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THE 'COARSER' SENSES IN OLD ENGLISH:
A STUDY OF THE OLD ENGLISH VERBS
OF TASTING, SMELLING, TOUCHING, AND PERCEIVING

by

Thomas Peter Klein

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Centre for Medieval Studies, at the University of Toronto

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Thesis Abstract
The ‘Coarser’ Senses in Old English: The Old English Verbs of Tasting, Smelling, Touching and Perceiving
Doctor of Philosophy. 1998
Thomas Peter Klein
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

My thesis explores a part of the semantic field of physical perception in Old English. Like us, the Anglo-Saxons distinguished five outward senses, and they seem to have considered sight the most comprehensive and powerful faculty, followed perhaps by hearing. I explore the sense faculties which the Anglo-Saxons considered more limited in the range of things they could apprehend.

I base my study on an examination of the Old English verbs involved in these three sense faculties, and I explore them according to three basic types. A verb of physical perception may describe the passive reception of sensation ("I hear"), the active seeking after such a sensation ("I listen"), or the general giving off of an impression ("it sounds"). A language's particular arrangement of verbs among these types will often reveal unconscious assumptions about perception.

In the first chapter, I look at Latin verbs for perceiving, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. This concise survey gives us an idea of perception verbs in a well-attested ancient language. We find a unique arrangement: a single general verb, sentio, expresses the passive reception of sensation for every kind of sense perception, while verbs particular to each sense (e.g., audio for hearing and gusto for tasting) usually only express the active seeking after sensation.

In the second through fourth chapters, I look at the Old English verbs of taste, smell, and touch. In the fifth chapter I consider the verbs of general perception. I find that a general verb does not preside over the whole system as in Latin. Instead, for tasting and touching, there are distinct verbs for the passive and active types of perception (e.g., (ge)feulan for passively feeling and (ge)grapian for actively touching). However, for smelling, an arrangement like that in Modern English begins to arise: stincan can be used for all three categories. In addition, the study suggests that the Anglo-Saxons thought of smells as vaporous emanations like steam or smoke; that tasting is a sense that occurs only incidentally to eating; and that they associated the sense of touch most strongly with the grip of the hand.
The thesis reveals some of the unconscious notions held by the Anglo-Saxons regarding sense perception. It is also a contribution to the lexicographical work being done at the *Dictionary of Old English*. The study yields a number of incidental benefits, illuminating some old textual cruces (the "stinking" dragon in *Beowulf*) and offering new insights into the geographical range of Old English dialects (correcting some misapprehensions about the composition of the Winchester vocabulary).
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLD</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</em> (London, 1975-).</td>
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Plate 93. The Fuller Brooch (Scale approx. x x).

Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to make an in-depth study of the Old English verbs of physical perception, concentrating on the verbs of taste, smell, touch, and general perception. It seeks to answer the following sorts of questions: what verbs pertain to each of these various sense faculties? How well attested are they? How sure are we of their meanings? How do they express the various modes of perceptual action—do they describe the passive reception of sensation, the active seeking after it, or the general giving off of a sensory impression? Do they reflect dialectal differences? What is the connection between general and specific verbs of perception? The study strives therefore to arrive at a balanced description of these semantic fields, assessing what we do know of their structures and what ultimately we cannot know. It is meant to be a companion to the Dictionary of Old English, and makes extensive use of its materials.

The decision to limit the study to the Old English verbs of taste, smell, and touch was originally made for reasons of length. The Old English verbs of sight, at any rate, have already received extensive treatment. However, as we will discover in Chapter 5, there is some evidence that the Anglo-Saxons might have thought of the senses of sight and hearing as distinct from those of taste, smell, and touch. This would justify considering the latter group as a unique subset of the five senses. For lack of a better term, I refer to them as the "coarser" senses.

The study begins with a concise survey of the same semantic areas in Latin (with the addition of hearing); this will give us an idea of how these fields may be arrayed in a well-attested ancient language, as well as provide background for the many Old English passages that are translated from Latin. In the following four chapters, I discuss in turn the Old English verbs of taste, smell, touch, and general perception. In the rest of the introduction, I first review previous studies of these semantic fields; I then explain three technical terms I use in the study to refer to the different modes of perceptual action; and finally I briefly discuss the five senses in Old English.

I. Previous Studies of Old English Verbs of Perception

While many notes on individual perception words, and particular occurrences of these words, have been and continue to be written, there has not been an extensive semantic survey of Old English perception verbs for over thirty years. None of the earlier
studies has had the advantage of the Microfiche Concordance or the Electronic Corpus of Old English, and none has gone into the same detailed discussion of examples as I do here.

Most of the earliest studies of perception words tend to be heavily etymological, more concerned with determining the meanings of the prehistoric words than their meanings in Old English. Francis Wood’s article, published in 1899, deals with the semantic origins of words for “smell” and “see” in the Germanic languages.¹ Wood’s aim is to uncover the original notions behind these perception terms. He explains his method: “To discover this original idea I see no other way than to reduce the several words of a group to a common root and, by a comparison of the various significations, find out the original meaning.”² Wood does not give contexts for the words he cites, and his definitions are dictionary-derived. While his study should be used with caution and has little to offer for a semantic study in Old English proper, it does illustrate several of the pervasive formative notions behind Germanic perception terms. He correctly highlights the connection between emitting vapor and emitting smell, which, as we will see in Chapter 3, is characteristic of Old English verbs of smell.

Published in the same year, Adeline Ritterhaus’ study of the verbs of sight in the Old Germanic dialects is much more careful and detailed.³ Although her survey of the literature is by no means exhaustive, Ritterhaus does provide examples of the words in context; the Old English examples come from Beowulf. Her central purpose is to determine which verbs were most central to visual perception in Proto-Germanic. Accordingly, she divides the study into verbs that primarily designate perception by sight, those that include seeing as one of their secondary meanings, and finally those that have an implicit syntactic connection to seeing. This work should certainly be consulted when studying the Old English verbs of sight.

Samuel Kroesch takes much the same approach as Wood in his 1911 article on words relating to the sense “perceive.”⁴ He attempts to trace the “stages of associative development” behind these words by citing the meanings of many Germanic cognates.

² Ibid., p. 299.
³ Adeline Ritterhaus, Die Ausdrücke für Gesichtsempfindungen in den altgermanischen Dialekten: Ein Beitrag zur Bedeutungsgeschicht, Part 1, Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache in Zürich 3 (Zurich, 1899). Part 2 was apparently never published.
Like Wood, he provides no illustrative examples of the meanings he cites, and his definitions come directly from dictionaries. While again his study is not very useful for ascertaining the meanings of the Old English verbs, it does provide an extensive index of the various Germanic words relating to perception, as well as of the formative metaphors behind them.

I have not had the opportunity to see a 1924 dissertation by Katharina Spinner. According to Vic Strite, this study "thoroughly examines each of the five senses in Old English poetry and compares sense terms in Old Norse, Old Saxon, and Old High German poetry. Spinner gives valuable background and is fairly comprehensive." I would be especially interested in seeing this study, because in my experience, verbs of perception tend to be fairly rare in poetry.

A useful and interesting, if limited, survey is Carl Darling Buck's chapter on sense perception in his Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages, published in 1949. As his title suggests, Buck lists synonyms from over twenty-five Indo-European languages for a number of perceptual meanings, from verbs meaning "perceive by the senses," "smell," "taste," and so on, to adjectives for texture and color. The advantage of his study over those of Wood and Kroesch is its organization, which facilitates the comparison of forms between the various languages. Ultimately, however, it presents much the same material. The format does not allow the inclusion of more than a few words from a given language, nor does it permit any detailed discussion of the particularities of each word listed. As I discuss in the following section, Buck applies the same logical distinctions to the verbs of perception as I do.

The most detailed study of a group of Old English perception verbs is Erkki Penttilä's 1956 monograph on the Old English verbs of vision. His study is extremely thorough, and he provides multiple examples of each meaning. He is especially interested in tracing semantic development within the Old and Early Middle English period. Interestingly, he divides the field up into the categories of "power of vision," "perceptual seeing," and "intentional seeing" which partially reflects the distinctions I work with.

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5 Katharina Spinner, Die Ausdrücke für Sinnesempfindungen in der angelsächsischen Poesie verglichen mit den Bezeichnungen für Sinnesempfindungen in der altnordischen, altsächsischen, und althochdeutschen Dichtung (Diss. Halle, 1924).


7 Carl Darling Buck, Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages (Chicago, 1949), Ch. 15 "Sense Perception," pp. 1017-83.
However, in a review of Penttilä's study, Randolph Quirk criticizes this three-fold division as an *apriori* organization:

In erecting a ready-made notional framework and fitting into it the actual linguistic signs, one is naturally in danger of failing to identify the language's own semantic framework. Penttilä denies himself the opportunity of seeing systematic semantic contrasts in the very interesting and important field he has selected for examination.8

Of course, the three categories that Penttilä uses may themselves constitute systematic semantic contrasts, and they surely reflect something of the nature and experience of seeing. Although Penttilä might be criticized for his extensive use of glosses in his illustrative examples, his is the fullest study of the verbs of any one perceptual area to date.

Eiric Henelius' 1963 dissertation on words for smell in Old and Middle English seems to be the most recent survey of Old English perception words.9 Henelius treats the nouns, adjectives, and verbs of smell. While the textual basis of his Old English section is fairly limited, Henelius does isolate many of the most interesting occurrences of the words involved, citing them in context (but without Latin sources), and his definitions of the words are reasonable.

Of all the particular types of perception verbs, those of sight have received the most extensive treatment, followed by those of smell, although these latter have not been discussed exhaustively. Very little has been written about the Old English verbs of taste, touch, hearing, and such general perception verbs as *(ge)fledan and *(ge)felan*. While the Old English verbs of hearing must await later treatment, we will deal with these other words here.

II. Modes of Perceptual Action

In writing about the various uses of perception verbs, I have found it useful to develop three technical terms: experiential, deliberative, and descriptive. In this section I explain these terms in the context of the sense range of the English verb *taste*. The various semantic developments of this verb prove a very good introduction to the developments

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9 Eiric Henelius. *Orden för lukt i Forn- och Medelengelska (till C. 1400): Ett "semantiskt fält"* ("Words for 'smell' in Old and Middle English [until c. 1400]: A 'semantic field'†). (Diss. Åbo. 1963).
characteristic of perception verbs in general; I also make some observations on the array of Modern English perception verbs, which serves as the implicit basis for comparison throughout the study.

We share the faculty of taste with many other animals, and across species it serves much the same function of determining a food’s desirability and palatability. Although tasting is really a complex of sense perceptions, nevertheless two basic actions centered in the sensitivity of the mouth and involving a human agent are described by taste. The first is what I refer to as experiential. This occurs when the sense faculty operates more or less automatically and involuntarily: we all must eat; in eating, we taste. Within this experiential use, however, we may discern a broad range of meanings, which may be arranged according to the degree of mental activity implied in the action. The meaning with the least degree of cognition is “to experience the flavor of,” which we find where there is a suggestion of the (un)desirability of the thing tasted or its possible effects on the taster: “Tony gulped the dark liquid, trying not to taste it” (Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* [1934] 6, 337). This sense may be extended metaphorically to mean simply “to experience”: “an army that had tasted defeat” (A. Jacob, *Traveler’s War* [1944] 213). A slightly greater degree of cognition is involved in the scientific sense “to perceive as a distinct flavor”: “Tallness, or colour-blindness, or the ability to taste the substance known as PTC ... are inherited” (*Punch* [1965] 10 Nov. 668/1). Interestingly, where the flavor perceived is imagined or lingering, the meaning of taste seems midway between “experiencing” and “perceiving”: “I almost taste the pork-flesh of Brother Wainwright” (*Daily Chronicle* [1904] 4 Aug. 3/3) or “I can still taste the coffee I drank at lunch.” The sense “to discern, discriminate (a flavor) from among other flavors” suggests another increment of cognition: “It is the high art of the tea-master to make you really taste the water beside the taste of the tea” (Y. Noguchi, *Through Torii* [1914] 2). “Discrimination” is apparently a meaning that lies near the heart of that notorious noun, “ghastly good taste” (James Kirkup, *Japan behind the Fan* [1970] 27). Finally, taste may mean “to detect”: “I tasted salmon in Claudine’s so-called vegetable purée.” This implies a complex mental process, as of comparison and deduction; there is also some notion of the cleverness of the speaker. Such processes are also often implied when taste is used with a subordinate clause, where it expresses the general mental apprehension of a fact: “I tasted that the milk had turned.” The verb means something like “to find out through taste,” indicating only how the information was received and not how it was processed. With taste, however, the

---

10 Whenever a illustration of an English word is drawn from the *OED*, it will follow this format. I slightly expand the title of the citation according to the *OED’s* bibliography. If no reference to an author or work is given, it may be assumed that I created the example myself.
fact must in some way arise from a perceptual cue: one may "see" but not "taste" that someone is lying.\(^\text{11}\)

The second basic action described by *taste* is what I call the deliberative use. Perhaps more than for most other senses, a willed and dynamic action is required to produce the experience of taste. We usually perform the action under conditions of trial or tentativeness, for example: "The recipe was an ice-breaker.... Everyone tasted it and agreed that the maple syrup made all the difference" (Mary McCarthy, *The Group* [1963] 1, 19).\(^\text{12}\) Yet the very fact that an especially deliberate action is required to produce the experience of taste means that the deliberative and experiential meanings are strongly associated and often blended. For example, in the sentence, "This is among the best *sluks* I've ever tasted" (James McClure, *Rogue Eagle* [1976] 7, 129), does *taste* mean "to experience the flavor of" or "to try, test through the faculty of taste"? It is likely that both meanings are intended and may not be separated.

I borrow the third technical term, descriptive, from Andy Rogers (see below). We may see the descriptive use of *taste* as a generalization of the experiential use, where that which is perceived becomes the subject of the verb. The descriptive use omits reference to a particular perceiver, and generalizes the impression of taste "given off" by a particular object to all perceivers capable of perception through taste. In this way it serves two functions. The first is evaluative, indicating the degree of pleasure or distaste that results from consuming a particular substance: "Bread without wine doesn't taste good" (E. E. Cummings, *Enormous Room* [1922] 3, 48) or "I'm not hungry, the food tastes icky" (J.

---

\(^\text{11}\) *Taste* has the additional distinction that unlike *see, hear, smell, and feel*, it may not describe the perception of an ongoing or whole event: "I smelled eggs cooking" and "I heard him speaking" but not "I tasted the milk turning." This arises apparently from the nature of the faculty of taste: it is a close, localized sense that cannot comprehend processes or events that are perceptible to other senses.

\(^\text{12}\) Formerly, the deliberative use of *taste* meant more than "to try the flavor of" food or drink; it meant "to try, test" anything: "I shall asay the deepes of the see ... This water ... will I tast" (Towneley Plays [a. 1460] 36/448 [MED]). Remember too that a *taster* was someone who tried a dignitary's food first, as much as for poison, as for flavor. The sense "to try, test" apparently arose from the sense "to taste, assay with the tongue." Despite appearances, however, *taste* and *test* arose from different origins: *taste* from *tastito*, the Vulgar Latin frequentative form of *tisto*, "to touch": *test* from the noun *testa*, "a brick, tile," or *testum*, "an earthen vessel." The *OED* traces *test*’s remarkable development from a noun designating the "cupel," the vessel used to assay the quality of a metal, to a verb meaning "to assay a metal as in a cupel," to its current meanings as a verb of "to try, evaluate." Thus the verbs are etymologically unrelated. Yet the near coincidence of their forms and their partial resemblance in meaning suggests a certain illegitimate family relationship. Perhaps the verb *test*, when its original sense had been forgotten and its figurative sense had become less obviously figurative, became the metaphorical extension of *taste*’s deliberative meaning.
Hudson, *Case of Need* [1968] 4, 3, 239). Its second function is to introduce several strategies for describing the flavor of a thing. It may indicate the flavor adjectivally: “The pale yellow sauce tasted sour” (*Times* [1975] 4 Oct. 124); or it may compare the flavor to a familiar substance, either by making an adjective from a noun: “It tastes rather orangey” (*OED*, s.v. *orangey*); or by using “like”: “ham ... that looks and tastes like salmon” (*Atlantic Monthly* [1937] Mar. 267).13

It is interesting to see how the three categories are filled for all five senses in English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Experiential</th>
<th>Deliberative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>look</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>look (at)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound</td>
<td>hear</td>
<td>listen (to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taste</td>
<td>taste</td>
<td>taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smell</td>
<td>smell</td>
<td>smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>feel</td>
<td>feel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While this chart is an oversimplification and does not take into account any number of synonyms, it does point out some interesting features of the basic English perception verbs. We observe that only the auditory sense has a unique form for all three uses, while the verbs for tasting, smelling, and feeling do triple duty. As we will see, these categories are filled rather differently in Latin and in Old English.

The three uses of perception verbs I have just outlined are not new, but they have rarely been discussed systematically and even more rarely applied to Old English verbs of perception. Penttilä, cited above, distinguishes experiential ("perceptual seeing") and deliberative ("intentional seeing") uses of verbs of seeing, but not the descriptive use. Carl Darling Buck also recognizes these distinctions, which he describes in the context of the major Indo-European languages:

> Within the spheres of the several senses there are certain logical distinctions which find linguistic expression in some languages and not in others....

---

13 A fourth and very common use of *taste* arises when the action described is intentional but no longer perceptual. Where the notion of trial or tentativeness persists, this sense can be paraphrased "to sample, try a bit of": "We agreed to taste some of the wines"; but where this notion has been lost, perhaps through extensive use, the third action is simply "to consume, eat, drink": "The Gothic king had flung St. Sabas into the waters for refusing to taste idol-meats" (William Bright, *The Age of the Fathers* [1901] 1, 25, 503). This too may be difficult to distinguish from the experiential: "It was years since he had tasted anything but jail food."
First, the difference between the subjective and objective notions. These terms ... apply to both the noun and the verb, and so are preferable to transitive and intransitive, which are applicable only to the verb. NE *smell* and *taste*, as verbs or nouns, are used both subjectively, with reference to the person perceiving, and objectively, with reference to the object which stimulates the sense. *I smell the rose, taste the apple and it smells sweet, tastes good*, and similarly a person's sense of *smell, taste*, or the *smell of a rose, the taste of an apple*...

Besides the distinction between subjective and objective, there is a further distinction within the subjective. It is that between the actual perception and the antecedent provoking it, the application of the appropriate sense organs.  

What is most interesting about this is that he describes the subjective and objective (or experiential / deliberative and descriptive) uses of perception verbs as similar in kind to the notions characterizing nouns of perception. While there does seem to be a some correspondence, my experience of the Old English perception words suggests that nouns move between these various notions much more easily than the verbs do.

Probably the fullest discussion of these three types with regards to verbs of perception in Modern English is that of Andy Rogers. Rogers refers to these three types as cognitive, active, and descriptive verbs. I favor my “experiential” and “deliberative” over his “cognitive” and “active” because, although they are somewhat more cumbersome, they describe the perceptual action from the perspective of the perceiver, who is either the passive “experiencer” of sensory stimuli or the agent that willfully seeks after such stimuli. However, in many cases (especially when the verb takes a subordinate clause or some other extended complement as its object), “cognitive” seems an appropriate term. As Rogers remarks:

> Clearly the meaning of the cognitive verbs includes the reception of some sensory-data by some physical mechanism, but the physical mechanism you perceive with is linguistically more or less irrelevant, so long as it reacts to the right stimulus in the right way.

When the verb describes the apprehension of some complex condition, the action it refers to often seems to take place more in the mental faculties than in the extremities where the sense faculties are located. Roger’s term “descriptive” for the third use is straightforward and I have adopted it: it is probably preferable to a term like “quasi-passive,” which the *OED* uses (s.v. *feel*).

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The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language by Randolph Quirk et. al. gives a brief account of perception verbs. It distinguishes four distinct uses of these verbs, under the two broader categories of stative (describing an ongoing, non-repeated event) and dynamic (describing a discrete, repeatable event) meanings. Under the stative meaning, either the thing perceived may act as the subject ("Percept at S"; e.g. "The house looks empty") or the perceiver, and here the verb is construed with the modal can / could ("Perceiver at S"; e.g. I can see the house). In both cases, the event is conceived of as being continuous. Under the dynamic meaning, the verb may either describe a "non-agentive" (i.e. experiential, e.g. "I heard the bell ring") or an "agentive" (i.e. deliberative, e.g. "I looked at the photographs") action, one that is conceived of as having a beginning and end. These categories are rather subtle, and the authors struggle to hold them together in the face of numerous exceptions. Since distinguishing stative and dynamic meanings in Modern English can be so difficult, I will generally not attempt to distinguish them for Latin and Old English. The three uses outlined above serve this study well.

III. The Five Senses in Old English

While unfortunately I cannot provide a full discussion of classical and medieval theories of perception--the reader should consult the surveys mentioned in the footnote--I can at least give a very brief sketch of the five senses in Old English. We find that the notion of five senses does seem to have had currency in Anglo-Saxon England: we can also discern a partial hierarchy of the senses, in which sight comes first.

The most compelling evidence of the currency of the concept of the five senses in Anglo-Saxon England is not literary, but comes from the visual arts. The Fuller Brooch, a photograph of which I have reproduced as a frontispiece, is a large silver brooch with a tooled design picked out by a black niello inlay. The brooch clearly represents the Five Senses as five human figures. For a full discussion of its appearance, history, and iconography, see the description by Rupert Bruce-Mitford. Originally dismissed as a

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fake soon after it came to light in 1910 (largely because of its smooth, polished appearance), it has been shown to be authentic on the basis of its chemical, as well as its artistic, composition. Bruce-Mitford gives it a date "in the second quarter of the ninth century, or perhaps c. 850." The figure representing sight occupies the central portion of the brooch, and the other figures are arranged around it in somewhat cramped ovals. The iconography is unambiguously conceived, as Bruce-Mitford describes it:

The strength of Leeds’s interpretation is simply that the figures do, by their attitudes and actions, illustrate the senses.... The only essential differentiation between the figures lies in their gestures or actions. The whole emphasis of the central figure, which is otherwise symmetrically composed and at rest, is in the eyes. These contrast with those of the other figures and the staring expression, marked by inverted eyebrows, is obviously deliberate. Of the other figures, Feeling is well indicated by the gesture of the hands and Taste by the hand in the mouth.... The branch which taste holds in his hand is no doubt intended to represent the source of what is being tasted. Smell and hearing are less obvious but just as unequivocal. They are inherently more difficult to convey than Touch and Taste. The hands of Smell are carefully and necessarily concealed behind his back, in order to avoid confusing the issue and to concentrate attention on the head. Here the mouth and eye remain negative, the only gesture being the turning of the head, which brings the nose towards one of the two plants that flank the figure.... Hearing is somewhat cramped for space but one hand is raised towards the ear, while the figure is shown running. He can be regarded as having heard a cry and shown as moving in answer to it.2

Interestingly, the theme of the brooch seems to be secular; other than a small cross on Sight’s garment, the figures seem to be lay people, and no allegorical meaning seems to be implied. What the brooch does imply, however, is the superiority of Sight: it occupies the central position, it is larger and more detailed than the other figures, and holds large budding branches, perhaps an indication of control.

Roughly some fifty years after the Fuller Brooch was made. Alfred, following Boethius, makes similar claim for the superiority of sight over hearing and touch:

Hwæt, þu wast þæt gesið & geheres & gefrednes ongitað þone lichoman þæs monnes, & þeah ne ongitað hi hine no gelicne: þa earan ongitað þæt hi geherað, & ne ongitað hi þeah þone lichoman eallunga swyclne swylce he bið; sio gefrednes hine mæg gegrupian & gefran þæt hit lichoma bið, ac hyo ne mæg gefran hwaðer he bið þe blæc þe hwit, de fæger de unfæger. Ac sio gesiðæ at frumcerre, swa þa eagan on besið, hi ongitað

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20 Ibid., p. 317.

21 Ibid., pp. 320-1.
Sight is favored because of its more comprehensive power. Note that Alfred adds the sense of hearing to his original. Although descriptions of the superiority of sight may be found in many places, we may cite the following passage from Isidore:

Sensus corporis quinque sunt: visus, auditus, odoratus, gustus, et tactus... Visus dictus, quod vivacior sit ceteris sensibus ac praestantior, amplius vigeat, quantum memoria inter cetera mentis officia. Vicinior est enim cerebro, unde omnia manant; ex quo fit ut ea quae ad alios pertinent sensus, 'vide' dicamus; veluti dum dicimus: 'Vide quomodo sonat,' 'vide quomodo sapit,' sic et cetera. Auditus appellatus, quod voces auriat: hoc est aere verberato suspiciat sonos. Odoratus quasi aeris odoris adactus. Tacto enim aere sentitur... Gustus a gutture dictus. Tactus, eo quod prætractet et tangat et per omnia membra vigorem sensus aspergat. Nam tactu probamus quidquid ceteris sensibus judicare non possumus. Duo autem genera tactus esse; nam aut extrinsecus venit quod feriat, aut intus in ipso corpore oritur. (Etymologiae 11, 1, 18)

("There are five senses of the body: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Sight is called thus because it is more lively and more excellent than the other senses, it flourishes more with respect to memory, among the other offices of the mind. For it is nearer to the brain, from which all things emanate: from which it happens that we say 'see' those things which pertain to other senses: 'See how it sounds,' 'see how it tastes,' and so on. Hearing is so called because it gives ear to voices: that is, it receives sounds when the air has been struck. Smell, like the touch of odor of the air, for we perceive (odors) when we have touched the air. Taste is named from the gullet. Touch, because it handles and touches and spreads the power of the sense through all the limbs. For by touch we test whatever we cannot judge by the other senses. However, there are two types of touch; for that which may affect it either comes from the outside, or arises inside, in the body itself."")

I have quoted the passage at length because it makes so many interesting points. Not only does Isidore give the primacy to sight and then follow a rough top-to-toe ordering of the other senses, but he also explains an interesting usage in Latin, whereby the verb video

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22Cf. "Nam ... eandem corporis rotunditatem aliter visus aliter tactus agnoscit. Ille eminus manens totum simul iactis radiis intuetur; hic uero cohaerens orbi atque coniunctus circa ipsum motus ambitum rotunditatem partibus comprehendit" (Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.4, 26)--"For sight recognizes the same roundness of a body in one way, touch in another. The former sense remaining at a distance looks at the whole thing at once by its emitted rays; but the latter, being close to the round thing and joined to it, when it has been moved around the thing's circumference, comprehends its roundness by parts."
Introduction

may be used of senses other than sight. He also distinguishes two types of touch, and suggests that touch is the sense that tells us what the other senses cannot.23

The five senses would have been familiar to anyone listening to the sermons of Ælfric. roughly 150 years after the making of the Fuller Brooch. Ælfric enumerates the five senses on a number of occasions, often in elaboration of his Latin sources. See this passage for example:

Da fif getyrna getacniæð da fif andgitu ures lichaman, þæt sind gesihð, hlyst, swæcc, stenc, hrepgung.... We gesæod þurh ure eagan, and ealle ðing tocnaðæð; þurh da earan we gehyræð; on ðæm münde we habbað swæcc, and tocnaðæ æhwæð hit bið þe wered, ðe biter, þæt we ðicgað; þurh da nosu we tostincæð hwæt clæne bið, hwæt ful; on handum and on eallum lichaman we habbað hreþhpung, þæt we magon gefrendan hwæt bið heard, hwæt hnesce, hwæt smeðe, hwæt unsmeðe, and swa gehwæt. (Catholic Homilies II, 23 [DOE: 26], 214, 44)24

(“The team of five [oxen] signify the five senses of our body, which are sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch. We see by means of our eyes and discern all things; by means of the ears we hear; in the mouth we have taste and discern whether that which we eat is sweet or bitter; by means of the nose we sniff out what is clean, what foul; in the hands and in all the body we have touch, so that we can feel what is hard, what soft, what smooth, what unsmooth, and whatever.”)

See also: “Da fif pund getacniæð þæt is gesihð, and hlyst, swæcc, and stenc, and hreþhpung” (Catholic Homilies II, 38 [DOE: 43], 319, 46)25—“The five pounds signify the five senses of our body, that is, sight and hearing, taste, smell, and touch.” Whenever Ælfric enumerates the senses, he always places sight first; the other four senses follow usually in the order of hearing, taste or smell, and finally touch.

Brief as this survey as, we at least know that the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with the five senses, and that they placed sight first. As for the ordering of the other senses, that is a question I deal with in Chapter 5.

23 Interestingly, in his Naturalis historia, Pliny describes touch and taste as the most advanced senses in man: “Ex sensibus ante cetera homini tactus, dein gustatus; reliquis superatur a multis. Aquilae clarus cernunt, vultures sagaciæ odorantur, liquidius audiantur talpae” (10, 69, 88)—“Of the senses, touch in man is superior to everything else, and so is his taste; as to the others, he is surpassed by many. Eagles see more clearly, vultures smell more sharply, moles hear more distinctly” (passage and translation cited from Vinge. op. cit., p. 39).

24 Cf.: “Quid in quinque jugis bouum nisi quinque corporis sensus accipimus?” (Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia 36, 1268, B)—“What do we understand by the team of five oxen if not the five senses of the body?”

Chapter 1:
Latin Verbs of Physical Perception

In this chapter I outline the semantic fields of the Latin verbs of physical perception. This chapter has several purposes. First, it will allow us to get an idea of how this area of meaning may be arrayed in a well-attested ancient language, before we turn to the much more sparsely attested record of Old English, and it will introduce us to some of the problems associated with studying the meanings of perception verbs. It will also serve a comparative purpose: instead of having just two sets of perception verbs to compare, i.e. those of Old English and Modern English, we will have three. Finally, it will serve as background whenever, in the following chapters, an Old English verb renders a Latin one.

My central approach is to contrast *sentio*, the verb which describes the experience of both sensory and mental impressions, with verbs of specific perception, which may describe both the experience and the deliberate gathering of physical sensation. We will find that *sentio* may substitute for the experiential use of many of the specific perception verbs. I begin with a discussion of *sentio* as a general verb of perception in which I describe it as the most basic and central verb among such other general verbs as *percipio*, *prehendo*, and *cerno*. I then discuss in turn the specific verbs of hearing, taste, smell, and touch. In each of these sections, I consider the verbs according to the three types of perceptual action outlined in the introduction--i.e. experiential, deliberative, and descriptive. I occasionally discuss nouns and adjectives as well, but only as they reflect or illuminate the meanings of the verbs. I do not discuss the verbs of vision, as this is an especially complex field, and does not relate directly to the Old English chapters.

This survey is meant to be detailed but not exhaustive. My procedure has been to begin by compiling lists of Latin words as rough equivalents to English verbs of perception, relying especially on Smith & Hall (A Copious and Critical English-Latin Dictionary). I then used the OLD (Oxford Latin Dictionary) and Lewis & Short (A Latin Dictionary) to get a general impression of the sense range of each word; here, while the OLD is more clearly organized (its format is similar to that of the Oxford English Dictionary), it does not consider senses that came into existence after the second century A.D., so that Lewis & Short is still invaluable for words and senses that arose later or that represent previously unattested popular uses. I then studied the numerous attestations of each word given in the TLL (Thesaurus Linguarum Latinae) and through these attempted to arrive at a probable development of the word's meanings. While I have often consulted the larger context of the passages cited by these various dictionaries, I have cited them
essentially as they occur in these dictionaries, only expanding their abbreviated titles. The Latin primary sources in this chapter are not listed in the Bibliography (with the exception of the Vulgate, which is accompanied by the Douay / Rheims translation); the reader may consult these dictionaries for fuller bibliographical references. I have given preference to the citations in the OLD, using the TLL system only when a citation does not occur in the OLD.

On the whole I have not attempted to trace closely the historical development of the words, as this would require many more attestations and much more time. However, three broad periods can be distinguished for the sake of contrast: an example is "early" if it comes from Plautus, Terence, Ennius, or Cato (all of whom lived in the earlier half of the second century B.C.); an example is "classical" if it comes from Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Horace, and so on (roughly between 100 B.C. and 200 A.D.); while examples from the Vulgate, Tertullian, Augustine or Prudentius are generally "late," "Christian," or "ecclesiastical" (after 200 A.D.)--and often adumbrate medieval usage. I have not ventured otherwise into medieval usage, first because of the difficulty of collecting examples, and second because I am concerned with describing Latin perception words while Latin was still spoken as a first language. In many cases, the historical comparison will be implicit and will often serve to show continuity, rather than variation, in usage.

I. Sentio and other verbs of perception and understanding

Our first task must be to describe the meanings of sentio and to show how it is distinct from other general verbs of perception. There are a number of verbs which are partially synonymous with sentio: percpio, prehendo, cerno, and intellego, to name several, may all express in various ways the action of perceiving. Sentio needs to be distinguished from percpio in particular, not least because of the association we easily make of percpio with our own verb perceive.

Sentio is initially distinguished from other general verbs of perception by the fact that its meaning, or range of meanings, does not arise from an obvious metaphor. Percpio literally means "to seize entirely," prehendo "to grasp, lay hold of," cerno "to sift," and intellego "to pick out from among," but the form sentio does not suggest any concrete origin. As it presents itself to us (and presumably to the Romans), the sense range of sentio flows like a single stream, arising from a central, basic meaning, and growing by logical, if unconscious, extensions. C. S. Lewis remarks that the central area of meaning
of *sentio* is probably “to experience, learn by experience, undergo, know at first hand.”  

This basic meaning feeds into the sense “to perceive (by one of the senses), feel” and then into “to sense, discern, know,” and so on into other branches, but the basic meaning is never entirely left behind.

Since we know that the central meaning of *sentio* is “to experience,” one might then suppose that *sentio* is akin to *experior*, but *experior* usually describes a much more dynamic and deliberate action, “to make trial of, put to the test, try out” (*OLD*). From this comes Latin *experimentum*, and our *experiment*. *Patior*, “to undergo, suffer,” overlaps in some degree, but it is less immediate, less personal, being something more like, “to have happen to,” which leads into its other sense of “to allow (to suffer!) something to happen.” *Cognosco*, which means “to get to know, recognize,” can occasionally mean “to have experience of” (*OLD*), for example: “Nondum legiones hostium cognoverat” (*De bello africano*, 72, 2)—“He had not yet had experience of the enemies’ legions”—but this use is rare. *Sentio* is thus central in expressing the sense “to experience, know at first hand.”

When *sentio* is used in this primary sense, it may be translated into English in a number of ways. The phrase “to go through” can be appropriate: “Tecum Philippos et celerem fugam sensi” (Horace, *Carmina* 7, 52, 2)—“I went through (the battle at) Philippi and the swift retreat with you.” When a group of people has experienced or “been through” distinct events, it is easy to see how they have “come to know” them: “Centuripini ... etiam ceterarum civitatum damna ac detrimenta senserunt” (Cicero, *Actio secundo in Verrem*, 3, 108)—“The people of Centuripae have also known the harms and damages of other cities.” Likewise, a sharp experience may cause someone to “find out” something: Caesar says of someone’s defeat in battle: “Quid ipse ad Avaricum sensisset” (*De bello gallico* 7, 52, 2)—“Which he had himself experienced / found out at Avaricum.” Despite such translations as “to come to know” and “find out,” we should note that cognition is absent from this use of *sentio*; indeed, so much so that *sentio* can be used of abstract or inanimate things without deliberate personification. Cicero says, “Omnia sunt misera in bellis civilibus, quae ... nostra aetas saepe iam sensit” (*Familiares* 4, 9, 3)—“All is wretched in the civil wars which our age has often now experienced.” An inanimate thing does not “come to know”; rather, it is simply affected, its state of existence altered: “sentiunt id (sidus canis) maria et terrae” (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18, 270)—“The seas and lands are affected by the Dogstar.” In another instance, we are so accustomed to speaking


2. However, *experior* also has the experiential sense, “to have experience of, undergo.”
of boats as living creatures that we might mistakenly assume a personification where there is none: "Navis ... velox et non sentiens ventum" (Seneca, Epistulae 76, 13)--"A swift ship, not affected by the wind" (not "feeling the wind").

Because sentio describes first-hand experience, it is natural that, when used of humans, it should describe the most personal, intimate experiences possible. Such are internal sensations like hunger and thirst: "Lassitudo et sitis iam sentiebatur" (Livy, 44, 36, 2)--"Hunger and thirst were felt already"; or emotions: "Ita torpentes gelu in castra redire ut vix laetitiam victoriae sentirent" (Livy, 21.56.7)--"They returned to camp so numb from the cold that they could scarcely feel the joy of victory." From this notion of immediate experience, it seems that sentio came to be used of the experiencing, or perceiving, of stimuli by each of the individual sense faculties. In the sections below, I will describe sentio as an experiential verb of hearing, taste, smell, and touch, and compare it to the verbs particular to each faculty. Sight is the only sense faculty that sentio does not regularly represent. Perhaps this is because, in Latin as in English, vision is very often a direct window onto understanding: things that are seen are considered less to be experienced, than to be comprehended or understood.3

While I have just remarked that sentio could be used as an experiential verb more or less specific to each sense faculty, this is certainly not always the case. As early as Plautus, sentio is used intransitively to describe the full use of one's faculties: "Quem di diligunt adulescens moritur, dum valet, sentit, sapit" (Bacchides. 817)--"He whom the gods love dies young, while he is strong, has his senses, and is wise." Clearly, sentio here implies a sort of power of perception that is not specific to any one faculty.

When we follow this stream of meaning of sentio yet further, we move beyond the realm of strictly physical perception. Here the meanings of sentio broaden to include mental acts and degrees of cognition. It may mean "to perceive, discern, recognize" and perhaps even "to understand." In the same way that some obvious, concrete thing becomes manifest or known through experience, so an abstract thing becomes known through a mental faculty that is (initially at least) unspecified, for example: "Vulteius tacitas sensit sub gurgite fraudes" (Lucan, 4.465)--"Vulteius became aware of the secret traps under the whirlpool"; and "Sensit invidiam miles" (Tacitus. Historiae 1.82)--"The soldier perceived (his) envy."

C. S. Lewis observes that one of the "most obvious instances of knowledge at first hand or by experience" is "that of our own conscious psychological state at the moment....

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3 For a more extensive discussion of this problem, see Chapter 5, pp. 169, 174, 179-83.
I know or perceive or (as the French would say) experiment, my present thought and emotions."\(^4\) It is apparently by this sort of connection that *sentio* means “to hold or express a given belief or opinion" (\(^{\text{OLD}}\))—"Si modo unum omnes sentient ac probent" (Caesar, *De bello gallico* 5, 31, 2)—"If all now think and approve one thing.” It is of course a development familiar to us in *to feel*. We are apt to consider “feeling” as more impressionistic and emotive than “thinking,” but as Lewis points out, the difference between “feeling” and “thinking” would perhaps not be understood by a Roman using *sentio*: “Tu si hic sis, aliter sentias” (Terence, *Andria*, 3 10)—“If you were in my place, you would feel / think otherwise.”

Finally, because an author will write what he or she thinks or believes, *sentio* can signify “to mean, intend”: “Ipse deus, simul atque volam, me solvet.” Opinor hoc sentit, ‘moriar’” (Horace, *Epistulae* 1, 16, 79)—“‘God himself will release me as soon as I wish.’ I believe this means, ‘I will die.’” *Sentio* shares this development with *sensus*, which can mean “sense, meaning”—indeed this development has made this chapter more difficult to write, as I am obliged to be careful when I speak of the sense of sense words.

Having outlined the range of *sentio*’s meanings, we may now consider some other Latin verbs of general perception, which have arisen under the force of a formative metaphor. We need to decide how central each of these is to the perceptual act. *Percipio* is of special interest, and we will begin with it.

*Percipio* may be said to flow from two springs of meaning. The first spring is that which is suggested by the elements of *percipio*, *per-* and *cupio*, “to seize entirely.” This sense does not appear in a full range of uses, but it is limited to certain contexts. It is most obvious when used of the effects of the emotions, for example: “Mihi horror membra misero percipit dictis tuis” (Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 1 118)—“Horror grips my wretched limbs at your words.” The stream also shows up in the slightly less vivid sense “to take up (natural produce), to harvest”: “Cum in parvo agello largiores multo fructus perciperet quam ex amplissimis vicinitas” (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18, 41)—“since he harvested much more abundant produce from his small plot than the neighborhood did from much larger (fields)”; and also the sense “to catch in flight”: “Cum pilam percipere conaretur” (Alfenus. *Digesta* 9, 2, 52, 4)—“When he attempted to catch the ball.”

The second spring of *percipio* is the sense “to receive.”\(^5\) which reflects a less


\(^{\text{5}}\) As we will discuss later in the section on Latin words for hearing, the sense of “to receive”
dynamic use of the parent verb *capio*. The sense “to receive” stands behind such senses as “to earn, reap”: “Cum vestri offici praemia percipere debeatis” (Caesar, *De bello civili* 2, 32, 6)—“Since you ought to earn the recompense of your office”; and “to receive through custom or usage”: “(Herbarum in remedia) utilitates longinqui temporis usu ... percepimus” (Cicero, *De naturae deorum* 2, 161)—“We have received the use of herbs as remedies from the practice of ancient times.”

These two streams are both involved in forming the perception meanings of *percipio*. The sense “to receive” seems prominent when it is the sense faculty itself that perceives, for example: “Num quid aliquo sensu perceptum sit, aspectu, auditu, tactu, odoratu, gustatu” (Rhetorica ad Herennium 2, 5, 8)—“Whether something is received by any sense, by vision, hearing, touch, smell, or taste”; and “Quod neque oculis neque auribus neque ullo sensu percipi potest” (Cicero, *Orator*, 8)—“Which neither the eyes nor the ears nor any sense can take in / receive.” More important for perception, however, is the sense derived from the first stream. The metaphor of “grasping” to signify mental comprehension is very common in European languages. Except when it is the sense that receives, the root sense of *percipio* of “seizing entirely” always seems to contribute something to the verb’s perceptual meanings. As a result, the verb never means simply “to experience (a given sensation),” as *sentio* may, but it always includes a hint of the sort of control through cognition that is expressed by a metaphor of grasping. A few examples will illustrate how cognition and understanding enter when *percipio* takes a physical object: “Percepta Treverorum fuga” (Caesar, *De bello gallico* 6, 8, 7)—“When he perceived the flight of the Treveri”; and “Placide egredere et sonitum prohibe forum et crepitum cardinum. ne quod hic agimus erus percipiatur” (Plautus, *Curculio*, 158)—“Go softly and avoid the sound of the doors and the creak of the hinges, so that the master does not perceive what we are doing.” However, the intensifying force of the *per*- prefix is especially important for the comprehension of a mental object: “Dum percipis omnem naturam rerum” (Lucretius, 4, 24)—“While you grasp the whole nature of things”; and “Nullam artem litteris sine interprete ... percipi posse” (Cicero, *Familiares* 7, 19)—“No art can be grasped from a book without a guide.” Thus *percipio* is removed from the most

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6 Cf. the semantic split between the cognates *chase* and *catch* (from Vulgar Latin *captiare* through Old French *chacier* and Old Norman *cachier* respectively [Partridge, s.v. *catch*]): the former describes only willed, dynamic actions, while the latter may describe either deliberate or involuntary actions (a policeman tries to catch a thief, but one doesn’t try to catch a cold).

fundamental action expressed by *sentio*, the simple experience of an outside force: *percipio* describes a more conscious, cognitive action, performed by the perceiver onto the thing perceived. *Percipio* is an important word for sense perception, but it is not as basic and central as *sentio*.

In its sense “to perceive, discern, recognize,” *sentio* is synonymous with a number of other verbs. *Capio*, the formative verb of *percipio*, and its cognate *accipio* both have similar metaphorical senses of “to take in, grasp mentally” and *capio* especially develops the “holding, comprehending” aspect: “Qui sensum verae gloriae ceperit” (Cicero, *Philippicae* 5, 29)—“He who grasped the meaning of true glory.” *Accipio* is also important as a verb of hearing, and I will discuss it in the following section.

*Prehendo* and its derivatives *comprehendo* and *apprehendo* are also “grasping” verbs that developed “understanding” senses, for example: “Quae sensum quidem effugient, ceterum rationeprehenduntur” (Seneca, *Naturales quæstiones* 2, 2, 3)—“Those things which escape the notice of the sense faculty are still grasped by reason”; and “Nequeunt quals animus sit ... cogitazione comprehendere” (Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 1, 50)—“They are unable to comprehend through reflection what the spirit is.” *Prehendo* and *comprehendo* could occasionally describe physical perception, especially vision, but their “grasping, understanding” senses remained central: “Mala ... prehendere quae possis oculorum lumine operto” (Lucretius, 4, 1141)—“Evils which you can see (i.e. understand) with your eyes shut” and “Vides ... oculos meos aegros adsiduisque lucubrationibus prope iam perditos; vix ipsos litterarum apices potui comprehendere” (Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13, 31, 10)—“You see my weak eyes, now almost ruined by nighttime reading; I could scarcely make out the tops of the letters.”

Two other sorts of metaphors for understanding are represented by *cerno* and *discerno* and by *intellego*. *Cerno* preserves its Indo-European root sense of “to sift” in classical Latin: “Rursus quae transiti artiore (cribro) cernitur” (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18, 115)—“(The grain) which passes through is sifted through a finer sieve.” The metaphor behind *cerno* and *discerno* is thus one of “sifting” or “separating.” One may sift with the mind in order to discern: “Aliorum vitia cernere, oblaviisci suorum” (Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 3, 73)—“To discern the vices of others and disregard their own”; just so, one who sifts with the eyes is one who sees: “Aliquod lumen—iubare?—in caelo cerno” (Ennius, *Scenica*, 19)—“I see—is it sunlight?—some light in the sky.” *Cerno* is a central verb in the semantic domain of seeing; *discerno* however remains closer to its base sense of “to separate, distinguish,” whether the distinction being made is a mental one: “Cum uxorem sororemque non discernis” (Cicero, *De Haruspicium responso*, 39)—“Since you do
not distinguish between a wife and a sister”; or a visual one: “Ipse diem noctemque negat discernere caelo ... Palinurus” (Virgil, Aeneid 3, 201)—“Palinurus himself could not tell day and night apart by the sky.” As for intellego, it is formed from inter, “among, between,” and lego, “to gather, pick, choose.” Together the two components suggest a concrete, agricultural term for “gleaning” between furrows. Yet intellego is the most abstract and non-material of the understanding / perception verbs, generally meaning “to grasp mentally, understand, realize” (OLD): “Nemo damnatur nisi qui intellegit non recte se agere” (Gaius, Institutiones 4, 178)—“No one is condemned but he who understands that he is acting wrongly.” All the same, intellego can occasionally mean “to discern, recognize (form, colour, taste, or other physical characteristics)” (OLD): “Ut colorum proprietates oculus intellegat” (Seneca, Epistulae 94, 19)—“So that the eye recognizes the properties of colors.”

All these verbs, from perciopio to intellego, are characterized by the continuing influence of their formative metaphors. They all contribute to the semantic domain of perception, but they do not intrude upon the central, basic area claimed by sentio, that of first-hand experience.

We will now turn from general verbs of perception to those that are specific to individual sense faculties. In the four sections below, we will look at in turn the verbs of hearing, taste, smell, and touch. In each of these particular semantic fields, sentio plays a significant role as an unambiguously experiential verb of perception.

II. Latin Verbs of Hearing

While I do not include a separate chapter on Old English verbs of hearing (there is some discussion of (ge)hyan in Chapter 5), it seems appropriate to include a section on the Latin verbs of hearing. It is an especially interesting area of the realm of physical perception verbs in Latin, introducing us to such problems as how an action can be willed in a faculty that operates essentially automatically; furthermore, the action of hearing occurs well within the range of senses of sentio, the verb which acts as the backbone of this discussion.

Regarding the verbs of hearing, Lewis & Short state that audito describes the involuntary or experiential action of “hearing” and ausculto the voluntary or deliberative
action of “listening.”8 This is not quite accurate. In classical Latin, *audio* described both involuntary and voluntary types of auditory actions. *Ausculto* was indeed primarily deliberative, but it was a low-register word which appears often in Plautus and Terence, but rarely in the classical authors. It appears again in the Vulgate, but only a small fraction of the times that *audio* is used, which is striking, given its later history as Italian *ascollare* and French *écouter*. It was thus a word of limited application, occupying a semantic space within the range covered by *audio*. We will find that several other verbs could also express experiential hearing: *accipio* developed a particular meaning of “to hear” which reflects its constituent elements and, apparently out of or in parallel with this sense, it also came to mean “to learn, understand, or believe.” Of course, *sentio* could express the experiential sense “to hear” as well. As for descriptive verbs of hearing, the closest equivalent to Modern English “it sounds” seems to have been the verb *sono*.

*Audio* was indisputably the central verb of auditory perception in Latin. Its semantic core arises first from the experience of sound. Used simply, *audio* describes the effect of sound on the ear, as in Ennius: “Quo nunc me ducis?--Ubi molarum strepitum audibis maximum” (*Scenica*, 373)––“Where are you taking me now?--Where you will hear the greatest din of the mills.” Yet hearing can hardly ever be described as just the experiencing of sound—awareness and analysis of the sound follow instantly. Thus *audio* may often be rendered with something like “to be aware of a sound.” For example, “Risit, ut audirem, ... Cupido” (Ovid, *Amores* 1. 6. 11)––“Cupid laughed so that I heard (i.e. was aware).” Likewise, “Marcellus ... ita stertebat, ut ego vicinus audirem” (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 4. 3. 5)––“Marcellus was snoring so (loudly) that I who was nearby could hear.” The sound of snoring may wake us, but the awareness of it keeps us awake.

This simple, perceptual sense of *audio* gives rise to other important meanings. The aspect of awareness may be emphasized and pushed towards “finding out” or “learning,” as when we say, “I hear you’re going to Rome.” Thus we find in Terence: “Sic est.--Qui scis?--Apud forum modo e Davo audivi” (*Andria*, 302)––“It is so.--How do you know?--I heard just now in the forum from Davus.” The particular instance in which we heard begins to be forgotten, as when we “hear of” or “hear about” something; so in Plautus: “Qui(d), tu numquam audivisti esse antehac vidulum piscem?” (*Rudens*, 993)––“What, you’ve never heard of the trunk-fish before?”

A second layer of meaning, more complex and judgmental, proceeds from these

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8 See Lewis & Short, s.v. *audio*: “*Audio* properly differs from *ausculto* as the Gr. *akouo* from *akroaomai*, the Germ. *hören* from *horchen*, and the Engl. *to hear* from *to listen*. the former of these words denoting an involuntary, the latter a voluntary act.”
senses of “being aware,” “learning,” and “finding out.” Comprehension of speech, when it occurs properly, occurs just as quickly and automatically as the perception of other types of sound. When Cicero remarks, “Vidistis hominem et verba eius audistis” (Actio secunda in Verrem, 4, 92)--“You have seen the man and heard his words,” he does not doubt that we have understood the speaker’s words; he assumes we have understood the speaker’s underlying intent or meaning. From this comes the use of audio to mean “understand, interpret”: “ut litterarum ego harum sermonem audio” (Plautus, Pseudolus, 99)--“as I understand the meaning of this letter.” Very often, however, we do not understand what we hear. In wrought, self-conscious passages, audio is used to describe the antithesis between hearing and understanding. So Cicero says, “Saepe ... apertis atque integris et oculis et auribus nec videmus nec audimus” (Tusculanae disputationes 1, 46)--“Often we do not see nor hear with eyes and ears that are open and whole.” Likewise, in the Vulgate, Moses tells his recalcitrant people that God has not yet given them “aures quae possunt audire” (Dt 29, 4)--“ears that may hear.”

Thus far, the usages we have described involve only passive reception and unconscious analysis, uses which are essentially non-deliberative and experiential. But when is hearing ever deliberate? For on the physical, mechanical level, hearing is the most involuntary of the senses. We may close our eyes, block our noses, move our hands away, or spit something from our mouths, but hearing continues whether we want it to or not--stopping the ears only muffles sound. Thus the intentionality that we seem to find in our word listen does not enter so much into the operations of the sense itself, as it does, first, into the obvious, exterior postures or gestures of listening (such as holding a hand to an ear, or an ear to a door) and, second (and more importantly), into the state of mental attentiveness, of which these attitudes are signs. This is the notion of “paying attention” or “attending,” which Latin expressed by attendo and animum adverto (also animadverto): “Quae loquor advortite animum” (Plautus, Pseudolus, 156)--“Pay attention to what I say.” The distinction between merely “hearing” and actively “attending” is very subtle. Cicero makes a neat transition from a largely passive perceptual action to wholly intentional one when he says, “Ut homines non solum audiant, verum etiam libenter studioseque audiant” (Divinatio in Q. Caecilium, 39)--“So that men do not merely hear, but that they also hear (or listen) willingly and eagerly.” Plautus, “quoting or parodying Ennius” (OLD, s.v. animadverto), employs audio in a string of attending words: “Sileteteque et tacete atque animum advortite: audire iubet vos imperator” (Poenusus, 3)--“Be still and silent and pay attention: the emperor orders you to listen.” An adverb may often indicate the presence of this intentional sense: “Rogo. domine imperator, audias me patienter” (Marcellus, Digesta. 28, 4, 3)--“I ask, Lord Emperor, that you hear me patiently.” The ease with which “hear”
may translate *audio* here indicates how far our *hear* may extend into intentionality.\(^9\)

The nouns and adjectives derived from *audio* take their meanings from both the experiential and the deliberative uses of the verb. On the experiential side, we find *auditus* as the name for the faculty itself: "Vox est ... spiritus tenuis auditu sensibilis" (Varro, *Grammatica*, 238)--"The voice is a subtle breath perceptible by hearing." Curiously, there does not appear to be any adjective for "audible" in classical Latin: *audibilis* first appears in the Christian writers of the fourth century. *Auditio* may describe that which is heard, "a report, rumour" (*OLD*): "Ne tenuissimam quidem auditum de ea re accepi" (Caelius Rufus, *Familiares* 8, 1, 2)\(^10\)--"I haven't heard the slightest rumour about this thing." *Audientia* and *auditor* however clearly take their meaning from the deliberative branch of *audio*. When those who speak in public ask for *audientia*, it is active "listening" or "attention" that they wish: "Si paulisper audientiam publica mihi tribuerit humanitas" (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.4)--"If all humanity will grant me attention for a little while"; an *auditor* is one who listens: "(Principium orationis) ita sumitur, ut attentos, ut dociles, ut benivolos auditores habere possimus" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.4.6)--"The beginning of the oration is taken up in such a way so that we may have attentive, docile, and well-disposed listeners." An *auditorium* is of course a place where one goes to listen, "a lecture hall."

In contrast to the broad semantic range and complexity of *audio*, the verb *ausculto* is quite straightforward. It is essentially deliberative in sense: it always seems to imply some aspect of volition in the auditory action. Plautus makes explicit its sense of "wishing" and hence "seeking to hear" in the introduction of *Miles gloriosus*: "qui ... auscultare nol(1)et, exsurgat foras, ut sit ubi sedeat ille, qui auscultare volt" (80)--"whoever does not want to listen, let him get up and go out. so someone who wants to listen may sit where he was sitting." Intimately connected with this is the notion of "paying attention," as in the Vulgate: "Attendii et auscultavi" (Ier 8, 6)--"I attended and hearkened"; and even more emphatic: "Aures audientum diligenter auscultabunt" (Is 32, 3)--"The ears of them that hear shall hearken diligently." In Terence, the distinction between active "listening" and passive "hearing" is made neatly: "Pater, obsecro, ausculta!--Aeschine, audivi omnia" (*Adelphi*, 679)--"Father, I beg you, listen!--Aeschines, I have heard everything." So

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\(^9\) The idea of intentional hearing can also be observed in the verb *oboedio*, which, composed of the elements *ob* and *audio*, literally means "to give ear, hearken, listen to" and which thus develops the sense "to obey, yield obedience to" (Lewis & Short).

\(^{10}\) See below for the use of *accipio* as "to hear" (pp. 25-6).
neatly do listen and hear fit the translation, it is easy to forget that audio could just as well substitute for ausculto here, as Terence himself shows: “Pater!--Nil audio” (Haeuton Timorumenos, 1056) --“Father!--I’m not listening.” From “wishing” or “seeking to hear,” it is a short step to the two other senses of ausculto. The first is that of “to listen secretly, eavesdrop” (also expressed by subausculto): “Ipse post tabulam latens, vitia quae notarentur, auscultabat” (Pliny, Naturalis historia 35, 84)--“Lying hidden behind the board, he overheard what sins were indicated”; likewise in the Vulgate: “Stultitia hominis auscultare per ostium” (Sir 21, 27)--“The folly of a man to hearken at the door.” Secondly, there is the sense which arises from acting immediately upon what one hears, “obeying”: the grammarian Nonius explains, “Auscultare est obsequi” (p. 246)--“To listen is to obey.” Some 400 years earlier, Ennius writes, “Mi ausculcta, nate, pueros cremari iube” (Scenica, 291)--“Obey me, son, order that the boys be burned.”

There are several nouns formed from ausculto, but they appear so rarely that they almost seem to be nonce words. Auscultatio is used first as “heeding” in Plautus: “Quid mihi scelesto tibi erat auscultatio” (Rudens, 502)--“Why did I ever listen to such a wicked man as you?” (lit. “Why was there listening for me to you, wicked one?”); and as “prying, eavesdropping” in Seneca: “Ex hoc malo dependet illud taeterrimum vitium, ausculatatios et publicorum secretorumque inquisitio” (Dialogi 9, 12. 7)--“From this evil is derived that foulest vice, the prying and inquiry into public and secret things.” An auscultator is either a listener: “Aut auscultator modo est qui audit aut disceptator” (Cicero, Partitionsoratoriae. 10) --“A listener or arbitrator is simply one who listens”; or one who obeys: “Equinis armentis namque me congregem pastor egregius, mandati dominici serus auscultator. aliquando permisisit” (Apuleius, Metamorphoses 7, 16)--“For the illustrious shepherd, an old obeyer of the lord’s command, finally allowed me to be of the same flock with the herds of horses.”

It is interesting to follow the fates of audio and ausculto into French and Italian. Audio, while it has supplied numerous derivatives, originally of learned or scientific origin but now part of the common vocabulary of most Romance languages as well as English, has suffered significant losses as an independent verb. Its French descendent ouir is now considered archaic or literary;12 entendre, used synonymously with ouir from the 13th to the 17th centuries, has now won out. On the other hand, écouter, from vulgar Latin

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11 In some versions “audire” is substituted.

ascoltare, is now used commonly; if anything, écouter has claimed special privilege over the senses of “hearing intentionally, listening,” which auscultare did not have exclusive claims to. In Italian, udire is still part of the language, yet the sense of “to hear” is just as often expressed by the broad perception term sentire. Yet, as in French, ascoltare is well-attested throughout the literary canon and in present-day use—quite a contrast to its rare occurrence in the Vulgate.

Several other verbs include the action of hearing within their broader semantic range, but there is one, accipio, that developed a distinct and experiential sense of “to hear.” This occurred apparently because of a certain flexibility in its prefix. Accipio is formed of the elements ad- plus capio, where ad equals “toward, to” and capio equals “to take, hold.” Ad- suggests motion towards oneself, so that the combination seems to yield the meaning “to take (something) to (oneself).” This meaning is obvious when someone is said to receive another person in a gesture of hospitality, of taking them in: “Bene me accipies adventitem, mea soror” (Plautus, Bacchides, 101)—“You’ll receive me well when I come, my sister”; it is also clear when used of inanimate things: “Multas accipit amnis aquas” (Ovid, Ars amatoria 2.344)—“The river receives (i.e. takes into itself) many waters.” It is curious, however, that up to the second century A.D., accipio is nearly always used of a thing which is in some way offered, brought forward, or presented. That is, it is not used of a wholly independent action of “taking to oneself,” for it might have then behaved more like comprehendo or sumo; but it describes a yielding to pressure instigated from outside. Pseudo-Fronto tells us, “Accipimus quae punitur” (Differentia grammatica 7.525, 2)—“We accept (or receive) what is offered.” The reason for this may arise from an earlier ambiguity in the implied object of ad-. The direction ad se ipsum, “to (or toward) oneself,” is obviously present in many senses of accipio and it is a normal way for the prefix to behave. However, there may have been a point early in the word’s history when the direction was instead (or in addition) ad rem quae offertur, “toward the

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14 For instance, accingo, from cingo meaning “to encompass, surround,” means “to gird or equip,” and specifically “to gird to oneself.” Ciego has the general sense of “to put in motion” while accio means “to summon,” that is, “to put in motion towards oneself.” Allicio, “to draw to oneself, attract,” sharpens the focus of lacio, “to entice.” In admitto, as in accipio, a dynamic verb (mitto “to send”) is modified so that the action is no longer entirely instigated by the one performing the action, but performed in response to outside pressure. The thing to which the object is “admitted” may be seen as an extension of the self.
thing being offered." *Ad-* would describe a focusing of the verb's action towards its object to the exclusion of other objects; the prefix would thus have the same force it has in *accurro*, "to run toward," or *accendo*, "to light fire to." This use of *ad-* might explain the word's restriction to things offered, while its other use of "to oneself" would explain the striking conversion of *capio*, a verb of vigorous action, to *accipio*, which describes relatively passive, yielding action.\[^{15}\]

*Accipio*’s sense of "to hear" begins as just another means by which something may be taken to oneself, that is, accepted or received: thus, as something may be taken in the hand ("Cette manus vestras measque accipite" (Ennius, *Scenica*, 283)—"give me your hands and receive mine"), in the mouth ("Ore necaturas accipiemus aquas" (Ovid, *Tristia* 1, 2, 36)—"We will receive the deadly waters in our mouths"), or by another part of the body ("Accipite hoc onus in vestros collos" (Cato, *Orationes*, 77)—"Take this burden on your necks"), so may something be received by the ears: "Plautum ... quaeo ut benignis accipiatis auribus" (Plautus, *Menaechmi*, 4)—"I ask that you receive Plautus with kind ears." The ears may be the verb’s subject: "Aures tuae hoc crimen accipiunt" (Cicero, *Ac. secunda in Verrem*, 3, 24)—"Your ears receive (i.e. hear) this charge." They then may be omitted altogether, and thus *accipio* acquires the sense "to perceive by the ears" or simply "to hear." Pliny tells us of the parrot "quaes verba pronuntiat" (*Naturalis historia* 10, 117)—"that pronounces the words it hears"; similarly, Sallust says: "Clamorem hostilam a tergo accepit" (*Iugurtha*, 58, 4)—"He heard the hostile clamor at his back." With its sense of receiving something brought to bear from the outside, *accipio* was well-suited to describe the action of hearing, a sense perception which is, as we have remarked, largely passive and involuntary.

