

B E O W U L F

A Verse Translation with Treasures of the Ancient North

by
MARIJANE OSBORN

with an introduction by

Fred C. Robinson



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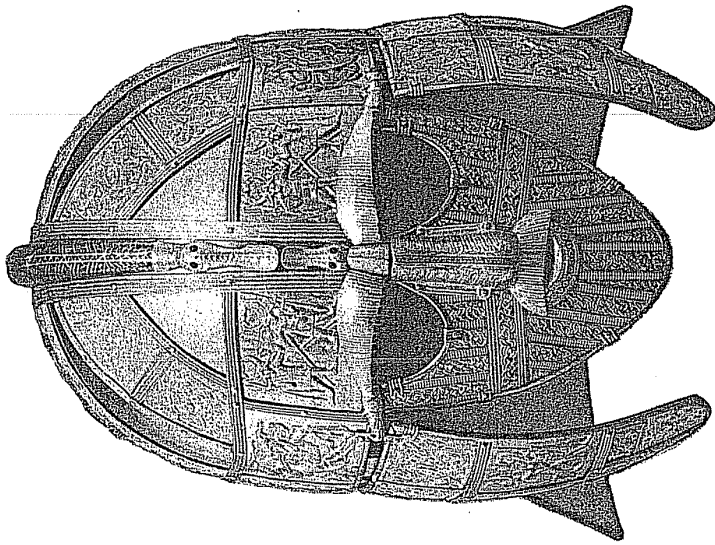
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B E O W U L F





To Dave and Desi:
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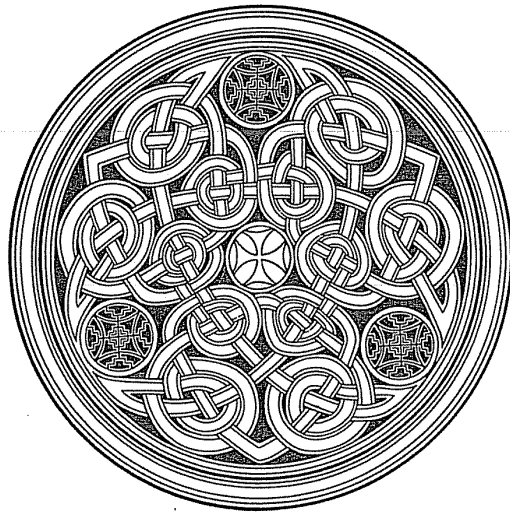


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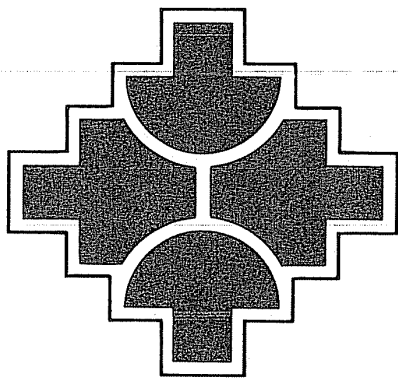
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(Museum credits for the pictures are given in the section on "Place and Date of the Artifacts.")

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Marijane Osborn
Reykjavik, 1980

An Introduction to BEOWULF



Beowulf is one of the relatively few major poems from the distant past which, upon first reading, still capture the attention of the modern reader and leave him changed when he puts the book down. Even those who have felt the narrative method to be flawed have usually responded to the poem's bracing severity, its awesome conflation of dignity and horror, and its strange, autumnal close. To an extent the poem transcends the slow revolutions in literary taste which have taken place since the eighth century: any modern reader can feel its moving power.

But readers require more from a serious poem than to be vaguely moved by it. The poet of *Beowulf* had a strategy and a purpose in moving readers, and to understand—rather than just feel—the poem the reader must have some sense of how the poet adjusted his medium to his narrative and his narrative to his purpose. At least three things are necessary for such an understanding. He must overcome the linguistic barrier of a form of English so archaic as to strike the modern reader as a foreign tongue. He must accustom his mind to a narrative method different from that of most literature read today, a narrative method which has little in common with that Classical poetic which underlies post-medieval European literatures. And finally, he must gain some insight into the thought-world of England in the Heroic Age.

The Language of BEOWULF

For readers of the present translation the barrier of language has been removed by Marijane Osborn. Wisely aware that translation is the art of taking as few losses as possible in a losing battle, Dr. Osborn tells us that

she is surrendering density of language in order to give the reader easy access to the narrative. Her decision was the right one. The story itself is translatable, and the dignity of its telling can be suggested. But the morphemic richness, the artfully congested syntax, and the odd, continually resumptive movement of the original poetry would be intolerable to modern minds accustomed to having stories developed through lucid predictions. A full and literal translation of the first sentence of the poem may help to illustrate the problem. The original Old English is as follows.

Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum,
þeodcýninga þrym gefrunon,
hū ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!

And the approximate sense in modern English is

Lo! Of Spear-Danes in yore-days
of nation-ruling scions of the family,
—concerning their surging power our
questions have been answered:
how sons of landed nobility
fulfilled their competitive zeal then.

Add to this mish-mash the constraints of the elaborate Germanic metrical form, and we are lost in a poetic language so distractingly dense and self-conscious as to be beyond modern comprehension.

For the translator one of the most difficult features of Old English poetry is the pervasive phenomenon of syntactic juxtaposition. The sentences do not move from subject to verb to object. One element of the sentence is expressed and then, in mid-sentence, the poet stops to offer an alternative statement of the same element: "of Spear-Danes, of nation-rulers, we have heard the power, have heard how they fulfilled . . ." and so on. Not only the sentences, but the very words of the poetic language are constructed upon this principle of juxtaposition. The poet does not say "spear-bearing Danes" but poses instead the simple juxtaposition "Spear-Danes," leaving it to us to discover the relationship between the two elements, a relationship which is not always as simple as it would seem at first glance: Danes skillful with spears? Danes stalwart as a spear? Danes well-provided with spears? Because this fondness for suggestive juxtaposition permeates the Old English poetic method at every level (as we shall see below), it will be well to pause here to examine a few of the poetic compounds which test the translator's skill.

In line 159 the Old English word *deað* "death" and the word *scua* "shadow" are combined to produce *deaðscua*, a word referring to the monster Grendel. The full meaning of the compound is "a shadowy, death-dealing creature" or perhaps "a death-dealing creature who dwells in the shadows." Later (l. 703) Grendel is called *scadugenga* "shadow-walker," an epithet with similar suggestiveness. In her translation Dr. Osborn is able to retain these compounds intact. But elsewhere such juxtapositions of words are too cryptic for modern English. In the Finnsburg episode the wounds on the bodies of the slain are called *bengeato* "wound-doors" (l. 1121), and Dr. Osborn translates "gashes" since no modern equivalent could encapsulate the intricate associations of the Old English word. For *bengeato* draws its significance from a complex of epithets in Beowulf and other Old English poetry which describe the human body as a house: *banhus* "house of bone," *feorhhus* "life's house," *gasthus* "house of the spirit," and *sawelhus* "house of the soul." The human body is a house of flesh and bone in which the spirit sojourns for an interval before its departure for the next world. Mortal wounds, therefore, are doors in this house through which the spirit escapes. The complex of these images develops a major subtheme in Beowulf, the theme of the sudden transience of man's life on earth. It would take an entire poem to develop the full sense of "wound-door" and "bone-house." And in "The Caged Skylark" Gerard Manley Hopkins produced such a poem after reinventing the compound "bone-house." Poems in *nuce* are precisely what these verbal juxtapositions are, and one of the translator's most difficult challenges is to resist their lure, to avoid clogging the narrative with hopeless attempts at reproducing juxtapositional effects which were natural to Old English but are alien to Modern. *Gleabam* "glee-wood" must yield to the colorless "harp," *breostwylm* "breast-whelming" to

"emotion," and *hiwdrincas* "sword-drinks" to "loss of blood through sword-wounds." Our modern polyglot English with its streamlined structures of predication and modification can never achieve the effects of a highly stylized poetic diction deeply rooted in ancient Germanic habits of verbal juxtaposition.

That modern translators should not ape the diction of Old English was demonstrated conclusively by a disastrous rendering of Beowulf undertaken by the poet William Morris near the turn of the century. A passage like lines 280-81—

gyf him edwenden æfre scolde
bealuwa bisigu bôt eft cuman—

can only be rendered in something like the way Dr. Osborn has done it:

—if change from this evil affliction
can ever grant him relief again—

The unwitting hilarity of Morris's

the business of bales, and the boot come again

(which seems to suggest wholesaling footwear rather than relieving affliction) is fatal to any passage, and such examples are common on nearly every page of his poem. And yet, one sympathizes with his effort to suggest those qualities of the poetry that are lost to the person who reads Beowulf in translation. A better way to achieve this end might be to indicate an approximate analogue of the Old English poetic method in a modern poem which succeeds (at least stylistically), and to urge the reader to keep that analogue in mind as he reads the smoothly paced rendering of Dr. Osborn. The closest one can come to the ancient forms in modern English verse, I believe, is the opening stanza of Hopkins' "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou has bound bones and veins in me,
fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,

Thy doing; and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

The startling images, the juxtapositional syntax, and the exuberant verbal power of this stanza suggest something of the manner of the Old English longline at work. As a vehicle for a three-thousand line narrative this kind of verse would never do for a modern English reader. But for the Anglo-Saxon hearing *Beowulf* it worked splendidly, and the students of this translation should try to imagine for themselves something of the Anglo-Saxon's experience as they encounter the ancient story in its newest modern dress.

The Narrative Method in BEOWULF

A tactful translation can help the reader over linguistic and stylistic barriers, but it can do little to condition his mind to unfamiliar narrative devices. Without some preliminary attention to these the reader may mistake an unaccustomed literary strategy for a literary defect and may look in the wrong direction for poetic achievement. Following are some of the more prominent differences between ancient and modern narrative methods.

The poet's opening statement that "we have heard of the glory of the great folk-leaders, how those athelings did arduous deeds" should not be dismissed as merely a convention for getting the poem underway. The poet means what he says. His audience has already heard the tales he is about to tell. They know the figures of Germanic legend and what they did. This fact liberates the poet from any obligation to tell his story in exhaustive detail with who, what, when, where, and how spelled out at every point in chronological order. It enables him to be allusive, to give hints and gists of episodes outside his main plot line. Indeed, from this point until the end of the narrative the story of Beowulf unfolds amid rumors of heroism and tragedy from the Germanic Heroic Age. Sigmund the dragon slayer is mentioned briefly as the subject of the minstrel's song in honor of Beowulf's defeat of Grendel. The most renowned of all Germanic heroes, Sigmund is the subject of Scandinavian legends, and his story emerges again in the later Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*. The *Beowulf* poet expects us to recognize him and to see the aptness of the comparison of Sigmund with the victorious Beowulf. He also expects us to sense the tragic overtones in the minstrel's joyous reference to Sigmund's triumph over the dragon: Beowulf too shall slay a dragon, but unlike Sigmund he shall then die of the wounds the dragon inflicts upon him. Such foreshadowing is possible when the audience shares the poet's knowledge of his characters' fates. Later we hear of Hengest and Hnæf, two precursory defenders of the Danes, and we are reminded of the fabled King Offa, one

of several kings in the poem whose characterization provides us with a common model against which to measure the stature of Beowulf when he becomes king. Beowulf is contrasted with Heremod, a notorious tyrant who serves as a foil to the noble hero, just as the shadowy lady named Thryth serves as a foil to the good Queen Hygd. To the modern reader these allusions to names and events which are then dropped rather than developed can seem distracting or enigmatic. But in fact they are precisely in keeping with the stated terms of the poet's narrative. They provide his central characters with a context in a reverently remembered past, and that past lends poignant meaning to each contrast that the allusions offer.

Even those episodes that are presented in full rather than allusively may strike the modern reader as somewhat lacking in visual realization. We have come to expect in long narrative poems a wealth of description—the graphic details that Homer lavishes on his characters and their settings, the careful setting-of-the-scene in *Roland*, or the plethoric word-pictures in medieval romance. Of this there is little in *Beowulf*. We are never told what Beowulf or Hygelac or Grendel look like. The "high hall" Heorot is alluded to again and again but never really described. Scholars argue inconclusively over the topography of the poem, so vaguely does the poet suggest it. Instead of description the poet tells us the *effects* people and things have on those who encounter them. Beowulf is a man so impressive that a wary shore-guard is overawed by his appearance. Heorot attracts men from distant regions and casts its light over many lands. The haunted mere (which, in an exceptional set-piece, is described somewhat) is so frightening that the stag at bay yields up his life to the hunting dogs rather than take refuge there. Hrothgar seems moved to an impassioned exhortation by the ornamented sword-hilt he holds in his hand. (How different is the poet's brief account of the rune-carved sword-hilt from Homer's leisurely depiction of Achilles' shield!)

Almost systematically the poet ignores the superficialities of things to dwell instead on their profound effects on those around them, and in doing so he reveals a set of mind characteristic of the Germanic culture he is portraying. In the dark time before Christianity arrived, the main positive good Germanic men found in life was the artifact of a life well lived—and the fame that follows such a life. A man or a thing enters memorial afterlife not because of appearances but because of effects. A man is remembered because he made friends love him and enemies fear him, a royal hall because it drew men from far around and touched their lives. In a culture where appearances pass away utterly while deeds are remembered, why should Beowulf's beard or Grendel's girth be measured? Anyone who reads the noble death speech of Beowulf and then complains that the location of his wounds and the expression on his face were insufficiently particularized has not yet understood the world-view of the Germanic Heroic Age.

The poet's proclivity for selective presentation and his emphasis on effects more than appearances lead to another unusual aspect of his poem—its narrative structure. A modern reader might feel that *Beowulf* has (as Johnson complained of *Samson Agonistes*) a beginning and an end but no middle. The first long section of the poem presents the youthful hero entering upon his first great exploit, the slaying of the Grendel kin. Then, at line 2,200, in no more than ten lines of verse the poet says, in effect, "and then fifty years passed," and we are suddenly plunged into the last day of the hero's life. The poet does tell us many of the hero's triumphant achievements during the intervening period, but these are all woven piecemeal into the many reminiscences and recollections that crowd upon Beowulf's memory as he marches toward his fatal encounter with the dragon. Structurally what the poet has done is to collapse end against beginning. Instead of allowing us to see his *Heldenleben* as a procession of events he forces us to view Beowulf's career as a stark juxtaposition of dawn and twilight, of hero's arrival and hero's departure. One effect of this narrative strategy is to direct our attention toward origins and destiny and to make us wonder whence the hero comes and whither he goes. That this is one intention of the poet is strongly suggested by the fact that we are introduced to this same structural pattern *in parvo* at the very beginning of *Beowulf*. The Prologue concerning Shield Shefing tells us how a troubled nation saw a young hero emerge from the unknown, grow to manhood and secure his subjects and then, full of years, depart across the waters toward an obscure destiny. The Prologue closes with the assertion that no one could say what his fate would be. The structure of *Beowulf* as a whole is in a way a restatement of that question, and the poem itself is a response—as the final section of this Introduction will seek to suggest.

Other explanations have been offered for the two-part structure of the poem, and no doubt there is some validity in them. Juxtaposing the hero's youth with the hero's age provides the poet with many opportunities for suggesting the pathos of human life, and the poet makes use of those opportunities with delicacy and restraint. The aged Hrothgar in the first part of the poem is a sad presage of what Beowulf will become; the youthful Wiglaf at the end is a poignant reminder of what Beowulf has been. The poet emphasizes these contrasts by shifting the epic formulas he had earlier attached to old Hrothgar to the aged Beowulf at the end and by shifting the formulas he had applied to the youthful Beowulf at the beginning to the youthful Wiglaf at the end. The result, of course, is to contrast as well as compare these figures: young Beowulf is greater than young Wiglaf, old Beowulf greater than old Hrothgar. Another effect of the two-part structure is to keep the essential moments in the hero's life before the reader's attention and to subordinate the less crucial events. And the essential moments are the moments of testing, the moments of ultimate stress. The

youthful hero proving himself in his first great battle; the aged hero facing certain death—these are the moments that interest the poet. Anglo-Saxon poets are concerned to study man *in extremis* (compare the elegiac monologue *The Wanderer* or the great battle-poem *Maldon*), just as their Germanic cousins on the Continent were. How do good men comport themselves at the critical moment? This had always been a favorite theme. And no doubt there are other literary interests served by the poet's choice of a two-part structure over the more familiar (to modern readers) "beginning, middle, end." The latter is an Aristotelian, not a Germanic formulation, and, as Samuel Daniel has well said, "All our understandings are not to be built by the square of Greece and Italy." A close examination of Germanic "monuments of truth," adds Daniel, "argues well their worth and proves them not without judgment, though without Greek or Latin" (*Defense of Rhyme*).

In "The Language of *Beowulf*" (above) it was noticed that the root principle of Old English word-formation and syntax in the poetry was juxtaposition, and in the immediately foregoing paragraphs juxtaposition was seen to be the basic structural principle at the highest level of aesthetic organization in the poem. The conclusion seems inescapable that *significant juxtaposition* is a device that readers must watch for in reading Anglo-Saxon poetry. I believe this is true to a much greater degree than is usually recognized. Just as the poet constantly combined two independent words with independent meanings and then expected his audience to ponder their relationship and appreciate the *tertium quid* that emerges from their juxtaposition, so also he placed one episode alongside the other or one scene in juxtaposition to another and expected us to divine their mutual relationship. Perhaps the best advice one can give to a reader who has come to *Beowulf* for the first time is to urge a constant alertness to the significance of juxtapositions within the poem.

One striking example of significant juxtaposition in *Beowulf* is the most famous single passage in the poem—Hrothgar's account of the ghastly mere where Grendel's mother dwells. The ogress has just slain Hrothgar's favorite retainer in talion for Beowulf's killing of Grendel, and the old King hopes that the hero might be willing to undertake the forbidding challenge of tracking her to her lair and doing battle with her there. The account of the deadly tarn where she lives, with its almost unique use of descriptive detail, is usually cited as a "purple passage" in the poem:

In a secret land
they dwell, among wild fells, wolf-slopes,
windy headlands where a waterfall
hurries down through the mist into darkness
under the fells. Not far away

in miles lies hidden that lonely mere
 overhung by trees covered in hoar-frost,
 a deep-rooted wood that shadows the water.
 They say every night there appears a strange
 fire on the lake!—And no man lives
 so wise as to know that water's depth.
 Though the stag of the heath, pressed hard by
 hounds,
 should make for the forest with his mighty
 antlers,
 put to flight from afar, he will forfeit his life
 on the shore rather than swim in that lake
 to protect his head. Not a happy place!
 There the wind stirs up sudden storms
 where clashing waves ascend to the clouds
 and the sky presses down, dark and smothering,
 weeping from above.

Every reader of *Beowulf* has admired this scenic tour de force, but rarely does anyone ask why it is there. (E. B. Irving, in his sensitive *Reading of Beowulf*, pp. 76ff. does ask, and his comments merit close study.) That the King should tell Beowulf where the Grendel kin live is quite natural, but why should the poet be at pains to heighten the poetry so, making this passage so unforgettably evocative of the horrors that lie beyond Heorot? Thinking in terms of characterization, we might conjecture that the passage is there as a reflection of the king's desperation. His imagination has been captured by the horrors that face him, and in describing a landscape so sad and menacing that it seems to have a soul Hrothgar is in fact displaying the desolate landscape of his own mind. Although plausible, perhaps, this explanation does not seem wholly adequate to the occasion. It is more to the point, I believe, to notice that the speech of Hrothgar is one element in a collocation of two passages that form a dynamic juxtaposition. For immediately following the description of the tarn appears Beowulf's clearest enunciation of the heroic code of the North:

Grieve not, wise ruler! A man should rather
 avenge his friend's murder than mourn him too much.
 Death comes to all. Let him who is able
 achieve in the world what he wants for himself
 of fame and glory before he must die—
 for the atheling, that is afterwards best!
 Arise, great king, &c.

And the response to Beowulf's stirring speech is dramatic:

The gray-haired king leapt up, thanking God,
 the mighty Sky-Lord, for what that man said.
 Then a horse was bridled for Hrothgar,
 a stallion with braided mane. In splendor
 the king rode, &c.

What we have witnessed is a valiant young warrior regenerating a despondent king and his grieving nation with an affirmation of the heroic view of life. But the glory of the passage is the juxtaposition of Beowulf's words with the graphic horrors against which he is asserting his code. For the Anglo-Saxon audience, the real purple passage is Beowulf's vigorous articulation of the heroic principle. Or, better stated, the supreme moment in this scene is the point of juncture between the two speeches—that ignition point that releases the power and meaning of what is perhaps the most important single statement by Beowulf in the poem.

Another significant juxtaposition occurs early in the poem. Lines 64 to 81 describe the happy flowering of Hrothgar's reign. Men work in harmony to build the fair hall Heorot, and in harmony they occupy it, with king and court observing their mutual vows of love and loyalty. But harmony prevails only so long as men can repress the hatred, disloyalty, and violence to which human nature is prone. The dark impulses are introduced with startling suddenness in lines 82-85, and what follows immediately—almost as if triggered by the human violence just mentioned—is the introduction of Grendel. There is a suggestion that the evil spirit without is brought to life by the evil within. And we may even see in the juxtaposition a hint of the old truth that while men always imagine that the greatest threat to their security is the enemy attacking from without, in truth they are more threatened from within. And the narrative at large makes clear what the juxtaposition suggests: Grendel with all his horror made a nightmare of Heorot, yet he could not finally destroy it, thanks to the help of Beowulf. But Heorot *was* violently destroyed by a force against which Beowulf was powerless to defend it—the hatreds which lurked within the hearts of the Danes themselves.

Finally, consider the close of the Finnsburg lay (lines 1159ff.). After Beowulf's successful avenging of the Danes against Grendel, the royal minstrel sings of an earlier occasion when the Danes avenged themselves against an enemy—Hengest's destruction of Finn and return of Finn's widowed queen to her ancestral home in Denmark. The minstrel's account is joyous, but oddly the poet of *Beowulf* gives a melancholy emphasis to the story, repeatedly focusing our attention on the sorrows of the queen, who

lost brother, son, husband, and her entire world in the violent encounter. Why this odd emphasis? The answer seems to lie in a juxtaposition artfully arranged at the close of the episode: "The lay was sung," says the poet, and almost immediately thereafter, "Then Wealhtheow came forth." The poet is calling our attention to an analogy between the two queens: like Hildeburh, Wealhtheow shall witness internecine warfare culminating in the burning of the royal hall Heorot. It appears from analogues outside the poem that the Danes were victorious in this warfare, as in the Finnsburg battle, but we are reminded by the poet's juxtaposition that victories do not end sorrows. The ill-starred Wealhtheow knows that the defeat of Grendel still leaves Heorot vulnerable to the envy and hatred in the hearts of men around her and seems almost to read the meaning of the poet's juxtaposing her entrance with the close of the Finnsburg lay, for she hastens to seek protection from the trouble she fears will arise from her ungrateful nephew. But her efforts will be unavailing. Dynastic struggles of tragic dimension lie ahead, and she, like Hildeburh, shall lose her dearest kin in the dispute. Here as elsewhere in the poem a simple juxtaposition of passages conveys presentiments of disaster which reverberate throughout the remainder of the narrative.

The Thought-World of the BEOWULF Poet

Beowulf is about many things, and the intellectual concerns that the poet shared with his milieu were no doubt numerous, complex, and beyond total recall. But it may be useful here to act out some of the more easily recognizable concerns of his culture, especially those which seem to have a bearing on his poem.

Many of these points of agreement between the poem and its cultural setting will be obvious. That a Christian poet writing only a century after his nation was converted from paganism should express pious views such as those in lines 180-88 will be a surprise to no one. That a poem describing the warrior class in the Heroic Age preceding that conversion should have little to say about the farmers and craftsmen upon whom any society depends will also seem normal to anyone who has ever read an epic or romance. But other attitudes in the poem can be understood only if we pause to consider the difference between our modern thought-world and that of the *Beowulf* poet. Consider the respective roles of nature on the one hand and man's artifice on the other. Anyone living after Rousseau and the English Romantic poets will be familiar with the view that man is born with a natural inclination toward wholesome conduct but that he is often corrupted by the artificial forms with which society surrounds him, such as

inhibitions, social customs, and city life. To restore the soul we must return to Nature, for

One impulse from a vernal wood
Can teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

No attitude could have been more alien to the pagan Germanic society depicted in *Beowulf* or to the early Christian society in which the *Beowulf* poet lived. Men in that day found no more comfort in nature per se than a thoughtful modern man finds in typhoons, black holes, or atomic fission today. Nature seemed anarchic, inimical, and life was endurable only in so far as man had imposed rational order upon it. The vernal woods were menacing, beset with fens and wolf-slopes, fires and storms, and uncontrollable, monstrous life. Against this aimless, teeming world man poses his rational craft. He strikes roads through the wilderness and dispells the natural darkness with lighted mead-halls. His ships conquer the turbulent wave and his ringmail and weapons keep sea-monsters at bay. Readers of *Beowulf* must be conscious of this attitude when they see throughout the poem the many references to cunningly made armor, artfully curved ships, damascened swords, and well-wrought buildings. Each artifact is a celebration of man's triumph over the hostile wilderness that surrounds the islands of order such as Heorot. The many artifacts pictured at intervals throughout the ensuing translation were not merely utilitarian objects: they were reassuring signs that man's rational order can be made to prevail over a formless and malignant nature. Perhaps the best visual emblem of this mind-set is the highly characteristic ornamental letter W from the Lindisfarne Gospels reproduced on p. 1 (in reality an inverted M). Such zoomorphic capitals appear at first glance to be abstract geometric designs—mere exercises in symmetry and balance. Closer inspection reveals that these designs are in fact highly stylized representations of beasts, birds, or fantastic monsters. For the Anglo-Saxon, the special pleasure in these designs was in seeing the bestial elements in nature constrained into meaningful symmetry. Out of two beasts the artist creates an ordered pattern; the pattern expresses a letter which is in turn a part of a word expressing human thought. For the *Beowulf* poet and his contemporaries this was the ideal relationship between man and nature.

