

Some Notes On (Cardinal+Noun) Combination

—From Old English to Early Middle English—

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1.1. When we read OE texts, we realize that the noun with a cardinal is sometimes in the genitive and sometimes not. In various Old English grammars, there is little space for the description of the unique combination (Cardinal+Noun). Generally speaking, what the books say is as follows;

Cardinals 1,2 and 3 are delined like adjectives.

Cardinals (4–19)⁽¹⁾ are generally undeclined. They do not govern the noun in the genitive.

Cardinals (20–)⁽¹⁾ are sometimes declined like neuter nouns, sometimes like adjectives, but are often left undeclined. When used like adjectives, they govern the genitive case.⁽²⁾

But the actual situation is not so clear-cut as mentioned above. In this report, the attention is paid upon the actual situation about the combination in Old English and how it changes in Early Middle English. Cardinal 1 is excluded here because it does not govern the noun in the genitive plural (unless it conveys the partitive sense).

The texts used here are *Charters from the Oldest English Texts, the Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, King Ælfred's Orosius, Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, Anglo-Saxon Chronicles A, B, C, D, F, H*

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and E, and *Lazamon's Brut* A and C.⁽³⁾ These texts can be roughly located, regionally and chronologically, as in the next table. The horizontal column shows the dialects and the vertical, the period.

	Northern	Anglican	Mid-land	Kentish	West-Saxon
9c				Charters	
10c		Bede		Chro. B	Orosius Ælfric Chro. A
11c	Chro. D			Chro. F	Chro. C
12c			Chro. E		
13c			Brut A Brut C		

In this report the emphasis is laid on the chronological differences and not on the dialectal ones.

1.2. Before examining OE examples, it would be better to survey (Cardinal+Noun) combination in Germanic languages. Greek and Latin examples are adduced for comparison with Gothic ones.

In Gothic cardinals 2 and 3 are declined like adjectives. We know that by looking at some examples from the New Testament.

2	páu twa áugona	duos oculos	δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς	Mark ix 47
	twáim páidom	duabus tunicis	δύο χιτῶνας	" vi 9
3	afar prins dagans	post tres dies	μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας	Mark viii 31
	du jerum þrim	annis tribus	ἐπὶ ἔτη τρία	Luke iv 25

Cardinals 2 and 3 are declined according to the gender, case and number of the noun they modify. This is the same in Gothic, Latin and Greek. Usually,⁽⁴⁾ they do not govern the genitive.

Cardinals (4-19) are indeclinable in all three languages except 4 in Greek. They do not govern the genitive. The examples are

5	pans fimf hláibans/quinque panes/τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους	Mark viii 19
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6	afar dagans sáihs/post dies sex/μετὰ ἡμέρας ἕξ	Mark ix 2
7	jera sibun/annis septem/ἕτη ἑπτα	Luke ii 36
8	dagos ahtáu/dies octo/ἡμεραι ὀκτώ	ii 21
10	drakmas . . . táihun/drachmas decem/δραχμὰς . . . δέκα	xv 8
12	jera twalif/annis duodecim/ἕτη δώδεκα	Mark v 25
.		
.		

The cardinals from 4 to 19 behave in the same way in Gothic, Latin and Greek. But cardinals (20-) in Gothic govern the noun in the genitive. We cannot see such an idiom either in Latin or in Greek.

40	dage fidwor tiguns/quadragesima diebus/ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα	Mark i 13
99	in niutehundis jah niune garaihtaize/super nonagintanovem iustis/ἐπὶ ἐνενηκόντα ἐννέα δικαίους	Luke xv 7
100	taihuntehund lambe/centum oves/ἑκατὸν πρόβατα	xv 4

The situation is the same in Old Saxon and Old High German.⁽⁵⁾ The following table shows the occurrence of the genitive case by the capital letter G.

	Cardinals 2&3	4-19	20-
Gothic	—	—	G
Old Saxon	—	—	G
Old High G.	—	—	G
Old English	—	—	G
Latin	—	—	—
Greek	—	—	—

The table shows that the use of the genitive case with cardinals (20-) is common in Germanic languages.

