The Old English Names of the Months
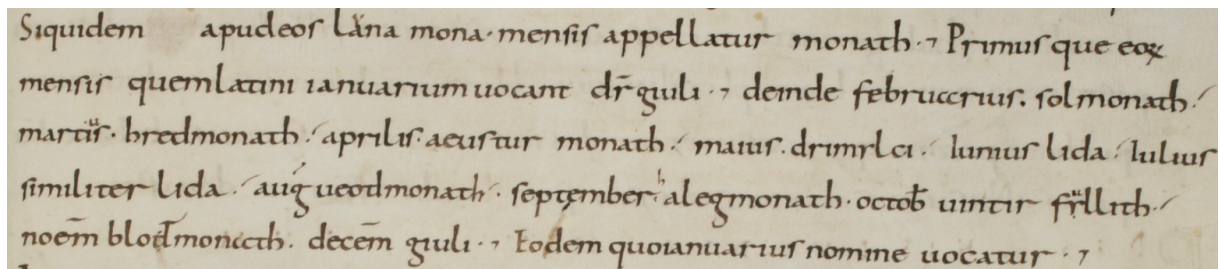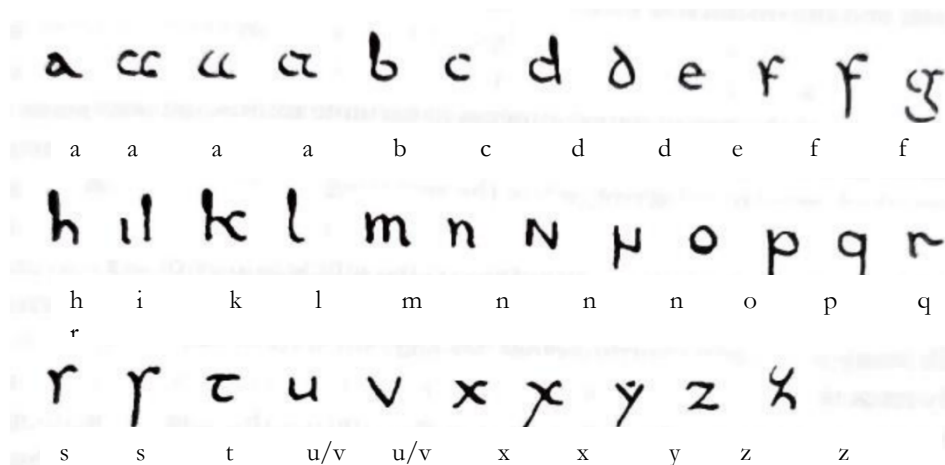

Codex Sangallensis 251, p. 69

(1) In the text passage above, find the Old English names of the months and underline them.
(2) Complete the table below (use the alphabet below to decipher the script).
(3) What do you notice in terms of the names and in terms of the number of months?

English months (Latin months)	Old English names of the months	Task 5
January (Latin ianuarius)		
February (Latin februarius)		
March (Latin martius)		
April (Latin aprilis)		
May (Latin maius)		
June (Latin iunius)		
July (Latin iulius)		
August (Latin augustus)		
September (Latin september)		
October (Latin october)		
November (Latin november)		
December (Latin december)		

Bischoff, Bernhard. 1990. *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity & the Middle Ages*, p. 113 (modern letters added).

(4) What is the base of the word *monath*? Compare the word and its base with their Modern English and Modern German counterparts

Old English	monath	
Modern English		
Modern German		

(5) The Old English names of the months were based on pagan cults from Germanic mythology, on the work of farmers and on meteorological conditions. Can you match the names of the months with their meanings? (Add the letters to the table on the first page.)

A) beginning of winter with the full moon in that month

B) weed grows in that month

C) the month in which cattle can be milked three times a day

D) literally 'holy-month', month of worship

E) midwinter, winter solstice; the Modern English word *Yuletide* comes from that word

F) month of blood sacrifice

G) refers to winds favouring naval expeditions, serenity of air and sea; cf. German *lind*

H) month in which cakes are sacrificed to the gods

I) pagan cult goddess Rheda

J) month in which Easter takes place; refers to the goddess Eostre

Find out more about the goddesses Rheda and Eostre, first by just guessing while having a look at the pictures below, then by doing some research on the Internet. Which mythology are they part of? Who are they exactly? What are their attributes? How is the Easter hare/bunny connected to the goddess Eostre?

