in southwestern France. And that region actually impacted English history, as well as the history of the English language.

We'll cover this history in more detail when we get to Middle English, but let me note here that Aquitaine was home to one of the most fascinating figures in Medieval history – Eleanor of Aquitaine. She inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine in the southwest of France as a child when her father died. And that made her one of the most eligible women in Europe. She later married the French King and she became Queen of France, but after an annulment from the French King, she later married Henry II of England and became Queen of England. So she was both Queen of France and Queen of England. And that marriage to Henry of England resulted in a vast kingdom which included England as well as large portions of France. In fact, when you add Aquitaine to Normandy and some of the other regions claimed by Henry, he actually laid claim to most of Western France. And that set the stage for a lot of conflicts between the England and France in the late Middle Ages. And those wars against France were a major factor which caused the French language to lose its prestige in England. In the midst of those wars – like the Hundred Years War – it wasn't cool to be French anymore in England. English kings decided that they were more English than French, so they stopped speaking French, and they started speaking English again. And in fact, about 25 years after the Hundred Years War began, French was repealed as the official language of England, and English finally became the official language again – almost three centuries after the Normans arrived. For the first time, English was used in the English Parliament. So had it not been for all of those messy entanglements down in places like Aquitaine, French might still be the official language of England. So all of these pieces are connected if we look far enough down the line.

With that historical note, I want to briefly turn back to the history of the early Carolingian Dynasty.

I noted earlier that Charles Martel's son Pepin III – or Pepin the Short – was the first Mayor of the Palace to be proclaimed as King of the Franks, thereby launching the Carolingian Dynasty. But Pepin died in the year 768. And in keeping with Frankish tradition, Pepin's kingdom was divided among his two sons. And it looked like history was destined to repeat itself as the powerful Frankish kingdom started to become divided again. But one of Pepin's two sons died three years later, and that allowed the other son to assume control of the entire kingdom as 'King of the Franks.' That son's name was Karl, and he became known to history as 'Karl the Great' or 'Charles the Great.' But we know him by the French version of that name – 'Charlemagne.' And the emergence of Charlemagne as King of the Franks brings our story current with the overall story of English. Charlemagne came to power on the eve of the Viking invasions, and during a period in which Britain was ruled by its most powerful king to date – Offa of Mercia. So all three story lines are now in the same place in the late 700s.

And Charlemagne spoke a language which we can probably call Old French. I say 'probably' because technically the Old French period begins shortly after the death of Charlemagne.

Now we'll look more closely at Charlemagne's reign and in the next episode, but let me briefly jump ahead to this death because his death triggered the document which marks the official beginning of Old French.

As I noted earlier, one of the recurring themes of Frankish history is the emergence of a strong leader who unified the kingdom followed by the division of the kingdom when that leader died. Well, this same scenario occurred again at Charlemagne's death.

In the year 842, two of his grandsons signed a treaty called the Oath of Strasbourg which settled the division of the kingdom into three parts, thereby laying the ultimate foundations of the modern nations of Germany and France. The treaty covered the land of the Franks as well as Germany. So it was written in two versions – one in the Romance vernacular of the Franks and one in the Germanic vernacular of the people east of the Rhine. And this is considered the first document to be written in the local vernacular of the Franks, so it marks the first official document written in Old French. And it marks the official beginning of the French language. It also happens to be the first document to be written in any local Latin vernacular. Italian and Spanish weren't documented until the next century. So all of those Romance languages were finally starting to be written down over two and a half centuries after English had become a written language.

So I am going to conclude this episode on that note because we now have all of the pieces in place – Old English, Old Norse and Old French.

Next time, we'll move the story forward to ninth century. We'll look at the most powerful king which Anglo-Saxon Britain had seen up that point – Offa of Mercia. And we'll examine the connections between the Anglo-Saxons and Charlemagne's Frankish Empire. We'll see how the Northumbrian Renaissance in Britain was replaced by the Carolingian Renaissance in France. And most importantly, we'll explore the first raids by the Vikings. And along the way, we'll examine how all of those events impacted the English language.

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