

Old English

- OE had the following diphthongs:

/æ(:)ɑ/

/e(:)o/

- They were all lost early on in ME as a result of the following monophthongisation processes:

OE /æ:ɑ/ → æ:

OE /æɑ/ → æ

OE /e:o/ → ø: → e:

OE /eo/ → ø → e

Middle English

There are three major sources of diphthongs in ME:

- vocalisation
- ME breaking
- borrowings

vocalisation of [j] and [ɣ, w] in syllable codas, giving [i] and [u]

CHANGE

OE /ej/ → eME /ei/

OE /ɑɣ/ → eME /aw/ → /au/

OE /ɑ:w/ → eME /ɔ:u/ → ME /ɔu/

EXAMPLES

OE *reȝn* | → ME *rein* 'rain'

OE *draȝan* → ME *drawen* 'draw'

OE *blāwan* → ME *blōwe* 'blow'

ME breaking: insertion of a glide before [x] and [ç]

x (BACK context) → ux

ç (FRONT context) → iç

CHANGE

OE [ox] → ME [ɔux] = /ɔux/

OE [eç] → ME [eix] = /eix/

EXAMPLES

OE *dohtor* → *douȝter* 'daughter'

OE *feohtan* → *feiz ten* 'fight'

The rise of ME diphthongs

OE	ME		
/ej/ <i>weg</i> 'way'		→ /ei/	} → /ai/
/eox/ <i>feohtan</i> 'fight'	→ /øx/ → /ex/	→ /ei/	
/æ:j/ <i>græȝ</i> 'grey'	→ /ε:j/	→ /ei/	
/æj/ <i>dæg</i> 'day'	→ /aj/	→ /ai/	
/ɑɣ/ <i>dragan</i> 'draw'	→ /aw/	→ /au/	} → /au/
/ɑw/ <i>clawu</i> 'claw'	→ /aw/	→ /au/	
/æɑx/ <i>seah</i> 'he saw'	→ /æx/ → /ax/	→ /au/	
/æaw/ <i>scrēawa</i> 'shrew'	→ /æ:w/ → /ε:w/	→ /εu/	
<i>fēawe</i> 'few'			
/e:ow/ <i>hrēowan</i> 'rue'	→ /ø:w/ → /e:w/	→ /eu/	} → /iu/ → /(j)u:/
/i:w/ <i>snīwan</i> 'snow'	→ /i:u/	→ /iu/	

/a:ʏ/ <i>āgan</i> ‘own’	→ /ɔ:w/	→ /ɔu/	} → /ɔu/
/a:w/ <i>cnāwan</i> ‘know’	→ /ɔ:w/	→ /ɔu/	
/a:x/ <i>dāh</i> ‘dough’	→ /ɔ:x/	→ /ɔux/	
/oʏ/ <i>flogen</i> ‘flown’	→ /ɔw/	→ /ɔux/	
/ox/ <i>dohtor</i> ‘daughter’		→ /ɔux/	
/o:ʏ/ <i>plōgas</i> ‘plows’	→ /ɔ:w/	→ /ɔu/	
/o:x/ <i>sōhte</i> ‘sought’		→ /ɔux/	
/o:w/ <i>grōwan</i> ‘grow’		→ /ɔu/	

Phonological effects:

- 1) the addition of new diphthongs;
- 2) [ʏ] vanishes completely;
- 3) [j, w] no longer occur in codas.

French borrowings

/oi/ *joie* ‘joy’
 /ui/ *puint* ‘point’ (*oi*, *ui* remained distinct till the mid-16th c.)

→ /oi/

▪ The resulting system

iu eu ɔu au
 ai oi ui