

SOME FOSSIL WORDS

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Whenever two people come into contact, there is a cultural exchange. Part of that exchange is words. English-speaking people, being among the most adventurous, have come into contact with more languages than most. I have discovered borrowings from two hundred different languages and dialects.

Some of these languages no longer have native speakers. Some are so ancient that only a word or two has survived in English. Here are a few of those survivors.

GOTHIC Prior to the beginning of the Christian era, Germanic tribes from the Indo-European heartland were trying to enter Europe. Opposed by the Romans and the Gauls, one group was deflected to the south and east and wound up in what is now the Crimea, where they became the Goths. A Gothic dialect was spoken in the Crimea as late as the 18th century. It is now extinct, but it was the earliest Germanic language to have a written literature, about 350 B.C.

After the fall of Rome, the Goths moved westward and conquered most of Italy and Spain. However, within a few generations the Italic Goths were absorbed into the Empire and the Spanish Goths were conquered by the Moors.

Although the Goths are no longer a people or a language, they transmitted a few of their words into English. **BANK** is an Ostrogothic word borrowed by us through the Italian. **STAKE** is a Visigothic word borrowed by us through the Spanish. **BAND** (musical) is a Gothic word from Provençal through French to English.

ETRUSCAN When the Italic-speaking Indo-Europeans migrated into Italy about 1100 B.C., they found it under the rule of an advanced people, the Etruscans. We do not know where the Etruscans came from; possibly they emigrated from Asia Minor after the Trojan Wars. They wrote their meager inscriptions with a modified Greek alphabet. Their language is largely untranslated.

Because the Romans were under the domination of the Etruscans for several centuries before conquering them, it would seem strange if Latin had absorbed no Etruscan words. **CATAMITE**, which we borrowed from the Latin, was borrowed by the Romans from the Etruscans. But previously, the Etruscans had borrowed it from the Greeks.

PUNIC The troubled country of Lebanon was known in ancient times as Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were famous for having invent-

ed the alphabet and for having produced some of the world's finest navigators.

These explorers established colonies and trading posts around the Mediterranean, up the Atlantic coast, and even in England. Their most famous colony was established in North Africa in 850 B.C. from Tyre. This colony, Carthage, dominated the Mediterranean until challenged by Rome. The Carthaginian language was called Punic. The Punic Wars lasted until 146 B.C., when Carthage and its culture was destroyed.

Hanno, a Carthaginian explorer of about 500 B.C., left an account of his adventures carved on stone tablets. He told of having seen hairy savages to the south, which he called GORILLAS. Hanno's tablets have been lost, but a Greek translation of them remains. When Dr. Savage, an American missionary, first saw the great apes in 1847, he used this Carthaginian word to name them.

HUNNIC During the fourth century, the Gothic tribes were trying to expand into central Europe. They were being pushed in that direction by a Proto-Slavic people, who, in turn, were pushed by the Chinese. These hunni, as the Romans called them, in 375 first attacked the Ostrogoths. Under Attila, the "Scourge of God," the Huns controlled eastern and central Europe until defeated by the Goths and Romans in 451 at Châlons-sur-Marne.

When they retreated, they left behind them the word QUIVER, the case in which these ferocious mounted warriors carried their arrows.

PICT The Picts may have been the earliest Celts to invade England and were pushed to the far north by later invasions. They may have been the last Iberians, escaping to the north from the invading Celts. Or, they may have been something altogether different; no one really knows.

We first hear of them in 78-84 A.D. from Agricola, the Roman general who was unable to conquer them. So, he built the beginnings of Hadrian's Wall to contain them. He named them the Picts or "painted men" because of their tattoos.

About 500 A.D., an Irish tribe, the Scotti, invaded northern England. After three centuries, the Scottish king Kenneth McAlpen conquered the last Pictish king, Wrod, at the Battle of Forteviot in 842.

CALEDONIAN is believed to be a Pictish word meaning "men of the wood" or "men of the thistle." The thistle is Scotland's national emblem today.

BABYLONIAN-ASSYRIAN When civilization came to Mesopotamia about 3400 B.C., it consisted of a series of city-states. The Sumerians settled along the Euphrates while the Assyrians settled along the Tigris. About 2100 B.C., Hammurabi, the great Amorite king, destroyed the Sumerians, reduced the Assyrians to vassal cities, and established Babylon as his capital.

For the next 800 years, whoever ruled Babylon also ruled Assyria.

ia. In 1300 B.C., Assyria declared its independence. By 700 B.C., Assyria was the undisputed mistress of the Orient, ruling even Egypt. In 606 B.C., the Scythians destroyed the last Assyrian city, Nineveh. Thus, the country and its people passed into the fog of history, leaving behind them as a monument the word ZIGGURAT, "high place," the name given to the stepped pyramids characteristic of their culture.

LOMBARD The warlike Germanic tribe of the Lombards (meaning "long heads") invaded Italy in the year 568 A.D. They occupied the plains at the head of the Adriatic, a region that became known as Lombardy.

Like the Franks and Goths, within a few generations the Lombards forgot their Germanic language and adopted the Vulgate Latin that evolved into Italian. Through a series of linguistic changes, their name was transformed into LUMBER, our English word.

AN INTERNATIONAL HUMOR FESTIVAL

From May 20 through May 29, the town of Gabrovo, Bulgaria will play host to the 9th International Biennial of Humor and Satire in the Arts. The Biennial includes competitions for cartoons, humorous drawings and illustrations, black-and-white drawings, paintings, sculpture, photography, and literature. The organizers of the Biennial solicit entries from the United States in order to have as wide a representation of nations as possible. If interested, send a SASE to Word Ways for a brochure (the editor has a few on hand) describing the conditions of entry.

AN INTERNATIONAL HUMOR CONFERENCE

The 7th International Humor Conference, named "Laughter in Paradise," will be held April 18 through April 22 in Laie, Hawaii. For further information, contact Margaret Baker and Jesse Crisler, English Department, Box 1904, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, Laie HI 96762-1294.