Nor is the *Beowulf* poet's delight in rationalizing nature limited to external nature. Human nature, when it escapes man's control, is perhaps the most dangerous force of all, as some of the preceding discussion has suggested. We find much in *Beowulf*, therefore, about the forms and customs

by which men ordered their lives. Greetings, speeches, preparations for battle are performed almost ritually. The herald who takes Beowulf's message to King Hrothgar does so standing "before his shoulder, according to the noble custom." All this is not mere *mise en scène*; it expresses a major theme in the poem, reminding us that men must ever strive for control, not yield to impulse. The same is true of the mead-serving ceremony and the formalities of seating guests and taking food. We never hear of feasts without ceremony—except when Grendel falls to his gruesome repast, or when the evil Heremod explodes with anger and slays his table companions. To the *Beowulf* poet such conduct as this is not human. It is natural.

The characters in *Beowulf* and the poet himself do not shrink from moral judgments. A man who slays his own kin is treacherous, not (as such a man might be judged today) in need of psychological counseling. A man who deserts his comrades in battle is a coward, not a respectable dissenter marching to a different drummer. A ruler who usurps the wealth that is owed to his followers is condemned and expelled; he is not, like some modern embezzlers, excused on the grounds that he was working under an emotional strain. A king whom old age has crippled may be excused as blameless even though he can no longer protect his people; but otherwise one is held responsible for his actions. Some modern critics have resisted this stern strain in the Anglo-Saxon outlook. They believe Beowulf's heroic stature is qualified by the poet, and the monsters, though evil, have something to be said in their defense. Such views smack of the modern world, not of the world of *Beowulf*.

And yet, moral judgments in the poem are not merely simplistic. In a sense, the entire narrative is a subtle questioning of the prevailing (eighth-century) moral judgment of the Heroic Age. But to understand this we must examine one further aspect of the thought-world of *Beowulf*, the confrontation of Christian and pagan beliefs in Dark Age England.

The standard Christian authorities in the time of the *Beowulf* poet left no room for uncertainty in assessing the confrontation of Christian and pagan: Christianity was the Truth and paganism was a treacherous network of lies and deceptions fabricated by the Devil. Any devout Christian, including the *Beowulf* poet, would presumably have accepted this view without question. A logical corollary to this view which Christians would also have been expected to accept, is the dictum expressed most clearly by St. Cyprian: "There is no salvation outside the Church." Most Anglo-Saxons who wrote on this subject espoused Cyprian's view without difficulty, but for some the implications were troubling. For to accept this view meant that one was willing to see one's ancestors consigned to eternal damnation. To kings who traced their lineage back to Woden and aristocrats who took pride in the works and wisdom of their Continental forebears, the consequences of accepting the Christian view could involve some pain. Many,

no doubt, tried not to dwell on the past, turning their minds instead toward the Christian present and future.

And yet it is precisely this condemned ancestry of the English to which the *Beowulf* poet has devoted his poem. Though himself a Christian, and probably the son and grandson of Christians, he does not write of the Christian heroes celebrated by many of his fellow poets but turns his gaze back to the Continent in the fifth and sixth centuries, back to his ancestors in the dark and hopeless past. He knows of their desperate situation in the Christian scheme of things, for he refers to the heathen practices of his characters (lines 175ff.):

At times they vowed in idol-tents
to sacrifice, &c.

and to the consequences of their heathenism:

Woe be to him
who because of strife must shove his soul
to the heart of the fire! He cannot hope
for help or change, ever.

But having acknowledged that his heroes lived in the days of heathen ignorance and having recognized the consequences of their beighted condition, he proceeds to tell their story with the deepest respect, admiring their generosity, praising their dignity, and exalting their prowess, right up to the moment that Beowulf departs this life.

Such treatment of his subject by the *Beowulf* poet was in a way daring, for churchmen in his day (and before) were emphatic in their declarations that pagan ancestors should not only be consigned to damnation but that they should also be forgotten. In his letter to the monks of Lindisfarne the eighth-century cleric Alcuin states the matter clearly when he exhorts the brothers to stop listening to stories of pagan heroes like Ingeld:

Let the words of God be read at the meal of the clergy. There it is fitting to hear the lector, not a harp-player; the sermons of the Fathers, not songs of heathens. For what has Ingeld to do with Christ? Narrow is the house; it cannot hold both. The King of Heaven will have nothing to do with so-called kings who are heathen and damned. For the One King rules eternally in Heaven, while the heathen is damned and howls in hell.

Is it impermissible, then, even to acknowledge that heathens were capable

of good acts? Tertullian had an answer: "The virtues of the heathen, being devoid of grace, can only be looked upon as splendid vices" (*De Carne Christi*).

Not every voice concurred in this harsh judgment. Anglo-Saxon missionaries on the Continent in the eighth century reported to their countrymen that the conduct of Germanic heathens was sometimes admirable, even though they were deprived of Christian revelation. In the neighboring Celtic regions Christian thinkers wondered whether truly virtuous men might not find salvation outside the Church if they intuitively sensed God's precepts and followed them. But these were minority voices, and the poet of *Beowulf* does not invoke their doctrines, if he knew them. Rather, through literary strategies he seeks to make a place for the noble ancestors in the memory of his nation. On the one hand he is forthright in acknowledging that Beowulf and his contemporaries were pagans. The speech Beowulf makes to Hrothgar following the description of Grendel's mere is from the pagan Germanic world and could never be reconciled to Christianity. The omens the Geats seek to read by casting lots (lines 204-5), the totemic animals that protect their armor, and the allusions to Weland and Wyrd are all elements of pagan Germanic culture. And at his death Beowulf is cremated (an abomination to eighth-century Christians) and the tumultus reared over his remains seems almost a heroön, so reverent are the praises that his comrades chant to his memory.

And yet, along with these pagan details in Beowulf's characterization, the poet has in other respects portrayed his hero as a man of such virtue as to suggest, at times, the example of Christ Himself. Beowulf's entire career is one of self-sacrifice, as he repeatedly risks (and ultimately gives) his life for the salvation and protection of his people. While not a Christian, Beowulf is nonetheless deeply religious, for although he never refers to Christ or to anything pertaining to the Church, he does refer often to an all-powerful Higher Being which rules the world and men's actions. He thanks this Being for his triumphs, he ascribes his strength to Him, and near the end of the poem he worries over the possibility of his having offended this Higher Being in some way of which he is unaware. He attains to virtue by adhering to the tenets of the old Germanic code, but he does so with such piety that he seems to approach the Christian ideal. His kindness is revealed when he refuses to accept the throne which Hygd offers him, preferring out of Germanic loyalty and love to help a young, weaker man to rule. At his death, Beowulf never condemns the cowardly retainers who deserted him in his hour of need; his thoughts are always and exclusively on the survival of his people. In their conception of nature (as was discussed above) and in many other things the pagan and the Christian views converged, and the poet emphasizes these points of convergence.

The poet's most imaginative device for portraying the pagan Beowulf as

deserving of an honorable place in the Christian thought-world is in his conception of evil in the poem. It is in the monsters, as J. R. R. Tolkien has pointed out, that we find an objective realization of all that is evil in heroic life and, at the same time, the center of evil in the Christian view. The accommodation of the two is clearest in the poet's tracing of the genealogy of Grendel in lines 105-14 (and again in lines 1261ff.). He tells us that Grendel is the descendant of Cain, thus giving him Judaeo-Christian ancestry. But the line of descent includes giants and elves and walking dead—creatures that have no place in Biblical lore but rather are from the demology of the pagan Germanic peoples. These creatures, according to Northern mythology, were the enemies of gods and men, the forces of chaos and brute violence seeking always to undo the order that good men and good gods have brought to the world. Grendel and his mother (and later the dragon) are embodiments of the evil force as it was conceived by Christians and, simultaneously, of the evil side of the Germanic heroic life.

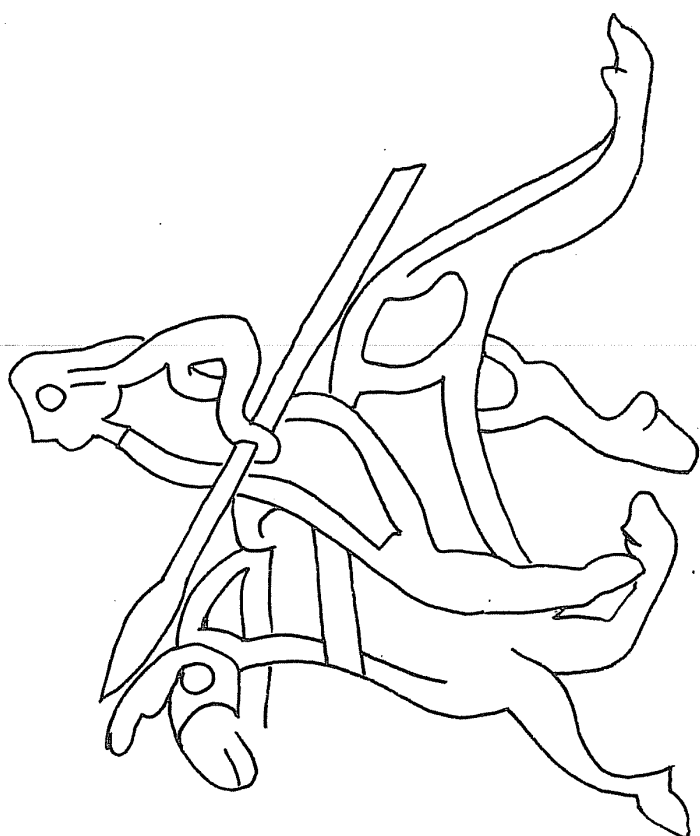
By pitting the hero Beowulf against the monsters thus defined, the poet has his hero join forces, unwittingly, with the Christian Anglo-Saxons of later years. This enables Christian Anglo-Saxons to identify positively with their pagan forefathers and thus retain pride of ancestry despite the theological gulf that divides them: Beowulf, though ignorant of Christian revelation, is nonetheless fighting against the same enemy that Christians of the poet's own day are fighting. While we can understand the Good only through Revelation and conversion, Evil is always the same. Cruelty and violence, whether manifested in Heremod or Cain, in the dragon of the Apocalypse or the dragon of Germanic mythology, are peculiar to no creed or culture. With this sad truth the poet of *Beowulf* was able to establish a place for the noble pagan in the collective memory of Christian Anglo-Saxons.

The *Beowulf* poet is not the first to build with poetry a place for his nation's past, but he has done it in a manner that is uniquely moving. There is an air of mystery and pathos in *Beowulf* that readers rarely forget. In part this is because the question of Beowulf's destiny beyond life is never clearly resolved. "His soul went forth," the poet says, "to seek the judgment of the just." The vagueness is deliberate, for the stern voices of early Christian dogma cannot be imagined away. Perhaps we must regard all the virtues of Beowulf as nothing more than "splendid vices"; perhaps the only just judgment for him after his pagan funeral is damnation. No word in the poem denies this. But the poet's tone—a tone of unqualified admiration for the hero maintained throughout three thousand lines of poetry—protests against such a judgment. We are thus left at the end of *Beowulf* with a delicately poised contradiction and a sad uncertainty. It is an uncertainty which for many centuries has darkened men's broodings over life and afterlife.

A modern example of such brooding provides an illuminating analogue to the conflicting feelings with which the poet closes *Beowulf*. The twentieth-century Spanish thinker Miguel de Unamuno engaged the subject of life after death in a moving philosophical meditation called "Del sentimiento trágico de la vida" ("On the Tragic Sense of Life"). After several agonized chapters on man's need for a belief in personal immortality, Unamuno finally acknowledges that there may after all be no afterlife, and hence no meaning in human existence. This terrible realization urges the author to the finest sentence in this book: "Y si es la nada lo que nos está

reservado, hagamos que sea una injusticia esto!" ("And if it is oblivion that is reserved for us at the end of this life, then let us act in such a way that this will have been an injustice!") The devout Christian who composed *Beowulf* could never have uttered directly such a desperate sentiment as this, but through the indirections of poetry he has suggested something very like it. For the tone and emphasis of his poem seem to tell us no less forcefully than Unamuno could have done that if it is oblivion that is reserved for such heroes as Beowulf, then these men lived their lives in such a way that this will have been an injustice.

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HAT

of the Spear-Danes in days of yore?
We have heard of the glory of the great folk-leaders,
how those athelings* did arduous deeds!

Often Shield Shefing shattered the courage
of troops of marauders by taking their mead-seats.
He terrified those nobles—long after the time
he appeared as a foundling. Comfort for that fate
came when he grew and prospered in glory
until those who lived in the neighboring lands
over the whale's road had to obey him,
yield him tribute. Yes—a good king!

Later a boy was born to Shield,
a young lad in his house, the hope of the Danes,
whom God had sent them, perceiving their need,
how they had suffered with no king to sustain them
for far too long. The Lord of Life,
the Wielder of Glory, gave worldly honor
to Shield's son among the South-Danes.
Beowulf** was famous—his glory spread far.

Thus a young warrior should strive to be worthy:
giving freely, while still in his father's care.

In later days, then, friends will leap
to stand beside him when strife comes—
companions will serve him. By praiseworthy deeds
a man shall prosper among people everywhere.

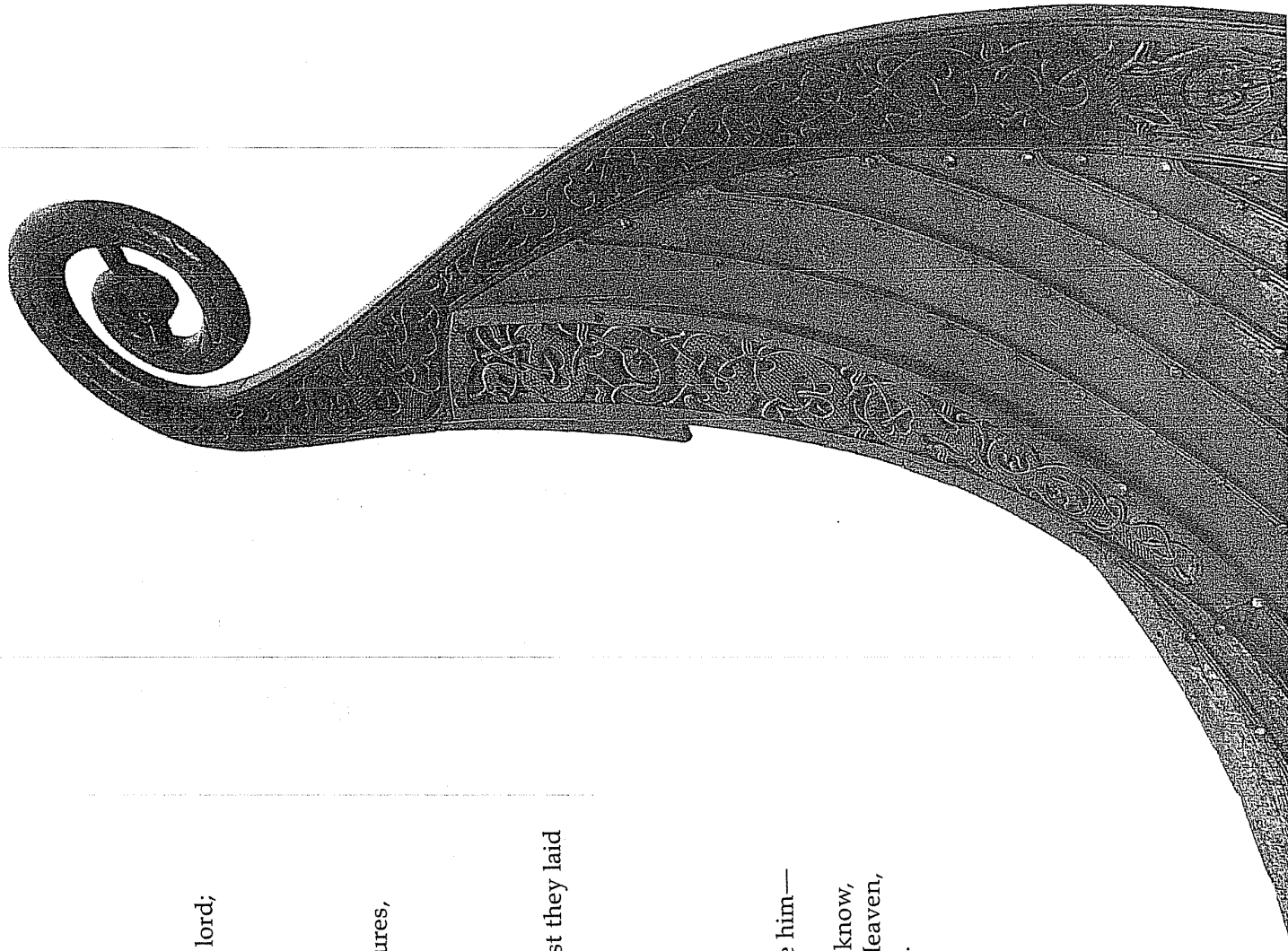
* *athelings*: noblemen

**Not the hero of the poem, who is introduced at line 194.

Shield, when old and his hour had come,
 turned away into the Lord's protection.
 His loving companions carried him out
 to the ocean's edge as he had ordered
 when still he could speak as the Shielding's lord;
 long had that dear prince ruled in the land.
 Shining in the harbor, a ring-prowed ship
 stood icy and eager, the atheling's vessel.
 There they laid their beloved lord,
 their giver of rings, that glorious man,
 on the deck by the mast among many treasures,
 fine things from foreign lands.

Never was ship more nobly adorned
 with battle weapons and garments of war,
 with blades and with byrnies! * On his breast they laid
 many a gift that would go with him
 in his far wanderings over the waves.
 They girded him round with ancient gold
 more generously on that final journey
 than those folk did who set him adrift
 alone on chill seas when only a child.
 At the last they set up a golden standard
 high over his head, then let the waves have him—
 gave him to the sea. Their hearts were sad
 and mournful their minds, for men cannot know,
 neither hall-councillors nor heroes under Heaven,
 how to say what hands received that cargo.

* byrnies: mail coats



Then in the strongholds the son of Shield,
Beowulf the Dane, grew dear to his people
as a famous king when his father, in dying,
had gone from the land. Late in life
he sired Hlafðane, who held the proud Shieldings
until gray with age, a grim old warrior.
Four sons and daughters he fathered all told,
and brought them up to be great rulers:
Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good,
and an excellent daughter, who was Onla's queen,
beloved wife of the Swedish war-king.

55

60

Then Hrothgar was granted glory in battle,
success in the field, which ensured that his friends
obeyed him eagerly, until that band grew
to a mighty troop. It came to his mind then
that he would command that a huge mead building
be made for his warriors, a mighty hall
which the sons of men should hear of forever.
And he would apportion out to his people
all that God had given him,
except for shared lands and the lives of men.

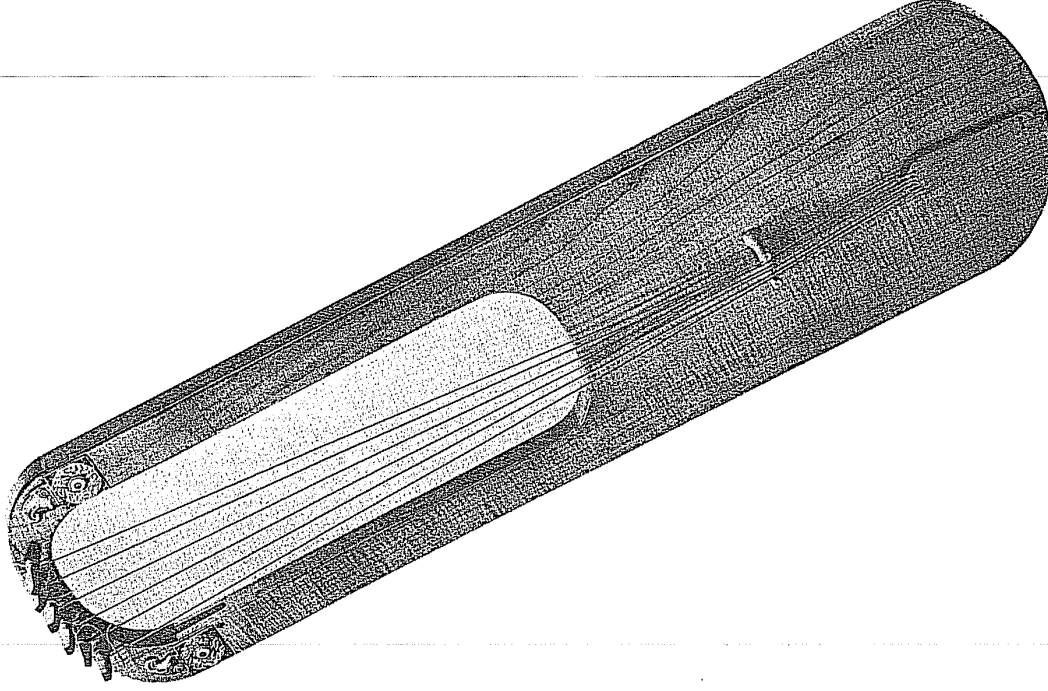
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75 I have heard that then through the whole world
craftsmen of many kinds were ordered
to make that place fair. In due course it befell
that Hrothgar's pride and joy was completed,
the greatest of halls. He named it Heorot—
his word was law throughout the land.
80 He kept his vow and gave rings of value
as banquet treasures. The building towered
high and wide-gabled—awaiting the hostile
leap of flames. But it was a long time yet
before the sword-hatred of a son-in-law
85 should wake to avenge a wicked slaughter.

In these days a spirit who dwelt in darkness
was growing more agonized in his anger
each time that he heard the joy in the hall
ring out anew. The round-harp hummed,
90 the clear song of the *shope*. * He sang who knew well
about the ancient beginnings of men.
He said the Almighty made the world,
the shining plain encircled by water,
exulting set out the sun and moon
95 as lamps to give light to land dwellers,
and fairly adorned the fields of earth
with limbs and leaves. Then he made life
for every kind of creature that moves.
And so the lordly ones lived in delight
100 and happy ease, until One began
to perform evil deeds, a fiend from Hell—
that grim spirit was called Grendel!
Huge walker on borders, he held the moors,
the murky retreat of a monster-race.

* *shope*: minstrel, bard.





Long he lived mournful in demon's lair
after the Creator had cast out Cain
and all his kindred for the killing of Abel—
the Lord everlasting avenged that blow!
No joy had Cain in that jealous feud
when the Maker had driven him far from mankind.
From his loins were born the uncanny beings,
giants and orcs and evil elves,
and also the titans who long contended
against God. He gave them their due!

2. The Coming of Grendel

The fall of night brought Grendel forth
to see how the Danes, with their drinking done,
had gone to rest in that gabled hall.
He found there, sleeping after the feast,
a band of warriors, quite unaware
of the woes of men—so the vengeful monster,
grim in his wrath, was ready at once
to rage upon them! From rest he plucked
thirty thanes, and, thrilled with his plunder,
darted away to his own den,
making for home with a sackful of murder.

When dawn came, the light of day
revealed Grendel's skill at slaughter;
and then festivity turned to woe—
sad songs in the morning. Mighty Hrothgar,
that famous ruler, wrapped in anguish,
wept at the death of his warrior-thanes.
Others found the monster's footprints,
a signature that foretold a strife
too long, too difficult. And without delay,

6 135

the next night, indeed, he began anew
with more killing, and had no qualms
about that feud—he was too fixed on it!

Then he who sought a sleeping place
somewhere else was easy to find—

140

in the women's bowers. For who would brave
the violence of that new hall-vassal
once he had seen it?

They kept themselves then

at a safer distance away from the demon,
and Grendel ruled and raged against mankind,

145

alone and evil, until empty stood
the best of houses. That was a hard time,
twelve long winters of bitter woe.

The king of the Danes had to endure

this cruel affliction, and it became

150

as familiar to the sons of men
as a well-known song, that Grendel waged
war against Hrothgar, with hateful attacks
and murderous forays for many a season,
a permanent feud. He wanted no peace.