*Sentio* too can have the experiential sense "to perceive the sound of or hear." It does not have *accipio*’s coloring of volition, nor does it extend into the deliberate senses of *audio*; it describes only the involuntary experience of the perception of sound. In two examples from Juvenal and Cicero, it is specifically the ear that hears: "Clamore opus est, ut sentiat auris, quem dicat venisse puer, quot nuntiet horas" (Juvenal, *Satires* 10, 216)—"The slave has to shout, so that the (old man’s) ear hears, when he says who has come, or announces the time"; and "Ut in fidibus musicorum aures vel minima sentiunt" (Cicero, *De "

\[^{15}\] It is interesting that in the Vulgate the parent verb of *accipio, capio*, seems to have reacquired its original force in at least one instance. *Accipio* is used for an independent, dynamic action of "taking to oneself," a sense near to that of *sumo*: "Simile est grano sinapis, quod acceptum homo misit in hortum suum" (Lc 13, 19)—"It is like to a mustard seed, which a man took and put [Douay: cast] into his garden."
officiis 1, 146) — "Just as the ears hear the least things in the stringed instruments of musicians." But it is not necessary that the organ of perception be specified: "Valvas sonere [sic] sensi regias" (Accius, Tragediae, 470) — "I heard the royal doors resound." In a passage from Lucretius, sentio occurs twice; the first time it means "to perceive generally" and the second time "to hear": "Perpetuo quoniam sentimus, et omnia semper cernere odorari licet et sentire sonare" (4, 228) — "We constantly perceive (the impressions given off by an object), and it is possible at all times to see all things, to smell them, and to hear them make noise."

Finally, the closest equivalent to the Modern English descriptive verb to sound is the verb sono. Like sound, sono first expresses the simple sense used of things "to make or emit a sound," for example, "Hic saxa sunt, hic mare sonat" (Plautus, Rudens, 206) — "Here there are rocks, here the sea sounds"; or of places, "to be filled with sound, echo resound" (OLD), for example, "In quorum plausus tota theatra sonat" (Ovid, Epistulae ex Ponto 2, 6, 28) — "The entire theatre resounds in accordance with their applause."

However, we are most interested in those examples in which the verb relates the action to a generalized perceiver, so that it is either used in conjunction with an adjective or adverb to describe the effect of a sound, as in "The strange passion ... making her voice sound shrill and piercing" (Braddon, Lady Audley [1862] 1), or with some other construction to express the impression conveyed or idea provoked by a sound, as in "That sort of talk sounds big, but it is in fact puerile" (Blackie, On self-culture [1871] 71). Sono can also express such meanings. Used with an adverb, it may describe the effect of a sound on the hearer, i.e. in the sense "to sound (well, ill, etc.)" (OLD), for example: "Nec bene sollicitis ebria uerba sonant" (Pseudo-Tibullus, Elegiae 3, 6, 36) — "Drunken words do not sound well to anxious people"; similarly, "Cum sint alia (uerba) aut magis propria ... aut melius sonantia" (Quintilian, Institutioratoria 10, 1, 6) — "Since other words are either more appropriate or better sounding to other people." Used with an internal accusative, sono may describe a sound in terms of what it is like (or not like), as in: "Haud tibi uultus mortalis. nec uox hominem sonat" (Virgil, Aeneid 1, 328) — "You do not at all have a mortal face, nor does your voice sound like a human." Sono thus seems to have expressed many of the same meanings as our descriptive verb sound, although it may have been used more often for the simple producing of sound.

In the Latin verbs of hearing, we find the full range of perceptual actions: the passive receiving of sound, expressed by the experiential verbs audio and accipio, as well as by sentio: the active, attentive seeking after sound (and its significance), expressed by
the apparently low-register deliberative verb ausculto, as well as by audio; and finally the conveying of a particular impression by sound, expressed by the descriptive sono.

III. Latin Verbs of Taste

Smith & Hall lists *gusto*, *degusto*, *libo*, and *delibo* as equivalents to Modern English *taste*. Of these four, however, the last three are primarily concerned with the non-perceptual aspects of tasting: “taking in,” “trying a little bit of,” “diminishing (by consumption).” Only *gusto* expresses both deliberative and experiential perceptual meanings. It inclines towards the deliberative and, like the other tasting verbs, often has a non-perceptual sense. Again, *sentio* could express the experiential action. Latin had at least one descriptive verb of taste: *sapio*, “to taste (of),” which also meant “to know.”

Although Cicero does include *gusto* in an enumeration of the senses (“Ea. quae gustemus, olfaciamus, tractemus, audiamus” [*Tusculeanae disputationes* 5, 111]—“Those things that we may taste, smell, touch, hear”), straightforward examples of the experiential perceptual use of *gusto* are few and mostly late, as in Augustine: “Sapores gustando ... sentimus” (*De civitate Dei* 11, 26)—“We perceive flavors by tasting”; or in Martianus Capella: “Cogit ... aliquid pati ... dulcedo gustantem” (4, 368)—“Sweetness compels the one that tastes it to suffer something.” The experiential sense of *gusto* could be extended figuratively to mean “to obtain knowledge of, experience,” as in “Necdum etiam castos gustaverat ignis honores” (*Ciris*, 145)—“Fire had also not yet experienced chaste honors.” This figurative use is of course also characteristic of our verb *taste* and, as we will see in the next chapter, of Old English *gebyrgan*.16

The deliberative use of *gusto* is more common: “Vinum ... postridie mane gustato” (Cato, *De agricultura*, 108, 2)—“Taste the wine on the next morning”; and “Quod prius gustari et sic ministrari praecepit” (Commodianus, *Carmen Apologeticum*, 660)—“He instructed that it first be tasted and thus served.” This sense was also receptive to various figurative uses, as in Cicero: “Stoicorum ista magis gustata quam potata delectant” (*Tusculeanae disputationes* 5, 13)—“the teachings of the Stoics are more pleasing to taste than to swallow.” It is often difficult to distinguish the deliberative from the experiential use: see this passage from Varro: “Cum ... ille [lupum piscem] gustasset et expuisset” (*Res rusticae* 3, 3, 9)—“When he had tasted the wolf-fish and spat it out”—does *gusto*

16 See pp. 51-2.
express that the hapless guest experiences the flavor of the fish, or that he deliberately takes a portion into his mouth in order to try it?17

Since *gusto* does not seem to have often expressed the experiential sort of tasting in classical Latin, the verb that may more regularly have designated this action is *sentio*. Since the *TLL* has not yet reached "S," we only have the few attestations of this sense given in the *OLD* without doing an indepth search of the literature. Nevertheless, the two examples given in the *OLD* are clear enough; here *sentio* means "to perceive by taste": "Ut quidam morbo aliquo ... suavitatem cibi non sentiunt" (Cicero, *Philippicae* 2. 115)—"Just as with some disease certain people cannot taste food’s sweetness"; and "Principio sucum sentimus in ore" (Lucretius, 2, 811)—"First we taste the flavor in our mouths."

Latin also had a descriptive verb of taste. In its perceptual sense, the verb *sapio* behaves much like our descriptive verb *taste*. It may be used with an adverb to evaluate a flavor, as in "Oleum male sapiet" (Cato, *De agri cultura* 66, 1)—"The oil will taste bad"; or "Qua sapient melius mixta Falerna manu?" (Martial, 10, 66, 6)—"What Falernian wines, mixed by hand, taste better?" It may also be used with an internal accusative to liken one taste to another, in the sense "to taste of / like, for example: "Si tenera ostrea cognoverit fluvium limum ac cenum sapere ipsum" (Lucilius, 329)—"If he knew that the tender oysters taste like the river’s very mud and filth"; similarly, "Calidae sapiat quid vulva popinae" (Juvenal, *Satires* 22, 81)—"May her vulva taste like something from a hot restaurant." *Sapio*, however, exhibits one of the more striking dual meanings in Latin: it also means "to know, understand," perhaps developing this second sense from the first by means of the intermediate senses "to have taste or discernment" and "to be intelligent, show good sense" (*OLD*).

17 As for the other verbs mentioned by Smith & Hall, the actions described by *degusto* are wholly deliberative; they arise, but are more or less disengaged, from the sense faculty. The prefix *de-* seems to perform two functions in the most literal senses: it has the sense "to taste [a part] of," that is, "to take a small amount" with emphasis on the motion toward oneself, as in Seneca’s description of the over-nice appetite: "Fastidientis stomachi est multa degustare" (*Epistulae* 2, 4)—"It is characteristic of the squeamish stomach to nibble many things." Secondly, it has the sense "to take from (in tasting)," with a notion of the gradual diminishment of the object, as in Varro: "Quod (pabulum) egredientes (boves) degustare possunt" (Varro, *Res rusticae* 2, 5, 15)—"The cows can eat up that food in going out." Used figuratively of a weapon, it may have the sense "to touch lightly, graze, nip": "Lancea ... summum degustat vulnere corpus" (Virgil, *Aeneid* 12, 376)—"The lance nips the top of the body with a wound." Like *degusto, libido* and *delibo* are wholly deliberative: any sense of tasting perceptually is only peripheral to their other senses of taking a little bit from, sampling, nibbling, or sipping.
As with the verbs of hearing, the Latin verbs of taste express all three basic types of perceptual actions. *Gusto* is both experiential and deliberative, although it tends especially to be deliberative—and often non-perceptual, in the sense “to nibble” or “to consume.” *Sentio* certainly could express an experiential sense of “to perceive by taste” and may have substituted somewhat for *gusto* in this respect. *Sapio* is the descriptive verb: like the descriptive use of *taste*, it could be used with an adverb in the evaluative sense “to taste (good, bad, etc.),” or it might be used simply to describe a flavor, in the sense “to taste of / like.”

**IV. Latin Verbs of Smell**

The main verbs of smell in Latin are *odoror* (or *odoro*) and *olfacio*, with its frequentative form *olfacto*. *Odoror* and *olfacio* are attested from Plautus onwards, and there seems to be little to distinguish them in either meaning or register. Like *audio* and *gusto* in the realms of hearing and tasting (and, more to the point, like our own *smell*), the two verbs could be used for both deliberative and experiential types of perceptual actions (i.e. both sniffing, searching and experiencing, perceiving), which in some cases are difficult to distinguish. The frequentative *olfacto* seems to be used solely for deliberative actions, while only *sentio* expressed the wholly unambiguous experiential meaning. Latin also had a number of verbs to describe the emitting and diffusing of odor, including *oleo*, *frugro*, and *spiro*, of which several could express the particular descriptive meaning “to convey an impression to the faculty of smell.”

The derivation of *odoror* from *odor* (“smell, odor, fragrance, strong smell” [OLD]) is straightforward. Lewis & Short tell us that *odos* is the old form of *odor*; if this is so, then *odoror* may not be much older than the earliest records of Latin. When it first appears in Plautus, it means “to explore by scent, sniff”: “Ibo odorans quasi canis venaticus” (*Miles gloriosus*, 268)—“I’ll go, sniffing like a hunting dog.” It is later used in Lucretius with the broader sense of “to take something (usually medicinal vapor) in by the nose”: “Castoreoque gravi mulier sopita recumbit, ... tempore eo si odorata est quo menstrua solvit” (6, 794)—“A woman will sink down, put to sleep with heavy beaver

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18 As we will see in Chapter 3, Old English also had a large number of these verbs.

19 Cf. the forms *honos* “honor” and *honoro* “to honor”; according to Lewis & Short, “*honos* was antiquated in Quintilian’s day.”
musk, if she smells it when she is going through her menstrual period.” Of course, the notion of exploring or sniffing out is one that is easily extended metaphorically: “Canes venaticos diceres: ita odorabantur omnia et pervestigabant, ut, ubi quicque esset, ... invenirent” (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 4, 31)—“You would call them hunting dogs: they were sniffing and tracking down everything in such a way that they would find each thing, wherever it might be.”

While the involuntary, experiential use of words like *odoror* can be hard to distinguish, it is clear when the sensory impression arrives before and provokes awareness. This sense is attested from Lucretius onward, but another canine reference, this time in Columella, makes it clear: “(Canes) advenientem sagaciter odorantur” (*De rustica* 7, 12, 7)—“Dogs can acutely smell someone coming.” In Latin, a keen sense of smell is called *sagax*, “keen, sharp, acute.” So when Pliny compares the perceptual powers of eagles and vultures, he says: “Aquilae clarius cemunt, vultures sapaci us odorantur” (*Naturalis historia* 10, 191)—“Eagles see more clearly, vultures smell more keenly.” Here *odoror* is used without an object to express the capacity for smell.

These examples show that *odoror* was used for both deliberative and experiential smelling. Interestingly, while it was not used for the descriptive action of conveying a general impression of smell, it does show signs of possible development in this direction, as the non-deponent form *odoro* means “to make fragrant, perfume” (*OLD*): “Xystus violis odoratus” (Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 2, 17, 17)—“A walk outdoors, perfumed with violets.”

Since *olfacio* (or *olefdu*) is composed of the elements *oleo* (=“to emit a smell, to smell of”) and *facio*, we might expect it to have the meaning “to cause to have a smell,” like *odoror* above, yet it nowhere appears to have this sense. Instead, the verb falls into a pattern very similar to that of *odoror*. Like *odoror*, *olfacio* could mean more broadly “to breathe in”; Juvenal uses it of teachers breathing in the unhealthy smoke of lamps: “Dummodo non pereat, totidem olecissee lucemas, quot stabant pueri” (*Satires* 7, 225)—“Provided that he does not perish, having breathed in (the smoke of) as many lamps as there are boys.” For the deliberative perceptual sense, one might cite the following example: “Olfacere ... anethum non alienum est” (Celsus, 3, 10, 2)—“Sniffing anise is not unknown.” The following example from Catullus (in a poem that is usually omitted from the school editions) may also be deliberative:

Non (ita me di amant) quicquam referre putavi.  
utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio. (97, 1)

(“I didn’t think it made any difference (god love me) whether I sniffed Aemilius’
As with *odoror*, the experiential sense of “to experience a smell, catch the scent of” can be hard to isolate. However, Plautus’ use of *olfacio* with *forte* to mean “to happen to smell” seems to express the idea of unplanned and hence experiential perception: “Ecquid tu de odore possis, si quid forte olfeceris, facere coniecturam?” (*Menaechmi*, 163)--“If you smelled something by chance, could you make a guess from its smell?” In Catullus we find another example of what seems to be experiential action:

Nam unguentum dabo ... 
quod tu cum olfacies, deos rogabis, 
totum ut te facient, Fabulle, nasum.  
(13, 11)

(“For I will give you a perfume, which when you smell it, you will beg the gods to make you, Fabullus, all nose.”)

This strikes me as similar to our expression “Wait till you smell / see / hear etc. this”: the focus is all on the experience of the sensation, not on how the sensation is taken in. The experiential use also seems to have developed, perhaps through the hunting-dog metaphor. the sense “to sniff out, find out, detect,” as we find in Terence: “Num sineres vero illum tuom facere haec?--Sinerem illum? aut non sex totis mensibus prius olfecissem?” (*Adelphi*, 397)—“For indeed you wouldn’t have let that (son) of yours do such things, would you?--Let him? Wouldn’t I have smelled it out six months before?” Finally, like *odoror*, *olfacio* was used without an object to describe the capacity for smelling: “Nec olfactus vestigia habent (delphini), cum olfaciant sagacissime” (*Pliny*, *Naturalis historia* 11, 137)—“Dolphins have no signs of an organ of smell, although they can smell keenly.”

*Olfacto*, the frequentative of *olfacio*, appears to be used only in the deliberative sense of “to sniff,” for example, in Plautus: “Summum olfactare oportet vestimentum” (*Menaechmi*, 167)—“It is necessary to sniff the top part of the garment.” Pliny also uses it when discussing signs of weather in the behavior of animals: “cows sniffing the air,” “boves caelum olfactantes” (*Naturalis historia* 18, 364), is supposed to be a indication of weather, though Pliny does not specify of what sort. Although *olfacto* seems to be only deliberative and hence potentially useful as a means of avoiding ambiguity, it is not widely attested.

*Sentio* alone expressed a solely experiential action of smelling. Indeed, the examples given by the various dictionaries suggest that it performs this role more distinctly than it does for hearing. In stating a well-known truth Pliny uses it in this way: “Odorem qui gerit ipse non sentit” (*Naturalis historia* 13, 20)—“The one who carries a smell cannot himself smell it.” Lucretius uses it in discussing the “bodies” that are not seen but are known to exist because they are experienced in other ways: “Varios rerum sentimus odores
nec tamen ad naris venientis cernimus umquam” (1, 298)—“We smell the various odors of things, yet we never see them coming to our nostrils.” Finally, the context of *sentio* in this passage from Plautus makes this sense abundantly clear:

M: Cur non pultas?
A: Quia non est intus quem ego volo.
M: Qui scis?
A: Scio pol ego, olfacio; nam odore nasum sentiat, si intus sit.

(Miles gloriosus, 254)

M: Why don’t you knock?
A: Because the one that I want is not inside.
M: How do you know?
A: By god, I know! I can smell; for my nose would smell him by his odor, if he were inside.

Finally, there are a number of Latin verbs that can describe the diffusion of odor, in the sense “to emit odor, give off a smell.” Of these verbs, several can express the specific descriptive meaning, “to convey an impression to the faculty of smell,” which may be used either to evaluate a smell (“that smells bad”) or describe it by likening it to other smells (“that smells like or of fish”). *Oleo* is one such verb. It may describe the emission of scent, as in “Hesperis noctu magis olet” (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 21, 39)—“Hesperis smells more at night”; it may be used with an adverb to evaluate the smell so emitted: “Culignam in feno Graeco ponit, ut bene oleat” (Cato, *Orationes*, 246)—“He places the small vessel in fenugreek, so that it smells nice”; and it may describe the smell in conjunction with an ablative noun: “Oluere lares comissatore Lyaeo” (Martial, 9. 61. 15)—“The house smelled of a bacchic reveller.” Of the several verbal derivatives of *oleo* (i.e. *redoio, oboleo, and peroleo*), *redoio* could be used both intransitively to mean “to give off a smell”: “Fracta magis redolere videntur omnia” (Lucretius, 4, 696)—“All things seem to smell more when they have been broken”; and transitively to mean “to smell of”:

“Oscula ... vernos redolentia flores” (Statius, *Silvae* 2, 1, 46)—“Kisses smelling of spring flowers.” Another verb, *fragro*, means “to smell strongly” (*OLD*); used with an accusative object, it means “to smell or be redolent of”: “Venus ... cinnama fragrans” (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2, 8)—“Venus smelling of cinnamon.” Then there are several “breathing” or “emitting” verbs which can also mean “to give off a smell,” such as *spiro*: “Graviter spirantis copia thymbrae floreat” (Virgil, *Georgics* 4, 31)—“Let an abundance of strong-
smelling savory blossom”; *halo*, a more poetic word, could have this sense as well. Finally, there are verbs for the giving off of a bad smell, such as *foeteo* and *puteo*. Used with an ablative, they can mean “to stink of,” as in “Foetere multo Mytale solet vino” (Martial, 5. 4. 1)—“Mytale (a woman) usually stinks with much wine”; or “Non cessavere poetae ... mero putere” (Horace, *Epistulae* 1, 19, 11)—“The poets never left off stinking of wine.” *Oleo* is thus perhaps the most important descriptive verb of smell, but many of the other verbs could go beyond describing just the emission and diffusion of odor, and express the impression made by an odor upon the faculty of smell.

While there are more verbs belonging to this particular semantic field than to those of hearing or taste, its structure is very similar. *Odoror* and *olfacio* express both experiential and deliberative types of smelling and appear to be of roughly equivalent use. The frequentative of *olfacio*, *olfacto*, expresses the deliberative use unambiguously, but is not much used, while *sentio* expresses, as always, only the experiential sense. There are more descriptive verbs of smell than there are of hearing or taste, which probably reflects the varieties of ways that smells may be generated and diffused; *oleo*, however, seems to be the verb closest to the descriptive use of our own smell.

### V. Latin Verbs of Touch

The Latin verbs of touch differ from those of hearing, taste, and smell, in that there seems to be a more or less complete split between the verbs that express deliberative and experiential action. Furthermore, there is a strikingly large number of verbs which could express deliberative action, include *tango*, *tempto*, *tracto*, and, in post-classical Latin, *palpo*, while experiential action is essentially expressed by *sentio* alone (see however the discussion of *palpo*, which may have been on the way to acquiring an experiential sense). There does not seem to be a descriptive of touch, although much the same meaning could be expressed by the passive use of *sentio*.

It is easy to guess why there is such a division between experiential and deliberative verbs of touch. In order to gather a tactile impression, we usually reach out with our hands towards the object we wish to feel; thus verbs for deliberative action are those that describe the various gestures that may be performed by the hands and arms. However, the sensations perceived by the fifth sense (understood broadly as “feeling” rather than the more limited “touch”) arrive from many different quarters. Thus when describing the reception of sensations that do not arise in the localized faculties of vision, hearing, taste,
and smell, we (like the Romans) tend to use just the general verb of perception. The deliberative/experiential distinction which we have used up to now here defines two different, but overlapping, semantic domains: one which describes the deliberate application of the sensitivity in the hands to discover things about the world, and another which describes the reception of a larger range of sensory impressions, arriving from many quarters and not ascribable to a single faculty.

Below, I will first consider the deliberative verbs of touch, tango, tempto, tracto, and palpo; I will then look at sentio, as well as at several verbs that could sometimes describe the perception of various particular sensations, such as algeo and aestuo, “to feel hot/cold,” and doleo, “to feel pain.”

In a number of ways, tango is the Latin verb most like our verb touch. They share a number of meanings and have even developed many of the same metaphorical senses. Indeed, the similarity in meaning between Modern English touch, Latin tango, and Old English (ge)hrinan, aesthrinan, and (ge)hrepian is striking, and will be laid out in some detail in Chapter 4.20 It is especially noteworthy that tango and touch bear similar relations to the substantives derived from them, tactus and touch. Both tactus and touch function as the main terms for that sense faculty: to give several examples of tactus: “Tactus enim ... corporis est sensus” (Lucretius, 2, 434)—“For touch is the sense of the body”; and “Tactus ... toto corpore aequabiliter fusus est” (Cicero, De naturae deorum 2, 141)—“The sense of touch is spread evenly through the body.” Given this association with the sense faculty, we naturally expect tango to be used of the deliberative, perceptual action of touching. The verb seems to be used in the sense “to explore by touch” in the following examples: “Abi, tange, si non totus friget, me enica” (Terence, Phormio, 994)—“Go, touch him: if he doesn’t feel completely cold, then slay me”; and “(Delphinum) accedunt et adludunt et appellant, tangunt etiam pertrectantque praebente” (Pliny the Younger, Epistulae 9.33. 6)—“They approach, play with, and call the dolphin; they even touch and stroke it, while it allowed this.” It has a more specialized, but still perceptual, sense of “to touch or feel (a vein), take (a pulse)” in the following example: “Non potest medicus per epistulas cibi aut balinei tempus eligere: vena tangenda est” (Seneca, Epistulae 22,15)—“A doctor cannot establish the times for food and baths by letter; a vein must be touched [i.e. the pulse must be taken].”

However, as we will observe when we discuss Old English verbs of touch, the

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20 See pp. 144-56.
specifically perceptual use of verbs like *touch* or *tango* can be difficult to isolate, despite their association with the sense faculty through the cognate nouns.\(^{21}\) This is probably because these verbs express generally the coming into or being in contact with something, and the sensation of touch is only one of the effects that may accompany contact. As this problem will come up again when we look at the Old English verbs of touch, I will briefly outline the range of the meanings of *tango*. First, *tango* may denote the coming into or being in contact of one object with another, in which neither object is affected by the contact, as when Cicero describes the touching of a knee to the ground: “Genu mehercule Marcum Antonium vidi ... terram tangere” (*Tusculanae disputationes* 2, 24, 57)—“I’ve seen Marcus Antonius touch the ground with his knee, by god” (of course, the gesture itself has further significance). The same notion is contained in the sense “to be immediately next to, border on” (*OLD*), used of places: “Haec civitas ... Rhenum ... tangit” (*Caesar, De bello gallico* 5, 3, 1)—“This city is next to the Rhine.” It is more often the case, however, that the objects are affected by their contact, and the severity of the effect may range from drastic to mild. Thus *tango* may be used to mean “to harm physically”: “Nec quisquam noceat cupido mihi pacis! ... melius non tangere. clamō” (*Horace, Sermones* 2, 1, 44)—“Let no one injure me, I who desires peace! Better not harm me, I cry.” It likewise indicates drastic results where it describes the action of lightning: “Si de caelo villa tacta siet” (*Cato, De agricultura* 14.3)—“If the villa has been struck by lightning (lit., from the sky)”; or of frost: “Frondes autumni frigore tactas” (*Ovid, Metamorphoses* 3, 729)—“Leaves touched by autumn frost.” *Tango* however is more often characterized by the notion of light, subtle contact. For instance, Seneca makes a distinction between (light) touching and (heavy) handling using *tango* and *contracto*: “(Scholasticorum studia) leviter tacta delectant, contractata ... fastidio sunt” (*Seneca, Controversiae*, 10, pr.1)—“Academic pursuits touched lightly delight one; once handled they become an annoyance.” Interestingly, *tango* may be used of the effects of a stimulus upon the senses, as we find in Lucretius: “Quae sensus iucunde tangere possunt” (2, 403)—“Those things that affect the senses pleasantly”; elsewhere he similarly describes the effect of sound on the ears: “Quae belle tangere possunt auris” (1, 643)—“Those things that touch the ears pleasantly.” We begin to understand why the action of deliberative perception is not central to the meanings of *tango*: it is one of the few actions in which the contact affects the one touching, more than the one that is touched.

*Attingo*, derived from *tango*, is very similar to *tango* in its range of meanings.

\(^{21}\) See Chapter 4, pp. 137-8.
While many of its meanings do not relate to perception, *attingo* may be used to describe an action deliberately performed to make contact, and in this perception by touch may enter. For instance, Cicero remarks of a river: “Nec enim ullam hoc frigidus flumen attigi” (*De legibus* 2, 6)—“For I never touched a river colder than this one.” Elsewhere he uses the verb in a broad sense of “to examine, explore,” presumably through touch: “Neque attigi neque aspexi” (Cicero, *Actio secunda in Verrem*, 4, 175)—“I neither examined it (by touch) nor looked at it.” *Attingo* may also be used for “feeling a vein, taking a pulse”: “Per speciem officii manum complexus pulsum venarum attigit” (Tacitus, *Annales* 6, 50)—“(The doctor) grasped (Tiberius’) hand in a pretext of courtesy and felt his pulse.”

After *tango* and its obvious connection to the name for the sense faculty *tactus*, *tempto* (or *tento*) emerges as one of the most important verbs for deliberative perception through touch. The *OLD* suggests that it may be the iterative, or frequentative, form from a root *temp* - or *ten* -. As we have already seen in *olfacto*, the frequentative may express an intensified sense of its formative verb; it thus very often emphasizes the intentional or deliberative aspects of the parent verb. While we know of no parent verb *per se*, the root of *tempto* connects it to *tendo* and *teneo*, words for “stretching or reaching out” and “grasping.” There is thus good reason to think that earliest sense of *tempto* had something to do with reaching out with the hands in order to receive a sensory impression.22 Indeed, the basic physical sense of “to touch or handle in order to receive a tactile impression” is readily evident in the verb’s attestations, for example, in Seneca: “Qui interrogatur, an cornua habeat, non est tam stultus, ut frontem suam temptet” (*Epistulae* 45, 8)—“A man who is asked whether he has horns will not be so stupid as to feel his own forehead.” In Suetonius, a similarly deliberative action of testing a knife edge (presumably with a finger) is clear: “Duos pugiones ... arripuit temptataque utriusque acie rursus condidit” (*Nero*, 49, 2)—“He seized two daggers and, after feeling the edges of both, brought them back.” And in Ovid we find: “Manibus quoque pectora temptat” (*Metamorphoses* 10, 282)—“He also feels (the statue’s) breasts with his hands”; here the action is erotic and hence charged with sensation. While *tempto* often describes intentional feeling with the hand or finger, other parts of the body may be used: “nec enim ullam hoc frigidus flumen attigi ... ut vix pede temptare id possim” (Cicero, *De legibus* 2, 6)—“For I never touched a river colder than this one, so that I could scarcely feel it with my foot.”

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22 Walde & Pokorny support this interpretation: “Vom Begriff der wonach ausgespannten, ausgestreckten Hand aus ‘betasten, befühlen, angreifen, untersuchen, auf die Probe stellen’,” p. 722.
As the examples above suggest, *tempto* is characterized by the notion of testing or trying. Beyond exploring by touch, we find it used of trying by taste: “Et ora tristia temptantum sensu torquabit amaro” (Virgil, *Georgics* 2, 246)—“And it will pucker the faces of the tasters with a bitter flavour.”23 From here, it opens into a broader sense of “to test, try, seek to discover the state of,” for example: “Si naturam sucini admoto igni temptes” (Tacitus, *Germania*, 45, 8)—“If you test the nature of amber by bringing fire close to it.” It is possible to use *tempo* to express the trying of opinions: “Visum st mihi ut eius temptarem sententiam” (Terence, *Phormio*, 619)—“It seemed to me I should find out his sentiments.” Perhaps from all these notions of exploration or investigation *tempo* acquired its sense of “to attempt, essay”: “Recte enim Graeci praecipiunt: non temptanda, quae effici omnino non possint” (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.5, 17)—“for the Greeks teach rightly, ‘do not attempt those things which absolutely cannot be accomplished.’”

After *tango* and *tempo*, the verb *tracto* and its three derivatives, *contracto*, *attrecto*, and *pertrrecto*, could occasionally express deliberative perception through touch. *Tracto*, the frequentative of *t r a h o*, “to draw, drag,” is based on the notion of manipulation and has the basic sense of “to subject to the action of the hands, handle,” for example: “Veluti tractata notam labemque remittunt atramenta” (Horace, *Epistulae* 2.1, 235)—“Just as ink when handled leaves its mark and stain.” A *tractator* was one whose job was handling and manipulating, a masseur. *Tracto* follows the same metaphorical route as our verb *handle*, where someone may “handle” (or “deal with, treat”) someone in some intangible way: “Ego te dehinc ut merita es de me ... tractare exsequar” (Plautus, *Asinaria*, 160)—“Henceforth I will act to treat you as you deserve from me”; or “handle” (or “manage”) intangible things like affairs or situations: “Mulieres ... ipsae sibi negotia tractant” (Gaius, *Institutiones* 1, 190)—“The women are themselves managing their own affairs.” But when *tracto* is used of physical handling, the action may indeed be performed deliberately in order to gather a sensory impression: “Pellis ... ad tactum tractandi dura resistit” (Virgil, *Georgics* 3, 502)—“The skin remains hard to the touch of handling.” Most notably, Cicero uses *tracto* as the touch verb when in one passage he enumerates the senses: “Ea quae gustemus, olfaciamus, tractemus, audiamus” (*Tusculanae disputationes* 5, 111)—“Those things that we taste, smell, touch, or hear.” An example such as this shows that the writer consciously associates *tracto* with the sense of touch.

Of the verbs formed from *tracto*, one gloss distinguishes between *contracto* and

attrecto in this way: “Attrectat aliquis manu semel, contrectat saepius” (Differentia, ed. Beck, p. 31, 29)—“One touches (attrectat) with the hand once, but handles (contrectat) more often.” This seems about right, if overly general. Like tracto, contrecto is especially used of protracted manual action, for example where Horace says (addressing his book): “Contractatus ubi manibus sordescere vulgi coeperis” (Epistulae 1, 20, 11)—“When you’ve been handled and begin to become soiled from the hands of the crowd.” In Classical Latin, the deliberative perceptual use of contrecto seems mainly to come into play in the specific, but sensation-charged, sense “to caress, fondle”: “Contractatis multorum uxoribus” (Suetonius, Domitianus 1, 3)—“Having fondled the wives of many men.” Only later in Christian writings is contrecto established as a central verb of deliberative perception, as in the Old Latin version of the Bible: “Dii nationum ... habent manus nec contrectant” (Itala, Ps 113, 7)—“The gods of the nations have hands and they do not feel.” Tertullian places it beside words pertaining to other senses: “Videat illos meus Thomas, audiat, contrectet et crediderit” (Ad nationes 2, 11)—“Let my Thomas see, hear, and touch them, and he will believe.” Augustine uses contrecto and sentio to distinguish between deliberate and experiential perception: “Dura et mollia contrectando sentimus” (De civitate Dei 21, 2)—“In touching we feel hard and soft things.”

While contrecto is characterized by protracted “handling” or “fondling,” attrecto may describe a slighter sort of touching, although the meanings of the two verbs cannot always be distinguished. The attestations of the TLL suggest that the sense “to feel, explore with the hands” is only found in later Latin, as in the blessing of Jacob and Esau in the Vulgate: “Esau frater meus homo pilosus sit, et ego lenis; si adtractavent me pater meus, et senserit, timeo....” (Gn 27, 11)—“Esau my brother is a hairy man. and I am smooth. If my father shall feel me, and perceive it, I fear....”

Pertracto, the final verb formed from tracto, has an intensifying prefix that implies thoroughness, so that where tracto means “to treat, consider (problems, a certain subject),” pertracto means “to examine in detail, study carefully (in thought or discussion)” (OLD). Pliny the Younger uses pertracto in describing the rigorous process of literary revision: “Primum quae scripsi mecum ipse pertracto” (Epistulae 7, 17, 7)—“First I go over with myself what I have written.” Thus when pertracto is used in a concrete, perceptual sense, it means “to handle or feel all over,” for example: “Milites bestias manibus pertractabant” (De bello africano, 72, 5)—“The soldiers run their hands over the beasts.” It may have the intensified sense of “to feel or fondle all over” when it is used of a sexual gesture: “Si papillam pertractavit, haud est ab re aucupis” (Asinaria, 220)—“If he has fondled a nipple, he is not at all far from the birdcatcher’s trap.”
Latin Verbs of Physical Perception

Palpo becomes an important verb in this semantic area in post-classical Latin, especially in Christian writings. Up to and perhaps throughout the second century A.D., palpo appears to have had only the senses “to stroke, fondle,” “to soothe,” and “to coax,” for example: “Iacet exiguus cum ramice nervus et, quamvis tota palpetur nocte, iacebit” (Juvenal, Satires 10, 205)—“The shrunken member lies useless with ruptured veins, and although it is stroked the night through, it will continue to lie”; and “Palpare Veneris iram” (Apuleius, Metamorphoses 5, 31)—“To soothe the anger of Venus.” In its new sense, palpo encompassed much of what is expressed by grope and by the deliberative sense of feel. It may be said especially to resemble Old English (ge)grapian: both have an etymological connection to words for the hand or its action (i.e. OE grap, “grasp, grip,” and Lat. palma, “palm, hand”) and both could be used for deliberative tactile perception, i.e., “to feel (deliberately), touch, handle, probe,” as well as for the now more restricted sense of grope, “to feel about, esp. blindly.”

Palpo is used in a deliberative perceptual sense in several instances in the Vulgate, for instance:

Accessit ille ad patrem, et palpato eo, dixit Isaac: Vox quidem vox Iacob est: sed manus, manus sunt Esau. (Gn 27, 22)

(“He came near to his father, and when he had felt him, Isaac said: The voice is indeed the voice of Jacob; but the hands are the hands of Esau.”)

Likewise:

Videte manus meas, et pedes, quia ipse ego sum; palpate et videte, quia spiritus carnem et ossa non habet, sicut me videtis habere. (Lc 24, 39)

(“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bone, as you see me to have.”)

See also the following example in which palpo is used in the specific deliberative sense “to probe, explore (with the fingers)”: “Si forte aliqua praecordiorum tensio digitis palpantibus occurrerit” (Cassius Felix [c. 450 A.D.], 34, p. 74, 4)—“If any tension of the internal organs happens to meet the probing fingers.”

Interestingly, we find palpo in this period regularly associated with the sense of touch, whenever the senses, and the actions they perform, are enumerated. For instance, Irenaeus speaks of “oculus videns, ... auris audiens, ... manus palpans et operans” (Irenaeus [4th c.], Adversus haereses 5, 3, 2)—“the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the hand that feels and works”; and in Ambrosiaster we find: “Quod ... nec oculis cernitur aut manibus palpatur” (Ambrosiaster [4th c.], Commentarium in Romanis 7, 6, 4)—“That which is neither seen by the eyes nor felt by the hands.” Remarkably, the more palpo is

24 Indeed, OE (ge)grapian often translates palpo. See Chapter 4, pp. 123-4.
associated specifically with the sense of touch, the more it seems to lose its unambiguously deliberative aspect. For instance, when Prudentius refers to the sense of touch as the sensus palpandi, it seems unlikely that he conceives of it as a sense which operates solely by such deliberative actions as touching and handling:

Quid durum, quid molle foret, quid lene, quid horrens, quid calidum gelidumve, deus cognoscere nosmet ad tactum voluit palpandi interprete sensu. *(Hamartigenia, 327)*

(“God wished us to learn through contact what is hard, what soft, what smooth, what rough, what hot or cold, with the sense of touch as an interpreter.”)

Surely it is a faculty that can also perceive sensations of contact that arise involuntarily. Likewise, when Augustine uses palpo in a series of perceptual actions, palpo must have the same aspectual character as audio, olfacio, and gusto:

Ad oculos enim videre proprie pertinet: ... neque enim dicimus: audi quid rutilet, aut: olfac quam niteat, aut: gusta quam splendeat, aut: palpa quam fulgeat: videri enim dicuntur haec omnia. *(Confessiones 10, 35, 54)*

(“For ‘to see’ pertains properly to the eyes: ... for we do not say: ‘hear how red it is,’ or ‘smell how white it is,’ or ‘taste how it shines,’ or ‘feel how it flashes’: for all these things are said to be seen.”)

In this context, palpo seems experiential (when someone tells us to “feel how the wind blows,” they want us to attend to the sensation, not to attempt to grope the air). To give one final example, when the psalm says that the gilded idols “have hands and feel not”--“manus habent, et non palpabunt” (Ps 113, 14), one is inclined to interpret “palpabunt” as experiential, since the idols’ insensitivity seems more salient than their inability to handle things.25 In post-classical Latin, therefore, it appears that palpo became important as a deliberative verb of touch, and was used in this capacity perhaps more distinctly than the other deliberative verbs--i.e. tango, tempto, tracto, etc.--were in Classical Latin. In certain contexts, palpo even takes on an experiential cast.

The central verb of experiential perception through touch, however, was sentio. Carl Darling Buck and Eve Sweetser have both remarked on the fact that the Indo-European languages generally do not have distinct verbs for the sense “to perceive by touch.” but rather express this meaning through the more general verbs meaning “to perceive by the senses.”26 With the exception of palpo, this seems to be true of Latin. *Sentio* can express

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25 For a fuller discussion of this passage, see Chapter 4, pp. 129-30.

26 See Carl Darling Buck. *Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European*
the perception of such tactile impressions as hardness: "Verum magis ipsam duritiam penitus saxi sentimus in alto" (Lucretius, 4, 267)--"But rather we feel that hardness of the rock more from deep within"; or heat or burning: "Corporis, quod cum uritur non sentit, stuporem" (Cicero, *Oratio de domo sua*, 97)--"The numbness of the body that does not feel when it is burned." Furthermore, beyond the realm of simple touch, *sentio* can describe the perception of impressions not easily ascribable to a distinct sense faculty, such as external motion: "Ut ... motum terrae ... nemo pugnantium senserit" (Livy, 22.5.8)--"So that none of the fighters felt the motion of the earth"; or internal motion: "In corpore extrema pulsum venarum ... magis sentiunt" (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 2, 218)--"In the human body the extremities feel the pulse of the veins more." It also covers those actions by which the body is apprised of its own condition, such as through pain: "Qui lateris dolorem cum febre sentiunt" (Scribonius Largus, 94)--"Those who feel pain of the side with a fever"; or numbness: "Donec sentiat torpere pedem totum" (Ibid., 162)--"Until he feels that his entire foot is numb."

There are several other verbs that could express (incidentally to their other meanings) the perception of various specific sensations reflecting the condition of the body. A word like *aestuo*, for instance, which normally means "to be excessively hot, swelter" (*OLD*), might express the sense "to feel hot" in an example such as "Non est uita tanti, ut sudem, ut aestuem" (Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 1, pr.4)--"Life is not of such great value, that I sweat, that I feel hot." Opposite *aestuo* might be placed *algeo*, which can mean "to feel cold" (*OLD*), for example: "Cum uestimentis postquam aps te abii, algeo" (Plautus. *Rudens*, 528)--"I feel cold after I have departed from you with the clothes." There are verbs to describe the experiencing of other sorts of discomfort, such as *esurio*, "to feel or suffer hunger" (*OLD*): "Quando esurio, tum crepant intestina" (Plautus. *Menæchmi*, 926)--"When I feel hungry, then my intestines rumble"; or *doeleo*, "to feel or suffer pain": "Cum uarices secabantur C. Mario, dolebat" (Cicero. *Tusculanae disputationes* 2, 35)--"When C. Marius' varicose veins were cut, he felt pain." Thus there were several ways to express the experiential appraisal of internal, physical conditions.

Latin does not seem to have had a descriptive verb of touch per se (i.e. one that would express the sense "the rock feels hard / hot etc."). However, much the same meaning could be expressed with *sentio* used passively: "Ventus, si fervidus sentietur, pluribus diebus permanebit" (Pliny. *Naturalis historia* 18. 339)--"If the wind is felt to be
hot, it will remain for many days." Here "sentitur" expresses much the same notion of generalized perception (i.e. everyone who is in a position to feel the wind feels it to be hot) as the descriptive feel does.

The Latin verbs of touch are perhaps best summarized according to two different periods. In classical Latin, we find a complete split between verbs designating deliberative and experiential action. The fairly numerous deliberative verbs include tango, attingo, tempto, tracto, contracto, attrecto, and pertrecto, which, among their various other meanings, may all describe a willed seeking after a sensation of touch. Tango is especially associated with the sense faculty through the noun tactus, while tempto emphasizes the notion of testing that is inherent in any willed, perceptual action of touch. Sentio is the only experiential verb of touch in classical Latin; it may describe the apprehending of sensations arising from the sensitive bodily envelope, as well as of internal sensations. Other verbs that may express the perception of the body’s condition include aestuo, algeo, esurio, and doleo. There is no descriptive verb of touch, but the passive of sentio can perform much the same function. In the later Latin of Christian writers, a new verb enters the field, palpo. Given its classical sense of "to stroke, fondle," one expects it to act as a deliberative verb of perception, and so it does; however, it is so regularly associated with the sense of touch that it occasionally seems to express an experiential sense. It thus breaks down the strict division between deliberative and experiential verbs of touch.

**Summary**

We now have an idea of how the verbs of perception are arrayed in one ancient language. The three types of perceptual action outlined in the introduction certainly apply to the Latin verbs. We note that Latin does not use a single verb per faculty for all three types as English does with taste, smell, and feel. With the verbs of hearing, taste, and smell, both experiential and deliberative action may be expressed by the verbs audio, gusto, odoror, and olfacio, but descriptive action is expressed by the unique verbs sono, sapio, and oleo. Several verbs, such as ausculo and olfacto, only express deliberative action, although they tend to be rarer, while sentio functions as the unambiguously experiential perception verb. In classical Latin, the semantic field of touch is the only one in which there is no crossover: tango, tempto, and tracto are only deliberative, while sentio is the sole experiential verb. This may no longer be true in later Latin where, with the addition of
*palpo*, there was a verb that apparently could express both deliberative and experiential action. With these characteristics of the Latin verbs in mind, we may now turn to the Old English verbs.
Chapter 2:
Old English Verbs of Taste

We begin this survey of Old English verbs of perception with the verbs of taste. In the verbs of taste, we have evidence for the three types of perceptual action--for the involuntary reception of a sense impression of taste, for the willed seeking after such an impression, and for the descriptive use, by which a thing is said to give off a particular taste impression to whoever is there to perceive it. However, these verbs are the most poorly attested group of perception verbs that we will encounter; by consequence, this is the shortest chapter in the study. We will in fact be dealing with only two basic forms: first (ge)byrgan and the verbs formed from it, abyrgan, in(ge)byrgan, and onbyrgan, and subsequently (ge)smaeccan. Our chief difficulty with the byrgan forms will be distinguishing between the experiential and deliberative uses of the verb. There are hints of some curious developments behind (ge)smaeccan, but because of the verb's few occurrences, we only get a hint of what its full range of meanings might have been.

I should include a word about my method for assembling words here and throughout the Old English portion of this study. I began collecting possible words to be studied by consulting the recently published Thesaurus of Old English (TOE). However, the TOE, which is distilled from Bosworth-Toller and other dictionaries but does not include any material from the DOE, is a rather blunt instrument, and I have found that many of the words it cites which initially appear to relate to perception are in fact only marginally relevant to our concerns. Once having determined the words to be studied, I then attempted to find as many occurrences of them as possible using the Electronic Corpus of Old English. While it is likely that I have missed a few instances here and there, I have certainly at least looked at the majority of occurrences of each word included here. When I had assembled a number of citations that seemed to exemplify the perceptual meaning I was considering, I then studied the larger context of these citations, and, whenever possible, tracked down Latin sources (a task rendered much easier by the DOE files and notes). I consulted the DOE whenever a particular word fell within the published fascicles (A through E to date) and in several cases looked at definitions in proof; I also consulted Bosworth-Toller, the Toller Supplement, and Clark Hall. I indicate whenever a particular definition or reading comes from one of these sources.

All the Old English and Latin sources included in Chapters 2 to 5 are cited by concise titles; full references are given in the Bibliography, along with an explanation of the manner in which the text is cited, and, in the case of the Old English sources, the DOE

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short title and Cameron number. In the case of the Blickling and Vercelli Homilies, it has been more practical to give the DOE short title and Cameron number in footnotes to the passages cited.

I. (Ge)byrgan and its derivatives

Judging from the number of their attestations, (ge)byrgan and the verbs formed from it by prefixation were the most important verbs of taste in Old English, expressing both experiential and deliberative, but not descriptive, meanings. The only other obvious contender for this position is (ge)smaecan, and the record for its existence consists, with one exception, in glosses alone. However, (ge)smaecan does seem to have expressed both experiential and descriptive meanings, so at least in the latter sense it would complement, not overlap with, the meanings of the byrgan forms.

Several substantive forms were derived from the verbs, including (ge)byrging, "flavor; sense of taste" (14 occ., mainly in OE Herbarium); byrgnes, "tasting, partaking of (food or drink)" (7 occ.); gebyrg, "tasting, partaking of (food)" (1 occ.); abyrging, "sense of taste" (1 occ.). None of these nouns seems to have been as widespread as swaec, which could mean both "flavor" and "odor," or refer to the action of "tasting" or of "smelling," and in a few authors, especially Ælfric, could mean "sense of taste."

In the sections below, I will consider (ge)byrgan first and in some detail; I will then look more briefly at abyrgan, in(ge)byrgan, and onbyrgan.

A. (Ge)byrgan

(Ge)byrgan, "to taste" occurs roughly 55 times. It appears to be homophonous with (ge)byrgan, "to bury"; in at least one instance, an Old English author may pun upon the two meanings, as we will see below. When considering the perceptual meanings of (ge)byrgan, it should first be noted that the most common use of the tasting verb was not perceptual at all, but described the "sampling," "partaking of" (DOE), "eating" or "drinking" of something consumable. In some cases, the verb is accompanied by what is usually called a partitive genitive, for instance: "Nim þe þis ofæt on hand. bit his and

1 Cf. DOE, s.v. abyrging, gebyrg, byrging2, gebyrging, byrgnes2.

2 See Mitchell, Old English Syntax, §§1340-2, on the partitive genitive and the difficulties associated with determining its meanings. For a survey of Old English verbs that take the genitive, see Visser. §§ 378-91, esp. 384.
byrige" *(Genesis B, 518)*——“Take this fruit in your hand, bite and eat it”; and “Da sæde Marcellus him þæt he were Cristen and him nære alyfed þæt he birgde þara haepenra symbles” *(Martyrology, MS B, Sept. 4, 199, 2)*——“Then Marcellus told him that he was Christian and it was not permitted to him that he partake of the heathens’ feast.” While the partitive genitive may in some cases express a nuance of “[to eat] a part of [a whole],” it is not a reliable indicator of *(ge)byrgan* being used in a non-perceptual sense, for as we will see below, in “he ne moste deaþes byrigan” *(Vercelli Homily 17, 16)*, *(ge)byrgan* is probably used in a metaphorical extension of its experiential, perceptual meaning and yet it takes a genitive object. Furthermore, *(ge)byrgan* is often used with a direct object in a non-perceptual sense. As I suggested in the Introduction, while *taste* (like *gusto*) generally seems to suggest some notion of trial or tentativeness accompanying the action, *(ge)byrgan* is not always accompanied by such restrictive notions. It is thus used in several instances as an equivalent of *comedo*, “to eat up, consume,” for instance:

\[
\text{Si casu porci comedant carnem morticinorum aut sanguinem hominis non abiciendos credimus.} \quad (\text{Poenitentiale Ecgberti, 77})
\]

Gif swyn etæd myrten flæsc and mannes blod *byrige*ð, we gelyfað þæt hi swa þeah ne syn to worpenne. \quad (\text{Confessional Prayers of Pseudo-Ægbert [Junius 121], 77})

(“If swine eat carrion flesh and consume human blood, we believe that nevertheless they are not to be rejected (i.e. as unfit for human consumption).”)

Furthermore, in *Beowulf*, *(ge)byrgan* seems to describe rather enthusiastic consuming:

“Byred ðlodig wæl. *byrge*ð þenceð: etæd angenga unmurnlice” \((448)\)—“He will carry the bloody slaughtered corpse, intend to eat it up; the solitary one will devour it without remorse.” In examples such as these, *(ge)byrgan* seems to come closer than either *taste* or *gusto* to becoming a simple “eating, consuming” verb.

There are, however, at least a few instances where *(ge)byrgan* certainly refers to a perceptual action of tasting. Yet in all of these examples, it is difficult to distinguish whether the action is performed voluntarily or passively—*in other words*, whether *(ge)byrgan* describes a deliberative or experiential action of tasting. The passages are rarely phrased in such a way that the object is unambiguously presented as something newly discovered (as in “I tasted something sour”) and hence as something experientially perceived. On the other hand, it is not clear that these objects are things that someone

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3 The verb may suggest something like “eat a little bit,” but it seems unlikely that it is perceptual: the serpent is not advertising the merits of the fruit’s flavor but its remarkable powers once consumed.

4 See p. 6.
would also go out of their way to taste, thus performing the action deliberately.\textsuperscript{5}

Two of the best examples where \textit{(ge)byrgan} can be shown to refer to perceptual tasting take their ultimate inspiration from the incident described in the Gospels in which Christ is given to drink wine or vinegar, which in some of the accounts has been mixed with gall:

\textit{Et dederunt ei vinum bibere cum felle mixtum. et cum gustasset, noluit bibere.} \textit{(Mt 27, 34)}\textsuperscript{6}

There are several Old English translations of this passage, including one in an unpublished homily:

\begin{quote}
And hi sealdan him win drincan wid geallan gemenged, and þa da he hit \textit{byriðe}, þa nolde he hit drincan. \textit{(Homily, Palm Sunday [Bodley 340], 197)}
\end{quote}

(“And they gave him to drink wine mixed with gall, and when he had tasted it, he did not wish to drink it.”)

The action described here by \textit{(ge)byrgan} (and by \textit{gusto}) must be perceptual: Christ refuses to drink the wine when he discovers that there is gall mixed into it. What is not clear from the context is whether “byrgde” means “took a small amount into his mouth in order to taste” or simply “perceived the flavor of,” since the object “hit” could refer just to the wine or to the flavor of gall in the wine. My inclination is to interpret it as deliberative, because the event is told from an essentially external point of view. Since elsewhere in the narrative, we are not privy to the characters’ thoughts and impressions, we can probably assume here that Christ is observed taking in the unpleasant mixture, but not actually

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{5} Ultimately, such difficulties in aspect would only be clarified if Old English was an ergative language (such as Basque), which distinguishes, on the level of grammar, whether an action is performed intentionally or involuntarily.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{6} The incident recalls Ps 68. 22: “Et dederunt in esca mea fel et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto”\textsuperscript{-}“And they gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Mc 15, 23 and Lc 23, 26 also describe the soldier giving Christ wine or vinegar to drink and in Mc, he is said to refuse it: “Et dabant ei bibere murratum vinum et non acceptit”\textsuperscript{-}“And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh, but he took it not.” Mt 27, 48, Mc 15, 36, and Lc 23, 26 also recount how Christ is offered vinegar moments before dying on the cross. Only Mt 27, 34 refers to him actually tasting the mixture.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{7} “Gustasset” is translated by “onbyrigde” in the Corpus version of the West Saxon \textit{Gospels} and by “onbyrede” in the Hatton; by “inbergde” in the Rushworth \textit{Gospels} and by “gebirigde vel gesap” in the \textit{Lindisfarne Gospels}. \textit{(Ge)}\textit{supan} elsewhere appears to mean only “to sup, take [fluid] into the mouth” (Bosworth-Toller, s.v. \textit{supan}; c.f. \textit{OED}, s.v. \textit{sup}: “to take [liquid] into the mouth in small quantities [as opposed to a draught]”)-although one might compare “gustaturas geberigdon vel gesupedon weron” (\textit{Lindisfarne Gospels}, Mark chapter heading gloss. 28). I do not include it in my discussion of Old English verbs of taste.
\end{quote}
discerning its composition.8

In one of the two passages inspired by this biblical event, (ge)byrgan has more of an experiential character. Here Christ is portrayed chiding the unrepentant on Doomsday:

Cildlica sceama ic gępafode and eal menisc sar ic dęrowode, and ic gępafode þæt me man mid bradum handum sough on mìn neb, and ecceed and geallan ic birigde.... Eal þas sar ic gędrowode for ðe, þæt ic tiode þæt þu an hefenum rixsode. (Nicodemus Homily [CCCC 41], 34, 37)

(“I endured the indignity of childhood and suffered all human pain, and I endured that man struck me with broad hands on my face, and man spat foul spit on my face and I tasted vinegar and gall. All this pain I suffered for you, when I endeavored that you prevailed in heaven.”)

Throughout the passage, Christ describes his earthly tenure as something which he has passively suffered and endured. It follows that when he speaks of tasting vinegar and gall, he means something like “I suffered or endured the flavor of vinegar and gall” (rather than “I deliberately tasted vinegar and gall [as an additional self-affliction].”) (Ge)byrgan is probably experiential here, and might be specifically defined “to experience the flavor of.”

In the second passage, from one of the Confessional Prayers, (ge)byrgan seems to be more deliberative:

Min drihten, si þe þanc þæs þe þu mid þinum þy clænan muþe & tungan ecceed & geallan byrgdest. Forgïf me for þære eadmodnesse þines muþes eallæ þa biernesse þe ic æfre æt þine heorte gefremede obþe ic æfre mid muþe to unnyte cwæde. (Confessional Prayers [Royal 2B, v], 13)

(“My lord, be thanks to you because you tasted vinegar and gall with your pure mouth and tongue. Forgive me through the mildness of your mouth all the bitterness that I ever committed toward your heart or I ever said vainly with my mouth.”)

Although at first there may seem to be little to choose between this passage and the one above, one notes that it is not set so obviously in the context of Christ’s passive suffering. The fact that the confessor thanks the Lord for tasting vinegar and gall suggests that the Lord did so deliberately. Indeed, the passage should probably be understood in a broader sense: in referring to the action of tasting vinegar, the confessor invokes the larger retributive act willingly performed by God on behalf of mankind. (Ge)byrgan may well be deliberative here.

There is one final example, where (ge)byrgan describes perceptual tasting, in the Letter of Alexander:

Pa we to þære ea cwomân, ða het ic for þæm unarefedlican þurste ... mine fyrd reste & wician. Mid þy we ða gewicod hæfdon ða wolde ic minne

8 Of course, as a counter-argument, one might say that Christ could be observed registering the flavor of the drink. These sorts of examples are ultimately unresolvable.
“When we came to the river, because of (our) great thirst, I ordered my army to rest and make camp. When we had made camp, I wished to moisten and cool my thirst. When I tasted that water, it was more bitter and harsh to drink than any I had ever tasted.”

While again the experiential and deliberative aspects of (ge)byrgan are difficult to distinguish, the phrasing suggests that in the first instance “bergde” is deliberative: Alexander tries the water for its taste, a test which reveals its extreme bitterness. In the second instance, however, “bergde” seems experiential: Alexander compares the flavor of the water to all the other waters whose flavor he has ever had the experience of tasting, not the other waters he has had the experience of testing. I am especially inclined to interpret the first instance of “bergde” as deliberative because the sensory information gleaned (i.e. that the water is bitter and harsh) is not made the grammatical object of the verb, but occurs in a separate part of the sentence. In the Latin, the verb is more obviously experiential: “Sitim leuare cupiens, amariore[\textit{m}]/ellabor[\textit{o}]/fluminis aquam gustavi” (Epistola Alexandri, 13, 2)—“Wishing to relieve my thirst, I tasted the water of the river (to be) more bitter than hellebore.”

As we saw earlier, (ge)byrgan is most commonly used in the non-perceptual senses of “to sample, partake of, eat or drink,” which all designate willed, dynamic actions. Since this is so, it is tempting to think that as a verb of perception (ge)byrgan was primarily deliberative, and that all the ambiguous cases above should be so interpreted. We can, however, be reassured that the verb was also used of experiential actions, because the experiential sense “to perceive through taste, experience the flavor of” is behind several of the figurative or transferred meanings of (ge)byrgan. In one instance, in Bede’s History, (ge)byrgan is used of the sweetness of a smell:

9 The rapidity and ease with which (ge)byrgan can switch between senses of tasting involuntarily, tasting deliberately, and simply ingesting is demonstrated by the fact that a few sentences later (ge)byrgan is used simply as “to drink”:

Milites quoque nunc ferramenta lambendo, nunc oleum gustando dfi\textit{ram} ...
\textit{sitim auferre conabantur}. Utidimus etiam plerosque ... suam ipsam urinam uexatos ultimis necessitatibus haurentes. (13, 14)

Da men bonne hwilum hie \textit{\textipa{p}} iren geloman liccovan. hwilum hie ele byrgdon & on bon bone grimmn burst celdon. Sume men bonne ... \textit{\textipa{p}}a wætan for \textit{\textipa{p}}æm nyde pigdon. (13, 15)

(“Then in some cases the men licked their iron implements, in others they drank oil, and so quenched their harsh thirst. Then some of the men, in their need, drank their urine.”)
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Et odoris flagrantia miri tanta de loco effundebatur, ut is, quem antea degustans quasi maximum rebar, iam permodicus mihi odor uideretur. (Bede, Historia 5, 12, 494, 4)

Swylce eac of ðære stowe swa micel swetnes wundorlices stænces wæs onsended, þæt siþ swætnis, þæc þy[r]igde10 & me micel þuhte, in ða witgemetisse þæs æfteran leochtæs & beorhtnesæ wæs lytel & medmicel gesewen. (Bede's History 5, 12, 430, 18)11

(“Likewise, a sweetness so great of marvelous smell was emitted from that place, that the sweemess, which I had savored and had seemed great to me, seemed little and middling in comparison to the following light and brightness.”)

I am inclined to agree with the DOE and treat this instance as a sense of “to savor” (i.e. “to experience pleasurably or enjoy as (if) a flavor”) which is transferred from the basic sense of “to taste,” rather than as a particular development of (ge)byrgan as “to smell”--particularly since “byrigde” translates “degustans.” One notes as well that the Old English passage tends to mix different types of sensory impressions, so that the sweetness of earlier smell is compared to the brightness of the new place. This particular nonce use of (ge)byrgan would thus come out of the verb’s experiential taste meanings.

So too would a broader, metaphorical sense of (ge)byrgan, “to obtain knowledge of, experience” (DOE), that often echoes a Latin phrase from the Vulgate, gusto mortem. e.g. “Qui non gustabunt mortem” (Mt 16, 28)—“That shall not taste death.” See, for example:

Simeon ... þære andswære onfeng fram þam halgan gaste, & he him cydde & sægde þæt he ne moste deâdes byrigan ær he mid his eagem dryhten gesæge. (Vercelli Homily 17. 15)12

(“Simeon ... received the answer from the Holy Spirit, and it proclaimed to him and said that he could not experience death before he saw the Lord with his eyes.”)

The passage paraphrases Lc 2, 26: “Et responsum acceperat ab Spiritu Sancto non visurum se mortem nisi prius videret Christum Domini”—“And he had received an answer from the

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10 MS T has “bregde”; O has “bregde” corrected to “byrigde” with “y” inserted and first “e” changed to “i”; B and Ca have “byrigde.”

11 The Latin passage continues: “Sicut etiam lux illa campi florentis eximia, in comparatione eius quae nunc apparuit lucis, tenuissima prorsus uidebatur et parua.” The Old English translation transfers parts of this second phrase into the first; it then is obliged to repeat: “Swylce eac swelce þæt leohæ & seo biorhtnes æs blœstmiendan fledes wæs medmicel gesewen in ðære stowe wynsumnesse”—“So too the light and brightness of the blooming field seemed middling in the delight of that place.”

12 [L.5 i.9 (PurifMaryVerc 17); B3.3.19]. We note that (ge)byrgan is used here with a genitive object, and yet is used in what is essentially an extension of its experiential, perceptual meaning.
Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord"; but the idea of tasting death must come from one of the other Gospel passages. The phrase was not transferred lifeless into Old English. We also find it in the *Dream of the Rood*: “Deode he þæt byrigde, hwædere eft dryten aras mid his miclan mihte mannum to helpe” (101)—“He tasted death there, yet the Lord rose again to help men with his great power.” C. J. E. Ball suspects there may be a pun here on *(ge)byrgan* “to bury.”

The verbs formed from *(ge)byrgan* by prefixation--*abyrgan*, *in(ge)bygun*, and *onbyrgcn*—seem to express meanings that fall well within the sense range encompassed by the basic form. These verbs do not contribute much more to what we have already observed about *(ge)byrgan* as a verb of taste, and I will treat them concisely.

**B. Abyrgan**

Of the twenty-three occurrences of *abyrgan* assembled by the *DOE*, most seem to exemplify only the non-perceptual sense of “to taste, partake of (something as food or drink)” (*DOE*). One example is found in Ælfric’s version of Abbo’s account of the death of St. Edmund:

Pa læg se græga wulf ... and mid his twam fotum hæfde þæt heafod beclypped, grædig and hungrig, and for Gode ne dorste þæs heafdes abyrian.  

(“There the grey wolf lay and had embraced the head with its two feet, greedy and hungry, and did not dare taste the head.”)