With this in mind, we are now ready to see the OE examples in detail.

2.1. Cardinals 2 and 3 are declined according to the case, number and

gender of the noun they modify. Of course there are many variations of spelling. For example;

- 2 twa denn Chart. 29⁽⁶⁾/twam gearum Bede 1-9⁽⁷⁾ twegen cyningas Chro. A 944⁽⁸⁾/ twa niht Chro. D 1071/betwix þam twam burgum Chro. A 924
- 3 preo monað Bede 4-12/þrie Scottas Chro. A 891/ mid þrim scipum Chro. A 897/ his ðry leorning cnihtas Ælfric p.498/ on ðisum ðrym wordum Ælfric p.52

In Brut A and C, the nominative/ accusative forms 'twa' and 'preo' are also found in the dative.

of two ʒonge childrē Brut C III p.165/ a preo ulockes Brut A III p.244

In the examples above the cardinal is used attributively. The noun that follows the cardinal is the headword and, therefore, not in the genitive plural.

Cardinals (4-19) are usually⁽⁹⁾ undeclined and they do not govern the genitive case. Some examples are

- 4 feower weðras Chart. 41/ iiii gear Bede 5-19
- 5 æft fif gearum (Latin: post quinque annos) Bede 3-20
- 6 syx winter Bede 2-20/ mid vi scypum Chrol. 1049
- 7 mid vii scipon Chro. E 1046/ seofon gear Bede 3-8
- 8 ehta wint Bede 4-26/ viii marc Chro. E 1039
- 9 nigon gear Bede 3-20/ nizen dawæs Brut A I p.106
- 10 buton ten ʒere Brut A I p.391/ x winter Bede 5-18
- 11 xi gear Chro. A 716/ endleofan winter Bede 5-18
- 12 twelf bocland Bede 3-24/ tweolf hende men Brut A I p.103
- 13 preottyne mila Bede 4-23/ þreottyne winter Bede 4-5
- 14 feowertyne niht Chro. C 979/ mid þan feowertene scipen Brut A II p.79

- 15 buton xv wucan Chro. D 1069/ fiftene mile Brut A II p.480
- 16 xvi scipan Chro. E 189/ mid sixtene crihtes Brut A II p.521
- 17 xvii gear Chro. E 189/ seouentene winter Brut A I p.91
- 18 xviii dagas Chro. D 1067/ muchele æthene scipen
- 19 xix men Chro. E 1948

In the next example, however, the cardinal is declined in the dative and the noun is also in the dative.

- 14 feowertyum dagu ær ... Bede 4-24

But there are some examples of the suffix '-a'. Here are three examples from Chronicle C.

- 5 v scypa/ viii scypa/ ix scypa 1049

In early OE 'scypa' is 'scypu'. 'Scypa' must be a dialectal variation of 'scypu' in Chronicle C.

Examples from Chronicles A and E are:

- x wintra Chro. A.409/ xiiii wintra Chro. E 776/ ymb xvi wintra Chro. E 755/ þa xix wintra Chro. E 1137

It is difficult to prove that the examples above have the partitive notion. Therefore, we have to admit that cardinals (4-19) do not usually have the noun in the genitive, but that there are some cases with the genitive.

Cardinals (20-) show an interesting phenomenon if we look from Charters to Brut C. In OE grammar, the cardinals are divided into three groups, that is, (a) 20-120, (b) 100 and (c) 1000 from the point of formation. The decades 20-120 are formed with 'tig' from forms of the cardinals 2-12, and decades 70-120 have usually the prefix 'hund'. A large number of examples from Charters down to Chronicles have the genitive case.

