

sæ

ypa

lagu

brimlade

deaðsele

*Eart þu se Beowulf se þe wið Breca wunne
on sidne sæ ymb sund flite?*

‘Are you the Beowulf who, against Breca,
on the broad sea, swam in strife?’
Beowulf, lines 506-507.

sæ

Sounds like: [say]
Meaning: sea

atol yþa gewealc

‘terrible tossing of the waves’
The Seafarer, line 6.

yþa

Sounds like: [ee-tha]
Meaning: waves

Lagu land gefeol lyft was onhrered

‘sea fell to the land, air was agitated’
From the Old English Exodus, recounting the
story of the Egyptians swept into the Red Sea,
which had parted for Moses.

lagu

Sounds like: [lah-goo]
Meaning: sea, water

... ic werig oft in brimlade bidan sceolde.

‘I, weary, often on sea-paths, have abided.’
The Seafarer, line 30.

brimlade

Sounds like: [brim-lah-duh]
Meaning: sea-paths

The ‘fastitocalon’, a great whale who
poses as an island to trick seafarers,
dives down into the sea with sailors on
his back, taking them to their ‘deaðsele’.
The Whale, found in the Exeter Book.

deaðsele

Sounds like: [death-sel-uh]
Meaning: death-hall,
hall of death

hronrade

hwæles epel

hwælweg

yðlidan

swanrade

... *him aeghwylc þara ymbsittendra*
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan · þæt wæs god cyning.

‘... to him, each of the surrounding tribes
over the whale-road had to submit,
give tribute. That was a good king!’
A poet describes the great king Scyld Scefing.
Beowulf, lines 10-11.

hronrade

Sounds like: [hron-rad-uh]

Meaning: whale-road

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles epel hweorfeð wide...

For now my soul leaves my breast-locker,
my mind over the mere-flood,
over the wide whales’ path it passes...
The Seafarer, lines 58-60.

hwæles epel

Sounds like: [(h)whales ethel]

Meaning: whale’s path

... *gielleð anflaga*
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu.

‘...the lone-flier screams,
calls onto the whale-road the unresisting heart
over the waves of the sea.’
(The ‘lone-flier’ is perhaps a sea-bird or a
wandering soul of the seafarer, or both!)
The Seafarer, lines 62-64.

hwælweg

Sounds like: [(h)whale-way]

Meaning: whale-way

het him yðlidan
godne gegyrwan· cwæð: he guðcyning
ofer swanrade secean wolde...

‘he ordered them a wave-crosser,
a good one be prepared. He said: the war-king
over swan-road, he would seek...’
Beowulf prepares to travel to Hrothgar’s court.
Beowulf, lines 198-200.

yðlidan

Sounds like: [eeth-lidan]

Meaning: a wave-crosser,
a ship.

Lagu land gefeol lyft was onhrered

‘sea fell to the land, air was agitated’
From the Old English Exodus, recounting
the story of the Egyptians swept into the
Red Sea, which had parted for Moses.

swanrade

Sounds like: [swan rad-uh]

Meaning: sea, water

sealtypa

streamas

flod

flodwegas

mereflode

*Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan gepohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige...*

‘Now they are troubled,
my heart-thoughts, that I - the high streams,
salt-waves - must myself test.
The Seafarer, lines 33-35.

sealtyþa

Sounds like: [see-alt-ee-tha]

Meaning: salt-waves

*Ne meahton magorincas ofer mere feolan,
swa hi fundedon, ac wæs flod to deop,
atol yþa geþræc, ofras hea,
streamas stronge.*

The warriors could not go over the water,
as they intended, but that flood was too deep,
terrible waves tossed, the banks high,
the streams strong.
Riddle 22, lines 5-8.

streamas

Sounds like: [strey-ahm-as]

Meaning: streams,
used often for ‘current’

*Ne meahton magorincas ofer mere feolan,
swa hi fundedon, ac wæs flod to deop,
atol yþa geþræc, ofras hea,
streamas stronge.*

The warriors could not go over the water,
as they intended, but that flood was too deep,
terrible waves tossed, the banks high,
the streams strong.
Riddle 22, lines 5-8.

flod

Sounds like: [flodd]

Meaning: flood, sea, water

For flogwegas...

‘[It] travelled the water-ways..’
Riddle 36, line 9.

flodwegas

Sounds like: [flodd-way-gas]

Meaning: water-ways,
flood-ways

*Forþon nu min hyge hwearfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles epel hwearfeð wide...*

For now my soul leaves my breast-locker,
my mind over the sea-flood,
over the wide whales’ path it passes...
The Seafarer, lines 58-60.

mereflode

Sounds like: [meer-florder]

Meaning: sea-flood,
mere-water

mere

holma gelagu

bat

scip

flota

Æt meres ende

‘on the sea shore’

The Legend of St Andrew.

