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THE FIRST LATIN WORDS IN ENGLISH

It is well known that Old English had an extremely low percentage of loan words, about three per cent, which means it was a thoroughly Germanic language. Nearly all these loans were of Latin origin. The first Latin words to get into what later became Old English were mostly words learned from Roman merchants and words learned by Germanic legionnaires. The number of these words cannot be established beyond any doubt, the maximum estimate reaching about 170 words. The current state of research is reviewed and the issues of continental and insular borrowings are thoroughly discussed by Kastovsky 1992.

The core of the following list are continental borrowings from Latin (as recognized by most authorities) which have survived into modern times, in some cases reinforced from AN/OE in the Middle English period. Words which were readopted in Middle English and words which have disappeared from English are also given here.

For the sake of comparison, the history of the same Latin words in Czech has been added to the entries. The Latin words either entered Czech via German or were borrowed directly from Latin. If there is no source indicated here, the link between Latin and Czech is in a common Indo-European root.

CHURCH AND RELIGION

ærc 'ark' < L *arca* (F *arche* was adopted into English and was the current term in 13c and 14c); Cz *archa* < G; Cz *rakev* < L

bisceop 'bishop' < popL **biscopus* < ecclL *episcopus*; Cz *biskup* < G

čirice 'church' < WGerm **kirika* < medGr *kūrikón*; Cz *čirkev*, prob. < G < Gr *Sætarn(es)dæg*, *Sæterdæg*, translation of *Sāturnī diēs*

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

prēdician 'preach' < L *prædicāre*

engel 'angel' < CGerm < ecclL *angelus*; OF *angele*; Cz *anděl* < L

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

scōl, *scolu* < medL *scōla* < L *schola* < Gr (the native word was *lārhus* 'lore-house'); Cz *škola* < L

dihtan 'arrange, impose, write' < L *dictāre*; modE *dight*; Cz *diktovati* < L *fers* 'verse' < L *versus*; Cz *verš* < L; Cz *vtřtři*

šcřifan 'prescribe, assign' < L *scribere*; modE *shrive*; Cz *škrabati*

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

diht 'direction, piece of writing' < L *dictum*

PLANTS

bēte 'beet' < CWGerm *bēta* < L *bēta*, perhaps of Celtic origin

cāwel, *cāul* 'cole' < L *caulis*; Cz dial. *kěl* < G

lilie 'lily' < L *lilium*; Cz *lilie* < L

minte 'mint' < WGerm **minta* < L *menta*, *mentha* < Gr; Cz *máta*; Cz coll. *pfeřminc* < G

næp 'neep' (dial. for 'tur-nip' < tur-nep) < L *nāpus*

palm, *palma*, *palme* 'palm' < CGerm < L *palma* ('tree' through metaphor from 'part of hand'); Cz *palma* < L

pere, *peru* 'pear' < popL **pira*

piper, *pipor* 'pepper' < L *piper* < Gr; Cz *pepř* < L

plūme 'plum' < L *prīna*, orig. pl. of *prīnum*; Cz *bluma* < G

popæg, *papæg* > *popig* 'poppy' < L *papāuum* < *papāver*

rose, *rōse* 'rose' < L *rosa*; Cz *rūže* < L

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

česten 'chestnut' < L *castanea*; ME *chesteine*; Cz *kařtan* < L

čiris 'cherry' < L *cerasus*; ME *cherie*; Cz *trěřně*, Sl *čereřňa*, both prob. through Romance languages

cymen 'cummin' < L *cuminum*; OF *cumin*, *comin*; Cz *kmín* < G or F

cyřfet 'gourd' < L *cucurbita*; AN *gurde*, OF *gourde*

persoc 'peach' < L *persicum* < *Persicum mālum* 'Persian apple'; ME *peche*; Cz *broskev* < L

plante 'plant' < L *planta*; OF *plante*; Cz *plantáz* < F

spīca, *spīce* 'herb' < L *spīca*; modE *spike*; Cz *řpýchar* < G

LOST:

