

# Ideas on the Origin of the Germanic People

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## Derived from an Analysis of the Early German Vocabulary

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It is well known that proto-Germanic, a prehistoric language that essentially defines the original German people, was diverse and contained both Indo-European and non-Indo-European words. The origin of any language is always a fascinating topic which reveals a great deal about the people speaking that language and particularly the people who first spoke that language. What happened in pre-history to bring about the later peoples of historic times may be shrouded in obscurity but, nevertheless, much can be said about human pre-history. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the pre-history and origins of the Germanic-speaking people from an analysis of the early German vocabulary.

### {mospagebreak title=Upper Paleolithic}Upper Paleolithic

The beginnings of the modern population of Europe, of which the Germanic people are a part, came with the Upper Paleolithic period more than thirty thousand years ago when Europeoids replaced Neanderthals all across Europe. Europeoids are a regional population generally treated as a part of the broad category, Caucasoid, which includes also Mediterranean, Indoids, and sometimes even Australoids, that is to say, any population that is not Mongoloid or Negroid (de Laubenfels, 1983). All of these regional variations of modern humans have developed gradually over time partly as a result of some degree of geographic isolation and are not generally sharply marked off from one another. That is, there have always been transitional and mixed individuals near where different populations approach one another. The Europeoids came to be substantially separated from their nearest neighbors, the Mediterranean, by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and an enlarged Caspian Sea, as well as the glacially covered Caucasus Mountains, the Upper Paleolithic having been contemporary with the latter part of the last glacial epoch. The Europeoids had only a minimal contact with the Mongoloids in the desert and swamp-covered bleak heart of Eurasia north and east of the Caspian Sea.

Upper Paleolithic people were skillful hunters and gatherers who lived by necessity in small groups, too small to be a source for marriage partners within the functioning group. It follows that they were, and those hunters and gatherers still in existence continue to be, exogamous. That is to say, marriage partners were sought outside the family group in some other group. This constant exchange of individuals between groups had the effect of creating a web of genetic and cultural uniformity. Genes as well as language, and other cultural practices, were continually interchanged over broad territories.

Because of the inter-connectedness of Upper Paleolithic societies, all across Eurasia and Africa philologists can detect relatively few widespread pre-agricultural language families, each in its particular region and one, two, or three for each broader regional population type mentioned above. The Upper Paleolithic lasted in Europe for about two dozen millennia at the end of which it looks like there were just three distinct language subdivisions there. In the tundra around the Scandinavian Ice-Cap were the Uralic people (Julku, 2002) called Ladogian by Coon, slightly different from the Cro-Magnon (1939). These were further divided into the ancestors of the Lapps (Sami) in the west, that is, England, France, Germany, and the now North Sea (modern Lapp survivors are a very mixed people); Finns in the middle, that is, Poland, Ukraine, and parts of Russia; and Ugrians in the general vicinity of the Ural Mountains. The forests of southwestern Europe were home of the ancestral Basque people, classical Cro-Magnons. In forested southeastern Europe, the third group probably was a main source for the Indo-European languages.

### {mospagebreak title=Neolithic}Neolithic

The next stage for the population of Europe came with the Neolithic when farming replaced hunting and gathering. The farming way of life, which came to Europe, was crafted in southwestern Asia by Mediterranean people. It appears to have entered Europe on two fronts about eight thousand years ago, with both fronts spreading northward to reach the shores of the North and Baltic Seas about six thousand years ago. A common form of spread was by colonies, which could have just pushed the aboriginal people aside. It does appear, however, that aboriginals often were generously absorbed as servants or slaves because, as agriculture advanced, the Mediterranean element became diluted until, by the time agriculture reached the shores of the northern seas, many, if not most, of the farmers were more like the aboriginal people than the original Mediterranean farmers. Another form of spread, sometimes important, occurred when some aboriginal groups came to understand the fundamentals of the new way of life and elected to embrace it. The western

agriculture advance entered Europe through Italy out of northern Africa and spread thence to France, the British Isles, and north along the shores of the Atlantic and the North Sea all the way to southern Sweden. The people involved are called the Atlantic Farmers. The eastern advance entered Europe through Greece out of Asia Minor and expanded north along the Danube and over the mountains to the Baltic Sea as well as eastward into central Eurasia. The people of this advance could be called the European Farmers. The two advances were separated more or less by the Alps and the middle Rhine and undoubtedly their people spoke very different languages from one another but may not have been otherwise very different.

