

Languages in Mediaeval Europe

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This is a brief description of available languages in the Mythic Europe of the Ars Magica system. It is assumed that the campaign takes place around 1200 A.D., but most of the information is accurate within a century of that date. The information focuses on Celtic and other West European languages because of the author's interest.

One overriding note is that even when a nation or province speaks one language more or less uniformly, it is still possible to travel ten miles and encounter mutually incomprehensible versions of the same language. A modern example of this is Swiss German, Bavarian German, and modern High German. Exactly where the linguistic line is drawn between having different dialects or different languages is well beyond the scope of this meager listing. Use your good judgement.

Celtic Languages

- *Goidelic* or *Gaelic*: Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic (Erse), Manx Gaelic

[N.B. The languages begin to diverge in the C. 10th because of geographical separation. Irish is originally written in the Ogam (or Ogham) alphabet. In this period, Scots Gaelic is written in the Irish dialect.]

- *Brythonic*: Breton, Cornish, Cumbrian, Welsh

[N.B. Cornish and Breton are mutually intelligible until the C. 15th. Welsh in 1200 A.D. is Old Welsh. In 1200 A.D., Cumbrian is probably similar to northern Welsh. Literature in these languages is written in the period from the C. 12th to the C. 15th.]

Germanic Languages

- *Germanic*: Bavarian German, Dutch, English (Old English, Anglo-Saxon), Frisian, High German, Low German, Yiddish
- *West Scandinavian*: Faeroese, Icelandic, Norwegian
- *East Scandinavian*: Danish, Gotlandish, Scanian, Swedish

[N.B. The various Scandinavian languages became distinct starting in the 12th century. Old Norse is still the language used for the Icelandic sagas. You may consider the Scandinavian languages presented to all be dialects of Norse.

Dutch includes Flemish dialects in Belgium. I do not know how widespread Yiddish might be in Mythic Europe given how Jews are treated by society at large, but it is probably prevalent

in mostly Jewish villages. High German dialects include Franconian, Swabian, Swiss, and Rhenish.

Old English (Anglo-Saxon) and Frisian are still very closely related. English has probably begun to absorb some elements of French in the 150 years since the Norman invasion, but this French influence is most prevalent in the southeast. Also, most English nobles at this time speak French in court. Major English dialects include Mercian, Middle English, and Northumbrian.]

Romance or Latinate Languages

- *Italian Isthmus*: Italian, Rhaetian, Sardinian

[N.B. Some other contemporary Latinate languages from the north of Italy include Faliscan, Oscan, Umbrian, and Venetic, but these are mostly dead by 1200. Major Italian dialects are regionally based, and include Corsican, Lombard, Neapolitan, Roman, Sardinian, Sicilian, and Tuscan. Rhaetian, which includes several (mutually incomprehensible) languages, is spoken in the Piedmont region.]

- *French Languages*: French (Langue d'Oil), Occitan (Langue d'Oc),

[The major dialects of Langue d'Oil are Normand (Norman French), Picard, and French. The major dialects of Langue d'Oc are Catalan and Provençal. The dividing line is roughly the Loire River.]

- *Iberian Peninsula*: Catalan, Castillian (Spanish), Portuguese

[Castillian and Portuguese are very similar languages.]

- *Others*: Latin, Dalmatian, Romanian

Slavic Languages

- *Baltic*: Latvian, Lithuanian, Old Prussian (Wendish)
- *West Slavonic*: Czech, Moravian, Polish, Slovak, Sorbian
- *South Slavonic*: Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croat, Slovene
- *East Slavonic*: Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian

[N.B. Most South and East Slavonic languages use the Cyrillic alphabet. Croatian uses the Latin alphabet although the spoken language is very close to Serbian.]

Other Languages

- *Albanian*: Gheg dialect is spoken in the north; Tosk dialect, the south.
- *Arabic*: Spoken through most of the Islamic world. Local languages also exist.
- *Armenian*: Classical Armenian (Grabar) uses the 38-letter alphabet developed by St. Mesrop. Spoken in Kingdom of Lesser Armenia and in some areas through Anatolia and the Caucasus.
- *Basque*: spoken in the western Pyrenees.
- *Berber*: spoken in Moorish Spain and Northern Africa.

- *Caucasian languages*: A wide variety of languages are spoken in the Caucasian mountains, with only a passing similarity to each other. They are not Indo-European languages.
- *Finnish*: Major dialects include Estonian, Sami (northern Norway and Sweden), and Suomi (in Finland).
- *Greek*: The official language of the Byzantine Empire.
- *Magyar*: spoken in the middle Danube basin (Hungary).
- *Maltese*: spoken on Malta, oddly enough.
- *Persian* (a.k.a. *Farsi*): One of the more prominent languages of the Islamic world.

References include correspondence on the Ars Magica mailing list (the Berklist), especially Jakob Rynge, Michael DeVerteuil, and Patrick Juola. The main source is the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language.