FIGURE 12　The Runic Alphabet (Futhorc)

Northumbria in 635). Christianity is essentially a religion of "the book" (based, that is, on the witness of written scriptures), and it was Christian monks, accustomed to making copies of the Bible and other religious works in Latin, who introduced the idea of using the Latin alphabet to write English too.

The alphabet used by the monks was not, however, completely adequate for Old English, which had a wider range of sounds than Latin. Their alphabet had only 23 letters, lacking *v* (whose function was shared with *u*), *j* (which was not distinguished from *i*), and *w*. The letter shapes of the Latin alphabet then were those we recognize today, though the scripts developed by the Anglo-Saxons showed much variation and evolution during the five centuries of writing in Old English.

As nearly as possible, the Christian monks who first wrote Old English in Latin characters must have tried to represent the language as they heard it. The spelling of Old English thus began by being more or less phonetic, matching sound to symbol. However, the fact that Old English had, according to one estimate, some 35 phonemes (fewer than Modern English, see p. 113), shows that some overlap in the representation of sounds was inevitable. Just as in Modern English, for instance, *s* and *f* were voiced between vowels, as in *arisan* (/ɑriːzan/ "to arise") and *ofer* (/oːvɛr/ over) but unvoiced in other positions, as in *sittan* (/sɪttɑn/ "to sit") and *fisc* (/fɪʃ/ "fish"). But the Anglo-Saxon scribes felt no necessity to represent these pairs as separate sounds. Only during the Middle English period would *z* and *v* (or its orthographical variant *u*), respectively, come to be used for the voiced varieties of the two sounds.

There were a few sounds of Old English not present in Latin (i.e., distinct phonemes) that the Christian monks felt they needed to represent. New letters were required. They were either borrowed from the old runic alphabet or simply created by modifying existing letters:

- For the unvoiced Old English phoneme /θ/ ("*th*ing") and the voiced version /θ/ ("*th*is"), both of which we now represent with "th," two symbols were adopted: the rune þ "thorn" and the invented symbol ð "eth", adapted from a *d*. The two Old English symbols were used interchangeably for both of the "th" sounds; scribes seem to have picked whichever they pleased and sometimes used both within a single word.
- For the Old English sound /w/, the rune ƿ "wynn" was borrowed.
- For the vowel /æ/, a sound distinct from that represented by *a* (/ɑ/, /ɑ:/), Latin *a* and *e* were combined to form *æ*, a character known to the Anglo-Saxons as *æsc* ("ash").

In the Middle English and Early Modern English periods, the English alphabet went through various changes. Some of the more noticeable alterations were the dropping of þ, ð, ƿ, and æ but the addition of ȝ, a letter we call yogh (a modification of an Anglo-Saxon *g*), which could represent a variety of sounds, including *g* as in *gear* and *y* as in *year*. Yogh was abandoned by about 1500. To give some sense of the historical progression of spelling, the same sentence (contrived for the purpose) is written here in the typical orthography of the four major historical periods. Classroom Activity 2.0 from Chapter 2 gives a more extended illustration of the development of the English orthography.

Old English:	He siehþ twelfe cyningas ond cwena togædere in ðam huse.
Middle English:	He seeth twelf kingis and queanes toȝider in þe hous.
Early Modern English:	He seeth twelue kynges and queenes together in the house.
Modern English:	He sees twelve kings and queens together in the house.

Capital and Small Letters

What we now call small letters (also known as lowercase letters, a term that described their location in the lower part of a printer's case of loose type) developed in the early Middle Ages when Latin, originally written in what we