

LECTURE 8.

# INTRODUCTION INTO MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, WHICH  
GAVE IMPETUS TO NEW LANGUAGE  
CHANGES



# 1. HISTORICAL EVENTS THAT INFLUENCED THE LANGUAGE

- The **OE** period lasted from the **V(VII) till the VII-XI** century. It started and lasted during the Germanic settlement on the territories of the British Islands. It is often called the **period of full endings**.
- The **ME** period started in the **XII-XV and lasted till the XVI century**. It was due to the strong influence of **Normans** and **Scandinavians** who arrived to Britain. The period is called the **period of leveled endings**.
- The ME period finished in the XVI century and the **NE** period started, which lasts till the present day. The NE period started with the **introduction of printing in 1475**, Chaucer's Age and Shakespeare's time. This is the **period of lost endings**.

# MIDDLE ENGLISH

□ is the name given by linguists to the **diverse forms of English in use** between the **late 11<sup>th</sup> century and about 1470**, when the **Chancery Standard**,



a form of London-based English, began to become widespread, a process aided by the introduction of **the printing press** into England by **William Caxton** in late 1470s.

□ The language of England as used after this time, up to 1650, is known as Early Modern English.

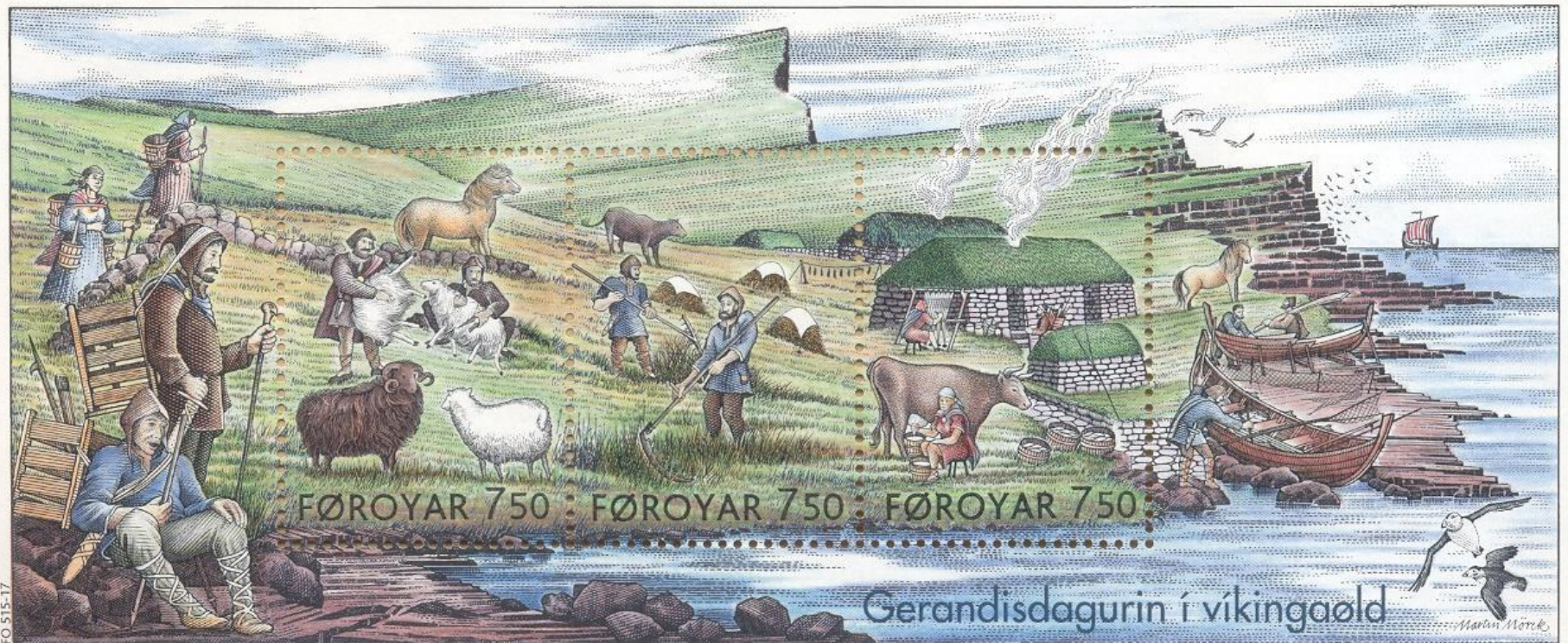
# VIKINGS

- ❑ invaded and settled in the north-east of England
- ❑ contact with Norse invaders might have been responsible for some of the morphological simplification of OE, including the loss of grammatical gender and explicitly marked case (with the exception of pronouns)