“Taste” here seems the appropriate translation, because what the example suggests is that the wolf did not dare as much as to taste--i.e. to nibble, take a bit of, or even to touch--the head. Indeed, with *abyrgan*, one has the impression that the verb is more often used in a restrictive sense of “to take a (very little) bit of” than is *(ge)byrgan*. For an additional example of this restrictive sense, one might cite the following passage:

13 The phrase *gusto mortem* occurs in Mt 16, 28; Mc 8, 39; Lc 9, 27; and Ls 8, 52. I have not found evidence that “gustaret” is used in place of “videret” in any of the Old Latin variants of Lc 2, 26.


15 Cf. “Quippe immanis lupus eo loci ... est repertus, qui illud sacrum caput inter brachia complexus procumbebat humi, ... quod inuiolabile ... oblita uoracitate seruabat attentus” (Abbo of Fleury, *Passio sancti Eadmundi*, 12, 40).
Pa nyste na Jonabas þæs cincges sunu, þæt hit swa geboden wæs eallan þam folce, ah abyrgde þa on þam lande anes dropan huniges. (Homily “Be mistican gelimpan” [Napier 36], 174, 13) 16

(“Jonathan the king’s son did not know that it had so been commanded to all the people, but he tasted a single drop of honey in the land.”)

The prohibition that Jonathan unwittingly violates is that no one should eat until evening has come (cf. “Maledictus vir qui comederit panem usque ad vesperam” [1 Sm 14, 24]—“Cursed be the man that shall eat food till evening”); abyrgan expresses the slightness with which the prohibition has been broken.

The only respect in which abyrgan reflects a perceptual meaning is when it is used in the metaphorical sense of “to obtain knowledge of, experience,” which we saw above for (ge)byrgan and which is often used of death:

Hit bið þonne swa swa Crist cweð þæt nan wer ne wifadæ ne wif ne ceorlað, ne team bið getymed, ne hi deadeæ abyrical syðdan, ac beoð englum gelice. (Ælféric, Catholic Homilies I, 16, 312, 136) 17

(“It will then be just as Christ said that no man will take a wife, nor wife a husband, nor will the family be propagated, nor will they experience death, but they will be like angels.”)

Here the action described by abyrgan is passive in aspect, and logically would seem to come out of the experiential perceptual sense “to perceive or experience through taste,” even though we find no attestations of this literal meaning.

C. In(ge)byrgan

The form in(ge)byrgan occurs apparently only three times, and only in the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels. However, in contrast to abyrgan, each of these occurrences is relevant to perceptual tasting. One is a gloss of a Latin passage we have already seen:

Et dederunt ei vinum bibere cum felle mixtum, et cum gustasset, noluit bibere.

& sealdun him win drincan wið gallan gemænged & þa he inberdige nolde

16 Cf. I Sm 14, 27: “Extenditque summitatem virgae quam habebat in manu et intinxit in favo melliis et convertit manum suam ad os suum”—“And he put forth the end of the rod, which he had in his hand, and dip it in a honeycomb: and he carried his hand to his mouth.”

17 Cf. Lc 20, 35: “Illi autem qui digni habebuntur saeculo illo et resurrectione ex mortuis neque nubunt neque ducunt uxorres, neque enim ultra mori poeterunt, aequales enim angelis sunt”—“But they that shall be accounted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married, nor take wives. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels.”
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he drincan. (Rushworth Gospels, Mt 27, 34)\(^{18}\)

("And they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, and when he had tasted, he did not wish to drink.")

As I argued before, although it is difficult to say for certain, the verb should probably be interpreted as deliberative, because the story is narrated from a consistently external point of view. The other two instances of \textit{in(ge)byrgan} occur in the two texts' respective glosses of John 2.8-10, which describes Christ's miraculous transforming of water into wine at the wedding at Cana:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Et dicit eis Iesus, “Haurite nunc et ferte architriclino,” et tulerunt. Ut autem gustavit architriclinus aquam vinum factam et non sciebat unde esset, ... vocat sponsum architriclinus et dicit ei, “Omnis homo primum bonum vinum ponit et cum inebriati fuerint tunc id quod deterius est; tu servasti bonum vinum usque adhuc.”} (Io 2, 8)
\end{quote}

("And Jesus saith to them: ‘Draw out now and carry to the chief steward of the feast.’ And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, ... the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him: ‘Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now.’")

I cite slightly less of the \textit{Rushworth Gospels} gloss:

\begin{quote}
& cwæð him ðe hælend, “Biriligæ ðu & brengæ ðæm aldormen.” & to-gibrohtun, þæt wutudlice \textit{inberigde} ðæ aldormen ðæt wæter to wine giworden & ne wiste hwona were.\(^{19}\)
\end{quote}

\textit{Gusto,} and hence \textit{in(ge)byrgan,} \textit{must} describe a perceptual action: something in the wine itself has made the \textit{architriclinus} or \textit{ealdormann} sit up and take notice. But again it is difficult to say whether the action is experiential or deliberative. It partially depends on what this officer’s role is perceived to be. The Douay calls him the “chief steward”; if this is the correct translation, then undoubtedly as head of the waiting staff, one of his roles would have been to taste the wine before it was served, and that is why Christ instructs the waiters to bring the wine to him.\(^{20}\) On the other hand, the Old English text’s rendering of \textit{architriclinus as ealdormann} suggests that the Anglo-Saxon glossator believed him to be

\footnotesize

18 \textit{Lindisfarne} has “gebirigde vel gesep”; see note 9 above.

19 The \textit{Lindisfarne Gospels} have “ingeberigde vel ingebarg.” How may we account for this hesitation between weak and strong verb formations of the preterite?

20 Lewis & Short describe \textit{architriclinus} (“one that presides at the table, master of a feast”) as a “vox hybrida,” equal to \textit{tricliniarches} (“a chief servant who has charge of the table”); it is composed of the Greek elements \textit{archi-} (“head, chief”) and \textit{triclinus}, from \textit{triclinium} (“an eating couch” or “dining room”).
some important personage officiating, rather than serving, at the feast. The wine would thus be brought to him first simply in recognition of his status. In that case, the *ealdormann* might not bother to test or sample the wine; he would simply drink it, unaware that there is anything unusual about it until it is in his mouth. If all this is true, then “gustavit” would be deliberative in sense, but “inberigde” experiential. However, the syntax might suggest just the opposite interpretation. The Douay translation treats the clause beginning with *ut* as a temporal clause meaning something like “and when” or “as soon as”; this seems correct to me, as the verb is in the perfect indicative. This suggests that the phrase means “as soon as he perceived the taste of it,” which of course entails an experiential meaning for “gustavit.” However, if we trust the syntax of the gloss, the Old English treats “ut” as introducing a purpose (or result?) clause by translating it “þæt” (this is even more definite in *Lindisfarne*, which glosses “ut” as “þætte vel miðdy”). This would have the phrase meaning “They brought him the wine in order that he taste it,” which is experiential. The exact meaning of this example may well be irretrievable. What we have learned, however, is that *ingeþyrgan* is particular to perceptual tasting, that it is used deliberatively (as we saw in the previous example), and that it also might be used experientially (as we see here).

21 The DOE gives the general definition of *ealdormann* as “someone in authority over others.” This of course could describe a chief steward; however, in most cases, the word *ealdormann* seems to be used of the person who has the highest authority in a particular group. One would thus not expect it to be used of someone like a steward who, although he has authority over other servants, is subordinate to the people he serves.

As for other treatments of *architriclinus* in Old English, Ælfric in his paraphrase and exegesis of the passage uses the term *dryhtealdor* (*Catholic Homilies* II, 4, 29, 17, etc.), which literally means “noble chief” and which also sounds too grand to be used of the chief servant; the DOE defines *dryhtealdor* “best man, friend of the bridegroom, used of one who acts as majordomo or lord of the feast at a wedding banquet,” thus more like a master of ceremonies than a chief wine taster. In another (anonymous) homily, *architriclinus* seems to have been misunderstood for a proper name: “On sunnandæg worhte drihten win of wætere in Architriclines huse” (*Homily* “Sermonem angelorum nomina” [Napier 45, 230, 21])—“On Sunday the Lord made wine from water in Architricline’s house.”

Only in *Abbo’s Bella Parisiaca urbis Gloss* do we find a definite description of the role of the *architriclinus* as it relates to wine. The Latin says “Colit architriclinus amicale amineum”—“The chief steward cultivates an agreeable Aminian (wine),” which the Old English glosses. “Begæð beorscipes ealdor gecweme win”—“The master of the banquet attends to the agreeable wine” (110, 6). But rather than indicating that *architriclinus* was a familiar word, this highlights its obscurity, for, as Lindsay remarks in the introduction to the edition, “Abbo ... deliberately concocted a Latin poem out of the obscurest words in the *Scholia Graeca* (and other glossaries) to puzzle his readers” (viii). It is quite possible, therefore, that the role of the *architriclinus* was generally unknown to the Old English glossators and translators of John 2.

22 Cf. Lewis & Short, s.v. *ut*, II, B, 1: “Introducing a temporal clause, the principal predicate being an immediate sequence. ... with perf. indic.”
D. Onbyrgan

Onbyrgan occurs around 100 times; it seems to be especially favored by Ælfric. Many of its occurrences show just the non-perceptual sense of “to partake of, eat, drink,” for example: “He nawiht ne onbyrigde buton berene hlaf and wæter” (Life of St. Guthlac [Cotton Vespasian D. xxi], 4, 118, 28)23—“He ate nothing except a barley loaf and water.” As the example suggests, onbyrgan may have had something of the same restrictive sense we observed in ab-wgæuz of “to take or eat a (very little) bit of.” One might also cite the following passage:

Gif ana wyrm on men weaxe, smire mid þære blacan sealfe. Gif he ut þurh ete & þyrel gewyrce, genim huniges dropan, drype on þæt þyrel, hafa þonne gebrocan glass gëara gërgunden, scead on þæt þyrel, þonne sona swa he þæs onbirigð þonne swilt he. (Bald’s Leechbook 2, 46, 114, 13)

(“If ana-worm grows on men, smear with the black salve. If it eats all the way out and makes a hole, take a drop of honey, drip on the hole, have then broken glass ready ground, sprinkle on the hole, then as soon as it eats a little bit of it, it will die.”)

Presumably what is meant here is that the worm will die as soon as it consumes a little bit of the honey spiked with glass.

There are, however, a few instances where onbyrgan refers to perceptual actions. For instance, in Alfred’s translation of Boethius, it appears to be experiential:

Hwæt, seo leo. þeah hio wel tam se, ... & hire magister swide lufige & eac ondræde. gif hit æfre gebyred þæt heo blodes onbirigð. heo forgit sona hire niwan taman, & gemonð þæs wildan gewunan hire eldrana. (Alfred, Boethius’ Consolation, 25, 57, 8)

(“Lo, the lion, though it be well-tamed, and greatly love and also fear its master, if it ever happens that it tastes blood, it forgets its new tameness and recalls the wild habits of its ancestors.”)

Certainly, the lion’s reversion to its natural fierceness is provoked by the chance tasting of blood, rather than by any intended action; this is supported by the wording of the original: “Si cruor horrida tinxerit ora, resides olim redeunt animi” (Boethius, Consolatio 3, m.2, 11)—“If horrid blood wets their mouths, their previously sluggish spirits revive.”

Onbyrgan probably means something like “to perceive the taste of.” The verb seems to have a similar experiential sense, although in a metaphorical context, in the Vercelli Homilies:

Eall we sceolon efestan to Godes templum swa swide swa ða bion doð to hira hyfe. to þam þæt we magon getrewlice onbyrgæan þa swetnesse þæs

23 Cf. “Excepta ordeacei panis particula et lutulentae aquae pociumento ... nullius alicuius alimenti usibus vescetur” (Felix, Vita sancti Guthlaci, 28. 94)
gastlican huniges of dam godcundum rædingum. (Vercelli Homily 19, 77)24

(“We must all hasten to God’s temple as greatly (numerously?) as the bees do to their hive, in order that we can truly taste the sweetness of the spiritual honey from the divine readings.”)

Onbyrgan appears to be experiential here because it is the sensation of sweetness, rather than the honey itself, which is the verb’s object. Literally the verb means here “to experience or perceive the taste of,” while its metaphorical meaning is more like “to experience the benefits of.”

Onbyrgan is subject to the same sort of figurative uses that we have examined above, particularly that of “tasting death.” However, there is one passage in which onbyrgan is used in a rather different way from how we have seen so far. The verb appears prominently at the opening of Solomon and Saturn:

Saturnus cwæd:
“Hwæt! Ic iglanda eallra hæbbe bocan onbyrged þurh gebregdstasas, larcæftas onlocen Libia and Greca, swylce eac istoriam Indea rices. (1)

(“Saturn said: “Lo! I have tasted the books of all the islands through learned arts. unlocked the knowledge of Libia and Greece, as well as the history of the realm of India.”)

The use of onbyrgan here seems to be somewhat akin to the sense “to experience,” but it may carry a more dynamic aspect, something more like “to try out, go through,” perhaps even “to immerse oneself in.” It might then be an extension of the deliberative sense “to seek to taste. taste intentionally.”

As we have seen above, besides their non-perceptual meanings of “to sample, partake of, eat or drink,” the byrgan forms could also refer to perceptual actions; however, in many cases it is difficult to distinguish whether the verb is being used experientially or deliberatively. Perhaps this is because tasting is the perceptual action over which we have the most control. Almost every experience of sensation within the mouth must first be preceded by a willed and externally visible action performed by the perceiver, by which he or she introduces something into the mouth from outside. Since it is always possible to observe this willed, dynamic action of taking in, the deliberative aspect of the perceptual action probably remains more salient in all but the most obviously experiential examples.

24 [HomS 34 (Verc 19); B3.2.34]. Cf. “Credimus enim quod uos uelit apes prudentissimas ad aluearium suum voluntariae festinetis ad aeclesiam Dei ut dulcedinem spiritalis mellis ex diuinis lectionibus fideliter pergustetis” (Homiliary [Pembroke 25], 319).
II. *(Ge)*smæccan, *smæc*, and *swæc*

*(Ge)*smæccan, it seems, barely got recorded in Old English at all. Yet although it only occurs in four places, Old English *(ge)*smæccan does exemplify the two most important meanings given by the *OED* for the verb *smack*, that is, both the descriptive, intransitive meaning:

Of food, liquor, etc.: To taste (well or ill); to have a (specified) taste or flavour; to taste or savour of something;

and the experiential, transitive meaning:

Of persons: To perceive by the sense of taste.²⁵

*(Ge)*smæccan is of special interest to us because it shows that the Anglo-Saxons did have a verb that expressed the general giving off of a gustatory impression, so that they could say that something *tastes*, as well as that they could *taste* it.

The descriptive meaning seems fairly well attested. Ælfric uses it twice as part of a translation definition of Latin *sapio*:

Sume word habbað ane geendunge and ane declinunge and habbað ma andgytu: ... *sapio*, ic wat ódde ic gesmæccce. (Ælfric. Grammar. 221. 9)²⁶

(“Some words have one ending and one declension, and have several meanings: *sapio*, ‘I know’ or ‘I taste of.’”)

The two senses that Ælfric recognizes in *sapio* constitute one of the more arresting dual meanings in Latin. From its original sense of “to taste of,” *sapio* apparently passed into “to have taste or discernment,” then “to be intelligent, show good sense,” and finally “to know, understand” (*OLD*). Since Ælfric is noting two distinct meanings of *sapio*, and since *(ge)*witan commonly means “to know, understand,” it follows that *(ge)*smæccan means “to taste of” or perhaps “to taste (well or ill).”

Likewise, there is little reason to doubt the experiential meaning of *(ge)*smæccan. We find it used in this way in a homily, where it is used figuratively of Mary, who tastes Christ’s sweetness:

Heo understod ealle þa word þære ænglen, & þære herdan, & þære

²⁵ *OED*, s.v. *smack*, v.¹ The *OED* also cites the variant forms *smake* and *smatch*, and cites the Old English examples under *smatch*.

²⁶ See also: “Seo forme *praeteritum* gæð dus: ... *sapio*, ic wat ódde ic smæccce, *sapiui* vel *sapui*, *sapidum*, etc.” (166. 6).
tunplwitegan, & eac forðen þæs sylfen hælendes, & heold gemyndelice
on hire heorte. Næfre ær ne æfter, nan oder swa forðlice ne gesmahte,
hwu swote is ure Drihten. (Homily “In festis sancte Marie,” 138, 13)²⁷

(“She understood all the words of the angels, and of the shepherds, and of the wise
men, and consequently also of the savior himself, and she held (them) thoughtfully in
her heart. Never before nor after, did anyone else ever taste how sweet our lord is.”)

This meaning is corroborated by the gloss: “ardamo²⁸.i. gusto, ic gesmece” (Antwerp
Glossaries, 52, 2).

That is all we can ascertain directly about the verb. As for smæc, the related noun,
it apparently occurs only four times, although a search through the textual variants of swae
might reveal more instances of it. Interestingly, the meanings of smæc hint that
(ge)smæccan might not have been just a verb of taste, but a verb of smell as well. In three
glosses, smæc describes a perceptual quality (rather than a sense faculty). In two of these,
it clearly means “flavor, taste.” One gloss is especially expansive: “in palato: in goman,
þær mon þone smæc todaleþ” (Cleopatra Glossary I, 255, 325)²⁹—“in the palate, where
one distinguishes flavor.” The second is also fairly clear: “nectar: win, þone swetan
smæc” (Ibid., 325, 136)³⁰—“wine, the sweet flavor.” In the third gloss, however, it
apparently means both “flavor” and “scent”: “dulcis sapa, id est dulcis odor: swete smæc”
(Harley Glossary, D 816)³¹—“sweet new wine, that is, sweet scent: sweet ‘smack.’”

Finally, in Alfred’s version of the Soliloquies, smæc obviously describes a sense faculty,
but it is not clear which one:

Ic þe bydde, drihten, ... bu þe we ne magon lichamlice ongytam [sic].
naper ne mid eagum, ne mid s[we]ce, ne mid earum, ne mid smece, ne mid
hrine. (Augustine’s Soliloquies 1. 6, 6)³²

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²⁸ The MLD records ardamo, “to taste,” and cites only this source (s.v. ardamare); it marks
the verb with a dagger (or obelisk), which, as the editors explain in their introductory notes,
“indicates a suspicion (sometimes amounting to certainty) that the form of a particular word
is due to a misprint, a misreading, or a scribal error.”
²⁹ The source of the lemma is probably Aldhelm’s Enigma 100, 31: “Dulcior in palato
quam lenti nectaris haustus.”
³⁰ The source of the lemma is probably Aldhelm’s De virginitate (verse), 2505: “Atque
bibens nectar nudabitur turpe veretrum.”
³¹ Sapor has been read for sapa, which would make even better sense. However, if it is
dulcis sapor, “swete smece” might then just be a gloss for it alone, and not for dulcis odor.
³² Cf. “Deus ... quem sensus ignorat” (Augustine, Soliloquia 1. 6, 25)—“God whom
The difficulty is distinguishing smæc from swæc. Swæc can mean either “taste” or “smell.” One might be inclined to solve this problem by giving smæc the meaning which relates to its use in the Cleopatra Glossary, i.e. “sense of taste.” However, later on in the Soliloquies, swæc is used again in an enumeration of the senses, and this time it contrasts with stenc, which unambiguously means “sense of smell”:

Me þincð nu þæt þu ne truwe þam utran gewitte, naðer ne þam eæum. ne þam earum. ne þam stencce, ne þam [w]ece. ne þam hrinunge.

(Augustine’s Soliloquies 1. 18. 18)33

(“It seems to me now that you do not trust your outer senses, neither the eyes, nor the ears, nor the smell, nor the taste, nor the touch.”)

Since swæc must mean “sense of taste” here, it follows that it means “sense of taste” in the earlier passage, leaving smæc with the meaning “sense of smell.” While the evidence here is somewhat muddled, it suggests that smæc and therefore possibly (ge)smæccan were not limited to the faculty of taste, but could describe that of smell as well.

Of the 80 or so occurrences of the noun swæc, the same number of examples, roughly 35, refer obviously to “smell” as refer to “taste,” while another 10 cannot be readily identified. Within a given work or author, swæc is generally used consistently for one of the two types of sense perception. Ælfric uses it often for the faculty of taste:

On ðam muðe we habbad swæec and toenawad hwæðer hit bið þe wered, de biter. þæt we ðicgad. (Catholic Homilies II, 23 [DOE: 26], 214. 47)

(“In the mouth we have taste and discern whether that which we eat is sweet or bitter.”)

He uses it equally often to describe the quality of that which is tasted, that is, its “flavor”: “on swæce swettran þonne beona hunig” (Catholic Homilies II, 10, 83, 68)—“in flavor sweeter than the honey of bees.” However, in a single instance, Ælfric uses it for that which is perceived by the nose, a “scent” or “odor”:

Ic þær wynsume stemne ormætes dreames gehyrde and wundorlices bræðes swæc of þære stowe utfloew. (Catholic Homilies II, 21 [DOE: 23], 201, 66)

(“I heard there the pleasant sound of great song and the scent of a marvelous odor

physical sense does not know.” Here as elsewhere the manuscript has “spece” for “swæce,” a not uncommon confusion of the letter wynn for “p”.

33 Cf. “Respues igitur in hac causa omne testimonium sensuum?” (Ibid. 1. 18. 34)—“Do you reject in this matter all the evidence of the senses?”
This is the meaning of *swæc* that is most common outside of Ælfric by a ratio of about four to one. In the three times that *swæc* occurs in poetry, it always means a "scent, odor, or smell" that has the quality of flowing outward as a vapor: “Him of muðe cwom swecca swectast” (*Guthlac B*, 1271) -- “The sweetest of smells came from his mouth.” One might argue that *swæc* only means the “faculty of taste” when used in formal, schematizing discussions, and it otherwise designated a broader, less precise sense impression which encompassed both tastes and scents, often associated and mutually enforcing.

**Summary**

I will now briefly summarize the findings of this chapter.

The *byrgan* verbs are clearly the central verbs of taste in Old English. Their perceptual meanings are well established, despite their more common non-perceptual uses of “to partake of, eat, drink.” While no definite dialectal pattern emerges from their attestations, it is clear that Ælfric favors *onbyrgan*, and this verb may be generally characteristic of Late West Saxon.

(*Ge)byrgan*, when it is used of eating, seems to go beyond *taste* and *gusto* to the point that it does not imply anything limited about the manner in which the food or drink is taken in: it can mean “to consume” and even “devour.” It is however used in a number of examples where it describes both experiential and deliberative actions. It is also employed in the figurative phrase “to taste death,” which associates the idea of first-hand knowledge with the intimate physical experience of taste.

*Abyr gan* is used mainly in the non-perceptual “partaking of” sense; more than *(ge)byrgan*, it might express the restrictive idea of “to take (a very little) bit of.” It relates to perception only in its figurative experiential sense of “to obtain knowledge of, experience.”

*In(ge)byrgan* occurs just three times in the Northumbrian and Mercian glosses. Nevertheless, in each of these occurrences, it clearly relates to perception, both in the deliberative sense, “to test by the sense of taste,” and the experiential, “to perceive by the sense of taste.” Our discussion here involved us in the question of whether the Anglo-Saxons understood what the exact role was of the obscure official called an *architriciticus*.

*Onbyrgan* shows a range of meanings very similar to that of *(ge)byrgan*: most uses are of the non-perceptual consuming sort; however, it too is used of experiential and deliberative types of perceptual actions. In one case, it shows the unusual figurative sense of “to try out” or possibly “to immerse oneself in (books on learned subjects).”

The remaining Old English verb of taste, *(ge)smaecan*, occurs four times. It seems
to have been the only verb of taste to express the descriptive sense “to taste of,” and it could express the experiential sense as well. However, the behavior of the related noun *smaec* suggests that *(ge)*smaecan might not have been limited to the faculty of taste, but could have extended to smell as well. Certainly, the rather similar sounding noun *swæc* relates to both faculties, and in the next chapter, we will see that geswæccan may also have been used for both faculties.
When we examine the Old English verbs of smell, we are quickly made aware of the fragmentary and often inconclusive nature of the evidence. Within its limits, however, several key points regarding the structure of the semantic field do emerge. Most importantly, we find that the best attested verb, (ge)stincan, could express actions within all three of the basic uses we have been exploring—that is, the experiential, the deliberative, and the descriptive. We also find that there are a number of verbs that designate just the descriptive use, including reocm, styman, aemian, bladesian, and hrenian. However, almost all of these verbs, including (ge)stincan, seem to take their origins from an especially dynamic conception of the manner in which smells are emitted and diffused; this underlying conception belies such perceiver-based definitions of the descriptive use as “to convey an impression to the faculty of smell.” The persistent pattern of development among these verbs seems to have been to go from the sense “to emit vapor (i.e. smoke or steam)” to that of “to emit odor.” This suggests that the Anglo-Saxons thought of smells as vaporous bodies emanating from a source, in the manner of (and sometimes indistinguishably from) steam or smoke.¹

As our first concern is to determine which words belong to the field, I should point out that the TOE lists the verbs epian, gestincan, and geswæccun (§02.05.08) under the meaning “to smell, perceive by smell.” Of these three, epian should probably be excluded. Although the “E” fascicle of the DOE (published in 1996) gives it the sense “to smell (any odour),” there is good reason to doubt this meaning, as I explain in my footnote.²

¹ For a survey of the broader Germanic smell words characterized by this notion, see Francis Wood, “The Semasiology of Words for ‘Smell’ and ‘See’,” Publications of the Modern Language Society 14 (1899), pp. 300-14. I do not know if our own locutions of smell reveal a single coherent conception of the nature and spread of odors. However, one current of speech seems to describe smells as the insubstantial, olfactory traces “given off” by an object and conveyed on currents of air (“I caught a whiff of the barbecue”); these traces may pervade an entire space (“John’s shoes stank up the hallway”). The idiom of comic strips often portrays bad smells as vaporous waves coming from an object.

² The DOE assigns epian the sense “to smell (any odour)” after its primary meaning “to breathe.” This should probably be emended. The definition “to smell” is based on a single attestation in the Paris Psalter; in all but one of the other 18 occurrences of epian it has the sense “to breathe” (the exception is an error, given as sense 2 in the DOE). The occurrence in the Paris Psalter is a translation of Ps 113, 14: “Aures habent, et non audient: nares habent, et non odorabunt” (“They have ears and hear not; they have noses and smell not”). The same passage occurs again in Ps 134, 17 in the Romanum version of the Latin
Conspicuously absent from the list given in the TOE is any Old English cognate of the verb smell. *Smellen* occurs suddenly in early Middle English texts, and it does not seem to have been confined to any one region. Among the localizable texts in which it is found, the form shows almost equal distributions in East Midland and Southwestern texts. This discourages us from thinking that an Old English *smellen* was the dialectal equivalent of *(ge)stincan* outside the West Saxon area; as far as we can tell, *smellen* and *(ge)stincan* would have existed in the same regions. How these two forms would have contrasted with each other is something we must leave to conjecture. It is interesting, however, that from its earliest attestations, Middle English *smellen* was employed in all three of the basic ways that it is now used; it seems to have taken over immediately from *(ge)stincan* after the latter’s pejoration to “to stink.”

psalter, on which the Paris Psalter is based. While the Paris Psalter translates “non odorabunt” as “ne magon eþian” in 113, in 134 it translates it “na wiht gestincan.” The reason for this is very likely to have been alliterative. In 113, the verb occurs in an alliterating position: “Earan habbað swylce and opene nose, / ne magon eþian, awytt hegyran.” In 134, however, the verb occurs in the position of the fourth major stress, which does not alliterate: “Earan habbað, ne hi awytt magon / holdes gehyran, þeah de him hlecðige / and nose habbað, nawiht gestincan.” Since *eþian* was probably substituted for the sake of alliteration in 113, it is probably used in its basic sense “to breathe,” which makes good sense: “they have open noses, but cannot breathe.” It should be remembered that the Paris Psalter is not a gloss; indeed it is known for its freedom from and variation with its original. Regarding this, J. D. Tinkler writes, “In the metrical psalms, ... there is marked deviation from any known Latin text.... Moreover, the versifier sometimes warps the sense of the Latin to fit the alliteration” (Vocabulary and Syntax of the Old English Version in the Paris Psalter. A Critical Commentary, Janua Linguarum, Series Practica 67 [The Hague, 1971], p. 9).

3 Alfred Bamnesberger (Beiträge zu einem etymologischen Wörterbuch des Altenglischen [Heidelberg, 1979], p. 117, s.v. smiellan) suggests, implausibly, that a form of smell does occur in Old English: the hapax *smyllan* which glosses *crepo*, “to crack, resound” (cf. “Aetas prima *crepanitus fleuit sub ferulis* under smyllendum gyrdum” [Prudentius Glosses [Boulogne-sur-Mer], 4; from Prudentius, Cathemerinon, Preface, 7]—“The first age wept under resounding rods.”). Bamnesberger claims that the semantic change exemplified here (i.e. from “to crack [as a whip]” to “to smell”) is comparable to that which has occurred with stink; Got. *stigqu* bedeutet ‘stoßen,’ ae. *stincan* drückt aber neben “stinken, riechen, duften; schnüffeln” auch die den Übergang vermittelnde Nuance ‘aufwirbeln, sich erheben’ aus. (p. 117)

Presumably, he understands the original perceptual meaning of *stincan* to have been something like “to thrust, impose upon the senses.” Such an analogy is riddled with problems. First, as I explain below (see note 5), there is no certainty that Gothic *stigqu* (Lehmann: “to clash, do battle”) and Old English *stincan* (“to smell”) are in fact related. Second, it is hard to see how *smyllan*, which evidently refers to the producing of sound, would move analogously to a meaning of “to smell.” Third, the more likely etymology of smell is the one that resembles the origin of virtually all the verbs we look at in this chapter, i.e. that ME *smellen* came from a word that originally meant “to smoke.” Smell may well be related to Low German *smelen*, “to reek or smoke.” Middle Dutch *smolen*, Dutch *smullen*, “to smolder,” and indeed to English *smolder* (see Eric Partridge, Origins. A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English [London. 1958], s.v. smell).
My discussion of the Old English verbs of smell is divided into three main sections. In the first, I look at the most important verb of smell *(ge)stincan*; in the second, I consider *geswæccan*, which is apparently confined to the experiential use; and in the third, I discuss the several descriptive verbs of smell, *reocan, styman, æpmian, bladesian*, and *hrenian*.

I. *(Ge)stincan, tostincan*

We will consider *(ge)stincan* first, the best-attested and apparently most important of the Old English verbs of smell. Remarkably, it is the only Old English perception verb that can describe actions in all three of the basic areas we have been working with, although the experiential and deliberative uses are largely distinguished from the descriptive by the prefix *ge*-.

While experiential and deliberative types of action are often associated (and difficult to distinguish) in perception verbs, the connection between them and the descriptive type is less common. It is not made at all in Latin--not even with a verb like *olficio*, whose constituent parts might cause us to expect a meaning like “to make smell, give off a smell,” but which only means “to perceive a smell” or “to seek to perceive a smell, sniff.” Could it be that the expansion of *(ge)stincan* into the three basic uses was the original catalyst by which Modern English *smell, feel*, and *taste* could express all three?

In the four sections below, I will look first at the descriptive use, which seems to have been the original use of the verb, and at the related noun *stenc*. I will then consider the experiential use, and the verb *tostincan* which seems to derive from it. The deliberative use is more difficult to isolate and will require some detailed discussion. Finally, as an excursus, I will look at an old textual crux in *Beowulf* which our consideration of *(ge)stincan* may help to illuminate.

A. The Descriptive Use

With very few exceptions, the simplex of *(ge)stincan* is only used for the verb’s descriptive meanings. 4

I will therefore use the form *stincan* to refer specifically to the descriptive use of the lexeme *(ge)stincan*. With the descriptive use, we may come closest

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4 The exceptions are the glosses of “odorabunt” in Psalm 134, 17, which is rendered “stincad” in the early 9th c. Mercian *Vespasian Psalter* (A) and “stincab” in its descendent, the 10th c. *Junius Psalter* (B) I will be arguing for a third exception in the case of the textual crux in *Beowulf.*
to the verb’s semantic origins; at the very least, by beginning here, we can trace out a plausible process of development of the word’s meanings.5

The meanings of *stincan* appear to arise out of a particularly dynamic conception of how smells are diffused and perceived. When we use our verb *smell* in its descriptive sense, we are primarily describing the effects of an odor produced on the sense faculty. We generally include an expression that is either evaluative (“that smells nice”) or comparative (“that smells like seaweed”). However, the Anglo-Saxons seem to have conceived of odors as vaporous bodies emanating from a source, much in the same way as steam or smoke does. There are two instances in which *stincan* provides clear evidence of this basic conception. One striking example is found in *Orosius’ History*, where *stincan* is not used of an odor at all, but in the particularly concrete sense “to emit fumes” or “to smoke”:

*Pa ongan se caele mid ungemet stincan*; *pa wareb luuinianus mid þam bræþe ofsmorod.* (6. 32. 151. 10)6

(“Then the plaster began to emit fumes excessively; Jovianus was then suffocated by those fumes.”)

We will see that the connection between “smoking, steaming” and “emitting a smell” is made with other Old English descriptive verbs as well. We observe that *bræþ*, which more commonly means “sweet fragrance,” evidently here means “noxious fume”; as we will see below, *stenc* the cognate noun of *stincan*, can occasionally mean “smoke, vapor” beside its more general sense “odor, smell.”

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5 The larger problem of the Germanic and Indo-European cognates of *(ge)*stincan is a thorny one and not likely to be fully resolved. Both the verb *(ge)*stincan and the related noun *stenc* are obviously related to OHG *sticken*, “to emit a smell, perceive through smell,” and OS *stank*, “stink, smell.” The question is whether these are cognate with a group of Gothic and North Germanic words relating to movement, including Goth *stigjan*, “clash, do battle,” and ON *stókkva*, “(str.) leap, take to flight; (wk.) propel, drive, sprinkle.” There are other OE words that clearly form a part of this latter group of cognates, including *tostencan*, “to scatter,” *stancrían*, “to sprinkle,” and possibly one or two instances of *stincan* (cf. “Dust stonic to heofonum” *Riddle* 29. 12). One can imagine how the diffusing of scent might come out of an idea of scattering and sprinkling. However, as the *OED* (s.v. *stink*) remarks, “The identity of the root is possible, but in view of the great diversity of meaning it cannot be positively asserted.” and Lehmann (s.v. *stigjan*) adds, “Etymology unclear. Because of the diversity of meaning several words may have fallen together.” Attempts have been made to find cognates outside the Germanic languages, but the results are dubious. It has been suggested, for instance, that the smell words might be related to Gk *παρνοκε*, “rancid.” This seems to assume that the meaning basic to the smell words is that of “bad smell.” but it appears fairly certain that the OE and OHG words were originally neutral. For a more detailed discussion, see section D below.

6 “Stincan” does not reflect any one word in the Latin: “[Jovianus], calore prunarum et nidore parietum nuper calce inilitorum adgrauatus et suffocatus, ... uitam finiuit” (*Orosius. Historiae* 7. 31. 3).
In a second example, *stincan* is used of odor or scent, but in such a way to indicate that the odor is being emitted from a source and diffused over a space:

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Him of muðe cwom
swëcca swetast. Swylec on sumeres tid
stincā on stowum stapelum faste
wynnum æfter wongum wyrtæ geblowene. (Guthlac B, 1272)
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(“The sweetest of smells came from his mouth. Just as in summertime, blooming plants, fast by their roots, diffuse scent in places, pleasantly across the fields....”)

The fact that Guthlac’s odor of sanctity comes “of muðe” (he is still breathing) and that the flowers to which this is compared “stincā ... æfter wongum” (“across, along the surface of the fields”) strongly suggests that *stincan* is being used to describe the dynamic emission and diffusion of scent, rather than simply the effect the scent has on the faculty of smell. This interpretation is supported by a number of glosses in which we find that *stincan* is associated with Latin verbs for emitting or exhaling air, as well as for exuding scent, such as *spiro*, “to breathe out, emit” (*Aldhelm Glosses* [Digby 146], 314); *exhalo*, “to give off, emit, exhale” (*Cleopatra Glossary I*, 166, 65); *fragro*, “to emit a smell” (*Prudentius Glosses* [Boulogne-sur-Mer], 217); *oleo*, “to emit a smell” (*Ælfric. Grammar*, 220, 13; *Prudentius Glosses* [Boulogne-sur-Mer], 217); and *redoleo*, “to diffuse an odor” (*Aldhelm Glosses* [Brussels 1650], 4656), as well as with the adjective *fumigabundus*, “smoking” (*Cleopatra Glossary I*, 201, 292).

The dynamic uses just outlined form the semantic background of *stincan*. However, it was more commonly employed in contexts that are simply evaluative, that is, that describe the pleasant or unpleasant effects of a particular odor. Modern *stink* conveys such uncompromisingly negative connotations that it is difficult to look at *stincan* without assuming that it has much the same force, especially when the smell referred to is a bad one. Yet *stincan* seems to have proceeded from the dynamic senses “to emit smoke” or “diffuse odor” to the more stative sense of “to give out a smell, convey an impression to the faculty of smell” without being marked for a good or bad odor, at least not at first. For instance, we can find in a single work such parallel constructions as “wyrtæ wel stincende” (*Gregory’s Dialogues* [C] 3, 1, 181, 4)—“good smelling herbs,” and “fule stincendan ea” (4, 37, 319, 14)—“a foul smelling river.”

Ælfric’s use of *stincan* to describe the scent of flowers may surprise us if we are unused to the Old English usage:

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7 Respectively, cf. “odoras ... herbas” and “foetenti fluuio” (*Gregory, Dialogi* 3, 1, 4; 4, 37, 10).
Ic wundrige þearle hu nu on wintres dæg her lilian blostm oðde rosan
brað swa wysumlice and swa werodlice stincan. (Ælfric, Lives of Saints,
Cecilia, 103)8

("I greatly wonder how now on a winter’s day lily blossom or rose fragrance smells
here so pleasantly and so sweetly.")

Our surprise should caution us against complacency when we find stincan used in a way
that resembles our verb stink: "He stanc swa fule þæt man hine ferian ne mihte" (Ælfric,
Lives of Saints, Maccabees, 545)9—"He smelled so fouly that no one could carry him."

There are, however, some indications that stincan was beginning to be marked for
bad odors, especially in Ælfric. In the 12 times Ælfric uses the present participle
stincende, it is always to describe unpleasant smells:

Him stod stincende steam of þam mupe, swa þæt earfodlice ænig læce him
mihte genealæcan. (Catholic Homilies I. 5, 221, 135)10

("A (badly) smelling vapor came from his mouth, so that barely any doctor could
approach him.")

Note that the pejorative aspect of “stincende” must be understood here; there is no negative
adverb. Outside of Ælfric, in glosses of Psalm 77, 70, Psalter D, followed by H, J, and
K, has “stincendum” for “fetantes,” evidently mistaking f(o)eto, “to breed, bring forth,”
for f(o)eteo, “to stink.”11 It is easy to imagine how a word like stincan acquires its
negative meaning. To say that something “smells” without further elaboration is to imply
that it does so in a remarkable manner. Probably the most salient way in which something
gives off a smell “remarkably” is when it does so profusely and unpleasantly; thus the
verb, though not modified by an adverb, becomes associated with a negative meaning.
Even now we may say that something “smells nice,” but when we just say that it “smells,”
it is not in approbation.

8 Cf. “Miror hoc tempore roseus hic odor et liliorum unde respiret” (Passio sanctae
Ceciliae. 1. 334, 17). The Latin respiro might be a sign that stincan is being used in its
dynamic sense of “to diffuse odor.”

9 Cf. II Mcc 9. 10: “Eum nemo poterat propter intolerantiam fetoris portare.”

10 “Stincende” corresponds with “fetidus,” an unquestionably negative word, in Ælfric’s
source: “Inerat etiam et anhelitus fetidus, in tantum ut vix medicorum aliqus pro adhibendis
medicaminibus ad eum accedere posset” (Haymo, Homiliae de tempore, 12, 80, D).

11 Psalters A, B, and C gloss more or less correctly, “de post fetantes, of þam siborenum”
("from the late-born [sheep]") , as does Psalter I, “fram eanigendum” (“from those [sheep]
bringing forth young”).
To take the pejoration of the verb yet further, *stincan* may have developed a special sense of “to rot, decay” as an extension of its sense “to smell badly.” Such is its apparent meaning in this example from Ælfric’s *Homilies*:

_Betweux eallum þam wundrum þe ure Hælend worhte ys þyss micle wundor mæricalcost gehuhte, þæt he þone stincendan Lazarum to life ærde._

(*Homilies* 6, 317, 111)<sup>12</sup>

(“Of all the miracles that our Savior worked, this great wonder seems the most glorious, that he raised the rotting Lazarus back to life.”)

The miracle of raising Lazarus from death is made greater by the fact that his body had already begun to putrefy. *Stincan* might be used in a similar way in a variant version of *Vercelli Homily* 1:

_Mid ludeum þeaw wæs þæt man þæra ricra manna lichaman mid deorwurðum wyrtum smyrede, þy læs heo brosian oðde stincan sceoldan._

(“It was the custom among the Jews that the bodies of powerful men were anointed with precious herbs so that they would not decay or rot.”)

Of course, here “stincan” might also simply mean “to stink.” The *MED* tentatively records a continuation of this sense for Middle English *stinken* as “‘to become rotten, putrefy’; one of the *MED*’s examples which might exemplify this sense is “Whan bodyes stynke vnder stone, Where soules been no man can telle” (Maidstone, *Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms*, 43), although again “stynke” may just mean “to stink.”

Among its descriptive uses then, *stincan* may indicate its semantic origins in the concrete and dynamic senses of “to emit smoke” and “to diffuse odor”; it also exhibits an essentially neutral sense of “to give off a smell.” to which various evaluative adverbs may be applied; and finally, it shows some definite signs of acquiring an unquestionably negative sense of “to stink” and possibly “to rot.”

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. “Inter omnia miracula quae fecit Dominus noster Iesus Christus, Lazari resurrectio praecipue praedicatur.... Resuscitavit putentem....” (Augustine, *Tractatus in evangelium Iohannis* 49, 1). “Stincendan” seems to correspond with “putentem,” and Lewis & Short define *puteo* both “to stink” and “to be rotten, putrid.” The ultimate source is Io 11, especially verse 39, “Domine, iam foetet,” which in the same homily Ælfric translates, “Hlaford leof, he stincō” (87)—“Dear Lord, he stinks.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Io 19, 40: “Acceperunt ergo corpus Iesu, et ligaverunt illud lenteis cum aromatibus, sicut mos est Iudaes sepelire.”
The noun *stenc*

In a number of respects, the noun *stenc* behaves as the substantive equivalent of *stincan*: it is used in contexts describing the emanation of smell; it may be a neutral term for that thing which is perceived by the sense of smell; and sometimes it may just mean “a stink.” But it also provides a link to the experiential and deliberative meanings of *(ge)*stincan we will look at subsequently, in its meanings “sense of smell” and “act of smelling.”

Of all the nouns of smell we will look at incidentally in this chapter, *stenc* is perhaps the most abstracted from the notion of odors being physical emanations like smoke or steam. Nonetheless, there is at least one example which shows *stenc* being used in the apparent sense of “smoke”:

\[\text{Edna ðæt swefluene fyr tacnade, ða hit of helle geate asprang on Sicilia þam londe ... & Sicilia fela ofslog mid bryne & mid stænce. (Orosius' History 2. 6, 50, 25)}^{14}\]

(“Etna signified that sulphurous fire, when it erupted up from the gate of Hell onto the land of the Sicilians and killed many of the Sicilians with burning and with smoke.”)

Furthermore, although *stenc* more commonly means “smell, odor, or scent,” the word is regularly used of smells that are emitted and diffused in the manner of smoke or vapor. For instance, it is common for *stenc* to describe smells that “come out” (“Stenc ut cyemean of þam wongstede” [*Panther, 44*]--“a smell comes out of the field-dwelling”), “go out” (“for þam yfelan stence þe him of eode” [*Ælfric, Homily, 15*]81]--“because of the evil smell that went out of them”), “rise up” (“mycel wynsunnesse stenc þær upp weoll” [*Gregory's Dialogues* [*C*] 4, 49, 338, 15]16]--“a smell of great pleasantness rose up there”), or “fill” a space (“se burgstede wæs blissum gefylled, swetum stencum” [*Guthlac B, 1317*]--“the dwelling was filled with delights, with sweet smells”).

Yet perhaps the most salient semantic characteristic of *stenc* is to designate that which is present to, and distinguished by, the faculty of smell, for example: “Mid þære

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14 The original is rather different, but see its use of “fumat”: “Aethna ipsa, quae tunc cum excidio urbium atque agrorum crebris eruptionibus aestuabat. nunc tantum innoxia specie ad praeteritorum fidem fumat” (Orosius, *Historiae* 2, 14, 3).

15 Homily for the Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent (*ÆHomM4 [Ass5]*).

16 Cf. “Fragrantia suauitatis emanuit” (Gregory, *Dialogi* 4, 29, 5).
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nose we tosceadan þa stencas" (Alfred, Pastoral Care 11, 65, 20)\textsuperscript{17}—"By the nose we discriminate smells." When it means "smell" or "odor," stenc appears to be itself a neutral term; however, it is usually accompanied by some evaluative adjective or phrase. In poetry, where it occurs 17 times, stenc refers only to smells that are "sweet" (swete), "pleasant" (wynsum and æpel), "holy" (halig), and "fair" (fæger), while in Ælfric and other homiletic writers, stencas are more often bad, for they may be "dreadful" (onbread), "foul" (ful), "overpowering" (ormæt), "reeking" (reocende), and "repulsive" (læptic). In the few instances where stenc appears without an evaluative adjective, it means "stink" or "stench":

\[\text{[Peo sawle] sylf beread all þone lichame & him liffæst, ... & þone heo ut gæd, he went al to stence & to þam ylice duste þe [he] of isceapen wæs. (Ælfric. Late "Christmas" Homily, 87, 4)\textsuperscript{18}\]

("The soul itself sustains all the body and quickens it, and when the soul goes out, it turns all to stench and into the same dust from which it was created.")

This suggests that the default value of stenc was becoming negative.

Finally, two further uses of stenc provide a link to the experiential and deliberative meanings of (ge)stincan. Ælfric commonly uses stenc to designate the sense of smell whenever he enumerates the senses (which he often seems to do as an expansion of his source), for example:

\[Da fif getyma getacnið da fif andgitu ures lichaman, þæt sind gesiðe. hlyst, swæcc. stenc. hrepung. \] (Catholic Homilies II. 23 [DOE: 26], 214. 44)\textsuperscript{19}

("The team of five [oxen] signifies the five senses of our body, which are sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch.")

Ælfric also uses stenc to refer to the application of the faculty of smell, in the sense of an "act of smelling":

\[Ælc dæra manna ðe hine forhæfð fram unalfedlice gerenhæþ, fram unalfedlice heorcnunge, fram unalfedlicum swæcce. fram\]

17 Cf. "Naso ... odores foetoresque discernimus" (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 1, 11, 166. 27).

18 See also this passage from Ælfric's translation of Pseudo-Basil's Admonitio: "Foroft se mann gewyrðed on ende toswollen and to stenc awended" (8, 50. 22)—"Very often in the end the man becomes swollen up and changed to stench."

19 Cf. "Quid in quinque jugis bouum nisi quinque corporis sensus accipimus?" (Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia 36, 1268, B). For other enumerations of the senses in Ælfric in which stenc appears, see Catholic Homilies I, 9, 251, 69; Catholic Homilies II, 38 [DOE: 43], 319, 47 & 323, 140; 39 [DOE: 44], 328, 36; Late "Christmas" Homily, 92, 27; and Grammar, 79, 5.
unalyfedlicum stence, fram unalyfedlicere hreunge, se hæfd mædenes naman for ðære anwalhynsse. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 39 [DOE: 44], 328, 40) 20

("Every man that keeps himself from illicit seeing, from illicit hearing, from illicit tasting, from illicit smelling, and from illicit touching has the name of ‘maiden’ because of his wholeness.")

Wulfstan uses stenc in this sense as well:

Tangit quoque sacerdos de sputo oris sui nares ... ut ... odorando percipiatur sanctitatis dulcedinem. (Wulfstan, Homilies, 8a, 21)

And þonne se sacerd æðrinhā mid his spatle þæs mannæ nose, ... þonne getacnāð he mid þam ðæt he sceal ... þurh stenc ... underfon godcundre halignysse. (Wulfstan, Homilies, 8b, 29) 21

("And when the priest touches the man’s nose with his spit, he signifies by this that he must discern divine holiness by smelling.")

The Latin equivalent “odorando” indicates that “stenc” refers to an “act of smelling.”

The meanings of stenc correspond neatly with the various meanings of (ge)stincan.

One wonders whether the experiential and deliberative uses of (ge)stincan might have developed under the influence of the noun, so that originally the experiential sense was governed by the literal notion “to perceive a stenc (odor),” or that the deliberative sense was shaped by the underlying idea “to apply the stenc (sense of smell).” This is a question of the chicken or the egg, and impossible to resolve. The difference in vowels between verb and noun (and the fact that Old High German stinken shows nearly the same meanings in relation to stank) would suggest that such developments, if they occurred at all, must have happened in the early stages of West Germanic.

B. The Experiential Use

The experiential use of (ge)stincan is distinguished in form from the descriptive by the almost exclusive use of the compound gestincan, with the exceptions noted above. This is one of the most striking differences between simplex verb and compound with ge- that I am aware of in Old English. The two uses, on the whole, require completely different types of subjects, for while all objects may stincan, only animate perceivers (usually humans) can gestincan them. Still in pursuit of the means by which the

20 Cf. “Qui ergo se abstinet ab illicito visu, ab illicito auditu, ab illicito odoratu, ab illicito gustatu, ab illicito tactualiter, propter ipsam integritatem, virginis nomen accepit” (Augustine, Sermones 93, 2, 2).

21 Also cf. “Tanguntur itaque de sputo nares, ... ut Christum in odore unguentorum sequantur” (Theodulf of Orléans. De ordine baptismi. 9, 228, D).
experiential and deliberate uses might have developed, we may wonder whether they might be linked to some notion inherent in the prefix ge-. The problem is not so much thorny as it is simply inconclusive. The OED (y-) describes one of its senses as being “perfective or intensive,” as it is manifested in “verbs which denote achievement of a result, the attainment of a stage in a process, or a special limitation of the general sense of the simple verb.” Skeptical at first, I had to admit that for at least some of the examples cited by the OED such tendencies are apparent: for such movement words as faran and gefaran or gan and gegan, Bosworth-Toller and especially Toller reveal that while both forms can mean “to go, proceed,” the senses “to get by going, occupy” are only found with the prefixed form; similarly, the DOE shows that while ascian (700 occ.) and geascian (175 occ.) both mean “to ask, inquire, etc.,” it is nearly always geascian which means “to find out, learn of.”

But how might a “perfective or intensive” notion for ge- reflect the differences in meaning we detect between stincan and gestincan? Richard Lindemann, discussing the various theories regarding the meanings of ge-, describes in more detail the idea that ge- reflects perfective aspect:

Reduced to its simplest terms, the doctrine states that in the older Germanic dialects the simple form of the verb, with some very few exceptions, expressed an action in its continuity whereas the compound verb expressed an action that was cut off, or brought to an end, or completed.22

In other words, the difference in meaning between simplex and compound might be understood in terms of stative versus dynamic action--stative action being ongoing and continuous, while dynamic action has a definite beginning and end. This would seem to match one of the primary differences between the descriptive and the experiential / deliberative uses of perception verbs: the descriptive use does not imply a beginning or end to the action, but the other two suggest an action occurring over a limited period of time. But then we must recall that the most basic sense of stincan is itself fairly dynamic: “to smoke,” which leads into “to diffuse odor.” This makes the theory’s match less good.

Lindemann advances his own theory about the meaning of ge-:

In the light of the correspondences established... OE preverbal ge- would have to “mean” that “the action expressed by any verb to which it is prefixed is directed toward some thing or in a direction forward and outward.” ... One NE morpheme alone will not suffice to express this abstract meaning in all contexts.... The NE morphemes necessary to

translate this abstract meaning of *ge-* will be such morphemes as *at, on, to, toward, and out, forth, away.*

There is a certain attractiveness to this explanation with regards to *stincan / gestincan.* Things give off smells indiscriminately and in all directions. However, when we smell them, we may be said to be applying the sense faculty “forward and outward.”

Unfortunately, Lindemann’s means of illustrating this meaning of *ge-* is not very persuasive. Ultimately, the difficulty of assigning a meaning to *ge-* lies in the fact that, as the *OED* remarks, “in many instances no difference in meaning is discernible between the simplex and compound.” This lack of differentiation in the use of *ge-* for most verbs obscures whatever meaning it might have in those instances where it does seem to make a difference. Thus the prefix may have had an influence in shaping the meanings of *gestincan,* but it is very difficult for us to say what that influence might have been.24

Whatever the difficulties offered by its prefix, the experiential use of *(ge)stincan* is itself quite straightforward. There are only around twenty instances of this use, but they are enough to show the same kind of array of uses, ranging from the pre-cognitive experiencing of a sensation to the cognizant apprehension of it, that we have already observed among the verbs of taste. At one end of the range, there is the sense “to experience the smell of,” which arises when the object that is smelled has some remarkable effect upon the perceiver. We might count the following passage as an instance of this sense (note that the descriptive *stincan* is also used): 

Mære bræđ þær stanc swa þæt þæt wif wundrode þæs wysuman bræþes and cwæð þæt heo næfre ær naht swilces ne gestunce. (Ælfric. *Lives of Saints.* Julian & Basilissa. 347)25

(“A sublime breath was diffused there, so that the woman marvelled at the pleasant scent, and said that she had never before smelt anything like it.”)

---


24 The fact that in general *ge-* seems to be applied indiscriminately should caution us from being too categorical in discussing the distinction between *stincan* and *gestincan.* Below I will argue that, in a passage in *Beowulf,* the simplex has a meaning we would normally associate with the compound. Our general experience of *ge-* should tell us that its omission is a definite possibility.

25 However, cf. “Haec mulier ... clamabat: Numquam in diebus vitae meæ tam suavissimum odorem sensi; nam sicut in amœnissimis hortis, liliorum, et rosarum et balsami nectar, et nardi redundat olfactus” (*Acta sanctorum Juliani ete Basilissœ,* 11, 48). The elaboration, in the Latin, on what the smell is like might indicate that the meaning of “numquam ... sensi” is “I have never perceived / distinguished a smell,” which would argue against the simple sense “she never experienced a smell like it” in the Old English.
What seems most salient about this use of (ge)stincan is that the woman is comparing this experience of smell with all her previous experiences; she is not trying to identify the smell according to a set of pre-established cognitive criteria. The following example from Bede’s History seems to embody an intersection of the senses of “perceiving a smell” and “experiencing (the effects of) a smell”:

Nullus uiuere serpens ualeat. Nam saepe illo de Britannia adlati serpentes, max ut proximante terris nauigio odore aeris illius adacti fuerint. intereunt. (Bede, Historia 1, 1, 18, 33)

Ne þær ænig nædræ lifian ne mæg; forþon of Breotone nædræ on scipum læde wæron, sono swa hi ðæs landes lyft gestuncen, swa swultan hi. (Bede’s History 1, 1, 30, 1)

(“No snake can live there, for snakes have been brought on ships from Britain, but they died as soon as they smelled the air of the land.”)

Are we to imagine that these snakes actually perceive the air of Britain, or do they perish in the instant of experiencing it? In another example, the sense of (ge)stincan is more simply “to perceive through smell”:

Þonne ge geseob growinge & blowende ealle corþan wæstmas. & þa swetan stencas gestincad þara wudwyrtæ, þa sono eft adrugiaþ & forþ gewitaþ for þæs sumores hæton. Swa þonne gelice bid þære menniscan gecynde þæs lichoman. (Bickling Homily 5, 59, 1)

(“When you see all the earth’s fruit growing and blooming, and smell the sweet scents of the wood-plants, then soon after they dry up and perish because of the summer heat. So it is like for the nature of man’s body.”)

Finally, at the other end of the range, cognition enters most fully in the sense “to detect, perceive through smell.” The following example shows this sense well:

Rem namque quam oculis non cernimus, plerumque odore praeuidemus. (Gregory. Regula Pastoralis 3. 32, 494, 59)

We oft gestincad mid urum nosum ðæt we mid urum eagem gesion ne magon. (Alfred. Pastoral Care 56, 433, 20)

(“We often smell with our noses that which we cannot see with our eyes.”)

The fact that the Latin uses praevidere, “to discern,” for a smell supports the impression that the context involves an act of perceptual cognition, more than the immediate experience of a particular faculty. While the distinctions I have been describing above are subtle, there is a good case for them; more importantly, the general experiential sense of (ge)stincan is clear and well-established.

[HomS 17 (BlHom 5); B3.2.17].
**Tostincan**

This is probably the best place to mention a verbal derivative of (ge)stincan. The prefix *to-* has a basic force of “apart” or “asunder.” When it is placed before a verb of perceiving or knowing, it heightens the aspect of discrimination inherent in the verb: we perceive or know one thing “apart” from other things. Thus we find in the *Pastoral Care*: “Mid dæm nosum we toseadað & tocnawað gode stencas & yfele” (56, 433, 21)27--“With our noses we distinguish and tell apart good and bad smells.” There is one occurrence of *tostiwan*, and it is used very similarly to *rosceadan* and *tosteadað* in the above example; what it seems to mean is “to tell apart by smell” or, more idiomatically, “to sniff out”:

“Purh da nosu we tostincad hwæt clæne bīð, hwæt ful” (Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies II*, 23 [DOE: 26], 214, 49)--“By means of the nose we sniff out what is clean, what foul.” The meaning of *tostincan* comes from the most cognitive end of (ge)stincan’s range of experiential meanings, and it is intensified by the prefix.

C. The Deliberative Use

There is good reason to believe that (ge)stincan had a deliberative use as well. However, there is only one clear example of it, and this example has not been cited in any of the Old English dictionaries written before the *DOE*. Furthermore, the *MED* does not record a deliberative sense for Middle English *stinken*.28 I am obliged to make a somewhat more in-depth analysis of this example in order to make certain that it means what it seems to mean. This in turn will provide the basis for the reinterpretation of a long-debated crux in *Beowulf*, in the following section. The example comes from the remarkable *Monasterialia indicia*, the Old English guide to monasterial sign-language.29 The passage describes how to request a leek, or possibly an onion:

Gyf þe læces lyste, þonne do þu mid þinum fingre, swilce þu borige inn on þine hand and do bralinga þine hand to þinre nasan, swilce þu hwæt gestince.  (59)

---

27 Cf. “Per nasum quoque odores fetoresque discernimus” (Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis* 3, 32, 494, 60). The Old English amplifies the “discerning, distinguishing” sense of *discerno* with a repetitive word pair, using two verbs for discerning. See Chapter 5, pp. 176-9.

28 Indeed the *MED* only cites two early examples of the experiential “to perceive the foul odor of (sth.),” which suggests that the word was well on the way to losing its dynamic perceptual meanings, both the experiential and the deliberative.

29 As the text explains: “Pis sindon þa tacna þe mon on mynstre healdan sceal. þær mon æfter regales bebode swigan haldon wile” (Preface)--“These are the signs that one must keep in the monastery when one wishes to keep silence according to the injunction of a rule.”
I interpret the gestures here to be first that of driving the tip of a finger into the palm of the other hand and then bringing that same hand, palm open, to the nose, as when one brings an object close to the nose in order to smell it. The adverb “bralinga” is important for this interpretation. In Old English, it is unique to this text. Elsewhere in the text it appears as “bradlinga” and was apparently formed from *brad*, “broad, flat, open,” and the adverb-forming suffix -inga. It seems to mean “flatly, with the palm open” (*DOE*). The passage may therefore be translated:

(“If you desire a leek, then do with your finger as if you were boring into your hand, and put your hand with the palm open to your nose, as if you were smelling something.”)

However, it is possible that *gести* is used here in its experiential sense and that the gesture is one of warding off a smell, that is, “bring your hand flat to your nose, as if you smelled something [bad].” I find this second interpretation less likely. First, there is no indication that that which is smelled has a bad odor, so the gesture of warding off such an odor is not explicitly warranted. Secondly, throughout the *Monasterialia indicia*, the phrase “swilce þu” is used to describe the action that the gesture is meant to resemble. In every case, the action described has a direct correlation to the gesture, rather than an implied one. We may observe this, for example, in the signs for “knife” (sy.x. i.e. *seax*):

Snid þu mid binum fingre ... swylce þu cyrfan wille (55)
(“Slice with your finger as if you wanted to cut something”):

for “refectory” (*beoddern*):

Sete þu bine bry fingras. swilce þu mete to mude do (49)
(“Form your three fingers as if you were putting food inro your mouth”):

for “rod” (*gyrd*):

Wege þine fyst swylce þu swingan wille (47)
(“Move your fist as if you wanted to strike”):

and for “candlestick” (*candelsticca, candelstæf*):

Hald þine hand samlocene. swylce þu candelstæf haebbe (3. 26)
(“Hold your hand half-closed, as if you were holding a candlestick.”)

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30 The *OED* records the word *broadling*, citing examples from the early 13th and then again from the 16th and 17th centuries, which it defines “broadwise, with the broad or flat side,” e.g. “He wile smite bredlinge mid sweare and brisen, óder mid egge and cleuen” (*Trinity College Homilies, 61*)—“He will strike with the broad side of the sword and bruise, or with the edge and cut.” This could well be the Middle English reflex of Old English *braidlinga*.

31 Also cf. “Lege þine hand bralinga to þinum hleore” (*Monasterialia indicia, 5. 30*)—“Lay your hand flat against your cheek.”
If the gesture with *gestincan* were meant to represent the reaction to a smell, we would expect a phrase like "as if you were closing your nose against a bad smell"—and this would more likely be expressed with an action of *pinching* with the thumb and forefinger! The gesture seems much more likely to be that of bringing an object close to the nose in order to smell or sniff it.32

**D. Stincan in Beowulf: how “stone” the dragon?33**

If we agree that *gestincan* describes a deliberative action in the *Monasterialia indicia*, it might well lend support to the idea that the un compounded *stincan* is used in a similar way in another, much debated passage. This passage is the one in *Beowulf* that describes the dragon’s growing anger at the theft from his hoard:

\[
\text{Pa se wyrm onwoc, wroht wæs geniwad;}
\text{stone ða æfter stane, stearcheort onfand}
\text{feondes foiltast. (2287)}
\]

("Then the serpent awoke, strife was renewed; it sniffed, moved quickly along the stone, hard-hearted it discovered the trace of an enemy’s foot.")

