

The Franks Casket

The Anglo-Saxon language

The Anglo-Saxon Artifact



What is it?

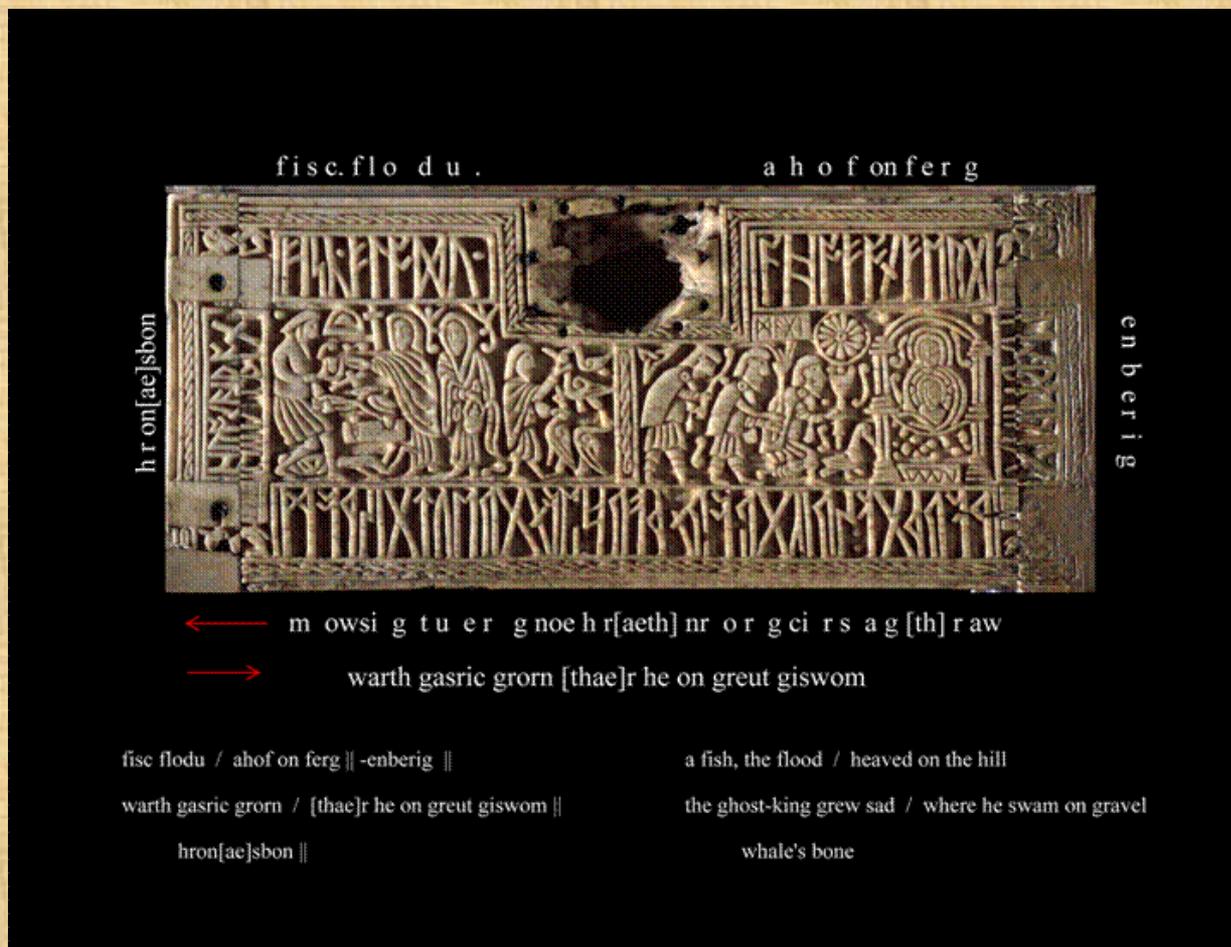
- The Franks casket is a carved Anglo-Saxon **whale-bone artifact** measuring 12.9 x 22.9 x 19.1 cm. which was discovered in Auzon, Haute Loire, France in the nineteenth century.
- Donated to the British Museum by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks in 1867, the artifact has aroused considerable interest and debate. In 1890, the missing right hand panel was found in Italy and is now in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.
- Scholarly consensus places the Franks casket in 7th/8th century Northumbria based on linguistic evidence.

- The box is made of whale's bone, richly carved on the sides and lid in high relief with a range of scenes with accompanying text in both the **runic** and **Roman alphabets** and in both Old English and Latin. Silver fittings attached to the casket, a handle, locks and hinges, were removed at some time in its history leaving scars which mark their original positions.

The front panel



The front is divided into two scenes: the left is derived from the Germanic legend of Weland the Smith, while the right depicts the Adoration of the Magi, when the three wise men visited the newborn Christ, labelled 'mægi' in runes.



Surprisingly, the main runic inscription on the front does not refer to the scene it surrounds. It is a riddle in Old English relating to the origin of the casket. It can be translated as 'The fish beat up the seas on to the mountainous cliff; the King of terror became sad when he swam onto the shingle.' This is then answered with the solution 'Whale's bone.' It tells us that the casket was made from the bone of a beached whale.

The riddle

- **Fisc flodu ahof on fergenberig;
warþ gasric grorn, þær he on greut giswom.
Hronæs ban.**
- **Translation:**
- **A tidal wave washed the fish onto the cliff-bank;
the whale was stricken with panic when he tried
to swim on the shingle.
This is the whale's bone.**

The left panel

- The left-hand end shows the founders of Rome identified in the accompanying text as Romulus and Remus, from the legend of twin brothers brought up by a wolf.
- Instead of just the lupa (she-wolf) there are two wolves, and instead of just one shepherd, Faustulus, by the cavern near the river Tiber, we have four warriors here, kneeling as if praying.



The back panel

- The back shows the capture of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman Emperor Titus. This scene has an inscription in mixed languages and scripts.



The right panel

- The right-hand end is difficult to interpret, but recalls a lost Germanic legend with a text partly encoded runes. This appears to describe a person called Hos sitting upon the 'sorrow-mound'.