- ❑ From about **AD 800** waves of **Danish** assaults on the coastlines of the British Isles were gradually followed by a succession of Danish settlers
- ❑ Danish raiders first began to settle in England starting in **865**
- ❑ soon moved north and in **867** captured **Northumbria** and its capital, **York**.
- ❑ in **869** by conquering **East Anglia**



□ In 871, **Alfred** became the King of **Wessex**

□ His army was weak and he had to pay tribute to Danes in order to make peace with them

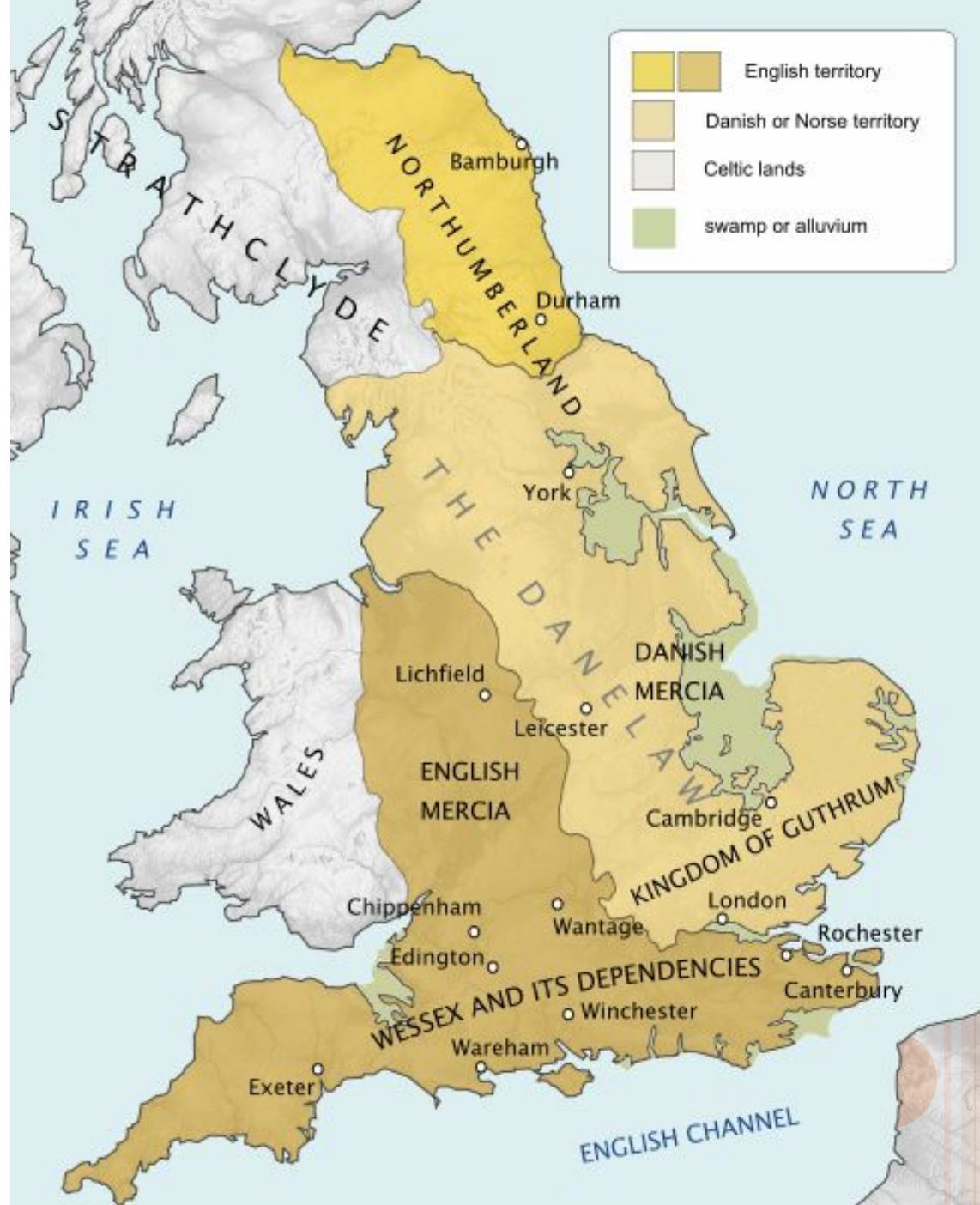
□ but the Danes turned to the north and attacked Mercia, a campaign that lasted until 874