Early editors, as well as translators nearly up to the present day, interpreted “stone” as if exemplifying the deliberative use of *(ge)stincan*, giving such translations as “he

32 There is no equivalent passage in the Latin texts on monasterial sign-language. (The relevant Latin texts are printed in Walter Jarecki, ed., *Signa loquendi, Sæcula Spiritualia 4* [Baden-Baden, 1981].) The oldest are continental and postdate the manuscript date of the Anglo-Saxon text by some 25 years (Ker 186. 22: "s. xi med."). The earliest, designated the “Cluny” text, includes a sign for “garlic or radish” which mentions smell but describes a different gesture from that for the Anglo-Saxon:

\[
\text{Pro signo allii seu rafe: extende digitum contra buccam paululum apertam}
\text{propter id genus odoris, quod sentitur ex illis. (Jarecki, p. 126, 25)}
\]

("For the sign of garlic or radish: extend the finger towards the mouth that is slightly opened, on account of the type of smell which is perceived from them.")

It is a puzzling gesture: why point towards the mouth to indicate a smell? (*Bucca* which more often means “cheek” means “mouth” here—cf. Ital. *bocca*, “mouth.” In a parallel passage in another text, *os*, “mouth,” is used [Jarecki, p. 177, 80].) Signs for “leek” and “onion” are included in this and other texts, but they do not resemble the Anglo-Saxon gesture.

The book edited by Jean Umiker-Sebeok and Thomas A. Sebeok (*Monastic Sign Languages, Approaches to Semiotics* 76 [Berlin, 1987]) reproduces many of the most important editions of and articles about medieval sign-language texts, including Kluge’s Old English edition; it also provides photographs of a number of gestures being performed, none of which however resemble the sign for “leek.”

33 A version of this section was presented as a paper at the annual Medieval Studies Conference at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, May 7-10, 1998.
sniffed,”34 “he sniffed,”35 and “he went smelling.”36 However, another school of thought related “stone” to Gothic stigqan, “to clash, do battle,”37 and Old Norse støkkva, “to leap, spring.”38 This theory gained wide acceptance so that in 1940, Else von Schaubert remarked that the old interpretation “ist jetzt allgemein fallen gelassen.”39 The case for the old interpretation was seriously reopened by Hans Schabram in 1979.40

It is easy to see how scholars have arrived at the sense “to move quickly” or “leap” for stincan here. There are a number of other Old English words, similar in form with stincan, which are obviously related to the “movement” cognates in Gothic and the Scandinavian languages. For instance, tostencan, “to scatter, destroy” (Bosworth-Toller), probably comes from the same branch of words as Gothic stigqan, “to clash, do battle,” and gastagajan, “to strike against (trans.),”41 and the Old Norse weak verb støkkva, “to cause to spring, propel, drive.”42 Likewise, Old English stancian, which glosses pluvicino “to sprinkle,” and stanc, which glosses pluvicinatio “sprinkling” (Antwerp Glossaries, 182, 17-18),43 certainly resemble another sense of the Old Norse weak verb


37 In Gothic, when “g,” appeared in a medial or final position before another velar consonant, such as “q,” it represented the velar nasal which we write “ng” (see Joseph Wright, Grammar of the Gothic Language, 2nd ed. with suppl. by O.L. Sayce [Oxford, 1954], §17).

38 On the assimilation of nk to kk in ON, see A. Noreen, Altnordische Grammatik I: Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik (Laut- und Flexionslehre) (4th ed. Tübingen, 1970), §266.3. Nikolai Grundtvig seems to have been the first to connect the word in Beowulf with the Old Norse word (Beowulfes Beorh eller Bjovulfs-Drupen det Old Angleske Helstedigt, [Copenhagen, 1861] p. 171).


43 The meanings of pluvicino and pluvicinatio are transparent enough; they are diminutive forms from pluo, “to rain,” and pluvia, “rain.” However, they do not seem to be recorded
The movement sense may be exemplified in a form of stïncan itself, found in one of the riddles: “Dust stone to heaven, dew fell on earth, night went forth.” The sense of “stone” as “rose” is clear enough from the contrast with “feol.” What is uncertain is how it has acquired this sense. This could conceivably be connected with the “smell” words, if it is construed as “to spread like vapor,” as a particular extension of the sense “to emit vapor / smoke.” On the other hand, this use resembles that of the Old Norse strong verb stïkkva, “to spring, rebound; to take to flight,” Old Danish stynka, “to dash, fly,” and Old Swedish stinka, “to jump, go here and there.” The sense “to rise” is curiously corroborated by the glosses in the early Erfurt and Corpus Glossaries: “exalauit stanc” (Erfurt Glossary, 361)—“it raised.” I say curiously because “exalauit” seems to be an error; the later Cleopatra Glossary corrects this to “exalauit stanc” (E, 65)—“it gave off. emitted.” The ambiguities multiply themselves here. If stïncan in “dust stone” has a meaning similar to the North Germanic words, then the verb might conceivably be used as a gloss of “exalauit” (although exalto is a causative verb of motion, “to cause to rise, raise,” while the putative stïncan is an intransitive verb of motion, “to rise”); yet since the homophonous stïncan, as we have seen, could also mean “to breathe out, exhale,” it could still gloss the corrected “ex(h)alauit.”

elsewhere; only Du Cange (Glossarium medie et infime latinitatis [Graz, 1883-87]) mentions them and cites this glossary!


46 Cleasby & Vigfusson, op. cit.

47 Cf. Nielsen, op. cit.: stynka (s.v. stïnka). “fare, flyve.”

48 Cf. Hellquist, op. cit.: stinka, stiunka (s.v. stïnka), “hoppa, fara hit o. dot.”

49 In the Corpus Glossary: “exalauit stone” (E, 391).

50 Stryker gives this ostensible source for the lemma of the Cleopatra Glossary: “Taetrum nimis atque ultra opinionem pestiferum odorem tabida et putrefacta congeries exhalaet” (Orosius, Historiae 5. 11. 3)—“The rotting and putrid mass gave off an extremely foul odor and noxious beyond belief.” The source thus clearly relates ex(h)alo to the emission of odor.
The "sniffed" interpretation for "stone" has suffered somewhat from the slightly misguided efforts of its proponents. Many scholars have gone forward as if wearing blinders, ignoring the "compounded" gestincan and its meanings. For instance, in support of the "sniffed" interpretation, Earl Anderson states:

Stincan, 'to emit a smell or vapor, exhale' is semantically and phonologically close to stencan, 'to pant, emit breath with effort.... It is possible that stincan acquired a sense 'to perceive an odor through sniffing,' and thus, like NE smell, indicated either the emittance or perception of an odor."\textsuperscript{51}

There is no need to call up a spurious word like *stencan, whose "phonological" resemblance to stincan was probably slighter than Anderson realizes,\textsuperscript{52} to account for stincan having an active perceptual meaning, when such a meaning was clearly manifested in the prefixed gestincan.

Schabram does not commit the above error, but he fails to keep the experiential and deliberative uses of (ge)stincan distinct. He maintains that the objection to the interpretation "to smell (deliberately), sniff" is that it arbitrarily assigns a transitive meaning, otherwise found only for the compound gestincan, to the simplex stincan. He points out (as we have already observed) that in the gloss of "odorabunt" in Psalm 134, 17, the Vespasian Psalter (A) has "stincad" and the JunciPsalter (B) has "stincad," thereby illustrating that the simplex could mean "riechen (trans.), durch den Geruchssinn wahrnehmen; to smell (trans.), perceive by the sense of smell."\textsuperscript{53} Schabram does not acknowledge that the Beowulf passage, if interpreted as he argues, involves the deliberative use. He thus weakens his argument by conflating the experiential and deliberative uses, calling them simply "transitive," an especially inappropriate term, given that the psalter passage uses the verbs without expressed objects. Schabram seeks to bolster his case by citing examples of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Anderson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 4.
\item Bosworth-Toller's stencan, which Toller changes to stenecian, occurs only twice as a gloss of "anhelantum" in Aldhelm's \textit{De virginitate} ("alius anhelantum in stadio cursorum plantis fidens pomicibus" [\textit{De virginitate} (prose), 2, 230, 13]--"another, trusting to his fleet feet in the stadium of the panting runners" [trans. Lapidge & Herren]). In one, it appears as "stenecendra" (Aldhelm Gloses [Brussels 1650], 96), in another, as "stænienden" (Aldhelm Gloses [Bodley 97], 5). As can be observed, the word differs significantly in form from the stinc- / stenc- words. In a note in his edition, Napier suggests the word is stenecian, "a derivative of stenan 'to groan'," an explanation which Holthausen and Clark Hall take up. If this is correct, then stenecian would be the same sort of verb derived through the "suffixal element \textit{k}" described by Eilert Ekwall ("Etymology of the Word Tinker," \textit{English Studies} 18 [1936]: pp. 65-7).
\item Schabram, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 148.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the parallel use of *sticken* as “riechen (trans.), durch den Geruchssinn wahrnehmen” in Old and Middle High German,\(^5^4\) but his examples are of course only of the experiential use.

I find the attested existence of a deliberative use for *gestincan* more convincing as evidence in support of the suggested “smelled, sniffed” interpretation of the *Beowulf* passage than the occurrence of an experiential *sticken* in an early Mercian psalter and its 10th century descendant. Schabram’s discovery does however illustrate that divisions of sense signalled in verbs by the prefix *ge-* will not necessarily carry through all of Old English. I would argue that despite the overall consistency with which the compound *gestincan* designated the experiential and deliberative meanings of *(ge)sticken*, there is no absolute rule that would deny the possibility that the simplex could not also be used in this sense.

At this point, the two alternative interpretations of “stone” in *Beowulf*, “smelled, sniffed” versus “moved quickly, leap,” seem to be of roughly equal likelihood. The challenge is to find which one seems to make better sense in the context of the passage. Here, the “smell” or “sniff” interpretation may emerge as the preferable reading. From lines 2287 to 2301, we discover what seems to be the triple occurrence of a series of three parallel actions. The actions occur in this order: (A) the dragon searches, (B) the dragon discovers, and (C) the thief disturbs. In order for “stone” to participate in this series of actions, it must relate to searching. perhaps with the sense “to search out by smell,” or simply “to sniff.” The first series runs thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(A) & } & \text{the dragon searches,} \\
\text{(B) & } & \text{the dragon discovers,} \\
\text{(C) & } & \text{the thief disturbs.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[(2287-90)\]

("Then the serpent awoke. strife was renewed; it sniffed along the stone, hard-hearted it discovered the trace of an enemy’s foot; he had stepped too far forward by secret skill near the dragon’s head.")

There then follows a two and a half line gnomic remark on the Lord helping those who help themselves: “So can a man who is not fated to die easily survive misfortune and exile, who

\(^5^4\) Schabram cites examples of Old and Middle High German *sticken* being used in an experiential sense, including a gloss of the psalter passage: “Nares habent et non odorabunt. Habent ... nasa unde nestinchent” (p. 149). Oddly, none of the recent Old High German dictionaries record the experiential sense; cf. Jochen Splett, *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1993); Taylor Starck & John Wells, *Althochdeutsches Grossenwörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1991); and Gerhard Köbler, *Wörterbuch des Althochdeutschen Sprachschatzes* (Paderborn, 1993). These dictionaries only record the descriptive sense “Geruch von sich geben” (Starck & Wells)—“to give off a smell.” Starck & Wells do however recognize that *sticken* glosses *odoror*, which never has a descriptive sense. Only Matthias Lexer’s *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1930) records the sense, “durch den Geruchssinn wahrnehmen”—“to perceive through the sense of smell.”
possesses the Lord's favor.” The second series of three actions occurs immediately afterward:

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Hordweard sohte
georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,
bone þe him on sweofote sare geteode. (2293-5)
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(“The treasure-guard searched earnestly along the ground, wanted to find the man who had done it injury in its sleep.”)

One observes the similarity of the phrasing “æfter stane” and “æfter grunde,” as well as the uses of onfindan and findan. The next four lines describe the dragon’s emotions, his searching outside the barrow, and his plans for vengeance: “Hot and savage, it often went all around the outside of the mound--there was no one in all that waste--but it rejoiced in the thought of conflict, an act of war.”

We find then the third series of actions:

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Hwilum on beorh æthwearf,
sincfæt sohte; ðe þæt sona onfand
hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod. (2299-2301)
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(“Sometimes it went back to the barrow, searched for the precious cup; it soon discovered that some man had tampered with the gold.”)

Here we find secan repeated from the second series, and onfindan repeated from the first.

The stylistic effect. I think, of this triple series of three actions is to convey how obsessively the dragon searches, and how at each stage it fits pieces of the puzzle together. Stincan contributes best to this series if it is read as parallel to the two occurrences of secan, in the sense “to search out by smell.” Now it may be objected that in 2293, secan might simply be used in a sense indicating movement of “to go, move, proceed” (Clark Hall).
thus in parallel with the “moved quickly, leapt” interpretation of “stonc.” However it is difficult to support such a neutral reading with the half-line that immediately follows, “wolde guman findan” (2294)–“wanted to find the man”; furthermore, secan is used in line 2300 with a direct object, thus obviously in the sense “to search for, seek.” If we maintain that both “stonc” and “sohte” (in 2293) refer to movement alone, we are then left with an oddly external view of the dragon’s actions at these points in the story, whereas elsewhere we are privy to its emotions and thoughts (e.g. 2296, 2302-6). Furthermore, the movement readings reduce the phrases “æfter stane” and “æfter grunde” to something more like filler; moving quickly “along the stone” just gives us a vague context for the action, but sniffing “along the stone” gives us a specific direction for the action.

To go one step further, the passage may make better sense if “stonc” is interpreted as “sniffed,” for then we can say that the events are presented in a logical sequence. The dragon wakes up, sniffs around, and discovers that a man had entered its barrow while it slept. It begins to search for the man, goes outside, and doesn’t find him; it then returns inside, and discovers the theft of the cup. This is what most angers the dragon, and what it wants revenge for, as the following lines explain: “Wolde se laða lige forgylidan drincfæt dyre” (2305)–“the hateful one wanted to requite the drinking vessel dearly, with flame”: and indeed at this point the digression begun in 2210 (“Wæs ða frod cyning, eald eþelweard–oððæt an ongan deorcum nihtum draca rics[i]an”–“He was then a wise king, an old guardian of the homeland–until a certain one, a dragon began to rule on the dark nights”) has now been brought back up to the “present” of the story. However, if we take “stonc” as “moved quickly” or “leapt,” we lose the orderly sequence outlined above. The dragon would then be leaping up spontaneously, without provocation—and after all, it has just woken up. By this reading, the dragon’s discovery and his subsequent rage are described all at once.

It may be that the “moved quickly / leapt” interpretation has been preferred mainly because it is the lectio difficilior, that is, we (as English-speakers) probably ascribe to stincan the behavior of our verb smell more readily than we recognize in it a sense parallel to that of Old Norse stökkva. However, if in the end the two readings are of equal likelihood, as I think they are, the reading seems preferable that recovers for the passage a sense that is better both for the narrative and for the poetry.

included in the idea of a dragon that “sniffs along stones,” but that does not mean that movement is the sole idea.
II. Gesewearcan

In the verb gesewearcan we face much the same situation as we did in the previous section with the nearly homophonous (ge)smaecan. The verb is poorly attested; the related noun swæc is much more common. Of all the Old English verbs of smell, it alone betrays no immediate connection to the emission of smell as odorous vapor; rather it seems to have expressed only experiential perception through smell.

Yet although gesewearcan is poorly represented (6 occurrences by my count), we can say with some confidence that it did have the meaning “to perceive through smell” and that in this sense it was synonymous with (ge)stincan. We know this because the two words existed apparently within the same dialect and were used as alternative glosses of the same Latin passage. The passage concerned is one in the Latin psalter in which odoro appears: “Aures habent et non audient; nares habent et non odorabunt” (Ps 113, 14) -- “They have ears and hear not: they have noses and smell not.” An identical passage occurs in Psalm 134, 17 of the Romanum version of the Psalter.58 Psalter D (mid 10th) offers the best evidence that geswearcan and (ge)stincan were synonyms. It glosses “odorabunt” as “gewæccad” in Psalm 113 and as “gestincæd” in Psalm 134. Of the five Gallican psalters related to D (which have “odorabunt” only in 113), it is followed in using geswearcan by H (11th),59 G (mid 11th), and J (second half of the 11th).60 We thus have evidence of a glossing tradition of geswearcan for odoro over a period of more than a hundred years.

In one other instance, geswearcan is found with the sense “to perceive through smell,” and here too it can be shown to alternate with (ge)stincan. It occurs in the poem Judgement Day II, which is a fairly close rendering of Bede’s poem De die iudicii:

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58 The Romanum Version is Jerome’s earlier translation upon which eight of the fifteen psalters are based. Psalters A, B, C, D, E, L, M, and P are based on the Romanum; F, G, H, I, J, K, and N are based on the Gallican (standard Vulgate); however, L, M, and N gloss neither passage.

59 The manuscript has “gespæccad,” which has obviously arisen from mistaking the Old English letter wynn (="w"') for “p.”

60 (Ge)stincan is the more common gloss of odoro in the psalms. Of the remaining psalters related to D, F (11th) has “gestincæd” and K (late 11th) “gestuncæd.” In another tradition, A (early 9th) glosses “odorabunt” as “stincæd” in 134 (in 113, it glosses it incorrectly as “weordiæd,” apparently mistaking “odorabunt” for “adorabunt”); B (first half of the 10th) has “gestincæd” in 113 and “stincæd” in 134; C (mid 11th) has “gestincæd” in both instances. Likewise, Psalter I (early 11th), which is noted for its independence, has “gestincæd” in 113 and P (Paris Psalter) has “na wiht gestincæd” in 134 (I discussed its use of “ebian” in 113 in note 2 above). E, which is very late (12th) and is known for its inaccuracy, has “gebiddæp” in both 113 and 134, thus making the same error as A.
Old English Verbs of Smell

Foetor et ingenti complect putredine nares.  (103)

(“And stench fills their noses with immense putrefaction.”)

Hy mid nosan ne magon naht geswæccan butan unstenc[a] ornætessen.  (207)

(“With their noses they can smell nothing but an immensity of bad smells.”)

Lines 92-271 of Judgement Day II were used by an unknown homilist in a sermon on the Last Judgement;61 this homilist substitutes (ge)stincan for geswæccan:

Ne hi mid heora nosum ne magon naht elles gestincan. buton unstenc[ ]ornætnessa.  (Homily on the Last Judgement [Napier 29], 139, 6)

Dobbie reckons the Old English poem to be of late composition, “probably the late tenth century,” because “the technique of alliteration shows many traces of decay.”62 It would therefore appear that geswæccan was a synonym of (ge)stincan in its experiential sense of “to perceive through smell” in Late West Saxon. However, neither the MED nor the OED gives any record of it in Middle English.

From what we have seen, geswæccan seems to fit into the experiential action of smelling, beside the more comprehensive verb (ge)stincan. This assessment is neat, but it does not take into account some other evidence. In the previous chapter on Old English verbs of taste, I cited the following example from Ælfric’s Grammar as a possible example of the sense “to have taste, taste of” for the verb (ge)smaecce: “Sapio, ic wat odde ic gesmaecce” (221, 6) --“sapio, I know or I taste of.”63 Of the fifteen manuscripts surveyed by Zupitza for his edition, fourteen have “gesmaecce” (or nothing). However, one, MS T (Cambridge, Trinity College R.9,1764), has “geswæcece.” It would be easy to dismiss this as an error except that, as we saw in the previous chapter, the noun swæc can mean “flavor,” “act of tasting,” or “faculty of taste.” This is true for roughly half of its occurrences overall (and for all but one of its 25 occurrences in Ælfric). Swæc, however, could also mean “smell, scent, odor”:

of þam wongstede.  Stenc ut cymed
swettra and swijbra wynsumra steam.
swæcca gehwylcum

61 On the relationships of the various versions, see Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, ASPR 6 (New York, 1942), pp. lxxi-ii.

62 Ibid., pp. lxix-lxxii.

63 See p. 58.

64 Cf. Ker 89, art. l: “s. xi-xii.”
wyrtæ blöstumum  and wudubledum. (Panther, 44)65

("A smell comes out of the field-dwelling, a scent more pleasant, sweeter and more powerful than any of the scents, than the blossoms of plants and than the wood flowers.")

In addition, it could mean "act of smelling" (or simply "smelling"):  

Ac se deð bið egesic for ðære biternesse, for ðon he betyneð ðæ eagan from gesiðhe & ðæ earan fram gehermesse ... & ðæ nysþyrțu fram swæce. (Homily, Version of Vercelli Homily 9, 62)

("But death is dreadful because of its bitterness, for it closes the eyes from seeing, and the ears from hearing, and the nostrils from smelling.")

Since swæc could mean either "smell" or "flavor," "act of smelling" or "act of tasting," it is conceivable that the verb geswæccan might not have been restricted to actions relating to smells, but might also have had meanings related to tastes, even a descriptive one of "to taste of."

A look at the cognates of swæc and geswæccan shows these cognates being used to refer to both smells and tastes. Pokorny tells us that the root *suék-* which swæc exemplifies is found only in two branches of Indo-European: West Germanic and, surprisingly, Britanic Celtic.66 The West Germanic cognates describe only smelling or smells: Old High German sweðhan means "to smell, stink, to give off fragrance" and Old Saxon swek means "smell, fragrance." The Celtic words, however, refer to tasting: Welsh chweg, Cornish whek, and Breton c'hoeuk mean "sweet, pleasant." and Welsh chwaeth means "taste."67

III. Other Descriptive Verbs of Smell

A number of verbs remain for discussion which could only express the descriptive use, the sense of "to give off a smell" or "to convey a certain impression to the sense of

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65 Compare a similar prose passage: "Seo stow ... stemende wæs & stincende of swæce blowendre blotman" (Life of St. Machutus, 89, 16) -- "The place was scented and smelled of the scent of blooming blossoms." Cf. "Locus enim in quo habitare solet florum odore flagrabit" (Bill, Vita sancti Machutii, 88, 30).

66 Pokorny, p. 1043. Pokorny describes the primary meaning of the root as "(gut) riechen," "to smell good."

67 Cf. Pokorny (s.v. suék-): Old High German sweðhan, "riechen, stinken, hervorquellen"; Old Saxon swec, "Geruch, Duft"; Welsh chweg, Cornish whek, Breton c'hoeuk, "süß, angenehm"; Welsh chwaeth, "Geschmack."
Old English Verbs of Smell

smell.” These verbs will give us further insight into how the Anglo-Saxons conceived of smells as vaporous emissions.

A. Reocan

Of the descriptive verbs of smell, reocan remains closest to its original meaning, “to emit vapor.” “Vapor” should be understood in its broadest sense, including any sort of smoking, steaming emission. Reocan may describe the steaming of hot water: “Wyl ða wyrtææalle on wætre, ... læt læt reocan on ða eagan” (Bald’s Leechbook 1, 2, 32, 6)– “Boil all the plants in water, let it steam into the eyes”; likewise, “Pa hatan wæter reocað & swa mycelæ æþmas wyrcæð” (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 57, 343, 3)68–“The hot waters steam and so make great vapors”; or the evaporation of dew: “Eode ða forð feordæ healf gear butan renscurnum and reocendcum deawe” (Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Book of Kings, 56)69–“Four and a half years passed without rain-showers and evaporating dew.”

Reocan may also describe the emission of smoke: “æt hreocendum heorpe” (Homily “Be misticum gelimpan” [Napier 36], 173, 15)–“in a smoking hearth”; likewise, “Wiþ toðwyrmæ, genim acmæla & beolonan sæd & weax, ... wyrc to weax candelle & bærn, læt reocan on þone muð” (Bald’s Leechbook 1, 6, 50, 16)–“For the treatment of toothworms, take acorn-meal, henbane seed, and wax, make into a wax candle and burn. let (it) smoke into the mouth.” It may also be used of a vapor less easily classified:

Gif wife to swipe offlowe sio monæcynd, genim niwe horses tord, lege on hate gleda, læt reocan swipe beþweþ ða þeoh up under þæt hraegl. (Bald’s Leechbook 3, 38, 331, 26)

(“If a woman’s monthly nature flows too greatly, take a fresh horse turd, lay it on hot coals. let it smoke / steam between the thighs under the garment.”)

It is our tendency to think of steam and smoke as things primarily perceptible through sight, while smells, from our scientifically informed viewpoint, are trace chemicals borne through the air. However, the various Old English usages that we are examining here suggest that the Anglo-Saxons associated smells with visible vapors and assumed that the same kind of vapors were at work when smells could not be seen. Of course, in the following example from Gregory’s Dialogues, a visible mist and a perceptible stench are one and the same:

68 Cf. “Aquae calidae vapores nimios faciunt” (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 57, 3).

69 Cf. III Reg 17, 1: “Si erit annis his ros et pluvia nisi iuxta oris mei verba”–“There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the words of my mouth.”
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*Erant vero super ripam praedicti fluminis nonnulla habitacula, sed alia exsurgentis foetoris nebulæ tangebantur, alia autem exsurgens foetor a flumine minime tangebat.* (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 37, 9)

Witodlice eac wæron ofer þam stæð þære [fore]cwedenan ea well manige hus, sume þa wæron gehrinene mid þy miste þæs fulan stences, þe of þære ea aras, sume na eallinga gehran seo fylnes þæs reocendan & stincendan mistes. (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 37, 319, 8)

(“Indeed there were also a good number of houses upon the bank of the aforesaid river, some of which were touched by the mist of the foul smell that rose from the water, some the foulness of the rising / reeking and stinking mist did not altogether touch.”)

We might first be tempted to treat “reocendan” as the equivalent of “exsurgens” and translate it simply “rising,” thus avoiding the slight redundancy, in Modern English, of the phrase “reeking and stinking.” However, the Anglo-Saxons did not shrink from such redundancies, often employing repetitive word-pairs in their translations of single Latin words, and it does appear, from other examples, that the present participle of reocan was used to describe the emitting of stench.

While reocan did not yet have the wholly negative force of our verb reek, so that Ælfric could write “butan ... reocendum deawe” (as we saw), it seems to have been on the way to acquiring a negative sense by a process similar to that which affected (ge)stincan.

When discussing (ge)stincan, I mentioned that the use of the present participle without an adverb implied that something gave off a smell in some remarkable way: something that is stincende is smelling “remarkably,” “strongly,” and hence very likely “badly.” The same principle applies to the use of the present participle of reocan. Since smells were apparently conceived of as odorous vapors emanating from objects, these objects “smelled” by the degree to which they let off these vapors. Because dung and decaying corpses let off a considerable quantity, they are described as “reocende”: “Seo eadige Agnes ... þara maðma ne rohte þe ma þe reocendes meoxes” (Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Agnes, 19)–“The blessed Agnes did not count their treasures more than stinking dung”; and “Cirdon cynerofe, wiggend on wîdertrod, wælscel on innan, reocende hraw” (Judith, 311)–“The noblemen turned back, the warriors in their return, from amidst the carnage, the reeking corpses.” Used without an adverb, the present participles must mean literally “emitting a

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70 On repetitive word-pairs, see Chapter 5, pp. 176-9.

71 In some dialects, reek does not have an altogether negative force, as is illustrated by the Scottish blessing, “Lang may your lum reek.” A smoking chimney is a sign of comfort.

72 Cf. “Pretiosissima ornamenta, quae a beata Agne veluti quaedam stercora sunt recusata” (Pseudo-Ambrose. Epistolæ 1, 2, 813, C).
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(90)

(great) quantity of odorous vapor," and thus imply "stinking, reeking." When elsewhere Ælfric uses the present participle of the smell itself, its effect is the same: "Hwæt is atelicor geðuht on menniscum gecynde þonne is ðæs hrofliam lic mid ... reocendum stence?"

(Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 23, 370, 158)73—"What seems more repulsive in humankind than this leprous body with its stinking smell?" In all three of the examples above, reocan carries some association of "emitting" and perhaps even "steaming," but it also clearly indicates the "giving off" of smell.

Despite the broad application of reocan to the emitting of steamy, smoky, or odorous vapors, the cognate noun rec almost always means simply "smoke." To give several examples: "Se yfla willa bið tostenced swaþere reoc beforan fyre" (Alfred, Boethius' Consolation, 38, 117, 17)74—"The evil will shall be scattered like smoke before a fire"; "Ascendit fumus. Upastah smic vel rec" (Psalter C, 17, 9)75—"The smoke rose up"; and, in the final image of Beowulf: "Heofon rece swe[all]g" (3155)—"Heaven swallowed the smoke (of the funeral pyre)." This consistency supports the interpretation of rec as "smoke" when the context does not make it clear: "Cyle & wind & rec & dust, þas þing & þisum gelic ælce dæge sceþpað þam eagum" (Bald's Leechbook 1, 26, 20)—"Chill, wind, smoke, and dust, these things and things like them harm the eyes each day." There seem to be only three instances in which rec has anything to do with smells or odors. In two of these, rec describes a "pleasant smoke" that marks the location of the True Cross, as we see in Elene:

Forlæt nu, lifes fruma,
of ðam wangstede weynsumme up
under radores ryne rec astigan
lyfllacende. (Elene, 792)76

73 Cf. "Et quid in humana carne abjectius carne leprosi, quae ... exhalantibus fetoribus impletur?" (Gregory. Homiliae in evangelia 39, 1301, B). "Exhalantibus" supports the interpretation that "reocandum" especially conveys a notion of the emitting of stench like a vapor.

74 The simile does not appear in the original Latin.

75 Fumus is not necessarily specific to smoke: it could mean "smoke," "steam," or "fume" (Lewis & Short). However, the context in the psalm makes it clear that "smoke" is meant, and the Anglo-Saxon glossator makes note of this by including both smic (which always meant "smoke") and rec.

76 Cf. "Fac ab eodem loco fumum odoris aromatum et suavitatis ascendere" (Acta Cyriaci, 9).
Similarly in the Martyrology: "Dær com upp of dære eordan wynsumes stences rec dær seo rod wæs gemeted" (Martyrology, MS B, May 3, 78, 13) -- "There came up from the earth a smoke of pleasant scent where the cross was discovered." Elsewhere in the Martyrology, rec refers to the foul-smelling smoke emitted from a demon’s nostrils: "Ful ree him eode of dæm næspiracylm" (Ibid., August 25, 187, 4) -- "A foul smoke came from his nostrils." Thus it would seem that while reocan could describe the emission of various types of vapors and of (bad) odors, the related noun rec was specific to "smoke."

B. Styman

In contrast to the broad use of reocan as "to emit vapor" and the more restricted meaning of rec as "smoke," the verb styman (also steman) is almost exclusively associated with the emission or exhalation of odor, while the related noun steam has a broader application as "(smoky, steamy, odorous) vapor." Like stincan, styman glosses such Latin words for the emission of vapor as flagro, odoro, redoleo, oleo, and fumigabundus, as well as "odorem dat" and "eructat, anhelam emittit." Only in one instance (out of some 35 occurrences, many of them glosses) does styman have to do with something other than the emission of scent:

And he þær geseah eac sumne þara manna þe he ær gewundfodle þa hwile þe he lifigende wæs—and se man lifde þagyt ... and sio wund wæs open, and þæt blod wæs stemende. (Letter of Boniface to Eadburga. 77) 77

(“And he saw there too one of the men that he had previously wounded while he was living—and the man lived yet, and his wound was open and the blood was running.”)

As we will see, what this example seems to share with the other uses of styman is the basic notion of “coming out, exuding.” However, this example may represent a sense of styman that was particular to moisture, perhaps “to run, ooze.” Such a sense is supported by the Old English cognates of styman. In one instance, the noun steam apparently means "moisture": “Forleton me þa hilderincas standan, steame bedrifenne” (Dream of the Rood, 61) -- "The warriors left me standing, covered with moisture (i.e. blood)." Likewise,

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77 Cf. “Ex naribus egrediebatur flama [sic] sulphurea” (Passio sancti Bartholomaei apostoli, 1, 144, 3).

78 Cf. “Vidit quoque ibi hominem quendam, cui iam in seculari habitu degens vulnus inflixit—quem adhuc in hac vita superesse referebat— ... cuius cruentatum et patens vulnus et sanguis ipse ... inputabat ei crudele effusi sanguinis crimen” (Boniface, Epistola ad Eadburgam, 5). “Effusi” (“poured out”) seems to be the closest equivalent to "stemende."
the verb *bestym*n (also *besteman*) means “to make moist” (*DOE*), usually with blood: “*Wæron beorhhliðu blode bestemed*” (*Exodus, 449*)—“The mountain sides were moistened with blood”; but also with water: “*Wolde ic ... neosan ... hu ðu wægflotan wære bestemdon ... wisige*” (*Andreas, 483*)—“I would like to find out how you guide the ships dampened by the sea.”

Other than the above examples, *styman* appears exclusively in conjunction with words for smell. There are two basic uses. A *braep*, a “scent” or “fragrance,” may itself “exude” or “be emitted”: “Unasecgendlic braeb stemde of hire gyrlum” (*Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 30, 433, 126*)—“An ineffable scent was emitted from her garments”; similarly, “Ic wundrie þearle hwanon þes wyrtbraed þus wynsumlice steme” (*Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Julian & Basilissa, 35*)—“I greatly wonder whence this fragrance of flowers is so pleasantly emitted.” In both examples, we observe that the scent proceeds from a source, and that it flows outward in some way. Otherwise, a place may “exude” or “be filled” (one is tempted to say “steam”) with scent: “Seo stow ... stemende wæs & stincende of swæccblowendre blouman” (*Life of St. Machutus, 89, 16*)—“The place was filled and smelling of the scent of blooming blossoms.” Likewise:

Wyrta wearmiad. willsele stymed
swetum swæccum. bonne on swole byrneð
þurh fyres feng fugel mid neste. (Philip 213)

(“The plants grow warm, the pleasant dwelling exudes with sweet smells, when in the heat the bird burns with its nest in the grip of fire.”)

In this last example at least, there is such a clear connection between warming and the diffusion of smell that the temptation to translate “stymed” as “it steams” is almost irresistible. This is the closest the verb comes to meaning “to emit vapor.”

The connection between the vapor of steam or smoke and the vapor of smell is more closely made with the noun *steam*. The medical texts provide us with examples of *steam* used to mean both “steam”:

Eft wip þon ilcan, wermod gesodenne on wætere on niwum cytele, do of heordæ, læt recan þone steam on þet eare. (Balde’s Leechbook 1, 3, 44, 1)

(“Again for the same (disease), (take) wormwood boiled in water in a new cauldron, take off the hearth, let the steam rise [ie. steam] into the ear.”)

79 Cf. Acta sanctorum Juliani et Basilissae, 2, 6; the Old English departs from the original.

80 Cf. “Locus enim in quo habitare soletab florun odore flagrabat” (Bili, Vita sancti Machuti, 88, 30).
and “smoke,” apparently as a synonym of rec:

Sume bec lærad wið þære healfdeadan adle þæt man pinteow bærne to gledum & bonne þa gleða sette toforan þam secum men & þæt he ðonne ontyndum eagem & opene mupe þane rec swelge þa þragæ þe he mæge, & þonne he ma ne mæge, onwende his neb aweg lýthwon & eft wende to & onfo ðam steme. (Bald’s Leechbook, Fragment, 284, 11)

(“Some books instruct for the half-dead disease that one burn a pinetree to coals and then set the coals before the sick man and that he then take in the smoke with open eyes and mouth for as long as he can, and when he can no longer, he turn his neck away a little while and again turn back to it and receive the smoke.”)

We have already observed several examples where steam means “odorous vapor or exhalation”: “Him stod stincende steam of þam mupe” (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 5, 221, 135)81—“A (badly) smelling vapor came from his mouth”; and: “Stenc ut cymeð of þam wongstede, wynsumra steam ... swæcca gehwylcum” (Panther, 44)—“A smell comes out of the field-dwelling, a pleasanter scent than any odor.” Thus steam apparently could be used for every sort of vaporous exhalation. There is one surprising gloss where steam is used for the “sense of smell”: “in visu auditu gustu odoratu vel tactu on gesyhþe on hlyste on onbyrgine on steame oþþe on æþrine” (Arundel Prayers Gloss, 38, 16)—“in sight, hearing, tasting, smelling, or touch.” It is difficult to guess how much this sole example is representative of regular usage; at any rate, it certainly illustrates the strong connection of steam to smells.

C. æþmian, bladesian, hrenian

There are three other verbs for emitting odor, and each is limited to only a few occurrences in glosses: æþmian, bladesian, and hrenian. The first two verbs seem to be obvious formations from their respective nouns. An æþm is always an emission, exhalation, or radiation of some kind, whether of breath (“Hreðer æðme weoll” [Beowulf, 2593]—“His breast surged with breath”), of steam (“Pa hatan wæter reocæð & swa mycele æþmas wyrcað” [Gregory’s Dialogues (C) 4, 57, 343, 3]82—“The hot waters steam and so make great vapors”), of odor (“æþm wynsumes stences” [Ibid. (C) 4, 28, 302, 17]83—“the scattering of pleasant smell”), or of fiery heat (“He gefret þæs fyres æðm” [Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 40, 529, 147]—“He feels the fire’s blast”). In straight development from æþm’s sense “exhalation [of odor],” the verb æþmian as “æþmmigende” glosses the

81 Cf. “Inerat etiam et anhelitus fetidus” (Haymo, Homiliae de tempore 12, 80, D).
82 Cf. “Aquae calidae uapores nimios faciunt” (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 57, 3).
83 Cf. “fragrantia odoris” (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 28, 4).
present participle "redolentia," in the sense "to emit a smell, diffuse an odor" (DOE) in the Prudentius Gloses [Boulogne-sur-Mer] (208). The Latin passage runs thus:

Spes eadem mea membra manet, quae redolentia funereo iussa quiescere sarcofago ... Christus ad astra vocat. (Prudentius, Cathemerinon 3, 201)

("The same expectation awaits my limbs, which, designated to lie smelling (stinking) in the funeral tomb, Christ calls to the heavens.")

As a verb of smell, æpmian is evidently yet another descriptive verb that concentrates especially on the emission and diffusion of odor, rather than the impression it conveys to the (generalized) sense of smell.85

Bladesian occurs six times in glosses (five of them glosses of Aldhelm). One of its senses seems to be "to burn, scorch," for example where "blatesiendum" glosses "coquentibus" in the Aldhelm Gloses ([Digby 146], 2420).86 Bladesian apparently develops this meaning from the formative noun blæd's less common sense of "fire, flame" (DOE).87 However, in the other three instances, bladesian glosses "redoleant" in the sense "to emit a scent" (DOE)88 in this passage: "Suavi odoris f[r]agantia dulcius redoleant" (Aldhelm, De virginitate [prose]. 9, 237, 21)--"They smell more sweetly with the sweet

84 The passage is also glossed by a Latin gloss, "fetentia," which is in turn glossed by the Old English "fulstincende."

85 In the only other instance it occurs, æpmian glosses exæstuo, "to blaze out, flare up" (DOE; see Liber scintillarum Gloss, 38, 218, 3); this sense is evidently related to the use of æpm which the example from Ælfric illustrates.

86 From the Latin passage: "Rigidamque spinae curvaturam prunis coquentibus extorruit" (Aldhelm, De virginitate [prose] 29, 267, 1)--"And he (St. Hilarion) burned the rough curve of (the basilisk's) spine with scorching coals." The DOE here defines bladesian "to blaze, flame," but coquo, which it glosses, is normally transitive.

87 Blæd more commonly means "blowing," or figuratively "glory." For the sense "fire, flame," see the gloss "flamma blæed" (Epinal Glossary, 445; Erfurt: "bled"). The DOE also cites the following passage from Ælfric as an illustration of this sense, but here blæd probably just means "breath": "He sende þone hælgen gast to eorþan, and he mid his blæde onælde eordlicra manna heortan" (Catholic Homilies I, 22 360, 168)--"He sent the holy spirit to earth, and he with his breath enkindled the hearts of earthly men." Compare the Latin source: "Sed ignem Dominus in terram mittit cum affluat sancti Spiritus corda carnalium incendit" (Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia 30, 1223, A).

88 Aldhelm Gloses [Brussels 1650], 635; [Digby 146], 554; and [Royal 5. E. xi], 65 ("redoleant & blæd"). Goossen's suggestion that the gloss "bladesiæb" in Brussels 1650 might render instead the Latin gloss "fulgeant" ("shine brightly, gleam" MLD) seems less likely, since the other two manuscripts do not have "fulgeant." Furthermore, the connection between such a use of bladesian and the unusual sense of bladesung as "lightning" is tenuous, since bladesung occurs with this sense only in Psalter E (76, 19 & 143, 6; as a gloss of coruscatio) which is late and known for its inaccuracy. Bladesung in Psalter E could well be an error for bliccetung, "flash of light, lightning" (DOE).
fragrance of perfume.” This sense accords well with the most common meaning of *bodesung*, “fragrance, odor” (DOE) a noun formed from *bladesian*, which either glosses *fragrants* (written *flagrants*) or renders it in translation: “aspera fragrantia odores seostregde *bodoesung*”99 & wynsumnes þæs swetan stencas” (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 16, 6; Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 16, 285, 16)—“the dispersed fragrance and pleasantness of the sweet smell.”

While we know very little about the use or importance of either *bladesian* or *æpmian*, their presence in Old English may at least be accounted for in terms of their relationships, derivational and semantic, to other attested Old English words. The case of *hrenian* is different. The word is found only once as a gloss of “redoleat” in the Liber scintillarum Gloss: “Religiosus numquam uinum redoleat. 90 æwfaest næfre win hrenige” (28, 206, 7)—“Let the pious man never smell of wine.” There are apparently two cognate words in Old Frisian, the strong verb *hrena, “to smell (of),” and the noun *hrenne, “odor,”*91 although I was unable to track down an actual example of these words in context. If Old English *hrenian* means what it seems to mean, we might be prepared to accept the etymology mentioned by Pokorny (from Wissmann), that *hrenian* is cognate with Old English *hrinan*, “to touch.”92 This is interesting, as it would furnish another example of a perception verb that has switched from one sense faculty to another (like *taste*). Might a smell be said to “touch” the perceiver? Holthausen (s.v. *hrenian*) proposed that the Old English word *hrunol, “foul, stinking,”* is another cognate. This connection seems less certain, as it depends very much on how we interpret *hrunol* in its single occurrence: “wið dy runlan attre” (Metrical Charm 2, 45)—“for the ?stinking / ?running poison.” Both Bosworth-Toller and Clark Hall express uncertainty about its meaning: the context suggests it should refer to a color.

89 The DOE records “bodoesung” as the spelling of *bodesung* in the Corpus version of Gregory’s Dialogues. The word appears three times in this form as a translation of *fragrantia; it does not mean “blessing.”

90 “Redoleat” has the additional Latin gloss, “id est fraglet [sic].”


92 Cf. Pokorny. p. 618: on *hrinan* and other touch verbs, see Chapter Four.
Summary

In this section we have made a number of discoveries, of both general and local interest. We have reviewed the evidence that the Anglo-Saxons were in the habit of speaking of smells as odorous vapors, which may well reflect how they conceived of them. Of more local interest, we have discovered a deliberative use of gestincan; and we have used this towards a reassessment of the “stone” crux in Beowulf. (In addition, at the beginning of the chapter, in note 2, I argued that epian probably does not, pace the DOE, mean “to smell (any odor)” rather than “to breathe”.)

It now remains only to summarize the structure of the field of smell verbs in Old English, as far as the evidence allows.

Clearly, (ge)stincan is the most general verb of smell in attested Old English. It is used (with some distinctions between the simplex stincan and the prefixed gestincan) in all three basic categories of perception verbs. It seems, however, to arise first out of the non-perceptual meaning “to emit vapor.” It carries the “emitting” element into the descriptive use as “to emit odor,” although the bulk of attestations of this use have the more perceptually-oriented sense “to give an impression to the faculty of smell.” Its experiential senses span the range between the precognitive “to experience a smell” to “to perceive / detect a smell,” a sense which the prefixed tostincan makes more specific as “to distinguish a smell.” Gestincan also apparently has the deliberative sense “to seek to perceive through smell,” a meaning it may exhibit in the disputed Beowulf passage “Stone ða æfter stane.”

The related substantive stenc is the noun of smell that seems to have evolved furthest towards referring to the sensory impression excited in the faculty of smell. Yet even with this sense of “smell, odor, scent,” and often negatively “stench,” there are plenty of instances where stenc is used in ways that suggest that it is conceived of as something more like a vapor. In one instance, it seems to refer to an odorous smoke; in others, the smell is said to come out, rise up from, or fill up a space, like vapor.

The poorly attested geswæccan is the only other verb besides (ge)stincan to express the experiential sense “to perceive through smell.” In this sense, it appears to have been a viable alternative to (ge)stincan. However, in one textual variant, it is apparently used in the sense “to have taste, taste of,” a meaning which might reflect the senses of the related noun swæc, which can mean both “flavor” and “smell,” “act of tasting” and “act of smelling.”

Reocan is a descriptive verb of which the bulk of attestations are of the non-perceptual sense “to emit vapor,” which strongly colors its perceptual meaning of “to emit odor.” When used as a present participle, it tends to have a pejorative meaning. The
cognate noun rec seems to mean only “smoke,” although in a few instances it describes an odorous smoke.

In attested use, styman almost exclusively refers to the emission of odor (once it refers to blood, “to run, ooze”), although it does so in a way that suggests a vaporous emission. A scent or odor may itself be said to styman, or a place might styman with odors. The noun steam may describe a “smoke,” “steam,” or “odorous vapor.”

Æhpian occurs in only two glosses; in one of these it means “to emit odor.” This sense seems to be a straight development from the more commonly found noun æpm, which describes an exhalation or emission of some kind, including that of odor.

Bladesian is found in six glosses; in three of these it means “to emit odor,” reflecting the regular use of the noun bladesung as a gloss for Latin fragrantia.

Hrenian, found once, also appears to mean “to emit odor.”
Chapter 4:

Old English Verbs of Touch

In his *Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages*, Carl Darling Buck remarks that among the languages he studies, "generally there is no distinctive verb for 'perceive by touch'"; rather, this sense "is expressed by the generic words for 'perceive by the senses'." Eve Sweetser has recently made a similar observation: "In all Indo-European languages, the verb meaning 'feel' in the sense of tactile sensation is the same as the verb indicating general sensory perception." We have seen that this is true for Latin verbs, with *sentio*, the general verb, being the only one to regularly express the perception of tactile impressions. It seems to be true of Modern English, although *feel* has certain limitations as a general term—it can express the perception of vague sensations not assignable to any specific sense faculty, but it cannot, for instance, express the perception of an auditory sensation—and its use as a deliberative verb of touch seems to help to anchor it in that sense faculty.

Old English, as we will see, did not have an experiential verb of touch specific to that faculty: it had the broader terms *(ge)felan* and *(ge)fredan*. Like Latin, and unlike Modern English, its verbs of deliberative perception through touch were wholly distinct from the experiential verbs: there is no indication that either *(ge)felan* or *(ge)fredan* had a deliberative sense. Unlike the Old English verb of taste *(ge)byrgan*, which moves easily and indistinctly between experiential and deliberative action, and unlike the verb of smell *(ge)stincan* which moves between all three types of perceptual action--experiential, deliberative, and descriptive—the Old English verbs of touch as a rule keep experiential

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3 See Chapter 2, pp. 47-52.

4 See Chapter 3, pp. 65-78.
and deliberative action quite separate.  

Having said that, I will observe that Old English verbs of both types—experiential and deliberative, that is, for there are no descriptive verbs—have a tendency to appear in contexts where they seem to be moving towards the opposite type. This tendency has made this chapter more difficult to write and has certainly lengthened it. Two other things have also increased the difficulty of this chapter: the multiplicity of verbs to be considered and the difficulty of isolating examples that clearly express perception through touch.

Faced with the difficulty of finding an appropriate structure for the material, I have turned to the Modern English verbs of tactile perception. I begin with a brief overview of these verbs; this will provide a model for the ordering of the Old English verbs, in particular those of deliberative perception. I then look at the Old English nouns of touch, as these provide a sort of introduction to the verbs from which they are derived, and illustrate how the sense of touch is generally designated by nouns derived from the deliberative verbs—and usually those that signify light contact—rather than from experiential verbs. In the first main section, I consider the experiential verbs (ge)felan and (ge)fredan; in the second, I look at three kinds of deliberative verbs, “handling,” “feeling,” and “touching” verbs; in the third, in lieu of a discussion of descriptive verbs, I look very briefly at alternative strategies for the descriptive use. Along the way, we will consider the possibilities that the deliberative “feeling” verb, (ge)grapian was on the way to acquiring an experiential use, and that some of the “touching” verbs were dialectal variants.

Of our own verbs of touch, feel seems to be the only verb that specifically describes perceiving by means of the tactile sense. Because sensations of a rather varied nature are perceived through this sense, feel tends to be a rather general type of verb, embracing a wide range of sensations. These several (rather maritime) examples from the OED are from old sources but their usages still seem current. They are ordered according to the increasing complexity of their complements: “I felt under my naked foot ... some hard substance or other” (Mrs. Griffith tr., Viaud’s Shipwreck [1771] 86); “The hand holding the inflated animal feels a constant boring motion of the spines” (F.D. Bennett, Whaling Voyage [1840] II, 265); and “A Sardinian captain bathing ... felt one of his feet in the grasp of one of these animals” (T. Beale, Sperm Whale [1839] 65). Although the experiential use of feel may be generalized to meanings that lie outside of purely physical perception, such as “to be conscious of (a subjective fact)” or “to experience (a sensation, emotion)” (OED), it is distinguished from other verbs of general perception, such as perceive or sense, in that in the above examples it really does refer to a specific type of perception, that of perceiving through contact, in a way that the other verbs would not.
Saying "I perceived some hard substance under my foot" does not specify the type of perception; it simply indicates that perception has occurred.

Turning next to the descriptive use, we find that *feel* is again the only verb. I suppose we do not expect to have more than one descriptive verb per sense faculty, and so *feel* does the job for the tactile sense: "If it feels heavy ... then we give him more rope" (Account of several late voyages and discoveries [1711] II, 165) and "The air was extremely cold, and felt particularly so to us" (J. Byron, The narrative of ... distresses suffered ... on the coasts of Patagonia [1768] 263). But there is in fact no particular reason why we should be limited to a single descriptive verb. The *OED* cites a similar (obsolete?) use of *touch*: "They touch rough--dusty rough, as books touch that have been lying around unused" (Jefferies, Open Air [1885] 104). This use of *touch* is not different in kind from the descriptive use of *feel*; it is only more restricted, being limited to the impressions that arise through actual contact.

Finally, for the deliberative use, we should first consider that, as in tasting, a rather obvious, easily observable gesture is required in order to apply voluntarily the sense of touch, a gesture generally performed with the hand and arm. Unlike tasting, where the motion is all towards the mouth, this gesture only involves a small portion of the whole sense organ, which is simply the entire surface of the body. That is probably why in Latin and Old English we find a complete split between deliberative and experiential verbs of touch, and why in all three languages there is a proliferation of deliberative verbs: there are many kinds of gestures. The number of verbs we encounter here require some sort of ordering. The system I have adopted here is based on the manner in which the action is performed: it can be heavy, neutral, or light.

I will refer to the verbs that involve heavy contact as the "handling" verbs. These are verbs that describe various sorts of prolonged manipulation or (literally) heavy-handed, intrusive gestures. *Handle* and *finger*, in their most concrete senses, belong here, both sometimes having the unpleasant association of too much contact with not wholly clean hands; *to paw* is the extreme development of this. *Grope* too belongs here, although it is now largely limited to intransitive use. What it suggests is the use of the hand as an organ of touch without the benefit of coordinated sight: we grope in the dark and the blind grope. It also suggests a blunt and intrusive gesture, which is probably why, coupled with the notions of darkness and going where the eye cannot, *grope* is used of indecent sexual gestures. *Grope* is much more restricted in use than its Old English ancestor *(ge)grapian*.

The verbs that are more or less neutral about the manner in which the gesture is performed are the "feeling" verbs. When *feel* is used in its deliberative sense, it has less to do with the manner of the gesture than with simply expressing the fact that an impression
was sought. If anything, it implies that there was enough contact for a full impression to be received: “The maids ... were not shy of being seen, nor of having their hair felt” (J. Davies tr., *Olearius’ Voyages and travels of the ambassadors sent ... to the great Duke of Moscovy* [1662] 108); and “I felt his pulse” (*Trial of maha rajah Nundocomar* [1776] 3311). Of course, feel can be used in the same way as grope, either in blindly “feeling one’s way” or in a sexual sense, but on the whole feel suggests a full gathering of sensory information, without materially affecting the thing that is felt. Thus it is essentially neutral with regard to the way the deliberative action is performed.

Last, the “touching” verbs refer to actions that are particularly light, subtle, or brief, touch being the obvious representative. In this example, “When the new car was swung out on to the wharf, Mike walked around it and touched it lovingly” (N. Scanlan, *Winds of Heaven* [1934] xvi, 150), we envisage this action as a light, caressing motion, probably performed with the tips of the fingers. In another example, “whatever she touches with her hands feels wet to her” (*Trans. Med. Soc. London* [1907] XXX, 371), touch only suggests immediate, brief contact, not prolonged handling. We will look at the Old English deliberative verbs according to this three-part division. As Buck mentions, among the Indo-European languages, it is often the “touching” verbs that supply the root for the substantive “sense of touch.” We will see that this is true of Old English in the following section.

**Old English Nouns of Touch**

Unlike the senses of sight, hearing, taste, and smell, the “fifth” sense cannot be related to a localized organ of sense, and even now our common conception of it remains vague. Although it is a commonplace that this fifth sense is not really a single sense at all, but a collection of different senses, we are still most accustomed to refer to the fifth sense as that of touch, “that sense by which a material object is perceived by means of the contact with it of some part of the body” (*OED*). The name touch somewhat inaccurately suggests that actual contact has to be made for perception to occur (thus overlooking the sorts of perception that occur at a distance, such as that of temperature). But it has the property of keeping the focus of this faculty, like the other four, on the reception of impressions arising from stimuli outside the body. The noun touch of course is identical to the verb touch, a deliberative perception verb designating light contact.

It is also possible to refer to the fifth sense as that of feel or feeling. A phrase such as “the feel” may be more or less synonymous with touch as described above; it may also refer to the overall impression given to the fifth sense after some extended interaction with a certain object or mechanism: “the feel of Mike’s car.” We can use feeling to refer to the
fifth sense, "the sense of feeling," and in doing so we may be thinking somewhat of the deliberative sense of the verb feel; but we are probably less apt to use feeling in this way than people were in the 16th to 18th centuries. Feeling is more likely to become a sort of catch-all term, embracing "all physical sensibility not referable to the special senses of sight, hearing, taste, and smell" (OED). Thus, the term touch implies a sense faculty concentrated on the surface of the body and especially in the hands, while feeling may be either limited to this or embrace those many ill-defined sensations that reflect both the state of the body and its environment.

The Anglo-Saxons knew the sense of touch by several names, including hrepung, hnunig, hrine, æthrine, grapung, and gefrednes. We note immediately that all these nouns, with the exception of gefrednes which occurs twice, are related to verbs of deliberative action--i.e. (ge)hrepan, (ge)hrinan, æthrinan, and (ge)grapian--and that the first four nouns are related to the "touching" type of verbs, a feature they share with our noun touch and Latin tactus. As we will see, there is also a hint of verbal action in several of the nouns, as the formative suffix -ung suggests. The nouns of touch in Old English are strongly associated with a willed and dynamic action, especially one performed with the hand and arm.

Not all of these nouns are well attested, but it is at least apparent that Ælfric preferred to use hrepung to refer to the sense faculty:

On handum and on eallum lichaman we habbað hrepung, þæt we magon gefredan hwæt bið heard, hwæt hnesce, hwæt smēde, hwæt unsmēde, and swa gehwæt. (Catholic Homilies II, 23 [DOE: 26], 214, 50)

("In the hands and in all the body we have touch, so that we can feel what is hard, what soft, what smooth, what unsmooth, and whatever.")

On the several occasions Ælfric enumerates the senses, he always uses hrepung to refer to the sense of touch, e.g., "Da fif pund getacnið þa fif andgitu ures lichaman, þæt is gesið, and hlíst, svæcc, and stenc, and hrepung" (Catholic Homilies II, 38 [DOE: 43], 319, 46)--"The five pounds signify the five senses of our body, that is, sight and hearing, sense, smell, hearing, taste, and touch--the special sense of the body, that is, the least touch, the Bee perceives." (Cited from the OED).

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5 See, for example, C. Butler: "Hir horns ... are the proper organum of the sense of feeling; by which, with the least touch, the Bee soudainly senteth any tangible object" (The Feminine Monarchie [1609] B 4); and Addison: "The Sense of Feeling can indeed give us a Notion of ... Shape" (The Spectator [1712] No. 411 §1) (cited from the OED).

6 For this use of (ge)fredan, see p. 111. Here Ælfric elaborates upon the Latin source: cf. Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia, 36, 1268, B.

7 Cf. Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia, 9, 1106, C: "Quinque [talenta] etenim sunt corporis sensus, videlicet visus, auditus, gustus, odoratus, et tactus." Other examples of hrepung are found in Ælfric's Catholic Homilies I, 9, 251. 69; Catholic Homilies II, 23, 214. 44: 38, 322.
taste, smell, and touch.”

However, on one occasion, in referring to the faculty of touch, Ælfric gives grapung as an alternative to hrepung to render Latin tactus:

Pa angitu sint gehatene þus: uisus, þæt is gesihð; auditus, hlyst; gustus, swæc on þam muðe; odoratus, stænc on þæra nosa; tactus, hrepung odde grapung on eallum limum ac þæah gewunelicost on þam handum. (Lives of Saints, Christmas, 196)8

(“The senses are called thus: uisus, that is sight; auditus, hearing; gustus, taste in the mouth; odoratus, smell in the nose; tactus, touch or feeling in all the limbs but most usually in the hands.”)

Ælfric is the only author who uses the noun grapung, and of the six times he does employ it, this is the only occasion where it signifies the sense of touch. Elsewhere it refers to the deliberate application of the sense of touch.

Hrinung and hrine, limited to four or five attestations each, also refer to the faculty of touch only once, and they do so in the same text, Alfred’s translation of Augustine’s Soliloquies. In Book 1, we find:

Ic þe bydde, drihten, ... þu þe we ne magon lichamlice ongytam [sic], naper ne mid eagem. ne mid [w]ece, ne mid earum. ne mid smece. ne mid hrine. (Augustine’s Soliloquies 1, 6, 6)9

(“I worship you, Lord, you whom we cannot perceive bodily, neither with eyes, nor with taste, nor with ears, nor with smell. nor with touch.”)

Shortly after, however, we find:

Me þincð nu þæt þu ne truwie þam uttran gewitæ. nader ne þam eagem. ne þam earum. ne þam stencce. ne þam smecce. ne þam s[w]ece. ne þam hrinunge. (Augustine’s Soliloquies 1, 18, 18)10

(“It seems to me now that you do not trust your outer senses, neither the eyes, nor the ears, nor the smell. nor the taste. nor the touch.”)

Since they occur in this enumeration of the sense faculties (where the sense organs, the eyes and the ears are substituted, as they often are, for the name of the faculty), we can be quite certain that hrine and hrinung refer to the faculty of touch. Aethrine occurs in similar

137; 39, 328, 36; and Grammar, 9, 6, where it translates tactus.

8 The latter 12th c. MS Bodley 343 closely reproduces this passage (Ælfric, Late “Christmas” Homily, 92. 27). Ælfric’s source (Boulogne Sermon: Sermo in natale Domini et de ratione anime, 128, 258) does not enumerate the senses.

9 Cf.: “Deus ... quem sensum ignorat” (Augustine, Soliloquia 1, 6, 25)—“God whom physical sense does not know.”

10 Cf.: “Respuis igitur in hac causa omne testimonium sensuum?” (Ibid. 1, 18, 34)—“Do you reject in this matter all the evidence of the senses?”
contexts, such as in the gloss to the Latin prayers in MS Arundel 155, where it translates tactus as one of the five senses: "per quinque sensus corporis mei: visu, auditu, gustu, odoratu, & tactu burh fif angytu lichaman mines: on gesihde, on hlyste, on byrgincge, on swæcce, & æþhrine" (Arundel Prayers Gloss 19, 18)—"through the fives senses of my body: in sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch." 1

Finally, the noun gefrednes appears twice in Alfred’s translation of Boethius. The word is interesting to us because it is not derived from a verb of deliberative action, but from (ge)fiedan, an important and general verb of experiential perception:

Hwæt, þu wast þæt gesihð & gehernes & gefrednes ongitað þone lichoman þæs monnes. & ðeah ne ongitað hi hine no gelicne: ... sio gefrednes hine mæg grgerapian & gefredan þæt hit lichorna bið, ac hio ne mæg gefredan hwæðer he bið þe blæc þe hwit. ðe ðæger ðe unfæger. (Boethius’ Consolation 41, 145, 18) 12

("Now, you know that sight and hearing and touch perceive the body of man, and yet they do not perceive it alike: touch can feel it and feel that it is a body, but it cannot feel whether it is black or white, beautiful or ugly.")

Does gefrednes mean “sense of touch”? As I will discuss below (pp. 112-13), the verb (ge)fredan could be used here in a general meaning of “to sense, perceive”; gefrednes might have the correspondingly broader meaning of “feeling” as we defined it above (p. 102), that is, “all physical sensibility not referable to the special senses of sight, hearing, taste, and smell” (OED). However, the use of gefrednes here in conjunction with the names of the other faculties, gesihd and gehyrnes, suggests that it refers specifically to the sense of touch—especially since tactus is the equivalent word in the Latin.

Gefrednes is the only noun for the sense of touch that is based on a notion of pure experiential receptiveness. Several of the others, those formed from the corresponding verbs with the suffix -ung, seem to have retained strong verbal, or at least active, connotations. As Visser demonstrates, the Old English abstract nouns formed with -ung do not differ, in their syntactic behavior, from other Old English nouns—for example, they never take objects (with the few exceptions, translated from Latin, that he mentions) or are modified by an adverb. 13 Nevertheless, as abstract nouns of action, they could express

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11 See also 17, 13 and 38, 16.

12 Cf. “Nam ... eandem corporis rotunditatem aliter visus aliter tactus agnoscit” (Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.4, 26)—“For sight recognizes the same roundness of a body in one way, touch in another.” For the full context of the Old English passage, see p. 112 in the discussion of (ge)fiedan below.

13 Visser, vol. 2, §1001, summarizes the qualities that make nouns formed from verbs with
active, dynamic notions that strike us as almost verbal, especially in conjunction with an objective or subjective genitive phrase, that might appear to us as either the object or subject of a verbal phrase. Such is the case with *hrepung* in the example below:

An æbæle læce wæs wunigende on þære byrig, ... se cuðe toscnanan, gif he cunnode þæs mannes be his ædrena hrepunge, hwæðer he hræde swulhte. (Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Basil, 566)

(“A noble doctor was dwelling in that city, who knew how to distinguish, if he examined a man by the feeling of his veins, whether he would die quickly.”)

