

The usual **Anglo-Saxon alphabet** contained the following letters:

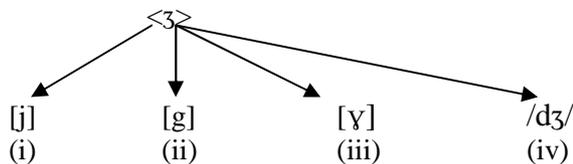
a, æ, b, c, d, e, f, Ʒ, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, þ, ð, u, ƿ ('wynn'), y

The Anglo-Saxons had, as well as runic wynn <ƿ>, three further letters of their own: <æ, þ, ð>. Like the other Anglo-Saxon letters, the first two of these had individual names: <æ> was called 'ash', <þ> 'thorn'. <ð> is nowadays called 'eth' or 'edh' and the name appears to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century coinage; in the Old English period its name was 'ðæt'. 'Ash' was an Anglo-Saxon adaptation of Latin <ae>, whereas thorn, like wynn, is an example of borrowing from the runic alphabet. The origin of eth, like its name, is more obscure, and although it is sometimes said to be a borrowing from Irish scribal tradition, this is not certain.

## Generally OE is read the way it is written.

There are only a couple of tricks you need to learn. Here they come:

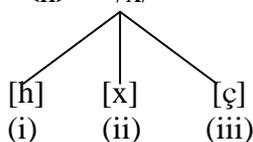
- In OE there was no phonemic opposition between [f] and [v], [s] and [z], [θ] and [ð].  
 <s> was used to represent [s] and [z],  
 <f> was used to represent [f] and [v],  
 <þ/ð> were used interchangeably!!! for [θ] and [ð].
- OE alphabet did not contain the letter <w>. /w/ was represented by the runic character <ƿ> 'wynn'. Modern editors, however, replaced the original <ƿ> with <w>, hoping to make our life easier...
- Old English scribes used another runic character 'yogh' <ȝ> to represent four sounds (hoping to make our life eventful...⊕). Modern editors, however, exhibit strong prejudice against <ȝ> (yoghism...) to the effect that they NEVER use it at all. Instead they use the letter <g> which replaced <ȝ> in ME.



- the palatal approximant /j/, (derived from Gmc \*/ɣ/ by palatalisation and also directly from Germanic initial \*/j/)  
 EXAMPLE: gear 'year'
- voiced velar stop [g]  
 EXAMPLE: god 'good', singan 'to sing'
- the voiced velar fricative [ɣ]  
 EXAMPLE: dagas 'days'
- the palatal affricate [dʒ]  
 EXAMPLE: sengean 'to singe'

- In OE <h> stood for /x/, which had three realisations depending on its position in the word and phonetic context:

OE <h> = /x/



- word-initially: heorte 'heart', hām 'home', hnutu 'nut'

- (ii) word-medially and word-finally in a back context: bōhte ‘bought’, rūh ‘rough’  
 (iii) word-medially and word-finally in a front context: niht ‘night’, hēh ‘high’

5. OE had a length contrast for consonants. Long consonants were normally represented by the use of doubled letters:

EXAMPLES:    biddan ‘to ask, pray’ /d:/                vs. bīdan ‘to await, experience’ /d/  
                  þonne ‘then’ /n:/                        vs. þone ‘the’ (Acc sg masc) /n/

6. In OE velars and palatals were represented in the same way. Here come the details:

/k(:)/ {velar} and /tʃ(:)/ {palatal} were spelt the same:

/k/ <c>    cyning ‘king’                        vs. /tʃ/ <c>    cyse ‘cheese’  
 /k:/ <cc>    locca ‘curl’                                vs. /tʃ:/ <cc>    reccan ‘stretch’

Therefore, in another attempt to make our life easier, modern editors place a dot over <ċ> to indicate the palatal variant. Alas, inconsistently...

/g(:)/ {velar} and /dʒ(:)/ {palatal} had the same graphic representation:

/g/ <g>    god ‘god’                                vs. /dʒ/ <g>    sengean ‘singe’  
 /g:/ <gg/cg>    dogga/docga ‘dog’ vs. /dʒ:/ <gg/cg>    byggan/bycgan ‘buy’

7. <sc>

word-initially        /ʃ/, as in: scip ‘ship’  
 word-medially        /sk/ before a back vowel: āscian ‘to ask’ – formerly \* āscojan  
                               /ʃ/ before a front vowel: fisces ‘fish’ (gen)  
 word-finally        /sk/ after a back vowel: tusc ‘tusk’  
                               /ʃ/ after a front vowel: fisc ‘fish’

8. OE <æ/ǣ> represented /æ/ and /æ:/, as in: dæȝ ‘day’, sǣ ‘sea’.

9. OE <ea/ēa> represented /æa/ and /æ:a/, as in: feallan ‘to fall /æa/    vs. rēad /æ:a/ ‘red’.

10. OE <y/ȳ> represented a front rounded vowel [y], as in: dryhten ‘God’ and fȳr ‘fire’.