The coming of the Danes

A Social and Cultural History of English
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The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The coming of the Danes

- Extract from The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
  - Arrival of the Danes in England
  - 787 - 897
- Written in Wessex at the end of the 9th century
- Written in Old English
Who were the Vikings?

- Viking (Old Norse) = pirate raider
- Norsemen = people from the North
- They came from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Sweden)
- Lived close to rivers and along the coastline
Who were the Vikings?

- Fishermen, farmers, traders, travelers
- Sailed all over Europe and the Atlantic Ocean in their long ships
Where did the Vikings go?

Swedish Vikings:
- Across the Baltic
- Deep into Russia

Norwegian Vikings:
- North of England
- From Scottish coast round to Ireland

Danish Vikings:
- Northern/Eastern England
- Northwest France
Vikings in Britain

- **Why?**
  - searching for better land for their farms
  - profitable trade routes
- **When?**
  - 787: Saxons attacked by three Danish long ships
  - 1066: last Viking battle at Stamford Bridge
Danish Vikings

- 787: three Danish long ships attacked the Saxons
- 865: Danish Vikings began to settle in Angle Land (England)
- 867: Danes captured Northumbria
- York → Yorvik (ON)
Danish Vikings

- Peace with King of Wessex → Danes kept Nottingham
- 869: Danes conquered East Anglia
- King Alfred of Wessex lost a battle against the Vikings → the Vikings took over all the northern and eastern parts of England
Danish Vikings

- **871:**
- Battle of Ashdown, King of Wessex won first battle
- Wessex made peace with Danish
Danelaw

878:
- Danelaw written after Guthrum's defeat at the Battle of Ethandun
- *Dena lagu (OE), Danelov (Danish=Old Norse)*
- Part of England in which Danish laws replaced the laws of the Anglo-Saxons
Danelaw

- 886: Treaty between Guthrum and King Alfred is formalized and boundaries are defined
- 955: re-conquest of Danelaw by Alfred’s three grandsons
placenames

- *-by:* Derby, Whitby, Selby, Grimsby
  - *-by* = farm, homestead

- *-thorpe: Scunthorpe, Grimethorpe*
  - *-thorpe* = farm
Language features of OE and ON

- Lexical impact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>Old English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>steak</td>
<td>steik</td>
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<tr>
<td>reindeer</td>
<td>hreindýri</td>
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<tr>
<td>ský -&gt; sky</td>
<td>wolcen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taka -&gt; take</td>
<td>niman</td>
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Old English and Old Norse

• Invasion of England by the Norse tribes had a significant impact on the English language
  – Language contact between Old English (OE) and Old Norse (ON)
    • plundering attacks on towns and monasteries
      → no significant language contact
    • large number of invasions, settlements and establishment of Danelaw
      → significant impact on language contact
  – Both developed from the same Germanic ancestor, language; hence there was great similarity between OE and ON
  – the Norse gave new words to the English language
Creolization?

**Bailey & Maroldt**

- creolization as “a gradient mixture of two or more languages” (p. 21)
- creole as “the result of mixing which is substantial enough to result in a new system, a system that is separate from its antecedent parent systems” (p. 21)
- “creoles often have special identifying traits” (p. 21)
- “[i]t cannot be doubted that it [Middle English] is a mixed language, or creole” (p.22)
“the infusion of Old Norse elements led to that sort of linguistic instability which linguistic mixture generally creates, and thus prepared the ground for even more substantial foreign creolization afterwards” (p.26)

The lexical borrowing of words like die, give, take “strongly supports the assumption of an Old Norse/Anglo-Saxon creolization prior to French influence” (p.27)
Thomason & Kaufman

- Borrowing through intense contact
- Normal transition of OE to ME
- “in the contact between Norse and English no case can be made for anything other than rather heavy linguistic borrowing by English from Norse” (p. 310)
- “[the Middle English of the Danelaw] is part of the network of ME dialects” (p. 280)
- changes were already underway in OE before the arrival of the Norse
- The language contact situation may have helped or accelerated changes, but they would have taken place anyway.

- The lexical and morphological influences of Norse are mostly the result of borrowing.

But:

-Borrowing does not provide an explanation for all of the aspects of this language contact situation.
References