Here “his ædrena” expresses what would be the object of a finite verbal phrase formed with the verb *(ge)hrepian*. In several other instances, *hrepung*, accompanied by an objective genitive, also suggests a strong verbal notion, but without the perceptual aspect—“touching” for other reasons: “Manega eac wrordon mettrume gehæled þurh his reafes *hrepunge*” (Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies II*, 34 [DOE: 39.1], 294, 213)—“Many sick were also healed through the touching of his robe.” The verbal idea expressed here, which the context bears out, is that the sick touched his robe. Elsewhere, the genitive suggests the subject of a verbal phrase: “he wearð ahred þurh martines *hrepunge* fram ðæm reðæn attre” (Ibid., 295, 247)—“he was saved from the cruel snake by Martin’s touching.”

*Grápun* also often seems to express a strong verbal notion as a noun of action. In most of its occurrences, it refers to the deliberate application of the sense of touch, the action that *(ge)grapian* normally describes:

Cecilia him cwæd to, cunna mid *grapunge* hwæðer hi stanæs synd, and stanene anlicynsse, þæ þe þu godas gecigst, begotene mid leade, and þu miht swa witan gewislice mid *grapunge*, gif ðu geseon ne mihte, þæt hi synd stanæs. (Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Cecilia, 334)

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-ung like other nouns; in §1002-1007, he discusses the trends in Old English that point to a verbal development in OE -ung words, as well as some of the pitfalls in this approach; and in §1022-1026, he looks at the phonological changes that brought about the participial -ing.

14 Here it is perhaps well to quote Mitchell’s citing of Gildersleeve: “Too much can be made of [the various uses of the genitive]; as Gildersleeve observes, ‘the great function of the Accusative is to form temporary compounds with the verb, as the great function of the Genitive is to form temporary compounds with the noun. Beyond this statement, everything is more or less extra-grammatical’” (Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, §1264).

15 Throughout this discussion, I treat the parallel forms *(ge)hrepiian* and *(ge)hreppan* as representing the same verb.

16 Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita sancti Martini*, 18, 4-5. See also Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies II*, 24 [DOE: 28], 228, 230.

17 Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 1, 2, 4-6.

18 Cf. *Passio sanctae Ceciliae*, 1, 340, 58: “Mitte manum tuam et tangendo discere hoc
("Cecilia said to him, 'Test by feeling whether they are stones and stony images, covered with lead, those things which you call gods, and you can certainly tell by feeling, if you can't see, that they are stones.'")

[Hi] sceawodon mid leohete þone scinende gyrlan. Hit was swīðe hnesce, scinende swa swa purpura, ac hi ne mihton tocawan hwilces cynnes hit wære, ne mid heora grapunge, ne mid heora sceawunge. (Ibid., Martin, 815)19

("[They] inspected the shining garment by the light. It was very soft, resplendent like purple, but they could not discern of what kind (of stuff) it was, neither by their feeling, nor by their inspecting.")

And finally, referring to Thomas's inspecting and feeling of Christ's wounds: "þurh his grapungæ, we sind geleaffulle" (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 16, 310, 95)20--"Because of his (act of) feeling, we are credulous."

Given its limited attestations, it is difficult to say whether hrinung kept as much of an active verbal notion as hrepung or grapung. In the gloss to the John 20 chapter heading in the Lindisfarne Gospels, hrinung appears beside the finite verb "gehran," suggesting that it might contain a notion of verbal action: "tactulateris mid rining oðde middy gehran dæm sidum" (Lindisfarne Gospels, John chapter heading gloss, 43)--"by touching or when he touched the sides." Tactulateris refers to Thomas's inspection of Christ's wounds. But in another example, hrinung may have lost its verbal spin, since it appears with the -ung noun bletsung which probably no longer has much of a dynamic sense: "Se bisceop mot ... þone andyttre smyrían, gif he hine wurðe læt his neosunge & his blestunge & his hrininge"21 (Chrodegang's Rule 69, 80, 22)--"The bishop can anoint the one who confesses, if he considers him worthy of his visiting [i.e. worthy of being visited by him] and blessing and touch."22

saxum est, si uidendo non nosti."

19 Cf. Sulpicius Severus, Vita sancti Martini, 23, 8: "Adhibitoque lumine uestem omnes diligenter inspiciunt. Erat autem summa mollitie, candore eximio, micanti purpura, nec tamen cuius esset generis aut uelleris poterat agnosci;curiosis tamen oculis aut digitis adrectata non aliud quam uestis uidebatur." The Latin speaks of "having handled the garment by eyes and by fingers."

20 Cf. Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia, 26, 1201, C: "Quia dum ille ad fidem palpando reductur, nostra mens ... in fide solidatur."

21 Someone, perhaps the scribe, has written "æthrininge" over "hrininge."

22 Cf. "Si episcopus potest aut dignum duc[it] a se visit[andum], et benedicere et tangere chrisma[te] confitentem sine cunctatione potest" (Chrodegang, Regula canonicorum 69, 80, 3)--"If the bishop is able or reckons him worthy of being approached by him, he can both bless and touch with balm the one confessing, without delay." "Neosunge" on the other hand seems to contain an active verbal notion, and the Latin source uses verbs rather than substantives.
Since they are not formed from the verbs in the same way, hrine and aethrine are not nouns of action. Usually, they mean “contact” or “touch,” for example:

*Sed tamen equi uerberibus caesi, calcaribus cruentati, fatigari poterant. moueri non poterant, sicque aquam fluminis tangere quasi mortale praecipitium pertimesciant.* (Gregory, Dialogi 1.2.2)

Ac þeah þa hors wæron mid swipum swide geswungene & mid þam spurum mistucode, hy swa þeah of þam stedum hy astyrian ne mihton, ac swa swide hi þære ea wæteres hrine him ondon. swilce hit wære sum deades scyfe.  (Gregory’s Dialogues [H] 1.2.15.3)

(“But though the horses were much beaten with whips and maltreated with spurs, nevertheless they could not move them from their places, and they feared the touch of the river’s water, as [if] it were a some precipitation of death.”)

However, there is an interesting example in the *Old English Herbarium* where the author uses aethrine apparently to refer to the quality or impression of an object when it is brought into contact with the skin, the “touch” or “feel” of a thing: “Feldwyrt ... bið hnesce on aethrine & bitere on burgingce” (17.62.5)—“Gentian is soft in touch and bitter in taste.”23 We might understand aethrine as a noun for the sense quality of touch, like the English nouns *taste* or *smell* when we say something is “sweet in taste” or “strong in smell” (or like Old English *swæc*, “on swæce swylce grene cystel”—“in flavor like green chestnut”24). Alternatively we can see it as conveying a more active notion of “soft in touching, i.e. in being touched,” an interpretation supported by the presence of the deverbal noun *byrgung.*25

Like Modern English and Latin, Old English took its nouns for the sense of touch principally from “touching” verbs. In many instances, the nouns kept an active aspect, and could refer to the act of touching as much as to the faculty of touch. The fact that it is usually most convenient to touch something with one’s hand, and that the sense faculty is particularly concentrated there, as Ælfric expresses, “on handum ... we habbað hrepunge” and “gewunelicost on þam handum,” means that the Old English nouns for touch are especially connected with a dynamic action performed with the hand and arm. The presence of a noun *gefrednes* for the sense of touch is all the more interesting, because it can only refer to tactile sensibility, not any particular dynamic action.

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23 Cf. “tactu molli, gusto amaro” (Pseudo-Apuleius, *Herbarium* 17, 63)—“with a soft touch, bitter taste.” See also p. 165 below.

24 See below, pp. 164-5.

25 It could even suggest a dynamic sense resembling that of a descriptive verb of perception. “soft in (its) feel, i.e. it feels soft.” The *DOE* defines this use of aethrine simply as “touch. contact,” perhaps the best solution.
I. Experiential Verbs of Touch

Like Latin, Old English appears to have maintained a nearly complete split between verbs of experiential and of deliberative perception through touch. Apparently, the only verbs to regularly express experiential perception through touch were (ge)fledan and (ge)felan (but see the discussion at the end of the section on (ge)grapian). However, their meanings “to perceive through touch” and “to feel the touch of, be aware of physical contact with” (DOE) might arguably be seen as only particular instances of the broader sense of “to be sensible of” or “to sense, perceive.” In a given context, it can be difficult to determine whether (ge)fledan or (ge)felan means specifically “to perceive through touch” or simply “to sense, perceive, etc.” Thus our primary problem here will be determining that the verbs are indeed used in a way that is specific to touch.

A secondary problem will be to see whether either of these verbs developed a deliberative sense in Old English. In its definitions of the verb feel, the OED includes an Old English example under the general sense “to examine or explore by touch,” and there are examples which might be adduced of a deliberative sense for (ge)fledan. Yet as we will see, pace the OED, it does not appear that either verb developed a deliberative sense in Old English. (Ge)fledan never appears to have developed such a sense, even in Middle English, while the first examples of the deliberative sense for Middle English felen are found in late fourteenth century texts.

We will be looking at these verbs at greater length in the next chapter as general verbs of perception; here we will consider only those uses which relate to perception through touch. The reader should note that although (ge)fledan and (ge)felan appear to be synonyms, there is some reason to think that they were words belonging to different dialects; this too will be discussed in the following chapter.

A. (ge)fledan

It will be useful to tackle the secondary problem first, the question of a deliberative sense for (ge)fledan. If we can demonstrate that the verb is actually being used in an experiential sense, the very fact that the use appeared deliberative will be a good sign that the verb, although experiential, is being used specifically of touch, since deliberative acts of perception through touch always involve contact. The one passage in which one might be inclined to interpret (ge)fledan as deliberative is in Alfred’s translation of Augustine’s Soliloquies. Here, an erotic image in Augustine becomes homoerotic in Alfred, because of
the respective grammatical genders of *Sapientia* and *Wisdom*:

*Nunc illud quaerimus, qualis sis amator sapientiae, quam castissimo conspectu atque amplexu, nullo interposito velamento quasi nudam videre ac tenere desideras.* (Augustine, *Soliloquia* 1, 42, 33)

("Now we inquire about what kind of a lover you are of Wisdom, whom you desire to see and hold with chastelest look and embrace with no intervening veil, nude as it were.")

The Old English is considerably expanded from the Latin:

*Hu ne wost du nu daet ælc þara manna þe ðærne swide luʃad, þæt hine lyst bet þaccian and cyssan þone ðærne on bær lic, þonne þer þær clædas betweona beod? Íc ongyte nu þæt [þu] luʃast þone wisdom swa swide, and þe lyst hine swa wel nacode ongitan and gefredan þæt þu nomdest þæt [git] ænig clæd betweuh were.... Ac ic nat hu þu hym onfon mage mid geglofedum handum. Ðu scealt æac don bær lic ongean, gyf ðu hine gefredan wīlt....
Da cwæd heo: Hu ne sæde ic ær, se se þe bær lic gefredan wolde, þæt he hyt scolde myd barum [handum] gefredan?* (Alfred, Augustine's *Soliloquies* 1, 42, 14)

("Don’t you know now that for every man that greatly loves another (man), it pleases him better to caress and kiss the other on the uncovered part of his body than where there are garments in between? I perceive now that you love wisdom so greatly and it pleases you so much to see and feel him naked that you would prefer that there were yet no garment in between. But I do not know how you can receive him with gloved hands. You must also uncover your body in return, if you want to feel him. Then she said, Didn’t I say before, that whoever wants to feel an uncovered body, he has to feel it with bare (hands)?")

In comparing the two versions, we are probably apt to connect “nacode ongitan and gefredan” and “nudam videre ac tenere”; if we do so, then the dynamic aspect of “tenere” may incline us to assign a dynamic, that is, deliberative, sense to “gefredan.” The parallel structure is misleading, however, since “videre” and “tenere” are clearly meant to be respectively connected with “conspectu” and “amplexu”; and there is nothing either in the context or in our general knowledge of the verb that suggests that (ge)fredan had anything to do with embracing. The apparently parallel positions of “tenere” and “gefredan” do not signify that they mean the same thing. However, it is particularly the phrasing of the following sentences that inclines us to assign a deliberative sense to “gefredan”: the possibly dynamic sense of “to take” of “onfon” in “ac ic nat hu þu hym onfon mage mid geglofedum handum” (although onfon usually has a more passive sense of “to receive”), and especially the mention of the hands (which admittedly must be supplied, but with “barum” seem to make the best sense) in “he hyt scolde mid barum [handum] gefredan.”

The easy leap we make from “feeling” experientially and “feeling” deliberatively may lead us astray. There are a number of reasons to think that (ge)fredan does not have a deliberative sense here. Most importantly, Old English already had a perfectly good and well-attested verb of deliberative perception through touch, (ge)grapian, as we will see later.
in this chapter. Alfred himself uses *(ge)grapiun* in his translation of Boethius; it is reasonable to expect him to use it here, if he had intended the action to be deliberative. Second, we are probably justified in seeing “ongitan” and “*gefredan*” as describing the same kind of perceptual action—that is, they are both experiential. Together they represent the complete enjoyment of Wisdom’s body, “seeing” and “feeling.” Thus these two verbs, which can both function as general verbs of perception, here orient themselves towards distinct faculties, perhaps illustrating a general semantic tendency: *ongitan* towards perception of a “higher” order, centering around sight and extending into understanding, *(ge)*fredan towards things “experienced” or “sensed” by vaguer or more general faculties.26 Third, to call upon etymology, *(ge)*fredan seems to have arisen from an abstract, rather than a concrete origin; as we will see in the next chapter, the Proto-Indo-European root seems to have conveyed some idea of “knowing” or “understanding.” This makes it less likely (although certainly not impossible) that *(ge)*fredan should come to describe a willed and physical action performed with the hand.

If the action described by *(ge)*fredan is not deliberative, it certainly can be considered specific to touch. There is no question of merely “sensing” the body of Wisdom; the idea of sensual contact is central to the erotic metaphor. Indeed, *(ge)*fredan might here be specifically defined “to feel or experience the touch of.”

Having found that *(ge)*fredan did not have a deliberative sense in attested Old English, we may now approach our primary problem of determining whether the verb has a consistent experiential sense specific to touch. One good way of determining that a verb is being used in a way specific to one sense faculty is when it appears in contrast with other perception verbs that are specific to other sense faculties. This occurs especially where each of the five senses, or the action particular to that sense, is spoken of in turn. There are at least two such examples for *(ge)*fredan. Perhaps the most straightforward is found in Alfred’s translation of Boethius:

> Manige sint cwucera gesceafte unstirende, swa swa nu scylfiscas sint, & habbað þeah sumne ðæl andgites, forðæm hi ne meahton ealles libban, gif hi nan grot andgites næfð[þ]en. Sume magon gesion, sume geheran, sume *gefredan*. sume [g]lestincan. *(Boethius’ Consolation 41, 145, 32)*

(“There are many un-moving living creatures, such as shellfish are, and yet they have a certain portion of sense—for they could not live otherwise, if they didn’t have a particle of sense. Some can see, some hear, some feel, some smell.”)

26 This tendency of these two verbs to orient themselves towards different areas of perceptual experience will be a central concern of the following chapter.
The certain portion of *andgite*, here “sense” or “the capacity to perceive by the senses,” is manifested in various degrees by different animals. Some can see and hear, some can only feel or smell. Alfred has enlarged upon his original:

*Sensus enim solus cunctis aliis cognitionibus destitutus immobilitus animantibus cessit, quales sunt conchae maris quaeque alia saxis haerentia nutriantur.* (Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.5, 3)

(“For sense alone, stripped of all other types of knowledge, belongs to unmoving animals, such as are clams of the sea and any other things that feed clinging to rocks.”)

The *sensus*, “sense,” that Boethius refers to is evidently the tactile sense, since shellfish have no other obvious perceptual organs—as Trevisa says, in his late fourteenth century translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon*: “Pey cleuep to þe erthe and mowe noþer [see] ne hire, ne taste, ne smelle, but onliche fele whan þey beþe i-touched” (2, 181—MED). It seems right to correlate this particular type of *sensus* with the verb “gefredan” in the translation, and to view the other verbs, “gesion,” “geheran” and “gestincan,” as additions by Alfred. Included as it is in the midst of the list of specific perceptual actions, “gefredan” would make little sense if it meant simply “to have sensation, feel (in general),” since all creatures can be said to do that.27 We note too the absence of any elaborating details (such as “mid hrine” for instance) that might fit “gefredan” to the context if it had only a general sense. The structure of the passage demands that *(ge)frehdan* have the specific sense “to perceive through touch.”

We find a second instance of *(ge)frehdan* contrasting with other specific perception verbs in *Ælfric*:

Da fif getyma getacnið da fif andgitu ures lichaman, þæt sind gesihð, hlyst, swæcc, stenc. hrepung.... We gesœð þurh ure eagan, and ealle ðing tocnawæð; þurh þæt earan we gehyræð; on þam mûde we habbað swæcc, and tocnawæð hwæðer hit bið ðe wered, ðe þiter, þæt we dicgað; þurh þæt nosu we tostincæ hwaet clæne bið, hwaet ful; on handum and on eallum lichaman we habbað hrepunge. þæt we magon *gefredan* hwaet bið heard. hwaet hnesce, hwaet smede, hwaet unsmede, and swa gehwæt. (Catholic Homilies II. 23 [DOE: 26], 214, 44)28

(“The team of five [oxen] signify the five senses of our body, which are sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch. We see by means of our eyes and discern all things; by

27 For this broader sense, see this example from *Ælfric*: “Englas lybbað and gefredað and tosecelað” (Catholic Homilies I. 21, 349, 127)—“Angels live and feel and discern.” See also the following chapter.

28 Cf.: “Quid in quinque jugis bouum nisi quinque corporis sensus accipimus?” (Gregory, *Homiliae in evangelia* 36, 1268, B)—“What do we understand by the team of five oxen if not the five senses of the body?” The enumeration of the senses seems to be original to *Ælfric.*
means of the ears we hear; in the mouth we have taste and discern whether that which we eat is sweet or bitter; by means of the nose we sniff out what is clean, what foul; in the hands and in all the body we have touch, so that we can feel what is hard, what soft, what smooth, what unsmooth, and whatever.”

Here Ælfric talks quite specifically about the five senses and the action performed by each. With the exception of taste, each sense faculty is associated with a particular perception verb, namely, (ge)seon, (ge)hyran, tostincan, and (ge)frendan. We assume that (ge)frendan, by analogy with the other verbs, refers specifically to the action performed by the sense of touch. One could argue that (ge)frendan might be aligned with the general verb tocnawan, “to discern, distinguish,” and thus might itself be used in a general meaning of “to sense or perceive.” However, the fact that (ge)frendan refers to the perception of various types of texture strongly suggests that it is here specific to the action of “perceiving through touch.” This is supported by the adjectives of texture in the subordinate clause it takes as an object.

The difficulty, just expressed, of distinguishing the specific and the general meanings of (ge)frendan becomes more pronounced in other contexts. We will now look at several examples in which determining the sense “to perceive through touch” is somewhat more problematic. Just before the passage in Alfred’s Boethius we looked at above (p. 104), there is another in which (ge)frendan appears twice. (We have already seen this passage with regard to the noun gefrednes.) Here, although (ge)frendan is obviously associated with the sense of touch, there is some reason to think it is being used in a more general way, particularly in its second occurrence. First, the Latin:

Nam ... eandem corporis rotunditatem aliter visus aliter tactus agnoscit. Ille eminus manens totum simul iactis radiis intuetur; hic uero cohaerens orbi atque coniunctus circa ipsum motus ambitum rotunditatem partibus comprehenditi. (Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.4. 26)

(“For sight recognizes the same roundness of a body in one way, touch in another. The former sense remaining at a distance looks at the whole thing at once by its emitted rays; but the latter, being close to the round thing and joined to it, when it has been moved around the thing’s circumference, comprehends its roundness by parts.”)

Boethius is making a point about the different ways that things can be known. Alfred elaborates upon this point by adding the sense of hearing; he also implies more directly that sight is a superior means of knowledge. There is only a rough correspondence to the perception verbs used in the Latin:

Hwæt, þu wast þæt gesið & gehernes & gefrednes ongítad þone lichoman þæs monnes, & þeh ne ongítad hi hine no gelicne: þa earan ongítad þæt hi geherað, & ne ongítad hi þæh þone lichoman eallunga swylcne swylcne he bið; sio gefrednes hine læg gegrapiian & gefredan þæt hit lichoma bið, ac hio ne læg gefredan hwæðer he bið þæ blæc þæ hwit, þæ fæger þæ unfæger. Ac sio gesið æt frumcerre, swa þa eagan on besið, hi ongítad
ealle þone andwltan ðæs lichoman. (Boethius' Consolation 41, 145, 18)

("Now, you know that sight and hearing and touch perceive the body of man, and yet they do not perceive it as alike: the ears perceive what they hear, and yet they do not perceive the body altogether the same as it is; touch can feel it and feel that it is a body, but it cannot feel whether it is black or white, fair or unfair. But sight from the beginning, as the eyes look upon it, they perceive all the form of the body.")

(Ge)fredan here is closely associated with the noun gefrednes, which evidently translates tactus, "the sense of touch," and with the verb (ge)grobian, which as we will see later in this chapter is the best-attested verb of deliberative perception through touch. As we know from the example from Alfred's Boethius cited above, (ge)fredan will be used a few lines later on to mean "to perceive through touch." It seems reasonable to connect (ge)fredan in "sio gefrednes hine mæg gegrobian & gefredan þæt hit lichoma bið" with the specific action of "perceiving through touch." Yet the interaction between (ge)fredan and ongytan in the passage may give us cause to reconsider. At the beginning, Alfred states that sight, hearing, and touch "ongitað" the body of man--so we know that it is not incongruous to apply ongytan to the sense of touch. He then says that the ears "ongitað" that which they hear, and he says last that the eyes "ongitað" that which they look upon. In the midst of this, it is the sense of touch that can "gefredan" that the object is a body. The pattern established in the passage suggests that (ge)fredan, in its broader meaning of "to sense, perceive," is used synonymously with ongytan. Both verbs might then be considered as equivalents to "agnoscit" in the Latin; the choice of (ge)fredan might have been dictated by the verb's general orientation in the "lower" senses. Our interpretation of (ge)fredan depends especially upon how we view its rhetorical force in its second occurrence. Do we read here a sort of argumentum ad absurdum by interpreting (ge)fredan as completely incongruous with its object (something in the manner of "the sense of touch cannot feel whether the body is black or white"), or do we assign it a sort of general perception meaning that would clash less with the object (as in "the sense of touch cannot perceive whether the body is black or white")? The attested capacity of (ge)fredan to behave as a general verb of perception (see the following chapter) argues against the idea of its being wholly incongruous.

One possible interpretation of the passage above is that although (ge)fredan is used twice in quick succession, it might be used each time with a slightly different meaning: the

29 Again, see Chapter 5, both for the orientation of (ge)fredan and (ge)felan in the "lower" senses and for their relationship with ongytan. I use the term "lower" because there is some evidence that the Anglo-Saxons placed taste, smell, and touch after sight and hearing in a hierarchy of the senses; still the term is not really satisfactory and I use it mainly for convenience.
first time in a more particular meaning of "to perceive through touch," the second in a more general meaning of "to sense or perceive."

There is another example where (ge)freadan may shift its meaning in a similar fashion, and this time it might be signalled by syntax. The passage is found in Alfred’s translation of the Pastoral Care. In the Latin, we find the general perception terms insensibiliter, sensus, and sentio:

\[ \text{Vnde bene ad Ezechielem dicitur: "Sacerdotes caput suum non radent, neque comam nutrient. sed tendentes attondeant capita sua." [Ez 44, 20]} \]

... Capilli uero in capite, exteriores sunt cogitationes in mente: qui dum super cerebrum insensibiliter oriuntur, curas uitae praesentis designant: quae ex sensu negligenti, quia importune aliquando prodeunt, quasi nobis non sentientibus procedunt. \text{ (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 2. 7, 228, 155)}

("Whence it is well said to Ezekiel, ‘Let priests not shave their head, not grow their hair, but let shearers clip their heads.’ For the hairs on the head are the exterior thoughts in the mind, which when they arise imperfectly over the brain, signify the cares of the present life. These arise from heedless sense, for they come out improperly from time to time, almost without us perceiving.")

In the Old English, (ge)freadan is used three times. As can be seen by comparing the two versions, Alfred’s third use of (ge)freadan is part of his own addition:

\[ \text{Be ðæm suide wel wæs geecueden to Ezechiele ðam witgan ðætte ða sacerdas ne scoldon no hiera heafdu scieran mid scierseaxum, ne eft hi ne scoldon hire loccas laetan weaxan, ac hie scoldon hie efseigan mid scearum.... ðæt feax ðonne on hira heafde getacnað ða uterran gedohtas, ðæt greówd & scind ofer ðæm brægene, & his mon ðæah ne gefred; ða g[le]men diisses andweardan lifes ðæt getacnað. Sua giemeleaslice oft sc[e]acað ure gedohtas from us, ðæt we his furðum ne gefredað, ðon ma ðe mon his feax mæg gefredan butan ðam felle, forðæm we oft ymb ungedaðenlice wisan smeagead. \text{ (Pastoral Care 18. 139, 11)} \]

("Concerning this, it was well said to the prophet Ezekiel that priests must not shave their heads with razors, nor let their locks grow, but they must cut them with shears. The hair on their heads signifies the outer thoughts, for it grows and flourishes over the brain and yet no one feels this; this signifies the cares of the present life. Often our thoughts go so heedlessly from us that we do not feel it any more than a man can feel his hair outside the skin. for we often think about improper subjects.")

"Insensibiliter" is rendered by "his mon ðæah ne gefred," and "nobis non sentientibus" by "we his furðum ne gefredað," but "ex sensu negligenti" is omitted in favor of the elaboration, "ðon ma ðe mon his feax mæg gefredan butan ðam felle." This is the only instance I have found where (ge)freadan takes a genitive object (of course, when the object is a feminine noun, it is often impossible to tell). Even here this is not applied consistently: "his feax" is accusative. But what exactly do the "his" of the two genitive objects refer to? The second "his" must not refer to any discrete "thing," since the only logical referent, "geðohtas," is plural, but rather to the entire preceding clause, "sua giemeleaslice oft sceacað ure geðohtas from us." The first "his" might either refer to "ðæt feax," or to the
clause “ðæt grewð & scind ofer dæm brægene.” I think it refers to the clause: the clause is closer to the pronoun than the noun is, the second “his” also refers to a clause, and having “his” refer to the clause rather than the noun would render “insensibiliter oriuntur” better.

If we accept this, then we can say that in both instances, “his” refers to an event or process. The genitive might be explained as somehow appropriate to this, perhaps as vaguely partitive: our hair grows and our thoughts go from us more or less continually, but if we perceived this at all, we would do so only part of the time. Here it makes better sense to understand (ge)fredan in its general meaning of “to sense or perceive.” In the third example of (ge)fredan, it is only “his feax” that is perceived, and here we can probably understand the more specific meaning “to perceive through touch” or “to feel the touch of.” The difference between the general and the specific meanings would thus be signalled by the case of the object. Of course this explanation must remain wholly speculative, since we have no other obvious instances of (ge)fredan with a genitive object.

Finally, for the sense “to perceive through touch,” we may consider three further examples, in each of which (ge)fredan is used in contrast with other verbs. Although we may be at first inclined to interpret the verb as specific to touch in each of these, the reading is never so simple. In two of these examples, both from the Pastoral Care, (ge)fredan demonstrates an interesting contrastive relationship with the verb (ge)seon, the difference between “feeling (the touch of)” and “seeing.” One passage describes a practice of doctors before anaesthetic: “Hyt done his læceseax under his cladium oddæt he hine wundað; wile ðæt he hit gefrede, ær he hit geseo” (Pastoral Care 26, 187, 9)--“He hides his surgeon’s knife under his clothes until he cuts (his patient); he wants him to feel it, before he sees it.”

I think we are meant to appreciate how the messages from the two sense faculties arrive at different times. But in his translation, Alfred may have also been drawing upon another, more general sense of (ge)fredan, that of “to experience, undergo.” The doctor is like the preacher who “cuts out” the sinful part of a man: the man must “undergo” this painful process in order to be healed; it is better that he does so before he “perceives” it. We thus understand here two sets of opposed meanings, that is, between “feeling” and “seeing,” and between “undergoing” and “perceiving.”

(ge)fredan seems to manifest a similar contrast with (ge)seon in another passage of the Pastoral Care: “Swa swa fleogende fugel ... gesihð ðone welan ðe he wilnað, & he ne geliefð dæs grines ðe he mid gebrogden wyrd, æðon he hit gefrede” (44, 331, 17)--“Just as a flying bird sees the riches that it desires, and it does not believe in the snare with which

30 Cf. “Ut secantem gladium sentiret aeger antequam cerneret” (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 2. 272, 81)--“So that the sick man would feel the knife cutting before he saw it.”
it will be caught, until it feels it.” There is an obvious discrepancy between what the bird sees, “gesiðo,” and what it then feels, “gefrede.” Yet the effects of being caught in the snare are so obviously bad, we might wonder whether the sense of “gefrede” could be better rendered with the more general sense: “it does not believe in the snare until it experiences it.”

The last example I will cite involves the perception of contact in quite an obvious fashion:

Oft bið seo sawul on anum þinge oðde on anum gefohte swa bysig þæt heo ne gymð hwa hyre gehende bið þeah ðe heo onlocie; ne þeah heo sume stemne gehyre, heo hit ne understent; ne þeah hi hwa hreppe, heo ne gefret. (Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Christmas, 216)

(“Often the soul is so occupied on a thing or a thought that it does not observe who is near, though it looks; and though it hears a voice, it does not understand it; and though someone touches it, it does not feel.”)

It seems significant that in this list of perceptual actions, (ge)freadan appears in the place appropriate for a verb of touch. Yet we cannot be certain that it does not share a broader sense of “to perceive, be aware of” with the two verbs of perceiving and understanding, gyman and understandan, that appear before it, especially since it translates the rather general verb sentio. Its common use with impressions that are general, vague, and not specific to an obvious sense faculty, might explain its use here without calling upon a meaning specific to touch.

Does (ge)freadan have the specific senses “to perceive through touch” and “to feel the touch of, be aware of physical contact with”? Or have we been reading these meanings into contexts involving contact, where the verb has simply been used in a general sense of

31 There is no exact equivalent to “gefrede” in the Latin: “Et more autum captus, ... quo stranguletur peccati laqueo non agnoscit” (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 20, 392, 135)— “And captured in the manner of birds, he does not recognize by what snare of sin he is being strangled.”

Ælfric also uses (ge)freadan to express becoming aware of a trap: “Pa getimode þam redan deofle, swa swa deð þam grædan fisce þe gesið þat æs & ne gesið þone angel þe on þam æse stiçæ. ... Pa gefredæ se deoful þone angel þe he ær grædelice forswælth” (Catholic Homilies I, 14, 296, 171)—“Then it happened to the devil as it does to the greedy fish that sees the bait and does not see the hook that lies fixed in the bait.... Then the devil perceived the hook that he had earlier greedily swallowed up.” I think that (ge)freadan here means something more general than “to perceive through touch” because the devil has apparently swallowed or ingested the hook, so that it has passed beyond the sensitive region in the mouth—assuming of course that the devil has the same sort of tactile sensitivity that we do.

32 Cf. “Sepe etiam in tantum afffectata erit qualibet cogitatione. ut, quamuis apertos habeat oculos, quae presto sunt non uidit, nec sonantem uocem intellegit, nec tangentem corpus sentit” (Boulogne Sermon: Sermo in natale Domini et de ratione anime, 128, 268).
“to sense, perceive” or of “to experience”? Throughout the section above, I have played devil’s advocate in arguing for other meanings, but I think the fact that it is used so often in contexts relating to perception through contact should tell us that it did have a specific sense of “to perceive through touch.” Perhaps the example cited first from Alfred’s translation of Boethius best proves that (ge)fredan had such a sense: “sume magon gesion, sume geheran, sume gfredan, sume [g]estincan.” The inclusion of (ge)fredan in the midst of this list without further elaboration would make little sense unless it had a meaning particular to touch.

B. (ge)felan

The case for (ge)felan having senses specific to touch is roughly the same as it is for (ge)fredan. We are probably especially inclined to give it such a sense because of our associations with our own verb feel, with its deliberative use that is specific to touch. Here again it will be useful to begin with that secondary problem of whether (ge)felan had a deliberative sense in Old English.

In defining the verb feel, the OED begins with the general sense division “to examine or explore by touch,” under which is found the more specific sense: “to handle (an object) in order to experience a tactile sensation; to examine by touch with the hand or finger.” This Old English example is given as its first illustration:

Psēt nygodē was pēt pēr com hagol & swa mycel byspernes, ge dæges ge nihtes, & swa gedreðedlic. pēt hit man gefelan mihte. (Orosius’ History 1, 7, 26, 3)

(“The ninth [plague] was that there came hail and so much darkness, both day and night, and so oppressive, that one could feel it.”

The Old English corresponds only roughly to the Latin:

Post grandinem cum igne permixtum. ... post tenebras imaginibus diras. crassitudine palpabiles. diuturnitate ferales. (Orosius, Historiae 1, 10 12)

(“Next, hail mixed with fire; next darkness, fearful with visions, palpable in its thickness, gloomy in its long duration.”)

As Janet Bately points out in her edition of the Old English Orosius, we do not know what the translator’s exemplar looked like, and it certainly was somewhat removed from the “best” manuscripts used by the editors of the Latin editions. But assuming that “palpabiles” appeared in the translator’s exemplar, we must decide whether this supports an experiential or deliberative reading of “gefelan.” Palpabilis, derived of course from palpo.

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has the root sense “that which can be handled, touched,” a deliberative sense. But as I remarked in the Latin chapter, there are contexts where palpo takes on an experiential aspect,\textsuperscript{34} and it was even easier for the adjective, as it was gradually disassociated from the verbal action, to do so, so that it also came to mean “that which can be perceived through the sense of touch.” Therefore, having palpabilis in the exemplar could be used to support either reading. We must rely on our own sense of the passage. If darkness becomes remarkably thick and oppressive, surely what is most immediately remarkable about it is not that it can be manipulated, touched, or handled, but that it can be perceived through touch at all.\textsuperscript{35} (Ge)fredan is surely experiential here, and it is specific to touch.

We will now consider a series of examples where (ge)felan is obviously experiential and where it seems to be specific to touch. Again, we are especially interested in instances where it contrasts with other specific verbs of perception. There is one instance in the translation of Gregory’s Dialogues (Corpus) where (ge)felan contrasts with (ge)sein in a revealing way. The story involves an invisible pig, which everyone can feel but not see:

\textit{Cumque in ea iam missarum sollemnia celebrarentur, et prae eiusdem loci angustia populi se turba conprimere, quidam ex his qui extra sacrarium stabant porcum subito intra suas pedes huc illucque discurrere senserunt. Quem dum unusquisque sentiret, et iuxta se stantibus indicaret, isdem porcus ecclesiae ianuas petiit, et omnes per quos transiit in admirationem commouit; sed uideri nil potuit, quamuis sentiri potuisset.} (Gregory. Dialogi 3, 30. 2)\textsuperscript{36}

\& þa þa in þære cyrican þære mæssena symbelnyssa væron gesungene, þa þrang seo mænigeo þæs folces hire betwyh for þære stowe nearonesse. Þa sume þa men, þe stodon beforan þam sceote, þa semninga gefeldon hi an swyn yman hider & þider betwyh heora fotum. Þæt sum þæt swyn heora hwylc [gefelde]\textsuperscript{37} & sæde þæm mannum þe him nehst væron. Hi

\textsuperscript{34} See Chapter 1, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{35} See also the discussion below under “An Experiential Sense for (ge)grapian?”, section 5, pp. 128-36.

\textsuperscript{36} Trans.: “Once, when the ritual of the mass was being celebrated in it [a church], and because of the narrowness of the place, the crowd of people pressed themselves together, some of those who were standing outside the chancel suddenly felt a pig running here and there among their feet. While everyone felt it and pointed it out to those standing near him, the pig made for the doors of the church and stirred into astonishment everyone whom it passed by; but nothing could be seen, although it could be felt.”

\textsuperscript{37} MS C (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 322) here has “gefylde,” “knocked down”; the reading of “gefælde” in MS O (British Museum, Cotton Otho C’ 1) is certainly the correct one.
gewilnode þæt swin & sohte þa duru þære cyrcan & onstyrede mid wundrunge ealle þa men, þe hit geond for, & þa ne mihte hit nan man geseon, & swa þehi hit mihton gefelan. (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 3, 30, 235, 24)

(“And when the solemn offices of the mass were sung in the church, the multitude of the people crowded amidst it because of the narrowness of the place. Then some men, who stood before the chancel, suddenly felt a pig running hither and thither between their feet, so that every single one of them felt the pig and told it to the men that were nearest to him. That same pig desired and sought the doors of the church, and stirred with amazement all the men that it went by; and they could not see it then, and yet they could feel it.”)

The contrast between (ge)felan and (ge)seon seems to be between the actions performed by two specific sense faculties, “feeling (i.e. through touch)” and “seeing” (such a contrast also seems to exist between the Latin sentio and video). With the pig running among the feet of the congregation and and brushing by people as it makes for the door, the context strongly suggests that (ge)felan is used to mean “to perceive through touch,” rather than any more general meaning of “to sense” (after all, it is only those who are close to the pig who can “gefelan” it--on the other hand, one wonders how they knew it was a pig).

There are four other examples where (ge)felan shows the sense “to perceive through touch,” although without the benefit of another contrasting verb of perception. In Chrodegang’s Rule for instance, in an admonition to priests to avoid drunkenness, we find: “Non bona, non mala, non dura, non mollia sentis. Ne gefelst þu god ne yfel, ne heard ne hnesce” (Chrodegang, Regula canoniciorum 60, 73, 5; Chrodegang’s Rule 60, 74, 13)--“You discern / feel neither good nor evil, neither hard nor soft.” In both the original and the translation, the authors made effective use of the dual capacity of sentio and (ge)felan to mean quite specifically “to perceive through touch” and more broadly “to perceive.” I think that the marked contrast between the abstract and the concrete pairs of opposites indicates that the authors were aware of a striking difference in meaning between these two uses of the verbs, and used this difference to raise the rhetorical pitch of the passage. This is preferable to thinking that a meaning like “to perceive” had become so general and colorless for the two verbs that they could be used with these two different sorts of objects without their readers sensing a rhetorical effect.

In the Old English translation of Bede, (ge)felan also translates sentio apparently in the specific sense “to perceive through touch” or “to feel the touch of.” In this story, a cleric who had fractured his arm asks his brethren to bring him a piece of Oswald’s miracle-working cross. They bring him some moss which had grown on the timber. Not having any pockets, he puts it inside his tunic and forgets about it. Then during the night. “Sensit nescio quid frigidis suo lateri adiacere. Pa ne wiste he hwæt he gefelde cealdes æt his sidan licgan” (Historia 3, 2, 218, 6; Bede’s History 3, 2, 156, 31)--“Then he felt he
knew not what lying cold at his side.” The complement of the verb is interesting because it tells us that the cleric feels not only the contact of the thing lying at his side, but the fact that it is cold.

\((\text{Ge})\text{felan}\) behaves much the same way in another incident described in Bede:

“\(\text{Senit ... quasi magnum latamque manum caput sibi in parte qua dolebat tetigisse.} \) Da \(\text{gefelyde} \) he \(\text{... swa swa mycel hond & brad his heafod gehrine in ðæm ðæle, ðe þæt sar & seo adl on wæs}\) (\text{Historia 4, 31, 446, 19; Bede’s History 4, 32, 380, 11})--“Then he felt as though a large and broad hand were touching his head in the part in which the pain and disease was.” Clearly, the action described here is based in the sense of touch; not only does the sick man perceive the contact with the invisible hand, but he also perceives something of the hand’s size and breadth.

Finally, we can be fairly certain that \((\text{ge})\text{felan}\) is being used in the sense “to perceive through touch” in \text{The Whale}, where the whale perceives that the hapless sailors have made camp upon his back (which they mistake for an island): “\(\text{Donne gefeleð facnes craeftig þæt him þa ferend on fæste wuniþ}\) (\text{Whale, 24})--“When he, skilled in deceit, feels that the travellers are resting fast upon him.” Certainly, his awareness must arise from the various impressions of contact produced by the sailors’ arrival, disembarkation, and setting up camp.

It is well to be careful, when looking at Old English words that superficially resemble Modern English words, not to automatically assign them the modern sense. Nevertheless, from what we have seen in the above two sections, it does appear that \((\text{ge})\text{fredan}\) and \((\text{ge})\text{felan}\) share with \text{feel} the particular sense of “to perceive through touch.” even though they did not have the deliberative sense of “to examine or explore by touch.” Since \((\text{ge})\text{fredan}\) and \((\text{ge})\text{felan}\) are also more general verbs, this confirms Sweetser’s remark, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that in Indo-European languages, “the verb meaning ‘feel’ in the sense of tactile perception is the same as the verb indicating general sensory perception.”

\text{}\text{II. Deliberative Verbs of Touch}\text{}

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that Modern English deliberative verbs of touch could be organized into three types: “handling,” “feeling,” and “touching” verbs, according to the respectively heavy, neutral, and light manner in which the action is performed. We will look at the Old English verbs according to these types. This
organization has the particular virtue of isolating the “touching” verbs, which possess certain characteristics of their own. It also allows us to focus on the “feeling” verb, (ge)grapian, as perhaps the most important and central deliberative verb of touch. The organization is not meant to imply that the “feeling” and “touching” verbs could not occasionally designate heavy or prolonged contact, but their general tendency was otherwise.

A. The “Handling” Verbs: handlian & (ge)cunnian mid hand

For the words designating heavy or prolonged contact, there is only the one verb handlian, which occurs around 25 times and which by its very form refers directly to the part of the body performing the action. The occasionally gross, intrusive nature of the gesture it describes is apparent in this example from Ælfric’s version of Pseudo-Basil’s Admonitio:

_Mulieris carnem omnino ne velis tangere, ne per tactum eius inflammetur cor tuum et spiritui tuo labaris in perditionem. Sicut enim foenum proximans igni conburitur, ita qui tangit mulieris carnem._ (7, 42, 8)

_~Ware naet þu ne hreppe wifmanna lichaman; swa swa fyre wyle ontendan þæt ceaf þæt him wiðliged, swa byð se þe _handlað_ wifhades mannes lic._ (7, 50, 9)

(“Take heed that you do not touch the bodies of women; just as fire will inflame the chaff that lies next to it, so will he be who handles the body of a person of the female sex.”)

The fact that Ælfric uses two different verbs where the Latin uses only tango suggests that he was not strictly bound by the original, and that the intrusive aspect of “handlað” is his nuance.

There are two examples where handlian seems quite clearly to be used in a deliberative perceptual sense. One is again in Ælfric:

_He æt þa sylf and dranc openlice mid him, þæt he swa geswutolode þæt he soðlice leofode æfter his agenum deade ... and he feowertig daga wæs wunigende mid him, þæt hy hine _handledon_ ... and eac on his sidan hy sceawodon his dolhswaða._ (Homilies, 7, 346. 136)

(“He himself ate and drank then openly with them, and thus he showed that he truly lived after his own death, and for forty days he dwelled with them, so that they might handle him and also examine the scars on his side.”)

The actions of examining and handling, both deliberative and perceptual, furnish a double proof of the physical nature of Christ’s risen body; this will come up again in the following section on (ge)grapian. The other example is found in the non-Ælfrician part of Genesis, where the blind Isaac must use touch to test the identity of his son. Jacob says, “_Si adtractaverit me pater meus et sensorit, timeo ne putet sibi voluisse inludere._” Gyf min
fæder me handlað & me gecnæwð, ic ondræde þæt he wene þæt ic hyne wylle beswican”  
(OEHeptateuch, Gen 27, 12)—“If my father handles me and recognizes me, I fear he will think that I want to deceive him.” At least one gloss also supports the deliberative perceptual sense: in the Harley Glossary we find “Contracta i. palpa handla” (C 1722)—“Touch, that is, feel handle.” Elsewhere handlian generally has the figurative sense of “to touch upon, deal with.”

This is perhaps the best place to mention a verb that in periphrastic constructions could have a deliberative perceptual sense. (Ge)cunnian generally means “to try, test, search into.” When construed with mid hand, it means “to search out with the hand,” as it does in this passage from Bede:

Sensit nescio quid frigidus suo lateri adiacere, admodumque manu requirere quid esset. ita sanum brachium manumque repperit.  (Bede. Historia 3. 2, 218, 6)

Ne wiste he hwæt he gefelde cealdes æt his sidan licgan; cunno[de] þa mid his hond & sohte hwæt þæt ware; þa gemette he his earn & his hond ... hale und sund.  (Bede’s History 3, 1, 156, 31)

(“Then he felt he knew not what lying cold at his side: he then searched out with his hand and sought what it was; then he found his arm and hand whole and sound.”)

In another instance, (ge)cunnian is used in a similar way with be hrepunge: “se cuðe tocnawan, gif he cunnode þæs mannes be his ædrena hrepunge, hwæðer he hraðe swulte”  
(Ælfric. Lives of Saints, Basil, 568)—“he knew how to distinguish, if he tested a man by the feeling of his veins, whether he would die quickly.”

Already we have seen several ways in which the act of deliberately applying the sense of touch could be described. The heavy “handling” aspect of these examples lies principally in the overt reference to the hands. While (ge)grapian could also describe blunt, intrusive actions, it is more often neutral.

B. The “Feeling” Verb: (ge)grapian

Judging from the number of attestations, (ge)grapian is the Old English verb of deliberative perception through touch. It means “to feel deliberately, explore by touch, examine by feeling.” It is found in the early Mercian Vespasian Psalter (A), Alfred’s early West Saxon translations of the Pastoral Care and of Boethius, in the Northumbrian Lindisfarne Gospels, in Ælfric and in other late West Saxon texts. I have designated it the

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38 Cited earlier on p. 105. See also the passage cited there: “Cecilia him cwæð to, cunna mid grapunge hwæðer hi stanas synd” (Ælfric, Lives of Saints. Cecilia, 334)—“Cecilia said to him, ‘Test by feeling whether they are stones.’”
"feeling" verb because it is usually neutral with regard to the manner in which the action is performed, like *feel* implying that there is enough contact for a full impression to be received—although it could also designate actions that are more prolonged and not necessarily perceptual, much like those described by *g Grope*.

There are several instances where the verb may be moving towards an experiential sense of “to perceive through touch.” Such a development would be very interesting, since it would offer an exception to Buck’s rule, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that “generally there is no distinctive verb for ‘perceive by touch.”’ I will consider the possibility of an experiential sense for *(ge)grapian* separately at the end of this section.

Unlike many of the verbs that we have dealt with, the perceptual meanings of *(ge)grapian* are well and unequivocally attested. This is thanks especially to several biblical episodes involving deliberate feeling, in which *palpo* is usually the word that *(ge)grapian* translates. The significant episode in the Old Testament is the blind Isaac’s examination of Jacob, who is disguised as his brother Esau:

\[\text{Accessit ille ad patrem, et palpato eo, dixit Isaac: Vox quidem vox Iacob est: sed manus, manus sunt Esau.}\]

He eode to þam fæder, & Isaac cwæð ðá, ðá he hyne *gegrapod* hæfde: Witodlice seo stemn ys Iacobe stemn, & ða handa synd Esuues handa. *(OE Heptateuch, Gen 27, 22)*

("He went to his father and then Isaac said, when he had felt him. "Indeed, the voice is Jacob’s voice, and the hands are Esau’s hands.")

The New Testament involves several significant episodes. In Luke 24, being able both to see and to feel Christ’s risen body proves that it is real and physical. We have three different translations of this passage, and all use *(ge)grapian*:

\[\text{Videte manus meas, et pedes, quia ipse ego sum; palpate et videte, quia spiritus carcem et ossa non habet, sicut me videtis habere.}\]

\[\text{Geseas hondo mino & fœt, þette ic seolf am; } \text{grapað } & \text{ gesæð, forðon se gaast lichoma } & \text{ bano ne hæfeð suæ mec gie seas habba.} \text{ (Lindisfarne Gospels, Luke 24, 39)}\]

("You see my hands and feet, that it is I myself; feel and see, for a spirit does not have body and bone as you see me to have.")

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39 *(Ge)grapian* also renders *adirectat* and *contractat* in several glosses: “*adirectat grapade*” *(Bede Glossary [Cotton Tiberius C, ii], 82); “*Contractavit i. palpavit gegrapade*” *(Harley Glossary, C 1699); and “*contracta gegrapudum*” *(Sedulius Glosses [CCCC 173], 311).*

40 The Rushworth Gospels have “*grapiað*.”
Geseod mine handa & mine fet ðæt ic sylf hit eom; grapiad & geseod ðæt gast næfð flæsc & ban, swa ge geseod me habban. (West Saxon Gospels, Luke 24, 38)\textsuperscript{41}

(“See my hands and my feet that it is I myself; feel and see that a spirit does not have flesh and bone, as you see me to have.”)

Sceawiad mine handa & mine fet, ðe wæron mid nægillum ðurhdrifene; grapiad and sceawiad, gif ic gast were þonne næfde ic flæsc & ban, swa swa ge geseod ðæt ic hæbbe. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 15, 301, 53)\textsuperscript{42}

(“Look at my hands and my feet, which were driven through with nails; feel and look, if I was a spirit then I would not have flesh and bone, as you see that I have.”)

Examination by touch is also important in John 20, where Jesus obliges the doubting Thomas. Since the Latin uses infero and adfero, only Ælfric’s freer translation has (ge)grapian:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

(“Put your finger in here, and see my hands; and take your hand and put it in my side: and do not be incredulous, but faithful.’ Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God.’”)

Sete þine hand on minum dolhswaðum & grapa mine handa & mine sidan; & ne beo ðu na ungeleaffull ðæt ic of deade arise, ac gelyf. Pornas pa sceawiode & grapode & cwæð him to, þu eart min drihten & min god. (Catholic Homilies I, 16, 307. 17)

(“Put your hand in my scars, and feel my hands and my sides; and do not be doubtful that I have arisen from the dead, but believe.’ Thomas then looked and felt and said to him, ‘You are my Lord and my God.’”)

Ælfric also refers to these same events on several other occasions:

\begin{quote}
God mæig don ealle þing; nu sceole we wundrian his mihte & eac gelyfan: þone lichaman he æteowde to grapienne, þone þe he in brohte
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} The fact that “grapiad & geseod” are followed by a subordinate clause introduced by “ðæt” (the translator evidently interpreting quia in its less common use as an equivalent to quod, rather than as a causal conjunction) creates certain difficulties in the interpretation of “grapiad.” which I will discuss below, pp. 132-34.

\textsuperscript{42} Although verbs of vision are outside the scope of this study, it is interesting to compare the ways the various passages translate the two occurrences of video. “Videte.” since it is a command, must be deliberative. The Lindisfarne and West Saxon Gospels translate it with (ge)seon. Ælfric with (ge)sceawian. “Videtis,” however, is experiential--meaning “as you see, as you perceive”--and all three passages translate it with (ge)seon. This demonstrates that (ge)seon can be both experiential and deliberative (compare MnE see: “I see Bob” and “See Bob run”), while (ge)sceawian can only be deliberative--or so this example would suggest.
beclysedum durum. (Catholic Homilies I, 16, 308, 37)\textsuperscript{43}

(“God can do all things; now we ought to marvel at and also trust in his might: he showed the body to feel/ to be felt, which he brought within closed doors.”)

Læs us fremodon þa de hraðe gelyfdon þonne þa de twyniende wæron. for þan de hi sceawedon & grapodon þa dolhswaðu Cristes wunda, & swa adraðfdon ealle twynunga fram ure heortan. (Catholic Homilies I, 21, 349, 112)

(“Those who believed quickly benefited us less than those who were doubtful, for they examined and felt the scars of Christ’s wounds, and so banished all doubting from our hearts.”)

Eow is nu eac to witenne, and we wyllað eow sægan, þæt ure leofa Hælend her on life wunode æfter his agenum deade, syðdan he of deade aras, mid his halgum apostulum.... Ealle his lima he hæfde, and hæfð butan twyn; on his fotum he stod, and þa næron butan sceancan; his sidan hy grapodon, and he sódllice hæfde ge innoð ge breost.... Protan he hæfde, þa þæ hy gehyrdon his stemne; and his handa hæfdon, þe hy gegrapedon, earmas and exla, on ansundum lichaman. (Homilies 7, 346, 127)

(“You also ought to know, and we wish to tell you, that our dear Lord remained here in this life after his own death, when he had arisen from death, with his blessed apostles. He had and doubtless has all his limbs; he stood on his feet and they were nothing but (ordinary) legs; they felt his sides, and he truly had both innards and breast. He had a throat, for they heard his voice, and his hands, which they felt. had arms and shoulders, on a whole body.”)

The Old English translation of Honorius’ \textit{Elucidarium} also refers to these events, and uses (ge)grapian for palpo:

\textit{Quotiens apparuit?--Duodecies.... Nono in octavo die, quando eum Thomas palpavit.} (Honorius, \textit{Elucidarium}, 391, 170)

Hwu oft æteowde he hine his gingran? Twelf sidēn.... Æt þan nigeđen sidēn, þa þa Thomas grapode his wunden. (Honorius’ \textit{Elucidarium}, 145, 11 & 32)

(“How often did he appear to his disciples? Twelve times.... On the ninth time when Thomas felt his wounds.”)

There is also at least one instance where Ælfric uses (ge)grapian in the sense “to feel

\textsuperscript{43} To grapienne: this is a classic case of the active form of the infinitive representing what might be understood in a passive sense. On this topic, Quirk & Wrenn remark that “A passive infinitive was usually expressed with the active form” (\textit{An Old English Grammar} [London. 1955], §131). Not everyone has been content with this assessment, however. Calloway expresses reservations about the infinitive’s passive voice, “except when the inflected infinitive is used with the verb beon (wesan) to denote necessity or obligation” (\textit{The Infinitive in Anglo-Saxon} [Washington, 1913], p. 6). Mitchell is even more doubtful: “Both the simple and inflected infinitives are basically active in form and sense. It is sometimes convenient to translate them as passive when they are used ... in the accusative and infinitive construction...” (\textit{Old English Syntax}, §923, my emphasis). Indeed, while “showed his body to feel” sounds stilted to us, we think nothing of “offered him a book to read.”
deliberately, explore by touch” apparently independently of a Latin source:

\[\text{pa grapode se læce his lima eft and cwæd. D\text{ë}n mægn is aterod and \text{pa} mihte \text{þu naefst. (Lives of Saints, Basil, 610)}\]

("Then the doctor felt his limbs again and said, ‘Your vigor has gone away and you have no strength.’")

These examples more than amply show that \text{(ge)grapian} had a deliberative perceptual sense of “to feel deliberately, explore by touch,” and particularly “to examine by feeling.”

\text{(Ge)grapian} could also devote more attention to the gesture itself, and in this it describes a heavier, blunter sort of action. Used without an object, it behaves very much like Modern English \text{grope}:

\[\text{Percutiat te Dominus amentiu et caecitate, ... et palpes in meridie sicut palpare solet caecus in tenebris.}\]

\[\text{Sende \text{de} Drithen on ungewit \& blindynsse, \text{dæt} \text{ðu grapie} on midne dæg, swa se blinda d\text{æ}d on ðystrum. (OE Heptateuch, Deut 28, 28)}\]

("May the Lord send madness and blindness upon you, so that you grope about at midday, as the blind man does in darkness.")

\[\text{\& hie \text{þa wurdon sona ablinde \& feollan to eor\text{ð}an, \& heora heaf\text{ð}u slogan on \text{þa} wagas \& hie grapode\ }\text{mid}\text{ heora handum on \text{þa eor\text{ð}an \& nystan hwyder hie eodan. (Blickling Homily 13, Assumption of Mary, 151, 4)}}\]

("And at once they became blind and fell to the earth, and struck their heads on the walls and they groped about on the earth and did not know where they went.")

And in the following example where it is transitive (with a genitive object), it must have a similar meaning of “to grope, feel” (I take \text{ynbutan} as an adverb):

\[\text{\& \text{þeah \text{þu me tæhest ær \text{þa} duru, ac ic hire ne meaht\text{e} mare aedian, buton \text{þæt} ic hire grapode \text{ynbutan \þæt \text{þæt} lytle leocht geseah twinclian. (Alfred, Boethius’ Consolation 35, 97. 16)}}}\]

("And though earlier you showed me the door, nevertheless I could not make it out any more, except that I felt it around so that I saw the little light twinkling.")

Furthermore, \text{(ge)grapian} could follow \text{palpo} in having the essentially non-perceptual sense

44 We have already seen this part of the story (see pp. 105 & 122): “An æbele læce ñæ wunigende on ðære byrig, ... se cuðe tocnaman, gið he cunnode ðæs mannes be his ædrena hrepunge, hweðer he hraðe swulte” (566)—“A noble doctor was dwelling in that city, who knew how to distinguish, if he examined a man by the feeling of his veins, whether he would die quickly.”

45 LS 20 (AssumptMor): B3.3.20.

46 This passage is not in the Latin.
of “to stroke.” In these examples from the PastoralCare, the action seems to be more soothing than exploratory, although there is something of exploration as well:

Sua se læce hyd his isern wið ðone monn ðe he sniðan wile; wend, gif he hit iewe, ðæt he him nylle gedægfean ðæt he hine sniðe. Ac grapad suide ðægre ymbutan ðæt ðæt he sniðan wile, & snið suide hrædlice.... ðy hit wæs betre ðæt he grapude mid ðæm bispelle, ærdænðe he cicde, sua se læce grapad. & stracað, & hyt his seax & hwæt, ærdænðe he stingen wille. (Alfred, Pastoral Care 26, 185, 24)

(“So the doctor hides his knife from the man that he wants to cut; he thinks, if he shows it to him that he won’t let him cut him. But he stroke very pleasantly around which that he intends to cut, and cuts very quickly. Therefore it was better that he stroked with the parable, before he chided, just as the doctor strokes and caresses, and hides and whets his knife, before he wishes to pierce.”)

Once in the realm of gestures and motions with the hand and arm, one might expect that (ge)grapian could occasionally take more dynamic and drastic (and wholly non-perceptual) senses, given its obvious relationship with the strong verb (ge)gripian (grap, gripon, gripen), “to grasp, seize” and with the noun grap, “grasp, clutch.” Indeed, in several instances, it does appear to mean “to grasp, seize, catch hold of”; this may be a sense particular to poetry. In Riddle 45, the ribald “Dough” riddle, it seems to be used exactly as the verb (ge)gripian: “On þæt banlease bryde grapode, hygewlone hondum” (Riddle 45, 3)—“The high-spirited woman caught hold of the boneless thing.” I take the fact that “grapode” has a prepositional phrase with on as its complement as evidence that it means “to catch hold of,” rather than “to stroke, fondle,” another possibility. In its two occurrences in Beowulf, its meaning is less transparent. When Beowulf uses (ge)grapian in describing Grendel’s assault to Hygelac, he appears to mean “grasp”:

No ðy ær ut ða gen idelhende
bona blodigtoð. bealewa gemyndig,
of ðæm goldsele gongan wolde;
ac he mænges rof min costode,
grapode gearofolm. (Beowulf, 2081)

47 The passage does not agree exactly with the Latin, where there is no equivalent to (ge)grapian: “Viri itaque sanctus ... celuit paululum quem quaeuisuit, sed percussit repente quem tenuit.... Ad aegrum medicus uenerat, secandum uulnus uidebat, sed de patientia aegri dubitatbat. Abscondit igitur ferrum medicinale sub ueste, quod eductum subito fixit in uulnere” (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 2, 272, 71)—“And so the holy man hid a little that which he sought, but struck suddenly when he held it. The doctor had come to the sick man, he saw a wound that needed to be cut, but he doubted the patience of the sick man. Thus he hid his surgeon’s knife under his garment, which he took out suddenly and thrust into the wound.”

48 Compare with the use of (ge)gripian in one of the “Onion” riddles: “Heo on mec gripeð” (Rid 25, 7)—“She takes hold of me”—which expresses very much the same idea.
Yet the bloody-toothed slayer, intent on destruction, did not then desire to go out empty-handed any sooner from the gold-hall, but he, notorious for his strength, tested me; ready-handed, he grasped me."

However, (and here it is not even clear whether "gearofolm" is an adjective or noun: "his ready-hand grasped me"), it is also possible to understand (ge)grapian in an exploratory, perceptual sense, which would agree with the "testing, trying" sense of (ge)costian. Earlier in the poem, when Beowulf deals Grendel's mother her death-blow, (ge)grapian describes the action of the sword upon on her neck:

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He gefeng þa fetehilt, ...
  yrringa sloh,
  þet hire wið halse heard grapode,
  banhringas þrace;  bil eal ðurfwod
  fægne flæschoman.  (Beowulf, 1563)

("He seized the belted hilt, struck angrily, so that he caught her hard/ the hard sword caught her against the neck, broke bone-rings; the sword went entirely through the doomed body.")
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It is not clear whether Beowulf or the sword is the subject of "grapode," nor whether heard acts as the subject or is used in a "semi-adverbial function" (Klaeber). Nevertheless, (ge)grapian appears to mean "to catch (hold of)," ⁴⁹ although Bosworth-Toller suggests "the hard blade touched her neck," a meaning perhaps supported by the use of the dative, literally "grapode to her against the neck." It is thus possible that (ge)grapian had a sense particular to poetry of "to grasp, seize, catch hold of" that was distinct from its prosaic sense of "to feel deliberately," although we do not have enough evidence to say for certain.

An Experiential Sense for (ge)grapian?

Now if there is one thing we have learned in the course of this study, it is that the various uses of perception verbs--experiential, deliberative, and descriptive--are never far removed from one another. I have reserved for special consideration five particular examples, in which, to greater and lesser degrees, (ge)grapian might be understood in experiential way, as "to perceive through touch, feel the touch of." In these examples, both the "old" meaning of "to feel deliberately" and the new meaning, or what might become the new meaning, appear to be simultaneously present. These might be considered snap-shots of semantic change in action. So while we have no really definite examples of (ge)grapian being used experientially, we will see it appearing in environments where it possibly could

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⁴⁹ If we understand heard as the subject and as referring to the sword, we can compare this with the use of (ge)gripian in Genesis A with reference to arrows: "Gripian unfægere under sceat werum scearpe garas" (2063)---"Sharp arrows fouly took hold under men's garments."
have gone on to acquire an experiential sense--and indeed in some speech communities it may have, although we have no evidence of it.

