

## **The Name of the Nose: Body Terminology in Early Medieval Europe**

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The sixth to eighth centuries saw a flowering of written laws in the Western European Germanic and Celtic territories. Central to the Germanic and present in the Celtic collocations are tables of fines for personal injury. Surprisingly, these tariffs have been virtually unaddressed in the scholarly literature. A thorough examination can dramatically increase our understanding for early medieval Europe in terms of societal custom, the influence of literature on the law, and the dissemination of legal practice.

This study concentrates on body-part vocabulary and social/sociolinguistic change. A tenet of historical linguistic theory is that body parts are among the words most resistant to change or replacement. In these legal texts, we have a valuable set of contextually similar, near-contemporary lists of body parts in various dialects of four of the branches of the parent language, Indo-European: most of the “barbarian” laws are written in Latin, although, crucially, some retain sporadic references to body parts in native Germanic dialects; Æthelberht of Kent breaks this tradition by commissioning the recording of his laws in the vernacular Old English, and his lead was followed by Alfred the Great; the laws of the Lombards, an offshoot of the Germanic peoples who were later subsumed by the Coptic Empire, were translated into medieval Greek; and finally we have roughly contemporary tariff structures in the Celtic vernaculars of Irish and Welsh. This paper etymologizes the range of body-part terms in light of their Indo-European reconstructions, the Latinate terminology used by Isidore in his *Etymologies*, and the

Latin terminology used in the Germanic laws recorded in Latin. More interesting than the terms which survive as expected (given phonological change) from Indo-European are those which have been replaced. Thus the primary questions to be raised are: to what extent did Isidore's *Etymologies* provide a literary focus for change; to what extent does the genre of legal writing in Latin affect the Germanic and Celtic vernaculars; and what does the concurrence of borrowings from Isidore, Latin law, or another vernacular text tell us about the aerial dissemination of law in early western medieval Europe?