

Old Germanic Vocabulary

Vocabularies of the Old Germanic languages were purely Germanic. They mostly consisted of native words and a small number of borrowings. Native words were inherited from Proto Germanic or were formed from native roots and affixes.

Native words were subdivided into several etymological layers, namely: I common Indo-European words and II common Germanic words reflecting different historical periods of development of the Germanic languages.

I Common Indo-European Words.

Words belonging to the common Indo-European layer constitute the oldest part of vocabularies of the Old Germanic languages. They go back to the days of Indo-European parent language, Proto Indo-European, before its extension over the wide territories of Europe and Asia and before the appearance of the Germanic group. These words were inherited by Proto Germanic and after its disintegration they entered vocabularies of individual Old Germanic languages, like Old English (OE), Old High German (OHG), Old Saxon (OS), Old Frisian (OFris.), Old Norse (ON), Gothic (Gt).

The vocabulary of Proto Indo-European language is reconstructed and presented in a two-volume book 'Indo-European and Indo-Europeans', published by a famous Georgian scholar Thomas Gamkrelidze in cooperation with his Russian colleague Vjačeslav Ivanov.

The second volume of this publication is totally dedicated to the semantic dictionary of Proto Indo-European. The reconstructed vocabulary covers the following thematic groups:

1. The living world: Gods, people, animals;
2. Indo-European conceptions of wild animals and their names;
3. Animals of the Middle World;
4. Animals of the Upper World;
5. Animals of the Lower World;
6. Animals ritually close to man;
7. Animals ritually distant from humans;
8. Indo-European plant names;
9. Indo-European terms for heavenly bodies;
10. Geographical environment and climate;
11. Kinship terms;
12. Economic activity, material culture, crafts, transportation;
13. Social organization,

And so on.

Each thematic group comprises number of words,

e.g. kinship terms – mother, father, sister, brother, etc;

animals of the Middle World - wolf, bear, leopard and panther, lion, wild boar, deer, antelope, wild bull, etc;

animals of the Lower World – serpent, snake, worm, mouse, turtle, etc;

animals of the Upper World – bird and eagle, swan, goose, crane, woodpecker, etc;

animals ritually close to man – horse, donkey, bull, cow, cattle, sheep, lamb, goat, etc;
animals ritually distant from humans – dog, pig, cat, chicken, hen, rooster, etc;
plants – tree, oak, willow, grape and wine, wheat, grain and barley, etc;
meteorological phenomena – wind, storm, rain, snow, etc;
astronomical phenomena – sun, moon, stars, constellations, etc;
geographical environment – mountain, river, sea, lake, swamp, etc;
economic activity – agricultural terminology, terminology of herding and hunting, etc.

Let's look at some concrete examples:

Mother

Sanskrit mātār; *Old Persian* mātar; *Old Irish* māt̪hir; *OHG* muoter; *OE* mōdor; *Latvian* māte; *Prussian* mūti, mothe; *Old Slavic* mati.

Father

Sanskrit pitār; *Avestan* pitar; *Greek* patēr; *Latin* pater; *Old Irish* athir; *Gt* fadar; *OE* fæder; *OHG* fater.

Brother

Sanskrit bhrātār; *Old Persian* brātār; *Latin* frāter; *Old Irish* brath(a)ir; *Gt* brōþar; *ON* broðir; *OHG* bruoder; *OE* brōþor; *Prussian* brāti; *Lithuanian* broterėlis; *Old Slavic* brat(r)ŭ.

Sister

Sanskrit svàsar; *Latin* soror; *Old Irish* siur; *Gt* swistar; *ON* syster; *OE* sweostor; *OHG* swester; *Prussian* swesto; *Old Slavic* sestra.

Widow

Sanskrit vidhāvā; *Latin* uidua (a divorced or unmarried woman); *Gt* widuwō; *OE* widuwe; *OHG* wituwa; *Prussian* widdewu; *Old Slavic* vŭdova „ВДОВА”.

Woman, wife

Indo-European *k'en

Sanskrit jani; *Persian* zan; *Gt* qinō; *OHG* quena; *OE* cwene; *Prussian* genno; *Old Slavic* žena.

Sun

Sanskrit sūvar; *Lithuanian* saule; *Prussian* saule; *Old Slavic* slŭnīce; *Gt* sauil; *OHG* sunna; *OE* sunne; *Latin* sōl.

Tree, oak

Hittite taru; *Sanskrit* dāru; *Albanian* dru; *Old Irish* daur; *Gt* triu; *ON* trē; *OE* trēo; *Old Saxon* trio; *Old Slavic* drŭvo; *Lithuanian* dervà ‘pine tree’.