1) In the section on Latin verbs of touching, I suggested that *palpo*, being so strongly associated with the operation of the sense of touch, seemed to veer occasionally towards an experiential use, despite its strong association with deliberative action. In this passage from the psalms, *palpo* might indeed be interpreted in an experiential way:

   Os habent, et non loquentur; oculos habent, et non videbunt.
   Aures habent, et non audient; nares habent, et non odorabantur.
   Manus habent, et non palpabant; pedes habent, et non ambulabant;
   non clamabant in gutturo suo. (Ps 113, 13)

("They have mouths and speak not: they have eyes and see not. They have ears and hear not: they have noses and smell not. They have hands and feel not: they have feet and walk not: neither shall they cry out through their throat.")

The question for us lies in whether we take "palpabunt" as belonging to the series of experiential, perceptual actions--of seeing, hearing, and smelling--or instead to the series of dynamic, non-perceptual actions--of talking, walking, and crying. It seems natural, of course, to understand it as forming a part of the series of perceptual actions; it also seems natural to interpret "palpabunt" as experiential, since the idols' lack of sentience, their inability to feel, i.e. to perceive, anything, seems more significant than their ability to reach out and touch something. The same point can made for "grapiad" in any of the psalter versions that translate the same passage.50 The example of the *Cambridge Psalter* (C), a late West Saxon version of the *Vespasian Psalter* (A), illustrates the point:

   Muð hi habbað & ne sprecad, eagan hi habbað & ne geseoð, earan hi habbað & ne gehyrad, nosa hi habbað & ne gestincad, handa hi habbað & na ge[grafiano], fet hi habbað & ne gað, ne clypiað on hracan his. (Psalter C. 113, 13)

("They have a mouth and they will not talk; they have eyes and they will not see; they have ears and they will not hear; they have noses and they will not smell; they have hands and they will not feel; they have feet and they will not walk; they will not cry in their throats.")

The problem comes down to a question of salience--what is it that the idol's hands don't do that we expect hands to do? Now while we may seek to resolve this problem by giving *(ge)grapian* its established meaning--as in "they have hands and they will not feel, i.e.

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50 The passage "manus habent et non palpabunt" appears in Psalm 113, 15 of the Gallican (standard Vulgate) version, upon which Psalters F, G, H, I, J, and K are based; the same passage appears in passage appears in both Psalm 113, 15 and Psalm 134, 18 in the Romanum version, upon which Psalters A, B, C, D, E, and P (Paris) are based. Of all these glosses, the only psalter which does not use a form of *(ge)grapian* to gloss "palpabunt" is Psalter K, which has "hrepadon" in Psalm 113. See below, p. 142.
grop, with them”—it is worth looking at the paraphrase Ælfric makes of this same passage:

Hi habbað dumbed mun & blinde eagan, deafe earan & ungrapiende
handa, fen buton fepe, bodig buton life. (Catholic Homilies 1, 26, 389, 41) \(^{51}\)

("They have a dumb mouth and blind eyes, deaf ears and unfeeling hands, feet without walking, body without life.")

Although it is still entirely possible that "ungrapiende" retains the normal deliberative sense of the verb, the fact that it has taken an adjectival form encourages us to read it as equivalent to blind and deaf, and that it therefore has the essentially experiential sense "not feeling," that is, "not perceiving through touch." If (ge)grapian could tend towards the experiential in its derivatives, then perhaps it could also as a verb.

2) There is a passage which we have already looked at several times, in which (ge)grapian, because of its interaction with (ge)fredan, might be understood in an experiential sense:

Pu wast þæt gesiða & geñernes & gesfrednes ongitað þone lichoman þæs
monnes, & þeah ne ongitað hi hine no gelicne; ... sio gesfrednes hine mæg
gegrapian & gefredan þæt hit lichoman bið, ac hio ne mæg gefredan
hwæðer he bið þe blæc þe hwit, þe fæger ðe unfæger. (Alfred, Boethius’
Consolation, 41. 145. 18) \(^{52}\)

("You know that sight and hearing and touch perceive the body of man, and yet they do not perceive it alike; touch can feel it and feel that it is a body, but it cannot feel whether it is black or white, fair or unfair.")

The difficulty here is determining how (ge)grapian and (ge)fredan complement each other.

In the section on the experiential senses of (ge)fredan specific to touch, I suggested that (ge)fredan here could be understood either in a specific sense of "to perceive through touch" or in a more general meaning of "to sense, perceive" (p. 112). If it is used in a specific way, then the contrast between the two verbs would be that of deliberative versus experiential, i.e. "the sense of touch can reach out to touch it and feel that it is a body." If it is used in a general way, then the contrast might be construed as that between merely registering a sensation and actually recognizing it, i.e. "the sense of touch can feel it and

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\(^{51}\) Ælfric translates the passage as part of his rendering of Bede’s Homilia 1, 20.

\(^{52}\) Cf. “Eandem corporis rotunditatem aliter uisos aliter tactus agnoscit: ... hic uero
cohaerens orbi atque coniunctus circa ipsum motus ambitum rotunditatem partibus
comprehendit” (Boethius, Consolatio 5, 4, 26)—“Sight recognizes the same roundness of a
body in one way, touch in another. The latter (sense), being close to the round thing and
joined to it, when it has been moved around the thing’s circumference, comprehends its
roundness by parts.” See also pp. 104 note 12 & 112.
perceive that it is a body.” The case for the latter interpretation might be strengthened by considering that neither of the two other perceptual faculties Alfred discusses, sight and hearing, are said to perform a willed, deliberate action as an independent agent.

3) For our third case we may consider a passage from Ælfric which we have already considered with regard to handlian:53

And he feowertig daga wæs wunigende mid him, þæt hy hine handleon and mid handum graopedon on his handum and fotum, hu he gefæstnod wæs, and eac on his sidan hy sceawodon his dolhswaða, and hy mihton geseon þæt he soðlice aras on ansundum lichaman, oferswiðdum deade. (Homilies, 7, 346, 139)

(“And for forty days he dwelled with them, so that they might handle him and feel with their hands and feet how he had been fastened, and also examine the scars on his side, and they could see that he truly arose in a whole body, death having been conquered.)

It is clear that the object of “grapedon” is the noun clause introduced by “hu.” Does the fact that “grapedon” takes a subordinate clause as an object mean that it is being used experientially? If the subordinate clause after “grapedon” above was introduced by “þæt” instead of “hu,” then we could say that (ge)grapian was being used experientially, for the “þæt” clause would convey factual information that had come into the disciples’ awareness. But since the subordinate clause forms a dependent (indirect) question rather than a dependent statement, the case is ambiguous. In Old and in Modern English, both experiential and deliberative verbs of perception can take dependent questions as noun clause objects.54 As an experiential verb in this context, (ge)grapian would mean “they perceived through touch how (i.e. the manner in which) he was fastened.” As a deliberative verb, it means “they applied the sense of touch in order to ascertain how he was fastened.” The difference is subtle but important. The first states categorically that the disciples came to an understanding of the manner in which Christ was fixed to the cross; the second only states that they used the faculty of touch for the purpose of coming to such an understanding—it does not actually state that they came to such an understanding.

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53 See p. 121.

54 In Modern English, we can compare watch, an essentially deliberative perception verb, with see, an experiential verb, in the sentences “I watched how he did it” and “I saw how he did it.” In Old English, we can compare (ge)sceawian, a deliberative verb of vision (but here used to mean “look at [figuratively], consider”), and (ge)seon, in these sentences: “Considerate lilia quomodo crescent. Sceawian da lillian hu hi waxan” (West Saxon Gospels. Luke 12, 27)—“Consider the lilies. how they grow,” and “Uidimus eum ascendentem in caelum. We gesawon hu he wæs on heofonas astigende” (Evangelium Nicodemi. 14.1. 178; Gospel of Nicodemus, 14.1. 179)—“We saw how he was mounting into heaven.”
However, unless told otherwise, we assume that for all intents and purposes the disciples actually did perceive how he had been fixed to the cross, and this is where the possible experiential meaning lurks. Here the deliberative sense of (ge)grapian is kept isolated by the phrases “mid handum” and “on his handum and fotum,” but one can at least observe how when a dependent clause begins to describe what sort of an impression was sought, even as an indirect question, one quickly comes to the conclusion that such an impression was actually perceived.

4) Another passage to consider is the West Saxon Gospels’ translation of Luke 24, 39. First, the Latin, which I present according to its phrasing:

\[Videte manus meas et pedes, quia ipse ego sum; palpate et videte, quia spiritus car\'nem et ossa non habet, sic\'\t me videtis habere.\]

The double use of quia is slightly troubling. Although in both cases it follows the imperative “videte,” it seems to be used in two slightly different ways: in the first instance, it seems to be acting in its occasional role as an equivalent to quod, the conjunction “that,” in introducing either an object clause or exclamation (depending on whether or not we interpret the clause introduced by quia as the true object of “videte,” with “manus” and “pedes” being syntactically superfluous, i.e. “see my hands and feet [i.e. by my hands and feet] that it is I myself”). In the second, it behaves like a causal conjunction in the sense “for, because,” since it introduces the reason that the examination of Christ’s body should lead one to believe that it is he, i.e. “feel and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.” The West Saxon version treats the passage slavishly:

\[Geseod mine honda & mine fet paet ic sylf hit eom, grapi\'d & geseod paet gast ne\'\t\p f\'aesce & ban, swa ge geseod me habban.\]

(“See my hands and feet that it is I myself. Feel and see that?/ because? a spirit does not have flesh and bone, as you see me to have.”)

The first paet clause is related to “geseod” as its counterpart in the Latin, as either an object clause or exclamation. The second paet clause is the difficult one. We may sum up the problem as one of punctuation, whether or where the sentence needs a comma (or its medieval equivalent) to indicate a pause. Should we, for instance, understand a comma after “geseod” and take “paet” as a causal conjunction? We would of course prefer to see a

55 See Mitchell, §1968, for the combination of object noun and noun clause in Old English. Mitchell observes, “Sometimes the paet elaborates or explains a noun which is syntactically superfluous.” possibly the case here.
form of forbon, the usual equivalent of causal quia, but Bosworth-Toller and the Toller Supplement do record several examples of *pæt* “introducing clauses of cause, reason” (cf. *pæt* *conj.* *iv*). The question of whether *pæt* may truly function as a causal conjunction has been the subject of some debate, and Mitchell (*Old English Syntax*, §3118-3127) discusses the problem in detail. He argues first that examples from Old English prose cannot be adduced to prove the use of *pæt* as a causal conjunction in poetry, “for in the prose the problems associated with translating or paraphrasing Latin periods into Old English led to the use of *pæt* in many contexts and functions which were alien to the poetry” (§3118). He goes on to remark that “the fact that it can often conveniently be translated by ‘because’ [in either poetry or prose] does not prove that it was a causal conjunction,” and a little later, “the problem is subjective as well as terminological.” What emerges from Mitchell’s discussion is that the use of *pæt* as a causal or explanatory conjunction is by no means as clear or distinct as for instance that of forbon.

Given that the case for understanding *pæt* as a causal conjunction is perhaps less certain than it is for *quia*, we may well observe that the context of the Old English strongly suggests that *pæt* is acting as a conjunction introducing a dependent clause, i.e. “see *that* etc.” After all, it follows “geseoð” which, as a verb of perceiving and understanding, often takes a subordinate clause as its object. Here again we have the question of punctuation.

Is this subordinate clause only the object of “geseoð,” so we should understand a comma after “grapiað”? Indeed, in the MS Corpus 140, we find this punctuation: “grapiað. and geseoð *pæt* gast næfp flæsc & ban. swa ge geseoð me habban;” while the MS Hatton 38 has no mark of punctuation after the first verb. Such punctuation, however, only highlights the fact that the order of the syntax suggests another interpretation—that the subordinate clause is the object of both verbs. Whether or not the translator intended this (he was, after all, sticking to his original), it might conceivably have been understood as such by a subsequent Anglo-Saxon reader. In this case, the subordinate clause describing *what* was felt and seen would nudge “grapiað” towards an experiential sense of “perceive through touch.”

The other Old English translations of this passage avoid these ambiguities altogether. The Lindisfarne Gospel gloss translates the two instances of *quia* with different words, thus recognizing their different uses: “geseas honda mino & foet, þætte ic seolf am; grapiað & geseað, fordon se gaast lichoma & bano ne hæfeð.” Ælfric clarifies the passage through a paraphrase: “Sceawiað mine handa and mine fet, ðe wæron mid næglum durhdrifene; grapiað and sceawiað, gif ic gast were þonne næfe ic flæsc and ban, swa swa
Finally, a very curious example of (ge)grapian is found in the Old English version of Exodus, which comes out of a passive construction in the Latin:

_Dixit autem Dominus ad Moysen: Extende manum tuam in caelum, et sint tenebrae super terram Aegypti tam densae, ut palpari queant._ (Ex 10. 21)

(“Stretch out your hand into the sky, and let there be darkness over the land of Egypt so thick it that it can be felt.”)

In the Old English we find:

_Sodlice Drhten cwæd to Moysen: Ahefe up þine hand þæt ȳstru cuman ofer eal Egypta land swa dicce ðæt hi grapian._ (OE _Heptateuch._ Exod 10, 21)

Much of the curiosity of the example lies in explaining the form “grapian.” As a starting point, we can take it as given that the Anglo-Saxon translator wanted to render the Latin as accurately as possible. The original is straightforward and there is little reason to think he might not have understood it. In particular, since Old English ȳstru often appeared in the plural, like Latin tenebrae, it seems unlikely that he misunderstood the subject of “queant,” and that “hi” refers to something other than “ȳstru” (such as the Egyptians, for example—so we assume that it does not mean “darkness so thick that they [i.e. the Egyptians] will grope”). To explain the form as it stands, we would assume that “grapian” is a form of the 3rd person plural present subjunctive, the subjunctive rendering the potential aspect expressed in the Latin by “queant.” Presumably, the Old English does not mean “darkness so thick that it grasps, seizes.” We need therefore to explain how an apparently active form renders a passive original.

The easiest solution is that “ðæt hi grapian” is a simple haplography for “ðæt hi hi grapian,” literally “darknesses so thick that they (the Egyptians) may feel them.” If the reader accepts the idea that the Egyptians may be so suddenly introduced into the translation, he or she is invited to skip to the penultimate paragraph of this section, and avoid some convoluted argument.

However, if one wishes to consider other possibilities, one highly speculative

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56 See pp. 123-4 above.

57 “Swa dicce ðæt hi grapian” is the reading in MS B (B.M., Cotton Claudius B. IV; Ker: “s. xi”), while MS L (Oxford, Bodleian Laud 509; Ker “s. xi”) has “swa þice þæt hig grapion.” Campbell (§735, f) notes that in Late West Saxon, the -en of the present plural subjunctive is often replaced by -an or -on.
Old English Verbs of Touch

The explanation is that this is the sole example of what one might call a true quasi-passive use of (ge)grapiæ. This use would be unlike the function as copula of such descriptive perception verbs as feel or taste (which serve to predicate something of a subject in the context of a given sense faculty: "it tastes sour"). It might instead be likened to such Modern English verbs as shine or smell (when used in the way of "his shoes smell," without an adverb), if the meaning of these verbs might in some cases be described as oriented in the perceiver, respectively "to produce a (visual) sensation of brightness" (probably more plausible where the object reflects rather than emits light) and "to produce an (olfactory) sensation of stench." This postulated meaning of (ge)grapiæ would be similarly described as "to produce a (tactile) sensation of contact." Yet even if shine and smell may be analyzed in this way, they differ from the postulated meaning of (ge)grapiæ in referring to specific sensations within the much broader fields of their respective sense faculties, rather than to the general activation of the faculty.

Alternatively, the proposed quasi-passive use of (ge)grapiæ might be analyzed as "to become palpable," and thus likened to the verb appear in its sense "to become visible" (but whether this action can in fact be understood as oriented in the perceiver is debatable). It might also be compared to a verb of sound like ring. Ring of course refers to certain kinds of things that make that sound, the use of ring with them might be analyzed as "to become audible"; when a bell rings, it is producing the sound inherent to it, thus in a sense becoming audible. But these various analogies only roughly approximate the meanings I have proposed for (ge)grapiæ, which remain unprecedented and fairly unlikely (but then so is touchable darkness).

The much more likely explanation is that this example is simply an anomaly: The form is active, but the sense is meant to be passive. Neither Mitchell, Campbell, nor Visser mention any instance where a present active subjunctive verb in a result clause renders a passive sense, so this is not a use preceded by other examples in Old English. It is highly probable that something has dropped out. Although Old English infinitives, in

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58 See Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik, A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (London & New York, 1985), §16.21: “A verb is said to have a copular complementation when it is followed by a subject complement ... or a predication adjunct, ... and when this element cannot be dropped out without changing the meaning of the verb. The verb in such a clause is a copular (or linking) verb, and is equivalent in function to the principal copula, the verb be.”

59 Of course, it’s possible to find quotations with shine that are syntactically similar to the Old English passage: “Whose lokes ... were so slick ... that they shone” (Holland Seutonius [1606] Annot. 30a).
certain environments, may behave as though they were passive, none of the commentators on the subject mention the company of modals as being one such environment. It is therefore not enough to add "mægen" here and take "grapian" as an infinitive: we probably would need to imagine an entire passive construction like "hi man mihte grapian," thus taking "hi" as the syntactic object.

Assuming that this phrase is defective through haplography or the loss of some passive construction (and does not contain an unusual quasi-passive), the experiential aspect of "grapian" here lies in its being used in an essentially impersonal way. The subject of the verb is vague (the posited Egyptians are not actually mentioned here), and we are not to imagine crowds of the benighted people manipulating the palpable darkness. If darkness is so thick that it is palpable, what is most remarkable about it is that it can be perceived through touch at all. As we have already seen in the discussion on (ge)felan, a related passage in Orosius uses (ge)felan--apparently experientially--together with the indefinite man: "Tenebras ... crassitudine palpabiles Swa micel þyþþernes & swa gedreþþelic, þæt hit man gefelan mihte" (Historiae 1, 10, 12; Orosius’ History 1, 7, 26, 3)--"So much darkness, and so oppressive, that one could feel it.") Especially apropos, the author of the Sawles Warde uses the Middle English reflex of (ge)grapian of darkness in Hell: “Se þicke is þrinne þe þosternes þet me hire mei grapin” (Sawles Warde, 98)--"So thick is the darkness in there that one can feel it." The sense of "grapin" is very likely to be experiential, since no one wants to touch the darkness.

The case for the experiential sense for (ge)grapian lingers in these ambiguous examples. It may be that in Old English, this verb only went halfway towards acquiring an experiential sense, and that it only had this sense in contexts where its experiential aspect was not overt, but disguised. As far as we know, (ge)grapian did not go on to acquire a widespread or common experiential sense in Middle English, as (ge)felan was to acquire the deliberative: rather its meanings were gradually restricted. The story of (ge)grapian makes an interesting note in the history of Indo-European perception verbs, as a word that almost became a distinct verb for the sense "to perceive through touch."

C. The "Touching" Verbs

We come finally to the "touching" verbs. Modern dictionaries associate the English

60 See note 43 above.

61 See p. 117.

62 The editors note that this detail is not in the Latin of Hugh of Saint Victor’s De anima.
verb *touch* with Latin *tangere* and with Old English *(ge)hrihan, æthrinan,* and *(ge)hrepian,* while Anglo-Saxon translations and glosses connect the Old English verbs with the Latin. All these verbs share a remarkably similar range of meanings. They possess the additional characteristic of having associated, presumably derived, substantive forms that can designate the "sense of touch." Yet despite this obvious association with nouns of touch, the perceptual uses of these verbs prove generally elusive and poorly attested. It is useful to approach the problem first from the angle of our own verb *touch.*

Later in this section I will introduce a general schema of the meanings of *touch.* For now we are concerned with the special area of usage in which its perceptual senses arise. I think we will agree that these senses come out of what might be considered one of the most basic general meanings of *touch:* "to place the hand or finger in contact with (something)." The *OED* is bold in connecting this action with perception: in its first definition of the simple verb *touch,* it has: "To put the hand or finger, or some other part of the body, upon, or into contact with (something) so as to feel it: 'to exercise the sense of feeling upon'" (Phillips, 1696)" (my emphasis). But smaller practical dictionaries are more reticent about the perceptual aspect of *touch:* My old *Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary* (1963) has only "to place the hand, finger, etc., in contact with." whereas *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current Usage* (1983, 7th ed.) has "bring part of the body esp. hand in contact with." Perhaps the writers of these dictionaries were reluctant to specify the perceptual meaning because they recognized the difficulty of isolating this usage.

There are two ways in which isolating this meaning can be difficult. One is that *touch* is used in many cases where its voluntary aspect is unclear, and *touch* wavers toward "to be or come into contact with," and away from a deliberative perceptual meaning. For example, in the following sentence, it is difficult to say whether the action is willed or just accidental: "The enemy left ... 'booby-traps' to blow a man to bits or blind him for life if he *touched* a harmlessly-looking stick or opened the lid of a box" (P. Gibbs, *From Bapaume to Passchendaele* [1918] 4). The other difficulty is that, even when the action

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63 Such ambiguity arises from English being, like most or all Indo-European languages, a non-ergative or accusative language, rather than an ergative language, such as Basque. As R. M. W. Dixon explains, an ergative language is one "in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from a transitive subject." One of the consequences of this is to indicate agency (i.e. "whether the action is purposeful or accidental"); "thus, in 'John hit Bill,' 'John' would be marked as (volitional) agent and 'Bill' as (affected) patient. In 'John hit Bill accidentally' and "The falling branch hit Bill." 'Bill' would again be marked as patient but 'John' and 'the falling branch' would not be marked as agent, since they do not exert volitional control over the activity. In 'John hit at Bill (but the implement didn't come into contact with him)' then
is clearly voluntary, the motive for making contact may be more complicated than simply wishing to feel. For example, the touching could be done in order to receive the virtue of contact (a very common use of touching verbs in the Middle Ages): “an old man who only wanted to touch his feet and receive darshan” (Illustr. Weekly India [1971] 2312). The perception of contact is clearly part of the old man’s action, but it is not its most important aspect. Touching can be a meaningful gesture in other ways:

... and herself, going out, puffed up with vanity as she touched the letters on the hall table and said: “How dull!” to show off.... (Virginia Woolf, Haunted House [1973, 8th ed.], 49)

Although the woman is likely to be aware of the texture of the letters, her act is meant to convey impatience or boredom. And when a person touches another person, both feeling creatures, it is quite likely that he or she does so as much to provoke sensation in that other person (whether to comfort, alert, attract, or so on) as to receive his or her own sense impression: “I wrap him warm and touch his trembling fineboned shoulder” (Joyce, Pomes Penyeach [1927]). The motive “in order to feel” hovers uncertainly around many of the uses of touch, even those cited in the OED under the definition I quoted above: “All that he twychit ... Turnit in gold” (Lyndesay, Dreme [1528] 1088)--does he touch in order to feel or does he only happen to touch?

Clearly, the verb touch has something to do with deliberative perception. Its use in a passage like this one, “The hot salty holes in the Red Sea contain some of the most startling sediments yet described.... A corer lowered into them comes back still hot to touch” (Nature [1970] 4, April 44/2), seems fairly clearly to illustrate the meaning “to feel deliberately, explore by touch.” Touch may even occasionally express experiential perception: in the following example, the action is involuntary and yet the verb seems to indicate what was perceived: “[My] hand touched the light button. I had sense enough to push it” (D. Hammett, The Dain Curse [1929] 95). This experiential sense is even clearer in earlier examples: “Finally by the feeling, we touch cold and hot, moist and dry” (A. Browne, Ars pictoria [1675] 65). But touch can perform many other duties as well, even when it describes the same gesture of placing the hand or finger in contact with an object. Indeed, in an electronic search through one thousand occurrences of “touch” in twentieth century citations in the OED, I found very few that could definitely be assigned a deliberative perceptual sense. Perhaps the associations with perceptual action we have for the verb are partially maintained through the noun with its important role as the name of the “fifth” sense.

‘John’ would be marked as agent but ‘Bill’ would not be marked as patient, since he was not affected by the action” (R. M. W. Dixon, Ergativity, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 69 [Cambridge, 1994], pp. 1, 24).
The Old English “touching” verbs likewise provide relatively few examples of the deliberative perceptual use (and indeed some of the examples below appear mildly experiential). Perhaps, however, the fact that there were several Old English nouns, obviously related to the verbs, for the “sense of touch” would have also helped to maintain an association with perceptual action for the verbs. In the sections that follow, I will look at each of the Old English verbs in turn. I will then take up another question, whether the hrinan verbs on the one hand and (ge)hrepi on the other might have been dialectal variants, a possibility suggested especially by the pattern of their attestations.

1. (ge)hrinan

There are at least four examples in which (ge)hrinan involves perceptual actions. Perhaps the clearest one occurs in Gregory’s Dialogues, where (ge)hrinan describes a very specific application of the sense of touch:

Sed congregati ex uicinis locis undique medici, ad tactum uenae demuntiaerunt eius exitum citius adfuturum. (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 13, 1)

Pa gesomnode he pa laecas æghwanon of þam neahstowum. Pa sona swa hi gehrinon his ædrum, hi bododon his ænde swiþe hræde towheardne. (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 13, 277, 22)

(“Then he summoned doctors from all the nearby places. Then as soon as they touched his veins, they predicted that his death was very imminent.”)

Here, (ge)hrinan must mean “to examine by feeling, i.e. feel for a pulse.” Pulse-taking is one of the best places to find deliberative perception verbs, since the doctor is so obviously applying the sense of touch deliberately, in order to gain information about the patient and arrive at a diagnosis. Above we saw (ge)grapiun being used in a similar context.64

Another example, less certain but still viable, comes from the gloss of the John 20 chapter heading in the Lindisfarne Gospels, which we have already looked at in regard to hrinung.65 I give the Latin sentence now in full: Item, post dies octo Thomas inspectione uel tactu lateris ac manuum confirmatur (Lindisfarne Gospels, John chapter heading gloss, 43)—“Likewise, after eight days, Thomas by the inspection or touching of his side and hands is confirmed.” The gloss to tactu lateris gives two interpretations: “mið rining oðde miðdy gehran dæm sidum”—“by touching or when he touched the sides.” Since by the double proofs of sight and touch Thomas was confirmed in the knowledge that Christ’s

64 See p. 127.
65 See p. 106.
risen body was real and physical, it seems likely that (ge)hrinan means "to feel deliberately, examine by feeling."

Finally, in two other examples, we find (ge)hrinan being used with the modal magan, "to be able to." In this context, the verbs seem less strictly deliberative, but hint slightly at an experiential sense. One occurs in a homily based on Matthew 28, in which the homilist paraphrases, then gives a brief exegesis of each consecutive passage. The relevant passage is the one in which Christ appears to the two Marys returning from his empty tomb:

\[
\text{Et ecce Jesus occurrit illis, dicens: Havete. Illae autem accesserunt, et tenuerunt pedes eius, et adoraverunt eum. (Matt 28, 9)}
\]

("And behold Jesus met them, saying: All hail. But they came up and took hold of his feet, and adored him.")

The homilist translates the second sentence and then explains the significance of them holding his feet:

\[
\text{Pa eodan ða halgan wif to him Criste, and hine be his fotum genaman, and him to gebeæn. Wæs on ðan cuð ðæt he hæfde soðne lichaman, æfter þære his æriste þa heo him hrinan mihton. (Homily “De sabbato sancto” [Bodley 340], 313)}
\]

("Then the holy women went to him the Christ, and held him by his feet, and worshipped him. By this it was known that he had a true body after his resurrection, when they could touch him.")

Since they are said to hold his feet, we know that they have performed a clearly deliberate and external action. But since they are said to be able to touch him, the implied significance of this action is not simply that they were able to reach out and make contact with Christ, but that once having done so, they could perceive the contact. The meaning of (ge)hrinan here might be interpreted "to exercise the sense of feeling upon," which I think approaches the experiential sense, "to be aware of contact with."

Finally, there is the single example that Toller gives to illustrate the sense "to touch, be sensitive to." The passage is in Genesis B: after Eve has eaten the apple, the devil deludes her by giving her special powers of vision ("Pa meaht eho wide geseon þurh þæs laðan læn, ... þeah heo hit þurh mannæs geþeahte ne sceawode" [600, 605]--"Then she could see far off, by loan of the evil one, though she did not view it [the world] by means of a human perception"). He then incites her:

\[
\text{Þu meaht nu þe self geseon. ... ðæt þe is ungelic wlite and wæstmas. ... Nu scineð þe leohal fore glædic ongean ðæt ic from gode brohte hwit of heofonum; nu þu his hrinan meaht. (611)}
\]
“(Now you can see yourself that appearances and forms are different for you. Now the bright light shines out before you that I have brought from God, radiant out of the heavens; now you can touch it.”)

Bradley translates the final phrase “Now you can lay hold on it,” but there is little evidence of a “laying hold” sense for (ge)hrinan. What the devil seems to be expressing is that Eve’s visual perception has gained a new dimension; now she can “touch” light. The sense of “hrinan” seems certainly perceptual; Toller’s definition supposes that it has become experiential. Perhaps it has, if only briefly: as I have already suggested, the most salient aspect of such contexts is not the ability to reach out and make contact, but to perceive the contact once it is made—“in other words, it has become the experiential “to feel.”

2. æthrinan

There is only one example of the perceptual sense of æthrinan, but it is fairly straightforward. It occurs in a place where æthrinan translates a perceptual use of tango:

Dixitque Isaac: Accede huc, ut tangam te, fili mi, et probem utrum tu sis filus meus Esau, an non.

& Isaac cwæd: Ga hider near þæt ic æthrine ðin, sunu min, & fandige hwæder ðu sy min sunu Esau ðe ne sy. (OE Heptateuch, Gen 27. 21)

(“And Isaac said, ‘Come here close so that I may touch you, my son, and test whether you are my son Esau or not.’”)

Clearly, it is the sense of touch that the blind Isaac must use to determine whether he is addressing his hairy son Esau. One might argue that the verbs “probem” and “fandige” are the only ones that express the idea of deliberate exploration, and that “tangam” and “æthrine” just mean “(that I) may put my hands in contact with (you),” without implying the particular sense “in order to exercise the sense of touch upon.” However, I think it is more likely that the exploratory, testing senses of probo and fandian simply amplify the deliberative perceptual senses of tango and æthrinan. This is supported by the sentence that follows, which we have already looked at in regard to (ge)grapian: “Accessit ille ad patrem, et palpato eo, dixit Isaac... He eode to þam fæder, & Isaac cwæð da, da he hyne gegrapod hæfde...” (27, 22)—“He went to his father and then Isaac said, when he had felt him...” As we see, palpo and (ge)grapian are used here, both verbs with well established meanings for deliberative perception. The use of the past participle with palpo suggests


67 See p. 123.
that it is meant to express the completion of the action proposed by Isaac in the preceding sentence, and one can read (ge)grapian in the same way. It seems very likely that all four verbs—tango and palpo, æthrinan and (ge)grapian—are meant to express deliberative perception through touch. Such a sense for æthrinan has plenty of precedence in the parallel use of (ge)hrinan, as well as the meaning “sense of touch” for the noun æthrine.

3. (ge)hrepiun/ (ge)hrepian

From the relatively numerous times that Ælfric uses the noun hrepung to refer to “the sense of touch,” we might expect that (ge)hrepiun would be used to mean “to explore by touch etc.” fairly often. In fact, there is only one instance where such a sense is plausible. Of the psalters that gloss the passage “Manus habent et non palpbunt,” the only psalter that does not use a form of (ge)grapian to gloss “palpbunt” is the Salisbury Psalter (K), which has: “Handa habbað & na hrepadan” (133, 15). Sisam & Sisam, the editors of the EETS edition, date the gloss at around 1100 and describe it as “the unaltered work of a typically unintelligent scribe,” whose knowledge of Latin was poor. His ignorance of Latin grammar, or his carelessness, is evident here of course in his translating the future tense of palpo with the past tense; several other careless errors are found nearby. This is a little discouraging, but we can give the example the benefit of the doubt: it could be the addition of a more knowledgeable scribe, whose copy came between Psalter K and Psalter D, the ostensible source of K. It is really quite likely that (ge)hrepiun had a deliberative perceptual sense, given its similarity with (ge)hrinan and æthrinan otherwise. Above, when discussing instances in which (ge)grapian might be interpreted in an experiential sense, I cited a parallel passage in another psalter in support of the idea that (ge)grapian might be understood in an experiential sense. I argued that the problem lay in deciding which set of verbs (all of which describe the non-attributes of the idols) (ge)grapian should be associated with: with the experiential, perceptual verbs of seeing, hearing, and smelling, or with the more dynamic verbs of talking, walking, and crying. I

68 The verb appears alternatively as a Class I or Class II weak verb. There is a good deal of variation, even in Ælfric. I will treat the two forms as representing the same verb, and henceforth, I will only refer to it as (ge)hrepiun.

69 See above, note 50.


71 See p. 130.
do not wish to quibble here over whether (ge)hrepian is deliberative or experiential—let us just assume it is deliberative—but we should simply note that the verb is used in this series of perceptual actions, and that its sense is also very likely to be perceptual.

A Dialectal Distribution for (ge,et)hrinan and (ge)hrepian?

Since it is our aim to identify the verbs that took part in the expression of acts of physical perception, and to determine the roles each of these played in relation to one another in the available Old English vocabulary, it is worth taking note of verbs that may have been characteristic of certain Old English dialects and not of others. Such verbs would not divide a semantic field between them; they might instead occupy the same semantic space in different dialects. In this study, we will consider two sets of possible dialectal variants: the hrinan verbs versus (ge)hrepian, and, in the next chapter, (ge)fredan versus (ge)felan. What characterizes both sets of words is, first, an extensive synonymy which is maintained through a broad range of uses. The synonymy between the hrinan verbs and (ge)hrepian will be outlined in the first section below. Close synonymy alone is of course not sufficient to indicate a dialectal difference; Collinson lists nine different possible origins for synonymy, only one of which involves dialect.72 What is most significant in suggesting a dialectal division in the use of these words is their patterns of attestation, which will be outlined in the second section. Here, while a few authors use both the hrinan and hrepian verbs, we will find that the distribution of these words falls into a rough regional, and hence dialectal, pattern.

What is additionally appealing about the idea that these two particular sets of verbs represent dialectal variants is fact that they alliterate and, in the case of (ge)fredan and (ge)felan, share the same root vowel. It is significant that only one verb of each set appears in poetry, for it suggests that the excluded words were not available to Anglo-Saxon poets. But even more significantly, the rough similarity in forms, especially that between (ge)fredan and (ge)felan, may have suggested a (false) etymological connection to speakers when they were aware of the other word as characteristic of another dialect: they might have said to themselves, “we say felan, but those people over Winchester way say it strange, fredan.” The similarity in forms might in some cases have discouraged people

from using both verbs.

Now in the sections that follow, I will first look at how these verbs cover the same range of meaning, comparing them to both Modern English *touch* and Latin *tango*, and then I will explore the pattern of their attestations.

i. Semantic Survey

It is a curious and readily observed phenomenon that words in different languages with the same base sense often go through very similar semantic extensions and metaphorical developments. Latin and Old English both seem to have had verbs that were very like our verb *touch*. It might be argued that the Latin word has influenced and shaped both the Old English and Modern English words; but whether it has occurred by the influence of one language upon the others or by an innate semantic tendency, played out in the development of all three languages (I will not decide here; probably there is something of both), the fact of their similarity remains. We may be accused of imposing our own understanding of *touch* upon these other words; doubtless a proponent of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis would say that we cannot escape from our own semantic assumptions. There is no good answer to this accusation: we can only point out how well the Latin and Old English words appear to fit into the same framework as *touch*. Of course, there are differences too, and these will be discussed in due course.

Let us begin by introducing a rough schema of some of the most salient meanings of *touch*, twelve senses in all. Of course there are many more particular senses that might be listed, but this schema will give us our framework with which to look at the other verbs:

1. “To place the hand, finger, etc. in contact with.”
2. “To bring (something) into contact with (something else).”
3. “To be or come into contact with.”
4. “To border on, adjoin, extend to” (of unmoving things).
5. “To reach, come to” (of moving things); “to attain.”
6. “To handle or have to do with in any degree.”
7. “To partake of (food and drink).”
8. “To lay hands on, treat roughly (in the least degree).”
9. “To affect by contact, act upon, make an impression upon.”
10. “To affect (in some negative or injurious way).”
11. “To affect the emotions of, move.”

73 This is the general theme of Eve Sweetser’s *op. cit.*) second chapter, “Semantic structure and semantic change: English perception-verbs in an Indo-European context” (pp. 23-48).
"To treat or discuss in passing, deal with."

If there is one notion characteristic of all these senses, it is that of "light contact," even if that contact is metaphorical, or the effects of the contact severe. Sometimes this notion is transmuted into the aspect "in the least degree" or "not even in the least degree," which comes up especially in the senses (6) through (10).74

What does not seem to be built into the general usage of touch is any guaranteed notion of the deliberate versus the involuntary nature of the action, even though whether the action was willed or not can have important consequences. Touching someone by accident is a forgiveable social gaffe; to do so on purpose may constitute harassment.75 We should probably not be surprised that touch moves so easily between intended and involuntary action; this has been true of many of the perception verbs we have looked at thus far.

The Latin verb tango and the Old English verbs (ge)hrinan, æthrinan, and (ge)hrepiun appear to fit quite well into the outlined schema, and the conditions just described seem to apply to them as well. The correspondence between them is not exact--hardly surprising, since touch itself has changed in the course of its history--but it is close. What this suggests is that all these verbs fulfill the same semantic need in their respective languages. This may lead us to suspect that (ge)hrinan and æthrinan on the one hand (they may have been synonymous for some speakers, differentiated for others, and still other speakers might have used only one of the two) and (ge)hrepiun on the other performed the same role in different dialects in Old English.76 Thus they would not have competed with one another in the lexis of an individual speaker.

We will now look at how the five verbs are used in each of the twelve senses outlined in the schema. Each sense will be followed by examples of each verb in this order: (a) MnE touch, (b) L tango, (c) OE (ge)hrinan, (d) OE æthrinan, and (e) OE (ge)hrepiun. Where no examples of a particular sense for a verb have been found, it will be indicated by three asterisks. The Modern English and Latin examples are drawn from the OED and OLD, and are not cited in the bibliography.

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74 Touch, from Old French tochter, is related to a number of Romance words, such as Spanish and Portuguese tocar and Italian toccare, that have a general sense of "to strike, hit." The OED remarks of touch that "the passage of the sense 'knock, strike' into that of 'touch' (in Fr., etc.) is like that of Eng. 'thrust, push' into 'put': a stroke at its lightest is a mere touch."

75 See note 63 above on ergativity.

76 Of course, the verbs might have expressed different nuances we are not aware of. The case for them representing different dialects must rest primarily on their distribution in the Old English corpus.
(1) “To place the hand, finger, etc. in contact with.” These examples represent only a few of the many sorts of gestures that may be involved.

a. “Love that is satisfied with touching the feet of its hero and making noise at him is likely to become parasitical.” (J.P. Chander, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* [1947] 140)

b. “Tange utramvis digitulo minimo modo.” (Plautus, *Rudens* 3, 4, 15) -- “Touch whatever you wish only with the least little finger.”

c. “Sentit ... quasi magnam latamque manum caput sibi in parte qua dolebat tetigisse. Da gefelede he ... swa swa mycel hond & brad his heafod gehrine in ðæm déle þe þæt sar & seo adl on wæs.” (Bede, *Historia* 4, 31, 446, 19; *Bede’s History* 4, 32, 380, 11) -- “Then he felt as though a large and broad hand were touching his head in the part in which the pain and disease was.”

d. “Qui cum videret quod eum superare non posset, tetigit nervum femoris eius. Da he geseah þæt he hyne oferswyðan ne mihte, ða æðran he hys sine on hys ðeo.” (*OE Heptateuch*, Gen 32, 25) -- “When he saw that he could not overpower him, then he touched the sinew in his thigh.”

e. “Ne cys þu mine fet, ne þu me ne hrepa, forðan þe þu ne eart gyt gefullod.” (Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Sebastian, 301)77 -- “Do not kiss my feet, nor touch me, for you are not yet baptised.”

(2) “To bring (something) into contact with (something else).” Since the actions performed in (1) either imply or explicitly state “with the hand or finger,” I concentrate here upon actions where the performer of the action brings two objects into contact that are distinct from his or her own person.


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b. “Virga ... movente soporem virginis os tangit.” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11, 308)-
   “He touched the mouth of the virgin with his sleep-inducing rod.”

c. “Iratus autem tetigit regem iacentem virga. He eorre þone cyning liggende gehran
   mid þære gyrde.” (Bede, *Historia* 3, 22, 284, 25; Bede’s *History* 3, 16, 228, 18)--
   “Angry, he touched the king as he lay with the rod.”

d. “And þonne se sacerd æthrinð mid his spatle þæs mannæ nose & his earan.”
   (Wulfstan, *Homilies*, 8b, 29)79--“And then the priest touches the man’s nose and
   ears with his spit.”

e. “He dyde þa his fingras into his earan, & mid his halwendan spatle hys tungan
   hrepode.” (Ælfric, *Homilies*, 17 [DOE: 18] 568, 30)80--“He put his fingers into
   his ears and touched his tongue with his healing spit.”

(3) “To be or come into contact with.” This of course constitutes a very broad range of
actions, both stative and dynamic, depending on the nature of the verb’s subject.81

a. “When the platinum contacts at the end of the armature touch, one-half of every
   complete wave flows into the accumulator.” (*Motor Man* [14th ed., 1912] 2. 33)

   which whenever they touch something hold it.”

c. “Sum stan is cathotices haten þone man findeð in Corsia lande, se wile cleofian on
   wihta gewilcere þe him hrineð.” (Lapidary, 30)--“A certain stone is called
   ‘cathotices’ which is found in the land of Corsica, which will adhere to whatever
   thing that touches it.”

d. “Cavete, ... nec tangatis fines illius; omnis qui tetigerit montem morte morietur.

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78 The context reveals that the action is indeed one of “touching,” not of “striking.”

79 Cf. “Tangit quoque sacerdos desputo oris sui nares et aures” (Wulfstan, *Homilies*, 8a,
   21); also cf. “Tanguntur itaque de sputo nares et aures” (Theodulf of Orléans, *De ordine
   baptismi*. 9, 228, D).

80 Cf. “Misi digitos suos in auriculas et expuens tetigit linguam eius” (Mc 7, 32).

81 It is difficult to find unambiguous examples of this sense. The examples given for (b)
   and (d) could be classed elsewhere, such as under meaning (1).
Warniæ bat ge ne cuman to neah sísum munte; ælc ðara þe his æþrinð swelte se deade." (*OE* *Heptateuch*, Exod 19, 12)—"Beware that you do not come too near to this mountain; anyone who touches it, may he die the death.")

e. "Swa hraðe swa his sceadu hi *hrepode* hi wurdon gehælede fram eallum untrumnyssum." (*Ælfric*, *Catholic Homilies I*, 22, 357, 83)\(^{82}\)—"As soon as his shadow touched them, they were healed from all illness."

(4) "To border on, adjoin, extend to." This sense is in many ways rather similar to (5), "to reach, come to," the essential difference being that here the subject of the verb is essentially stationary, and usually inanimate. There are no attested examples of this sense for æþrinan or (ge)hrepian.


b. "Haec ciuitas ... Rhenum ... **tangit**." (Caesar, *De bello gallico* 5, 3, 1)—"This city borders on the Rhine."

c. "Sio filmen ... *gehrined* þære sidan, on oðre is ðam innode getang." (*Bald's Leechbook* 2, 6, 242, 16)—"The membrane [of the spleen] touches the side, on the other [part] it is close to the intestines."

d. ***

e. ***

(5) "To reach, come to" (of moving things); also metaphorically, "to attain."

a. "I have **touched** the highest point of all my Greatnesse." (Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, 3, 2, 223).

b. "Ubi primum terram **tetigimus**." (Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 203)—"Where we first touched land."

c. "Grundum ic **hrine**, helle underhnige, heofonas ofterstige." (*Riddle 6*, 5)—"I
touch the foundations, stoop below hell, pass beyond the heavens."\(^8^3\)

d. "He ær to heofonum becom ærbon þe he eorþan æthrine." (Blickling Homily 14, Birth of John the Baptist, 165, 18)\(^8^4\)--"He came to heaven before he touched/reached earth."

e. "Seo cwacigende swuster eode of ðam stærpum þe heo on astod, ... and heo, ðærrihte swa heo þæt gesceot hreþode, læg swilce heo mid slæpe fornumen wære and aras siðan hal." (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 2, 16, 159)\(^8^5\)--"The trembling sister went from the steps on which she stood, and as soon as she touched/reached the chancel she lay down as if she were overcome by sleep and afterwards she arose healthy."

(6) "To handle or have to do with in any degree." From this we get a number of various particular senses, such as "to meddle with," "to take, steal," and "to have sexual contact with," as the examples illustrate.

a. "You gets into bed and goes straight off to kip, never touched me you didn’t, you great iron." (J. Curtis, Gilt Kid [1936] 7, 79)

b. "Ut id quod non tuum esset tangere." (Plautus, Aululius, 640)--"So that you would touch that which was not yours."

c. "Ibi ob refrigerium uiantium, erectis stipitibus, aereos caucos suspendi iuberet, neque hos quisquam, nisi ad usum necessarium, contingere ... auderet. He þær gehet for wegferendra gecelnisse stapolas aseton & þær ærene ceacas onahon: and þa hwædre næñig ... hrinan dorste ... buton his nedbearflicre þegnunge." (Bede, Historia 2, 16, 192, 27; Bede’s History 2, 14, 144, 27)--"For the refreshment of travelers, he ordered that poles be set up and iron jugs hung there; and yet no one dared steal (lay a finger on?) them, except for their necessary use."

\(^8^3\) Although the riddle-object (Creation) is actually a stationary thing, in the riddle it is portrayed as a moving creature.

\(^8^4\) LS 12 (NatJnBapt); B3.3.12. Cf. "Joannes ante pervenit ad cœlum, quam tangeret terram" (Pseudo-Augustine, Sermones. 99, 3).

\(^8^5\) Cf. "Mox ut cancellos adigit" (Augustine, De civitate Dei 22, 8, 468).
d. “And heo næfre nolde were æþrīnan, ac heo wæs on Godes æ seo getydeste fæmne.” (Homily “De natuītate Sanctae Mariae” in Hatton 114, 135, 653)86--
“And she never wished to touch a man, but she was the most skilled woman in God’s law.”

e. “Da sende Moyses ærendracan to Edom þam cynincge; bæd þæt he most faran forð ofer his land be rihtum wege & ne reppan his nan þingc.” (OEHeptateuch, Num 20, 14)87--“Then Moses sent messengers to the king Edom; he asked that he be allowed to travel over his land by the right way and not to touch anything of his.”

(7) “To partake of (food & drink).” “In the least degree” is often implied.

a. “He dies that touches any of this fruit, Till I, and my affaires are answered.”
(Shakespeare, As You Like It 2.7, 98)

b. “Cui licuit soli superorum tāngere mensas.” (Ovid, Metamorphoses 6, 173)--
“Who alone has been permitted to touch the meals of the gods.”

c. “Contingere cibum sacrilegum nollent. Ac hi ... noldon ne na gehrīnan þam unalyfdan & godwra[e]lican mete.” (Gregory, Dialogi 3, 27, 1: Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 3, 27, 232, 12)--“But they would not touch the forbidden and wicked food.”

d. “Hara & swyn synd forbodene to æþrinene.” (OEHeptateuch, Lev 11, 6)88--“It is forbidden to touch hares and pigs.”

86 MS J (Bodley 343): “heo næfre wære arinæn.” Cf. “Quae virum numquam nec videre voluit, quae in lege eruditionem optimam habuit” (Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium 12, 73, 8)--
“She who never wished to see a man, who had the best knowledge of the law.”

87 The passage only paraphrases the Latin of the Vulgate: “Misit interea nuntios Moyses ... ad regem Edom, qui dicerent: ... Obsecramus ut nobis transire liceat per terram tuam. Non ibimus per agros, nec per vineas, non bibemus aquas de puteis tuis, sed gradiemur via publica. nec ad dexteram nec ad sinistram declinantes” (Nm 20, 14)--“In the mean time Moses sent messengers ... to the king of Edom to say: ... We beseech thee that we may have leave to pass through thy country. We will not go through the fields, nor through the vineyards, we will not drink the waters of thy wells, but we will go by the common highway, neither turning aside to the right hand, nor to the left.”

88 Cf. Lv 11, 6: “Lepus quoque ... et sus ... horum carnibus non vescemini, nec cadavera contingetis”--“The hare also ... and the swine, ... the flesh of these you shall not eat, nor shall you touch their carcasses, because they are unclean to you.”
e. "Ealra þæra þinga þe on Neorxnawange syndon þu most brucan, ... buton anum treowe þe stent onmiddan Neorxnawange. Ne hrepa þu þæs treowes wæstm, for ðon þe ðu byst deadlic gif þu þæs treowes wæstm geëst." (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 1, 181, 70)89--"You may eat of all those things which are in Paradise, except for one tree that stands in the middle of Paradise. Do not touch this tree’s fruit, for you will be subject to death if you eat of this tree’s fruit."

(8) "To lay hands on, treat roughly (in the least degree)." The situation behind this meaning is generally that of an angry, violent, or powerful person using their own physical force upon another person; it is often used negatively.

a. "He wanted to give me beans, but Florence wouldn’t let him. She said, ‘Father, you are not to touch him. It was a pure misunderstanding.’" (P.G. Wodehouse, Joy in the Morning [1946] 17, 145)

b. "Si me iratus tetigerit, iratus uapulabit." (Plautus, Asinaria, 406)--"If being angry he touches me, being angry he will get a beating."

c. "Ne wæs ænig þara þæt me þus þriste, swa þu nu þa, halig, mid hondum hrinan dorste." (Juliana, 510)--"There was none of them that dared touch me with their hands so boldly as you do now, a holy woman."

d. "Magister, obsecro te, respice in filium meum, quia unicus est mihi: et ecce spiritus adprehendit illum, et subito clamat, et elidit, et dissipat eum cum spuma. Lareow, ic halsie þe, geseoh minne sunu, for þam he is min anlica sunu. & nu se unclœna gast hine æthrinð90 & he færlice hrymð, & fornimð hyne & fæmð, & hyne tyrð & slit." (West Saxon Gospels, Luke 9, 38)--"Teacher, I implore you, visit my son, for he is my only son, and now the unclean spirit seizes him and he suddenly cries out; and it wastes him and he foams; and it tears and rends him."

e. "Hine [biton lys] bealdlice and flean, þone þe ær ne dorste se draca furbon hreppan." (Ælfric, Homilies, 21 [DOE: 22], 679, 47)--"Lice and fleas bite him boldly, whom before the devil did not even dare to touch."

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89 Cf. Gn 2, 16-17 & 3, 2-3.

90 MS Hatton 38 has “ætrind.”
(9) “To affect by contact, act upon, make an impression upon.” This is usually used of the power of an inanimate agent to act upon an inanimate object (but see the Latin); it too is often used negatively. I could find no examples for *aethran*.


b. “Pernas ... nec tina nec uermes **tangent**.” (Cato, *De agricultura* 162, 3)—
“Neither moths nor worms will touch the hams.”

c. “Æghwylc gecwæd þæt him heardra nan hrinan wolde ieren ærgod.” (*Beowulf*, 987)—“Everyone said that [even] the good old iron swords of stern men would not have touched him.”

d. ***

e. “He sloh þa to mið eallum mægene, ac þæt swurd ne mihte buton þa hyde ceorfan.... He weard þa ofsceamod and sloh eft swiðe; þæt æststod þæt swurd and þone swuran ne hrepode.” (*Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Ash Wednesday*, 211) *(cf. “Languidus rursum in feminam mucro delabitur et, quasi ferrum ream timeret adtingere, circa cenuicem torpet innoxium” (Jerome, *Epistola* 1, 7, 3)).

(10) “To affect (in some negative or injurious way).” This meaning usually involves the broad effects of some non-sentient thing upon a person or people. The effects may be severe, but the action itself seems to retain its aspect of lightness; one may be infected by a touch only, and fire or frost, though harsh, make contact in a seemingly light and superficial manner.

a. “I wasn’t no ways drunk; but I must have been **touched** more or less, because I felt myself to be so sober.” (R. Boldrewood, *Robbery Under Arms* [1888], 2, 11. 180)
b. “Frondes autumni frigore tactas” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3, 729)—“Leaves touched by the cold of autumn.”

c. “Ræhton wide geond werþeoda wrohtes telgan; hrinon hearntanæ hearde and sare drihta bearæn.” (*Genesis* A, 990)—“The shoots of the sin spread out widely among the peoples; the sorrow-shoots touched the children of men hard and bitterly.”

d. “_python wundrodon ealle þa þe þær wæron, þæt þæt fyr ne æþran furðon anæs hæres on him, ac heora lichaman wæron hwittran þonne snaw.” (*Life of St. Eustace*, 218, 459)93—“Then all marvelled who were there that the fire did not touch even a hair on them, but their bodies were whiter than snow.”

e. “Nunc autem venit super te plaga, et defecisti; tetigit te, et conturbatus es. [Iob 4, 5] Wite com ofer ðe and ðu ateorodest; sarnys ðe hrepode and ðu eart geunrotsod.” (*Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II*, 30 [DOE: 35], 264, 142)—“Plague came over you and you became weak; suffering touched you and you are grieved.”

(11) “To affect the emotions of, move.” *(Ge)hrepiun* shows better evidence of this sense than *(ge)hrinun*. For *(ge)hrinun*, the example from *Beowulf* suggests how such a meaning might arise, where the sense seems to be that the wound has struck some inner sensitive core. The sensitivity is one of pain, but it could possibly extend then into emotional sensitivity. I could find no example of such a sense for *æthrian*.

a. “I can’t say how much the thought of that fidelity has *touched* me.” (Thackeray, *Roundabout Papers, Nil nisi bonum* [1863] 227)

b. “Hic me dolor *tangit*.” (Cicero, *Brut.*, 331)—“This grief touches me.”

c. “Næs he fæge þa git, ac he hyne gewyrpte, þeah ðe him wund *hrine*.” (*Beowulf*, 2975)—“He was not yet fated to die, but recovered himself, though the wound touched him.”

d. ***

e. “Beo him gesæd ær he gewe æte teartan witu, þæt his heorte mid ðære biternysse

Old English Verbs of Touch

beo gehrepod.” (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 20 [DOE: 22], 196, 222)94—“Let it be said to him before he knows the sharp punishments, that his heart will be touched with bitterness.”

(12) “To treat or discuss in passing, deal with.” We of course now say touch on or upon. This may be used either of a person (usually an author) or of a text. Here again, (ge)hrinan and æthrinan do not display any close examples, although there are several passages where both verbs hint at such a sense, through deliberately metaphorical uses. This sense is however well represented in (ge)hrepian.

a. “He touches on the same difficulties and he gives no answer to them.” (Jowett. Plato [1875, 2nd ed.] 4, 5)

b. “Ubi Aristoteles ista tetigit?” (Cicero, Luc., 136)—“Where has Aristotle touched on these things?”

c. “Be ðæm scamfæstan hit is nytte ðæt ðæt hit mon on tæla[n] wille, ðæt hit mon healfunga speece, swelce hit mon hwon gehrine.” (Alfred, Pastoral Care. 31, 207, 6)—“For the modest man, it is more beneficial that one tells him only partially that which one wishes to censure in him, as if one were touching it a little.”95

d. “We æthrynon ōa deopan sæ and ōa muntas þisses weorces.” (Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion 1, 1, 16, 160)—“We touched the deep sea and the mountains of this work.”96

e. “Pises godspelles angin hrepode ōes hælendes þrownunge.” (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 10, 259, 23)—“The beginning of this gospel touched on our savior’s

94 Cf. “Vivo tamen prædicetur acrius, quatenus cor illius amaritudo compunctionis tangat” (Vita sancti Fursei, 6, 30).

95 Cf. “Istis plerunque ad connuersionem sufficit quod eis doctor mala sua saltim leniter ad memoriam reducit” (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 7, 288, 7)—“For these (the modest men) it is very often enough for (their) conversion, that their teacher simply gently brings back their sins to them.” Alfred’s apparently spontaneous use of (ge)hrinan shows that this use of the verb was natural to Old English.

96 The example is deliberately metaphorical, “we have touched,” that is, made physical contact with, “the sea and mountains,” but “of this work,” that is, we have mentioned the most profound parts of this work. The conscious metaphor is carried on from the earlier statement. “We æthrynon mid urum arun ōa yðan ōa deopan wælis” (Ibid. 1, 1, 16, 145)—“We have touched with our oars the waves of the deep pool.”
suffering.”

The overall similarity in the meanings of these verbs is striking. Occasionally, of course, one or other of the verbs, particularly the Old English verbs, do not seem to represent the particular sense well, or perhaps not at all. We may plead as an excuse the relative paucity of examples; with a larger corpus, we might well find the verb being used in the sense that is lacking here.

That is not to ride rough-shod over the aspects of each verb that make it unique. *Tango*, for instance, is not wholly confined to actions involving light contact. The OLD defines one sense “to touch with some degree of force” and includes this example where *tango* seems to mean specifically “nudge”: “cubito stantem prope tangens” (Horace, *Satires* 2, 5, 427)—“nudging his neighbor with his elbow.” It is also used with *caelum* to describe lightning striking, surely a drastic sort of action: “si de caelo uilla tacta siet” (Cato, *Deagri cultura* 14, 3)—“if the villa is struck by lightning (lit. touched by the sky).” Another unusual use is the sense “to touch (with a substance) so as to leave a trace or film” (OLD): “medicamento rursus bene tangendae sunt [haemorrhoidae]” (Pers. 3, 44)—“the hemorrhoids ought to be well coated again with ointment.”

*(Ge)hrinan* also seems to have been used in a drastic sense of “to strike, afflict”; see this passage in *Andreas*: “Wat ic Matheus þurh manra hand hrin[e]n heorudolgum, heafodmagan searonettum beteted” (941)—“I know your close kinsman [to be] afflicted with deadly wounds by the hands of the wicked, entangled in cunning meshes.” In the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, it glosses *percutio*, “to strike”: “Percutiam pastorem. iec ðerhsle vel hrino ðone hiorde” (Mark 14, 27)—“I will smite or strike the shepherd.” One wonders whether the sense “strike” or the sense “reach” is behind the apparently formulaic phrase “hran æt heortan” which comes up in *Genesis B*, l. 724, and *Beowulf*, l. 2270, in the former of the apple swallowed by Adam, in the latter of “deædes wylm”—“the flux of death.”

The uses of *aethran* are on the whole not markedly different from *(ge)hrinan*, despite its prefix. There are however several examples in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* where this very prefix does cause it to be used apparently as a calque on the Latin *adhaereo*, “to stick to,” which it glosses: “Etiam puluerem qui adhaesit nobis. Æc soð þæt asca se ðe aethran us” (Luke 10, 11)—“Also the dust which stuck to us.” The calque implies that the *hrinan* element equals *haero*, thus entailing the sense “to touch and not let go,” potentially a rather striking development. There is also one instance in *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion* where it is used of an intercalated day (one inserted in the calendar to put it in accordance with the solar year) in the sense “to fall upon”: “bissexxtus ... binnan þam feorðan geare ealle þære
wucan dagas prydlcæ æthrine” (1, 2, 28, 86)—“in the fourth year, the intercalated day falls mightily upon all the days of the week.”

(Ge)hrepian, finally, stands apart from the other Old English verbs because of its regular use (in Ælfric) in the senses “to affect the emotions of, move” and “to treat or discuss in passing.” That it too might have had a more drastic sense is suggested by the fact that in one instance it glosses cieo, “to set in motion, agitate” (Cleopatra Glossary 1, 118, 520), which would indicate a shift from “to touch” to “to shove,” and in another, the participle “gehrepud” glosses incitus, “rapid, swift” (Prudentius Glosses [Boulogne-sur-Mer], 167). These verbs show the sort of variation and particularities that we would expect within an overarching pattern of synonymy.

In the study of semantics, it is a generally accepted truth that fully synonymous words are rare. David Burnley, for instance, remarks that “the economy of language ... is illustrated by the fact that it contains very few total and complete synonyms.” Now while I have just pointed out a few instances in which (ge)hrinan, æthrinan, and (ge)hrepian show some individual characteristics, their uses overall seem very similar. If words are not distinguishable in terms of their denotations, they will be in terms of their stylistic or connotative registers. It is very difficult for us to say what different connotations (ge)hrinan, æthrinan, and (ge)hrepian might have had. But if we theorize that they were words expressing the same thing in different dialects, we can offer at least one explanation of why they appear to share so many of the same meanings.

ii. Distribution in Old English Corpus

(Ge)hrrinan is the only verb of the three to appear in the early prose from the reign of King Alfred (871-899). Alfred himself uses gehrrinan 5 times in his translation of the Pastoral Care and once in the Meters of Boethius (if he is the author), while he uses the derived substantives hrine and hrinung once each in the Soliloquies. (Ge)hrinan (usually the prefixed form) is also found in several early texts of Mercian background: it occurs 31 times in Werferth’s translation of Gregory’s Dialogues, which, although preserved in a West Saxon manuscript (Corpus) from the second half of the 11th century, retains some of its Mercian characteristics, and 35 times in the translation of Bede, also known to have a


98 See Janet Bately, “Old English prose before and during the reign of Alfred,” Anglo-Saxon England 17 (1988), p. 97: “The only Mercian text that can be securely assigned to the late ninth century is the translation of Gregory’s Dialogi.”
Mercian origin. (Ge)hrinan also occurs in the Old English Martyrology, another early, apparently Mercian text. As luck would have it, however, it occurs in the fragment of the Martyrology found in the 11th century MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, which contains a portion of the text, from 25 to 31 December, that is missing from all the other manuscripts, making it impossible to say whether (ge)hrinan appeared in the earlier versions. In addition, (ge)hrinan appears three times in the 9th century gloss of the Vespasian Psalter (A), which is generally agreed to be Mercian, and once each in the Life of St. Chad, the Life of St. Christopher, and the Letter of Alexander, which have been thought to have “early” and “Mercian” origins, although Janet Bately has raised some serious doubts about the validity of these claims.

The 10th century evidence supports the idea that the hran forms were characteristic of the Anglian parts of England. (Ge)hrinan appears 49 times and aethran 3 times in the Northumbrian glosses of the Lindisfarne Gospels; (ge)hrinan also occurs 5 times in the Durham Ritual Gloss, apparently added by the same scribe, Aldred, who wrote them around 950. In the Rushworth Gospels, the glossators Farman and Owun employ (ge)hrinan and aethran 32 times, a number of which are independent of the Lindisfarne model, which attests to the currency of the verbs in 10th century Mercia as well as Northumbria.