□ In ten years the Danes gained control over East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia, leaving only Wessex to resist

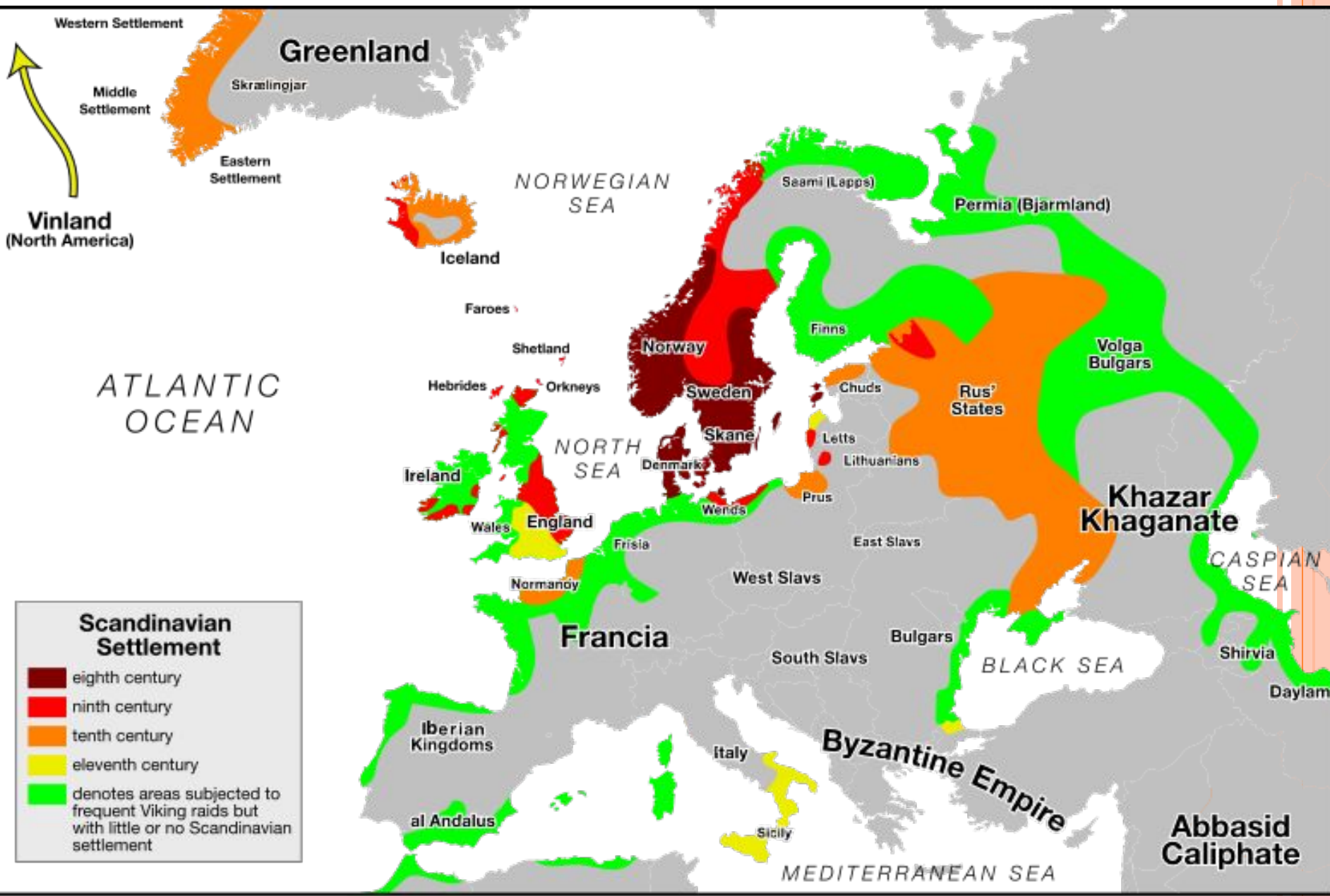
□ As a term of surrender, King Alfred demanded that Guthrum, the Danes leader be baptised a Christian; King Alfred served as his godfather. This peace lasted until 884, when Guthrum again attacked Wessex



