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**OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE (C. 450–1100)****Zayrova Zilola Rasul qizi**

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Annotation. Old English Literature refers to the body of written works produced in the English language from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons around 450 AD until the Norman Conquest in 1066, and a little beyond. It represents the earliest phase of English literary history and is mostly composed in Old English (also called Anglo-Saxon). This literature reflects a warrior society with strong ties to pagan and Christian traditions, blending oral storytelling, heroic poetry, religious writings, and riddles.

Keywords: Old English Literature, Beowulf, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Caedmon's Hymn, The Dream of the Rood, Anglo-Saxon England, Alliteration, Kenning, Oral Tradition, Wyrð (Fate)

Historical and Linguistic Context

The Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain in the 5th century introduced Old English, a Germanic language, which was spoken and written until the Norman Conquest. The period is marked by oral tradition, where storytelling was a communal and performative event. Writing was initially limited and mainly done by monks in monasteries, who produced religious texts and translations of Latin works. Old English evolved through various dialects, primarily West Saxon, Mercian, and Northumbrian, with West Saxon becoming dominant in the surviving manuscripts due to the political prominence of Wessex.

Beowulf: The most famous Old English epic poem, *Beowulf* narrates the heroic deeds of its titular hero, including battles with the monster Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon. The poem is notable for its exploration of heroism, loyalty, fate, and mortality, as well as its vivid portrayal of Germanic warrior culture. *Beowulf* is the longest surviving Old English poem and a cornerstone of medieval literature, blending pagan heroic ideals with Christian elements.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A collection of annals written in Old English, this chronicle records the history of the Anglo-Saxons from the 9th century onwards, offering invaluable historical insights alongside its literary value.

Religious and Didactic Literature

Monastic writers produced a rich corpus of religious poetry and prose, including:





- **Caedmon's Hymn:** The earliest known Old English poem, attributed to Caedmon, a humble cowherd who miraculously received poetic inspiration.
- **The Dream of the Rood:** A religious poem presenting the crucifixion of Christ from the perspective of the Cross itself.
- **Alfred the Great's Translations:** King Alfred's efforts to translate important Latin texts into Old English helped preserve knowledge and promote literacy.

Themes and Styles

Old English literature is dominated by themes such as heroism, fate (wyrd), exile, loyalty to kin and lord, and the struggle between good and evil. Pagan heroic ideals coexist and intertwine with Christian morality.

Stylistically, Old English poetry is characterized by:

- Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.
- Caesura: A strong pause in the middle of each poetic line.
- Kenning: Compound metaphors (e.g., "whale-road" for the sea).
- Oral-Formulaic Composition: Use of repeated phrases and structures to aid memorization and recitation.

Conclusion: Old English literature provides a window into early medieval England, preserving the language, culture, and worldview of the Anglo-Saxon people. Through epic tales like *Beowulf*, religious poetry, and historical chronicles, it reveals a society balancing the heroic pagan past and the Christian present. The legacy of Old English literature lies in its foundational role in shaping the English literary tradition and language development.

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