Apple

Old Slavic **ablŭko**; *Bulgarian* **аблъко**; *Old Polish* **jabło**; *Latvian* **ābele**; *OE* **æppal**; *OHG* **apful**; *Gt* **apel**.

Mouse

Sanskrit **mūs**; *Persian* **mūš**; *Greek* **mŭs**; *Old Slavic* **myši**; *Latin* **mūs**; *OE*, *OHG*, *ON* **mūs**.

Hen

Latin **gallus** ‘cock’ (compare Old Slavic **glasŭ** **голос**); *Gt* **hana**; *OHG* **heno** ‘cock’; *OE* **henn**; *ON* **heni**.

Grape and wine

Hittite **uḫana**; *Mycenaean Greek* **wono**; *Armenian* **gini**; *Albanian* **vēnë**; *Latin* **uīnum**; *Gt* **wein**; *OE* **wīn**; *OHG* **wīn**; *Old Slavic* **vino**; *Polish* **wino**.

Phonetically similar terms for wine can be found in a number of ancient Near Eastern languages. E. g. Arab. **wain**; *Hebrew* **jajin**; *Egyptian* **wnš**; also South Caucasian or Kartvelian word ***ywino**. The wide distribution of phonetically similar words meaning ‘wine’, ‘grape’ among various linguistic groups of the Near East at a great time depth allows us to regard them as migratory words for ‘wine’ and ‘grape’. The fact shows that there are etymological links between the ‘wine’ and ‘grape’ words within each of the language groups - Indo-European, Semitic and Kartvelian and they must have passed from one language to another at a protolanguage level.

It is also interesting to observe a lot of similarities in the ritual role of animals among different Indo-European peoples.

Wolf. This semantic unit is represented by several lexemes in Indo-European - ***ul̥k^[h]** and ***ul̥p^[h]**

Sanskrit **vṛkah**; *Avestan* **vəhrka**; *Old Slavic* **vilkŭ**; *Lithuanian* **vilkas**; *Albanian* **ulk**; *Hittite* **ulippana**; *Gt* **wulfs**; *OE* **wolf**; *Latin* **lupus**.

In Old Hittite tradition wolf plays a special role, functioning as the embodiment of sacral qualities. Wolves and wolf packs serve as an image of unity and omniscience.

There is a striking parallel between the Old Hittite ritual of putting on wolf skins and dances of ‘wolf people’, i.e. those dressed in wolf skins in an ancient Germanic tradition where warriors are depicted as wearing wolf skins and referred to as wolves (*OE* **heoruwulfas**, **wælwulfas** ‘wolf warriors’). The custom is also found in Gothic: in Byzantium, Christmas was marked by ritual dances of Gothic warriors in wolf skins down to the end of the Byzantine period. It is also noteworthy that the word ‘wolf’ was frequently used in Germanic personal names such as: **Ulfilas**, **Beowulf**, etc.

II Common Germanic Words

The second important layer, Common Germanic Vocabulary includes words which are shared by most Germanic languages, but do not occur outside the group. Being specifically Germanic these words **constitute an important distinctive feature of the Germanic languages at the lexical level**. This layer is smaller than Common Indo-European words, roughly 1 : 2. Common Germanic words originated in the Proto Germanic language, when the Germanic tribes lived close together. These words are connected with nature, the sea and everyday life of Teutons.

Some of the words did not occur in all Germanic languages, some words are attested only in West and North Germanic languages, some in North and East Germanic languages.

Let's look at some examples:

OE biddan (to ask, implore); *OHG bitten*; *ON biðja*; *Gt bidjan*.

OE Ze-byrd (birth); *OHG Geburt*; *ON byrð, byrðr*; *Gt gabaurþs*.

OE cicen (chicken); *Low German küken* (küchlein); *ON kiuklingr*.

OE fyllan (to fill); *OHG füllen*; *ON fylla*; *Gt fulljan*.

OE findan (to find); *OHG fintan*; *ON finna*; *Gt finþan*.

OE flæsk (flesh); *OHG Fleisch*; *ON flesk* (pork).

As mentioned above, words of Indo-European origin are attested in all or many Indo-European languages, as for words of common Germanic origin, they exist only in the Germanic languages and nowhere outside this linguistic group. **Consequently they represent a common linguistic feature of the Germanic languages on the lexical level**. These words originated in the Proto Germanic language and entered vocabularies of Old Germanic languages after the disintegration of Proto Germanic.