(Ge)hrinan, especially the simplex, is the only one of the touch verbs to be found in

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100 The relevant passage is “Hire næfre wer ne gehran” (Martyrology MS D, Dec 25, 4, 1)–“Man never touched her.” Celia Sisam, in “An Early Fragment of the Old English Martyrology,” Review of English Studies, n.s. 4 (1953), pp. 209-20, discusses the various manuscripts and the date and Mercian provenance of the Martyrology.


103 See Bately, “Old English prose,” pp. 104-14, esp. p. 109: “I am not convinced that all the so-called Mercian words must originally have been particular to the territory called Mercia, or even to territory controlled by Mercians.”

poetry, where it occurs 25 times: once in Andreas, 5 times in Beowulf, once in Christ and Satan, twice each in Genesis A and B, 3 times in Guthlac A and once in Guthlac B, once in Juliana, once in the Meters of Boethius, twice in the verse part of the Paris Psalter, and once each in the Riddles 6, 15, 23, 39, 66, and 84. The dating and provenance of Old English poetry is a vexed question, of course, but it is thought, at least by some scholars, that many of the distinctive words that characterize the Old English poetic vocabulary come from its Anglian origins.105

This brings us to the main body of late West Saxon texts, where (ge)hrin. æthrinan, and (ge)hrepian begin to mix a bit more freely. The exception, of course, is Ælfric: (ge)hrepian occurs a total of 80 times throughout his works, whereas hrinan and its derivatives are completely absent.106 This regularity in usage is dramatically demonstrated in the translation of the Heptateuch. Of the seven times that (ge)hrepian occurs there, six fall within the parts translated by Ælfric, as Peter Cleomae sets them out (Gen 1-3, 5.32-9, 12-22; Num 13-end; Josh, except 1.1-1.10 and 12),107 whereas with the one exception, the anonymous compiler prefers æthrinan, which he uses five times, and once onhrinan.

Having seen this, we are naturally interested to see whether (ge)hrepian falls into the body of texts known as the Winchester group, which is centered around Ælfric and includes a number of other texts with apparent connections to Winchester. Since the last century, it has been recognized that the works of Ælfric are characterized by a distinctive vocabulary. In 1972, Helmut Gneuss proposed that Ælfric acquired this special vocabulary as a result of his education at Winchester in the school of Æthelwold, and that the same vocabulary is to be found in other texts that emanated from this school.108

105 See, for example, Walter Hofstetter, "Winchester and the standardization of Old English vocabulary," Anglo-Saxon England 17 (1988), p. 157: "The greatest part of Old English poetry was composed at an earlier period [i.e. earlier than the 10th c.] and in the Anglian dialect." Campbell ([19]) is more cautious; see also Ashley Crandell Amos, Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980). esp. "Lexical Tests," pp. 141-56.

106 There are, however, variant readings of Ælfric which substitute hrinan for hrepian forms. In "heo hrepode his reafes fraedu" (Catholic Homilies II, 24 [DOE: 28], 228, 238), MS B (Bodley 343) has "aran." However this is a late manuscript (Ker: "s. xii2"), and the substitution is likely to be scribal, rather than to reflect Ælfric's usage.


Walter Hofstetter fleshed out this theory in 1987 with a study of thirteen semantic areas in which it was possible to distinguish between Winchester and non-Winchester usage; using these thirteen areas, he was then able to produce an expanded list of works characterized by the Winchester usage.\textsuperscript{109} While I have expressed some doubts about the premises of this theory, specifically that it was the result of a conscious effort to “standardize” the vocabulary, rather than a reflection of the dialectal background of its users,\textsuperscript{110} there is no doubt that the Winchester texts are characterized by a distinctive vocabulary.

\textit{(Ge)hrepian} and the \textit{hrinan} words do seem to fall into the Winchester/ non-Winchester pattern of attestation, but they do not do so as distinctly as the two verbs we will look at in the next chapter, \textit{(ge)fredan} and \textit{(ge)felan}. For one thing, in seven of the fourteen places where \textit{(ge)hrepian} occurs (counting the works of \AE{}lfric as a single body), forms of \textit{hrinan} also occur, indicating that, for the writers of these texts, the words were viable synonyms. Aside from \AE{}lfric, \textit{(ge)hrepian} appears in three texts classified as Winchester texts by Hofstetter, and in one of these, the \textit{Benedictine Rule Gloss}, it occurs without \textit{hrinan} forms. However, in the other two, forms of \textit{hrinan} also occur. In the Hatton version of \textit{Gregory’s Dialogues}, one of the central texts exhibiting the Winchester usage, the 10th century reviser does use \textit{(ge)hrepian} twice, but he does so spontaneously, improving the sense of the translation rather than altering a form of \textit{hrinan}. In four cases, he is content to let \textit{(ge)hrinan} stand, and twice he replaces it with \textit{æthrinan}. This suggests that both \textit{(ge)hrepian} and \textit{æthrinan} formed part of his active vocabulary, and \textit{(ge)hrinan} was not strange to him. Another important representative of the Winchester usage is the \textit{Durham Hymnal Gloss}: here again we find \textit{(ge)hrepian}, which occurs twice (plus one occurrence of \textit{hrepung}), being used beside \textit{æthrinan}, which occurs once.

A form of \textit{hrepian} occurs by itself in the \textit{Sedulius Glosses} in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Latin 8092, where “\textit{adacta}” is glossed by “mid hre[punge]” (15r II/156). The editor, Michael Lapidge, supplies the ending to the manuscript “hre.” I mention this because Lapidge notes some lexical affinities of this gloss with the vocabulary of the


\textsuperscript{110} I expressed these doubts in a paper entitled “Word Choice and Dialect in Old English: The Problem of \textit{Felan} and \textit{Fredan},” presented at the Fourth Annual Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference, held on February 12-14, 1998, at Arizona State University.
Winchester group. I tentatively include it in the chart below.

On the other hand, forms of hrinan occur without (ge)hrepian in several other Winchester texts: they appear 3 times in the Expositio hymnorum Gloss, once each in the Psalters F, G, I, and J (Stowe, Vitellius, Lambeth, and Arundel), while hrinung is used once in Chrodegang’s Rule. That hrinan forms are found in F, G, and J is not surprising, since they follow D (Royal). Hofstetter considered them Winchester texts because they substitute Winchester for non-Winchester words in a considerable number of instances ("considerable" meaning as low as 10% of the time). However, that I, which has a close relationship with F but shows “striking independence” in modifying and multiplying glosses, should use æthrinan (against F’s hrinan) suggests us that this verb was part of the glossator’s active vocabulary. The chart below summarizes the occurrences of hrepian and hrinan forms in Winchester texts.

1. Winchester texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+hrepian</th>
<th>+hrinan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ælfric’s works (including Heptateuch)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedictine Rule Gloss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(?) Sedulius Gloss [Paris, Latin 8092]</td>
<td>(hrepung 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory’s Dialogues [Hatton]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham Hymnal Gloss</td>
<td>2 (hrepung 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expositio hymnorum Gloss</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrodegang’s Rule</td>
<td></td>
<td>(hrinung 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalters F G I J</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see that (ge)hrepian is characteristic of certain Winchester texts, but it is not the

111 See Michael Lapidge, “Some Old English Sedulius Glosses from BN Lat. 8092,” Anglia 100 (1982), pp. 1-17. Lapidge writes, “These glosses offer sufficient evidence to indicate that they are to be associated with that standard literary dialect of Old English whose features have recently been outlined by Helmut Gneuss.... A number of words among the Sedulius glosses, for example, seem to be words preferred by Ælfric: aslacian, beladung, campdan, hrepung, tyhting, and ungeendod” (p. 6, my emphasis). He goes on to note lexical affinities with the glosses in Psalter I (Lambeth) (as well as D, Royal, a non-Winchester psalter), and in the Benedictine Rule. Surprisingly, Walter Hofstetter did not include it in his study.

112 See Morrell, pp. 112 & 124.
exclusive touch verb among the Winchester texts, although it is in Ælfric.

Turning now to the attestation of these verbs in non-Winchester texts of late Old English, we should take note of how they are attested in another body of texts, mainly glosses, which has also been noted for its distinctive vocabulary. Phillip Pulsiano has recently written on this topic:

Both Walter Hofstetter and Elmar Seebold have drawn attention to a corpus of Canterbury texts that have certain lexical characteristics in common. Unlike words of the Winchester group, ... the vocabulary of the Canterbury group is both more general and drawn from a wider range. 113

Among these texts are the Prudentius Glosses [Boulogne-sur-Mer], the Arundel Prayers Gloss, the Liber scintillarum Gloss, the Regularis concordia Gloss, and the Cleopatra Glossaries 1 & 3. This is how hrepian and hrinan forms appear among these texts:

2. Canterbury Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glosses</th>
<th>+hrepian</th>
<th>+hrinan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prudentius Glosses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundel Prayers Gloss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra Glossary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (gehrine 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liber scintillarum Gloss</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularis concordia Gloss</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the split here is not very distinctive: apparently, for at least two of the glossators, the two verbs were synonyms. Their use together might reflect the mixing of dialects that must have gone on in Canterbury, with ecclesiastics and scholars (such as Dunstan) coming from other areas, especially the West Saxon region, and mingling with the more local people of Kentish background.

Outside of the Canterbury texts, there are four non-Winchester works in which forms of hrepian occur; in all of these we also find forms of hrinan. In his Enchiridion, Byrhtferth seems to show a real preference for (ge)hrepian, which he uses 13 times, over aethrinan, which he uses four times. The grounds on which Hofstetter excluded the Enchiridion from the Winchester group are fairly tenuous: with one occurrence of a Winchester word against three occurrences of non-Winchester words, there simply wasn’t

much evidence to put it definitively in either group. However, we should note that
Byrhtferth only uses (ge)hrepian to mean “to mention in passing, treat, touch upon,”
whereas he uses æthrinan to mean “to make or come into contact” and (of an intercalated
day), “to fall upon,” so it is not certain that the two verbs were actually synonyms for him.
In the West Saxon Gospels, where they do appear to be synonyms, the translator clearly
favors æthrinan over (ge)hrepian, for the two verbs occur in a proportion of 35 to 1. In the
Herbarium, (ge)hrepian occurs twice against one occurrence of æthrinan (and two
occurrences of the noun æthrine). In two other medical texts, Bald’s Leechbook and the
OE Medicina, only forms of hrinan are found; this tendency towards the Winchester usage
in the Herbarium is reflected in the data presented in Hofstetter’s study. 114 Finally,
(ge)hrepian occurs twice and æthrinan once in Psalter K (Salisbury), 115 the only psalter
where (ge)hrepian is found. This is interesting, for it represents the sole instance we have
where a scribe appears to have replaced a form of hrinan with (ge)hrepian: in Psalm 143,
5, K has “hrepa muntas,” whereas D, the basic model behind K, as well as E, F, G, and J
have “ahrin.” (Interestingly, as we noted earlier, in the parallel passages in Psalms 113, 15
and 134, 17, K was the only psalter to gloss palpo with (ge)hrepian instead of
(ge)grapian.) 116 Evidently, the scribe of K liked (ge)hrepian. I will not detail the non-
Winchester texts in which only forms of hrinan appear: it is enough to say that they occur
about 50 times in 40 other texts not mentioned above, which include homilies, saints’ lives,
confessionals, liturgical directions, the Lapidary, the Marvels of the East, notes, and
glosses.


115 Plus one occurrence of “trinð” (“qui tangit montes”) in Psalm 103, 32, which
Campbell suggests is an error for “hrinð” “due to lemma ‘tangit’” (A. Campbell, An
alternatively, the gloss could be an aphetic form of “æ(h)rínð” (cf. twit < atwite [OED. s.v.
twit]). The same error occurs in Psalter J (Arundel): “tringað,” while both psalters gloss the
nearly equivalent passage in 143, 5 correctly.

116 See p. 142.
3. Other Non-Winchester Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+hrepian</th>
<th>+hrinan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE Herbarium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (æthrine 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalter K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Saxon Gospels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bald’s Leechbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE Medicina</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Other Texts</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We may now draw a few tentative conclusions regarding the possible dialectal division between hrinan and hrepian forms. It seems certain that the hrinan forms are characteristic of the North, since they alone occur in the unquestionably Anglian Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels; they also occur in early, presumably Mercian, prose texts and in poetry, which is believed to have an Anglian background. Hrinan forms are also found in the early West Saxon texts of Alfred, so they are not exclusively characteristic of the North. (Ge)hrepian, on the other hand, appears only in late West Saxon texts. It is generally characteristic of the Winchester texts, but not exclusively, whereas the hrinan verbs tend to appear in non-Winchester texts, but not exclusively. For a number of writers, the pattern of synonymy we traced earlier seems to have been actual—that is, they used both forms; for other authors, such as Byrhtferth, the different verbs may have played quite distinct roles in their vocabulary. It is difficult to pin down a dialectal pattern for (ge)hrepian, other than that it was a southern phenomenon that seems to have made its way into writing only in the mid to late tenth century. Whether Ælfric used it so strikingly to the exclusion of the hrinan forms as a result of his training at Winchester or because of his dialectal background is an open question, one that I would be interested in pursuing at some later date.

III. Descriptive Strategies of Touch

If the Anglo-Saxons had no descriptive verb of touch, if they could not say that some object feels a certain way, what could they say instead? We must remember that when we use feel in this way in its most practical sense, we are usually describing the
general and, for the moment, static qualities of an object. Situations calling for this kind of use do not come up all that regularly, particularly not in Old English, but they can be found in such places as narrative descriptions of unfamiliar places or things, or technical descriptions of various kinds.

The most obvious answer to the question above is that the Anglo-Saxons could simply use the verb “to be.” Thus we find Ælfric, in a passage of narrative description, saying of a miraculous (in fact, demonic) robe: “Hit wæs swide hnesce” (Lives of Saints, Martin, 816) —“It was very soft.” In the Old English usage, something does not feel hard or soft; instead we feel that it is hard or soft: “We magan gefredan hwæt bið heard, hwæt hnesce, etc.” (Catholic Homilies II, 23 [DOE: 26], 215, 51) —“We can feel what is hard, what soft.” Because the verb “to be” is used, there is no reason for the adjectives applied to a thing to be limited to a single sense faculty, as we see in the Herbarium: “Maiores sunt in longitudinem rectae et durae, gustatu mordaces. Beoð þa maran wyrtruman lange & heard & swyþe bittere on byrgingcge” (Pseudo-Apuleius, Herbarium, 140, 183; OE Herbarium, 140, 182, 5) —“Then the larger roots are long [L: straight long-wise] and hard and very bitter in taste.” The roots are described according to their appearance, texture, and taste.

Another possibility is to use the verb “to have” in order to say that something has a certain quality, or that a specific part of it has this quality. Again in the Herbarium we find: “Deos wyrt þe man eringius ... nemneþ hafað hnesce leaf þonne heo ærest acenned byþ” (OE Herbarium, 175, 216, 9) —“This plant which is called eringius has a soft leaf when it is first sprung”; and “heo hafað heard sæd” (174, 218, 14) —“It has a hard seed.”

Finally, if it was necessary to specify to which sense faculty something had a given quality, it was possible to use a periphrasis like “on æthrine” or “on byrincge,” as the Herbarium does on other occasions:

Heo dracontea on stangum lande wyxð, heo ys hnesce on æthrine &
weredre on byrincge & on swæce swylce grene cystel. (15, 60, 6)\textsuperscript{121}

(“This dragonwort grows on stony ground; it is soft in touch, sweet in taste, and in flavor like green chestnut.”)

And in another instance, “Feldwyrt ... bið hnesce on æþrine & bittere on byrgingce” (17, 62, 5)\textsuperscript{122} --“Gentian is soft in touch and bitter in taste.”

As these few examples should suggest, the lack of a deliberative verb of touch in Old English would not have constituted a true lack at all. The same ideas could easily be expressed in other ways. Even impressionistic connotations that seem to accompany our descriptive use of feel might be produced with swilce, as in “on swæce swylce grene cystel.”

\section*{Summary}

In this chapter, we have explored a number of features that characterize verbs of touch in Old English, as well as Modern English and Latin. We noted that, like Modern English and Latin, the nouns that refer to the sense of touch are generally derived from verbs that mean “to touch, come into contact with.” The Old English nouns of touch seem to be particularly associated with a dynamic action performed with the hand and arm. We also noted a more or less complete split between experiential and deliberative verbs, as well as an absence of descriptive verbs--both features which are characteristic of Latin. But we also found that both experiential and deliberative verbs--and particularly the deliberative verb (ge)grapian--could appear in contexts where they seemed to be used in the “opposite” sense. The case of (ge)grapian is particularly interesting in this, because it suggests that Old English might have been on the way to acquiring a particular verb that meant “to perceive through touch,” in place of the general verbs of perception which are normally used.

Now to summarize the uses of the Old English verbs of touch:

(Ge)fledan and (ge)felan performed very similar roles as experiential verbs of touch, both having the meanings “to perceive through touch” and “to feel the touch of, be aware of physical contact with.” As we will see in the next chapter, there is good reason to

\textsuperscript{121} Cf. “Nascitur ... terra Apulia super saxis, tactu molli, gustu dulci, tamquam castanea (viridis) saporem habens” (Ibid., 15, 61)--“It grows in the land of Apulia upon rocks, with a soft touch, sweet taste, having a flavor of green chestnut.” Is there any practical difference between a gustus and a sapor?

\textsuperscript{122} “Tactu molli, gusto amaro” (Ibid., 17, 73)--“With a soft touch, bitter taste.”
think that they were not true synonyms, but dialectal variants. Although both had more general meanings of "to experience" and "to sense, perceive," the examples we looked at suggested that they did have meanings that were specific to touch, although the line between the particular and general meanings of these two verbs is often very subtle. In any case, neither of them appears to have had the deliberative sense that Middle English *felen* was to acquire.

There are a number of deliberative verbs of touch, a situation which reflects the variety of gestures by which the action can be performed:

_Handlian_, which can be considered a heavy, "handling" verb, by its very form refers to the part of the body performing the action. Although it is not very well attested, its deliberative sense of "to touch extensively with the hands in order to feel" is fairly certain. The verb *(ge)cunnian*, "to try, test," could sometimes also have a heavy, "handling" sense of "to search out with the hand" when it was construed with such phrases as "mid hande" or "be hrerpunge."

*(Ge)grapian* appears to have been the most important verb of deliberative perception through touch, and its senses of "to feel deliberately, explore by touch, examine by feeling" are very well attested. It may be considered the "feeling" verb because it is usually neutral with regard to the manner in which the action is performed, although it could describe heavier sorts of contact, in the senses "to grope (blindly)" and "to stroke." In poetry, it may have had the particular sense of "to grasp, seize." There is also some reason to think that *(ge)grapian* may have been on the way to developing an experiential sense, although in the examples we looked at, it seemed that this sense only occurred in contexts where it was somewhat disguised.

Old English had three verbs that could describe deliberative perception through light contact, *(ge)hrinan, æthrinan*, and *(ge)hrepiun*. I observed that there are instances in which each of these touching verbs might be "mildly" experiential. Their broader array of meanings follow the pattern displayed by similar verbs in other languages: _touch_ in Modern English and _tango_ in Latin. Their distribution in the Old English corpus suggests that these might have been dialectal variants, the *hrinan* verbs appearing especially, but not exclusively, in Anglian and non-Winchester texts, *(ge)hrepiun* appearing in Winchester texts, but it is also clear that for certain writers, the words were more or less synonyms.

Finally, Old English employed several strategies in place of the descriptive use: using the verb "to be" most obviously, and also certain elaborations using nouns of touch.
Chapter 5:
Old English General Verbs of Perception

The aim of this chapter is to complete this study with a discussion of the general verbs of perception. However, instead of surveying all the broader verbs that might admit perceiving through the physical senses among their meanings, we will only consider three verbs in this chapter: *ongytan*, *(ge)fredan*, and *(ge)felan*. These are certainly the most common general verbs of perception, and they are the logical words with which to conclude this study. *(Ge)fedar* and *(ge)felan*, close synonyms which may have been dialectal variants, can be said to correspond with *senio*, the first word we looked at in this study, while *ongytan* has much in common with *percipio*, the second. Together, the three Old English words cover the whole range of ways that things are perceived: from the direct, precognitive "experiencing" of a sensation, to the more removed, mental "apprehending" of a perceptual message.

In practice, these verbs share a fair amount of semantic ground. But because they apparently draw their perceptual meanings from different sources, *ongytan* from mental "apprehending" or "grasping," *(ge)fedar* and *(ge)felan* from more immediate "experiencing," they seem to maintain distinct spheres of influence, as it were, over the five senses. This suggests a two-part division in the way that the operation of the various senses was conceived, which may help to justify the decision to limit this study to the verbs of taste, smell, and touch.

At the beginning of this thesis, I examined evidence that suggested a partial hierarchy of senses in Anglo-Saxon notions about physical perception. In the iconography of the Five Senses in the Fuller Brooch, Sight is clearly the favored sense. The figure occupies the central portion of the brooch, around which the other four figures, in cramped ovals, are arranged. Sight is larger and more detailed than the others, and it looks outward, brows furrowed, with intense concentration. The arrangement of the brooch suggests the superiority of Sight and its more comprehensive power. This accords well with what Alfred says of sight, in contrast to hearing and touch: "Ac sio gesihð æt frumcerre, swa þa eagan on besioð, hi ongitað ealle þone andwlitan ðæs lichoman" (*Boethius' Consolation*, 1

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1 By concentrating solely on these verbs, we are of course dealing with experiential action alone.
41, 145, 25)—“But sight, from the beginning, as the eyes look upon it, they perceive all the form of the body.” In enumerations of the senses, especially in Ælfric, sight is always listed first. There is good reason therefore to think that the Anglo-Saxons accorded a more important place to sight in their thinking about the senses. As for the other four senses, the only evidence we have for a hierarchy is the order in which they appear in enumerations of the senses: hearing usually comes after sight, followed by taste and smell (or vice versa), and finally touch.

We should not be surprised to find that ongytan, the most common meaning of which is probably “to perceive mentally or understand,” is regularly associated with seeing, as the association between seeing and understanding is one we often make ourselves. What is interesting is that ongytan is also connected with hearing. This suggests that the senses of both sight and hearing were, for the Anglo-Saxons, senses of “knowing” and “understanding.” On the other hand, (ge)fredan and (ge)felan are commonly associated with the sense of touch and with general bodily sensation, and occasionally with taste. Although neither verb is directly connected with smell, the general orientation of (ge)fredan and (ge)felan suggests that they preside over the more immediate, closer senses, and that these senses might justifiably considered as a subgroup of the five senses.

In the sections below, I will first consider ongytan as a general verb of perception and as one relating especially to seeing and hearing; I will then look at (ge)fredan and (ge)felan, which I will treat as near-synonyms.

I. Ongytan

My central concern in the sections below will be to “place” ongytan in the semantic field of physical perception. I will first briefly consider the metaphor behind it; I will then describe its meanings, particularly as they relate to physical perception; finally, I will explore the evidence, in the form of repetitive word pairs, for its particular affinities with the senses of sight and hearing.

Ongytan seems to have played a role in the Old English vocabulary in relation to

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2 Cf. “Ille eminus manens totum simul iactis radiis intuetur” (Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.4, 26)—“The former sense (sight) remaining at a distance looks at the whole thing at once by its emitted rays.” The passage is interesting because it points out the capacity of sight to perceive something from a distance, which is important for understanding why sight comes to be equated with understanding, and not with first-hand experience.

3 The only exception I can find is in Augustine’s Soliloquies (1. 6. 6), where taste comes before hearing—see Chapter 4, p. 103.
(ge)fredan and (ge)felan that is roughly analogous to that played by percipio in relation to sentio, and by perceive in relation to feel. Ongytan, percipio, and perceive each tend to describe an action that takes place more in the faculties of the mind than "out there" in the extremities of the sense organs; each seems to suggest the non-emotive cognizing of a fact or situation (concrete or abstract) more than the direct experiencing of it. Furthermore, each seems to be based on a fairly easily reconstructed metaphor of seizing, grasping, or apprehending, in contrast to the more "basic" verbs--i.e. (ge)fredan, (ge)felan, sentio, and feel--which do not arise out of any obvious metaphorical construction. The metaphor is a familiar one and has occurred in many different manifestations in various languages. Eve Sweetser identifies this as a manifestation of the overarching metaphor of "Mind-as-Body"; in this instance, the metaphor describes the ability of the mind and the physical senses, sight in particular, to focus on and pick out, in terms of the physical action of taking hold of or grasping something.

The role that ongytan plays as a general verb of perception would seem to be largely shaped by the metaphor on which it is based. But before looking at the various perceptual meanings of ongytan, we should consider this metaphor a little more closely. We need to assess whether in fact it still had an active force when Old English came to be written down; we should also determine whether we have correctly identified its meaning.

There are several reasons to be cautious when asserting the active force of the metaphor. It may seem fairly straightforward to us, but we can interpret it by means of our verb get. We have the etymologists to back us up: the root -gyf- has been related to an Indo-European root ghend- or ghecf- meaning "to seize, apprehend"--also the source of Latin prehendo "to grasp, seize" and praeda, "booty." However, in Old English, the

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4 Of course, the metaphor behind perceive, a Romance loan-word, is not obvious to the average English speaker.

5 Cf. Samuel Kroesch: "Probably the most familiar and obvious development of the idea 'perceive, understand' is that obtained from the concrete meaning 'take hold of a thing, grasp.... This development in meaning is common not only to all the Germanic dialects but is also found in other Indo-European languages" ("The Semasiological Development of Words for 'Perceive,' etc., in the Older Germanic Dialects," Modern Philology 8 [1911], pp. 462-3).


7 See Pokorny, pp. 437-8.
simplex gytn is virtually never attested. Of the compounds formed from it--agytan, begytan, forgytan, ofergytan, ongytan, and undergytan--most only have abstract meanings, describing mental actions of the same order as those encompassed by ongytan. Agytan means "to understand, comprehend" and "to find out, discover" (DOE); forgytan and ofergytan mean "to forget, neglect"; and undergytan, which seems to be an Ælfrician or Winchester equivalent of ongytan, means "to understand, perceive." What we imagine to be the "literal" senses of the root are only regularly retained by begytan, which means "to obtain, acquire; seize, capture; receive (spiritual) grace" among other senses (DOE). Its most dynamic aspects emerge in examples such as this from Beowulf: "Ferhōfreccan Fin eft begeat sweordbealo sliðen" (1146)--"Cruel sword-evil in turn got bold-spirited Finn"; or in this from Orosius:

Gallie oferhergedan Romana land oð iiii mila to ðære byrig & þa burg mehton eade begitan. (Orosius' History 3, 4, 57, 24)

("Gauls overran Roman land up to four miles from the city and could easily have seized the city.")

Therefore, if the simplex was rarely in use in Old English and if the original meaning of the root was only retained by begytan, we may well ask whether the Anglo-Saxons had the means to reconstruct the metaphor behind ongytan. Some of the examples below suggest that they did still have some notion of it; however, I think we should assume that it would not have occurred to most speakers that ongytan was metaphorical. Still, there is one instance, in Beowulf, where ongytan has a dynamic sense of "to seize": "Hine se broga angeat" (1291)--"Fear seized him." Perhaps the single example, in this undateable poem, of this sense of ongytan represents the memory of the old use of ongytan, which by the time of the great Old English prose works had become obsolete.

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8 Aside from some questionable glosses and a very late text (the Soul to the Body fragments), the only text I am aware of that contains an instance of the simplex is the Benedictine Rule Gloss. For the passage, "Usque dum satisfactione congrua veniam consequatur" (24, 56, 14)--"Until by suitable satisfaction he has obtained pardon," the gloss has "Oðdæt he ... forgifennesse gite." Elsewhere the text glosses "inventum"--"something found"--as "gett" (55, 93, 5).

9 Cf. "Terribilis Gallorum inundatio ... facile sine dubio ... pertubatam occupatura ciuitatem..." (Orosius, Historiae 3, 6, 1)--"A terrible inundation of Gauls, certain to occupy easily the frightened city."

10 It is worth noting that in this example, ongytan is distinguished from the 12 other times it occurs in Beowulf (always with the meaning "to perceive") by being spelled with an initial a. It is also interesting that ongytan is used metaphorically of the effects of fear, a particular application that seems to characterize the most dynamic examples of percipio as well. Cf. "Mihi horror membra misero percipit dictis tuis" (Plautus, Amphitruo, 1118)--"Horror grips
I have described the metaphor behind both *ongytan* and *percipio* as one of seizing or grasping. But is this necessarily its force? In the first chapter, I pointed out that *capio*, the verb from which *percipio* and *accipio* are derived, has both a dynamic, drastic sense of "to seize, take hold of" and a more passive one of "to receive" that does not imply any active agency on the part of the subject. Get is the same: we may *get* something quite voluntarily and dynamically, or we may *get* it without any effort on our own part (as in "I got Martha’s cold"). If the meanings of *begytan* are any clue (i.e., that it could mean both "to seize" and "to receive"), this dual agency must have also characterized the poorly attested *gytan*. Upon consideration, one realizes that metaphors of mental and physical perception in Old English, Modern English, and Latin are based on notions of both active and passive agency. In English, we may *grasp* a fact, or simply *take* it in; likewise, we can *pick out* something seen in the distance, using the directing and fixing nature of sight identified by Sweetser, or again just *take in* a scene. It is well to keep both types of agency in mind when considering the metaphorical basis of *ongytan*, as both seem to have had a hand in shaping the range of its meanings.

I will not be considering the form *undergytan* separately in this study. In his article "*Undergytan* as a ‘Winchester’ word," Shigero Ono surveys the attestations of *ongytan*, *undergytan*, and *understandan*, and concludes, “*undergytan* seems to have been among the words favoured by Ælfric and the ‘Winchester group’ and avoided by Wulfstan.” However, because it occurs a number of times outside the Winchester group and because Ælfric, while he seems to favor *undergytan*, also regularly uses *ongytan* (about one third as often), it may not be appropriate to designate *undergytan* a “Winchester word.” The form of *undergytan* may reflect the popularity of the *under-* prefix in late Old English, which can be seen replacing *on-* in several other words. *Undergytan* seems to have the same meanings as *ongytan*, but because it is less common, it is more difficult to draw a full

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11 See Chapter 1, pp. 17-8.

12 The Old English verb *behealdan* seems to show a similar range of ideas: from a literal, dynamic sense of “to hold, possess,” it expresses a deliberative visual sense of “to behold, look,” and a more passive, experiential one of “to see, notice”; it also expresses the active mental sense of “to consider” and the more passive idea of “to realize, perceive mentally” (*DOE*).


14 See Ono, p. 571.
A. Meanings

Having outlined these various concerns, we are now ready to look more closely at the meanings of *ongytan*. It is useful to begin with its most common meanings, those which describe the non-physical action of coming into a state of knowledge. When we try to define these meanings, we quickly come up with a lot of near synonyms, more than we really need. But, as a beginning, we can organize them into two rough groups.

First, when *ongytan* describes the comprehension or awareness of a thing as it really is, we can define it "to perceive, understand, discern, comprehend, or gather." Of the over 1,850 times that *ongytan* occurs, the majority probably fall within these definitions. Among the myriad examples that might be cited, we may pluck these few. In the *Life of St. Margaret*, *ongytan* refers to an action of mental acknowledgement:

> *Ic ongete þæt þu eart dema cwucra & deadra. Dem nu betwux me and þyssum deoflum.* (Life of St. Margaret [Cotton Tiberius A. iii], 11, 6)

(“I recognize that you are the judge of the living and the dead. Judge now between me and these devils.”)

In Alfred's translation of Boethius, it describes an action of "perceiving" or "finding out" through direct experience (while the Latin *deprehendo* speaks more distantly of "discovering" or "detecting"):

> *Deprehendisti caeci numinis ambiguos uultus. Quae sese adhuc uelat alis, tota tibi prorsus innotuit.* (Boethius. Consolatio 2. pr.1. 11)

(“You have discovered the changing faces of the blind goddess (Fortune). She has become completely known to you, who thus far conceals herself from others.”)

> *Nu ðu hæst ongiten da wanclan truwa þæs blindan lustes. Pa triowa þe þe nu sindon opene hi sindon git mid manegum oðrum behelede.* (Boethius' Consolation, 7, 15, 29)

(“Now you have perceived the unsteady promises of blind pleasure. These promises which are now clear to you are still hidden to many other people.”)

And in Alfred’s preface to the *Pastoral Care*, it means “to understand” in a particularly literal sense:

> *Swiðe lytle fiorme ðara boca wiston, fordæmde hie hiora nan wuht ongiotan ne meahton, fordæmde hie næron on hiora agen gediode*

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15 The use of *ongytan* does not reflect any of the Latin sources. The nearest model has “Tu es iudex uiuorum et mortuorurn.... Judica inter me et diabulum” (*Passio sanctae Margaretae* [Monte Cassino], 11. 10)—“You are the judge of the living and the dead. Judge now between me and the devil.”
awritene. *(Pastoral Care, Preface, 5, 11)*

(“They knew very little of the benefit of those books, for they could not understand anything of them, because (those books) were not written in their own language.”)

Second, we may recognize a refinement of the “perceiving, understanding” meaning when something is identified according to a set of criteria that the perceiver already possesses, as in “to recognize, realize, or know.” Often this is hardly to be distinguished from the above meanings, but it is clearest when the thing recognized is a person, for example: “Ond þa æfter manegum gearum heo wæs fram hire fæder ongıtenu and broضربرم” *(Martyrology, MS D, Dec 26, 6, 5)*—“And then after many years she was recognized by her father and brothers.” We find it used similarly, in *Elene*, of animals: “Pa weregan neat, þe man daga gehwam drifeð and þirsceð, ongıtæ hyra goddend” (357)—“The weary oxen, that are driven and beaten daily, recognize their benefactor.”

There is no strict break in the usage of *ongytan* between the perceiving of abstract and of physical things. The two kinds of perception might be inextricably linked: “Heo fonlice blisse & gefean man mihte a on his mode & on his andwleotan ongıtæn” *(Blickling Homily 18, St. Martin, 223, 34)*—“One could always perceive heavenly bliss and joy in his mind and in his face.” Martin’s joy is manifest both in his face and in his mind, the state of which cannot be physically perceived, but only deduced from outward signs. *Ongytan* may be applied equally to the different actions performed by the eyes, by the ears, by the imaginative faculty, and by reason:

> Se an man ongıt þæt þæt he [on] ðœrum ongıt þurh þa eagan synderlice, þurh þa earuan synderlice, þurh his rædelsan synderlice, þurh gesceadwisness synderlice. *(Alfred. Boethius’ Consolation. 41, 145, 29)*

(“Each man perceives that which he perceives in another in separate ways: he perceives him separately through the eyes, separately through the ears, separately through imagination, separately through reason.”)

It is perhaps for this reason that when Alfred uses *ongytan* specifically of physical perception, he finds it necessary to specify “physically”: “Pu þe we ne magon lichamlice ongıtæn” *(Augustine’s Soliloquies 1, 6, 7)*—“You whom we cannot physically perceive.”

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16 LS 17.1 (MartinMor); B3.3.17.2.

17 Cf. “ Ipsum ... hominem aliter sensus, aliter imaginatio, aliter ratio, aliter intellegentia contueut” *(Boethius, Consolatio 5, pr.4. 27)*—“Sense regards the same man in one way, imagination in another, reason in another, and intelligence in another.”

18 Cf. “Deus ... quem sensus ignorat” *(Augustine. Soliloquia 1, 6, 25)*—“God whom sense
Yet despite its general application, *ongytan* could describe quite specific kinds of physical perception. First, *ongytan* seems to have a particular affinity with the action of seeing, and with the verb *(ge)seon*. A good example is found in *Beowulf*, in the description of the hero’s homeward sea voyage: “Sæganga for... forðe ofer yde, þæt hie Geata clifu *ongiton* cuþe næssas” (1908)—“The seagoer went forth over the waves until they perceived the cliffs of the Geats, the familiar headlands.” Compare this passage with the parallel description of the outward voyage, where *(ge)seon* is used: “Gewat þa ofer wægholm... flota famiheals... þæt þa líðende land *gesawon*, brimclufu blican” (217)—“The foamy-necked ship went over the sea until the travelers saw land, the sea-cliffs shining.” Clearly, *ongytan* and *(ge)seon* serve nearly the same purpose. Perhaps *ongytan* expresses here a nuance of “to catch sight of” or “pick out (something in the distance)” that is a residual effect of its etymological background. It might also have this nuance in the instance of *Beowulf*’s approach towards Heorot: “Guman oneton... òp þæt hy [s]æl timbred geatolic and goldfah *ongytan* mihton” (306)—“The men moved quickly until they could perceive the timbered hall, splendid and gold-adorned.” In a perhaps related sense, in the *Dream of the Rood*, *ongytan* means “to discern, make out”; here it does not refer to seeing things in the distance, but to discerning something that has been partially covered up: “Ic þurh þæt gold *ongytan* meahte earmra ærgewin” (*Dream*, 18)—“Through that gold I could make out the earlier strife of wretched men.”

*Ongytan* also seems to have a strong association with hearing. Bosworth-Toller cites several examples where it specifically describes the perception of sound: the best are found in poetry, as in *Guthlac B*: “Symle ic gehyrde... örperne mid þec; ic þæs þeodnes word... *ongeat* geomormod, gæstes spræce” (1212)—“I heard always another man with you; sorrowful, I perceived the words of this lord, the spirit’s speech.” or again in *Beowulf*: “Wyrmas and wildeor... bearhtm *ongeaton*, guðhorn galan” (1430)—“The serpents and wild beasts perceived the noise, the war-horn sounding.”

*Ongytan* could be used of other senses as well, but this use is mainly confined to medical texts. However, contrary to what one might expect, these passages do not employ *ongytan* as a simple reflex translation of a particular word, but rather use it fairly spontaneously. This suggests that although *ongytan* was more readily applied to the actions of seeing and hearing, it was not unnatural to use it in these other contexts. For instance, in the *Herbarium*, *ongytan* is used to mean “to perceive a smell”:

> *Adversus ictus scorpionum... implastrum istud apponas. [ita] tamen, ne æger odorem eius accipiat.* (173, 219)

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does not know.”
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Wið scorpiones stingce, ... genim þas ylcan wyrt, wyrc to plastre, lege to ðære wund ... swa þæt se seoca þone stenc ne ongite. (OE Herbarium, 173, 218, 1)

(“Against scorpion’s sting, take this same plant, work it into a plaster, lay it on the wound in such a way that the patient does not perceive the smell.”)

This use of ongytan seems less cognitive and more truly experiential (to use that word in its broader sense) than the previous examples. In this context, one has a vague notion that what is important is not that the patient is not aware that there is a smell, but that he does not experience the smell, does not breathe it in.

This last point is interesting, because in the context of the medical texts at least, ongytan was used of the essentially non-cognitive perception of pain, cold, relief and so on; its meaning seems to be more like “to feel” or even “to experience,” rather than “to perceive.” For example:

*Ad omnem dolorem, adhuc rem non videntem catellum conditum prima aetate si edas, nullum sentis dolorem.* (Medicina de quadrupedibus, 14, 271)

(“For all pain, if you eat a puppy that is pickled (?) in its earliest age while it is not yet seeing, you will feel no pain.”)

Wið ealle sar, gif þu on foreweardon sumera þigest hwylcne hwelp no þonne gyt gesounde, ne ongite þu ænig sar. (OE Medicina, 14, 270, 9)19

(“Against all pain: if in the early summer you eat any puppy that is not yet seeing, you will not feel any pain.”)

As I described in the first chapter, sentio is the most “basic” Latin verb of general perception, and it comes out of a sense of “to experience at first hand.” Like sentio, ongytan here must refer to the direct experience of pain, rather than the distant intellectual awareness of it—“feeling” or “sensing” pain, rather than “perceiving” it. Ongytan also describes the “sensing” of cold in a passage in the Herbarium:

Wið þæt þu cyle ne þolige, genim þas ylcan wyrtan on ele gesodene, Smyre þonne þæmíd þa handa & ealne þone lichaman, ne ongite ðu þone cile on eallum þinum lichaman. (OE Herbarium, 178, 224, 7)20

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19 The Old English translator either misread “aetate” or his exemplar had “aestate”—which could well be the correct reading, as many medical recipes indicate the time of year in which a medicine should be taken.

20 There is apparently no extant Latin version. One is tempted to wonder whether the herbalist wasn’t a practical joker; certainly if you smear your body with nettle juice, you “won’t feel a chill”—one might also prescribe fresh red chilies. However, nettles are apparently still used in folk remedies, and the young shoots are said to be edible.
Old English somewhat fastidiously recommends a different method of administering the cure:


(“And so whichever man drinks the juice of this plant, he will experience relief of the bowels with wonderful quickness.”)

It is not as though the patient becomes aware of this relief as a distantly and cognitively perceived fact; it is rather perceived at first hand.

We have observed how from its most common “mental” meanings of “to perceive, understand” and “to recognize,” ongytan can be used of the action performed by the physical senses in general and by the faculties of sight and hearing in particular. We have also found that in some contexts, i.e. the medical texts, it could be used of the “sensing” or “experiencing” of smell and of broader sensations—cold and pain and relief from pain. We will now explore its particular affinities with the senses of sight and hearing.

**B. Ongytn in repetitive word pairs**

I have sketched out the range of meanings of ongytan as it occurs by itself. More, however, can be learned of ongytan, and of its affinities with seeing and hearing, as it occurs in pairs with other verbs. The phenomenon of such repetitive word pairs in Old English has received its fullest treatment in the study of Inna Koskenniemi. The classic case of a repetitive word pair, as Koskenniemi describes it, is that in which a regularly-occurring phrase “consists of two nearly-synonymous words linked together by a conjunction. It expresses an idea which is virtually the same as that expressed by either of the two words alone.” However, the words in these phrases need not always be synonyms; indeed, “they may denote more vaguely related, complementary, or even
antithetical ideas.” In the phrases I consider below, the words do not need to be linked in a consistent way: they might be joined by and, coordinated by ne and ne, or even, in poetry, used in apposition without a conjunction. It is not necessary that they adjoin each other; what is important as a criterion, as Koskenniemi notes, is that they occupy the same or parallel syntactical position in the sentence. Furthermore, when the text in which they occur is a translation, the word pair will often render a single Latin word.

Koskenniemi describes four types of semantic relationships—"which, however, cannot always be strictly separated"—that can be expressed by a word pair. "The components of a word pair can be:

1. nearly-synonymous
2. associated by contiguity of meaning
3. complementary or antonymous
4. enumerative."

The enumerative relationship does not concern us here (although we have already encountered it when dealing with lists of the senses). Most of the examples we will look at will show elements that are nearly-synonymous or contiguous in meaning; a few will be complementary.

When we consider the why of word pairs, we are of course mainly asking about pairs that are nearly synonymous or contiguous in meaning, since complementary pairs obviously express something that a single word would not—as in "I hear and I obey." In the instance of two near-synonyms translating a single Latin word, as Koskenniemi remarks, "the use of two English words may have resulted from the feeling that one OE word might not cover the whole semantic range of the Latin word." This is certainly an understandable motivation for many of the doublet translations we will look at below—for instance, we find agnosco, used in a somewhat unusual sense of "to come to know about, hear about," translated by ongytan & (ge)hyran. In time, a word pair may become "mechanized," as the pair ongytan & oncnawan seems to have done as an equivalent of intellego. But a more significant motivation for the use of word pairs, both in translations and original texts, is that two ideas may be linked in the writer's mind. Thus the evidence

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22 Ibid., p. 90.

23 Ibid., p. 91.
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given below suggests the Anglo-Saxons made a connection between seeing and understanding, and between hearing and understanding. Such connections would especially emerge and proliferate in a literary period which favored repetitive word pairs as a stylistic device. Andy Orchard, speaking specifically of the many word pairs in the Letter of Alexander, describes the text's stylistic milieu: "The richness of the diction witnessed by this persistent use of doublets has a basis in the exuberant Latinity with which the more exotic of Alexander's experiences and activities are described; repetitive word pairs are a frequent feature of the original also."24

In an article on Old English verbs of thinking, Michiko Ogura noted a particular tendency of Old English verbs of thinking to be used in pairs.25 Ongitan is no exception. It occurs in a number of characteristic pairs. The most common is the nearly synonymous pair, ongytan & oncewan. This pair occurs at least 45 times, always expressing a single general sense of "to understand, perceive, recognize."26 To give two examples, this pair is found in both original sources: "We magon ongitan & oncewan þæt we synd ealle gebroðra" (Wulfstan, Homily 8b, 63)27--"We can understand and recognize that we are all brothers"; and in translations, usually rendering a single Latin word:

Ille ... responderet numquam se veram fidem posse relinquere quam semel agnovisset. (Gregory, Dialogi 3, 31, 2)

He ... answarode ... & cwæð þæt he næfre forlætan ne mihte þone sóðan geleofan. Þæ he æonne ongeat & onconeow. (Gregory's Dialogues 3, 31,


26 There is only one instance in which ongytan and oncewan contrast with each other: "Done sóðan fruman & ðone sóðan ende ælcre gesælde ge ongitað, þeað ge hine fullice ne oncewan" (Alfred, Boethius' Consolation, 26, 58, 4)--"You perceive the true beginning and the true ending of all happiness, though you do not fully understand it." Compare the Latin: "Vos ... erum ... illum beatitudinis finem--licet minime perspicaci qualicumque tamen cogitatione--prospicitis" (Boethius, Consolation 3, pr.3, 1)--"You discern--although not with keen-sighted thought, nevertheless with some measure of it--that true end of happiness." Ongitan reflects prospicio, whereas oncewan seems to reflect cogitatio. Assuming that ongytan and oncewan are not used in alternation with each other as synonyms (as in "You perceive but you do not fully perceive"), they appear to refer to different mental actions. Alfred does not use this pair elsewhere in his works; it would seem that for him the words had distinct, contrasting meanings.

27 The original inspiration for this passage seems to have been Æelfric: "God is our father, þæt we sceolon ealle beon on God gebroðru & healdan þone broderlican bend unforodne" (Catholic Homilies I, 19. 327. 1)--"God is our father, therefore we must all be brothers in God and hold the brotherly bond unbroken."
Ongytan also occurs in such nearly synonymous and essentially cognitive pairs as ongytan & (ge)vitan, “to understand & know” (12 times); ongytan & (ge)leornian, “to understand & know by learning” (5); ongytan & onfindan, “to understand & find out” (3); ongytan & onfon, “to understand & grasp” (2); and ongytan & (ge)cunnan, “to understand & know” (1). Ongytan also occurs in a number of pairs, still within the wholly mental range, where the relationship between the two words may be more contiguous or complementary, as if describing two parts of a process. Such pairs are (ge)pencan & ongytan, “to think & understand” (9 times); (ge)mynan & ongytan, “to remember & understand”; ongytan & (ge)lyfan, “to understand & believe” (5); and (ge)acsian & ongytan, “to ask (or: to find out by asking) & understand” (3). Even in these pairs, however, often the two verbs are hardly to be distinguished, and they do not always occur in the logical sequences I have given them here. All these examples illustrate that ongytan has a marked tendency to occur in pairs with other verbs. Since all the pairs above describe actions that take place in the mental realm, the fact that ongytan also occurs regularly with (ge)seon and with (ge)hyran tells us that the Anglo-Saxons made definite associations between the senses of sight and hearing and the faculty of understanding, which they did not make with the other senses.

1. ongytan & (ge)seon

The association of ongytan with (ge)seon is striking. The two appear together in various collocations over 25 times, so that (ge)seon is the second most likely verb for ongytan to appear with, after oncnawon. Most of the semantic relationships they demonstrate can be described as nearly-synonymous; a few others seem to be complementary. However, splitting hairs over what distinct meanings the two express in a given passage is usually not a fruitful exercise (e.g. to argue that in the sentence “Ic þine untrumnesse geseo & ongite” [Life of St. Guthlac (Cotton Vespasian D. xxi), 20, 164, 70]28, “geseo” refers to external observation, “ongite” to mental appraisal). Although I will attempt to sketch out what each means in the examples below, what is most significant is simply that the two verbs occur together so often. I will limit myself to nine examples, and include instances both of translations from Latin, and of texts independent of a source. I have grouped the examples according to the sort of general meaning they seem to express: in the first group, the two verbs essentially mean “to understand, perceive (mentally)”; in

28 Cf. “Infirmitatem tuam intelligo” (Felix, Vita sancti Guthlac, 50, 156).
the second group they mean “to see (visually)”; and in the third they seem to be 
complementary, expressing the sense “to see and understand.”

In describing the association of ongytan and (ge)seon, it is convenient to begin at 
the mental level. The extension of (ge)seon into mental insight seems to have been as 
natural and unconscious for the Anglo-Saxons as the same use of see is for us. It is thus 
not surprising that the two verbs are often used together to express a single basic sense of 
“to understand, perceive (mentally).” In the following two examples, the two verbs render 
a single Latin verb:

*Tum ego cernens ex parte mea accidisse....* (Epistola Alexandri, 10, 8)

*Da ongeat ic selfa & geseah of dæle þæt me þa earfeðu becwomon.* 
(*Letter of Alexander, 10, 10*)

(“Then I myself realized and saw that these hardships beset me from [my own] 
fault.”)

In another example, both verbs are used in one part of the sentence but not in the other 
(which indicates that there was a limit to the amount of repetition tolerated):

*Nam in aqua ex petra producta Moysen, in ferro uero quod ex profundo 
aquae reedit Heliseum. ... uideo.* (Gregory, *Dialogi* 2, 8, 8)

*Sodlice ic seo & ongyte in þam forð gelæddan wætere of þam stane, þæt 
he onhyrede Moysen þone latteow þære ealdan æ. & in þam irene, þe 
gecyrde of þæs wætere grunde, ic ongyte Heliseum.* (Gregory’s 
*Dialogues* [C] 2, 8, 120, 13)

(“Truly, I see and understand in that water brought forth from the stone, that he 
imitated Moses, the leader in the old law, and in the iron, which returned from the 
water’s bottom, I understand Elisha.”)

In the two examples, ongytan and (ge)seon correspond to cerno and video, so in both 
instances they render Latin verbs which had connections to both visual and mental 
perception, but whose basic meanings were probably more associated with visual 
perception. Yet both examples involve the speaker coming to an understanding about a 
situation or relationship which is not visual—Alexander about the source of his difficulties, 
Peter about what a certain figuration signifies. Perhaps the Old English translators 
employed the two verbs because they wished to avoid the overly literal rendering that might 
have resulted had they used (ge)seon alone. Certainly, the word pair was generally 
available, as these two passages independent of a Latin source demonstrate:

*Sona swa he eft geseah & ongeat þæt þæt folk to Gode cyrde, he eft 
hrædllice æt Gode abæd þæt he eft ren ofer eordan wæstmas sealde.*
(Vercelli Homily 20, 20)29

(“Then as soon as he saw and perceived that the people turned to God, he then quickly prayed to God that he again give rain over earth’s fruits.”)

(Mæg bonne on þæm golde ongitan Geata dryhten, 
geseon sunu Hrædles, bonne he on þæt sinc starad, 
þæt ic guncystum godne funde 
beaga bryttan. breac bonne moste. (Beowulf, 1484)

(“Then, the lord of the Geats may understand from that gold, Hrethel’s son may see when he looks upon that treasure, that I found a giver of rings good in his generosity, enjoyed [him] while I could.”)

In both of these examples, ongutan and (ge)seon describe what is essentially the non-visual apprehension of a fact. In the Vercelli Homily, that people have turned to God is not likely to be a self-contained visual vignette; it is more likely to be a continued event or process that is comprehended mentally. The example from Beowulf is especially nice because it involves Hygelac “seeing” not the treasure, but what the treasure signifies—that Beowulf was received well by Hrothgar.

The two verbs are also associated in the literal sense of (ge)seon, “to see, perceive (visually).” Here of course it is ongutan that is extended into the physical, visual realm, perhaps by means of its “picking out” or “taking in” background. The word pair may again be demonstrated both in translations:

Hominem cum cognoverint, aut si quis persequatur, longe fugiant. 
(Orientis mirabilia, 12. 2)

Gif hi hwylcne man on dam landum ongitan ocde geseop, ... bonne 
feorrið hi & fleod. (Wonders of the East, 12. 3)30

(“If they perceive or see any man in those lands, ... then they distance themselves and flee.”)

Rex ... calicum ... episcopo ... praebuit, ut uideret an spiritu prouidente 
discerneret quis ei pocusum praebet. (Gregory, Dialogi 3. 5. 2).

Se cyning ... ðam [blind] biscope þone drync sealde, to þon þæt he 
gesawe & ongeate hwaþer se biscope foreseondum Godes gaste hit 
oncawan mihte hwa þæt ware, þe him þone drync sealde. (Gregory’s 
Dialogues [C] 3. 5. 186. 7)

(“The king gave the drink to the [blind] bishop, in order that he could see and perceive whether the bishop, by the providing spirit of God, could discern who it was that gave him the drink.”)

29 HomS 38 (Verc 20); B3.2.38. The passage is not in the Latin source cited by Scrapp; the figure referred to here is the prophet Elias (cf. Iac 5, 17-18).

30 In this translation there are two word-pairs!
And in an original text:

Da wæs gemyndig modgebyldig,
beorn beaduwe heard, eode in burh hraē, ...
stop on stræte, (stig wiðode),
swa him nægig gumena ongitan ne mihte,
synfulra geseon. 

("Then he was thoughtful, patient in mind, the man stern in battle, he went quickly into the city, he walked on the street (he knew the way), so that none of the sinful men could perceive him, see him.")

With each of these three examples, one could argue for distinct, complementary meanings for ongitan and (ge)seon. However, as I said above, splitting hairs in this way is not useful. The authors of the passages above might have had distinct meanings in mind, but it is impossible for us to say with certainty what these distinct meanings might be. It is more likely that the two verbs are used together because they help to define each other. Like a series of near-synonyms in a dictionary definition, they elaborate upon each other and mark out a common area of meaning.

That is not to say that ongitan and (ge)seon cannot also contrast with each other in expressive ways. A passage from the Blickling Homilies seems to make deliberate rhetorical use of the way that (ge)seon, a verb of vision, can mean “to understand” or “recognize,” like ongitan and oncnawan:

Ponne geseob elle gesceafa ures drihtnes mihte, þeah be hie nu mennisce men oncnawan nellen ne ongitan. 

("Then all creatures will see our Lord's power, though human folk are now unwilling to recognize or perceive it.")

Many creatures, particularly the inanimate ones, do not normally see in the literal sense. But at the end of the world, the Lord's power will become readily apparent even to those things which are without a visual or mental faculty. They will “see,” while today humans use their faculties of discrimination and reason to blind themselves from what should be readily apparent. This passage demonstrates a rather subtle interplay of associations, making as much use of the differences in meaning between (ge)seon and ongitan (and oncnawan), as of the similarities. Another passage, from Exodus, shows a more straightforward sequence of actions. Here the verbs seem to be used in their respective prototypical meanings: the Israelites see sail-like clouds gathering, and from this they

31 See also note 26 above.

32 HomS 26 (Bl 7); B3.2.26.
understand that God is present.

Fyrd eall geseah  

hu þær hlifedon  
lyftwundor leoh;  
dugod Israhela,  
weroda drihten,  
halige seglas,  
leode ongeton,  
þæt þær drihten cwom  
wicsteal metan.  
(Exodus, 88)

("The whole army saw how holy sails, bright wonder of the air, towered there; the people, the host of Israelites, understood that the lord had come, the lord of hosts, to establish a camping-place.")

Here the two verbs complement each other by describing two parts of a process.

This brief section has served to demonstrate the affinities that ongytan, a general verb of perception, has with (ge)seon, a verb specific to a particular sense faculty, but having the capacity to be extended beyond that faculty into mental perception. In the following section, we will find that ongytan is also regularly associated with (ge)hyran, the verb "to hear."

2. ongytan & (ge)hyran

Ongutan also appears often with (ge)hyran. The two occur together in various collocations over twenty times in the Old English corpus. The nature of the association is shaped by the particular characteristics of (ge)hyran. It does not have the same figurative extension into wholly non-physical perception as (ge)seon does--although one might question whether that which is "heard" in several of the examples below has actually been taken in by the ears (when one says "I hear you’re going to France,” one is only vaguely referring to the means by which one received the information). Like hear, (ge)hyran may most closely approach an abstract sense when someone fusses over whether a thing has truly been "heard"--that is, absorbed and understood. On the other hand, in the company of (ge)hyran, ongytan exhibits more strongly some features that were only hinted at in its interactions with (ge)seon, and this too shapes the nature of the association. In particular, in several instances it seems to have the sense “to take in.”

When ongytan has its common sense “to understand,” the relationship between ongytan and (ge)hyran is complementary, as they describe two parts of a process, that of hearing and understanding. For instance, in Gregory’s Dialogues, in a straightforward rendering of the Latin, we find: “Si libenter audis, citius agnoscis. Gif þu hit lustlice gehyrst, þu hit hrædlice ongits” (2, 3, 12; [H] 2, 3, 110, 16)--“If you hear it willingly, you will quickly understand it.” More often, however, the two verbs describe a disjunction, that of hearing but not understanding. For example:

Hie wæron stanenre heortan & blindre þæt hie þæt ongeotan ne cuðan  
þæt hie þær gehyrdon.  
(Blickling Homily 9, Christ the Golden-Blossom.
(“Their hearts were stony and blind so that they could not understand that which they heard there.”)

The inspiration for this passage probably comes from Matthew 13, which the West-Saxon Gospels translate: “Audi tu audietis et non intellegetis. Of gehyrnyse ge gehyrad & ge ne ongytap” (13, 14)—“Through hearing you will hear and you will not understand.”

The common, established sense of “to understand” for ongytan fits the three examples above quite well. It also fits ongytan where Alfred uses it with (ge)hyran in the opening lines of his preface to Gregory’s Dialogues:

Ic Ælfred ... habbe gearolice ongyten & þurh haligra boca gesægene oft gehyrad þætte us ... is seo mæste ðearf, þæt we hwilon ure mod betwix þas eorþlican ymbigðano geleðigen & gebigen to ðam godcundan & þam gastilcan rihte. (Gregory’s Dialogues, [C] Preface, 1, 1)

(“I, Alfred, have clearly understood and in holy books often heard it said that it is the greatest benefit for us that we sometimes calm our mind among earthly anxieties and turn it toward the sacred and spiritual right.”)

Beside this use of ongytan & (ge)hyran in an original text, we may cite this example from the Letter of Alexander, where two verbs render the single verb miror:

Tibi et matri meae sororibusque meis, ut superbam inclinatamque barbari temeritatem miraremini, exemplar nisi. (Epistola Alexandri, 24, 16)

Das þing ic for þon þe sece magister, & Olimphiade minre meder, & minum geswustrum, þæt ge gehyrdon & ongeaton þa oferhygdlican gedyrstignesse þæs elreordgan kyninges. (Letter of Alexander, 24, 24)

(“I tell this thing to you, teacher, and to Olymphias my mother and to my sisters, so that you can hear and understand the overweening arrogance of the foreign king.”)

But while “to understand” seems to fit ongytan in its two contexts here, its relationship with (ge)hyran seems less distinctly complementary--i.e. as describing separate elements of a sequence--and rather more synonymous. For in Alfred’s Preface, the subordinate clause introduced by “þætte” is properly the object of both verbs--Alfred says he has both “ongyten” and “gehyred” that it benefits us to think on spiritual matters. In the Letter, Alexander does not so much wish his correspondents to come to a deep, cognitive understanding of the foreign king’s arrogance; rather he just wants them to hear about it. In both examples, the two verbs together describe the absorbing of knowledge (through spoken or written report), instead of relative parts of a process.

Finally, in the following three examples, all translations from Latin, the meaning of the two verbs seems particularly similar, and especially close to the basic meaning of (ge)hyran:

Constat quia ad solam utilitatem audientium uiderit. (Gregory, Dialogi
He geseh þa gesihte þam mannnum to nyttesse, þe hit gehyrad & ongitan, & na him sylfum to ænigre helpe.  
(Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 40, 327, 15)

(“He saw the vision for the benefit of the men that hear it and take it in, and not for any help to himself.”)

Quod ... fidissimus quidam amicus illius animaduertit.  
(Bede, Historia 2, 12, 176, 26)

Pa wæs sum cyninges begn his freond se getreowesta, þe ðas þing gehyrde & onget.  
(Bede’s History 2, 9, 126, 29)

(“There was then a certain follower of the king (Æthelfrith), his (Eadwine’s) most faithful friend, who heard and took in this matter.”)

Neque hoc silendum est, quod de Theophanio ... agnoui.  
(Gregory, Dialogi 4, 28, 1)

Nis þæt eac to forswigienne, þæt ic onget & gehyrde be Theophania.  
(Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 28, 301, 15)

(“I should not pass over that which I gathered and heard concerning Theophanius.”)

In the first example, where “þe hit gehyrad & ongitan” expands “audientium,” it seems unlikely that “ongitan” means “understand.” The narrator is not concerned about whether people understand the pains of Hell, but merely whether they are within earshot of the speaker. In the second, the directional “grasping” or “gathering” ideas behind ongitan may help translate the obviously metaphorical notion conveyed by animadverto. In the third, the translator is simply using ongitan to describe the receiving of a report. One might be inclined to argue for diversified meanings for the two verbs in each example. We are, I think, generally resistant to redundancy. However, it is important to remember that the Anglo-Saxons seem to have had a higher tolerance for repetitive phrasing. It is thus more likely that in each of these examples, the two verbs mean much the same thing. Certainly, the sense of these passages would not be changed, as far as we can tell, if one or other of the two verbs was removed.

We have seen that the general verb ongitan could describe the receiving of nearly all types of sense impressions. However, its occurrences in word pairs show that it had particular affinities with sight and hearing. It is in the nature, if you will, of these two faculties to turn toward mental perception and understanding. These final two sections have shown us more about the nature and behavior of ongitan; they have also shown us that these two faculties may justifiably be considered separately from those of taste, smell, and touch.
II. *(Ge)*fredan and *(ge)*felan

*(Ge)*fredan and *(ge)*felan are close synonyms. Their nearest equivalent in Latin is *sentio*, which they often translate. Like *sentio*, they can occasionally refer to the more “cognitive” types of perceptual actions, in the particular senses of “to discern (mentally)” or “to know or understand (intuitively)” and to this extent they partially overlap with *ongytan*. However, the larger pattern of their attestations strongly suggests that their most basic meanings are oriented in the “lower” senses, and in the essentially pre-cognitive realm of sensation that is directly “experienced,” rather than more distantly “perceived.” In the previous chapter, we looked at examples that demonstrated the sense of “to perceive through touch” for both *(ge)*fredan and *(ge)*felan. Here we will see examples showing their use in the broader context of bodily sensation. Thus, while *(ge)*fredan and *(ge)*felan could be said to be the general verbs that “preside” over the particular types of physical perception which have been discussed in the previous three chapters (although nowhere is there a direct connection made between them and the sense of smell), they may also be said to be the specific verbs for the area that is the final step in the progression of physical senses we have followed in this study—taste, smell, touch, and now general bodily sensation.