Nis ðæt feor heonan ðæt se mere standeþ

‘It is not far from here that the mere stands’

Beowulf, lines 1361-63.

mere

Sounds like: [meer]

Meaning: sea, mere, lake,
sometimes artificial.

... gielleð anflaga

hweteð on hwælweg hreper unwearnum

ofer holma gelagu.

‘...the lone-flier screams,

calls onto the whale-road the unresisting heart
over the waves of the sea.’

(The ‘lone flyer’ is perhaps a sea-bird or a
wandering soul of the seafarer, or both!)

The Seafarer, lines 62-64.

holma gelagu

Sounds like: [holma yeh-lah-goo]

Meaning: waves of the sea
(both holma and lagu separately
mean ‘sea’ or ‘water’)

Fyrst forð gewat· Flota wæs on yðum

bat under beorge·

‘Time passed by. The ship was on the waves,
boat under cliffs.’

Beowulf, lines 210-11.

bat

Sounds like: [bat]

Meaning: boat

Also appears as *sæbat* or *merebat*,
sea-boat or lake-boat in other texts.

Gewiton him þá fēran - flota stille bád·

seomode on sole, sidfæðme scip

on ancre fæst...

‘Then they went faring - the boat was still.

It remained on the sand, the broad-beamed ship,
fast at anchor...’

Beowulf and his companions leave their ship and
travel by foot to Hrothgar’s hall, Heorot.

Beowulf, lines 301-2.

scip

Sounds like: [ship]

Meaning: ship

Fyrst forð gewat· Flota wæs on yðum

bat under beorge·

‘Time passed by. The ship was on the waves,
boat under cliffs.’

Beowulf, lines 210-11.

flota

Sounds like: [flotta]

Meaning: boat, ship

Flota also appears as *sæflota* or *mereflota*, sea-
boat or lake-boat, in other texts.

feran

ceol

lid

nacan stefnan

hreran mid hondum

*Gewiton him þa feran - flota stille bad·
seomode on sole, sidfæðme scip
on ancre fæst...*

‘Then they set off - the boat was still.
It remained on the sand, the broad-beamed ship,
fast at anchor...’
Beowulf and his companions leave their ship and
travel by foot to Hrothgar’s hall, Heorot.
Beowulf, lines 301-2.

feran

Sounds like: [fair-an]

Meaning: to go, to travel,
to make a journey.

Gildas, a British monk writing in the sixth
century, and Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk in
the eighth century, both record that ‘the first
Anglo-Saxons’ arrived on just three *ceol*, in
the fifth century.

ceol

Sounds like: [chay-oll]

Meaning: ship, especially
a large ship.

*Seo eft ne com
to lide fleogan ac heo land begeat,
grene bearwas...*

‘It [the dove] came again
flying to the ark, for it had found land,
green groves...’
From the Old English version of Genesis.

lid

Sounds like: [lid]

Meaning: boat, especially ‘ark’

... mec oft bigeat nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan.

... I often kept anxious night-watch at the boat’s prow.
The Seafarer, lines 6-7.

Often used metaphorically to represent the whole
boat.

nacan stefnan

Sounds like: [nacan stefnan]

Meaning: boat’s prow,
stern of a vessel

*he... sceolde hreran mid hondum hrimcealde
sæ*

‘He (a wanderer)... must row by hand over
the ice cold sea’
The Wanderer, line 4.

hreran mid hondum

Meaning: move by hand, row

eagorstreamas

sæhengest

líðend

wæter

wæterpisa

*lc wæs syxtyne siðum on sæbate mere
hrerendum eagorstreamas...*

‘I have been sixteen times on a sea going
boat, stirring water-currents...’

The Old English story of ‘Andreas’, which
imagines St Andrew as a Germanic hero.
Here the saint boasts of his sailing skill.

eagorstreamas

Sounds like: [ey-agor-strey-
ahm-as]

Meaning: water-currents, sea

*Wolde ic anes to ðe cræftes neosan, ðæt ðu me getæhte... hu ðu
wægflotan, wære bestemdon, sæhengeste, sund wisige.*

‘I want to discover your skill, that you teach me... show
how you sail this wave-floater, drenched by the ocean, this
sea-horse.’

