

# Extreme English

## *Origins of English and its Sibling, Frisian*



“Out of this world Yoda’s  
syntax always has been.”

Chicago Tribune, May 17, 2005 By  
Nathan Bierma

Eric Gilleland

National Center for Atmospheric Research

April 23, 2009 -- IBM Take Our Children to Work Day

# Does Frisian sound similar to English?

In âld folksrymke seit:

len, twa, trije

De boer dy soe my krije

Ik sprong oer de hikke

Doe koe er my net berikke

1 2  
3

len, twa, trije, fjouwer, fiif, seis

Wy telle oan seis ta. Telle jo mei?

OE

## Earliest Record of English

*“This she-wolf is a reward to my kinsman”*

Anglo-Frisian, C.E. 450-500  
From Undley Common near Lakenheath, Suffolk, England

Image from The British Museum



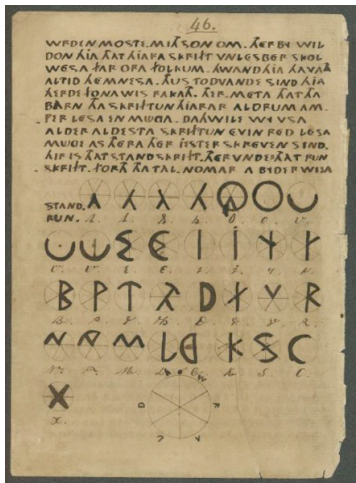
OE

# First writing of the early history

*The English People*

–by *The Venerable Bede*

–Written nearly 300 years afterwards



*The Frisian People*

“It Oere Linda Boek”?

- Alternate world history (pre BCE 2193)
- Hoax?
- (e.g., Scrutton, 1979)

OE

# Whence the English?

According to  
Bede



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# Whence the English?

New evidence: 2 major revisions  
to Bede



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Who were the English?

Anglo-Saxon?

Or...

OE

# Who were the English?

Franco-  
Fries



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# Which one is Englisc?

Fadar usa firiho barno,  
Thu bist an them hôhon  
himilia rîkea,  
Geuuîhid sî thin namo  
uuordo gehuuilico

...sona swa hi ut of þam in eodon þa  
geseƷon hi þone hræfn mid þan  
sweartan nebbe þa glofe teran uppe  
on anes huses þæce...

Tha thi koning Karle and thi koning  
Redbad fan Danemerkum in thet land  
komen, tha bisette aider sine wei ina  
Franekra ga mith ene hereskilde, and  
quath aider thet land were sin.

# Coarse-scale history of English



5th century	First (large-scale) germanic groups in Britain
Late 8th century	Viking Raids
Mid-to-late 9th century	Danish invasions
Late 11th century	Norman Conquest (1066)
Mod-to-late 15th century	“Chancery Standard” and printing press give rise to MnE
15th, 16th, 17th century	The Great Vowel Shift

# Coarse-scale history of Frisian



6th to 9th century	Various runic inscriptions
13th century	Earliest surviving Frisian text
17th century	Gysbert Japicx, poet and writer who elevated Frisian to a <i>literature</i> language





# English and Frisian

English	Frisian	Dutch	German
little	lyts	klein	klein
wet	wiet	nat	naß
you	jo	U	Sie
sheep	skiep	schaap	schaf
think	tinke	denken	denken
cheese	tsiis	kaas	käse



Bûter, brea en griene tsiis...







Bûter, brea en griene tsiis...

...Wa dat net sizze kin,  
Is gjin oprjochte Fries!



Etching of Grutte Pier, from 'Chronycke ofte Historische Geschiedenis van Friesland' published in 1622

--Pier Gerlofs Donia  
(aka Grutte Pier)

# Tanke wol! Oant sjen!



Skûtsjesilen



Fierljeppen



Keats



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# Some references

- Old English  
Mitchell and Robinson (2001), Robinson (1992)
- Middle English  
Burrow and Turville-Petre (2000)
- Old Frisian  
Bremmer (2009)
- Modern Frisian  
Tiersma (1999), Dykstra (2000), Fisher (1986), Bosma-Banning (1981)
- Entertaining  
Bryson (2001), Wolman (2008)
- English Word Origins  
Ayto (1990)

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