The fact that they seem to be so nearly synonymous and that they never appear to have both been employed by a single Anglo-Saxon author merits a somewhat different treatment here. My discussion will consist of three main parts. First, I will explore their etymology. Despite their near synonymy, they come from rather different origins. *(ge)*fredan from an apparently abstract background, *(ge)*felan from a concrete one. Second, I will lay out their meanings. My treatment here will be more like a dictionary entry; it will then be followed by a brief discussion. Third and finally, I will briefly consider where they are attested and discuss the possibility of their being dialectal variants.

A. Etymology

Both *(ge)*fredan and *(ge)*felan are words with widely attested Indo-European cognates; *(ge)*fredan and its cognates are especially illustrative of the fundamental phonological developments that characterize the language family. It is interesting to trace the history of the roots of these words, but we should not expect such a history to reveal much about the meanings of the words in Old English. It often happens that a word’s “etymological” meaning turns out to be more of a curiosity than a revelation.
(Ge)fredan seems to have had an abstract background for as far back as we can trace it. It is apparently cognate with another Old English word, the adjective *frod, “wise, old.”33 The root from which these descend is the Proto-Indo-European *pr̩at- or *prot-.34 This root appears in widely-removed Indo-European languages. For instance, it is found in words from the Balto-Slavic languages, as in Lithuanian pràsti, “to become accustomed to; to understand, comprehend, perceive, know,” and pròtas, “intelligence, understanding, wit, intellect”;35 Latvian prast, “to understand,” and pràts; “understanding, sense”;36 and in Old Prussian iss-pres-tun, “to understand,” and pràtin, “counsel, advice.”37 The root appears also in the unique subfamily represented by Tocharian A and B as pratim, “decision, verdict; council.”38 In the Celtic branch, where Indo-European /p/ is “generally lost,”39 we find the Old Irish cognate ràthaigd, “to perceive, get knowledge of.”40

When the root was carried through the development of the Germanic branch of Indo-European, it naturally underwent the sound-changes that affected that branch. Among

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33 This connection is made by the OED ("OE. (ge)fredan wk. vk., f. frod wise; = MDu. vroeden, OHG. fruotan"). the MED, and by Francis Wood, "Etymological Notes." Modern Language Notes 29 (1914), p. 70, number 10. Holthausen omits (ge)fredan, and it is similarly not mentioned in Lehmann's A Gothic Etymological Dictionary or De Vries' Almordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. (For full bibliographical notices for Lehmann and De Vries, see below; otherwise, for reference works for which a full notice has not been given, see the "Reference Works" section of the Bibliography.)

34 Walde-Pokorny: *pr̩at- “verstehn [sic]” ("to understand"), vol. 2, p. 86; Pokorny: *pret-, *prot- “verstehen,” p. 895. Neither Walde-Pokorny nor Pokorny mention (ge)fredan, but they do mention frod here.


37 Cf. G.H.F. Nesselmann, Thesaurus Linguae Prussicae (Berlin, 1873): “iss-pres-tun: verstehen” and “pràtin: Rath.” Old Prussian is the West-Baltic language that became extinct in the 18th century.


the other sound-changes tabulated by Grimm’s Law, Indo-European voiceless stops became voiceless fricatives in Germanic. Thus /p/ became /f/, and /t/ became /θ/. As a result, we find in Gothic, the earliest attested Germanic language, the following cognate words: /pl/ became /fl/, and /lt/ became /θl/. This /θl/ shows up in Gothic frodei, “wisdom,” and frodaba, “intelligently.” Furthermore, in West Germanic, /θl/ was unconditionally changed to /l/. Thus we find Old Saxon /rof/, “old, wise, experienced,” and /rodon/ “to grow old, to be wise”; Old Frisian /rof/, “clever,” and frodhed, “cleverness”; and Old High German /frad/, “able,” and /fradi/, “efficiency, zeal.” Finally, of course, there is the Old English /rof/, “wise, old” and /geʃredan/, “to feel, perceive.” The vowel /e/ in /geʃredan/ has resulted from /i/ mutation: that is, the vowel was fronted by a following /l/ that dropped out


44 This change occurred before Proto-Germanic fixed the stress on the first syllable of the word.

45 Cf. Lehmann, F 86. *Frodei* is not attested in the nominative singular.


of the word before Old English came to be written down, but can be seen in Gothic *frājan.49

Further cognates appear in Old High German. They are the common words *fruot, “wise, experienced, knowing,” *fruoten, “teach, educate; become wise,” and *fruoti, “maturity, intelligence, prudence, dignity.”50 These words have undergone the sound change known as the Second Consonant Shift (Grimm’s and Verner’s Laws constitute the first), by which /d/ was changed to /t/ in Old High German.51

The results of this search for the cognates from the IE root *prot- are summarized in the accompanying chart (see the end of the section). It seems clear that what characterizes the group as a whole are the senses “to understand, know, perceive” where the cognates are verbs, “intelligence” where they are nouns, and “intelligent” where they are adjectives, with the Germanic branch making some association between intelligence or wisdom and age. Pokorny’s definition of the Proto-Indo-European root as “verstehen,” “to understand,” seems appropriate.

Nevertheless, there have been other ideas about the possible origins of these words. Richard Broxton Onians, in his exploration of the physical origins of ideas about the mind and soul, suggested that Old Norse *frōdr, “intelligent,” and *frōða, “froth,” were connected, thus giving another example of how moisture was associated with intelligence and life in primitive thought.52 His idea, while interesting, does not seem to be borne out by the evidence of Indo-European cognates; Pokorny sets *frōða under *preu-(h)-, a particular development of the root *per- or *preu-, which apparently had the sense “to spray, sprinkle, sneeze, puff.”53

Francis Wood posited that the cognates arose out of an original sense “press, press

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49 See Millward, pp. 72-3, for a straightforward description of this sound change, also known as front mutation or umlaut. The same change affected (ge)felan. The prehistoric following /ij/ caused the raising of the vowel, initially to /æ/, and subsequently to /e/. There are no examples of *frēdan in Old English, but we do find feilan in the Durham Ritual Glosses and the Lindisfarne Gospels.

50 See Köbler.

51 See Arval Streadbeck, A Short Introduction to Germanic Linguistics (Boulder, 1966), pp. 49-50, for a summary of the sound changes affecting Old High German.

52 Richard Broxton Onians, The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 63 & 68, n. 7.

53 Cf. Pokorny, p. 809: 1. per-, pere-: pre-, preu- “sprühen, spritzen, prusten, schauben.” De Vries does not mention any connection between *frōdr and *frōða.
forward,“54 and he adduced the evidence of a word *freden meaning “to touch, handle, feel; to perceive” in the western Central German (or Franconian) dialects, found in French Lorraine along the Moselle river, in Luxembourg, and in German Eifel along the Rhine.55

But as we have seen, there is no evidence of a deliberative sense “to touch” for the Old English (ge)fredan, nor any of its cognates. The Central German words might be related to French froter, “to rub.”

Samuel Kroesch attempts to relate the bases *frap- and *frod- of the Germanic words to an IE base *pero-, *pere- which he finds in Latin interpres, “mediator, interpreter,” and peritus, “experienced.”56 The connection is dubious. Walde-Hofmann associate the second element of interpres with pretium, so that an interpres was one who established what was given and taken in a negotiation (originally a business transaction) between two parties,57 while peritus, “experienced, skillful,” seems to be descended from an IE root *per- meaning “to attempt, chance, try” or “danger.”58 As these attempts to trace the cognates back to a concrete origin yield little fruit, it seems best to assume that the parent language or languages of Indo-European had an abstract term for “understanding.”

Just as (ge)fredan has a common origin with frod, so (ge)felan may be cognate with the poetic word folm, “palm, hand,” although their relationship is perhaps more remote.59

54 See Wood, p. 70: “The primary meaning ov the above must hav been ‘press, press forward,’ whence ‘tuch, feel, grasp, understand’ in Lothr. *freden ‘berühren, betasten; empfinden.’” (Wood practices a type of reformed spelling.)

55 Cf. *freden in Michael Ferdinand Follmann, Wörterbuch der deutsch-lothringischen Mundarten (Niederwalluf bei Wiesbaden, 1909, repr. 1971) and in Josef Müller, Rheinisches Wörterbuch (Berlin, 1931); cf. frieden in Luxemburger Wörterbuch (Luxembourg, 1950).


The nearest relatives to *gelain* are its West Germanic cognates. These are the Old Saxon *gifolian*, "to feel, perceive, observe"; 60 Old Frisian *fela*, "to feel," and *fele*, "feeling, sense"; 61 Old High German *fuolen*, "to feel, sense; caress"; 62 and Middle and Modern Dutch *voelen*, "to touch, feel, perceive." 63 Thus all share the experiential meanings of "to feel, perceive," while the German and Dutch cognates can also express the deliberative action, "to touch, feel deliberately."

There are several schools of thought about the origin of these cognates. Pokorny's first guess (he admits two possibilities) is the most speculative of all. He suggests that the cognates are associated with Latin *polleo*, "to be strong," and *pollex*, "thumb, big toe," and that they descend from a root *polo-* meaning "swollen, fat, big." The connection is "vielleicht ... 'mit dem Daumen betasten'" ("perhaps ... 'to feel with the thumb'"). 64 However, the deliberative action seems to be more or less secondary in the meanings of the cognates in Germanic, so this interpretation is dubious.

A more plausible solution is one that connects these cognates to a larger body of words for touching, striking softly, setting into motion, deriving ultimately from a root *pel-*, *pele-*, or *ple-*. 65 These words include Latin *palpo*, "to stroke," Greek *psalalw*, "to pluck, pull (the string of a bow or musical instrument with the fingers)," 66 and Sanskrit *asphalayati*, "he causes to collide, strikes." 67 An expanded form such as *pelem-*


61 Cf. Richthoffen: "fela: fühlen" and "fele: Gefühl."

62 See Köbler.


64 Pokorny, p. 840.

65 See Pokorny (pp. 798 & 801): "1. pel-, pele-, ple- .... G. Wörter für 'schwingen schütteln, zittern, hin- und herbewegen.'" Pokorny admits this possibility as his second guess, although he does not connect the "shaking, vibrating" words with words for the hand. The connection is made by such dictionaries as the *OED*, C. T. Onions's *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Eric Partridge's *Origins. A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London, 1966), and Ernest Klein's *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam, 1966).


(Pokorny) or *plama (OED) is posited to explain the forms of words for the hand or palm as Old English folm, Old Saxon folm, Old High German folma, Old Irish tám, Latin palma and palmus, and Greek παλάμη. This would imply an interesting association between touching, the hand, and perception in the semantic development of these words.

This brief look at the history of the roots of (ge)fredan and (ge)felan reveals rather different origins. Contrary to the general expectation of more abstract words coming out of concrete origins, the root of (ge)fredan, which is widely attested in Indo-European languages, seems to have had abstract meanings of “to know, understand” for as far back as we can trace it, although there have been some rather dubious attempts to connect the root to a concrete origin. The background of (ge)felan is somewhat more obscure, but it does seem to be cognate with Old English folm and Latin palma, which both mean “palm, hand,” so its origins seem to be solidly concrete. Both of these etymologies offer some surprises: if the background behind (ge)fredan is one of “knowing” or “understanding,” how did it come to designate a somewhat pre-cognitive action of “experiencing” or “feeling directly” in Old English? And if the background behind (ge)felan is related to the hand, why does (ge)felan not seem to have a deliberative sense in Old English? Studying the etymologies of these two words does not tell us much about their meanings in Old English, but it does show how words of diverse origins can move from opposite directions to fulfill the similar semantic needs.
### Cognates from IE *prot-*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lithuanian</th>
<th>Old Norse</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prąstį: “to understand, perceive, know”</td>
<td>frōðr: “intelligent, wise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prūtas: “intelligence, understanding, wit”</td>
<td>frēði: “knowledge, learning, lore”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frēða: “to instruct”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latvian</th>
<th>Old Saxon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prāst: “to understand”</td>
<td>frod: “old; wise, experienced”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prāts: “understanding, sense”</td>
<td>frodon: “to grow old, be wise”</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Prussian</th>
<th>Old Frisian</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iss-pres-tun: “to understand”</td>
<td>frod: “clever”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prātin: “counsel, advice”</td>
<td>frodhet: “cleverness”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tocharian A and B</th>
<th>Old English</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pratiṃ: “decision, verdict; council”</td>
<td>frod: “wise, old”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fredan: “to feel, perceive”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Irish</th>
<th>Old High German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rithaigid: “to perceive, get knowledge of”</td>
<td>frod: “able”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frūd: “efficient, zeal”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frūnt: “experienced, knowing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frūoten: “teach, educate; become wise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frūotiti: “maturity, intelligence, dignity”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Meanings

My presentation of the meanings of (ge)fledan and (ge)felan differs slightly from the way I have treated the meanings of other words. I present these meanings in the form of two dictionary entries, with a series of descriptions of senses, each followed by a number of illustrative examples. This will make comparing their senses easier, and their near-synonymy will be more apparent. I follow this with a brief discussion, in which I compare their semantic range to that of Modern English feel, and suggest an instance where (ge)felan might be on the way to acquiring one of feel's most salient uses.

The etymology of (ge)fledan and (ge)felan, which, as we have seen, suggests rather different origins for the two words, does not prepare us for their meanings in Old English. In my arrangement of their senses, I have attempted to show how their range of meanings can be seen as coming out of a basic notion of experiencing at first hand.68 Being susceptible to experiencing at first hand leads naturally to being susceptible to sensation, which itself leads to being able to perceive, and hence to simply perceiving by senses such as touch. It is possible to argue that in most of the examples below, (ge)fledan and (ge)felan do not suggest the same, slightly detached cognizing of perceptual impressions as ongytan does, but the more direct experiencing of them; and that when the object taken by the two verbs is some subordinate clause or other complex object that expresses some extended, multi-faceted circumstance, that circumstance is apprehended by faculties that are intuitive rather than cognitive in nature--as in when one senses, rather than perceives, that something is a certain way.

I have assigned (ge)fledan and (ge)felan seven basic senses. The first sense, “to be subject to, experience, undergo,” is the broadest: it concentrates on the “experiencing” or “going through” of something intense or unpleasant, rather than the apprehending of it by any particular sense faculty. The second sense, “to feel, be sensible of, suffer or experience the effects of,” begins to admit perception, as it focuses on whether the subject of the verb has experienced a thing or event at the level of physical sensation; alternatively and more broadly, it describes the suffering of the physical effects of an event. A secondary meaning is the sense “to feel, experience sympathetically (the pains of others).” The third sense, “to have sensation, be sensible,” represents the intransitive use that describes the general capacity for sensation. The fourth sense, “to perceive through touch,” is the experiential meaning we explored in the previous chapter (and it will show many of the same examples), while the fifth involves the use of (ge)fledan and (ge)felan

68 Like that suggested by C.S. Lewis as the basic notion behind Latin sentio. See Chapter 1, pp. 14-5.
with other types of sense perception--taste mainly, but hearing as well in the case of (ge)frelan. The sixth sense, "to sense, perceive or recognize through general physical impressions," describes the apprehending of some aspect of one's own physical state, or alternatively of some external phenomenon that generally cannot be apprehended by sight. The seventh sense, "to feel intuitively, understand" is somewhat more tentative, but it seems to be manifested when verbs to refer to the discerning of some abstract thing by means of intuitive faculties.

My arrangement of the senses of (ge)frelan and (ge)felen differs from that prepared for the forthcoming "F" fascicle of the DOE principally in the order of senses. but otherwise it is very similar, with a few isolated differences of interpretation. The DOE also treats the two verbs as being nearly synonymous. Its arrangement of senses for gefelen runs thus: "(1) absolute: to feel, i.e. to have sensation, sensory perception; to sense or perceive; (2) to feel the touch of, be aware of physical contact with; (3) to have a sensation of, feel the physical effect of (pain, heat, cold, etc.); (4) to feel the effect of, experience the impact of; (5) to feel, sense, react sympathetically toward (someone else's suffering); (6) to perceive, sense; become aware of, recognize; discern, distinguish; (6.a) describing a sense other than touch: to sense, detect, i.e. 'taste'; (6.b) governing accusative-infinitive construction, or rendering such a construction in a Latin source; (6.c) governing object clause introduced by hu swa swa fræt." The DOE's arrangement makes good logical sense, particularly in placing the absolute use first and the use with complex objects last. What I attempt to suggest in my arrangement is a development coming out of experiencing at first hand and being sensible of close effects, which then includes having sensation and perceiving through touch, then perceiving through other faculties or general physical impressions, and finally understanding and knowing intuitively.

1. (Ge)frelan

1. to be subject to, experience, undergo (temptation, martyrdom, assault of enemies)

Ælc gallic ontendnys wearð eallunga on him adwæsced, and he næfre syðan naht ðyllices on him sylfum ne gefredde. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 11, 93, 59)69

("All lustful burning was entirely quenched in him (Benedict), and afterwards he

69 Cf. Gregory, Dialogi 2, 2, 2-3, esp.: "Ex quo uidelicet tempore ... ita in illo est temptatio uoluptatis edomita, ut tale in se aliquid minime sentiret"--"From that very time, the temptation of pleasure has been so mastered in that man, that he felt very little of such a thing in himself."
never experienced anything of the sort in himself.")

Et licet persecutor[ut]m non sensisset gladium, tamen per vitae meritum, deo digni,
martyrio non priuantur. (Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis, 161)
& þeah þe hi swurdes ehtynysse ne gefredon þeah þurh heora lifes geearnungum, hi
ne beoð martyrdomes bedælede. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 36, 489, 99)
(“And though they did not experience the sword’s persecution, yet through their
life’s labors, they shall not be deprived of martyrdom.”)

Quia enim murum silentii non habet, patet inimici iaculis ciuitas mentis. (Gregory,
Regula pastoralis 3, 14, 346, 77)
Forðæm sio burg ðæs modes, ðe mid nanre suigean ne bið bityned, sceal suðe oft
gefredan hiere feonda speru. (Alfred, Pastoral Care, 38, 277, 21)²⁰
(“Thus the fortress of the mind, that is not enclosed with any silence, must often
experience the spears of its enemies.”)

2. to feel, be sensible of, suffer or experience the effects of (blows, torments, heat of fire,
 heaviness, hunger, poison; often expressed negatively); (b) to feel, experience
 sympathetically (the pains of others)

Hine mann sloh þa swiðe mid scearpne æxe, ac he hit ne gefredde, for þam he wæs
treowen, ne he nan word ne cwæð, for þam þe he cucu næs. (Ælfric, Homilies, 21
[DOE: 22], 706, 546)²¹
(“A man struck him (Seraphis, an idol) mightily with a sharp axe, but he did not feel
it, for he was wooden, nor did he say a word, for he was not alive.”)

Þa wurdon ða cempan wodlice astyrode, and gelæhton Martinum, and hine lange
swungon mid swipum and mid stafum, and he suwode æfre swilce he ne gefredde

²⁰ One wonders if Alfred’s Latin original might have had “patitur” (“it experiences,
undergoes”) rather than “patet” (“it stands exposed”), although of course this would also
require “iacula.”

²¹ Cf. “Porro Serapis neque doluit, nempe ligneus, neque vocem emisit sicut examinis”
(Rufinus. Historia ecclesiastica 9. 28)--“Moreover, wooden Seraphis did not, obviously, feel
pain, nor did he emit a voice, being lifeless.”
heora swingla nateshwn. (Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Martin, 974)72
(“Then the warriors were madly stirred up, and seized Martin, and beat him long with
whips and staffs, and he remained ever silent as if he did not feel their blows at all.”)

Ecce miser uel modo cognosce: quia triumpho de thesauris Christi: et non sentio
tormenta tua. (Passio sancti Laurentii, 2, 94, 9)
Pu earming: undergoit huru nu, þæt ic sigrige be Cristes maðmum, & ic þine tintregu
naht ne gefrede. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 29, 423, 143)
(“You wretch: now understand indeed that I triumph by the gifts of Christ, and I do
not feel your tortments.”)

Ne derað þæt fyr nan þing þam rihtwisum þe ær fram synnum geclænsode wæron, ac
swa hwa swa ungeclænsod bid he gefret þæs fyres æðm. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies
I, 40, 529, 147)
(“That fire does not injure in any way the righteous who were earlier cleansed from
sin, but whosoever is uncleansed, he feels the fire’s blast.”)

Tunc idem Martyrjus narrabat quia cum eum portasset pondus ejus minime sensisset.
Nec mirum: quomodo enim pondus sentire poterat? (Gregory, Homiliae in
evangelia 39, 1300, D)
“Þa þa ic hine bær, ne gefredæ ic nanre byrðene swæmysse.” Hu mihte he
gefredan æniges hefes swæmysse? (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I. 23, 370. 152)
(“When I bore him, I felt no heaviness of a burden. How could he feel the
heaviness of any weight?”)

Et qui carne propria nostram esuriem saturavit, esurivit pro nobis. cum temptaretur in
heremo. (Pseudo-Basil, Admonitio, 3. 36, 7)
And se þe ealle þing afedeð, se gefredæ hungor þa þa he on þam westene wæs
gecostnod fram deofle æfter þam þe he fæste feowertig daga on an. (Ælfric,
Pseudo-Basil’s Admonitio, 4, 42, 17)
(“And he who feeds all things felt hunger, when he was tempted in the wilderness by
the devil after he had fasted forty days alone.”)

Eft æt sumum sæle hine gelæhte an næddre be þam fingre: ac he ascoc hi into

72 Cf. “Magis ex hoc furentes, quod ille quasi non sentiens uerbera inlata contemneret”
(Sulpicius Severus, Dialogi 1, 2, 3)—“Enraged all the more by the fact that he, as if not
feeling, thought little of the strokes they rendered.”
bymendum fyre: and he þæs attres nan þing ne gefredde. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 37, 505, 251)
(“Again at a certain time a snake seized him by the finger, but he shook it into the burning fire, and felt nothing of the poison.”)

(b)

Ure hælend sitt on heofonum nu mid urum lichaman, and he gefret swa hwæt swa us gelimpþ þe hys lima syndon.... Ne cwæð he na. “Hwi ehtst þu minra manna,” ac “Hwi ehtst þu min,” for þam þe he gefredde his halgena sarnyssa. (Ælfric, Homilies, 25c [DOE: 26.3], 756, 1)
(“Our savior now sits in heaven with our bodies, and he feels whatever happens to us, that are his limbs. He did not say, ‘Why do you persecute my people?’ but ‘Why do you persecute me?’ for he felt the afflictions of his saints.”)

“Tu,” inquit, “Rufine. ludis et mea mala non sentis.” (Pseudo-Cassiodorus, Historia ecclesiastica tripartita 9, 30, 12)
He cwæð þa mid wope. “Me þincð þæt ðu plegast and þu mine yrmðe naht ne gefredst.” (Ælfric, Homilies, 26 [DOE: 27], 766, 89)
(“He said then with tears, ‘it seems to me that you make sport and do not at all feel my misery.’”)

3. to have sensation, be sensible

Sunt namque lapides, sed nec vivunt, nec sentiunt.... Habet namque commune esse cum lapidibus. vivere cum arboribus. sentire cum animalibus. intelligere cum angelis. (Gregory, Homiliae in evangelia 29, 1214, A)
Stanas sind gesceafhta, ac hi nabbad nan lif, ne hi naht ne gefredæ.... Him is gemæne mid stanum þæt he beo wunigende, him is gemæne mid treowum þæt he lybbe, mid nytenum þæt he gefrede, mid englum þæt he understande. (Ælfric, Catholic

73 Cf. “Quia et nos membra sumus Filii; et nos membra tamquam quod discimus, ipse discit quodammodo in membris suis. Quomodo discit in nobis? Quomodo patitur in nobis” (Augustine, Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis, 21, 7)—“For we are also limbs of the Son; and we are limbs just as if what we learn, he learns in a certain way in his limbs. How does he learn in us? In the way that he suffers in us.” The first use of (ge)fredan parallels disco in the Latin; the second parallels patior.
Homilies I, 21, 349, 123)
("Stones are creatures, but they have no life, and they do not feel. He (man) has it in common with stones that he exists, he has it in common with trees that he lives, with animals that he feels, with angels that he understands."

Dum sentit, sensus est. (Boulogne Sermon: Sermo in natale Domini et de ratione anime, 127, 247)
Heo is sensus, þæt is andgít oðde felnyssæ, þonne heo geleart. (Ælfric, Lives of Saints, Christmas, 185)
(“It (the soul) is sensus, that is sense or feeling, when it feels.”

4. to perceive through touch; (b) to experience the touch of

Sume magon gesion, sume geheran, sume géfredean, sume gelestencean. (Alfred, Boethius’ Consolation, 41, 146, 3)75
(“Some can see, some hear, some feel, some smell.”)

On handum and on eallum lichaman we habbad hreþunȝe, þæt we magon géfredean hwæt bið heard, hwæt hnesce, hwæt smeðe, hwæt unsmeðe, and swa gehwæt.
(Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 23 [DOE: 26], 214, 50)
(“On the hands and on all the body we have the sense of touch, so that we may feel what is hard. what is soft. what is smooth. what is unsmooth. and so on.”)

Sio géfredean hine mæg geþrapian & géfredean þæt hit lichoma bið, ac hio ne mæg géfredean hwæðer he bið þe blæc þe hwit, þe fæger þe unfæger. (Alfred, Boethius’ Consolation, 41, 145, 20)76
“The sense of touch may touch it and feel that it is a body, but they cannot feel whether it is black or white. fair or not fair.”

Abscondit igitur ferrum medicinale sub ueste, quod eductum subito fixit in uulnere. ut

74 See Chapter 4, pp. 108-16, for detailed discussion of most of the passages below.

75 Not in the original Latin. Cf. Boethius, Consolatio 5. pr.5, 3.

76 The translation only paraphrases the original Latin. See the previous chapter for the whole passage.
secantem gladium sentiret aeger antequam cerneret. (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 2, 272, 81)

Hyt ðonne his læceseax under his clādum oddæt he hine wundāð; wile ðæt he hit gefrede, ær he hit geseo. (Alfred, Pastoral Care, 26, 187, 9)

("He hides his surgeon’s knife under his clothes until he cuts [his patient]; he wants him to feel it, before he sees it.")

Quae ex sensu neglegenti, quia importune aliquando prodeunt, quasi nobis non sentientibus procedunt. (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 2, 8, 230, 162)

Sua giemeleaslice oft sceacað ure gedōhtas from us, ðæt we his furðum ne gefredað, ðon ma ðe mon his feax mæg gefredan butan ðam felle. (Alfred, Pastoral Care, 18, 139, 19)

("Often our thoughts go so heedlessly from us that we do not feel it any more than a man can feel his hair outside the skin.")

(b)

[Sapientia] quam castissimo conspectu atque amplexu, nullo interposito velamento quasi nudam videre ac tenere desideras. (Augustine, Soliloquia 1, 42, 33)

Ic ȝongyte nu þæt [þu] lufast þone wisdom swa swiðe, and þe lýst hine swa wel nacode ongitan and gefredan þæt þu noldest þæt git ænig clāð betweuh were. (Alfred, Augustine's Soliloquies 1, 42, 17)

("I perceive now that you love wisdom so greatly and it pleases you so much to see and feel him naked that you would prefer that there were yet no garment in between.")

5. to perceive through other senses: through taste; (b) through hearing

Et amaro pigmentorum pocio mellis dulcedo adiungitur, ne ea quae saluti profutura est, in ipso gustu aspera amaritudo sentiatur. (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 17, 366, 63)

Sua eac se læce, ðonne he bietre wyrtæ deð to hwelcum drence, he hie gesuet mid hunige. ðylæs he ða bieternesse ðære wyrtæ ðe hine gehæla[n] sceal æt fruman

77 For the alteration of genitive and accusative objects in this sentence, and the different meanings that might be implied, see Chapter 4, pp. 114-5
gefrede. (Alfred, Pastoral Care, 41, 303, 12)
(“So too the doctor, when he prepares bitter plants for some drink, he sweetens them with honey, lest he (the patient) perceive first the bitterness of the plants that must heal him.”)

(b)

Micel sweg gæð of heora swiftum ryne & of þam scinendan rodore, þeah þe we for þam mycclan fylrle ne hit gefredan ne magon. (Ælfric, Alcuini interrogationes Sigewulfi, 21, 142)78
(“A great sound comes from their swift running and from the shining sky, although we cannot perceive it on account of the great distance.”)

6. to sense, perceive, or recognize through general physical impressions (something about one’s own physical state, something perceptible about the external world)

Æt nextan þa da he gefrede his deade nealæcunge. (Ælfric, Catholic Homilies I, 5, 222, 162)79
(“When he finally felt his death’s approach.”)

Tetigit me. inquit. aliquis. Ego enim sensi de me virtutem exiisse. (Augustine, Sermo 77, 4, 6; cf. Lc 8, 46 [Vet. Lat.])
Sum man me hrepode. Witoldlice ic gefrede þæt dære hælde miht of me eode.
(Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II, 24 [DOE: 28, 228, 241]
(“Someone touched me. Truly I felt that the healing power went out from me.”)

Et confessim siccus est fons sanguinis eius, et sensit corpore quod sanata esset a plagas.
And þa sone weard hyre blodes ryne adruwod, & heo on hire gefredde þæt heo of þam wite gehæled was. (West-Saxon Gospels, Mark 5, 29)
(“Then soon the running of her blood was dried, and she felt in herself that she was

78 I could not find a Latin source for this passage.

79 Cf. “Cum ex dolorum violentia iam vitae exitum adesse sensisset” (Rufinus. Historia Ecclesiastica 1, 8, 14)—“When from the violence of the pain, he sensed the end of his life then to be near.”
healed from that disease.

_Si omnino uirium suarum mensuram uiderit pondus oneris excedere._

_Gyf heo þonne sydde eallunge _gefre_ð, þæt þære byrdene hefinesse oferstihð þæt gemet hyre strængðe._ (Benedictine Rule, Winteney Version, 68, 141, 7)  
("If she then feels quite distinctly that the heaviness of the burden surpasses the measure of her strength.")

_Fordæm he ongit swa micle swiður him on feohtan swa he hine selfne untrumran _gefre_ð on his lichoman._ (Alfred, Pastoral Care, 52, 407, 23)  
("For he perceives himself (to be) so much the more under assault, the more he feels himself (to be) unwell in his body.")

_Et cum aliquandiu ... sensisset ... per spiritum Domini adesse uirtutem, erectus paululum ... orationis suae ... intrepidus expectabat euentum._ (Sulpicius Severus. Vita sancti Martini 7, 3)  
("After a certain time, he felt in his mind that God's power was approaching, and he stood up unafraid, waiting for the granting of his petitions.")

_Da deopolican drymen mid heora drycræfu[m] ... worhton manega tacna ongean Moysen ... ðoðæt hi sylfe sædon, oferswylðede æt nextan, Digitus Dei est hoc, þæt Godes finger wære Moysen on fulsume & hi ne mihton na leng Moyse wìðstan dan for þam strangan fíngre þe hi _gefre_ðdan hiom ongean._ (Ælfric. Homilies. 1. 207, 258)  
("The mystical sorcerers with their witchcraft worked many marvels against Moses, until they themselves said, finally overpowered, 'This is God's finger,' for God's finger was at Moses' aid and they could not long withstand Moses because of the strong finger that they sensed against them."")

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80 Cf. "Tantoque intolerabilius designatur uinci, quanto contra se uidet per integra infirmae carnis castra pugnari" (Gregory, Regula pastoralis 3, 28, 462, 79)—"They hold being conquered so much more intolerable, by as much as they see themselves attacked by the unimpaired armies of the feeble flesh."

81 Cf. Ex 8, 19 (Digitus Dei est hoc is an alternative reading from some of the Old Latin manuscripts).
7. to feel, understand, or know intuitively

*At contra ammonendi sunt aegri, ut se Dei filios sentiant.* (Gregory, *Regula pastoralis* 3, 12, 326, 60)

'Ongean ðæt sint to manianne ða mettruman ðæt hie ongieten & *gefreden* ðæt hie sua micle ma beoð Godes bearn. (Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, 36, 251, 20)

(“On the other hand, the sick are to be reminded so that they understand and feel that they are so much the more God’s children.”)

*Salus itaque corporis quando ad bene operandum accepta despicitur, quanti sit muneris amissa sentitur.* (Gregory, *Regula pastoralis* 3, 12, 324, 20)

'Ac ðonne se mon his lichoman hælo for[sihð], ðonne ðonne he wel trum bid ðo wyrceanne ðæt he ðonne wile, ðonne ðonne him eft sio hæl losað, ðonne *gefred* he æresð hwelec heo to habbanne wæs ða hwile ðe he hi hæfde. (Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, 36, 249, 5)*

(“But if a man neglects the health of his body, when he is well enough to do what he wants, then when that health fails him, he first understands what it was to have it, while he did have it.”)


(“How can you not see that every plant and every tree most wishes to grow on the land that best suits it and is natural and proper for it, and where it feels that it can grow most readily and slowest decay?”)

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82 This use of *gefredan* might also be considered an expression of (2); certainly, there is an aspect of understanding or finding out through direct experience, through suffering the effects of ill-health.

83 Cf: “Atqui non est quod de hoc quoque possis ambigere, cum herbas atque arbores intueris primum sibi convenientibus innasci locis, ubi, quantum earum natura queat, cito exarescere atque interire non possint” (*Boethius, Consolatio* 3, pr.11, 18)—“But there is no reason to hesitate about this, when you consider that plants and trees grow first in places appropriate for them, where, as much as their nature permits, they cannot quickly dry up and perish.”
2. *(Ge)felen

1. to be subject to, experience, undergo (death, healing, retribution)

Deæe ne feleð. *(Riddle 84* ["Water"], 50)
("It does not experience death.")84

Alia tardius sentiunt medicamin beneficiæ. alia citius. *(Passionarius Galeni* 5. 44, 79r.)
Sume lator feleð þara læcædoma, sume ræpor. *(Bald’s Leechbook* 1, 35, 84, 25)
("Some experience healing slower, some faster.")

Peccai. ut eram dignus recipio. Aequalem vindictam peccati mei non sentio. minus percussum me quam merebar agnosco. *(Isidore. Synonyma* 1. 29)85
Ne cweðan: For hwan ærafne ic ðæs yfel? ... Ac ma ðu scealt cweðan: Dryhten, þæ ic syngode, swa mycel ic ne gefele, swa ic wyrðe eom. *(Vercelli Homily* 22, 85)86
("Do not say. Why do I suffer this misery? But rather you must say, Lord, I have sinned against you, I do not suffer as much as I am deserving.")

2. to feel, be sensible of, suffer or experience the effects of (pain, torments, thirst, heat, an encounter, separation of soul from body); (b) to feel, experience sympathetically (the pains of others)

Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma, þonne him þæt feorð losðað, ne swete forswelgan ne sar gefelan. ne hand onhreran ne mid hyge þencan. *(Seafarer. 93)*

84 “Deæe ne feleð” is the only complete phrase that survives in this part of the riddle, so its context (and hence its meaning) cannot be determined with certainty. Craig Williamson translates “She dies without feeling” *(A Feast of Creatures. Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* [Philadelphia, 1982], p. 143). or in other words “she is not sensible of (her) death,” thus taking *(ge)felen in the sense of (2) “to feel, be sensible of.” To my mind, the fragments just preceding and following the phrase, “oft searwum bið” (49, “often it is with cunning arts / devices—”) and “peah þe ... --du hreren, hrif wundigen” (51, “although ... [something] shaken, belly wounded”), suggest what is being said is that the riddle-object does not experience death, despite the assaults upon it. However, the dative ending of “deæe” is puzzling.

85 “I have sinned, I receive as I am deserving. I do not suffer a retribution equal to my sin; I know that I have been struck less than I deserved.” The Old English compresses the Latin.

86 HomU 7 (ScraggVerc 22); B3.4.7.
("When life is lost to him, then his body can neither taste sweetness, nor feel pain, nor move a hand, nor think with the mind.")

Super umbilico ... graui dolore tenentur. (Passionarius Galeni 3, 16, 34v.)
"Se man sar gefele aet his nafolan. (Bald's Leechbook 2, 56, 278, 4)
("The man feels pain in his navel.")

Þonne þu gefele þæt sar, gemyne þæt cwicsusles fyr. (Vercelli Homily 22, 91)
("When you feel that pain, remember the fire of living misery.")

Tacn þæs ofercealdan magan, þæt þa men ne þyrst ne hi swol gefelæp on magan. (Bald's Leechbook 2, 16, 194, 11)
("Signs of an overly cold stomach [are] that men feel neither thirst nor heat in their stomachs.")

Feleþ sona mines gemotes, seo þe mec nearwað, wif wundenlocce. Wæt bið þæt eage. (Riddle 25 ["Onion"], 9)
("She soon feels the encounter with me, she who narrowly confines me, the woman with braided locks. The eye is wet.")

... ut ... dissolutionem carnis ab anima sentire minime permittantur. (Gregory. Dialogi 4, 14, 5)
"Þonne þa sawla ut gað of þam lichaman þara gecorenra manna. ... þær gewunanþ eac hwilum ... to þon þæt hi ne gefelan to unebelice & geþolian þæt gedal þære sawle from þæm lichamana. (Gregory, Dialogi [C] 4, 15, 281, 2)
("When the souls go out of the bodies of chosen men. they remain there also a little while, in order that they do not too grievously feel and suffer the separation of the soul from the body.")

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87 "They are held by a heavy pain upon the navel."

88 [HomU 7 (ScraggVerc 22); B3.4.7.] Cf. "Cogita, o homo, quoslibet mundi cruciatus, intende animo quascumque saeculi poenas; ... compara hoc totum gehennae et leve est quod pateris" (Isidore, Synonyma 1, 30)—"Think, oh man. of whatever tortures of the world, bring to mind any of today's punishments; compare all this to hell and what you suffer is light."

89 I have not found a Latin source for this passage.

90 "So that they are permitted to feel the separation of the flesh from the soul very little."
3. to have sensation, be sensible

"Earth-dwellers cannot express through wise intellect how greatly those inanimate creatures, that cannot feel, experienced the lord's torments."

"We can understand from this sort of example what the soul, which is living and can feel, suffers for its guilt. now we have heard that the unliving bones, that cannot feel anything, were also burned up in the fire's great punishment."

4. to perceive through touch

"The ninth [plague] was that there came hail and so much darkness, both day and
night, and so oppressive, that one could feel it.

*Non dura, non mollia sentis.*  (Chrodegang, *Regula canonicorum* 60, 73, 5)

Ne gefelst þu ... ne heard ne hnesce. (Chrodegang’s Rule 60, 74, 13)

(“You feel neither hard nor soft.”)

Ponne gefeleð facnes cæftig þæt him þa ferend on fæst wuniþp. (Wælæ. 24)

(“When he, skilled in deceit, feels that the travelers are resting fast upon him.”)

*Porcum subito intra suos pedes huc illucque discurrere senserunt.* (Gregory, *Dialogi* 3, 30, 3)

 Па semninga gefeldon hi an swyn yman hider & pider betwyh heora fotum.

 (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 3, 30, 236, 1)

(“Then they suddenly felt a pig running hither and thither between their feet.”)

*Sensit nescio quid frigidī suo lateri adiacere.* (Bede, *Historia* 3, 2, 218, 6)

Pa ne wiste he hwæt he gefelde cealdes æt his sidan ligan. (Bede’s History 3, 1, 156, 31)

(“Then he felt he knew not what lying cold at his side.”)

*Sentit ... quasi magnam latamque manum caput sibi in parte qua dolebat tetigisse.*

 (Bede, *Historia* 4, 31, 446, 19)

Pa gefelde he ... swa swa mycel hand & brad his heafod gehrine in þæm dæl, þæt þæt sar & seo adl on wæs. (Bede’s History 4, 32, 380, 11)

(“Then he felt as though a great and broad hand touched his head in the part in which the pain and disease was.”)

5. to perceive through taste

And þæt sealt þe se sacerd þam cilde on muð dæð, þæt getacnað godcundne wisdom; & eallswa se lichama þonne gefelð þaes sealtes scærpnysse, swa sceal seo sawl ongitan wisdomes snoternysse. (Wulfstan, *Homily* 8b, 22)

(“The salt that the priest puts in the child’s mouth signifies divine wisdom; and just as the body tastes the sharpness of the salt, so shall the soul perceive the prudence of wisdom.”)

Sonæ swa he ðæs wateres swetnysse ifelde, þa wearð he swide blīde on his mode.
6. to sense, perceive, or recognize through general physical impressions (something about one's own physical state or that of one's unborn child, something perceptible about the external world); (b) to distinguish through mental processes (good or evil)

And þonne se mo dor gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic, ga þonne to cyrican. (Metrical Charm 6 ["For Delayed Birth"], 12)
("And when the mother feels that the child (within her) is alive, let her then go to church."")

Cum tam fortem me esse sentirem. (Gregory, Dialogi 3, 33, 9)
Ic gefylde me sylfne swa swiðe strangne. (Gregory's Dialogues [C] 3, 33, 244, 14)
("I felt myself so very strong.")

Confestim me melius habere sentirem. (Bede, Historia 5, 6, 468, 22)
Pǣ wǣs geworden, þæs ðe he on minre ondwilitan bleow, ða sona instepe gefelde ic mec batiende & werpende. (Bede’s History 5, 6, 402, 33)
("When this was done, after he blew on my face, then immediately I felt myself healing and recovering.")

Sanatam se ab illa corporis dissolutione sentiens.... (Bede, Historia 3, 9, 244, 2)
Sona þæs þe heo onwoc, þa gefelde heo. þæt heo was gehæled from hire lichoman untrymnesse. (Bede’s History 3, 7, 180, 7)
("As soon as she awoke, she perceived that she was healed of her bodily infirmity.")

Tanto sollicitius ad usum orationis excreuerat, quanto et aliud quod libet agere nequaquam ualebat. (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 16, 3)94

93 Cf. "Moxque amaritudo aquarum in maximam uersa est dulcedinem; et letatus est populus dulces bibendo aquas" (Inventio sanctae crucis, 2, 44, 9)—"And soon the bitterness of the water was turned into the greatest sweetness; and the people were made glad in drinking the sweet waters."

94 "She rose up the more diligently to the practice of prayer, the more she was not at all able to do anything else."
Swa myccle geornlicor & ymbhydliglor heo beede symble hire gebedu, swa micle swa heo ma gefelde þæt heo ne mihte nænigra þinga ahtar elles don. (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 16, 284, 7)

("She attended to her prayers the more zealously and diligently, the more she understood that she could do nothing else.")

Si quod adhuc ei uitale spiramen inesset, naribus eius adposita curauit aure dinoscere. Quod ille sentiens, cui tenuissimus inerat flatus.... (Gregory, Dialogi 4, 12, 3)

Heo ... wolde gewitan mid hire earum æt his nospyrum hwæþer ænig orð him inne wære. Pa gefelde þæt sone se mæserepreost, þam wæs gyt inner swipe medmicel gast. (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 12, 276, 15)

("She wanted to ascertain, with her ears at his nostrils, whether there was any breath in him. Then the priest sensed that, in whom there was yet a very little life.")

Ond se ondranc eac þæs wætres, and hi gefeldon begen þæt þæs wæs ðæt betste win. (Martyrology, MS B, March 20, 37, 12)95

("And he also drank the water, and they both perceived that it was the best wine.")

Vidit defunctum paulatim membris omnibus commoueri. et laxatis in usum uidendi palpitari luminibus. (Sulpicius Severus, Vita sancti Martini, 7, 3)

Pa wæs ymb hwile, ða gefelde he þæt se deada man his leomu ealle astyrede, & his eagan upahof & forðlocode. (Blickling Homily 18, St. Martin, 217, 30)96

"After a while, he perceived that the dead man stirred all his limbs, and lifted up his eyes and looked forth."

(b)

Non bona, non mala ... sentis. (Chrodegang, Regula canonicorum 60, 73, 5)

Ne gefelst þu god ne yfel. (Chrodegang’s Rule 60, 74, 13)

("You distinguish neither good nor evil.")

95 Cf. “Confitebantur alterutrum quia uideretur sibi nunquam melius uinum bibisses” (Bede, Prose Vita Cuthberti, 35, 266) -- “They confessed to each other that it seemed to them that they had never drunk a better wine.”

96 LS 17.1 (MartinMor): B3.3.17.2.
Old English General Verbs of Perception

7. to feel, understand, or know intuitively

Et non sensuerunt [sic] quomodo dormierunt neque ubi animas eorum deposit Deus. (Passio Septem Dormientium, 116)

He sylf dæs þingc swa gescitfe ... þæt heora nan gefelan ne mihte hu hi gewurdon on slæpe, ne heora non nyste hwær heora sawla reston. (Legend of the Seven Sleepers, 234)

(“He himself so fashioned this thing that none of them could understand how they had fallen asleep, nor did any of them know where their souls had rested.”)

The semantic ground shared by these two verbs should be obvious from the examples above. They are both common equivalents of Latin sentio and cover much of its range of senses (and indeed their range of senses may well have been expanded by exposure to sentio). However, there are enough instances of independent and original uses of the two verbs to show that they are not just used as a reflex translation of sentio.

The examples above suggest that, in usage, they were essentially based in the idea of “experiencing, undergoing,” as in “Sio burg dæs modes ... sceal suiðe oft gefredan hiere feonda speru” (Pastoral Care, 38, 277, 21)—“The fortress of the mind must often experience the spears of its enemies” or “Sume lator fælað þara læcedoma” (Bald’s Leechbook 1, 35, 84, 25)—“Some experience healing slower.” This idea opens into “being sensible of,” as in “Se gefredde hungor” (Ælfric, Pseudo-Basil’s Admonitiones, 4, 42, 18)—“He felt hunger,” or “Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma ... sar gefelan” (Seafarer, 93)—“His body cannot feel pain,” as well as into “suffering the effects of,” as in “He þæs attres nan þing ne gefredde” (Catholic Homilies I, 37, 505, 251)—“He felt nothing of the poison,” or “To þon þæt hi ne gefelan to unepelice ... þæt gedal” (Gregory’s Dialogues [C] 4, 15, 281, 2)—“In order that they do not feel the separation too grievously.” Up to this point, (ge)fædan and (ge)fælan behave much like Modern English feel, as my using feel to translate many of these examples suggests.

However, both verbs comprehend a range of types of physical perception that goes beyond that covered by feel. (Ge)fædan and (ge)fælan include things tasted as well,97 and each extends into the more “cognitive” realms of hearing and sight. Thus in Ælfric’s version of Alcuini interrogationes Sigewulft, with no known Latin precedent, (ge)fædan is used of sound: “Micel sweg gæð of heora swiftum ryne, ... þeah þe we for þam mycclan

97 But cf. OED feel (7), MED felan (2), EDD feel (4) for examples of the sense “to perceive by smell or taste” in later periods of English. e.g. “Don’t you feel the bitter flavour of the orange?” (Jamb. Suppl. [EDD]).
fyrlene hit gefredan ne magon" (21, 142)—"A great sound comes from their swift running, although we cannot perceive it on account of the great distance." On the other hand, in a passage in *Blickling Homily* 18, which renders Sulpicius Severus' *Vita sancti Martini*, *(ge)felan* is used of something seen, translating *video* in the Latin source: "*Vidit defunctum paulatim membris omnibus commoueri.* Da gefele he þæt se deada man hi leamu ealle astyrede" (7, 3; 217, 30)—"Then he perceived that the dead man stirred all his limbs."

Furthermore, there are occasional instances where both verbs describe an action that takes place solely within the mental faculties, an action of perceiving or discerning mentally. This may well be the case in the example from the *Winteney Version* of the *Benedictine Rule* in which *(ge)fiedan* appears: "*Si omnino uirium suatum mensuram uidereit pondus oneris excedere.* Gyf heo þonne synde eallunge gefret, þæt þære byrdene hefinesse oferstið þæt gemet hyre strængde" (68, 141, 7)—"If she then feels quite distinctly that the heaviness of the burden surpasses the measure of her strength."

Although it is undoubtedly by a general physical appraisal that the nun perceives that the harshness of the rule surpasses her strength, her realization is essentially a mental action: this is underscored by the fact that *(ge)fiedan* translates *video*, which is obviously used in a non-concrete sense. Likewise, we find *(ge)felan* used in *Chrodegang’s Rule* of the non-concrete discerning of good or evil: "*Non bona, non mala ... sentis. Ne gefelst þu go ne yfel*" (60, 74, 13)—"You distinguish neither good nor evil.” These examples suggest that, as general verbs of perception, *(ge)fiedan* and *(ge)felan* could extend into mental perception and discernment; however, the larger pattern tells us that they were primarily oriented towards the senses of general bodily sensation and of touch.

Finally, although there are of course a number of senses included in the *OED*’s entry for *feel* that *(ge)fiedan* and *(ge)felan* do not express, we may concentrate, as a kind of excursus to this section, on one such sense which may be emergent in Old English. That is the sense "to have an emotional conviction of; to think, believe, be of the opinion" for which the *OED* gives this example from Trollope: "She felt that she might yet recover her lost ground" (*Barchester Towers*, 32). While this expression is not original to the twentieth century, I have the vague impression that it is very much current and indeed rather overused, perhaps because of all the sorts of euphemistic beating-around-the-bush to which it can be put to use, as in: "The company feels that your talents might be better employed elsewhere, Jones.” This impression was confirmed on the day that I wrote this (May 31, 1998) by a cartoon I saw in Toronto’s *Eye* magazine: it had two panels, each depicting a seated Thinker, head supported by his hand. Under the first, the caption read, "1690’s.... I think therefore I am,” while under the second, it read, “1990’s.... I feel therefore I am.”
There is at least one instance where Old English (ge)fælan seems to be moving toward such a sense. This is found in the entry of the Old English Martyrology commemorating Saint Cuthbert:

Da he aras on dæge of undernæste, da sæde he þæt hine ðyrste and het him beran wæter to.... Da bletsoðe he þæt wæter and his onbergde ond sealde his mæseprome, ond he hit sealde heora þene.... Da ondranc se þæs wætres and sealde hit þæm breðer de him æstod.... Ond se ondranc eac þæs wætres, ond hi gefeldan\(^98\) begeh þæt wæs þæt betste wæn. Ond þa hi þa tid hæfdon ymb þæt to spreconne, þa ondette heora ægder oðrum þæt hi næfre ær selre wæn ne druncan. \(\text{\textit{Martyrology, MS B, March 20, 37, 4}}\)

("When he arose during the day from his morning rest, he said then that he was thirsty and commanded that water be brought to him. Then he blessed the water and tasted it and gave it to his mass-priest and he gave it to their attendant. Then this (attendant) drank this water and gave it to the brother that stood near him. And this man also drank the water, and they both perceived?/ sensed?/ felt? that it was the best wine. And when they had the opportunity to talk about it, then each confessed to the other that they had never drunk a more excellent wine before.")

Do we know for certain that the water has turned to wine? Or are we only told how things appeared to the two monks? Our interpretation of “gefeldan” hinges on the answer. If we believe that the passage is relating an objective fact, then “gefeldan” takes on an expository role in the narration of the story, telling us, through the medium of the two monks, what the water has become: “they perceived it was wine.” If however we think that the narrator is being somewhat more cautious, that he is only reporting how things appeared to the monks, then “gefeldan” has a qualifying role, something like “they had the impression” or “it seemed to them that it was wine.

To my mind, the second option seems more likely. Nowhere does the narrator actually say that the water has become wine; he is careful to frame the story from the perspective of the two monks. He seems to repeat pointedly the word wæter in “Da ondranc se þæs wætres” and “Ond se ondranc eac þæs wætres.” Furthermore, what they are said to perceive must be at least partially subjective and dependent on their own previous experience: that it was the best wine, that they never drank one more excellent. Here, I think, is the key to the possible developing sense of “to think, believe, be of the opinion.” It cannot be fully present, for, regardless of their opinion about the wine, the two monks had first to discover that it was (or seemed to be) wine. But it is emergent in the fact that at least part of what they perceive (that it was the best) must represent their subjective evaluation.

The Latin source supports the interpretation that the story is told from the

\(^98\) MS C: “gefeldon.”
perspective of the two monks, without any claims to omniscient certainty. Kotzor describes Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti* as the "ultimate source" for this passage;\(^99\) although this snippet does not show all the parallels, the two passages are quite close in most respects. I quote a little less of the Latin than of the Old English:

> Et minister recepto poculo ... bibit, ... et uisa est ei aqua quasi in saporem uini conuersa, tantique sibi testem voIens adhibere miraculI fratrem qui proxime astabat, porrexit ei poculum. Qui cum et ipse biberet, eius quoque palato pro aqua uinum sapiebat.... Et ubi vacuum tempus ad loquendum acceperunt, confitebanhir alterutrum quia uidetur sibi nunquam melius uinum bibisse. (Bede, *Vita Cuthberti* [prose], 35, 264)

(“And the attendant, having taken the cup, drank, and it seemed to him as if the water had been changed into the flavor of wine. And wishing to make a brother who was standing by a witness for him of so great a miracle, he offered him the cup. When he too had drunk, he also tasted wine instead of water on his palate. And when they had time free to talk, each confessed to each other that it seemed to them that they had never drunk better wine.”)

Bede is even more circumspect than the Old English: it *seems* to the first brother that the water has acquired the flavor of wine; the second brother tastes wine on *his* palate (evidently it still looks like water); it *seems* to both of them that they had never drunk better wine. The miracle here is not one of turning water into wine, but rather, as the chapter heading explains, “Quomodo aquam ... in uini saporem conuertit”--“How he changed water into the flavor of wine.” It is a miracle that is rather subjectively localized in the mouths of the two monks. The emphasis on seeming and appearing (which may lead into subjective opinion) in the Latin may very well inform the use of “gefelden” in the Old English.\(^{100}\)

### C. Distribution in the Old English Corpus

In the previous chapter, I considered the possibility that the verbs of touch (*ge-* and *œthmnan*) and (*ge*)hrepiam were dialectal variants. Both verbs exhibit similar uses over a broad range of meanings.\(^{101}\) Yet the *hrinan* forms are the only ones to appear in early

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\(^{100}\) This possible development in the use of *(ge)*felan becomes quite clear for Middle English *felen*, for example: “Y, John Aston, prist, unworthely required to say what I felyde in the matyr of the sacrement of the autere” (*MED, J. Aston in Lewis Life Wyclif* (1820) 262).

\(^{101}\) Of course, apparent near-synonymy does not in itself constitute a case for two words being dialectal variants, and it is clear that for some Old English writers, the two verbs were synonyms, in that these writers use them in variation with each other. But their overall distribution in the Old English corpus suggests a possible dialectal pattern.
West Saxon and Mercian texts, in the Northumbrian gospel and liturgical glosses, and in poetry. *(Ge)hrepiun*, on the other hand, is exclusively characteristic of Ælfric's works, as well as of some, but not all, of the Winchester texts; it also appears in several of the Canterbury and non-Winchester texts, but here the *hrinan* forms predominate. While I said that it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions regarding the dialectal distribution of the two verbs, it does appear that the *hrinan* forms were characteristic of the North (but were used in the South as well), while *(ge)hrepiun* was a southern feature that made its way into writing, most notably in the works of Ælfric, in the mid to late tenth century.

The case for *(ge)fredan* and *(ge)felan* being dialectal variants is even more compelling. As the semantic survey above reveals, their range of meanings was, if anything, closer. However, they never seem to have both been used by a single Old English author (discounting late manuscript variants, mainly of Ælfric's works). While this interesting problem must await fuller treatment, I will now briefly outline its most salient features.

We may first observe that *(ge)felan* is characteristic of the Northumbrian texts: it occurs twelve times in the *Durham Ritual Gloss*, once in the gloss of the Lindisfarne *Gospels* and again in the identical gloss of the Rushworth *Gospels*. Furthermore, *(ge)felan* is the only one of the two verbs to be found in poetry, where it occurs nine times: twice in *Christ C*, and once each in *Christ & Satan*, *Seafarer*, *Whale*, *Riddles 6, 25, 84*, and *Metrical Charm 6*. If one accepts the premise that much of the distinctive Old English poetic vocabulary has an Anglian origin, then the presence of *(ge)felan* in both poetry and the Northumbrian glosses suggests that it was characteristic of Anglia.

Turning next to the Early West Saxon works, we discover something rather surprising. Although in Late West Saxon, *(ge)fredan* and *(ge)felan* fall generally into the Winchester / non-Winchester pattern outlined by Gneuss and Hofstetter, in Early West Saxon they depart from it. According to Hofstetter, one of the characteristics of the Winchester usage is that it is "a late Old English phenomenon." However, we find that both *(ge)fredan* and *(ge)felan* appear in early West Saxon, and they do so in a rather striking pattern. *(Ge)fredan* appears fifteen times in the *Pastoral Care*, four times in *Boethius' Consolation*, and four times in Augustine's *Soliloquies*. *(Ge)felan*, on the other

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102 See Chapter 4, note 105.
103 See Chapter 4, notes 108 & 109.
hand, occurs eleven times in Gregory’s Dialogues (Corpus), five times in Bede’s History, once in Orosius’ History, and once in the Martyrology. The pattern, of course, is that (ge)fredan is characteristic of the translations now accredited to Alfred, while (ge)felan is characteristic of the non-Alfredian works. The Bede and the Orosius, once ascribed to Alfred, have been shown on linguistic grounds to be the work of other authors.105 Werferth was the translator of Gregory’s Dialogues, while the Martyrology, which seems to have been written in the second half of the ninth century, has never been connected with Alfred.

All four of the texts in which (ge)felan appears show signs of Mercian background or influence. We know Werferth was a Mercian, and the language of his translation reflects his non-West Saxon background. The translation of Bede also contains a large number of Mercian elements; it is principally for that reason that we do not attribute it to Alfred.106 The Orosius is less obviously marked by non-West Saxon features, but, in her edition, Janet Bately does remark upon a small number of Mercian “or even Northumbrian” elements.107 The Martyrology is also thought to have a Mercian origin.108 Among these early texts, we can probably mark out a very rough West Saxon versus Mercian or Anglian division between (ge)feland (ge)felan.

Turning next to the Late West Saxon texts, we find that (ge)feland alone is characteristic of Ælfric’s works, where it occurs 35 times.109 There are also single


106 See Chapter 4, note 99.


109 The exceptions are the variant readings with (ge)felan that appear in the late manuscripts B (MS Bodley 343, Ker: “s. xii2”) and G (MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv, Ker: “s. xii med.”). Since in every instance these variants are set against other earlier and more authoritative manuscript witnesses, we may safely assume that these are scribal changes that do not reflect
occurrences of it in the tenth century Hatton revision of Gregory's Dialogues, in the Durham Hymnal Gloss, and in the Expositio hymnorum Gloss, all reckoned by Walter Hofstetter to be part of the body of texts characterized by the Winchester usage. The list may be further expanded if we include the two occurrences of gefredmaelum, a calque on Latin sensim, "gradually, tentatively," found in the Aldhelm Gloses in the manuscripts Brussels 1650 and Digby 146. (Ge)fdan, on the other hand, occurs twice in the Winchester group, once in Chrodegang's Rule and once in the Legend of the Seven Sleepers. We should probably not expect absolute correspondence to the Winchester / non-Winchester division; Hofstetter's study outlines general trends, but it is not uncommon to find non-Winchester words in Winchester texts and vice versa. (Ge)fredan thus seems to be a typical Winchester word.

(Ge)fredan also occurs outside the Winchester group in Late West Saxon. Most notably, it appears twice in the Liber scintillarum Gloss and once in the Regularis concordia Gloss, which, as I noted in the last chapter, are thought to form part of another group of texts characterized by a particular vocabulary, the Canterbury group. It is found as well in such texts as the West Saxon Gospels and the Witeney Version of the Benedictine Rule. However, (ge)fdan predominates in non-Winchester texts: it appears in Bald's Leechbook, the Old English Herbarium, Wulfstan's Homilies, the Blickling and Vercelli Homilies, and other homilies and saints' lives.

While this information is of course very sketchy, I think it is possible to imagine a dialectal line or isogloss demarcating the use of (ge)fredan versus (ge)fdan in late Old English. We assume that (ge)fredan was a southern feature. If we wish to account for its use both at Winchester and at Canterbury, we may draw an east-west line above these cities, which perhaps dips south in the middle to allow for the use of (ge)fdan in many West Saxon texts. The problem will be an interesting one to take up in more detail later. Certainly, the fact that no one author makes use of both verbs—in an era which favored tautological and often alliterative word pairs—is remarkable and deserves closer attention.

Ælfric's usage.

110 Although there are 11 occurrences of (ge)fredan in the Corpus version, they are all in the latter portion of the text which the reviser did not rewrite. The one instance of (ge)fredan in the revised version was changed from ongytan in the original translation (Gregory's Dialogues [C] 2. 2. 102. 2; [H] 2. 2. 102. 4).


112 See Chapter 4, pp. 161-2.
**Summary**

*Ongytan* seems to play a role in the Old English vocabulary in relation to *(ge)fledan* and *(ge)felan* that is roughly analogous to that played by *percipio* in relation to *sentio* in Latin, and by *perceive* in relation to *feel* in Modern English. As a general verb of perception, *ongytan* describes an action that occurs primarily within the mental faculties, essentially the somewhat detached cognizing of a situation, rather than the immediate experiencing of it. Its most common senses do not directly relate to physical perception at all: “to understand, comprehend” and “to recognize.” However, when it relates to physical perception, *ongytan* has particular affinities with seeing and hearing, which it demonstrates both alone and in combination with verbs particular to these faculties, i.e. *(ge)seon* and *(ge)hyran*. The regular association of *ongytan* with these faculties suggests that they are justifiably considered apart from the closer, more intimate senses.

*(Ge)fledan* and *(ge)felan* differ markedly from each other with regard to their etymological backgrounds: *(ge)fledan* appears to be one of a number of Indo-European cognates whose meanings might be distilled as the essentially abstract “to understand, know” or “intelligence,” while *(ge)felan* belongs to a group of more concrete words that associate sensation with the hand and with actions of touching or striking. For all practical purposes, however, the two verbs seem to have expressed very nearly the same range of meanings in Old English: they arise out of a basic sense of “to experience” and they most often express the perceiving of general bodily sensations, of tactile sensations, and occasionally of taste sensations; they also express the more complex apprehending of both external and internal conditions, although in this they may tend to imply that this apprehending has occurred through more intuitive, rather than cognitive, means. Despite the similarity of their meanings, the two verbs never seem to have been used by a single author, and it is possible that they are dialectal variants, *(ge)felan* being particularly characteristic of the North, and *(ge)fledan* characteristic of the South, and especially of the Winchester vocabulary.
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