Vowels

For Old English of the eighth-ninth centuries, we can assume for all dialects this minimal or 'core' **vowel system**:

Short Monophthongs	Diphthongs	Long Monophthongs	Diphthongs
i y u		i: y: u:	
e (ø) o	e o	e: (ø:) o:	e:o
æ ɑ	æɑ	æ: ɑ:	æ:ɑ

1. phonetic as well as phonological symmetry throughout the long and short systems: matchings like [u]/[u:], [i]/[i:] instead of the modern types [ʊ]/[u:], [ɪ]/[i:] -a feature that was to persist well into the Early Modern period;
2. only three contrastive heights, as opposed to the four that were to develop in the thirteenth century;
3. <eo> = [e(:)o] and <ea> = [æ(:)ɑ] diphthongs only of the 'height-harmonic' type, i.e. with both elements of the same height, as opposed to the earlier and later closing types like /ai au/, and the much later centring types like /iə/ *(idea)*.
4. front rounded vowels y(:) and ø (:) [note! ø (:) unrounded to e(:)]. y(:) and ø (:) were new phonemes in OE introduced after the operation of i-umlaut
5. length contrast for diphthongs (at least under traditional interpretation)
6. no reduction to /ə/ in unstressed positions

OE digraphs

OE manuscripts contain the following digraph **spellings** <ea, eo, io, ie> whose interpretation has long been the subject of much controversy in OE studies.

<ea, eo, io> represent the following OE developments:

- WGmc diphthongs *au, *eu, *iu
- sounds resulting from the operation of breaking on the front vowels *æ(:), *e(:), *i(:)
- sound resulting from the operation of back umlaut on short æ, e, i

<ie> (present in early WS) represents the following development:

- the sounds developed by the operation of i-umlaut of OE diphthongs, i.e. i-umlaut of <ea, eo, io>
  The original sound represented by <ie> must have monophthongised quite early as evidenced by spelling with <i> or <y> for earlier <ie>, hence earlier <hieran> 'hear' becomes <hiran> or <hyran>

Consonants

The late Old English consonant system was:

stops	p	t	tʃ	k	p:	t:	tʃ:	k:	
	b	d	dʒ	g	b:	d:	dʒ:	g:	
fricatives	f	θ s	ʃ	x	f:	θ: s:		x:	
nasals	m	n			m:	n:			
liquids	r l				r: l:				
glides	w		j						

phonological patterns:

1. While stops and affricates were paired for voice, the fricatives were not; /f θ s/ were in most dialects voiceless except medially in the foot (between two voiced sounds). Thus [v ð z] appeared in native words only preceded by a stressed vowel (followed by an optional liquid or nasal) and followed by an unstressed vowel; /f θ s/ were always voiceless initially, finally and in clusters.

2. geminates allowed unlike in MnE

3. /r/ occurred in all positions

4. different phonotactic patterns - /kn, gn, xn, xl, xr, xw, fn, wl, wr/ grammatical in OE

phonemic inventory:

5. Old English had neither an /h/:/x/ contrast nor a phonemic velar nasal /ŋ/ ; [h] was the word - initial allophone of/x/, and [ŋ] an allophone of /n/ before velars.

6. OE /g/ had the fricative allophone [ɣ] (voiced velar fricative) between back vowels as in *dagas* 'day (nom./acc. pl.)' /dagas/ = [daɣas]; intervocalically if preceded by a front vowel it had the allophone [j], as in *dæge* 'day (dat. sg.)' /dæge/ = [dæje].