

## Practice texts

## 3a. Sign-Language in the Monastery

Anglo-Saxon monasteries were organised according to the Rule of St Benedict (see p. 139). This demanded silence from monks at table and at night time, and so systems of signing had been developed in continental monasteries to provide a non-verbal means of communication. A guide to 127 signs in OE, from which the following examples are taken, survives in a single, mid-eleventh-century copy. Nothing is known of the extent to which signs were actually used. Originally, the instructions would have been in Latin. The eight signs selected here are numbered for convenience but there is no numbering in the manuscript. New vocabulary is given below, after the text, but you might prefer to try reading it first without help, as most of the words are guessable. The signs are taken from *Monasteriales Indicia: the Anglo-Saxon Monastic Sign Language*, ed. and trans. D. Banham (Pinner, 1991).

LANGUAGE NOTE. The instructions for signing tend to be formulaic. One pattern is a simple statement: 'The sign (*tācen*) of [the thing wanted] is . . .'. Another pattern uses a 'correlative' structure: 'When you want to have [a thing], then you [make the following sign]'. In OE, 'when' and 'then' (adverb and conjunction) are expressed by the same word, *þonne*, making a correlative pair. In idiomatic ModE, the second *þonne* may be better left untranslated. Most of the verbs are in the subjunctive mood (*þū sette* rather than *þū settest*, *wille* rather than *wilt*, etc). This is because hypothesis is involved, but it makes no difference to our interpretation. *Dō*, *gnīd* and *strīc* are imperative forms (i.e. they convey an order).

1. Huniges tācen is þæt þū sette þīnne finger on þīne tungan.
2. Ðonne þū drincan wylle, þonne leġe þū þīnne scyte-finger andlang þīnes mūðes.
3. Ðonne þū wīn habban wille, þonne dō þū mid þīnum twām fingrum, swilce þū tæppan of tunnan ontēon wille.
4. Bēores tācen is þæt þū gnīde þīne hand on þā ōþre.
5. Ðonne þū fisc habban wylle, þonne weġe þū þīne hand, swilce hē dēþ his tæġl þonne hē swymð
6. Ðonne þū sāpan habban wille, þonne gnīd þū þīne handa tōġædere.
7. Ðonne þū camb habban wylle, þonne strīc þū mid þīnum fingrum on þīn feax nyþerweard, swilce þū cembe þē.
8. Breçena tācen is þæt þū strīce mid þīnum twām handum up on þīn þēoh.

## SELECT VOCABULARY

andlang [adv. + gen.] *along*  
 bēores [gen. sg.] < bēor n. *beer*  
 brečena [gen. pl.] < bræcče f. *trousers*  
 [ModE breeches]  
 camb m. *comb* [acc. sg.]  
 cembe [pres.] < cemban [wk.] *to comb*  
 dō [imper.] < dōn [§G1b] *to do*  
 drincan [str.] *to drink*  
 feax n. *hair* [acc. sg.]  
 fingrum [dat. pl.] < finger m. *finger*  
 gnīd [imper.], gnīde [sbj.] < gnīdan [str.]  
*rub, grind*  
 habban [wk.] *to have*  
 hand f. *hand* [acc. sg.]  
 hunīges [gen. sg.] < hunīg n. *honey*  
 leġe [imper.] < lecgan [wk.] *to lay*  
 mūdes [gen. sg.] < mūð m. *mouth*  
 nyperweard [adv.] *downwards*  
 onbūtan [prep.] *about, around*

ontēon [str.] *to draw out*  
 ðpre [dat. sg. fem.] < ðper [pron.] *other*  
 sāpan [acc. sg.] < sāpe f. *soap*  
 sette [pres. sbj.] < settan [wk.] *to set, put*  
 strīc [imper.], strīce [pres. sbj.] < strīcan  
 [str.] *to stroke* [ModE strike]  
 swilce [conj.] *like, as if*  
 swymð [pres.] < swimman [str.] *swim*  
 tācen n. *sign* [ModE token] [nom. sg.]  
 tæġel m. *tail* [acc. sg.]  
 tæppan [acc. sg.] < tæppa m. *tap, spigot*  
 tōgædere [adv.] *together*  
 tungan [acc. sg.] < tunge f. *tongue*  
 tunnan [acc. sg.] < tunne f. *tin, cask*  
 þēoh n. *thigh* [acc. sg.]  
 þīne [acc. sg. fem.] < þīn *your*  
 weġe [imper.] < wegan [str.] *move*  
 [ModE weigh]  
 wīn n. *wine* [acc. sg.]