RHEDA *https://percyjacksonfanfiction.fandom.com/wiki/Rheda*	
EOSTRE *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%92ostre#/media/File:Ostara_ by_Johannes_Gehrts.jpg*	

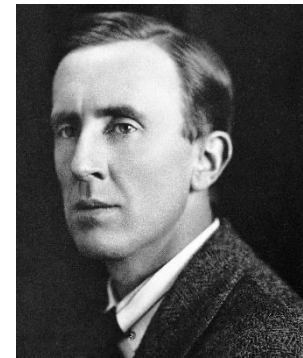**The world of J.R.R. Tolkien – A world full of Old English!**

The author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien, was actually a scholar of Old English, which is the reason why there are numerous references to or based on Old English in his works.

The following image is from the appendix in the third book of *The Lord of the Rings*. It contains the Hobbit calendar, the so-called "Shire Reckoning". Have a look at the different names of the months: What do you notice? Can you spot any similarities and differences to what you know already?

APPENDIX D

SHIRE CALENDAR
FOR USE IN ALL YEARS

(1) Afteryule	(4) Astron	(7) Afterlithe	(10) Winterfilth
YULE 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29	LITHE 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29
1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30	1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30
2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 –	2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 –
3 10 17 24 –	4 11 18 25 –	3 10 17 24 –	4 11 18 25 –
4 11 18 25 –	5 12 19 26 –	4 11 18 25 –	5 12 19 26 –
5 12 19 26 –	6 13 20 27 –	5 12 19 26 –	6 13 20 27 –
6 13 20 27 –	7 14 21 28 –	6 13 20 27 –	7 14 21 28 –

(2) Solmath	(5) Thrimidge	(8) Wedmath	(11) Blotmath
– 5 12 19 26	– 6 13 20 27	– 5 12 19 26	– 6 13 20 27
– 6 13 20 27	– 7 14 21 28	– 6 13 20 27	– 7 14 21 28
– 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29	– 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29
1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30	1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30
2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 –	2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 –
3 10 17 24 –	4 11 18 25 –	3 10 17 24 –	4 11 18 25 –
4 11 18 25 –	5 12 19 26 –	4 11 18 25 –	5 12 19 26 –

(3) Rethe	(6) Forelithe	(9) Halimath	(12) Foreyule
– 3 10 17 24	– 4 11 18 25	– 3 10 17 24	– 4 11 18 25
– 4 11 18 25	– 5 12 19 26	– 4 11 18 25	– 5 12 19 26
– 5 12 19 26	– 6 13 20 27	– 5 12 19 26	– 6 13 20 27
– 6 13 20 27	– 7 14 21 28	– 6 13 20 27	– 7 14 21 28
– 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29	– 7 14 21 28	1 8 15 22 29
1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30	1 8 15 22 29	2 9 16 23 30
2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 LITHE	2 9 16 23 30	3 10 17 24 YULE
	Midyear's Day (Overlithe)		

Tolkien, J.R.R. [1955], 2011. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. London: Harper Collins, p. 1106.

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https://www.filmstarts.de/nachrichten/18475156.html

For early finishers: The protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings* is called Frodo. His name is actually based on the Old English adjective *frod*. Check what the adjective means on the following website: https://bosworthtoller.com/

Do you think his name fits Frodo? Why (not)?

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https://dunesjedi.wordpress.com/2019/01/16/frodo-an-undervalued-hero/

Model answers

(1) Abbreviated words are expanded in brackets; Old English forms are printed in **bold**.