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- 20 xx hida Chart. 45/ xx scipa Chro. A 897
30 þritig wintra Bede 5-23/ xxx godra ðegna Chro. D 1052
31 an 7 þrittig wintra Bede p.488
40 feowertig daga Bede 5-4
56 syx 7 fiftig wintra Bede 3-24
60 sytigum wintra (Latin: annos sexagesimo) Bede 1-2
70 hund seuonti wintra Chro. A 409
84 lxxxiiii monna Chro. A 787
100 hund-teontig weðera Ælfric p.567
400 feower hund geara Ælfric p.190
1000 tyn hund wintra Chro. A 973
5000 fif ðusend leoða Ælfric p. 578
:
:
10500 endlifte healf ðusend punda Chro. D 1018

On the other hand, the following ones have contracted suffixes.

- 21 xxi wiñt Chro. A 738
37 xxxvii wiñt Chro. A 688
50 ·l· wiñt Chr. C 867

The next ones have suffixes ‘-e’ and ‘-o’ which might have been from the suffix ‘-a’.

- 37 xxxvii wintre Chro. E 731
50 syððan fiftig wintre Chro. E 963
40 xl scipo Chro. E 1018

Contrary to the ‘rule’ of OE, there are many examples that have no genitive, especially in Brut.

- 30 þrittig winter Bede p. 488
31 xxxi gear Chro. F 755
40 mid xl pundum Chro. D 915
50 mid L scipon Chro. F 1052
125 an hundred 7 fif 7 twenti biscofes Chro. E 675

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300 þreo hūðred rideres Brut C I p. 68
 5000 fif þousend scealdes Brut C II p.482
 10000 þe ten þusend cnihtes Brut C I p.237

2.2. We can now see the whole situation in one table. The table shows the percentage. Examples of {(Cardinal+Noun)+Noun/Adjective} are excluded.

	Cardinals (2-19)				Cardinals (20-)			
	(1)G	NG *	OF	Ambi- guous ⁽²⁾	G *	NG	OF	Ambi- guous
Charters	6%	94%	0%	0%	83%	3%	0%	4%
Orosius	0	98	0	2	89	10	0	1
Ælfric	0	100	0	0	97	1	0	2
Bede	0	98	0	2	96	3	0	1
Chro- nicles ⁽³⁾	5	91	0	4	67	20	0	13
Chro- nicle E	7	91	0	2	80	19	0	1
Brut A	1	97	1	1	0	91	5	4
Brut C	0	98	1	1	0	95	5	0

Notes (1) G means that the noun is in the genitive plural. NG means that the noun is not in the genitive.

(2) In the 'ambiguous' columns are included examples with contracted suffix and those, the case of which we cannot determine.

(3) Chronicles A, B, C, D, F & H.

The OE rule requires columns with asterisk. That is, cardinals (2-19) do not govern the noun in the genitive, and cardinals (20-) govern the noun in the genitive. As for cardinals (2-19), the OE rule is almost observed in each text. But, as for cardinals (20-), the OE rule is almost always observed from Charters to Bede. But exceptional cases become frequent in the Chronicles until we have all examples without the genitive case in Brut A and C. At the same time, we notice the

appearance of the OF-combination which is quite unknown in the OE period.

2.3. At this point, let us line up the questions we have in mind.

What is the reason, if any, why cardinals (20-) govern the genitive?

Why has the OE combination (Cardinal + Noun in G. pl.) disappeared?

At first look, it seems that the combination had originally a partitive notion, hence the partitive genitive. For example;

ðritig daga

can be interpreted as 'thirty of (all the) days'. This hypothesis instantly invites a question: why do cardinals (2-19) have no genitive? The true reason of this unique combination can be found in the original formation of the cardinals. All the decades (20-120) have the same suffix 'tig'. This suffix has the same origin as 'tigjus'. in Gothic, which is a noun (=decade). Subsequently, cardinals with '-tig' are used substantively in Old English as well as in other Germanic languages. 'Hund' and 'ðusend' are originally nouns, too. And the noun that follows must be put in the genitive plural because it modifies the cardinal. But, in the case of cardinals (13-19), the situation is different. These cardinals are formed with the suffix 'tiene', which has the same origin as 'taihun' in Gothic. This word is a numeral and not a noun. Therefore, in the combination {Cardinal (13-19) + Noun}, the noun is not put in the genitive because it is modified by the cardinal that behaves like an adjective. And cardinals (2-12) are used attributively and they modify the noun. This twofold system of cardinals is found in all Germanic languages, but not in Latin and Greek.