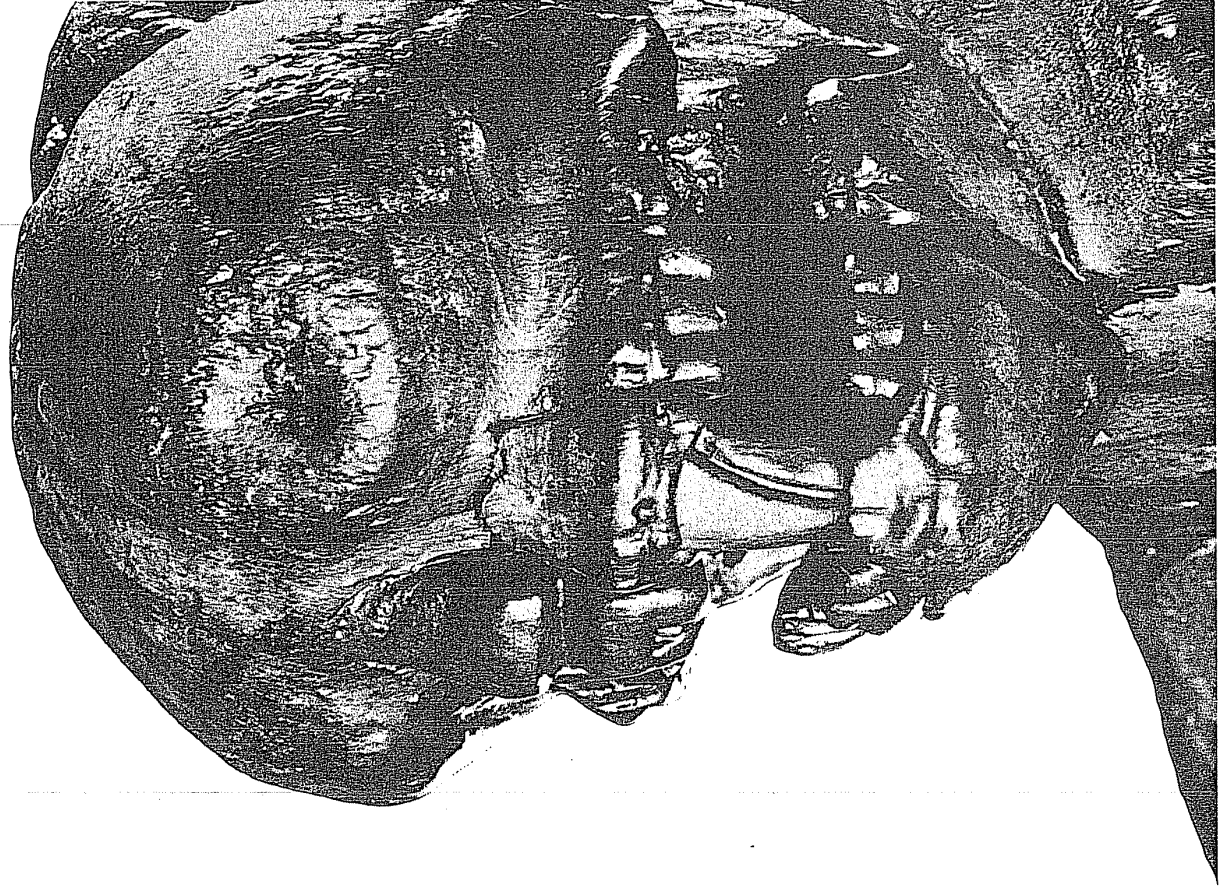
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To stop killing the Danish kindred
or settle with gold was no goal of his—
no hall-lord had any reason to hope
for bright compensation from that slayer's hand!

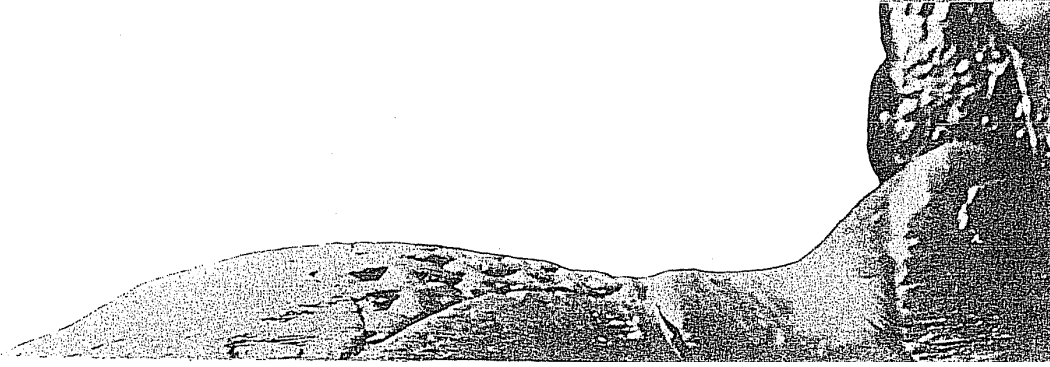
No, that demon, that dark death-shadow,
leapt out upon young and old alike,

160

a hideous ambush! In darkness he held
the misty moors. Men cannot know
whither such hell-wights bend their ways!



165 Thus mankind's foe carried on the feud.
That fiend in exile often performed
ghastly deeds; and he dwelt in Heorot,
the gold-decked hall, in the dead of night
(but close to that gift-throne he could not come,
draw nigh the lord's treasure, nor know his love).
170 To the lord of the Danes his dwelling there
was heart-breaking torment. Others took
more active council: they cast about
in secret to discover what could be done
to stem the tide of sudden attacks.
175 At times they vowed in idol-tents
to sacrifice, in ancient phrases
seeking aid from the slayer of souls
in their deep sorrow.



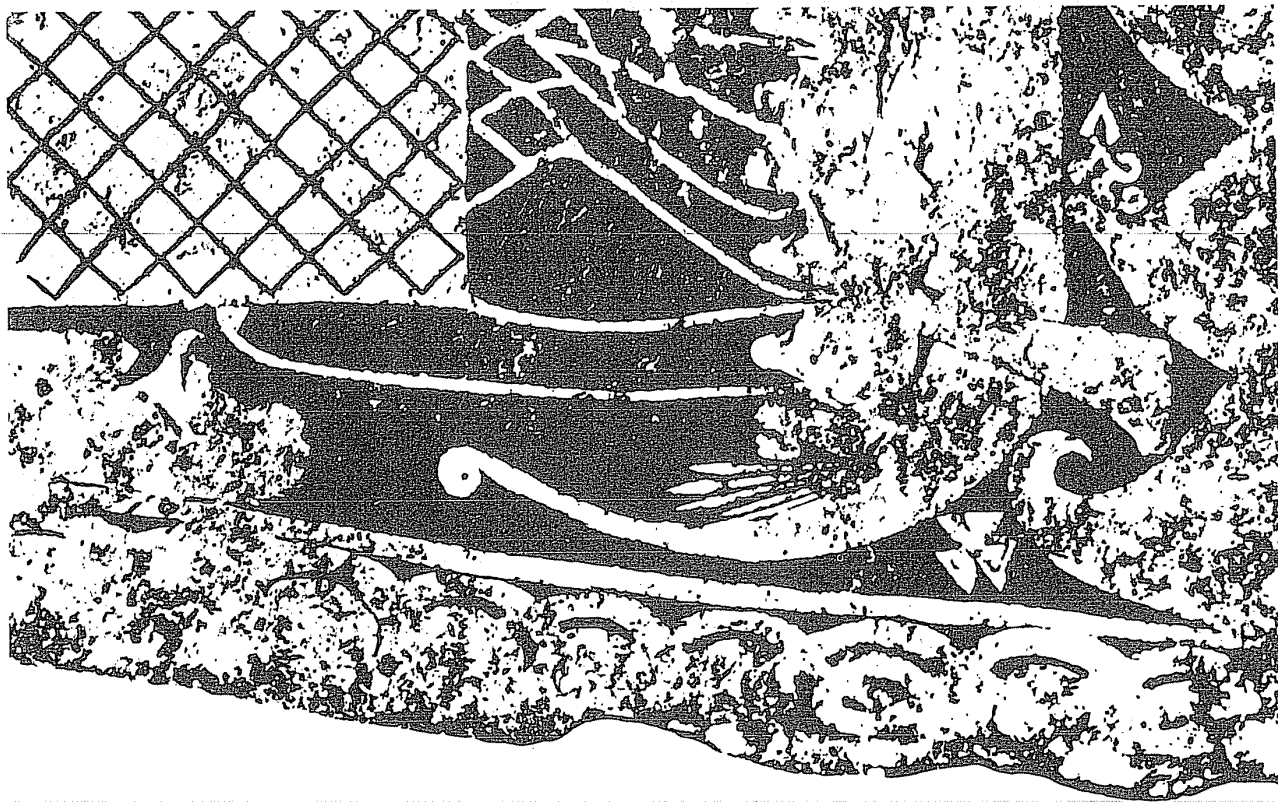
180 *Such was their wont,*
the hope of the heathens; in their hearts they thought of
Hell below. They knew not the Lord,
the Judge of Deeds, or how to rejoice
in trusting God, the Protector in Heaven,
the Wielder of Glory. Woe be to him
185 *who because of strife must shove his soul*
to the heart of the fire! He cannot hope
for help or change, ever. Happy is he
who may seek out the Lord on his last day
and ask for peace in the Father's embrace!

3. Beowulf Goes to the Land of the Danes

190 Despite his wisdom, Hrothgar's son
could not stop turning over his troubles
in that painful time, or suppress his worry—
the strife was too cruel that had stricken his people,
a grim persecution, the greatest night-terror.
But Grendel's deeds were told to a Geat
195 in his far homeland, to Hygelac's thane. *

200 He was the mightiest man in the world
in those long ago days of this fleeting life,
and noble of purpose. He ordered prepared
a goodly ship, and said he would go
over the swan's road to seek out Hrothgar,
knowing that prince had need of men.
His wise friends did not find fault
with him for that daring, though he was dear to them;
indeed, they encouraged him, casting lots
205 for his coming venture, and the valiant fighter
chose from among the Geatish champions
the bravest he could find. Then Beowulf went forth
as one of fifteen, a sea-crafty warrior
who showed them, by landmarks, the way to his ship.

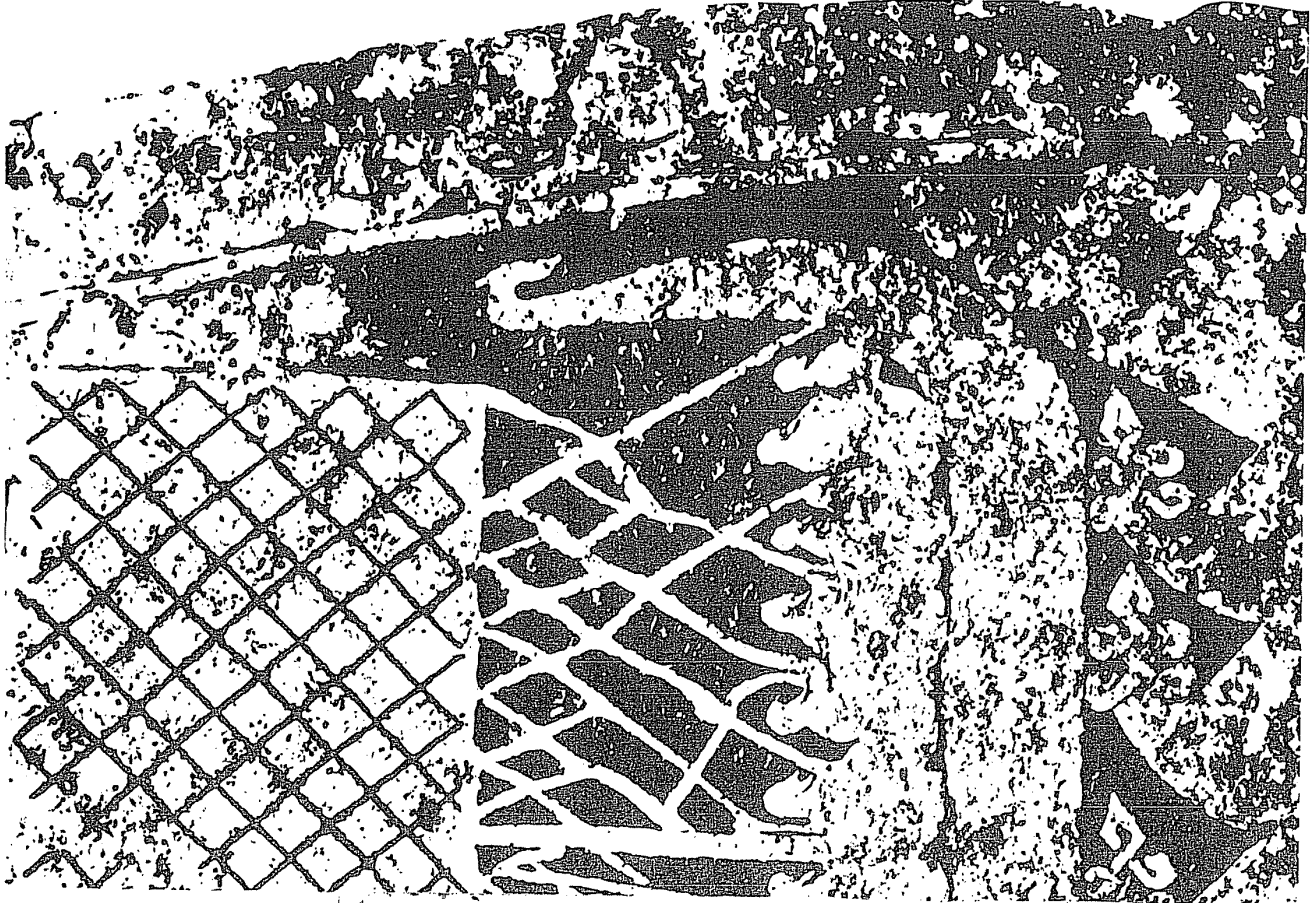
* thane: sworn follower



The moments passed; the men waited.
When the vessel was well afloat on the waves
they clambered aboard beside the cliff
where the currents whirled, carrying treasures
into that hold, handsome weapons
and splendid armor. Then they cast off
on a willing journey in their ship of wood.

Thrust by the wind over billowing waves,
it flew through the foam as free as a bird,
and sailed so far by the following day
that sailors perched in that twisted prow
could make out the shining shapes of land:
bright seacliffs, broad headlands,
then sharp rocky crags. They had crossed the ocean;
the voyage was over. Eagerly now,
they leapt ashore to anchor their ship,
their ring-mail singing as they moved around.
But they paused to give their thanks to God
for an easy passage on the perilous sea.

From the high sea wall someone was watching;
the Shielding whose task was to guard that shore
saw them lift their shields from the side of the ship,
ready for battle. Bursting with curiosity,
wondering what kind of men these were,
Hrothgar's sentinel leapt to his saddle,
rode down to the shore, and shook his spear
in a mighty fist, though his words were formal:
"Who are you, coming here in armor,
a band of men in byrnie, steering
your high-keeled ship down the ocean streets,
across the water? Look, I have watched here



at this land's end for a long time
 to make certain that no sea-invader
 would disembark on the Danish shore,
 and never have warriors borne weapons here
 more openly! Nor do you offer
 any sign of the elders' consent.
 And never in the world have I seen a more noble
 man in armor tower above others
 than him in your midst; that is no mere hall-thane
 made proud with weapons—may his appearance
 never prove false! But now, inform me
 of your kindred before you come any farther
 on Danish soil—you might be spies!
 Listen to me, sea-faring men
 far from your homes, I have one thought,
 and here it is: you had better hurry
 and tell me clearly where you have come from!"

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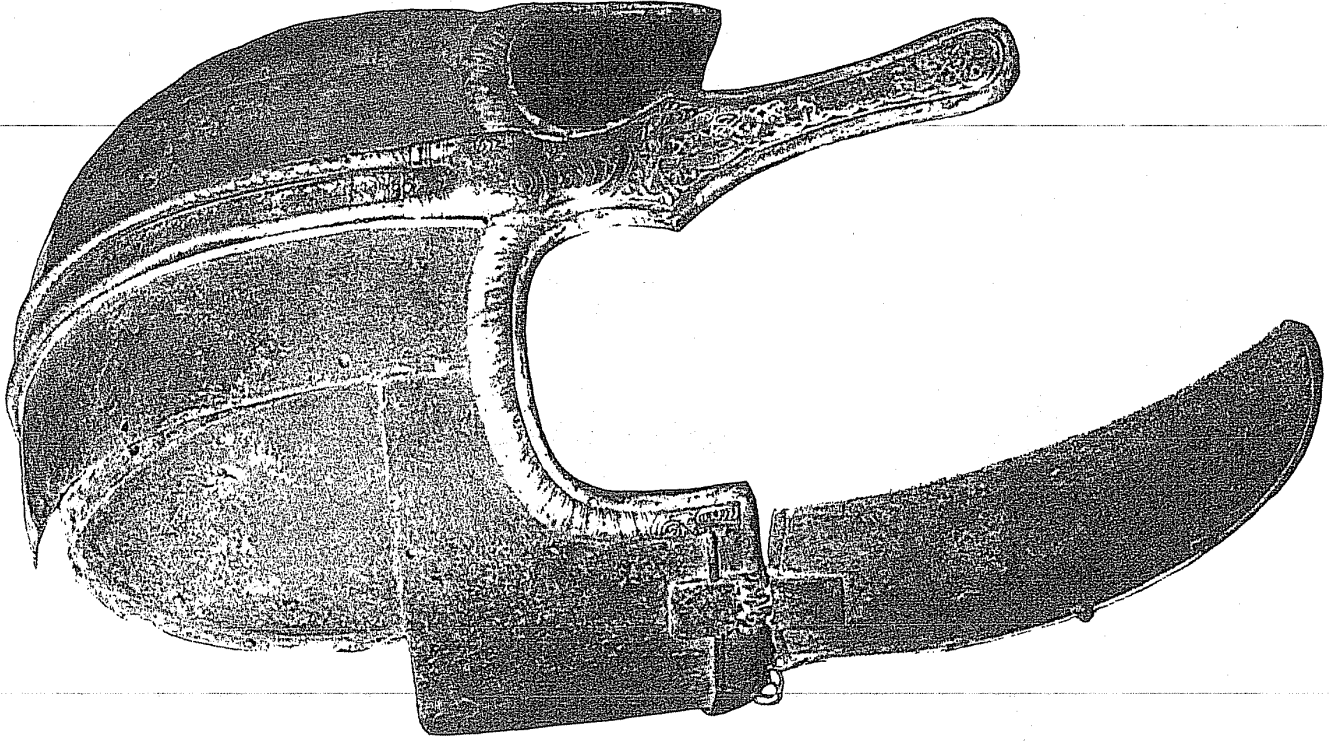
4. His Reply to the Sentinel's Challenge

The leader among them made his reply,
 wisely unlocked his hoard of words:
 "You are looking at men from the land of the Geats;
 we are Hygelac's hearth companions.
 My father, familiar to men everywhere,
 was a noble prince whose name was Edgetheow.
 He lived many winters before passing away,
 aged and honored; the elders who offer
 advice to kings recall him well.
 With friendly intent we have come very far
 to seek your lord, the son of Hroldane,
 guide of his people. Give us advice!
 How shall we approach your proud leader
 to make known our mission? There can be nothing

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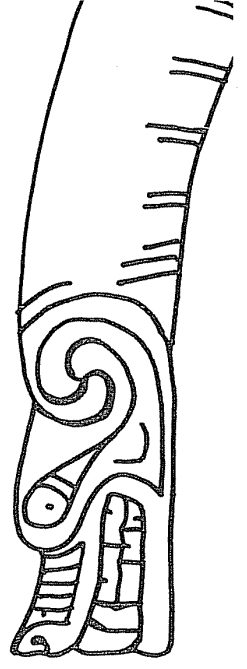
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secret about it, for surely you know
whether it is true, as we have been told,
that among the Danes some dire being
shows hatred by his deeds in the dead of night;
uncannily hostile, he causes terror
with a grim corpse-hunger! I have come to Hrothgar
to offer help with an open heart,
to aid that good king in overcoming
the fiend—if change from this evil affliction
can ever grant him relief again—
and then his burning cares will be cooler;
or else he will have to endure forever
a life of distress, so long as there stands
the best of houses in its high place!”

The sentinel spoke where he sat before them,
brave on his warhorse: “Words and deeds
are two things that an intelligent man
must learn to assess if he means to succeed.
I hear you tell me that you intend
loyal service to the Shielding’s lord.
Come then, with your weapons; I will show you the way.
Moreover, my thanes will be ordered to guard
your freshly tarred ship, to shield it well
against all marauders while it rests by the shore—
until the time comes that its coiled prow
is launched on the currents to carry you back
across the waves to Weathermark,
along with those brave men you have brought
who have the luck to survive with their lives!”
Then he turned his horse. Behind them remained
the roomy vessel bound by a rope,
lying at anchor.

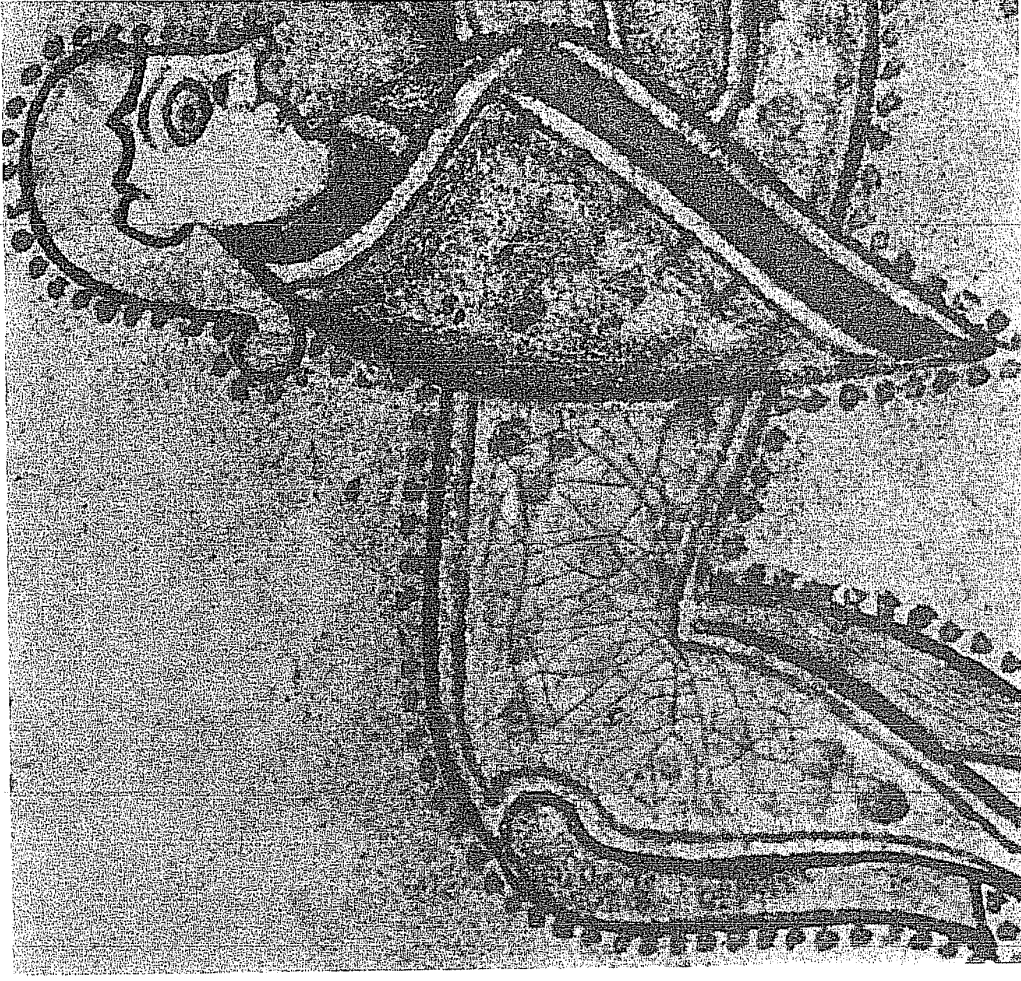


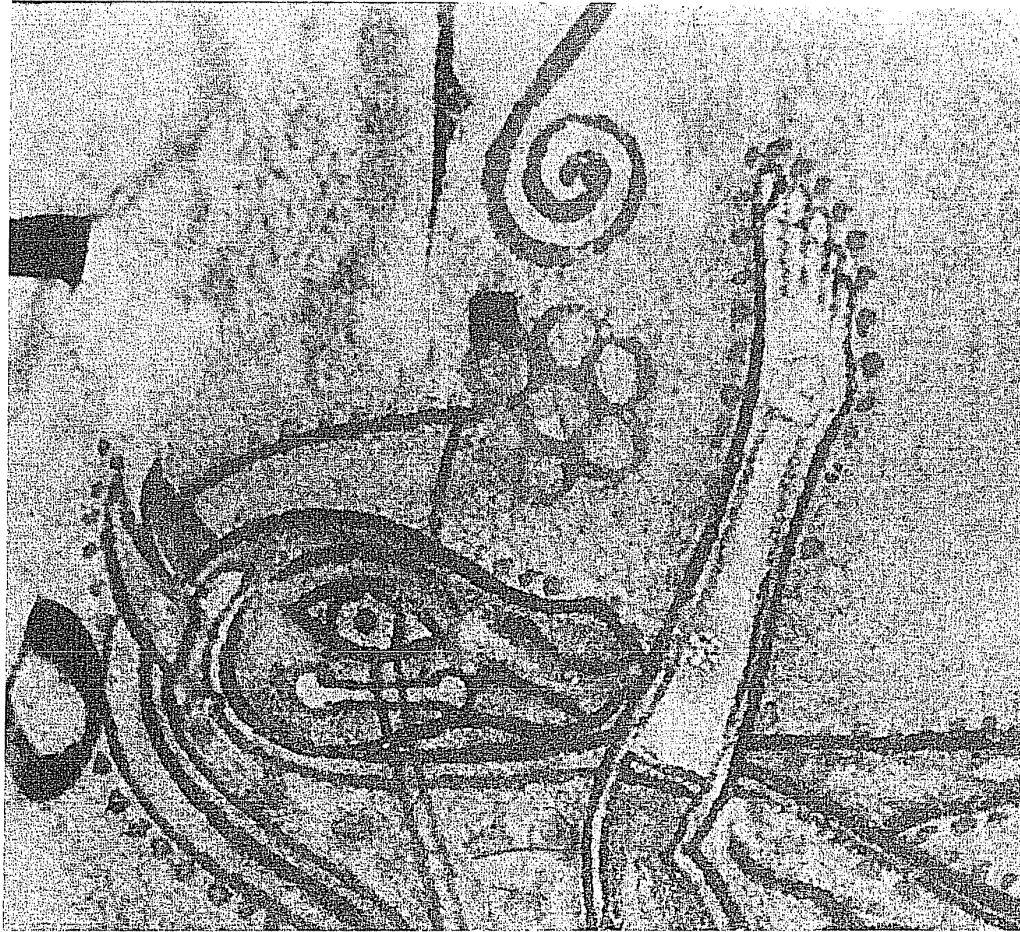
305 Likenesses of boars
 above their cheekplates, bright with gold,
 shone wondrously, warlike shapes
 keeping guard over life. The Geats hurried,
 marching together until they could glimpse
 that great timbered hall with its golden roof.
 No building there was in all the world
 more famous than this ruler's fortress—
 310 its light shone out over many lands!