Si quidem apud eos luna '**mona**', mensis appellatur '**monath**'. Primusque eor(um) mensis, quem latini ianuarium vocant, d(icitu)r '**giuli**'. Deinde februarius '**solmonath**', martius '**hredmonath**', aprilis '**aeusturmonath**', maius '**drimylci**', iunius '**lida**', iulius similiter '**lida**', aug(ustus) '**ueodmonath**', september '**halegmonath**', octob(er) '**uintirfullith**', no(v)em(ber) '**blotmonath**', decem(ber) '**giuli**', eodem quo ianuarius nomine vocatur.

Translation:

[The Anglo-Saxons also take the name from the moon in the manner of the Hebrews and Greeks] as for them the moon is called **mona**, the month **monath**. The first of their months, which the Latins call January, is called **giuli**; then February **solmonath**, March **hredmonath**, April **aeusturmonath**, May **drimylci**, June **lida**, July also **lida**, August **ueodmonath**, September **halegmonath**, October **uintirfullith**, November **blodmonath**, December **giuli**, the same name by which January is called.

(2) Table

English months (Latin months)	Old English names of the months	Task 5
January (Latin ianuarius)	**Giuli**	**E**
February (Latin februarius)	**Solmonath**	**H**
March (Latin martius)	**Hredmonath**	**I**
April (Latin aprilis)	**Aeusturmonath**	**J**
May (Latin maius)	**Drimylci**	**C**
June (Latin iunius)	**Lida**	**G**
July (Latin iulius)	**Lida**	**G**
August (Latin augustus)	**Veodmonath**	**B**
September (Latin september)	**Halegmonath**	**D**
October	**Vintirfyllith**	**A**
November	**Blod (or Blot)-monath**	**F**
December	**Giuli**	**E**

(3) There are only 10 months; January and July are both named *giuli*, June and July lida.

(4) Month, moon, Monat, Moon

Old English	monath	mona
Modern English	month	moon
Modern German	Monat	Mond

Note: The word *month* derives from *moon* and the same is true for German, cf. *Mond* and *Monat*. The Old High German form for 'moon' is *mona*. The *-d* at the end of *Mond* was only added in the 14th century.

(5) See last column in Table 2

Additional task: Rheda + Eostre: part of (West-)Germanic mythology

RHEDA
- meaning of the name: the famous, the victorious; attested solely by Bede in *De Temporum Ratione*, hence not much known about her, mostly educated guesses
- Anglo-Saxon goddess of victory, glory
- connected to the victory of spring over winter (Hredmonath = March)
- warrior-like appearance in picture, fierce, strong in battle, stick, crown, glance, etc.

EOSTRE
- West-Germanic spring goddess → clearly visible in picture: spring-like appearance, surrounded by a flourishing nature, flora and fauna (storks, hares, birds, nymphs = apostles of spring, of a new beginning), stick with a flower-like/sun-like top
- namesake of the festival of Easter
- deity solely attested by Bede, similarly to Rheda
- connected to other dawn goddesses attested among Indo-European-speaking peoples
- several theories and interpretations surrounding this goddess (e.g. Jacob Grimm)
- Connection to Easter hares/bunnies (according to some theories and interpretations): Northern Europe, Easter imagery = hares and rabbits = probably sacred to Eostre, symbols of fertility, fecundity, love, carnal pleasure
- → carries and brings eggs because originally a bird, as legend has it: Eostre transformed the bird into a hare
- earliest evidence of Easter Hare: 'Osterhase' in south-west Germany in 1678 (professor of medicine Georg Franck von Franckenau), widespread only in the 18th century

Additional task: Tolkien's Shire Reckoning
- same names of the months as in Bede!
- slightly modified, slightly modernized spelling, slightly reduced phonetically (*-monath* > *-math*, *-mylci* > *-midge*, etc.)
- subcategorizations introduced: *afteryule*, *foreyule*, *forelithe*, *afterlithe* (note for the teacher: such subcategorizations also appear in later manuscripts containing Bede's *De Mensibus Anglorum*, but not in Codex Sangallensis 251)

Early finishers: Frodo
- *frod* = 'wise, prudent, sage, skilful'
- discussion: fitting name or not? individual answers