When the light of history reached central Europe, the European Farmers from the Baltic Sea south to Greece and eastward were all speaking Indo-European languages. If they earlier had spoken some other languages, as has been argued (Gimbutas, 1991), those languages have disappeared without a known trace. Against that possibility is the fact that the toponyms (names of rivers and mountains) all across central Europe are all quite Indo-European (Krahe, 1951, 1954) and it is well known that the toponyms of original settlers (farmers) widely persist even when new languages inundate an area.

By contrast, the earliest historic accounts in Atlantic Europe find intrusive Indo-European speakers advancing everywhere. Little may be known about the Atlantic languages themselves but the people who spoke them can be named. The Indo-European Italic people, for example, overran lands occupied by Ligurians whom the Italics treated rather like the Europeans treated native Americans. The Ligurians were, in fact, very much absorbed into the later Italic population. Sardinians and Secals were probably related to the Ligurians. West of the Rhone and across Iberia the native population was called Iberian. Actual inscriptions in the Iberian language are known and whatever it was the language was not Basque. The Romans reported Celts in the northwest of Iberia while in the center the Celts were mixing with the Iberians such that the Romans called the people there Celtibrians. Further north, Caesar reported the population speaking Celtic but the land was called Gaul (Gallica). Apparently the original Gauls had been assimilated by the invading Celts. The language in southern England was a related form of Celtic (Cambrog) but the Romans called the land Britannia. The original Britons were still quite in evidence in the north where the Romans called them Picts for the blue tattoos all over their bodies. The Celts of Gaul and of southern Britain represented a second wave of Celts, the first wave surviving in Spain and Ireland. Caesar called Ireland Hibernia (Iber-land) but the language there was Gaelic (Celtic). Perhaps the use of "Iber" here reflects some awareness of a relationship with the Ibers further south. Finally, the people of the most northern parts of Atlantic settlement were called Germans by the Celts, which is thought to mean "neighbors". The German language, like Celtic, is regarded to be Indo-European and is the focus of this study.

#### {mospagebreak title=Early Germans}Early Germans

The vocabulary of proto-Germanic can be accurately reconstructed because there survive writings of a whole series of closely related descendant dialects dating roughly to thirteen hundred years ago and some even earlier. Orel, for example, has recently published such a compendium, quite detailed if somewhat incomplete (2003). A careful study of all known early Germanic word roots and their relationships reveals that very close to half of them are known to have obvious cognates in the Indo-European lexicon. This confirms the general conclusion that Germanic is indeed an Indo-European language. Germanic words from Indo-European include such expressions as "father, mother, brother, daughter", and all the numbers. Almost all particles such as "at, on, for, under, up, out" and so forth are included. One also sees "head, eye, nose, lip, chin, arm, finger, toe" and "eat, do, have, know, come, see, sew, stand, and be". The core of the language is firmly in place.

Other than the obvious Indo-European forms, there are other elements in early Germanic. About ten percent of the vocabulary has cognates in nearest neighbor language sub-family Balto-Slavic (with an emphasis on Baltic). Some words, certainly, like "hleib" (Russian for bread or loaf) were clearly borrowed from Germanic. The lack of any discernable cognates in this group anywhere else within Indo-European suggests that these are probably not Indo-European words. The Germanic people have long been aggressive towards their Baltic neighbors. The Goths, for example, appear to have in prehistoric times crossed from Sweden and appropriated erstwhile Baltic territory. Germans are not likely to have borrowed Baltic words because words have a tendency to flow only from the aggressor to the victim. Thus there is a reasonable likelihood that many Balto-Slavic cognates with the Germanic resulted from borrowing from the early Germanic (note that this group of words differs in the six shifted consonants characteristically changed in Germanic Indo-European words from those corresponding in Balto-Slavic. This suggests a borrowing in early times before these shifts took hold).

Where no obvious cognates are found for Germanic words there are often offered obscure or tortured etymologies. Even when those without any discernable merit are ignored, there still remain some ten percent of Germanic words whose etymologies are at best uncertain. Because virtually all of these etymologies are attempts to make an Indo-European connection suggests that the attempt results from the premise that, because Germanic is demonstrably basically Indo-European, an Indo-European etymology for questionable words is likely or at least possible. Such a large number of convoluted etymologies, however, is unusual and therefore doubtful. Most modern European languages have rather complete etymologies and such awkward derivations are not prevalent. The purpose of language, after all, is

communication and it is remarkable how strictly the form of most words is preserved. Anything else would undermine the essential function of words. Notice, by contrast, the mutation of place-names over time.