Pointing the way to that warriors' hall,
 the sentinel instructed them
 how to approach it, then turning his horse,
 bade them farewell in a few words:
 315 "Now I must go. May God almighty
 hold you with honor and keep you unharmed
 in your brave venture. Back to the sea
 I must go to keep watch against invaders."

5. The Road to Heorot

320 Down the wide path paved with stone
 the men walked together. Their byrnies gleamed;
 the hand-locked rings in that hardy armor
 sang as the warriors went along
 the road to the the hall. When they arrived there,
 325 tired from seafaring, they set down their shields,
 wondrously strong, against the wall,
 then sank to the bench. Again their byrnies
 rang out in song, and the spears stood
 all together where the Geats had placed them,
 330 an ash-grove with iron-gray leaves. Those athelings
 had worthy weapons!





Then a warrior came out
to inquire of the strangers what their kindred was.

"Whence do you bring those brilliant shields,
gray sarks* and grim masked helmets,
and all those iron spears? I am Hrothgar's
official spokesman, and may I say

that I've never seen a troop more bravely attired?

I suspect neither exile nor piracy
will have prompted your coming, but courage and pride
have led you to Hrothgar."

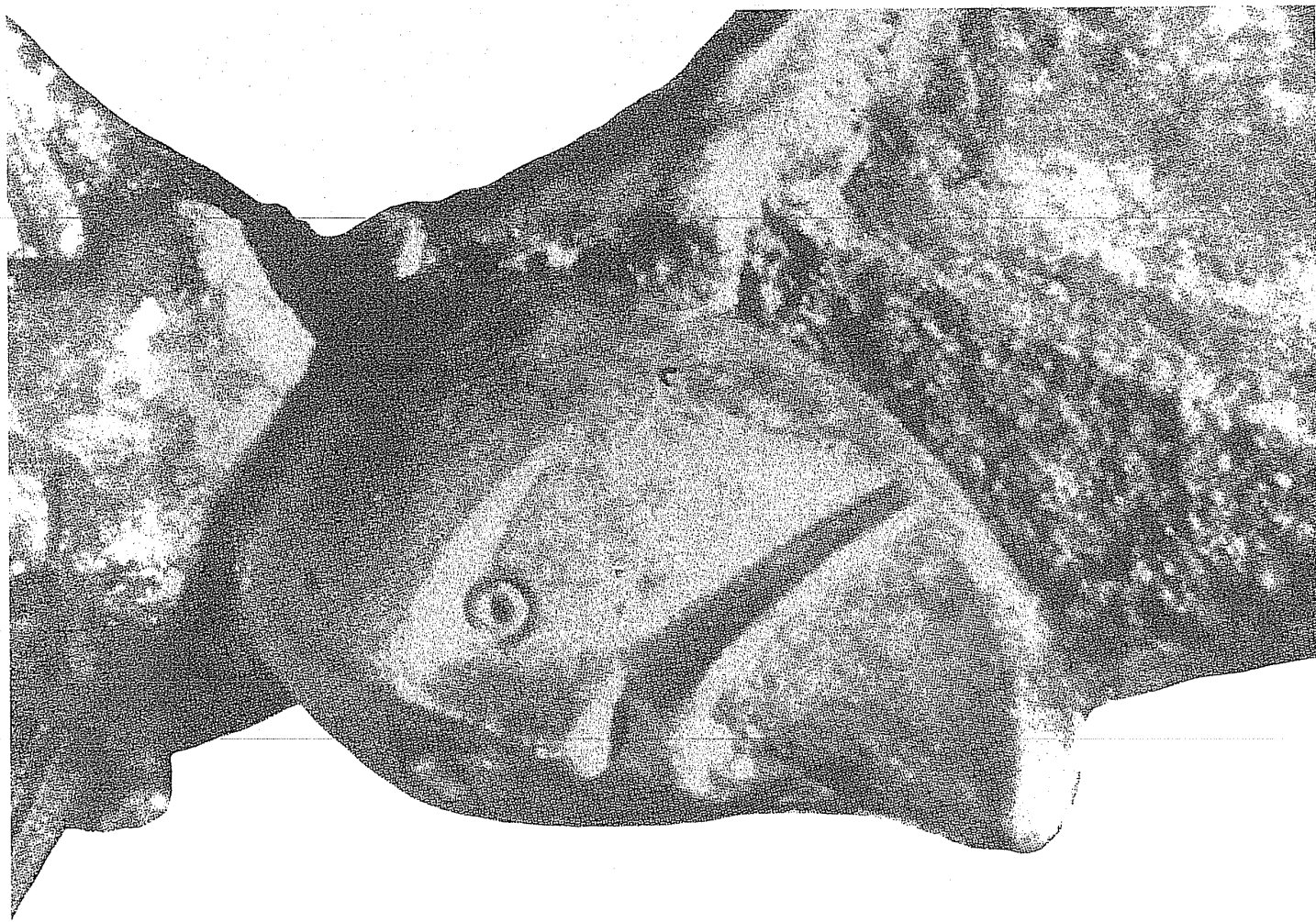
Their leader answered,
selecting his words in a lordly manner,
strong under his helmet: "We are Hygelac's
boon companions. Beowulf is my name.
I wish to tell Halfdane's son himself,
that noble ruler, the nature of
the cause that brings me, if he will accord us
the honor of approaching such a princely man."

Wulfgar spoke; a high-ranking Wendel,
his clever mind was known to many,
along with his prowess in war, and his wisdom:
"I shall inquire of our king,

the friend and lord of the Danish folk
and their giver of rings, about granting you
leave to approach him, our famous leader,
and I shall return at once to tell you
whatever it pleases him to reply."

*sarks: mail coats

Quickly he strode to where the king
sat inside, with his silver hair
shining among friends; before his shoulder
Wulfgar, according to noble custom,
stood, and spoke freely to his friendly lord:
"We have visitors who have voyaged far
to come here, sir, seafaring Geats.
The leader of these athelings
is called Beowulf, and they request
permission to enter, that they might hold speech
with my noble lord. Do not deny them
a kindly answer, O gracious king!
In war equipment they appear worthy
of our esteem. Indeed, that earl
did well who guided these warriors hither."



Hrothgar spoke, lord of the Shieldings:
"Beowulf? I knew him when he was a boy.
His father was Edgetheow. For his fealty
King Hrethel gave him the Geatish princess,
his own daughter, to adorn his home.
Now his son comes seeking our friendship.
Already those who rove the seas
bearing our courtesy gifts to the Geats,
bright treasures of gold, tell tales of him,
that he has the might of thirty men
in the grip of his hand. Perhaps holy God
has sent him to us as a sign of hope
for the West Danes—would this were true!—
against Grendel's horror. To that good man
I shall offer gifts to honor his courage.
Go now, quickly, tell them to come in
and see how good kinsmen gather together.
Say also these words: their coming is welcome
to the Danish people!"

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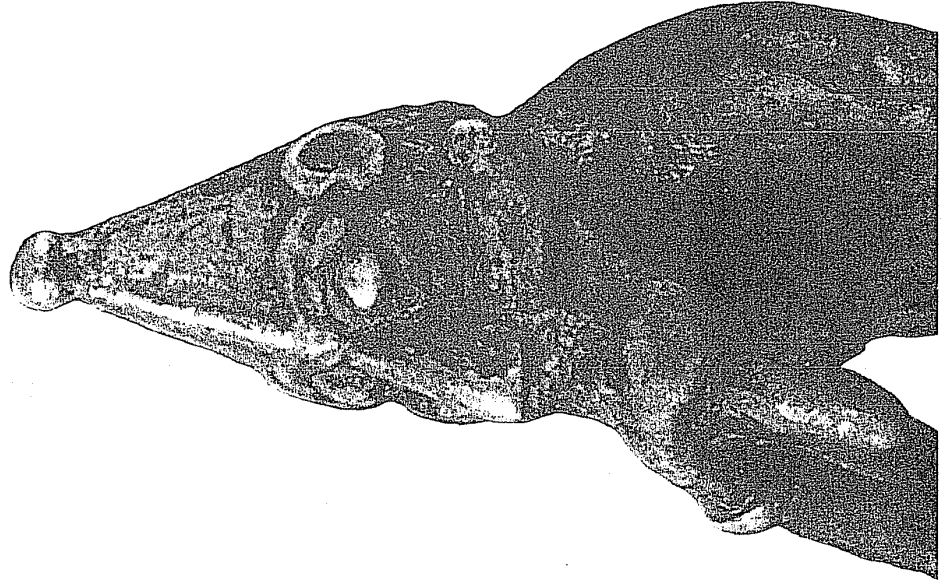
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Turning to the door,
Wulfgar spoke from just inside:

"My master, the lord of the Danes, commands me
to say he knows your noble lineage,
and invites you, who have so bravely ventured
across the waves, to be welcome here.
You may enter, in all your war-equipment,
even your helmets, to approach Hrothgar;
but let your shields and those dangerous shafts
await out here the result of your words."

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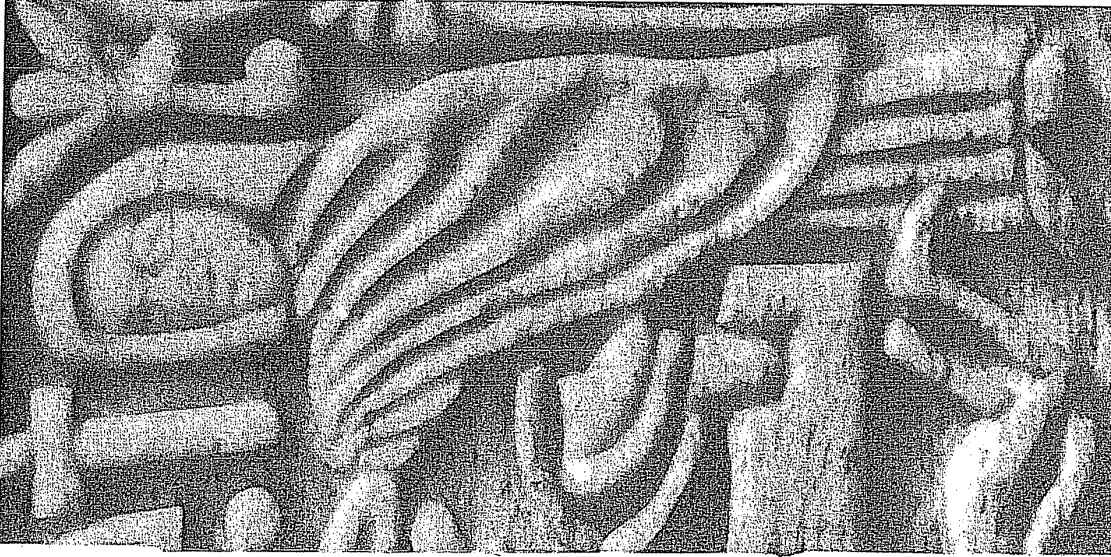
Beowulf arose then, and around him his men,
 a notable troop; he entrusted some
 with guarding the weapons while he went inside.
 They marched together as the messenger led them
 under Heorot's roof. The hardy warrior
 went in his helmet to stand on the hearth,
 where his byrnie sparkled as he spoke
 (that battle-net linked with a smith's lively skill):
 "Health to Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's
 kinsman and thane. Many things I have done
 that are famous already. This affair of Grendel
 was related to me in my own land
 by travelers, who told us that this timbered hall,
 the best of buildings, made for brave men,
 stands empty and useless when the evening light,
 fair in the heavens, fades from the sky.

"My own kinsmen and the wisest of the councillors,
 and the best among us, O mighty Hrothgar,
 persuaded me that I should seek you
 because they knew my enormous strength,
 and had seen my courage that time when I came
 bloody from a fight where I captured five
 of our huge enemies in a hard battle,
 then killed, by night, a number of sea monsters,
 totally crushed them—they had courted trouble!—
 avenging the Geats. Now it is Grendel's turn.

Now I should like to hold, alone,
 a meeting with that monster, if you will permit me.
 Chief of the Danes, champion of the Shieldings,
 I ask one boon (do not forbid me!):

Allow me, noble lord of warriors,
 protector of the folk, now I have come so far,
 to attempt alone, with only my troop,
 this brave company, to cleanse Heorot!





"And because I gather that Grendel rashly
spurns all weapons, I also wish
(in order to please my own dear prince
Hygelac, and make him proud of me)
to lay aside my shining sword
and yellow shield, and show that demon
a fight to the death, foe against foe,
with my grip alone! Then he who loses
must give himself up to the judgment of God.

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"But if that fiend should win the fight
in this place of battle, I think that upon
the Geats he will feed . . . as on Danish folk
he has often been sated. So you need not consider
where to hide my head, for he will have me
dripping with blood, if death takes me.
He will bear me away, his mouth watering,
to taste my flesh, tearing it ruthlessly,
staining the moors. So do not distress
yourself concerning my body, but send
this best of byrnie, if battle takes me,
to Hygelac, for it is Hrethel's heirloom,
the work of Wayland, that I wear on my breast,
the finest of garments. Fate goes as it must!"

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7. Hrothgar's Acceptance

Hrothgar spoke, lord of the Shieldings:
 "Both from duty, my friend Beowulf,
 and a sense of kindness you have come to us.
 Your father started the greatest of feuds
 when by his own hand he slew Heatholaf
 among the Wylfings; the Geats were wary
 of defending their friend with a feud in the offing,
 so he came away to the kingdom of the Danes,
 overseas to the Shieldings, and they sheltered him.
 All this happened when, as a youth,
 I had just come to power in the jewelled kingdom,
 the bright stronghold of the Danes. My brother
 Heorogar had died, a son of Halfdane
 born before me; he was better than I!
 But I settled that feud by sending gifts
 to the Wylfings over the water's ridge.
 I sent them treasures, and he swore me oaths.

"Hard it is to say from my heart
 to any man what misery,
 what havoc Grendel has wrought with his hatred,
 what harm he has done us. My dear hall-troop
 of warriors has waned; *wyrð* * has swept them
 into Grendel's power. But God may easily
 deprive that desperate foe of deeds!

* *wyrð* late



480 Often it has been that able men
have boasted loudly over their beer
that they would defy the fiend's attack
with fierce blades, and hold the hall—
485 and then in the morning there would only remain
the marks of their blood on this noble building,
the planks of the benches painted with gore,
the hall, with their lives. Of loyal men
I would have the fewer when that fight was done . . .

490 "Sit now to the feast and unfetter your thoughts,
pledge great deeds as your mood may prompt you!"
Then room was made in that friendly mead-hall
for all the Geats to sit together
on the drinking benches, and those doughty men
495 went to their places. A thane was watchful
of their every need, and from the ale-vessel
poured shining liquid. At times the shope
sang in the hall, and happiness reigned
over all that gathering of Danes and Geats.



8. Unferth's Taunt

500 Unferth spoke; the son of Edgelaf,
 who sat at the feet of the Shielding lord,
 unbound his battle-runes.* Beowulf's voyage
 and his noble venture rankled enormously,
 for Unferth begrudged any greatness in others,
 and found it offensive if they earned more fame
 505 under the heavens than he himself—:
 "Are you that Beowulf who strove against Breca
 across the sea in a swimming contest,
 where the two of you recklessly risked your lives
 on the high seas for a heedless boast?
 510 They say that nobody could dissuade you,
 neither friend nor foe, from that fruitless act
 of wilful pride. You swam through the water,
 arching your arms through the ocean currents,
 weaving the waves, drawing hand after hand,
 515 gliding on the sea; then suddenly the billows
 swelled in a storm, and you struggled there
 for seven nights. But Breca outswam you;
 he had more strength. And a morning dawned
 when the tide had hurled him on the Heatho-Raemes' shore.
 520 He went on home then, a hero to his people
 in the land of the Brondings where he belonged,
 and was soon entrusted with treasure and kingdom
 in that mighty fortress. In his match against you,
 Breca entirely fulfilled his boast.
 525 I wonder if you will not come off the worse
 in this venture, too (though you have prevailed
 in many grim battles), if you dare to remain
 waiting in this hall for a whole night."

* This colorful phrase means merely that Unferth "began to speak brusquely."

Beowulf spoke, the son of Edgetheow:

"Well, Unferth, my friend, being full of beer,
you have much to say about my swim
with Breca! But truly I tell you this:

my strength was greater against the sea
and the angry waves than any other man's.

The two of us vowed, being very young—
we were both only boys when we made this boast—
to venture out on the wild ocean

and dare to risk our lives. And we did it!

As we breasted the waves, we held naked blades
fiercely in our hands to defend ourselves

against the great whales. Breca could not gain
any distance from me in that mighty current

through the speed of his stroke, nor did I wish to spurt
away from him, so together in the waves

we swam for five nights, until swept asunder
by the swelling waters of the coldest weather,

as night grew dark and a wind from the north
turned wildly against us.

"The rough waves
aroused the fury of the great fishes,

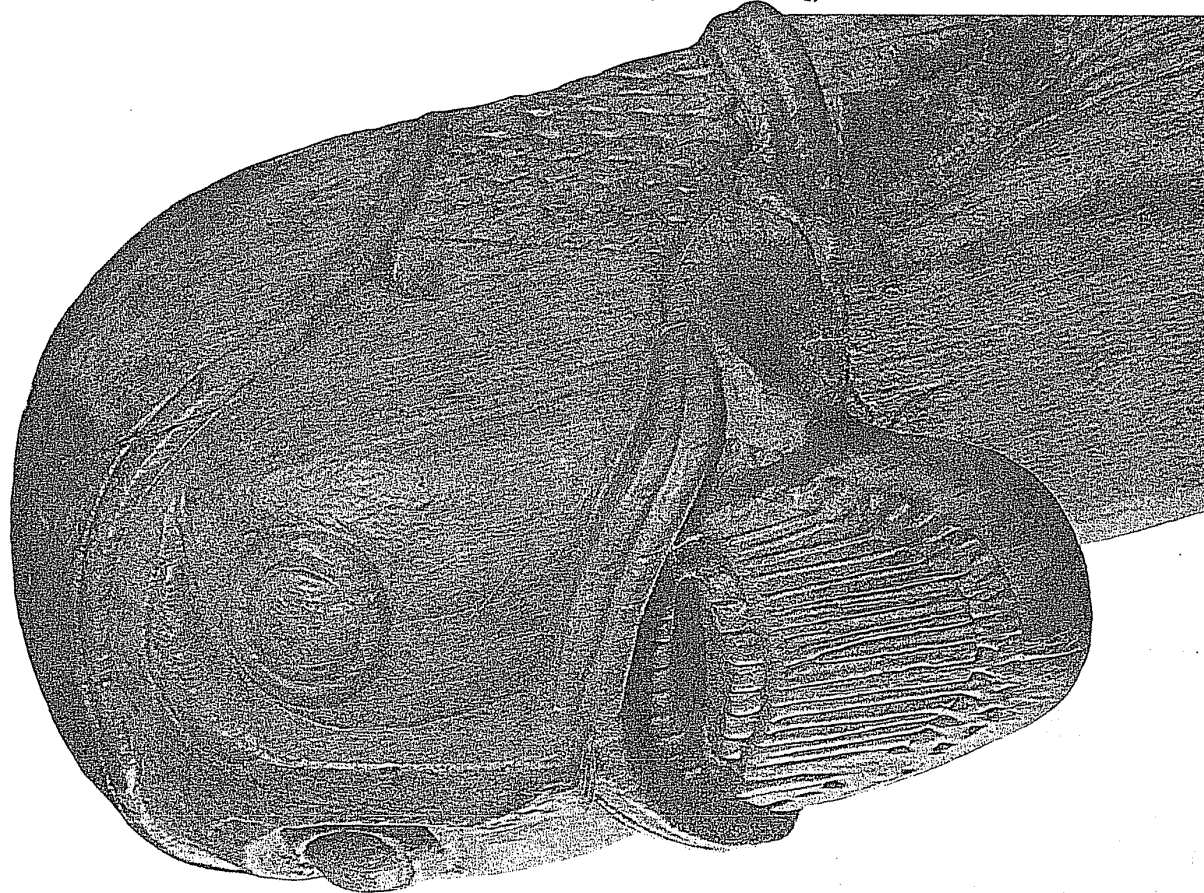
and there my hand-locked mail helped me;
my byrnie defended me from those foes,

where, woven for battle, it lay on my breast
adorned with gold. Drawing me down,

a fierce monster held me fast

in his ugly grip. But it was granted

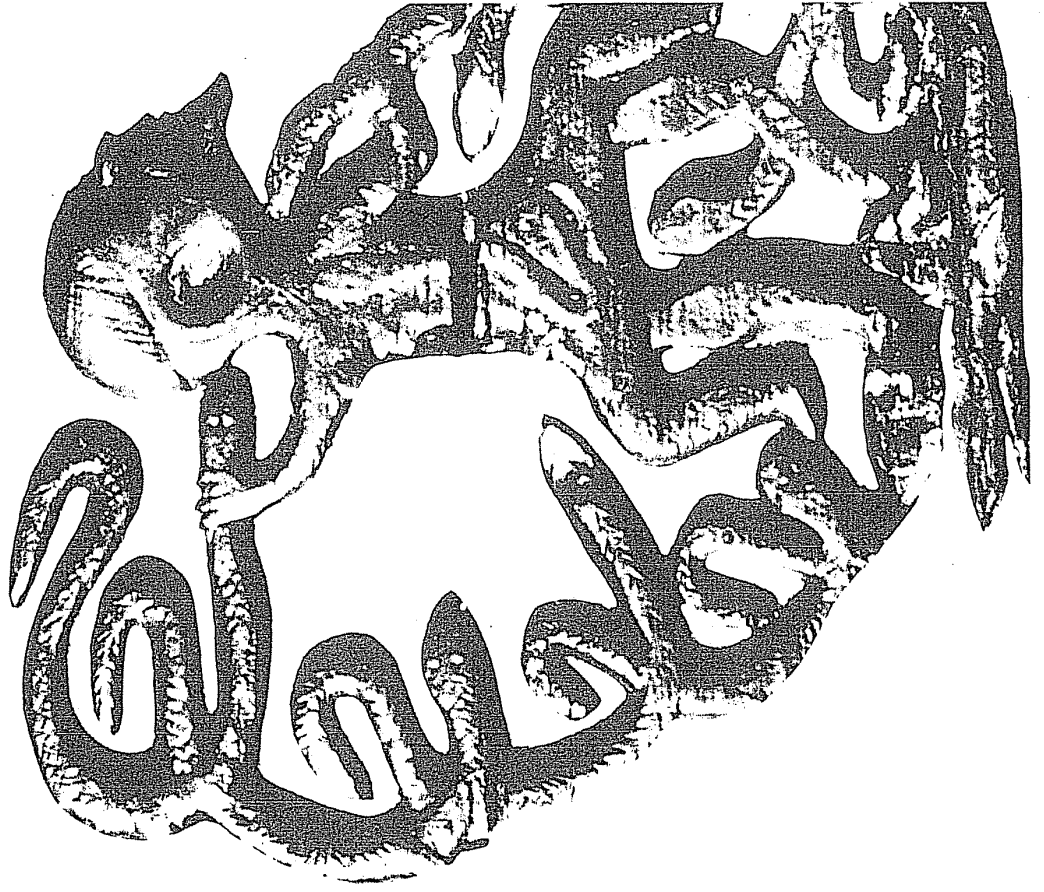
that I should touch that beast with the tip
of my blade, and the storm of battle destroyed
the huge sea-creature through my hand . . .



9. Credentials of Courage

560 "Those predators, pressing in upon me,
 harassed me sorely. But I served them well
 and justly with my jewelled sword:
 At their feast below those foul spoilers
 had little pleasure; they had planned to partake
 of me, at their banquet on the ocean bottom!
 565 But the following morning they were flotsam, lying
 along the shore, put to sleep by my blade,
 hurt so severely that voyagers
 have never since been hindered in sailing
 their ships on those seas. From the east shone
 God's bright beacon; the billowing waves
 570 grew calm, and then I saw cliffs ahead,
 a windy land. *Wyrd* often saves
 the undoomed hero if his courage holds!

575 "In the end my sword appeared to have slain
 nine sea-beasts. Never have I heard of
 a harder night battle under heaven's vault,
 nor a man more forlorn among the waves;
 but I survived the violent clutch
 of those foes, and weary from the fight was swept
 580 by the flooding tides onto Finnmark shores,
 left high and dry.



"I have not heard
that you have brandished your flashing blade
in battles so wild. Breca has never,
nor indeed, either of you, yet done
anything comparable in the way of conflict
with the blood-gleaming sword—I do not boast overmuch—
though one must remember your brother's murder,
and he your own kinsman! For that deed, Hell
will claim you someday, clever though you are.

585

"I say to you truly, son of Edgelaf,
that demon would never have done so many
crimes so insulting to your king,
such harm in Heorot, if your own heart
were half so brave as you yourself boast;
he has found out that he need not fear
an avenging storm of violent blades,
the feuding swords of the brave Shieldings.