Now we go to the next question why the combination {Cardinal

(20-)+Noun in G.pl.) has disappeared. The combination is twofold. Let us pick up two examples to explain this twofold system.

(a) *twentig wintra*

(b) *fewer winter*

Though they look alike, their difference becomes clear when they are schematized as below:



(The slanted arrow shows the modifying relation;
the modified ← the modifier)

In type (a), the grammatical headword is the cardinal 'twentig' which is a noun. On the other hand, in type (b), the head is not the cardinal but the noun 'winter'. This grammatical difference causes the difference in the surface structure. But, when we think of the meaning, we know that the semantical headword is the noun in both examples.

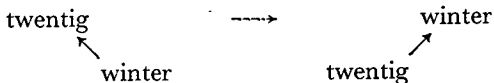
Summing up, we have the table below.

	Cardinals (2-19)	Cardinals (20-)
Grammatical headword	Noun	Cardinal
Semantical headword	Noun	Noun

The grammatical headword and the semantical one coincide in the case of cardinals (2-19), but they do not in the case of cardinals (20-). This awkward system with cardinals (20-) remains in the OE period, but it seems to have failed to survive in Early Middle English.

When a grammatical factor and a semantical factor do not coincide in a language, it can be said, generally speaking, that the grammatical factor usually gives way to the semantical. This can be applied in the present case. The shift of the headword from the cardinal to the noun has happened in the combination with cardinals (20-). That is,

type (a) is changed into a new form;



The example below shows us the process of shifting clearly.

mid sixtigum scipum Chro. D 1066

We know that the semantical headword is the noun 'scipum' from two clues. First, the noun is in the dative (not in the genitive 'scipa'). Secondly, the cardinal is put in the dative plural which means that the cardinal is used attributively.

mid xxxix scypon Chro. D 1050/ mid lx scipum Chro. C 1040/ mid feowerti scipen gode Brut A I p. 198

As we see in the examples above, the tendency to use no genitive is most apparent when the combination is in the dative (particularly in the Chronicles). In the Chronicles, among the 42 examples which have no genitive, 35 are in the dative. And in Brut C, we have many examples like

folle soue hundred selie kempes Brut C II p.427/ mid prittie cnihtes Brut C I p.145

fif hundred sipes Brut C I p.156

The OE twofold system is now changed into the one which prevails today.

3.1. When the combination (Cardinal + Noun) is governed by another word that requires the genitive case, both the cardinal and the noun are declined in the genitive. There are four cases where this happens;

- (1) Independent use (ex. *Ʒære sawle deað is Ʒreora cynna.* Ælfric p. 496)
- (2) Verb + (C + N)⁽¹⁰⁾
- (3) (C + N) + N'
- (4) (C + N) + Adjective

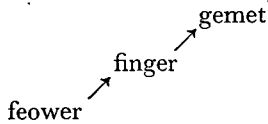
In this report we describe only the cases of 3) and 4).

3.2. (C + N) + N'

For example;

feower fingra gemet Bede 4-11

has the following structure.



Here cardinal 4 is not declined. The noun 'finger' is put in the genitive plural and becomes 'fingra'. When the cardinal is 2 or 3, it is declined as below.

twegra	gebroðra	bearn.	Bede 1-4
C	N	N	

The case, gender and number of 'twegra' coincide with those of 'gebroðra' and not with 'bearn'. But when the cardinal is more than 20, N is already in the genitive like

þritig hiwisca.