From the Old English story of ‘Andreas’, which imagines St
Andrew as a Germanic hero. The saint asks God (disguised
as a sailor) to teach him seafaring skills.

sæhengest is also used once in a Latin - Old English
glossary to mean ‘hippopotamus’!

sæhengest

Sounds like: [say hengest]

Meaning: sea steed, sea horse,
metaphor for ship

ða liðende land gesawon

‘the travellers saw land’

Beowulf, line 221.

Elsewhere in the poem, it becomes *sæliðende* or
mereliðende, specifically ‘seafarers’.

liðend

Sounds like: [lith-end]

Meaning: traveller

*Wæter and eorþe sint on gecynde cealda
ba twa...*

‘Water and earth are by nature cold,
both the two of them...’

From the Old English ‘Boethius’ (a translation
of a sixth century Latin philosophical text by
Anicius Boethius, translated into English from
at least the ninth century).

wæter

Sounds like: [watter]

Meaning: water

He hafap opre gecynd, wæterþisa wlonc...

‘He (the whale) has another aspect (to his
personality), the proud water-rusher...’
The Whale, lines 49-50.

wæterþisa

Sounds like: [watter-thissa]

Meaning: A water-rusher, used
to mean ship or whale.

eardstapa

faroplacende

lacan

sip

feor oppe neah

Swa cwæð eardstapa, earfeþa gemyndig...

‘So spoke the earth-stepper, mindful of hardships’
The Wanderer, line 6.

Grendel is called a mearcstapa, ‘marsh-stepper’ in Beowulf.

eardstapa

Sounds like: [ee-ard-stappa]

Meaning: earth-stepper, wanderer, traveller, pilgrim

faroplacende

Sounds like: [faroth-la-kenduh]

Meaning: sea steed, sea horse, metaphor for ship

Is ðæt frecne stream, yða ofermæta, ðe we her on lacap...

‘perilous is that stream, huge the waves, on which here we toss...’
From an Old English gospel book.

lacan

Sounds like: [lack-an]

Meaning: to move about as a ship does on the waves, as a bird does in its flight, as flames do

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan, sipas secgan...

‘I can tell a true tale about myself, speak of journeys...’
The Seafarer, lines 1-2.

sip

Sounds like: [sith]

Meaning: a journey, voyage

feor opþe neah

Sounds like: [fee-or otheh nee-ah]

Meaning: far or near

selen

wrixlan

ceap

leodbygen

ceapdæg

*Ne seleð þe wæstmas eorðe
wlitige to woruld-nytte...*

‘The earth will not fairly give you fruits
for your worldly-need...’
God punishes Abel for killing his brother, Old
English Genesis.

selen

Sounds like: [sell-en]

Meaning: a gift, a grant, a
habit of giving.

Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan

‘Wise men should exchange songs/ lays/ riddles’
Maxims I, line 4.

wrixlan

Meaning: to change, exchange,
deal, lend, trade

He his ceap gedrifen hæfde

‘he had driven his bargain.’
From an Old English gospel book.

ceapung-gemot - ‘market place’.

ceap

Sounds like: [chee-app]

Meaning: cattle (literally), trade,
purchase, goods. Or, payment.

leodbygen

Sounds like: [ley-odd-by-gen]

Meaning: the buying of people,
slavery

ceapdæg

Sounds like: [chee-app dayg]

Meaning: market day

ƿ

sealtwic

ceap-cniht

ceapman

feoh

ƿ (feoh) *byþ frofur ƿira gehwylcum;
sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan
gif he wile for drihtne domes hleotan.*

‘Wealth is a benefit to all men;
Still, every man must deal it generously
If he wishes to gain glory in the presence of the lord.’
The Rune Poem, lines 1-3.

ƿ (feoh)

Sounds like: [fey-awh]

Meaning: wealth

(feoh - written as words rather than as a
rune, means ‘cattle’, ‘fee’ or ‘price’)

sealtwic

Sounds like: [see-alt wich]

Meaning: a place where salt is
sold, a salt market

ceap-cniht

Sounds like: [chee-app cuh-niht]

Meaning: servant, slave (literally, a
young man who has been bought)

Cypemen monig cepeþing to ceapstowe brohte

‘Chapmen brought many saleable things to
market’
Recorded in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*.

ceapman

Sounds like: [chee-app man]

Meaning: chapman, market-
man, merchant

lc ðe ða fæhþe feo leanige

‘I reward your trouble (in the sense of ‘violent
vengeance’) with money’

Hrothgar promises Beowulf gifts if he is able to kill
Grendel’s mother.
Beowulf, line 1380.

feoh

Sounds like: [fey-awh]

Meaning: cattle, fee, price,
property, riches

X

fisces bep

goldes brytta

hors

papa

ƿ (Gifu) *gumena byþ gleng and herenys,
wraþu and wyrþscype, and wræcna gehwam
ar and ætwist ðe byþ oþra leas.*

‘Gift, for men, is honour and praise,
support and worthiness, and, for every wretch,
glory and sustenance, for those who are without
anything else.’