## NOTES

1. **hunīges**. OE *hunīg* does not sound quite like ModE ‘honey’, because the first vowel is like ‘u’ in ‘full’.
2. **scyte-finger** ‘shooting-finger’. The forefinger (or index finger) was the one used to draw the string of a bow. The *y* in *scyte* is a very short ‘ee’ sound, made with pursed lips.
3. **tæppan**. This is not a ‘tap’ in the usual modern sense but probably a wooden peg, or spigot, used to plug the hollow wooden tube inserted into a barrel to allow liquor to be drawn off.
4. **gnīde** The rubbing imitates the grinding of grain in the beer-making process (though it is not clear exactly what ‘beer’ was in the Anglo-Saxon period).
5. **hē ðēp**. The pronoun refers of course to *fisc*, not *hand*. There is no ambiguity for the Anglo-Saxon because *hē* reflects the masc. gender of *fisc*; *hand* is fem. and would require the fem. pronoun *hēo*, ‘she’.
6. **sāpan** ‘soap’. The OE long vowel *ā* usually becomes a long vowel ‘o’ in ModE, as here. So also OE *bān* > ‘bone’, *stān* > ‘stone’, *bāt* > ‘boat’, etc.
7. **feax** This word survives in the proper names ‘Fairfax’ and ‘Halifax’. ModE ‘hair’ comes from another OE word, *hær*, with the same meaning. **nyperweard** ‘netherwards’ or ‘downwards’. We still use ‘nether’ in ModE, as in ‘the nether regions’.

8. **brečena** The garments referred to, worn beneath a tunic, were like long ‘shorts’, covering the loins and thighs. The ModE derivative ‘breeches’ is used for knee-length or jodhpur-like trousers.

For a modern translation, see p. 27.

## 3b. Sunday Special

There are several OE versions of a so-called ‘Sunday Letter’, supposedly composed by Christ himself and miraculously delivered from heaven. Its purpose is to exhort Christians to observe Sunday properly, as a day not only for worship but for a complete cessation from work. It does this by invoking all the extraordinary events that occurred on a Sunday, from creation to resurrection. In connection with Noah’s ark, the extract transmits a common but muddled tradition: Armenia is not of course a mountain but a region, now in eastern Turkey; within it lies Mt Ararat, on which Noah’s ark is said to have come to rest. The passage below is based on extracts from *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter in Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 8, ed. and trans. D. Hines (Cambridge, 2010). Reference in the notes is to line-number.

- Đa cwæð Drihten God: ‘Sōþ is þæt ic ēow secge, þæt ic wæs for ēow on rōde ġenægled and þær ic þrōwade for ēow. And ic ārās on sunnandæg of dēaðe, forþan þe se sunnandæg is restendæg and wuldorlic dæg and lihtnesse dæg, and forþan þe on þām sunnandæg ġescēop Drihten heofonan and eorðan and ealle þā ġesceafte þe on hym syndon. On sunnandæg wāron englas ġesceapene, and on sunnandæg reste Nōes earce on þære dūne þe Armēnia hātte, æfter þām miclan flōde. On sunnandæg lādde Drihten his folc of Ēgyptum þurh ðā Rēadan Sæ drīum fōtum, and his fēond ādruncon in ðære sǣ. Sōþ is þæt ic ēow secge, ġif ġē ne healdað þone hālgan sunnandæg mid rihte, þæt ic sende ofer ēow mīcele stormas and hagolstānas and flēogende næddran þe ġē beran ne mægen.’

## SELECT VOCABULARY

ādruncon [pret.] < ādrincan [str.] *to drown, be drowned*  
 ārās [pret.] < ārisan [str.] *to arise*  
 Armēnia [name] *Armenia*  
 æfter [prep. + dat.] *after*  
 beran [str.] *to bear*  
 dēaðe [dat. sing.] < dēað m. *death*  
 drīum fōtum [dat. phrase] *with dry feet*  
 dūne [dat. sing.] < dūn f. *hill*  
 earce f. *ark* [nom. sg.]  
 Ēgyptum [dat. pl.] < Ēgypte [masc. englas [nom. pl.] < engel m. *angel*  
 eorðan [acc. sg.] < eorðe f. *earth*  
 fēond m. *enemy* [here plur.] [ModE fiend]  
 flēogende [pres. part.] < flēogan [str.]  
*to fly* [ModE fly, flee]  
 flōde [dat. sg.] < flōd m. *flood*  
 forþan þe [conj.] *because*  
 ġif [conj.] *if*  
 hagolstānas [acc. pl.] < hagolstān m. *hailstone*  
 hālgan [dat. sg.] < hālig [adj.] *holy*