- 884
- Alfred defeated him, with peace codified in the Treaty.
- The treaty outlined the boundaries of the **Danelaw** and allowed for Danish self-rule in the region







- **From 1016 to 1035 the English kingdom was ruled by Canute the Great as part of a North Sea Danish Empire**
- In 1066, two rival Viking factions led invasions of England. Harald Hardrada took York but was defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZtsaUigoOw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNQM29ZUXvk>



- ❑ **William of Normandy** and his Normans defeated Anglo-Saxon armies at the **Battle of Hastings** in Sussex in **1066**
- ❑ The language gradually became the mix of French (which was the language of Lords) and English (the language of peasants)
- ❑ In the 11th-12th centuries French got the leading role
- ❑ However in 1269 King Edward issued a proclamation in English. English was preserved but had a lot of French borrowings, so we can say that the vocabulary was greatly enriched, but not grammar.



## 2. LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE SCANDINAVIAN INVASION

- the Scandinavian Invasion introduced **many words** during the 9th and 10th centuries (many place names, items of basic vocabulary, words concerned with particular administrative aspects of the Danelaw)
- The Vikings spoke Old Norse, a language related to Old English
- a mixed language
- theory holds that exactly such a mixture of Old Norse and Old English helped accelerate the decline of case endings in Old English
- simplification of the case endings occurred earliest in the north and latest in the southwest, the area farthest away from Viking influence



### 3. LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE NORMAN CONQUEST

1066

#### WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

#### Battle at Hastings

the top levels of society of English-speaking political and ecclesiastical hierarchies were removed

Their replacements spoke **Norman French** and used **Latin** for administrative purposes

Norman French came into use as a language of **polite discourse and literature**, and this fundamentally altered the role of OE in education and administration



□ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SU41crKHRng>



□ Consider these pairs of MnE words. The first of each pair is derived from OE and the second is of Anglo-Norman origin:

□ *pig - pork*

□ *chicken - poultry*

□ *calf - veal*

□ *cow - beef*

□ *wood - forest*

□ *sheep - mutton*

□ *house - mansion*

□ *worthy - honorable*


□ *bold - courageous*

□ *freedom - liberty*

□ The role of Anglo-Norman as the language of government and law can be seen in the abundance of MnE words for the mechanisms of government which derive from Anglo-Norman: court, judge, jury, appeal, parliament

□ prevalent in MnE are terms relating to the chivalric cultures which arose in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, an era of feudalism and crusading



- The end of Anglo-Saxon rule did not change the language immediately.
  - Although the most senior offices in the church were filled by Normans, OE would continue to be used in chronicles such as the Peterborough Chronicle until the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The non-literate would have spoken the same dialects as before the Conquest, although these would be changing slowly until written records of them became available.
  - The wealthy and the government anglicized again, although Norman remained the dominant language of literature and law for a few centuries.
  - The new English language did not sound the same as the old: the complex system of inflected endings was gradually lost or simplified in the dialects of spoken ME (Northern, West Midland, East Midland, South Western, Kentish). The loss of case-endings was part of a general trend from inflections to fixed word order that also occurred in other Germanic languages.
  - This change was reflected in its increasingly diverse written forms too.
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- In the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, **Chancery Standard** (or London English)—introduced a greater conformity in English spelling
- fame of Middle English literature tends to derive principally from the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (author of Canterbury Tales) and of John Gower
- Early ME (1100-1300) has a largely Anglo-Saxon vocabulary (in the North, with many Norse borrowings). But it has a greatly simplified inflectional system
- The grammatical relations that were expressed in OE by the dative and accusative cases are replaced in Early ME with **constructions with prepositions**
- This replacement is incomplete. We still today have the OE genitive in many words (we now call it the “possessive”: the form dog’s for “of the dog
- Grammatical genders also disappear from English during the Early ME period (apart from personal pronouns)



- To be watched at home :
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNQM29ZUXvk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SU41crKHRnsg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLcerKzOsoI>

