**Лекция по дисциплине «Зарубежная литература» для студентов факультета иностранных языков (специальность «Английский язык»), 3 курс**

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**Lecture 1 The Old English Literature**

During the first 5 centuries AD. and long before that Britain was inhabited by people called Kelts, who lived in tribes. The British history considered to begin in the 5th century, when it was invaded from the continent by the warlike tribes of Angles, Saxons and Jutes. At the very end of the 5th century they settled in Britain and began to call themselves English (after the principal tribe of settlers, called English).

Although we know very little of this period from literature, some poems have nevertheless come down to us.

In those early days songs called epics were created in many countries. The epics tell of the most remarkable events of a people's history the deeds of heroic men. The first epic songs known in literature are Homer's "illiad" and "odyssey" (end of the 6th century BC)

Beowulf.

Beowulf is an Old English heroic epic poem composed in the later Early Middle Ages (in the 8th, 9th or 10th century). At 3,183 lines, it is notable for its length. The poem is untitled in the manuscript, but has been known as Beowulf since the early 19th century. As the single major surviving work of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, the work in spite of dealing primarily with Scandinavian matters has risen to such prominence that it has become "England's national epic."

In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, battles three antagonists: Grendel, who is destroying Heorot and its inhabitants in Denmark, Grendel's Mother, and later in life (after he is King) a dragon. He is mortally wounded in the final battle, and after his death is buried in a barrow by his retainers.

The events described in the poem take place in the late 5th century and during the 6th century after the Anglo-Saxons had begun their migration and settlement in England, and before it had ended, a time when the Anglo-Saxons were either newly arrived or in close contact with their Germanic kinsmen in Scandinavia and northern Germany. The poem could have been transmitted in England by people of Geatish origins, and it may not be a coincidence that whereas Beowulf is the most well-known Anglo-Saxon work left to posterity, the most well-known Anglo-Saxon archaeological find, Sutton Hoo, also showed close connections with Scandinavia. It has consequently been suggested that Beowulf was first composed in the 7th century at Rendlesham in East Anglia, and that the East Anglian royal dynasty, the Wuffings, were descendants of the Geatish Wulfings.

The poem deals with legends, i.e. it was composed for entertainment and does not separate between fictional elements and real historic events, such as the raid by king Hygelac into Frisia, ca. 516. Scholars generally agree that many of the personalities of Beowulf also appear in Scandinavian sources, but this does not only concern people (e.g., Healfdene, Hroðgar, Halga, Hroðulf, Eadgils and Ohthere), but also clans (e.g. Scyldings, Scylfings and Wulfings) and some of the events (e.g. the Battle on the Ice of Lake Vänern). The Scandinavian sources are notably Ynglinga saga, Gesta Danorum, Hrólfr Kraki's saga and the Latin summary of the lost Skjöldunga saga. As far as Sweden is concerned, the dating of the events in the poem has been confirmed by archaeological excavations of the barrows indicated by Snorri Sturluson and by Swedish tradition as the graves of Ohthere (dated to c. 530) and his son Eadgils (dated to c. 575) in Uppland, Sweden. In Denmark, recent archaeological excavations at Lejre, where Scandinavian tradition located the seat of the Scyldings, i.e. Heorot, have revealed that a hall was built in the mid-6th century, exactly the time period of Beowulf. All the three halls found during the excavation were about 50 metres long.

Beowulf may be based on oral traditions passed down by scops (tale singers), and the author of the poem is unknown. The epic poem was written down by monks, who at the time were among the few people who could read and write. Throughout the poem it is likely that the monks had Christianized the epic, because the Geats were pagan. The precise date of the manuscript is debated, but many estimates place it close to AD 1000. Traditionally the poem's date of composition has been estimated, on linguistic and other grounds, as approximately 750-800. More recently, doubt has been raised about the linguistic criteria for dating, with some scholars suggesting a date as late as the 11th century, near the time of the manuscript's copying. The poem appears in what is today called the Beowulf manuscript or Nowell Codex (British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv), along with other works. The manuscript is the product of two different scribes, the second scribe taking over at line 1939 of Beowulf.

The poem is known only from a single manuscript. The spellings in the the poem mix the West Saxon and Anglian dialects of Old English, though they are predominantly West Saxon, as are other Old English poems copied at the time. The earliest known owner is the 16th century scholar Laurence Nowell, after whom the manuscript is named, though its official designation is Cotton Vitellius A.XV due to its inclusion in the catalog of Robert Bruce Cotton's holdings in the middle of the 17th century. It suffered damage in the Cotton Library fire at Ashburnham House in 1731.

The poem as we know it is shot through with elements of the Norse legendarium along with Christian statements. It is often assumed that the work was written by a Christian monk, on the grounds that they were the only members of Anglo-Saxon society with access to writing materials. However, the example of King Alfred suggests the possibility of lay authorship.

In historical terms the poem's characters would have been pagans. The poem's narrator, however, places events into a Biblical context, casting Grendel and Grendel's Mother as the kin of Cain and placing monotheistic sentiments into the mouths of his characters. Although there are no direct references to Jesus in the text of the work, there are many indirect references. Also, the book of Genesis serves as a touchstone for the poem, since Grendel and Grendel's mother (due to their heritage) are seen as punished by the Curse and mark of Cain. Scholars disagree as to whether Beowulf's main thematic thrust is pagan or Christian in nature. Of particular note is the description of soldiers' helmets, decorated with boar-carvings, alongside references to God and Christ, such as when Beowulf is given up for lost in Grendel's Mere at the sixth hour, which was the time at which Christ dies on the cross in the Bible. This could possibly be evidence of Christian details being placed in the story alongside traditional accounts of ancient Germanic religious practices. However, the lack of a pre-Christian written version of the epic leaves the issue unresolved.

ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD (1100-1350).

In the year 1066, in the Battle of Hastings, the Anglo-Saxon king's army was defeated by William, Duke of Normandy, who became King of England. A strong feudal monarchy was established in the country. The ruling classes consisten of the Norman nobility and the clergy. The power of the Catholic Church had become very great. Most of the English people became serfs.

The Normans came from the north-west of France. They brought with them the culture of their country and the French language. Thus, three languages were spoken in England. The language of the nobility was French, the churchmen used Latin, and the common people spoke Anglo-Saxon.

The three social classes of the country had their own literature. Very popular with the Normans were romances - tales in verse praising the bravery and nobleness of knights. They were sung by minstrels to the accompaniment of a lute. Many romances were based on Celtic legends, especially on those about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. King Arthur was a half-legendary Celtic king who probably lived in the 6th century, had benn brought up by magician Merlin who later helped him in all his deeds. He had his seat in the town of Camelot. Ih his castle there was a Round Table at which one hundred knights could be seated at a time. One seat was always reserved for the bravest knight. Arthur was married to Guinevere.

The literature of the Church was scholastic, moralistic, and it supported the feudal system. The books written in Latin by monks taught the common people that their sufferings on earth would be rewarded in heaven.

The Anglo-Saxon composed their own popular poetry. The main genres were the fabliaux - funny stories about townspeople, and the bestiaries - stories in which the characters were animals.