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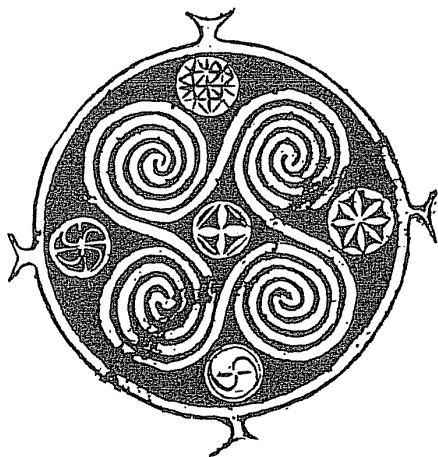
He takes his toll, sparing none
of the Danish people, takes his pleasure,
puts them to death and expects no reprisal
from the Danes of the Spear. But soon enough
I shall show him the strength and courage
of a Geatish warrior! And whoever wishes
can go bravely to mead after tomorrow's
morning light shines for men,
when the radiant sun rises in the south!"
Then Hrothgar, the giver of rings, was glad.
The brave old chieftain of the Bright Danes,
the leader of those people, who had longed for help,
had faith in Beowulf's firm resolution.

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When the jesting of heroes rose joyously
 and words were winsome, Wealthew came forth,
 Hrothgar's queen, mindful of kinship.
 That gold-laden lady, greeting the men,
 handed the cup around the hall,
 first to the lord who guarded that land,
 the dear home of his people. She bade him take pleasure
 in his drink from the cup, and the noble king
 gladly partook of the shining goblet.
 Then the Helming lady went through the hall
 to young and old, letting each man use
 the cup in his turn, until the time came
 that the ring-laden queen in courtesy
 bore the mead-cup to Beowulf.
 She greeted the prince, and piously thanked God
 that the course she desired had come to pass—
 that now she could count on someone for comfort
 from the wicked deeds.

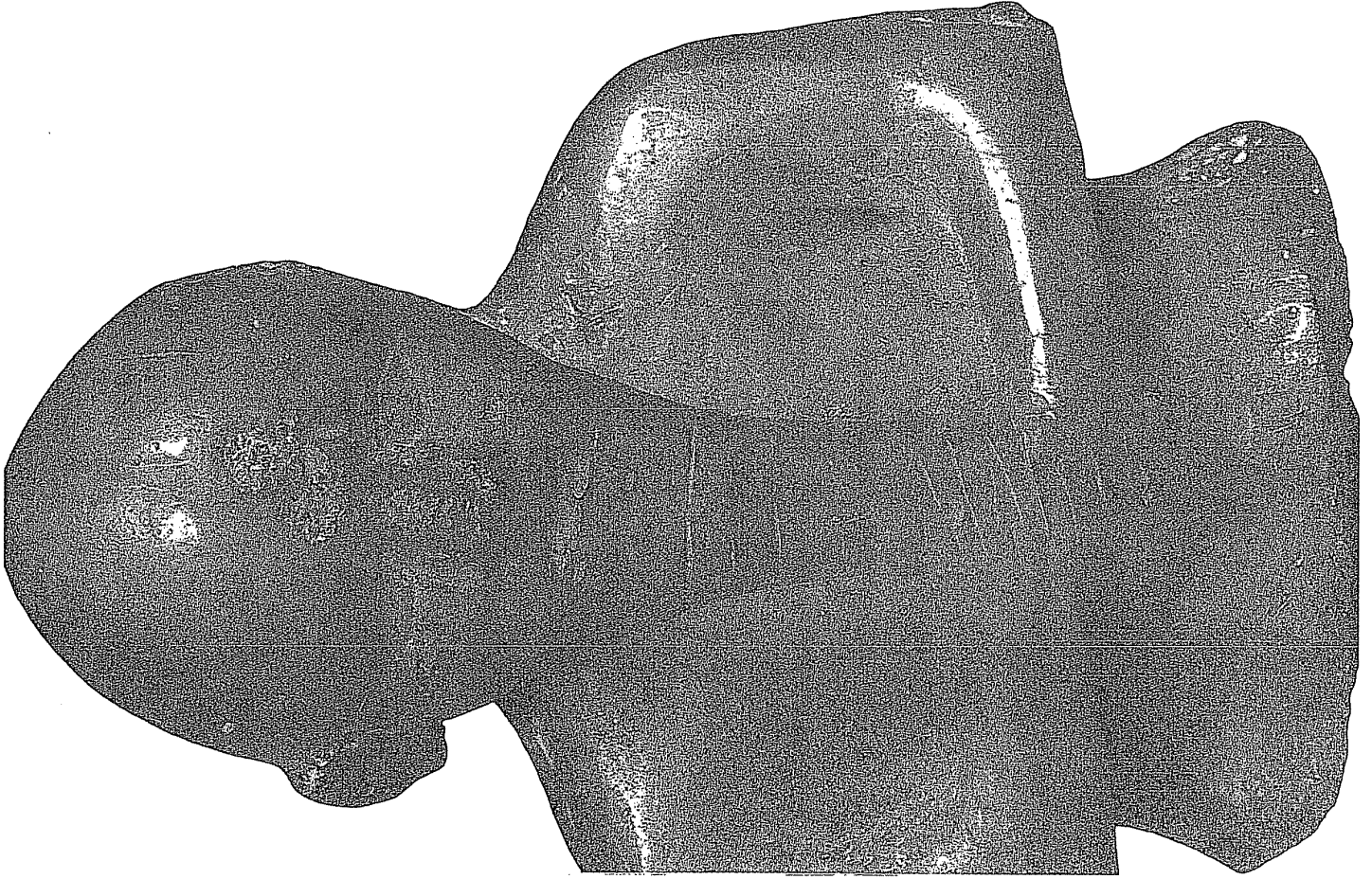
The fierce warrior
 accepted the cup that the queen held out.
 He drank, and then, sonorous, inspired by the challenge,
 Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:
 "I resolved, when first I set out to sea,
 when I boarded that ship with my band of men,
 that I would fully perform the wish
 of your people, or fall in the fight, caught fast
 in that horrible claw. I shall behave
 with fitting courage, or my final day
 shall come to meet me in this mead-hall!"
 The woman liked well those noble words
 of the Geat's pledge; gold-laden she went
 to sit in splendor beside her lord.

Then, as before, the sounds were fair
 inside that hall, the warriors happy;
 their tales brave, until the time came
 that Halfdane's son wanted to seek
 his evening rest; he knew that the enemy
 had longed to do battle in that high building
 from the time they had seen the sun's first light
 until nightfall lengthened across the land
 and shadows came moving in dark shapes
 under the clouds.

The company all rose.
 Hrothgar the king spoke to his hero,
 offering Beowulf the best of luck,
 and rule of his wine-hall, saying these words:
 "I have never entrusted to another man,
 so long as I have been able to lift my shield,
 lordship in this hall but to you alone.
 Take now and hold the best of houses,
 remember fame, hold fast to valor,
 watch against the foe! You shall want for nothing,
 if you come through alive from this deed of courage!"

10. The Watch for Grendel

Then out from Heorot Hrothgar went,
 the lord of the Shieldings, with his loyal thanes;
 the old warrior wanted to seek his wife,
 his consort Wealtheow, and the comfort of bed.



Men soon discovered that the King of Glory,
 in special dispensation, had set a hall-watch
 against Grendel, a guard against giants.
 In his great strength the prince of the Geats
 trusted fully—and in God's friendship.
 That warrior removed his woven mail-coat,
 the helmet from his head, and handed his sword,
 the finest iron blade, to a friendly thane,
 bade him take care of that battle gear.

670

Then Beowulf, before he climbed into his bed,
 reflected on some of his former words:
 "I take no less pride in my martial prowess,
 in my hardy fighting, than Grendel in his.
 Thus with the sword I shall not slay him,
 kill him with that weapon, though I certainly could;
 he would not understand how to strike back
 with blade against shield, though he is brave enough
 in his wicked strength. So this night we abstain
 from the sword altogether, if Grendel dares seek
 a war without weapons, and then wise God,
 the holy Lord, on whichever hand
 seems fitting, will assign the victor's fame."

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Putting his face to the pillow, the warrior
 began to rest, and around him many
 a brave man sank to sleep in the hall.
 Not one of those thanes thought for a moment
 that he would live to return to his beloved
 home, his kindred, and the hall he was raised in;

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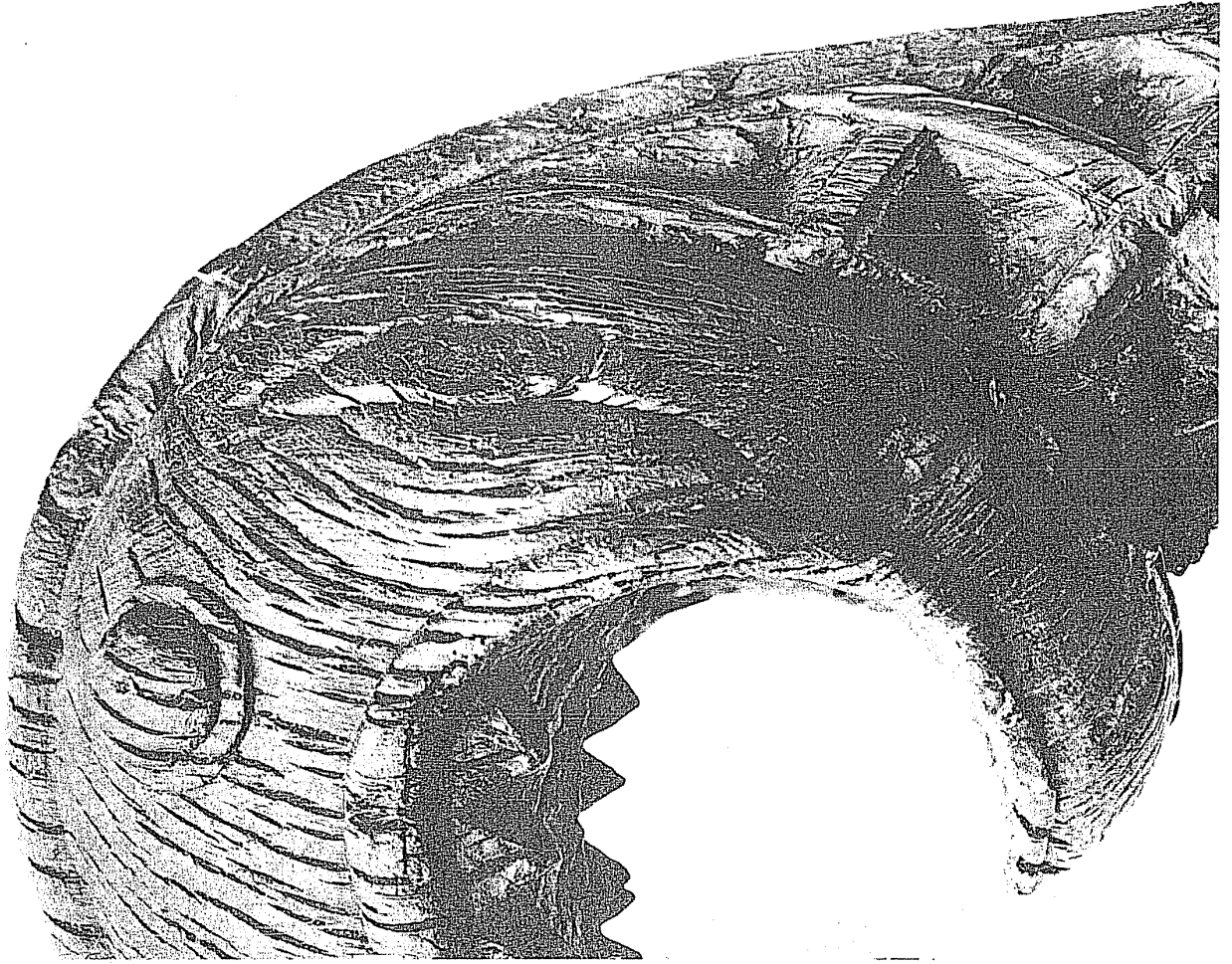


they had been told that death had taken
 very many before them in that mead-hall,
 too many good Danes. But the Maker granted
 that the fight of the Weathergeats would be woven
 with battle victory, that they would vanquish
 their strange foe through the strength of one,
 through his own power. Truly, forever,
 mighty God has ruled mankind;
 this is known.

In the night he came—
 the shadow walker! The warriors slept
 who were trusted to guard that gabled hall,
 all but one. This was known also:
 that Grendel could not, when God did not wish it,
 draw them under the demon shadow.
 But one man lay there, watchful, and waiting
 in anger for the enemy and the outcome of that fight.

11. The Fight with Grendel

From the moor there came, under misty cliffs,
 Grendel striding; he bore God's wrath.
 The monster of evil had it in mind
 to hunt for his dinner in that high hall!
 Under the masses of cloud he moved
 until he could glimpse the gleams of gold
 that marked those timbers. That was not the first time
 that he had visited Hrothgar's home,
 but never before had he found in that place
 a fiercer welcome, or warriors more fiery!



28 720

To the hall he came, huge and striding,
doomed, without joy. At once the door
sprang from its hinges at the touch of that hand.
He burst open the building's mouth,
cruel in his rage, and quickly then
he stepped across the colored floor,
moving in fury, as from his eyes
there leapt a horrible light like a flame.

725

Within that mead-hall he saw many men,
kinsmen, sleeping calmly together,
loyal companions. Then his heart leapt up:
that terrible demon intended to tear
each comrade's life, before daylight came,
away from his body. The thought of a banquet
made his mouth water. But *wyrd* would not
let him enjoy that taste any longer
after that night.

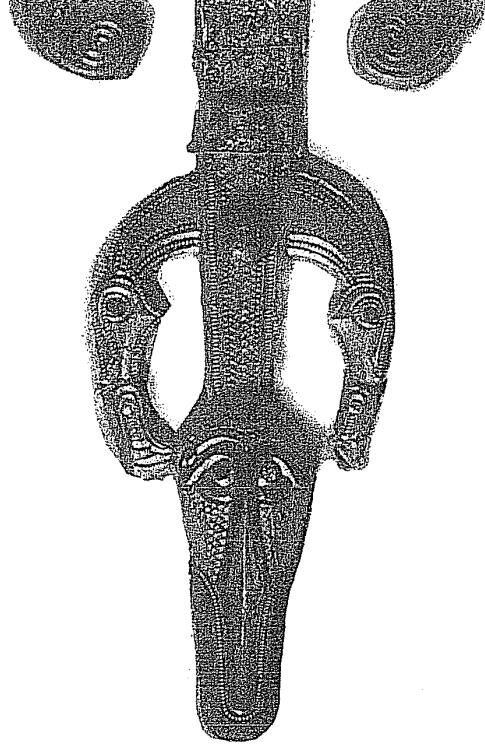
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735

The noble kinsman
of Hygelac watched to see how the wicked
predator meant to plan his attack.
That loathsome demon would not delay;
like a flash, he snatched up the first of his quarry,
a sleeping man, and slit him open,
bit his body, gulped down his blood,
swallowed huge morsels, immediately
had devoured each part of his victim's corpse
to his fingers and toes!

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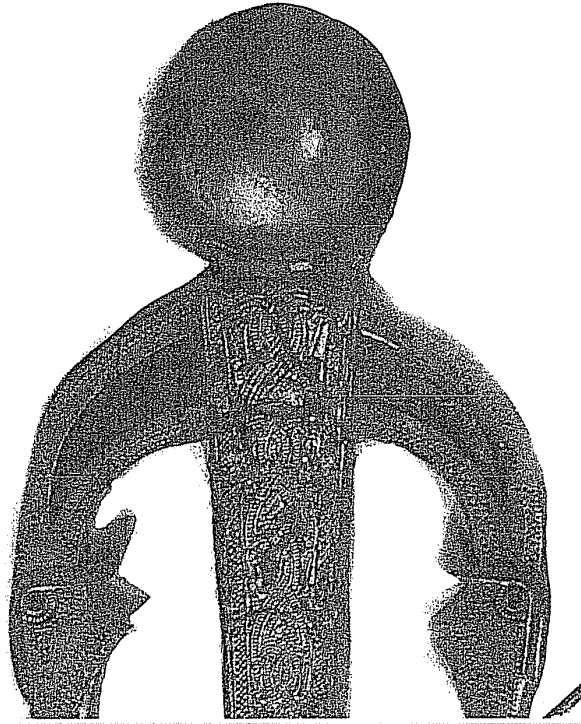
nearer now, clutched at the next with his claw,
stirred from his rest a stronger man!
As the demon reached out, the other grasped him,
and grimly sat up against that arm.

750 And then that cruel fiend first discovered
that he had never met, throughout middle earth,
in any warrior in all the world,
a mightier grip. In his heart he grew
greatly afraid—but he could not flee.
755 His single thought was to slip into darkness,
back among his devils; those earlier days
of gluttony here were gone forever.

High of courage, Hygelac's kinsman
remembered his evening's speech, stood up,
gripped fast against him; fingers burst;
760 Grendel was desperate to get away,
but the prince came closer. The monster in panic
felt like swinging free if he could,
then breaking for the fen, but he knew that his fingers
were caught in that grip. That was a dismal call
765 for the harmful fiend, that he paid to Heorot!

The hall thundered, sounding to the thanes
who lived in that place hideously like
the pleasure of men who were merry on ale.
Both were furious. The floor boomed.

770 Then it was a wonder that the noble wine-hall
held out so well against those warriors,
that it did not fall. But it was made fast
within and without with iron bands
designed by a clever smith. From the sill
775



at the floor of the building where those fierce ones fought
 benches lavish with gold sprang loose.
 No wise man among the Shieldings
 had ever expected that anyone
 could break that beautiful antlered building
 or pull it apart, unless pulsing flames
 were to swallow it up.

780

The sound roared out,
 gaining in frenzy, pouring out fear
 for all of the Danes, for each of those
 who heard that wailing come through the wall,
 the mournful tune of God's antagonist,
 his song, not of victory—the slave of Hell
 bemoaning his fate. He held him fast
 who was the mightiest man in the world
 in those long ago days of this fleeting life.

785

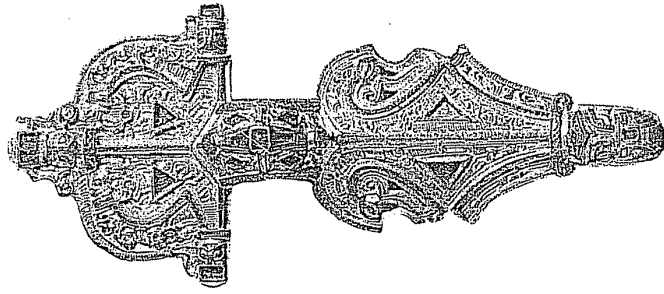
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12. The Quelling of Grendel

For nothing in the world did Beowulf want
 to let that killer escape alive,
 nor did he consider that Grendel had served
 any useful purpose! A daring youth
 from the band of warriors came slashing about
 with his ancient sword; he wanted to save
 the life, if he could, of his noble leader.
 And others joined him, just as brave,
 but unaware when they drew their weapons—
 intending to hew Grendel down between them,
 to get at his life—that none of the greatest
 iron blades over all the earth,
 not any sword at all, could ever touch him;

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he had cast a spell on all cutting edges,
making them harmless. Yet his departure,
in those long ago days, from this fleeting life,
would be gripingly painful, and that grim spirit
would be forced to descend to the fires of the damned.

805

Then he who had perpetrated such horrors,
so many crimes against mankind,
the fiend who was waging a permanent feud
with God, found that his garment of flesh
would no longer serve him, for the noble kinsman
of Hygelac had gripped him hard by the hand
(each was loathsome to the other alive),

810

and was pulling his body to pieces, cracking
his shoulder wide open. Sinews sprang out
and the body burst apart! Beowulf was victor,
and the demon Grendel in his death-throes
sought only to flee far into the wilds
to his joyless den, for there was no doubt,
he knew, that his life, the number of his days,
was done. For all the Danes, that conflict
had been settled according to their desire:
he who had come from so far had cleansed
Hrothgar's hall, and from hateful intrusions
had rescued it.

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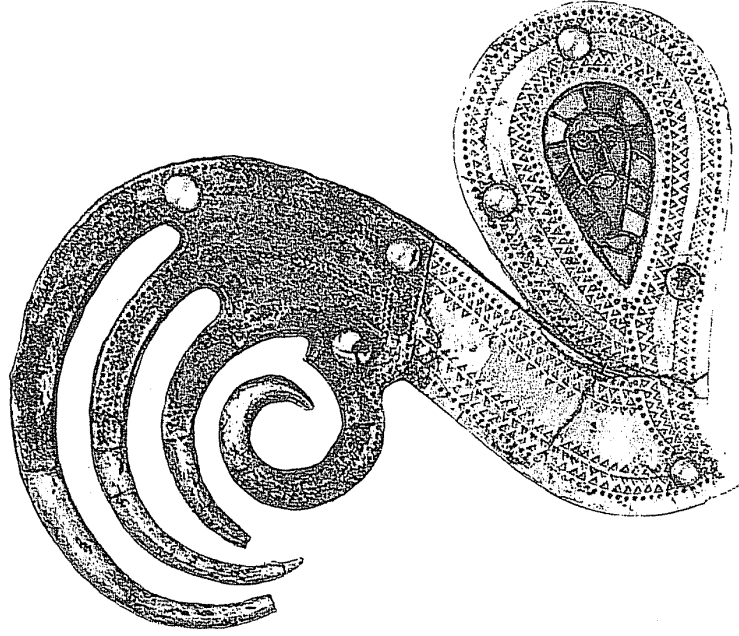
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He revelled in his deed,
in the work of that night, for nobly had he
fulfilled his pledge. The prince of the Geats
had entirely undone the distress of the Danes
that had bound them up in endless brooding
and caused them, of sad necessity,
to endure such sorrow. The clear sign of this
came when that hand was placed by the hero
with arm and shoulder, all in one piece,
Grendel's whole grip, up under the gable.

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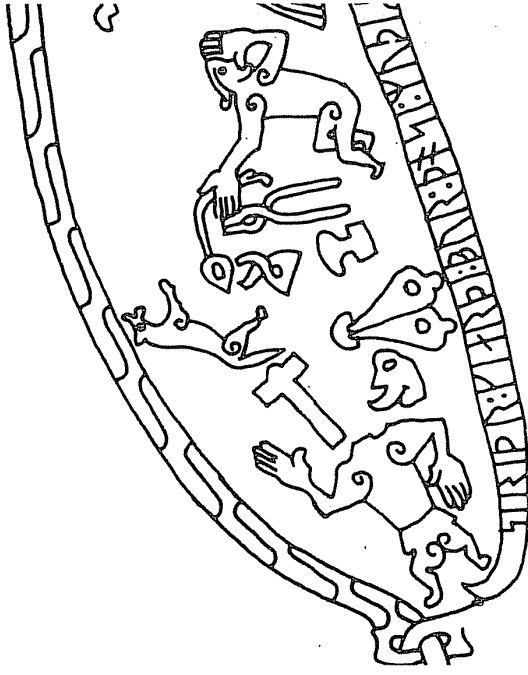
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13. An Appropriate Tale

Then in the morning many a warrior
 hastened to that gift hall, as I have heard;
 noble men came from far and near,
 from all over the land, to look on that marvel,
 the foe's huge footprints. His fall seemed
 no cause for regret to any of the councillors
 who looked on the tracks of the loser of that fight
 and saw how weary of mind he was
 as he made his way thence. To the monsters' tarn,
 fated and fleeing, he bent his way.
 The water there was welling with blood,
 a terrible surf that was swirling up
 in burning waves of hot battle gore.
 Joyless, forlorn and despairing of life,
 he hid his doomed and heathen soul
 in the harboring fen. There Hell took him.

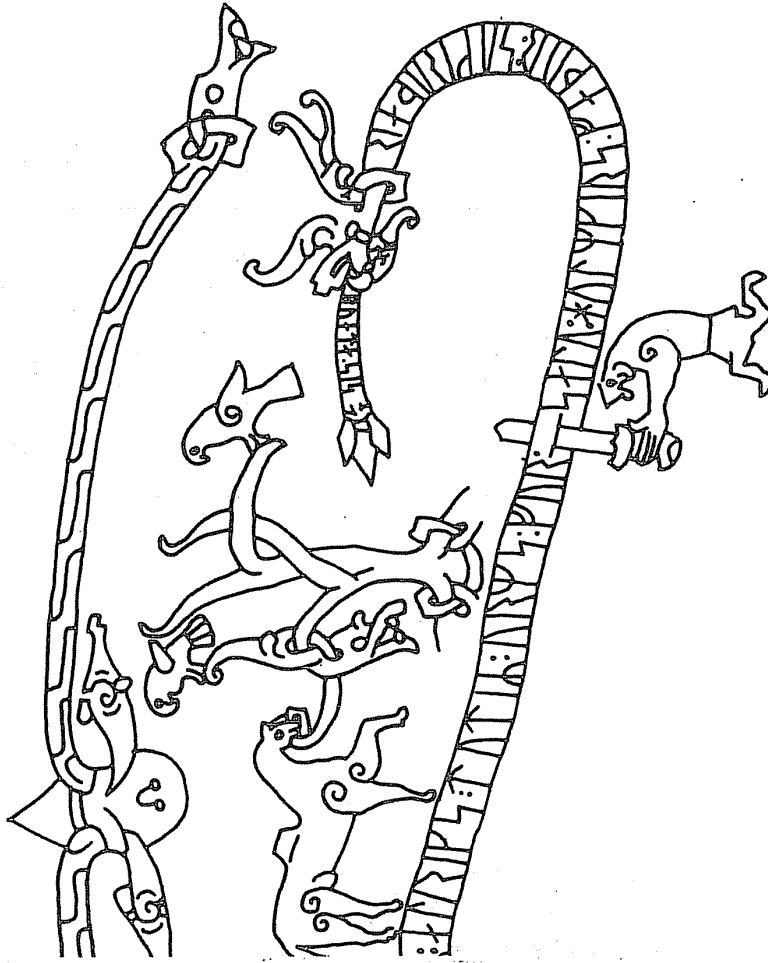
Afterwards the troop of old companions
 and the younger men, too, turned to pleasure,
 warriors riding away from the pool,
 glorious on their horses. The heroic deed
 of Beowulf was spoken of, and many men said
 that north or south between the two seas,
 across the whole earth, there existed no other
 warrior so brave, more worthy of rule,
 under the vast vault of the heavens!
 Yet their own prince, Hrothgar, they did not disparage
 by such regard, for he was a good king.