cipe 'onion' < L *cēpa*; Cz *cibule* < OHG *zibolle* < L *cipolla* < *cēpa*

COOKING

četel 'kettle' < CGerm **katilaz* < L *catillus*; Cz *kotel* < G

cōc 'cook' < VL *cōcus* < L *coquus*

cyčene 'kitchen' < WGerm **cocīna* < L *coquīna*; Cz *kuchyně* < G

mylen 'mill' < L *molīnus*; Cz *mlýn* < G

panne 'pan' < VL *panna* < L *patīna*; Cz slang *fanka* < G

FOOD AND DRINK

butere 'butter' < L *būtūrūm* (< Gr); Cz dial *putra* < G

čēse 'cheese' < WGerm **kāsjo* < L *cāseus*

must 'must, unfermented juice of the grape' < L *mustum*; Cz *mošt* < G

rædič 'radish' < L *rādic-*, *rādex*; *-ish* perhaps from blending with F *radis*; Cz *ředkev* < G

wīn 'wine' < CGerm **wīnam* < L *vīnum*; Cz *vīno* < G

LOST:

senep 'mustard' < L *sinapi*; G *Senf*

ANIMALS

catt 'cat' < LateL *cattus*

draca 'drake, dragon' < WGerm **drako* < L *dracō*; Cz *drak* < L

pāwa, *pēa* 'peacock' < L *pāvō*; Cz *páv* < G

turtla, masc., *turle*, fem. 'turtle-dove' < L *turtur*; Cz *tetřev*

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

elpend, *ylpend* 'elephant' < L *elephāns*; ME *olifaunt*; Cz dial. *elefant* < Gr

mūl 'mule' < CGerm < L *mūlus*; OF *mul*; Cz *mul* < L

strūta, *strýta* 'ostrich' < L *strūthiō*; ME *ostrice*; Cz *pštros* < G

VESSELS, BOXES ETC.

čist 'chest' < Germ **kistā* < L *cista*; Cz coll. *kisna* < G

cuppe 'cup' < L *cuppa* < *cūpa*; Cz *kupa*

disč 'dish' < L *discus*; Cz *deska*, prob. < L

sacc 'sack' < L *saccus* < Semitic *saq*; Cz *sak* (> *sáček*), *žok* < G

scrīn 'chest' < L *scrinium*; modE *shrine*; Cz *skřīň* < G

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

bytt 'leather bottle' < VL *bottis*; Cz *butylka* < Rus < F

cælc, *celc*, LOE *caliç*, *cæliç* 'cup' < L *calic-*; OF *chalice*; Cz *kalich* < G

scutel 'dish' < L *scutula*, *scutella*; ME *scutel*

LOST:

læfel, *lebil* 'spoon, cup' < L *labellum*

orc 'pitcher' < LL *orca* < L *urceus*

TRADE

čēāp 'bargain, price, market' < WGerm **kaupaz* < L *caupō* 'small tradesman, innkeeper'; ModE *cheap*, *Cheapside*, *Chapman*; Cz *kupovati* < G

mangere 'monger', derived from *mangian* 'to trade' < Germ **maggōjan* < L *mangō* 'dealer, trader' (< Gr)

moneye < OF *moneie*; Cz *mince* < G; Cz *portmonka* < F

mynet 'mint, coin of money' < WGerm **munita* < L *monēta* 'mint' (in Rome; *Monēta* was an epithet of the goddess Juno, in, or next to whose temple coins were minted); ME

toll ‘payment, toll’ < L *tolēneum*

MEASURE AND DISTANCE

mīl ‘mile’ < WG **mīlja* < L *mīlia/mīllia*, pl. of *mīle/mīlle* ‘thousand’ in the phrase *mīlle passus* or *passuum* ‘one thousand steps’; Cz *mīle* < G

pund ‘pound’ < CG **pundo* < L *pondō* ‘pound weight’; Cz arch. *puđ* < R < G;

Cz *funt* < G

ynče ‘inch’ < L *uncia* ‘twelfth part’