hätte [pres. passive] < hātan [str.] to call	restendæg m. <i>rest-day</i> [nom., acc. and dat. sg.]
healdap [pres.] < healdan [str.] <i>to hold, keep</i>	rōde [dat. sg.] < rōd f. <i>the cross</i> [ModE rood]
heofonan [acc. sg.] < heofon m. <i>heaven</i>	sǣ m. <i>sea</i> [acc. sg.]
lædde [pret.] < lædan [wk.] <i>to lead</i>	ġesceafte [acc. sg.] < ġesceaft f. <i>created thing</i>
lihtnesse [gen. sg.] < lihtnes f. <i>brightness</i> [ModE lightness]	ġescēapene [past. part.], ġescēop [pret.] < ġescieppan [str.] <i>to create</i> [ModE shape]
mid rihte [dat. phrase] <i>with right, correctly</i>	sende [pres.] < sendan [wk.] <i>to send</i>
næddran [acc. pl.] < nǣdre f. <i>snake</i> [ModE adder]	sōþ n. <i>truth</i> [acc. sg.]
ġenægled [past part.] < næġlian [wk.] <i>to nail</i>	stormas [acc. pl.] < storm m. <i>storm</i>
ofer [prep. +acc.] <i>over</i>	(se) sunnandæg <i>Sunday</i>
rēadan [acc. sg. masc.] < rēad [adj.] <i>red</i>	þrōwade < þrōwian [wk.] <i>to suffer</i>
reste [pret.] < restan [wk.] <i>to rest</i>	þurh [prep. +acc.] <i>through</i>
	wuldorlic [adj.] <i>glorious</i>

## NOTES

- 1 **þæt . . . þæt**. The same ‘correlative’ structure is used in lines 8–9.
- 2 **forþan þe** ‘because’. A very common conjunctive phrase (lit. ‘for-that that’), occurring often simply as *forþan* (or *forþām*).
- 3 **lihtnesse dæg** ‘day of brightness’. The inflection on the first noun is important here: *lihtnesse* is gen. sing. of fem. *lihtnes* (lit. ‘lightness’). Nouns in *-nes* or *-nis* are always fem. [§B3].
- 5 **reste** ‘rested’. Although *restan*, ‘to rest’, is a weak verb, it is one of several which simplify their preterite forms, so that an expected *-ode* does not appear [§G4a.3].  
**earce** A noun with a variety of forms; *arc* (as used in 2c/4, p. 13) eventually became the dominant form.
- 6 **hätte** A unique verb form, meaning ‘is called’.
- 7 **þurh ðā Rēadan Sǣ** ‘through the Red Sea’. *Sǣ* (usually masc. but here fem.) is an odd word which often takes no inflection [§B1g.iv]. The other words are in the fem. accusative sing., after the preposition *þurh* [§A1a]. **drīum fōtum** OE has many such adverbial phrases, in the dative but lacking a helpful preposition; the dative plural ending *-um* makes them easy to spot. Note that *drīum* is pron. ‘dree-um’ and the first syllable of *fōtum* sounds like ‘phot’ in ‘photo’.
- 9 **flēogende**. Remember that *-end* (or *-and*) on an OE verb is the equivalent of ‘-ing’ in ModE, making a present participle that can be used as an adjective or a noun.

For a modern translation, see p. 28.

## PRACTICE TEXT 3a (p. 23)

## Sign-Language in the Monastery

1. The sign for honey [*lit.* honey’s sign] is that you put [*lit.* set] your finger on your tongue.
2. When you want to drink, lay your forefinger [*lit.* shooting finger] along your mouth.
3. When you want to have wine, make with your two fingers as if you want to draw out the spigot from a cask. [*Lit.* When thou wine have will, then do thou with thy two fingers as-if thou tap from cask draw-out want.]
4. The sign for beer is that you rub your (one) hand on the other.
5. When you want to have a fish, move your hand as it [the fish] does its tail when it swims.
6. When you want to have soap, rub your hands together.
7. When you want to have a comb, stroke downwards on your hair with your fingers, as if you were combing yourself.
8. The sign for underpants is that you stroke with your two hands up your thigh.

PRACTICE TEXT 3b (p. 25)

Sunday Special

Then the Lord God said: 'It is the truth that I say to you, that I was nailed on the cross for you, and there I suffered for you'. And I arose on Sunday from death, because Sunday [*lit.* the Sunday] is a rest-day and a glorious day and a day of brightness, and because on Sunday the Lord created heaven and earth and all the created things that are in them. On Sunday, angels were created, and on Sunday, Noah's ark rested on the hill that is called Armenia, after the great flood. On Sunday, the Lord led his people from Egypt through the Red Sea with dry feet, and his enemies drowned in the sea. It is the truth that I say to you: that, if you do not keep holy Sunday correctly, I will send over you great storms and hailstones and flying snakes that you will be unable to bear.