Then (C + N) modifies N' 'mynster';

mynster þritiges hiwisca Bede 5-19

(Here the order is reversed: N' + (N + C))

C 'þritig' is now in the genitive singular. But N 'hiwisca' is already in the genitive and it does not change. This is the rule to construct {(C + N) + N'} combination in OE. Actually, however, C is often left undeclined when C is more than 20.

geond twentig geara fæce Ælfric p. 294

binnan six and twentig geara fæce p. 456

þæt feowertig geara fæc p. 200

Here are two examples in which C is declined in the genitive plural.

It means that C is used like an adjective and has the same gender, case and number of N, not of N'.

Æfter ðritigra daga fæce Ælfric p.68
geond feowertigra daga fyrst p. 28

But they are exceptional, and, after all, the tendency is to drop the genitival suffix of C in Early ME.

pritti dohtrenne foder Brut A I p. 114
pritti dohterne fader C "

In (C + N) + N', we have been concerned so far with (C + N) modifying N', which is schematized as below;

(C + N) \nearrow N' Pattern (1)

But there is another possibility like

(C + N) \nwarrow N' Pattern (2)

In Brut A and C we have many examples of pattern (1);

A	C
7	seoue sulhzene lōd/ soue solwene lond II p. 364
20	twenti sulhene lond/ twente sulzene lond II p. 126
30	pritti sulzen3 lond/ pritti solwene lond II p. 370
60	sixti hidene lond/ sixti hidene lond II p. 284

This is a set-phrase to measure land in OE, and Brut A and C still keep the genitival form 'sulzen' (<sulze<sul).

On the other hand we have an interesting example of pattern (2).

fif sulung landes Chart. 28

OF-combination comes to take the place of the pattern (2) in Brut.

A	C
30	pritti solh of lond/ pritti solwene lond II p.366

pritti solh of londe/ pritti solh of londe II p.364
60 sixti hidē of londe/ (No corresponding line) II p.341

These two patterns, which convey the same meaning, exist in Brut A and C. We cannot guess at present which of the two will survive in ME.

3.3. (C + N) + Adjective

Such expressions as

I am seventeen years old.

The wall is ten feet high.

The island is fifty miles long.

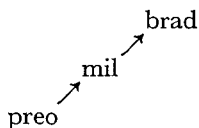
have their origins in OE. Some adjectives (brad, ald, heah, etc.) usually govern (C + N) in the genitive case.

The construction differs according to the cardinal.

When the cardinal is 2 or 3, it is declined in the genitive plural.

preora mila brad Orosius p. 18

This is schematized as below;



Other examples of this type;

twegea elna heah Orosius p.74/ twegea mila heah Orosius p.210/
preora furlunga brad Bede 1-25

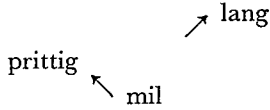
When the cardinal is (4-19), it is left undeclined.

v mila brad Orosius p. 260/ eahta nihta eald Ælfric p. 90 /x fota hea
Orosius p.246/ feowertyne nihta eald Chro. E 1110

When the cardinal is more than 20, the OE rule requires the genitive in the cardinal.

prittiges mila lang Bede 1-3

The example above can be schematized as below;



The other examples of this kind are

hundnigontiges wintra ald Bede 3-27

eahta and feowertiges elna lang Orosius p.18

fiftiges elna lange Orosius p.18

But, in the Chronicles A and E, we have interesting pairs.

A

E

pritiges mila brad/ xxx mila brad 893A 894E

hund twelftiges mila lang/ hundtwelftig mila lang 893A 894E

We can see the disappearance of the genitival suffix ‘-es’ in E. And many other examples have no genitival suffix.

xx fota ðicce Orosius p.210/ *ðritig wintra eald* Ælfric p.258/

fiftig fæðra wíd Ælfric p.20/ *sixtig mila brad* Orosius p.18/

tu hund mila brad Bede p.27/ *II hund elna heah* Orosius p.74/

ehta hund mila lang Chro. E p.3

The table below shows the frequency of the suffix ‘-es’ of the cardinals (20-) in {(C + N) + Adjective}.