At times those riders gave free rein
to their roan stallions, let them race,
let them leap forth where the turf seemed fair,
in a test of speed. At times the king's thane,
a splendid man who remembered old songs
and kept them in his mind along with many
long ago sayings, began linking his words,
binding them together. Soon he began
to recite with discernment Beowulf's success,
and skillfully to adapt an appropriate story,
mingling his words.

He said all there was
that he had heard of about the heroic
deeds of Sigemund, the strange things that happened
on the wide travels of that son of Waelis—
feuds and crimes that few men
would have heard about, if there had not been
Fitela with him in later frays,
when Sigemund would say to his sister's son
something of such feats as they fought together,
always companions in the play of swords;
they killed many giants.

To Sigemund came
the glory due him after his death,
for that hero had slain a mighty serpent,
the guardian of a hoard. Under the gray stone
the atheling's son descended alone
on that fearsome deed, Fitela not with him.
It was granted, however, that his gleaming sword
should strike through that dragon to stand in the wall
quivering, and the beast was destroyed by that blow!



So fearlessly had the warrior performed
that now he could enjoy the hoard of jewels
at his own leisure. He loaded his boat.
Wael's son carried that glimmering wealth
into the hold; and the hot beast shrivelled.

895

*In deeds of prowess (for which he prospered),
Sigemund was the most famous of warriors,
of protectors or fighters, among all folk
since King Heremod's glory declined
with his might and his courage. Among the Jutes
Heremod was betrayed by his own retainers
to men who killed him. Keen were the sorrows
that had long oppressed him, and to his people
he had grown to be the greatest of burdens.*

900

*Many a warrior mourned his exploits,
lamenting for those days when he had believed
that Heremod could not fail as a cure for affliction,
that he would thrive as a prince among thanes
in his father's pattern, ruling the people
and the kingdom's wealth, its fortress and warriors,
the country of the Shieldings. The kinsman of Hygelac,
Beowulf, became a help to his comrades
and to all, but hatred took hold of the other.*

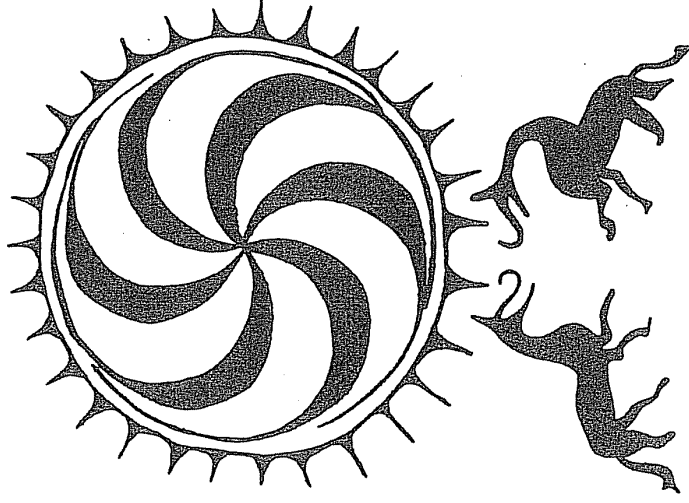
905

910

915

At times, racing down the yellow roads,
they matched their horses. Then the morning light
moved on, and many a man of valor
hastened to that high hall to see
the curious trophy; likewise the king,
the keeper of the hoard, came from his wife's house.
He walked along firm in his warrior's glory,
known well to be best, and his queen walked with him
across the meadow with an escort of maidens.

920



925 Hrothgar spoke—he went to the hall,
stepped onto the raised place and looked at the roof
adorned with gold, and at Grendel's hand—:
"For this great sight may we give our thanks
to God Almighty! I have endured many
afflictions from Grendel, but the Keeper of Glory
can always work wonder after wonder.

930 "It was not long ago that I gave up hope,
gave up expecting ever to experience
relief from misery, when marked with blood
the best of houses stood humbled by horrors—
935 a far-reaching woe to the men of wisdom,
for they had lost trust in their power to protect
the stronghold of the folk from foes like demons
and wicked spirits. But now this warrior
940 through the might of God has managed the deed
that none of us earlier could have ever
contrived with our wits. Indeed, that woman
who bore, according to noble custom,
such a son, if still she lives,
945 well may declare that wise God
blessed that birth!



950 "Now, good Beowulf,
 I should like to claim you as my own kinsman,
 a son in my heart. Hold well, henceforth,
 to our new relationship. You shall know no lack
 of precious things where I wield power.
 I have often granted a gift from the hoard
 to honor less worth in a lowlier warrior,
 weaker in battle. Now, Beowulf, you
 955 have performed such feats that your fame will live
 forever and ever. May ancient God
 grant you always the grace that he grants you now!"

Beowulf spoke, the son of Edgetheow:
 "With kindly intent we came to perform
 that deed of valor, to meet with the demon
 and test the strength of that fearsome stranger.
 960 Yet I wish you had seen him stretched out in death
 before your own eyes, in all his trappings!
 I meant to bind him immediately
 onto his deathbed with a dreadful grip
 so that under my hand he would lie there, openly
 struggling for his life—unless he escaped,
 weakened though he was. But the Lord did not want me
 to stop him from leaving with his life intact:
 I could not hold onto him hard enough—
 he was too strong. But he had to forsake
 970 his hand, his arm, and his whole shoulder,
 to save himself and seek escape.

"That destitute being did not thereby
 purchase relief for a longer life
 975 haunted by his sins, for his wound holds him
 tight in the clutch of terrible pain,
 a woeful bond; there he must wait,
 that guilty demon, for the Great Judgment,
 what Heaven's King decides to decree."



980

Then Edgelaf's son Unferth was altogether
 a quieter man in vaunting his courage
 when the athelings saw the other's skill
 displayed high up: the enemy's hand
 with its fearful fingers. In front of each one
 stood a strong nail very like steel,
 the talon of the heathen warrior's hand,
 a horrible spike. Everyone said
 that no iron blade of noble valor
 could ever have touched him, that no trusty sword
 could have harmed that bloody hand of battle!

990

15. The Banquet

Then all hands were called to Heorot
 to make that hall beautiful. Many were the men
 and women, too, by whom that wine-house
 was adorned for its guests. Golden shone
 the weavings on the walls, scenes of wonder
 for every person who looked thereon.

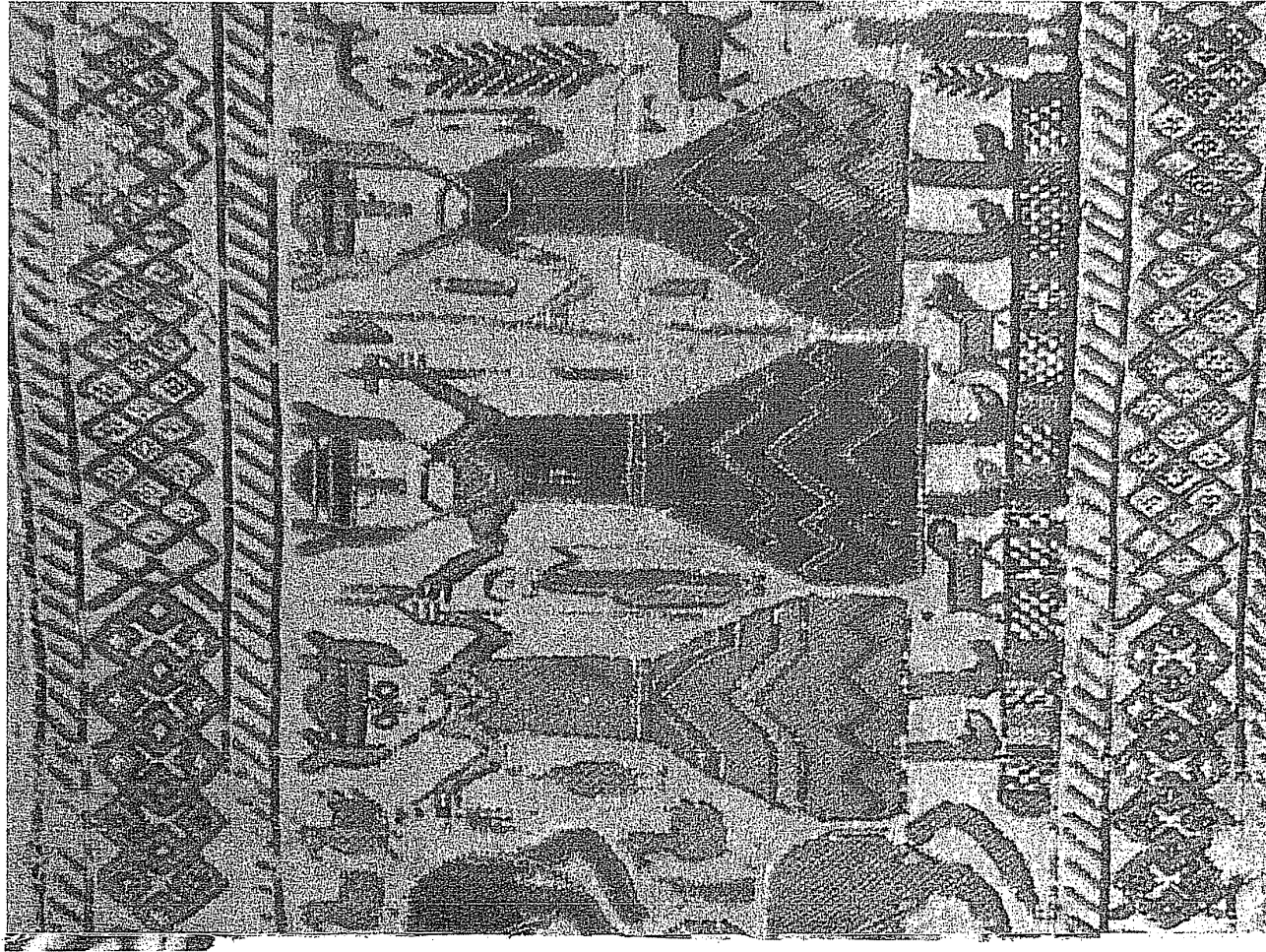
995

That bright interior had been broken to rubble,
 though tightly bound in bands of iron;
 hinges had sprung open, and only the roof
 was intact when the demon turned away,
 marked with his deeds, to make his flight,
 desperate for life. Death is not easy
 to hide away from, try it who will!

1000

For those with souls, by necessity,
 must pass, each one, to the place prepared
 for all who inhabit human lands,
 where the body falls asleep in its narrow bed
 after the banquet.

1005



Then came the hour
 when Hrothgar, the son of Halfdane, decided
 that he wanted to sit at the feast himself.
 I have never heard of a noble band
 comport themselves better in their ring-giver's presence.
 Brilliant in their fame, they sank to the benches,
 rejoiced at the banquet. Joining in their pleasure
 with many a cup of mead in that hall
 were two bold kinsmen toasting together,
 Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Heorot within
 was filled with friends; few were the Danes
 who gave any thought then to thickening plots.

1010

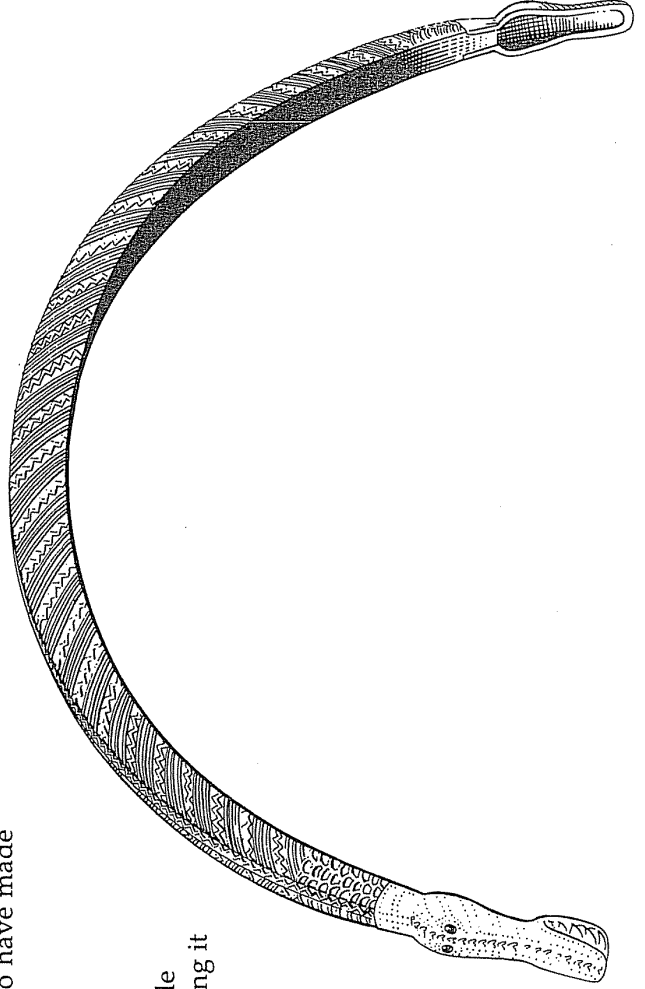
1015

Hrothgar presented a golden standard
 to Beowulf the Geat, to honor his greatness,
 and with that banner a helmet and byrnie;
 and then many saw a magnificent sword
 borne in to the hero. Beowulf drank
 from the cup in the hall; no cause had he
 for shame before friends at that treasure-sharing!
 I have not heard of many great kings who have made
 four golden gifts in friendlier wise
 to another man on the ale bench!
 Spanning that helmet a crest stood high,
 twisted with wires to protect the head
 from blows without, so that no hard blade
 could wound the warrior who was wearing it
 into a fight against violent foes.

1020

1025

1030

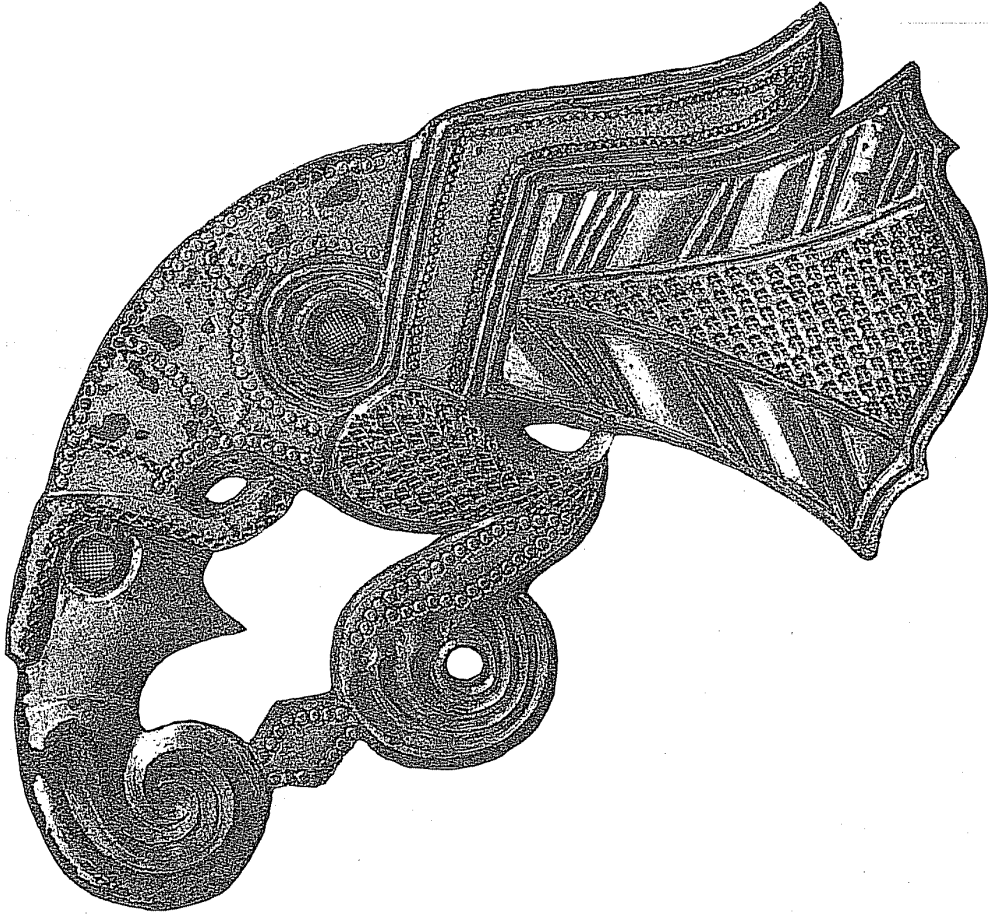


The king of athelings then ordered that eight stallions bright with golden bridles be led through the hall. On one of those horses was a fine saddle, finished with gems; it had been the king's own battle seat when Hrothgar had wished to test his hand at sword-play. Never was that warrior known to retreat from the front when corpses fell!

By now the lord of the Ingwines had lavished upon the Geat a goodly share of horses and jewels, and he wished him joy of them. Thus the hoard guardian honored that hero with such a bounty of stallions and wealth that no one can find a fault in his kindness who holds to the truth of that treasure-giving.

16. Hildeburh's Sorrow

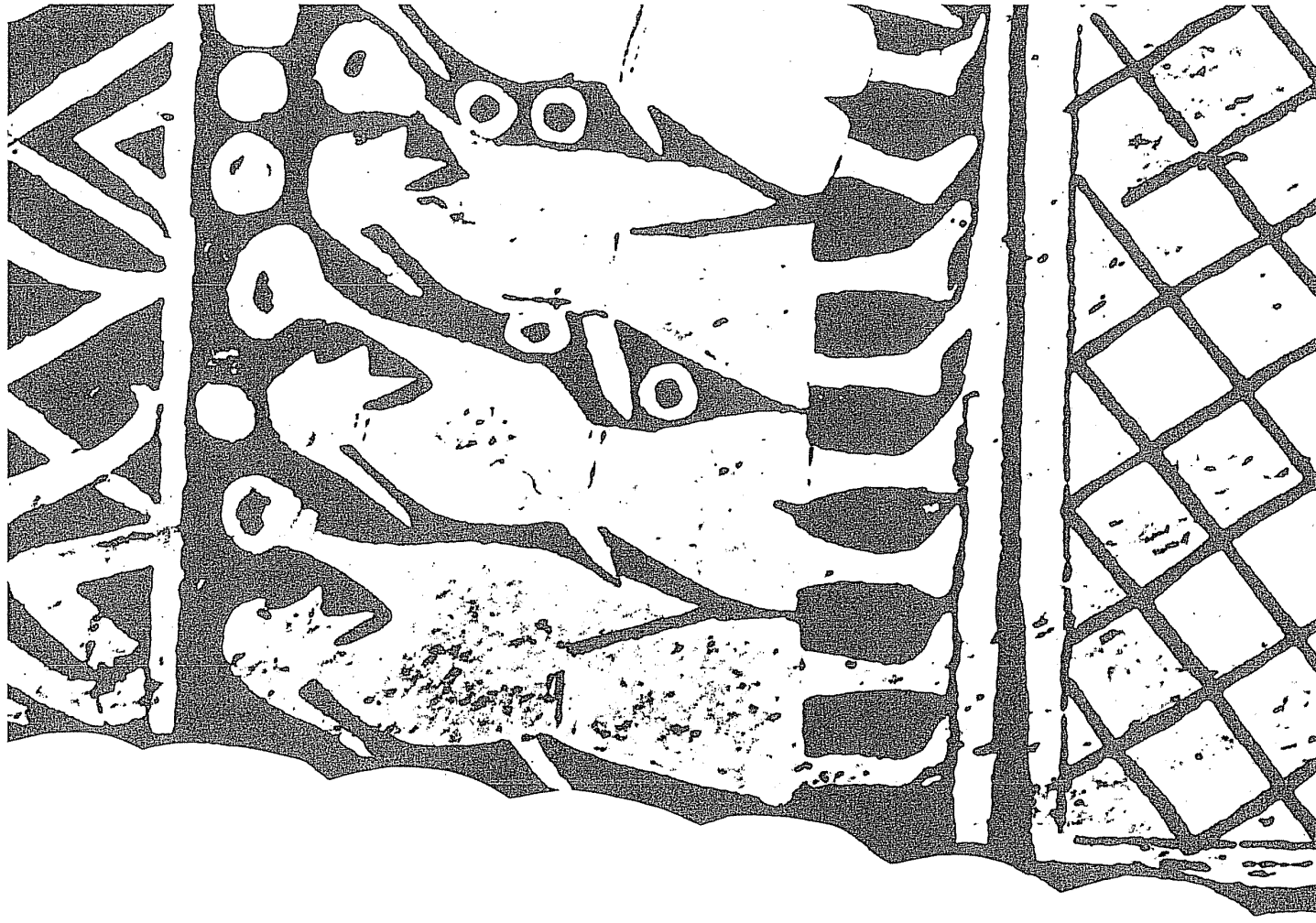
Once again, to each princely warrior who had braved the sea paths with Beowulf, Hrothgar gave marvellous gifts on the mead-bench, heirloom treasures. Then he ordered yet more: that the man should be honored with gold whom earlier Grendel had slaughtered, as he would have slain more Geats and Danes, had not wise God and that warrior's courage conquered *wyrd*. The Lord ruled then the lives of men, as still he does. Thus understanding and prudence are best, for much must be borne of good and ill, by anyone who dwells in this world in these difficult days.



1065 Singing and music swelled together
 in the presence of Hrothgar, Halfdane's war prince;
 the harp had been strummed to many a story
 when the king's shope began to declaim
 a formal hall tale in front of the mead-bench,
 about Finn's men when disaster befell them,
 and that Danish hero, Hnaef of the Shieldings,
 who was destined to fall in Frisian slaughter.
 Truly, Hildeburh had cause to protest
 the good faith of the Jutes. Guiltless, she found herself
 deprived of her loved ones at that play of shields—
 one son, one brother; wounded by the spear,
 they sank to their deaths. That was a sad woman!

1075
 1080 Hardly without cause did Hoc's daughter
 bemoan her fate when morning came,
 when under the sky she could clearly see
 the murdered corpses of those she had cared for
 most dearly in the world. War also took
 all Finn's thanes, save only a few,
 so that he was not able in any way
 to press Hengest to a fight in this place
 or dislodge those Danes who were still alive
 with the prince's friend.

1085
 1090 So the Frisians offered
 a compact of peace; they would clear out completely
 a second hall and its ruling high seat,
 which the Shielding warriors could share with the Jutes;
 and at the ring-giving the Frisian ruler
 would honor the Danes every day,
 offering treasures to Hengest's troop—
 just as many of those jewels and weapons
 of plated gold as he would give
 to deck out the Frisians in their drinking hall.



Then they swore on either side
to keep the peace. To Hengest, the king
promised with undisputed zeal
that he would protect that dwindled troop
with honor and wisdom, and that no man would
weaken their pact with words or deeds;
and no malicious tongues were allowed
to mention the fact that the Danes were following
their chieftain's slayer, having no other choice.
If anyone dared with audacious speech
to remind the Danes of that deadly hatred,
then the sword's edge would settle it!

The pyre was made ready and precious gold
carried from the hoard. The hardest warrior
of all the Shieldings was laid there, shining,
where all could see the blood-stained sarks,
the iron-hard boar-helmets, overlaid
with glittering gold, and many good men
who had died of their wounds. What warriors had fallen!

Then Hildeburh said that her own son
should be laid beside Hnaef, and left to the flames;
his corpse should be burnt beside his kinsman,
at his uncle's shoulder. Then singing, she
lamented her sorrow. The warrior ascended;
the hugest of fires wound up to the heavens,
howling by the mound. Heads were consumed;
gashes burst open and the blood sprang out
through bitter wounds. Soon the blaze,
greediest of spirits, had swallowed the dead
of both peoples; their power had vanished.