Finally, fully thirty percent of early Germanic vocabulary enjoys no known cognates of any stature. This is generally readily admitted for specific words in dictionaries and etymologies. Thirty percent is a large proportion. Add to that the probability of Balto-Slavic cognates and questionable etymologies hiding more non Indo-European word origins. Important words like "all, blood, drink, dry, fly, give, grow, hand, hay, roof, calf, knife, morning, rain, rope, sheep, smith, take, weapon, and word" have no cognates. Notice also that these words have distinctly different sound frequencies from Indo-European vocabulary. Early Germanic as reconstructed from later dialects dates back roughly to three thousand years ago, while early farmers apparently speaking Indo-European languages only approached the area of Germanic origins some six thousand years ago. Surely early Germanic speech had developed apart from its Indo-European element for less than three thousand years. Modern European languages that have origins in Latin and Germanic speech over comparable time spans have no such body of unexplained elements. Clearly early Germanic is a mixed language.

#### {mospagebreak title=Origins of Mixture}Origins of Mixture

Given that early Germanic is a mixed language, what arguments can be advanced as explanation? Mixed languages are not unusual; in fact, there may not be many which are not. Languages, as was noted above, characteristically absorb words from powerful or influential neighbors, often due to conquest. Thus modern Irish is replete with English words. English is possibly half French in origin. French has far more words of German (Frankish) origin than is often appreciated. Modern German relies heavily upon Latin but Latin relied heavily upon Greek. The core of each of these languages perseveres but the powerful neighbor in each case is very much in evidence. The earliest Germans, however, had no powerful neighbor. Far from it. In those times Indo-European people were expanding aggressively in all directions. Where the Germanic people emerged, Atlantic farmers have, in effect, disappeared. Proto-Lapp hunters and gatherers retreating far to the north were of no consequence.

Conquerors do not admit contamination of their language by those they conquer. One would be hard-pressed to assemble a handful of Welsh words accepted into English even though the Welsh are very much a part of the modern English people. Modern French shows little evidence of Celtic vocabulary even while modern French celebrate their Gaulish origins. Germans who conquered Prussia had little use for Prussian words even while they proudly presented themselves as "Prussians". All over Spanish America the Spanish mixed with natives to produce a hybrid population called "mestizo" but their language is not distracted by any body of native words. Had the Indo-European farmers conquered the Atlantic predecessors where the German people emerged, no hybrid language should have taken form.

There is one other explanation for the generation of language mixture. Not rarely do a people adopt wholesale the language of a powerful neighbor. In this case the core of their own language is abandoned, but mixture results. That is, adoption of language is rarely total. It is obviously difficult to assimilate the whole package all at once and, furthermore, it should be no surprise that people do cling to some, at least, of their native vocabulary. Thus, when Irish assay to speak English, native Irish words tend to intrude. Natives in Mexico (not mestizos) when speaking Spanish are prone to resort to native words not infrequently. English spoken in India or the Philippines suffers the same fate. In fact, all sorts of "pidgeon" languages tend to be awful mixtures. And so it is, that one is led to conclude that the northernmost Atlantic farmers, when confronted with aggressive European neighbors, decided to join them in order not to be submerged. They could surely see what was happening to the Gauls to their south.

#### {mospagebreak title=German Origins}German Origins

The fact that proto-Germanic is less than two-thirds based on Indo-European vocabulary leads to a suggested origin for the Germanic people not generally expected. The basis of the original Germanic population, like the Gauls and the Britons and other western Europeans, lies with the Atlantic Farmers. The Germans only became Indo-European speakers through adoption. Owen in 1960 did see German origins as an amalgam of Northern Megalithic (Funnel Beaker Culture) and invading Indo-Europeans (Corded Ware Culture) approximately four and a half millennia ago. What were Atlantic speakers then opted to speak the language of the invading forces even though the resulting vernacular carried a considerable load of their former vocabulary. The Germanic people subsequently became aggressive, particularly over the Celtic speaking people, and Germanic history is entangled with Celtic culture, even as France, Spain, and the British Isles, also with roots in the Atlantic culture, in a different way, were much involved with the Celts. The Romans later also had their input with all these originally Atlantic people. But, fundamentally, the Germanic people share roots in the Atlantic culture with their western neighbors and in this way differ from the peoples of eastern Europe. Early Germanic thus appears to contain the last best surviving remnant of the ancient Atlantic vocabulary.

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