The Rune Poem, lines 19-21.

ƿ (feoh)

Sounds like: [fey-awh]

Meaning: wealth

(feoh - written as words rather than as a
rune, means ‘cattle’, ‘fee’ or ‘price’)

ᚱ *Sigel semannum symble biþ on hihte,
ðonne hi hine feriaþ ofer fisces beþ,
oþ hi brimhengest bringeþ to lande.*

‘The sun/ the sail is always a joy to seamen,
when they ferry over the fishes’ bath,
until they bring the brine-horse to land.’

The Rune Poem, lines 45-47.

ƿisces beþ

Sounds like: [fishes beth]

Meaning: the fishes’ bath, the
sea.

Most often used to speak of a gift-giving
leader. A mark of a good, strong leader was that
they would deal out treasures to followers and
allies.

goldes brytta

Sounds like: [gold-es britta]

Meaning: a distributor of gold

Ða wæs Hroðgare hors gebæted wicg wundenfeax

‘Then for Hrothgar was a horse bridled,
a steed with braided mane’
Beowulf, 1399-1400.

hors

Meaning: horse

ᚱ (Rad) *byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum
sefte ond swiþhwæt ðamðe sitteþ on ufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpapas.*

The reins in the hall are to every man
soft, and strong for those that sit above on
a mare, [it is] mighty-harsh over the miles-paths.
The Rune Poem, lines 13-15.

papa

Sounds like: [path-a]

Meaning: path, road, way

R

swæp

steorbord

bæcbord

Norðmanna

ᚱ (Rad) *byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum
sefte ond swiþhwæt ðamðe sitteþ on ufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpapas.*

‘The reins in the hall are to every man
soft, and strong for those that sit above on
a mare, mighty-harsh over the mile-paths.’
The Rune Poem, lines 13-15.

ᚱ (rad)

Meaning: riding, or reins.

swearte wæran lastas, swæþu swiþe blacu...

‘dark were their tracks, the path very black’
Riddle 40, lines 2-3.
Here the poet describes the path left by a hand
holding a pen - - it wasn’t just people or animals
who could leave a *swæþ* on their journeys!

swæþ

Sounds like: [swath]

Meaning: a track, a path, a
mark left by a moving body, a
footprint

*Ohthere norðrihte be þæm lande; let him ealne weg þæt weste
land on þæt steorbord and þa widsæ on bæcbord þry dagas.*

‘Ohthere travelled northward along the coast, keeping
the empty land to the right and the wide sea to his left for
three days.’

The Old English ‘History of the World’ translates a fifth
century Latin text. It also includes a ‘new’ (ninth century!)
story of Ohthere, a visitor at King Alfred’s court, who
claimed to have travelled further north than anyone else.

steorbord

Sounds like: [stee-or board]

Meaning: the right-side of the
boat facing forward, the side
of the ‘steer’, starboard.

*Ohthere norðrihte be þæm lande; let him ealne weg þæt weste
land on þæt steorbord and þa widsæ on bæcbord þry dagas.*

‘Ohthere travelled northward along the coast, keeping
the empty land to the right and the wide sea to his left for
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The Old English ‘History of the World’ translates a fifth
century Latin text. It also includes a ‘new’ (ninth century!)
story of Ohthere, a visitor at King Alfred’s court, who
claimed to have travelled further north than anyone else.

bæcbord

Sounds like: [back board]

Meaning: port (side of a boat)

*Ohthere sæd his hlaforde, Ælfrede kynincge, þæt he ealra
Norðmanna norðmest bude*

‘Ohthere told his lord, King Alfred, that he lived furthest
north of all Northmen.’

The Old English ‘History of the World’ translates a fifth
century Latin text. It also includes a ‘new’ (ninth century!)
story of Ohthere, a visitor at King Alfred’s court, who
claimed to have travelled further north than anyone else.

Norðmanna

Sounds like: [North manna]

Meaning: north men, north
peoples

garsecg

wendelsæ

Scotland

igland

cuman

*Ure yldran ealne ðysne ymbhwyrft ðyses middengeardes on
ðreo todældon, swa swa Oceanus ymbligeð utan, ðone man
garsecg hatað...*

‘Our ancestors dealt out the whole expanse of this world
into three parts, such that Oceanus surrounds everything,
that men call ‘spear man’.’

