

History of English I  
Part VI  
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Ohthere's voyage  
Selections p. 12

þæt he bade on þæm lande norþweardum wip þa Westsæ. He sæde þeah þæt þæt land sie swipe lang norþ þonan; He said, however, that the land is [i.e. extends] very long to the north from there. Ac

Ohtere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge, þæt he ealra Norðmonna norþmest bude. He cwæp þæt he bude on þæm lande norþweardum wip þa Westsæ. He sæde þeah þæt þæt land sie swipe lang norþ þonan; He said, however, that the land is [i.e. extends] very long to the north from there. Ac hit is eal weste, buton on feawum stowum styccemælum wiciap Finnas, on huntōpe on wintra, and on sumera on fiscape be þære sæ.

**Ohthere saede his hlaforde** – Ohthere (Ottar) said to his lord (“lord” is here used to convey respect to his host, Ohthere – a Nordic tradesman – was not King Alfred’s subject)

**Disguised compounds – words that were originally compounds but due to shortening are not transparently compounds any more**

**Hlaford** < hlaf + weard (loaf – guardian: bread-keeper) – **LORD**, (cf hlaefdige < hlaf + dig- to knead (as in DOUGH) – **LADY**)

Other examples:

god-spela (good news)– **GOSPEL**, shire's reeve (= county's head) – **SHERIFF**, and many more)

Later in the text: **buton** < be + utan (BE OUT) –

**BUT** (all words in bold print are disguised compounds – notice that some were disguised compounds in Old English and have been shortened even further)

Old English had 4 cases (just like Present-Day German):

Nominative (basic meaning – what? who?)

Genitive (basic meaning – of what? whose?)

Dative (basic meaning – to what? to whom?)

Accusative (basic meaning – what? who? as objects)

Ohthere saede **his** (Genitive Singular) **hlaforde** (Dative Singular), **Aelfrede cyninge** (both Dative Singular) – Ohthere said to his lord, to Alfred the King

**cyning** – KING (cf Estonian “kuningas” –  
has retained the Proto-Germanic ending – az)  
Cf German König

**Bude** (praeterite from) **buan** - 1) to dwell, to cultivate land), 2) to stay, visit  
(cf BOER, German Bauer, Gebaude)

The two meanings yield two interpretations of where Ohthere actually lived and what places he visited. (Lennart Meri  
“Hõbevalge” – Ottar visited what is present-day Estonia)

**that he ealra Northmonna northmest  
bude** – that he of all Northmen (=Danes,  
Vikings) northernmost lived (or stayed,  
visited)



**He cwaeth thaet he bude on thaem lande  
northweardum with tha Westsae** – he said  
that he was (or lived) on that land northwards against that  
(the) West Sea (probably the North Atlantic off the  
Norwegian coast).

**cwaeth** - praeterite from **cwethan** – to say,  
to speak; QUOTH as in “quoth he”, “quoth the  
Raven: Nevermore” (“Ütles ronk: ei iialgi”, Edgar  
Allan Poe), notice that the word order is always reversed in  
Modern English! Also BEQUEATH (pärandama) < **be-  
cwethan**.

**with** - against (see Beowulf)

**tha, thaet, thaere** – see next slide (pick the correct forms on your own!)

Declension of the demonstrative pronoun **that** (for those interested,  
Introduction p. 53 - not obligatory!):

## Singular

Masculine    Feminine    Neuter

N se	seo	thaet
G thaes	thaere	thaes
D thaem	thaere	thaem
A thone	tha	thaem

## Plural (all genders)

N tha

G thara, thaera

D thaem, tham

A tha

The demonstrative pronoun was often used in the function of an article but was not grammaticalised (i.e., not obligatory and subject to rules). In that respect, Old English was much like Estonian (“Pane raamat lauale”, “Pane **see** raamat lauale”, but hardly ever “Pane **see** raamat **sellele** lauale”, as against Modern English “Put **the** book on **the** table” – here the article is **grammaticalised**, i.e. **compulsory** in both positions – the same was true already of Middle English)

**theah** – though, **THOUGH**

**thaet** – conjunction

**thaet** - demonstrative pronoun

**sie** - Subjunctive from **beon/wesan** (to be), used to denote reported speech, the so-called quotative function (as in present-Day German **sei** – **olevat**; in many cases the Estonian **olevat** implies far more doubt than the German **sei**, though there are cases where the Estonian **olevat** also has a mere quotative function).

**swithe** – very much

**thonan** – thence, from there (THENCE is still used in Modern English, just like *whence, hence, hither, thither*, etc).

**He saede theah thaet thaet land sie swithe lang north thonan** – he said though that that land is (i.e. extends) very long north from there

**Ac** - but (has not survived except as a loan  
in Estonian: **aga**)

**hit is eal weste** – it is all empty (WASTE as  
in T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland").

**buton** – except for, BUT, see above,  
disguised compounds

**stow** – place (**place** is a French loan); TO  
STOW, a STOWAWAY (“jānes”, a person  
riding without paying, originally on a ship, a  
person hiding/stowed in the hold of a ship)



**stycce** - piece (cf German **Stück** – piece, Estonian **tükk**)

**styccemaelum** (adjective/adverb, originally from the Dative plural of the respective adjective) – piecemeal; here and there (NB! Notice how one part of a Germanic word – **stycce** – has been replaced by a French loan (**pièce**), the other part has remained Germanic. This word also shows the path from the Dative Plural ending **–um** to the adverbial ending **–om**, as in **seldom, whilom**).

**on feawum stowum styccemaelum** – in a few places here and there (**on** in the meaning of where? takes the Dative, in the meaning of to where? whither? takes an Accusative, as in **on stefn stigon** in “Beowulf”; this is *exactly* the rule in Present-Day German)

**wiciath** – Present Plural from **wician** (a weak verb, i.e. the predecessor of Modern English regular verbs) – to dwell  
(**wic** – dwelling place, village, cf Modern English –WICH, -WICK in placenames).  
An early loan from Latin (**vicus** – village).

**Finnas** - might have been predecessors of present-day Lapps (Samis); might have been Estonians?

**On feawum stowum styccemaelum wiciath Finnas** - in a few places here and there live/dwell Lapps/(Estonians?)

**On hunttothe on wintra and on sumera on fiscathe** – (living) on hunting in winters and in summers on fishing

**be thaere sae** – by that see (thaere – Dative singular of the feminine form of thaet, see the Table above).

A rough translation to help you (remember that for a real translation, you'll have to go through the slide-show!)

Othere said to his lord, King Alfred, that he lived (or: stayed, visited) northernmost (**NB! Notice that the present-day form is “northernmost”**) of all the Northmen (Present-Day Norwegians/Vikings/speakers of Old Norse, who most probably lived in present-day Norway). He said, however, that the land is [i.e. extends] very long to the north from there. But it is all waste, except that Sámi (or perhaps Estonians? Depends on whether he lived in or visited the place) people camp out in a few places here and there—by hunting in winter and fishing in summer along the sea.