

Merry Quizmas!

By Alex Bellos

Puzzle 1

The modern English words used during the Christmas season come from a range of sources. Here we present ancient words, along with their original language and what they meant at the time.

Your Challenge

Name the modern English word that derives from each, bearing in mind that the meaning may have changed a little over the centuries.

Old Word	Language	Meaning
1. choraula	Medieval Latin	a dance to the flute
2. jol	Old Norse	a heathen feast, later taken over by Christianity
3. Cristes mæsse	Old English	Christ's service
4. myrge	Old English	pleasing, agreeable, pleasant, sweet
5. X'temmas	new word, 1551	Christmas; X from the Greek letter for "Ch" in Christ
6. boudin	Old French	sausage
7. mangeoire	Old French	fodder bin in cowsheds and fields
8. Sante Klaus	Dutch, 1773	St. Nicholas, a Middle Eastern bishop
9. adventus	Latin	arrival
10. stocu	Old English	sleeve
11. gingeln	new word, late 1300s	emit tinkling metallic sounds
12. halig	Old English	sacred, godly
13. nael	Old French	birthday
14. nativitatem	Latin	birth
15. slee	Dutch	vehicle mounted on runners for use on ice and snow

Puzzle 2

English is a Germanic language, which means it descends from the original Germanic language spoken by tribes in northern and western Europe around 2,500 years ago. Other Germanic languages include German, Dutch, Frisian (spoken in the north of the Netherlands), and the Scandinavian languages. Here are some Christmas phrases in five Germanic languages:

English	Christmas Eve	New Year's Day	Christmas wreath	Christmas tree
Dutch	Kerstavond	Nieuwjaarsdag	kerstkrans	kerstboom
Frisian	krystjûn	nijjiersdei	krystkrânse	krystbeam
Swedish	julafton	nyårsdagen	julkran	julgran
Danish	juleaften	nytårs dag	jul krans	juletræ

Source: *United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad*
Solutions can be found on atlasobscura.com

Your Challenge

The following are all translations of the same sentence. What is that sentence, and what language is each one in?

1. God jul och gott nytt år!
2. Vrolijk kerstfeest en een gelukkig nieuw jaar!
3. Noflike krystdagen en in gelokkich nijjier!
4. Glædelig jul og et godt nytår!

The three sentences below are in three other Germanic languages: Afrikaans (spoken in South Africa), Faroese (spoken in the Faroe Islands), and West Flemish (mostly spoken in Belgium). Which sentence is in which language?

- a. Geseënde Kersfees en 'n gelukkige nuwe jaar!
- b. E vroolek kerstfeejst èn e ghelu'g'gegh nieuwjoar!
- c. Gleðilig Jól og gott nýggjár! (the letter ð is pronounced as English "th" in "that")