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

mydd ‘bushel’ < L *modius*; in modE as *mud* < Du, and as *modius* < L

LOST:

byden ‘measure, barrel’ < VL *butina*; Ger *Bütte*

DRESS

belt ‘belt’ < L *balteus*, of Etruscan origin

cug(e)le ‘hood, cowl’ < L *cuculla*; Cz *kukla* < L

purpure, fem. ‘purple garment’ < L *purpura*; Cz *purpur* < G

LOST:

sīde ‘silk’ < VL *seđa* < L *seta*

FURNITURE, HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

port ‘door, gate’ < L *porta*; Cz *prāti*; Cz *portýr* < G; Cz *fortna* < G

pyle, pylu ‘pillow’ < L *pulvinus*

šcamol ‘bench, stool’ < L *scamellum*, dimin. of *scamnum*; modE *shambles*; Cz *škamna* < L

wīc ‘dwelling, village’ < L *vīcus*; modE *wick*; Cz *ves*

LOST:

fæcele ‘torch’ < L *facula*

mēse, mīse ‘table’ < L *messa* < *mensa*; Cz *mīsa* < VL; Cz *menza* < L

BUILDING ARTS

čealc ‘chalk’ < WGerm < L *calc-* ‘lime’

copor ‘copper’ < Germ **kupar* < L *cuprum* < *cyprium* (*æs*) ‘metal of Cyprus’

pic ‘pitch’ < CGerm < L *pic-*, *pix*

post ‘pillar’ < L *postis*

pytt ‘pit’ < WGerm **putti*, *puttja* < L *puteus*

tīgele ‘tile’ < L *tēgula*; Cz *cihla* < G

torr ‘tower’ < L *turris*; reinforced in ME by *tūr* < AN

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

cruft(e) ‘crypt’ < L *crupta*, *crypta*; Cz *hrob*; Cz *krypta* < L; Cz *kruchta* < G

šcīndel ‘roof-shingle’ < L *scīndula*; ME *scincle*; Cz *šīndel* < G

solor, solere ‘upper chamber’ < L *solārium*; AN *soler*; modE *sollar*

LOST:

mūr 'wall' < L *mīrus*; Slovak *múr* < G

CRAFTS, TOOLS

ancor 'anchor' < L *ancora*; Cz *pavouk*

cylen 'kiln' < L *culīna*; Cz *kulinární* < L

pīpe 'pipe' < VL *pīpa*, ult. from L *pīpāre*, imit.; Cz *pípa* < It; Cz *fajfka* < G

pinn 'pin, peg' < L *pinna*

sicol, *sicel* 'sickle' < VL **sicila* < Campanian L *secula*

sūtere 'shoemaker, (Scot. & north.E.) souter' < L *sūtor*; Cz *šíti*

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

regol 'wooden ruler' < L *rēgula*; Cz *řehole* < L

LOST:

clūs(e) 'bolt, enclosure' < VL *clusa* < *clausum*

MILITARY ACTIONS

pīl 'pointed stake, javelin' < L *pīlum*; modE *pile* 'dart, spike'

stræ:t 'road' < L (*via*) *strāta*; modE *street*; Cz *stříti*

weall 'wall' < L *vallum*; Cz *val* < G; Cz *interval* < L; Cz *konvalinka* < L

OTHER WORDS

fals 'false' < L *falsus*; Cz *faleš* < G

plaster 'medical application' < L *plastrum*; Cz *flastr* < G

segn 'banner'; < L *signum*; Cz *signál* < L

tyrnan 'turn' < L *tornāre*, *turnāre*; Cz *turnaj* < G < F; Cz *turnus* < L; Cz *storno-*
vat < It; Cz *turniket* < F; Cz *turné* < F; Cz *tornādo* < Sp

READOPTED IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:

cāsere 'emperor' < L *Caesar*; ME *Cesar*; Cz *císař* < G

trifet 'tribute' < L *tribūtum*; ME < L

No claim can be made that the above list is complete or that it brings some final answer to a question. The main idea has been to show that a majority of the Latin borrowings survived into modern English and that a minority disappeared, just as many other Old English words of domestic origin.

There are words which are regarded as continental by some authorities on the subject and which have not been included here, eg. *munuc*. The reason is the degree of likelihood that the concept of monasticism was known to the speakers of Germanic dialects before they accepted Christianity. Monasticism existed in India and in other parts of Asia long before Christianity and the first Christian monks lived in Egypt (St. Anthony, c. 270 AD). In 340, St. Athanasius went to Rome and brought the knowledge of monastic life to Western Europe. Monasticism soon became common in Rome and throughout Italy and then it spread to Gaul and to northern Africa. The patriarch of Western monks, St. Benedict of

Nursia, lived in 480–553, ie after the Angles, Saxons and Jutes came to Britain. There is also an argument in favour of regarding *munuc* a continental borrowing: it was first used of the hermits and only later was widened to embrace the coenobites.

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