The opening of the Old English ‘History of the World’, a
ninth century adaptation of a fifth century Latin text.

garsecg

Meaning: spear-man, sea

*And þære Affrica norðwestgemære is æt þæm ylcan wendelsæ
þe of þæm garsecge scyt, þær Ercoles syla standað.*

‘The northwestern boundary of Africa is at the
Mediterranean where it flows in from the ‘spear man’
[the Atlantic], where the Pillars of Hercules [the straits of
Gibraltar] stand.’

From the Old English ‘History of the World’, a ninth
century adaptation of a fifth century Latin text.

wendelsæ

Sounds like: [wendel-say]

Meaning: the Mediterranean
sea

Ond hyre westende is Scotland.

‘The western boundary [of Europe] is Ireland.’

From the Old English ‘History of the World’, a ninth
century adaptation of a fifth century Latin text. There’s
some confusion in many early medieval texts about what
exactly to call the places we now call Ireland or Scotland!

Scotland

Meaning: Ireland

*Brittania þæt igland hit is norðeastlang, and
hit is eahta hund mila lang and twa hund mila
brad.*

‘The island of Britain extends to the
northeast (of Europe), and it is eight hundred
miles long and two hundred miles broad.’
From the Old English ‘History of the World’,
a ninth century adaptation of a fifth century
Latin text.

igland

Sounds like: [ee-land]

Meaning: island

*On þæm landum eardodon Engle, ær hi hider on land
coman...*

*The English lived in that region before they came to this
country...*

From the Old English ‘History of the World’, a ninth
century adaptation of a fifth century Latin text. Here,
the narrator describes Jutland, now part of Germany
and Denmark.

cuman

Sounds like: [coo-mann]

Meaning: to come, to go

norð

suð

east

west

seglan

norð

Sounds like: [north]

Meaning: north

suð

Sounds like: [sooth]

Meaning: south

east

Sounds like: [ee-yast]

Meaning: east

west

Meaning: west

*... seglede þanon east þe lande swa swa he mihte on feower
dagum geseġlan.*

‘(Ohthere) then sailed eastward along the coast as far as he
could for four days of sailing.’

The Old English ‘History of the World’ translates a fifth
century Latin text. It also includes a ‘new’ (ninth century!)
story of Ohthere, a visitor at King Alfred’s court, who
claimed to have travelled further north than anyone else.

seġlan

Sounds like: [sey-lan]

Meaning: to sail

rowan

wracnian

cræt-wisa

cræte-hors

wæd

rowan

Sounds like: [ro-ann]

Meaning: to go by water, to row or sail.

wracnian

Sounds like: [wrack-nee-on]

Meaning: to travel in a foreign place.

cræt-wisa

Sounds like: [krat-wee-za]

Meaning: a charioteer.

cræte-hors

Sounds like: [krat-eh-horse]

Meaning: cart horse.

wæd

Sounds like: [wadd]

Meaning: shallow water you can cross, a ford.

forþ-weg

here-sīþ

ræde-mann

mere-stræt

brim-gæst

forþ-weg

Sounds like: [forth-way]

Meaning: an onward course, a journey forward.

here-sīþ

Sounds like: [heh-reh sith]

Meaning: the journey of an army.

ræd-mann

Sounds like: [rad-eh-man]

Meaning: a horseman or rider.

mere-stræt

Sounds like: [mere-straat]

Meaning: water-road, the sea.

brim-gæst

Sounds like: [brim gast]

Meaning: sea-guest, sailor.

hyð

steor-mann

segl-rād

scip-gebroc

mere-werig

Place names, for example
'Rotherhithe', which is by the River
Thames, include this word.

hyð

Sounds like: [hythe]

Meaning: a port, landing place
for boats.

steor-mann

Sounds like: [stee-or man]

Meaning: the steer man,
captain.

segl-rād

Sounds like: [seygle-rad]

Meaning: sail road,
or 'the sea'.

scip-gebroc

Sounds like: [ship ye-brock]

Meaning: shipwreck.

mere-werig

Sounds like: [mere weriyg]

Meaning: tired of the sea.

sund-wudu

flot-man

gold-gifa

dryncelean

freoðuwebbe

sund-wudu

Sounds like: [sund-wood-oo]

Meaning: sea-wood, ship.

flot-man

Sounds like: [flott man]

Meaning: boat man, pirate, sailor.

gold-gifa

Sounds like: [gold giffa]

Meaning: gold giver, leader.

dryncelean

Sounds like: [drink-eh-lee-an]

Meaning: a drink to seal a deal.

freoðuwebbe

Sounds like: [free-oh-thu-webb-uh]

Meaning: peaceweaver, a woman who joins communities.