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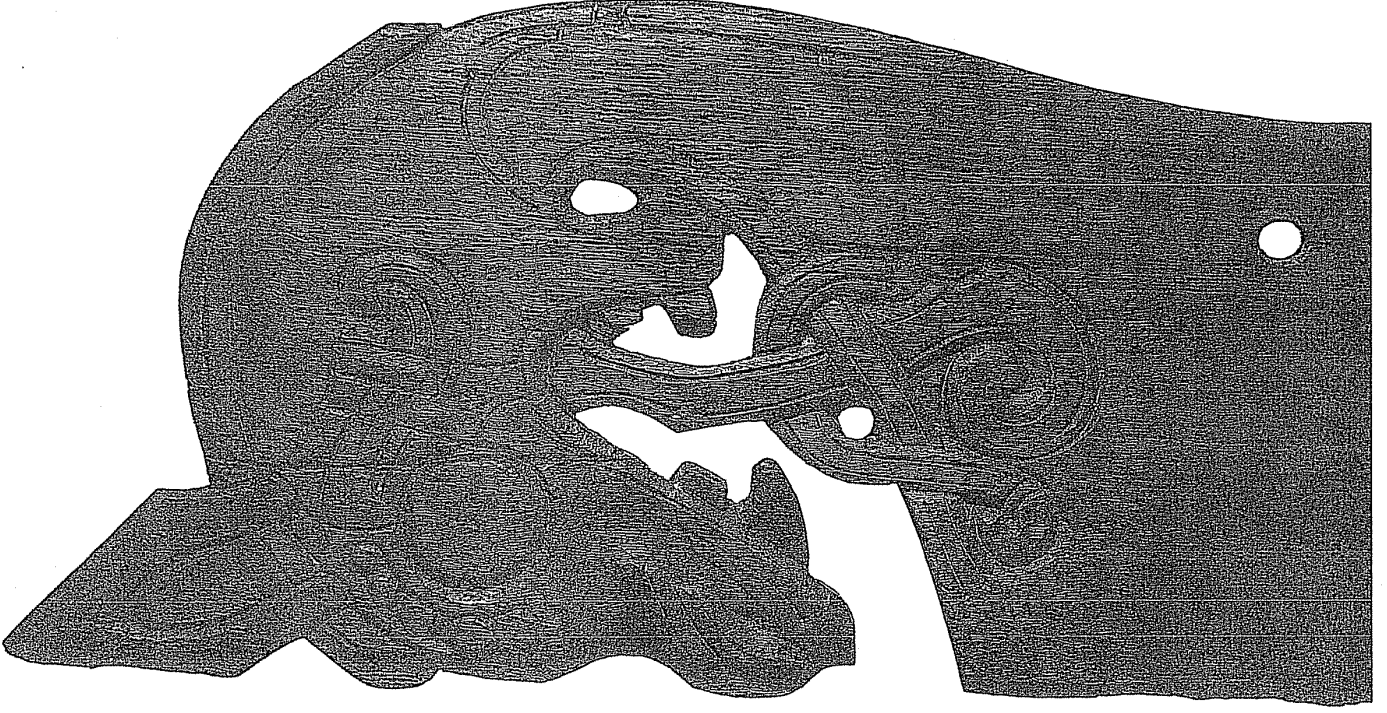
17. Hengest's Revenge

1125 The Shieldings went forth to find themselves dwellings;
 lamenting their friends, they looked around Frisia
 for house and high fortress, for Hengest was forced
 to remain with Finn through a mournful winter.

1130 He cast no lots, yet kept on thinking
 of home, though he could not cross the ocean
 on his serpent-prowed ship, for the sea was swollen
 with mighty storms; it strove with the wind.
 Then winter locked the waves in icy bonds
 until spring weather brought warmth again—
 as still it does. The dazzling seasons
 keep their proper times.

When the winter had passed
 and the land was fair, a longing to go
 took hold of that thane. But he gave more thought
 to wreaking vengeance than to riding the seas,
 to bringing about a bitter meeting
 that he had in mind for the men of the Jutes.
 The choice of revenge, then, was very easy,
 when Hunlafing laid upon his lap
 "Light of Battle," that best of blades,
 whose edges were known to the Jutish nobles.

Then cruel were the swords that struck down the king,
 Finn the brave-hearted, in his own house,
 for Guthlaf and Oslaf had greatly complained
 of being attacked after weary traveling—
 and held Finn to blame. The fiery heart
 cannot be subdued; that hall was dyed
 red with friends' lives, and the ruler lay
 slain among his troop, and the queen was taken.



The Shielding warriors bore to their ship
the ancient treasures that Finn had protected
in his coffers at home—all they could carry
of the precious ornaments. And over the sea paths
they took his lady to the land of the Danes,
led her to her people.

1155

The lay was sung,
the minstrel's tale, and mirth started up again;
the revels increased as cup-bearers came
pouring the wine. Then Wealtheow came forth
in her golden necklace where the king and his nephew
sat nobly together, still known for their friendship,
each true to the other. And there sat Unferth
at the feet of those princes; they praised and trusted
his great courage, though to his kinsmen
he had done little service at the play of swords.

1160

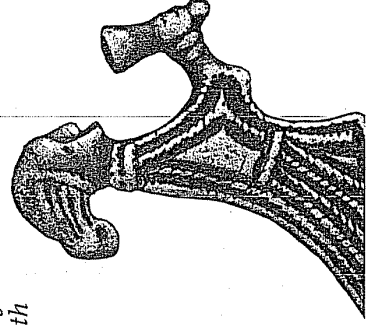
1165

The lady spoke: "Take this cup, my lord,
giver of rings, gold-friend to men!
Be joyful, and speak with generous words
of kindness to the Geats, in your kingly way.
Be gracious, and remember them with those gifts
from near and far that fill your coffers.
I have been told that you wish to take
this man for your son. But the bright mead-hall,
Heorot, is cleansed. Hand out while you hold them
the kingdom's rewards, but leave to your kinsmen
folk and rule when you must go forth
to discover your fate.

1170

1175

1180



"O friend of the Shieldings,
I know that my gracious Hrothulf will guard
our children with honor, if you are chosen
before your nephew to make your way forth
from life in this world. I expect he will wish
to repay our sons with special goodness
if he recalls all the kindnesses
that we showed to him when he was young."

1185

She went along the bench then, to where her boys were,
Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the sons of heroes,
all the youths together; there sat the Geat,
Beowulf himself, between those two brothers.

1190

18. The Ring-Giving

Bearing the mead cup, the queen bid Beowulf
in courteous words to partake of that wine,
and his worth was acknowledged with noble treasures:
two arm rings, a corselet, and a golden collar—
the greatest torque I have ever heard tell of.

1195

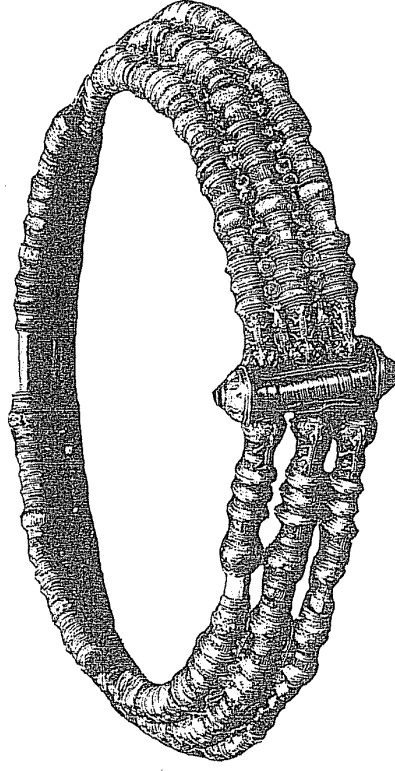
No, I have not heard of a finer hoard treasure
under the heavens since Hama made off
with the Brosinga mene* to that bright city
(precious figures in a princely setting);
he turned from Eormenric to eternal gain.

1200

Hygelac of the Geats, Swerting's grandson,
flaunted that collar on his final campaign,
when he strove to protect beneath his standard
the booty he had won—but wyrd took him.
Because of his pride he had courted trouble,
a feud with the Frisians. On the flowing waves
powerful Hygelac transported that treasure
of fabulous wealth—to fall under his shield.

1205

*mene: necklace

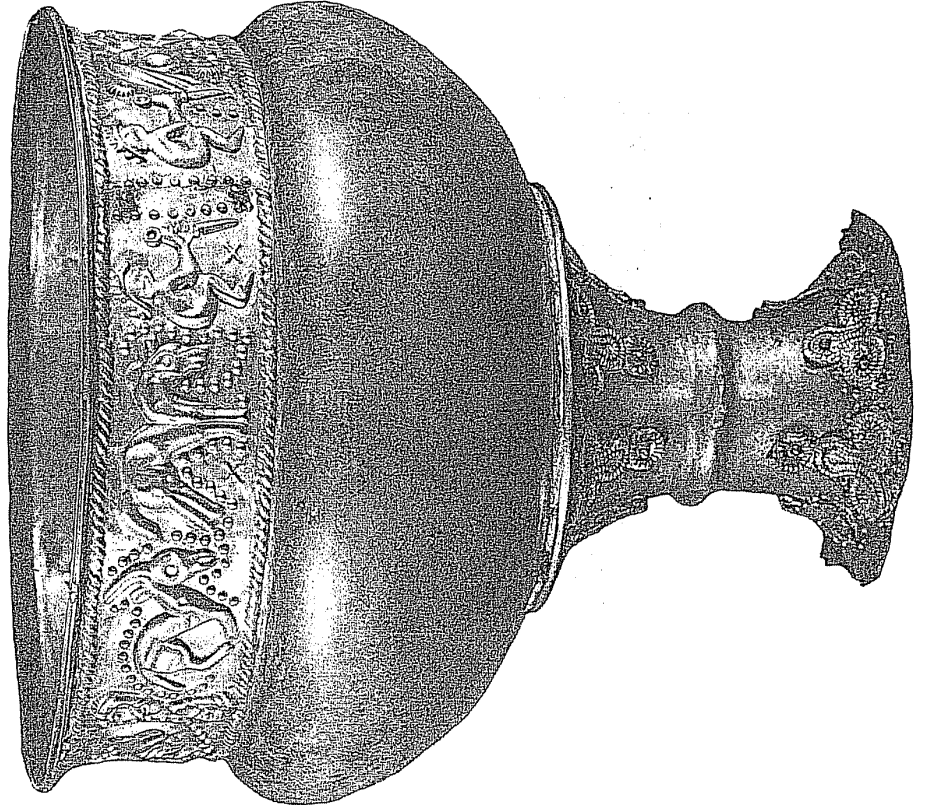


*Then three things passed into Frankish power:
his life, his war-gear, and that wondrous collar.
Less noble were the fighters who, after the feud,
plundered that corpse on the field of carnage—
of havoc for the Geats.*

*But applause had greeted
the tale of Hama, and then in the hall
Wealthew spoke: "Wear this collar,
dear Beowulf, well; let it bring you luck,
and the corselet, too, from the common treasure.*

*May you show your power, and to these young Shieldings
grant your favor, and I'll not forget you!
You have fought so well that far and near,
forever and ever, men will honor you
as widely as that home of the winds, the sea,
encircles the land. As long as you live,
be happy, young man; with many gifts
I shall recall your deeds. Be kind
to my sons in everything, blessed atheling!*

*"Here each warrior is true to the other,
disposed to be generous, loyal to his prince.
They are harmonious and courteous men—
having drunk from my cup, they do as I bid!"*



She returned to her seat and the banquet continued.
 They feasted and drank, unwary of the doom,
 the twisting fate determined of yore,
 that would strike among them long before morning!
 Hrothgar, their leader, went away to his house
 to seek his bed. Within that high building
 the athelings kept watch, as often before.

1235

They cleared the benches and laid down bolsters,
 fluffed up feather-beds. (But one of those friends
 lay down on his couch a doomed man!)
 They had hung their shields above their heads,
 bright on the wall, and over each bench
 ready to hand they set their steep helmets
 that towered in battle, and their ring-mail byrnies,
 their magnificent spears. Such was their custom:
 they always kept fit and ready for a fight
 at home or afield, eager to help
 whenever their lord might look to them
 in need. That was truly a noble people!

1240

1245

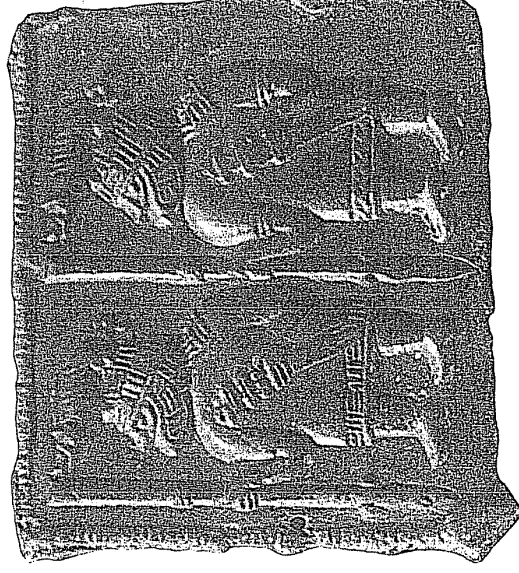
1250

19. Grendel's Mother Comes

They fell asleep. One man paid sorely
 for his evening's rest, as often had happened
 when Grendel came to dwell in that gold-hall,
 evilly, until an end came to that:
 after crimes against others he was killed himself!

1255

But then it was seen that still there lived
 another monster, marking time



after Grendel's death, the demon's mother,
a witch of the sea, resenting her sorrow,
one who was wont to dwell under water
in the cold streams after Cain sent
a sharp blade through his own brother,

1260

his father's offspring; he set forth then, fated,
proscribed for his murder from life among men,
to dwell in the wastelands. From his loins awoke
the demons of wyrd; Grendel was one of them,
that hateful foe who had found at Heorot
a man awake and waiting for the fight.

1265

The horrible being laid hold of Beowulf,

1270

but he remembered his mighty strength,
the ample gift that God had given him,
and counted on support and comfort from the Prince
who rules on high. Thus he wrestled

that monster from Hell. Humiliated, then,
mankind's foe went joyless to find
a place to die in. And that demon mother,

1275

with her heart as heavy as a hanged man, wanted
to venture to Heorot to avenge her son's death.

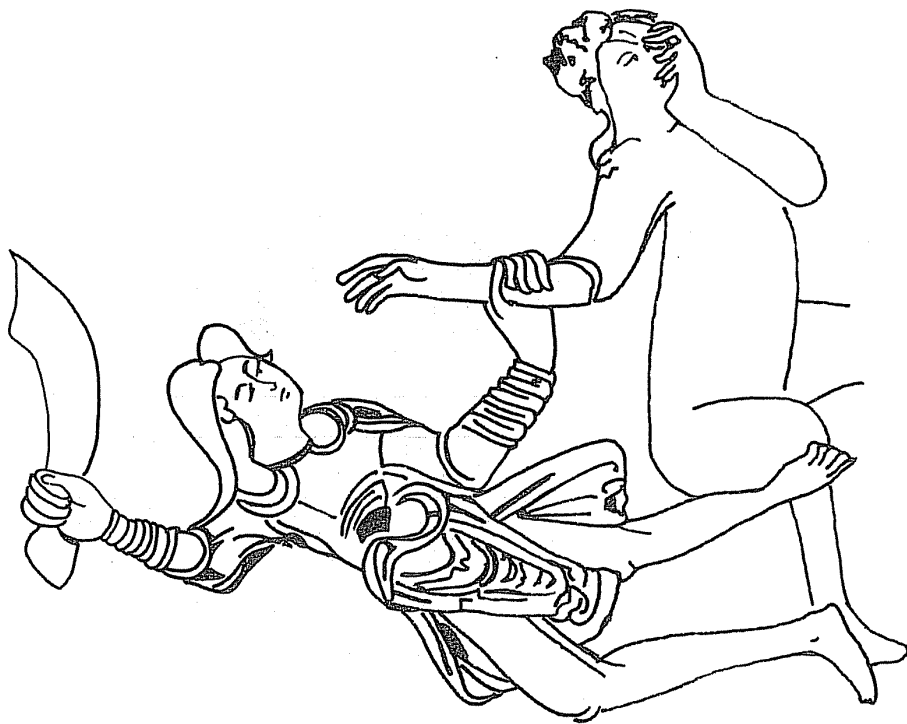
She came then to Heorot; in that hall the Danes
were fast asleep. A change of fortune
befell them as she entered—and yet the force
of Grendel's mother amounted to less

1280

than his by as much as a woman's might
is shadowed by the strength of a sword-bearing man—
when that fine weapon forged with the hammer,
the blade with a pattern emblazoned with blood,
strikes out at the boar above the helmet.

1285

Then damascened blades were drawn in the hall,
the swords hanging over the seats, and many



shields held fast in men's fists were raised;
but helmets were forgotten when horror came upon them,
and byrnies left aside.

That sea witch wanted
to escape with her life when she was discovered,
but she carried off in her cruel grip

1295

a noble warrior when she went to the fen.
He was the dearest of Hrothgar's companions,

his truest supporter between the two seas,
a noble shield-warrior of great renown,

whom she took from his bed. Beowulf was not there,
for after the gift-giving he had been guided

to another building for the rest he had earned.
A cry rose in Heorot. She reached for the claw,

1300

taking down that hand from its bloody height.
Sorrow was renewed in the homes of the Shieldings:

that was no bargain, when on both sides
they paid for their feuding with the lives of friends!

that was no bargain, when on both sides
they paid for their feuding with the lives of friends!

that was no bargain, when on both sides
they paid for their feuding with the lives of friends!

1305

Savage was the hatred of that hoary old warrior
when they told him about his best of thanes,

and he knew his dearest companion was dead!
Beowulf was quickly bidden to come

to Hrothgar's dwelling; it was break of day.
Nobly he moved among his men,

1310

a champion among warriors, to where the king waited,
wondering if God would ever grant him

a change from this time of terrible woe.
Along the floor walked the worthy fighter

among his thanes—the whole hall thundered—
until he came before the king

and hailed him, asking if he had had
a pleasant night, as he had planned.

1315

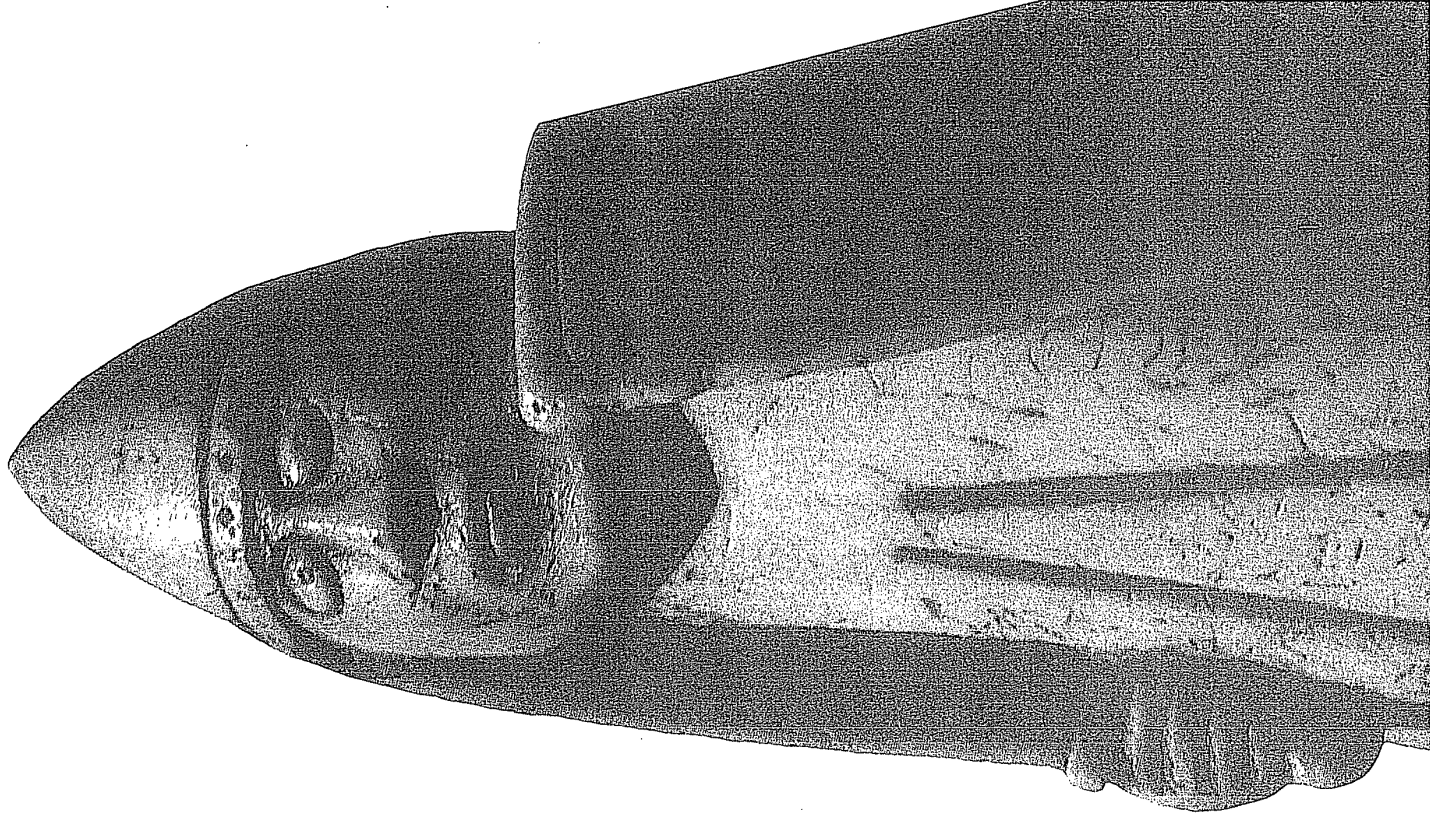
a pleasant night, as he had planned.

a pleasant night, as he had planned.

a pleasant night, as he had planned.

a pleasant night, as he had planned.

1320



Hrothgar spoke, the Shielding's protector:
 "Ask not about pleasure. Sorrow is renewed
 for the Danish people. Ashere is dead,
 the elder brother of Yrmenlaf,
 my confidant and advisor in council,
 my shoulder companion, with whom I would parry
 the blades that threatened to smite our boar-helmets,
 protecting each other. As Ashere was,
 such a man ought an atheling be!

1325



"A demon wandering in darkness slew him
 by night in Heorot, and I know not whither
 that creature has borne away her catch,
 anticipating feasting. She avenged that fight
 of night before last when you laid on Grendel,
 grappling him hard, with hostile intent,
 when for far too long he had torn and depleted
 the folk of my hearth. He fell in battle,
 and now there comes to avenge her kinsman
 a second mighty slayer of men,
 who goes very far in her fury for vengeance
 as many athane may often think
 when in great distress he grieves for his treasure-giver,
 weeping in his heart. Now that hand lies low
 which once gave worthy rewards to you all!

1330

1335

1340

"But there is a tale that the country folk tell,
and hall-councillors, too—I have heard it myself.
They say they have sometimes spotted two
such huge monsters who walk the moors,
wanderers from elsewhere. One was formed,
so far as the most discerning could see,
in a woman's likeness; the second one
shared her exile in the shape of a man,
except he was huger than anyone human!
The folk who dwelt there in olden days
named him Grendel, but nobody knows
his sire, or whether other spirits
were spawned before him.

1350

1355

"In a secret land
they dwell, among wild fells, wolf-slopes,
windy headlands where a waterfall
hurtles down through the mist into darkness
under the fells. Not far away
in miles lies hidden that lonely mere
overhung by trees covered in hoar-frost,
a deep-rooted wood that shadows the water.
They say every night there appears a strange
fire on the lake!—And no man lives
so wise as to know that water's depth.

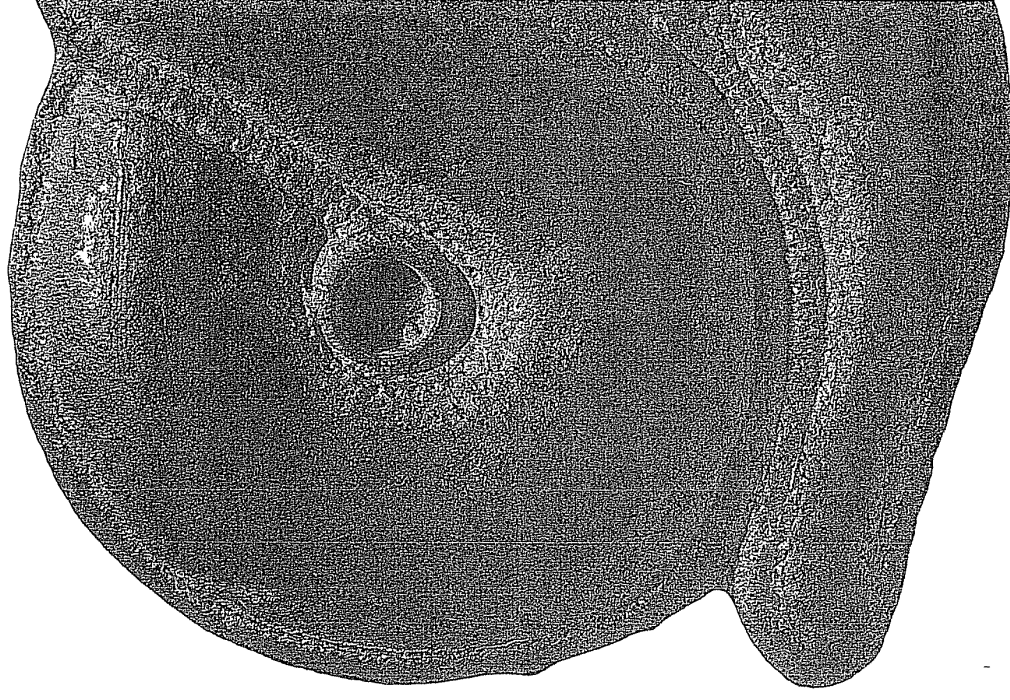
1360

1365

Though the stag of the heath, pressed hard by hounds,
should make for the forest with his mighty antlers,
put to flight from afar, he will forfeit his life
on the shore rather than swim in that lake
to protect his head. Not a happy place!
There the wind stirs up sudden storms
where clashing waves ascend to the clouds
and the sky presses down, dark and smothering,
weeping from above.

1370

1375



"Now once more you
alone can save us, but you have never seen
that fearful place where you may find
the surly demon. Seek if you dare!
I shall honor you for taking that on,
just as before, in jewels and gold,
worthy treasures, if you come away."

1380

21. Creatures of the Mere

Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:
"Grieve not, wise ruler! Rather should a man
avenge his friend's murder than mourn him too much.

