

sæ

yþa

lagu

brimlade

deaðsele

*Eart þu se Beowulf se þe wið Brecan wunne
on sidne sœ ymb sund flite?*

sœ

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

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 eþel

hwælweg

yðlidan

swanrade

... him aeghwylc þara ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan · þaet 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.

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflope,
ofer hwæles eþel 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.

... gielleð anfloga
hweteð on hwælwæg 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.

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.

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.

hronrade

Sounds like: [hron-rad-uh]

Meaning: whale-road

hwæles eþel

Sounds like: [(h)whales ethel]

Meaning: whale’s path

hwælwæg

Sounds like: [(h)whale-way]

Meaning: whale-way

yðlidan

Sounds like: [eeth-lidan]

Meaning: a wave-crosser,
a ship.

swanrade

Sounds like: [swan rad-uh]

Meaning: sea, water

sealtyba

streamas

flood

floodways

mereflode

*Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan gebohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
sealtpa 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.

*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.

*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.

For *flogwegas*...

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

*Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreberlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles ebel hweorfeð 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.

sealtpa

Sounds like: [see-alt-ee-tha]
Meaning: salt-waves

streamas

Sounds like: [strey-ahm-as]
Meaning: streams,
used often for 'current'

flod

Sounds like: [flodd]
Meaning: flood, sea, water

flodwegas

Sounds like: [flodd-way-gas]
Meaning: water-ways,
flood-ways

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 heanon ðæt se mere standeþ
'It is not far from here that the mere stands'
Beowulf, lines 1361-63.

... gielleð anfloga
hweteð on hwælwæg 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 flyer' is perhaps a sea-bird or a
wandering soul of the seafarer, or both!)
The Seafarer, lines 62-64.

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.

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

Gewiton him þá féran - 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.

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

mere

Sounds like: [meer]

Meaning: sea, mere, lake,
sometimes artificial.

holma gelagu

Sounds like: [holma yeh-lah-goo]

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

bat

Sounds like: [bat]

Meaning: boat

scip

Sounds like: [ship]

Meaning: ship

flota

Sounds like: [flotta]

Meaning: boat, ship

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.

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.

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

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

... 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.

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

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

feran

Sounds like: [fair-an]

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

ceol

Sounds like: [chay-oll]

Meaning: ship, especially
a large ship.

lid

Sounds like: [lid]

Meaning: boat, especially 'ark'

nacan stefnan

Sounds like: [nacan stefnan]

Meaning: boat's prow,
stern of a vessel

hreran mid hondum

Meaning: move by hand, row

eagorstreamas

sæhengest

líðend

wæter

wæterþisa

*Ic 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.

*Wolde ic anes to ðe cræfes 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'!

ða liðende land gesawon

'the travellers saw land'

Beowulf, line 221.

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

*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).

He hafab̄ oþre gecynd, wæterþisa wlonc...

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

eagorstreamas
Sounds like: [ey-agor-strey-ahm-as]
Meaning: water-currents, sea

sæhengest
Sounds like: [say hengest]
Meaning: sea steed, sea horse,
metaphor for ship

liðend
Sounds like: [lith-end]
Meaning: traveller

wæter
Sounds like: [watter]
Meaning: water

wæterþisa
Sounds like: [watter-thissa]
Meaning: A water-rusher, used
to mean ship or whale.

eardstapa

faroblacende

lacan

sib

feor obbe 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, sibas secgan...

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

sib

Sounds like: [sith]
Meaning: a journey, voyage

feor orþe 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.

Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan

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

He his ceap gedrifen hæfde

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

ceapung-gemot - ‘market place’.

selen

Sounds like: [sell-en]

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

wrixlan

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

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

ꝝ

sealtwic

ceap-cniht

ceapman

feoh

ꝝ (feoh) byþ frofur fira 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.

ꝝ (feoh)
Sounds like: [fey-awh]
Meaning: wealth
(feoh - written as words rather than as a
rune, means 'cattle', 'fee' or 'price')

Cyfemen monig cepeþing to ceapstowe brohte
'Chapmen brought many saleable things to
market'
Recorded in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.

ceap-cniht
Sounds like: [chee-app cuh-niht]
Meaning: servant, slave (literally, a
young man who has been bought)

ceapman
Sounds like: [chee-app man]
Meaning: chapman, market-
man, merchant

Ic 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 beþ

goldes brytta

hors

paba

X (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.

↳ 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.

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.

Da wæs Hroðgare hors gebæted wicg wundenfeax

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

R (Rad) byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum
sefte ond swiþhwæt ðamðe sitteþ on ufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpaþas.

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.

ꝝ (feoh)

Sounds like: [fey-awh]

Meaning: wealth

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

fisces beþ

Sounds like: [fishes beth]

Meaning: the fishes' bath, the
sea.

goldes brytta

Sounds like: [gold-es britta]

Meaning: a distributor of gold

hors

Meaning: horse

paþa

Sounds like: [path-a]

Meaning: path, road, way

R

swæþ

steorbord

bæcbord

Norðmanna

ꝑ (Rad) byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum
sefte ond swiþhwæt ðamðe sitteþ on ufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpabas.

‘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.

swærte wærān 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!

*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.

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story of Ohthere, a visitor at King Alfred’s court, who
claimed to have travelled further north than anyone else.

*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.

ꝑ (rad)
Meaning: riding, or reins.

swæþ

Sounds like: [swath]

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

steorbord

Sounds like: [stee-or board]

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

bæcbord

Sounds like: [back board]

Meaning: port (side of a boat)

Norðmanna

Sounds like: [North manna]

Meaning: north men, north
peoples

garscg

wendelsæ

Scotland

igland

cuman

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

‘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.

*And þære Affrica norðwestgemære is æt þæm ylcan wendelsæ
þe of þæm garsecge scyt, þær Ercole's 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.

garsecg
Meaning: spear-man, sea

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

nord

sud

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 be lande swa swa he mihte on feower dagum geseglian.*

‘(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.

seglan

Sounds like: [sey-lan]

Meaning: to sail

rowan

wrancian

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-siþ

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.

segI-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.