	Chart.	Orosius	Ælfric	Bede	Chronicles	Chro. E	Brut A	C
G	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
NG	0	14	7	2	0	4	0	0

Now we know that, even in the OE period, the OE rule is not strictly observed. It may be said here that (C + N) is, in most cases, in the adverbial accusative. The suffix of N, usually ‘-a’, is sometimes changed to a weak form ‘-e’, as in the following examples.

x mile lang/ xx mile lang Chro. E 656_{PI(11)}

And in Brut we have no suffix in N,

fiftene 3er ald Brut A I p.14

along with the orthodox form;

fewer unchene long Brut A II p.586

four unchene lang C "

It is noteworthy that Brut C still keeps the OE form 'unchene' (= inches).

When the adjective is in the accusative, it has the suffix '-ne' in Bede.

ðone . . . eahta fota bradne/ ðone . . . twelf fota heanne Bede 1-12

Anyway, in the combination {(C+N) + Adjective}, the genitival suffixes of C and N begin to drop already in OE, and the further change is easy to guess. It might not take long to attach the plural suffix '-s' to the apparently singular N, making the well-known pattern like 'sixty years old' in Current English.

4. Summary

First we have made the OE rule that

Cardinals 2 and 3 are declined, and do not govern the noun in the genitive,
cardinals (4-19) are not declined and do not govern the noun in the genitive, and
cardinals (20-) are not declined and govern the noun in the genitive.

The rule is almost always observed in the early OE period, i.e., from Charters to Bede. But we have 20% non-genitive examples with cardinals (20-) at the end of the OE period, i.e., Chronicles A, B, D, C, F, H and Chronicle E. And we have no examples of the genitive in Early ME, i.e., Brut A and C.

The reason to use the genitive with cardinals (20-) is that the cardinals (20, 30, 40, 50 . . . 100, . . . 1000 . . .) are treated substantively in OE. But, in that case, the grammatical headword (cardinal) does not coincide with the semantical (noun), and, in the latter part of the OE period, the shift of the head from C to N becomes more frequent, which causes the disappearance of the genitive in (C + N).

When (C + N) combination modifies a noun or an adjective, it behaves differently according to the cardinal. When the cardinal is 2 or, 3, it is put in the genitive plural, and so is the noun (N). Cardinals (4-19) are not declined at all and only the noun (N) is declined in the genitive plural. With cardinals (20-), C must be put in the genitive singular, but it is frequently left undeclined.

The texts under investigation cover the period from OE to Early ME. And, in these texts, we are able to see the gradual breakdown of the two-fold system of (C + N) combination from OE to Early ME.

NOTES

- (1) Cardinals (4-19) means cardinals from 4 to 19. Cardinals (20-) means Cardinals more than 20.
- (2) Cf. Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer*, ninth edition, OUP 1953 Campbell's Grammar does not mention the syntax of the combination.
- (3) The tests used are
Henry Sweet, *The Oldest English Texts*, E.E.T.S. OS83 London, 1885 (Reprinted 1957)
Henry Sweet, *King Alfred's Orosius*, I. E.E.T.S. OS79 London, 1883
Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of The Anglo-Saxon Church*, London 1844
Thomas Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Part I 1 & 2 E.E.T.S. OS95, 96 London, 1890 (Reprinted 1959)

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Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, OUP, London 2 Vols. 1892 (Reprinted 1965)

Sir Frederic Madden, *Lazamons Brut, or Chronicle of Britain*, 3 Vols. London, 1847 (Reprinted by MAS 1970)

- (4) Exception is the partitive genitive, which is not dealt with in the present report.
- (5) Cf. p. 138 *Altsächsisches Elementarbuch*, F. Holthausen, Heidelberg 1921 p. 204 *Historical German Grammar*, W.B. Lockwood, OUP, 1968
- (6) This means Charters No. 29.
- (7) This means Bede Book I, Chapter 9.
- (8) This means Chronicle A anno 944.
- (9) They are declined only when they stand independently or when they are not immediately before the noun. Both cases are not included here.
- (10) C stands for cardinal. N stands for noun.
- (11) PI means the Peterborough Interpolation which is in the 12th century.