

**\*bi** Runic:  | Pronunciation: /'bi/

preposition

## Meanings

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1. by, at (with accusative or dative)
2. near, around (with accusative or dative)

## Etymology

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From Proto-Indo-European *\*h<sub>1</sub>epí* with accent on the second syllable (compare Ancient Greek *ἐπί* (*epí*) (*epí*, ‘on, upon; at, near’)) from *\*h<sub>1</sub>épi* (‘on, at, near’), locative case of *\*h<sub>1</sub>éps*, from root *\*h<sub>1</sub>ép-* (‘grab, snatch, get’). The Proto-Germanic *-b-* reflects voicing of earlier *-p-* by Verner’s Law, which presupposes a preform with accent on the second syllable. This seems more likely than an origin from a zero-grade form, *\*h<sub>1</sub>pi*, since the phonology is simpler: 1. Accent moved to second syllable. *\*h<sub>1</sub>épi* > *\*h<sub>1</sub>epí* 2. Loss of laryngeal *\*h<sub>1</sub>epí* > *\*epí* 3. Grimm’s Law *\*epí* > *\*efí* 4. Verner’s Law *\*efí* > *\*ebí* 5. Loss of the unaccented initial syllable *\*ebí* > *\*bi*. (Ringe 2017) also notes this as the etymon for the *ib-* in Gothic *𐌴𐌸𐌳𐌹𐌶𐌰* (*ibdalja*, ‘mountainside, hillside, descent’) and *𐌴𐌹𐌺𐌰* (*ibuks*, ‘backward, back’), clearly showing the initial vowel intact, likely having remained due to its initial placement in the compounds. A further argument against the zero-grade formation is *\*fanē* (‘from’) < *\*h<sub>2</sub>pó*: even with the accent on the second syllable, it clearly shows no Verner’s Law effect in Proto-Germanic, showing that loss of initial laryngeal likely occurred before Verner’s Law could take effect.

## Descendants

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**\*bi** (Proto-West Germanic)

**bī** (Old Dutch)

**bi** (Middle Dutch)

**bij** (Dutch)

**bie** (Limburgish)

**\*bi** (Proto-West Germanic)

**bi, be** (Old English)  
**by, be, bi** (Middle English)  
**by** (English)  
**by, bye, bi', be, b'** (Scots)

\***bī** (Proto-West Germanic)

**bi, be** (Old Frisian)  
**bi** (North Frisian)  
**bie** (Saterland Frisian)  
**by** (West Frisian)

\***bī** (Proto-West Germanic)

**bī, pī** (Old High German)  
**bī** (Middle High German)  
**bii** (Alemannic German)  
**bei** (German)  
**בײַ (bay)** (Yiddish)

\***bī** (Proto-West Germanic)

**bī** (Old Saxon)  
**bî** (Middle Low German)  
**bi** (Low German)  
**bi** (Swedish)

**𐍃 (bi)** (Gothic)

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\*bistandanaṁ *verb*   \*biṣankijanaṁ *verb*   \*biwandijanaṁ *verb*   \*biwindanaṁ *verb*