

vowel in the following syllable. Moreover, the subsequent history of the two vowels also points to a merger (see 6.3.1). However, an argument in favour of phonemic /ɑ/ comes from cases of <a> + nasal, as in OE *mann* ~ *monn* ‘person’, *fann* ~ *fon(n)* ‘fan, winnow’, *gram* ~ *grom* ‘hostile’ (Hogg 1992b: 86, contra Colman 1983). The <a>~<o> variable spellings suggest a shift to the back vowel area, possibly pre-nasal [ã~õ]. OE Merican and Northumbrian texts regularly represent PrG /a/ + nasal as <o> + nasal, for example *monn* ‘man’, *gongan* ‘go’, *lomb* ‘lamb’. In late West Saxon the <a> spellings are the more common, though in ME the Northern and West Midlands spelling favours <o>.



The spelling-pronunciation correspondences for the OE digraph spellings are very complex. We will get to some details of interpretation in 6.5.3; for now we list the most common digraph spellings and their reconstructed values in two rather vaguely defined ‘early’ and ‘late’ stages. As in Figure 6.3, the editorial macron indicates etymological length.

Digraph	Value		Example
	<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>	
<ēa>	æʊ	æə	<i>strēam</i> ‘stream’
<ea>	æ ^o	æ	<i>heall</i> ‘hall’
<ēo>	eʊ	eə	<i>sēon</i> ‘to see’
<eo>	ε ^o	ε	<i>ġeolu</i> ‘yellow’
<īe>	iʊ	iə, iɪ	<i>(ġe)līefan</i> ‘to believe’
<ie>	ɪ ^o	ɪ	<i>ġiefan</i> ‘to give’

Figure 6.4 OE digraph spellings and reconstructed realisations

Since our focus is on late West Saxon, omitted from Figure 6.4 is the spelling <io>, found primarily in Northumbrian and Kentish. Only three of the six realisations of digraph spellings in the third column – [æə], [eə] and [iə] – are uncontroversially considered contrastive. The phonetic values assigned to these contrastive diphthongs are different in the early and late stages of OE, and the exact phonetic interpretation of the diphthongal end points have been and can be debated. Although the matching orthographic sequences with supplied macrons and without the macrons – <ēa>-<ea>, <ēo>-<eo> and <īe>-<ie> – seem to invite a parallel interpretation of long and short diphthongs, we will see in 6.5.3 that positing such a parallel is neither necessary nor compelling.