1385

Death comes to all. Let him who is able
achieve in the world what he wants of glory
and fame among men before he must die—
for the atheling, that is afterwards best!

1390

Arise, great king, let us go quickly
to mark the track of Grendel's mother.
She will not escape under cover, I swear,
to the darkest cavern, or the depths of the sea,
or the wild forest, go where she will!

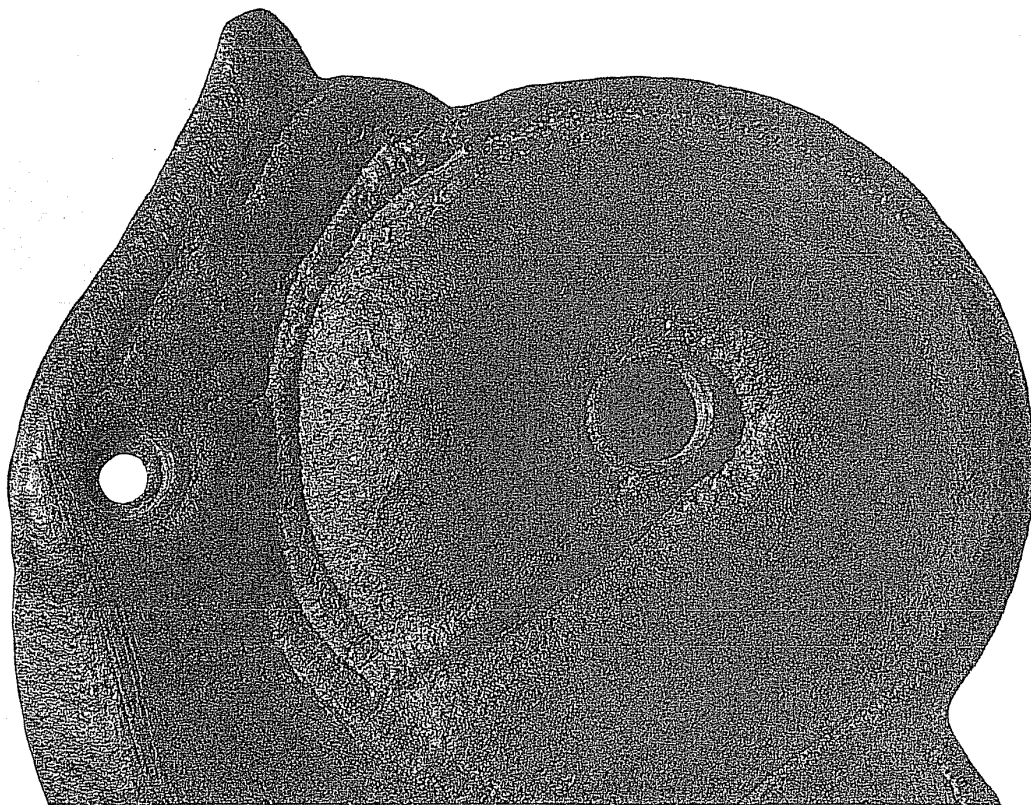
1395

For a day only endure with patience
the weight of your sorrow—I know you will."
The gray-haired king leapt up, thanking God,
the mighty Sky-Lord, for what that man said.

Then a horse was bridled for Hrothgar,
a stallion with braided mane. In splendor
the king rode, followed by his band on foot
carrying shields. The spoor was clear
as it wound along the path through the woods,
then over the waste land, and onward she had gone
over mirky moorlands, making off
with the corpse of the best of all the comrades
who made their home in Hrothgar's hall.

1400

1405



That son of princes picked his way
 over steep cliffs that were loose with stone,
 along narrow footpaths and unknown trails,
 precipitous mosses where monsters dwelt.

1410

With a certain few he spied out the land,
 going before so that others could follow,
 when suddenly he came to a stand of trees
 bending across gray blocks of stone,
 a dismal wood. Dark beneath
 lay a stagnant and bloody lake.

1415

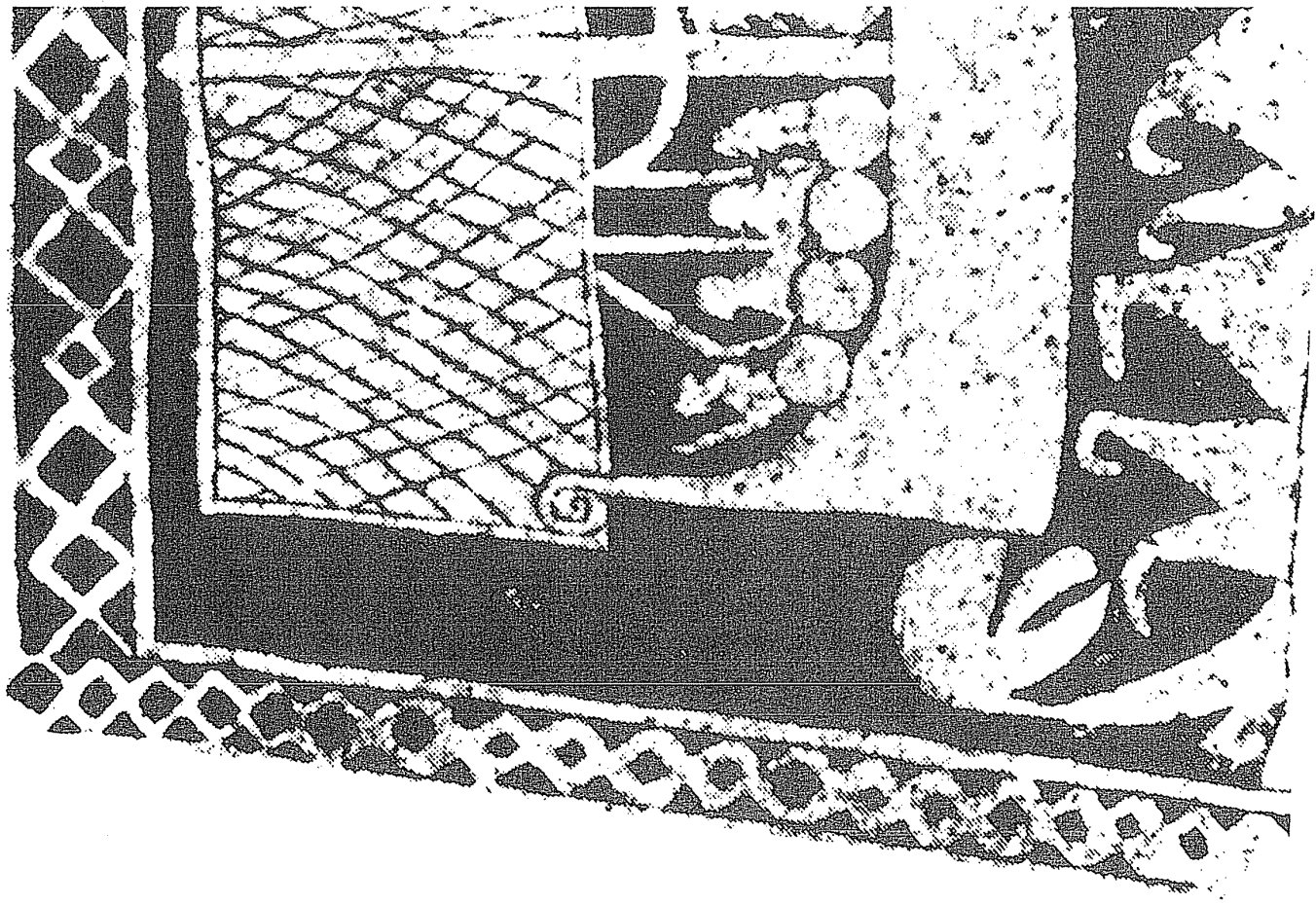
To all the Danes it was hard to endure,
 a difficult thing for many athane,
 for each of those friends, when on the edge
 of that stony cliff they came upon it—
 Ashere's head.

1420

The water welled hotly
 as they looked at the lake. Then loud and clear
 the war horn sang out, and those walkers found
 boulders to sit on, where they could see
 many a wondrous serpent winding
 through shallows, or lying on rocky ledges—
 such creatures of the deep as often, near dawn,
 will show themselves to passing ships,
 a horrid meeting!

1425

1430



They hurried away,
snapping and angry at the bright sound
of the pealing horn. A prince of the Geats
shot at one of those swimming monsters
so hard with his arrow that the point drove home
to score on its life; then on that lake
he dawdled at swimming, when death was on him!
With a hooked javelin they hemmed him in;
as he bled out his life they thrust a boar-spear
under his scales and drew him to shore,
a wondrous serpent. With awe the warriors
looked on this thing that lived in the mere!

1435

1440

Recklessly Beowulf readied himself
in his coat of mail, carefully woven
and finely adorned, which would dare to enter
that lake; this byrnie would protect his body
so that no malicious monster's claw
could dig in his breast or endanger his life.
And the shining helmet hurling its light
through the depths of that tarn would protect his head;
made worthy with jewels, through the surging waters
the encircling bands would shine as they did
in days long ago, when a great smith wrought it
and set about it the shapes of boars
so that no sharp blade could wound him in battle.

1445

1450



54 1455

And the last helper was not the least.
Hrothgar's *thule** lent it to him—
a hilted sword whose name was *Hrunting*.
Among the highest of inherited treasures,
that iron blade, hardened in blood,
was fretted with serpent-marks; never had it failed
any warrior who wound his fist
hard upon it, in perilous quest
or fierce battle. That was not the first time
that it had to perform a courageous feat!

1460

1465

Indeed, Unferth, the son of Edgelaf,
said little about that strength he had boasted of
earlier at beer, when he lent his blade
to a better warrior; he did not wish
to risk his own life in that turbid lake
with a noble feat. There he lost fame,
renown for courage. Not so the other,
once he had readied himself for war!

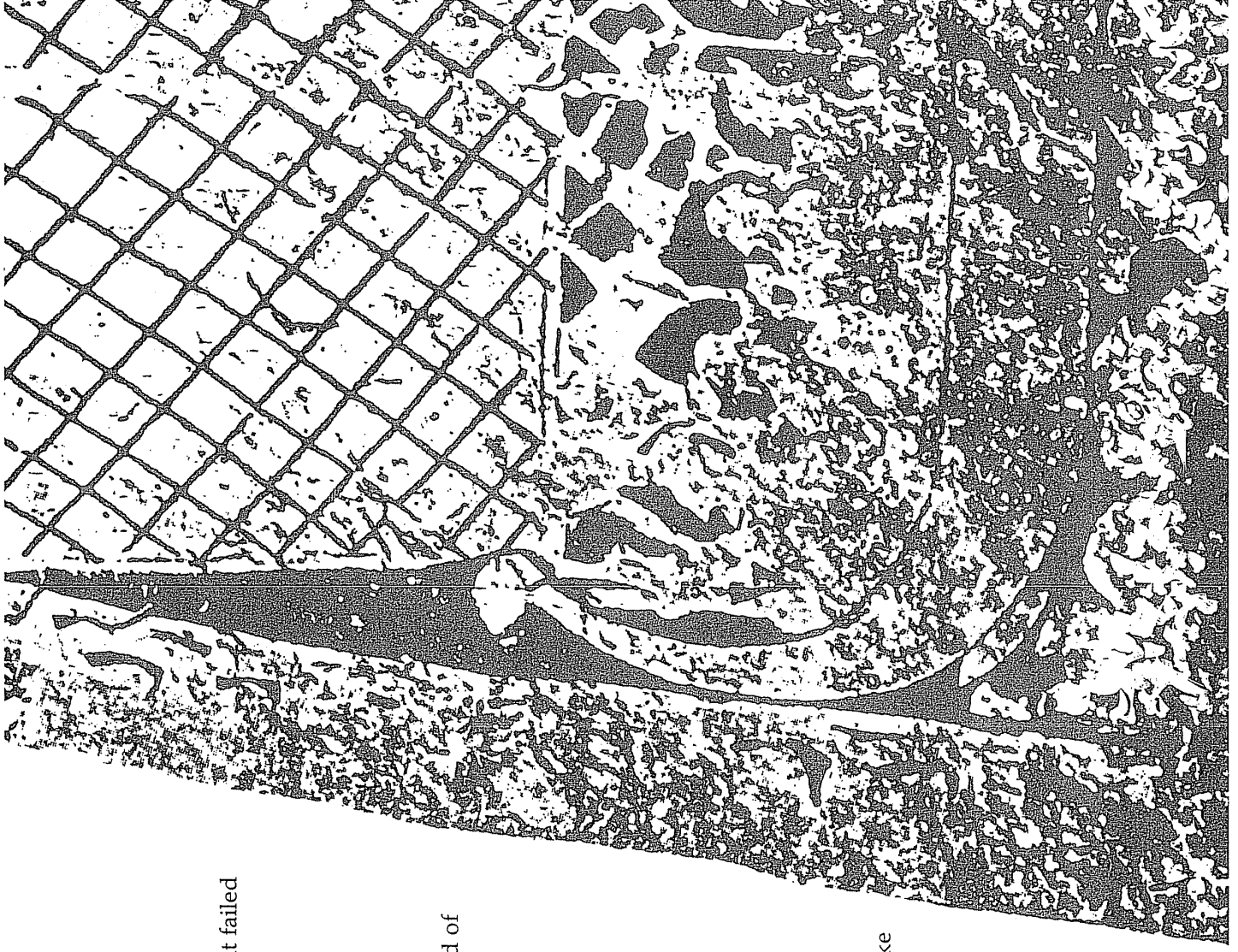
1470

22. The Encounter with the Sea-Hag

Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:

"Consider now, great son of Hlafdane,
wise leader and gold-friend of warriors,
now that I'm ready, think of those things
we spoke of earlier: if in your service
I should lose my life, you said you would like
to perform the office of father to me.

**thule*: orator



Be, then, a guardian to my band of warriors,
my brave companions, if battle takes me.

And the riches you gave me for honor and glory,
dear Hrothgar, convey them to Hygelac,
so that the lord of the Geats may look

upon that gold and priceless treasure
and know that I found a munificent
giver of rings, who was grateful to me.

Let Unferth have that ancient heirloom,
my wave-marked sword, known widely to men
for its hard blade. With Hrunting I

shall hew myself glory or death shall have me!"
After these words the prince of the Weathergeats
turned away with courage, not caring at all
to wait for an answer. The waters swallowed him.

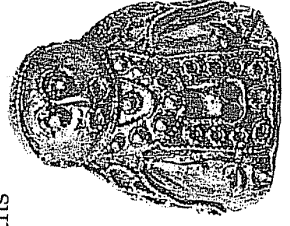
Part of the day had already passed
before he reached that unfathomed bottom.

At once that ravenous hag who had ruled
those flooding waters for fifty years
discovered, slaving, that some strange human
was diving down to her demon lair.

She grappled with him, gripping him tight
with terrible claws, but she could not harm
his body, for the ring-mail wrapped it around.

Unable to get at the Geat through his sark
or penetrate it with her piercing talons,
the sea-hag, clutching him, swam to the bottom,
dragging that prince to her dismal home
in a manner that, no matter how brave he was,
he could reach no weapon. Harassing him,
many a curious creature of the depths
broke its tusks against his byrnie;

monsters pursued him.



Then the warrior perceived
 that now he stood in a strange battle-hall,
 where no water was getting him wet
 and the swirling tarn could never touch him
 because of the roof. He saw ruddy flames,
 a blaze of firelight shining brightly.
 And then the hero saw that hag,
 the incredible mere-witch, and cut a great swathe
 through the air with his blade, holding nothing back,
 so that crashing on her skull the ring-marked sword
 sang out greedily. Then her guest found out
 that his gleaming blade would not bite
 or harm her, no, that heavy sword
 failed him at need. Many a fight
 had it endured, often driven
 through a fated man's helmet; that time was the first
 for that gleaming treasure that its glory faded.

Now Hygelac's nephew, keen for renown,
 was resolute; and in a rage
 he hurled that sword, with its shining marks
 and steel blade, so it struck the ground
 and lay there, still. He trusted his strength,
 the might of his grip. Thus a man shall do
 when he hopes to gain some lasting glory
 for his deeds in battle: he does not fear death!

Then by the shoulder Beowulf seized
 Grendel's mother—the Geat was now
 furious, and had few qualms about fighting—
 and swung her, hard, so she smashed to the floor!
 Promptly she paid him back for that pass,
 closing upon him with a clammy embrace,
 and, weary, that strongest of warriors stumbled;
 catching his foot, he went crashing down.

1545

She straddled her hall-guest and drew her *sax*,

a gleaming knife; she wanted to get

vengeance for her child. But on his chest

lay the woven sark; that saved his life

with iron rings that blunted both point and blade.

1550

Edgeþeow's son would have ended his days

there under the pool, the prince would have perished,

except he was helped by his woven sark,

that hard net of war—and by holy God,

who brought him victory in that battle.

1555

The Ruler of the Skies decided it rightly,

with ease, when Beowulf stood up again.

23. Cleansing the Tarn

He saw before him a fabulous blade

among other armor, an ancient sword

worthy of a warrior, the choicest of weapons—

1560

except it was mightier than any other man

could bear into battle but Beowulf,

heavy and ornate, the handwork of giants.

The daring champion of the Shieldings dived

for that radiant hilt, raised it high,

despairing of his life, lunged angrily,

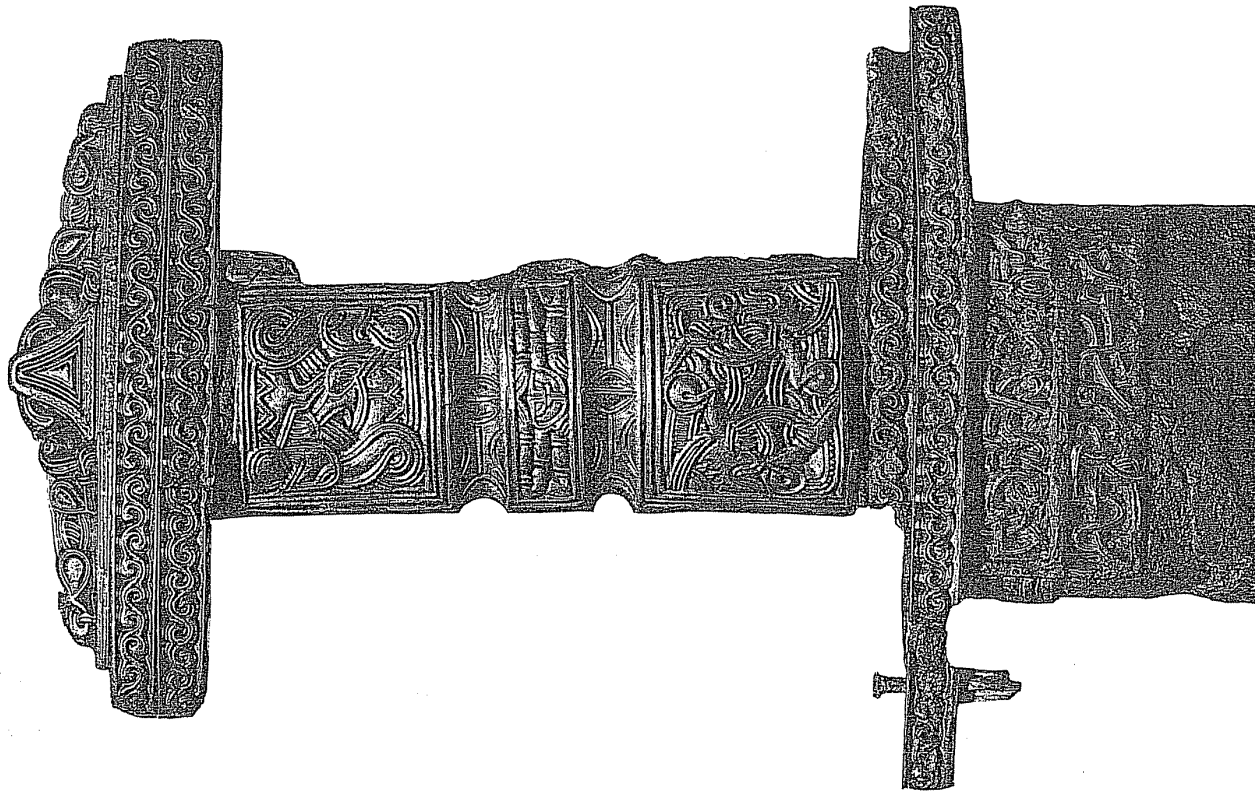
slashing down hard through the skin of her neck,

breaking the vertebrae, the blade vanishing

through her. Fated, she fell to the floor.

The warrior rejoiced, lifting his weapon.

1565



58 1570

The flame leapt up and light poured out,
shining as bright as the sun in heaven,
the sky's candle. He cast an eye

around him, then walked along the wall,
holding that weapon high by the hilt

1575

with a single purpose. That sword was still useful
to that prince of warriors, for he wished to repay
Grendel for many a remorseless attack

that the demon had made on the men of the Danes,
more often, by far, than that one occasion

1580

when he had slain Hrothgar's hearth companions
asleep in their beds, and eaten, slaving,
fifteen men of the Danish folk,

and carried another such number away—
hideous booty! Beowulf well

1585

had paid him back, to the point that now
he saw Grendel lifeless, lying on his bed
a foul corpse, as the fight at Heorot

had earlier decreed. That corpse sprang apart
when Beowulf dealt it a final blow,

1590

hacking off Grendel's monstrous head.

At this, the thoughtful thanes who stood
watching by the lake with wise Hrothgar
saw the tarn grow turbulent

and the water bubbling up with blood.

1595

The gray-haired elders spoke together,
saying they did not expect to see
the brave warrior come back again

to hail their king. The water-hag,
many men thought, had murdered him.

1600

So at the ninth hour the noble Shieldings
gave up waiting; the gold-friend of the warriors
turned toward home. But their guests, sick at heart,

sat there, staring at the lake and hoping,
but not expecting, to see their noble

1605

friend once more.



Forming icicles

of iron, that blade, hot with the blood
of monsters, was melting. It soon diminished
entirely, wondrously, like the winter ice

when the Father loosens the bonds of frost,
unwinding the water ropes, he who holds rule
over times and seasons; that is the true God.

The prince of the Weathergeats did not wish

to take more of the treasures (though he saw many there)

than Grendel's head and with it the hilt

adorned with jewels; the damascened blade

had vanished entirely, the venomous blood

of those hideous creatures was that hot!

Then he came away who had accomplished

the fall of those demons, diving up

through the clearing pool; all that expanse

of waters was cleansed when the wandering fiend

passed away from life and this fleeting world.

The leader of the Sea Geats made for land,
swimming bravely, revelling in his booty,

the mighty burden that he had brought with him.

His thanes approached him, thanking God,

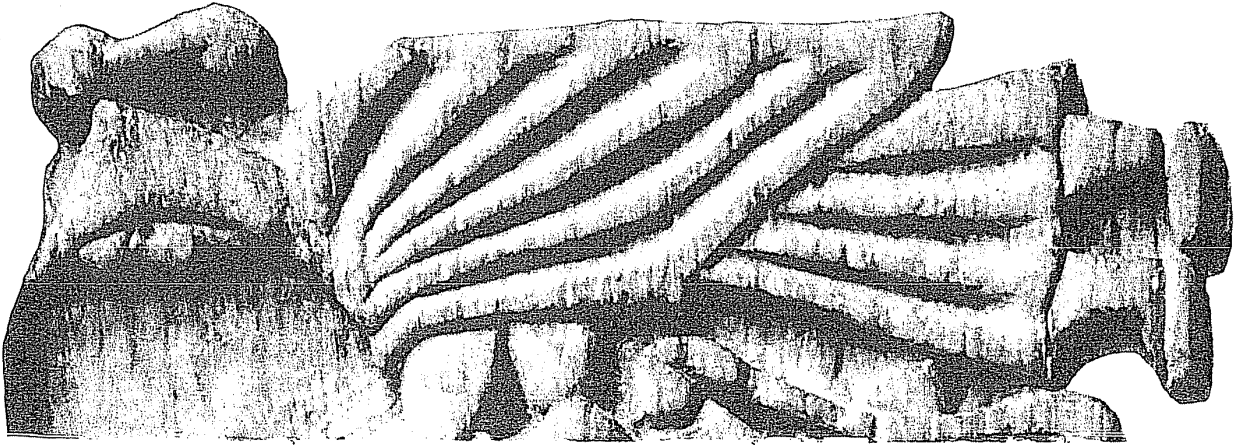
glad to see their prince again,

rejoicing that Beowulf was safely back.

They lifted his helmet from his head

and loosened his byrnie. The lake subsided

in low ripples laced with blood.



Light-hearted, the men went marching along
 the path which crossed the perilous moor
 to the well-trodden road. Away from the cliff,
 bold as kings, they carried that head,
 loathsome to each of those loyal thanes,
 fierce as they were. It took four warriors
 to stagger under the bloody stake
 on which to Heorot they bore that head.
 Then all fourteen of them, fierce and brave,
 striding along the stone-paved path,
 suddenly came to the king's bright hall;
 their prince marched with them, proud among his warriors.

That prince of thanes, well worthy of praise,
 brave of deed and destined for glory,
 came inside and saluted the king.
 Behind him by its knotted hair was borne
 that demon's head, where the nobles were drinking—
 monstrous for them and that woman among them
 to see, yet a wonder, and they watched it, aghast.

24. The Giant Sword-Hilt

Beowulf, son of Edgetheow, spoke:
 "O King, this treasure comes from the sea.
 Gladly we give you this golden hilt
 that you gaze on here, for the glory of the Shieldings.
 I barely survived with my life that venture
 under the water. It was hard work,
 a battle where I would have been
 taken at once—but God protected me.

