

1660 In that encounter I could accomplish
nothing with Hrunting, though it is a noble blade;
but the Ruler of Men enabled me
to see hanging, huge on the wall,
this ancient sword (often he aids
one who is friendless), so I drew the weapon
and swung it hard when I had the chance
to kill that demon. Then the damascened blade
melted when immersed in the monsters' blood,
the hottest of battle gore. I took that hilt
away from the foe in fitting vengeance
for wicked deeds, the deaths of the Danes.

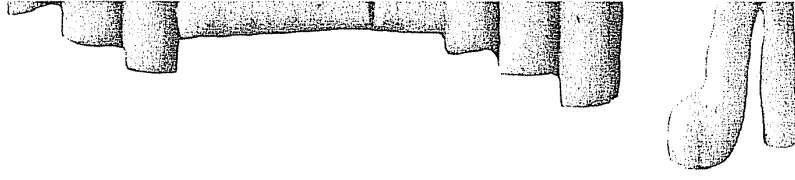
1670 "I promise you now that by night in Heorot
you may sleep without sorrow among your warriors;
and, lord of the Shieldings, you need no longer
be afraid, for the folk of your hearth—
that any of the thanes, young or old,
will endanger his life there, as he did before."

1675 Then into the hands of gray-haired Hrothgar
was given the giants' golden hilt,
the ancient artifact. After the fall
of devils, this work of wondersmiths went
to the prince of the Danes—and from this world passed
grim-hearted Grendel, God's adversary,
guilty of murder, and his mother also.
That hilt was kept by the best of kings
who had ever held sway between the two seas,
or dealt out gold in Danish lands.

Hrothgar spoke—he looked on the hilt,
 that ancient heirloom. Upon it was etched
the long ago beginnings of strife
when the fierce giants were slain in the flood.
 It swept them away, a tribe estranged
 from the Ruler eternal; as retribution
 he sent upon them the surging waters.
 And on that sword-guard, in shining gold,
 graceful runes were correctly engraved,
 saying for whom that choicest of swords
 had first been made, with its twisted markings
 shaped like serpents. Then the wise king spoke
 (he was Halfdane's son), and all fell silent:

1690
 1695
 1700
 1705

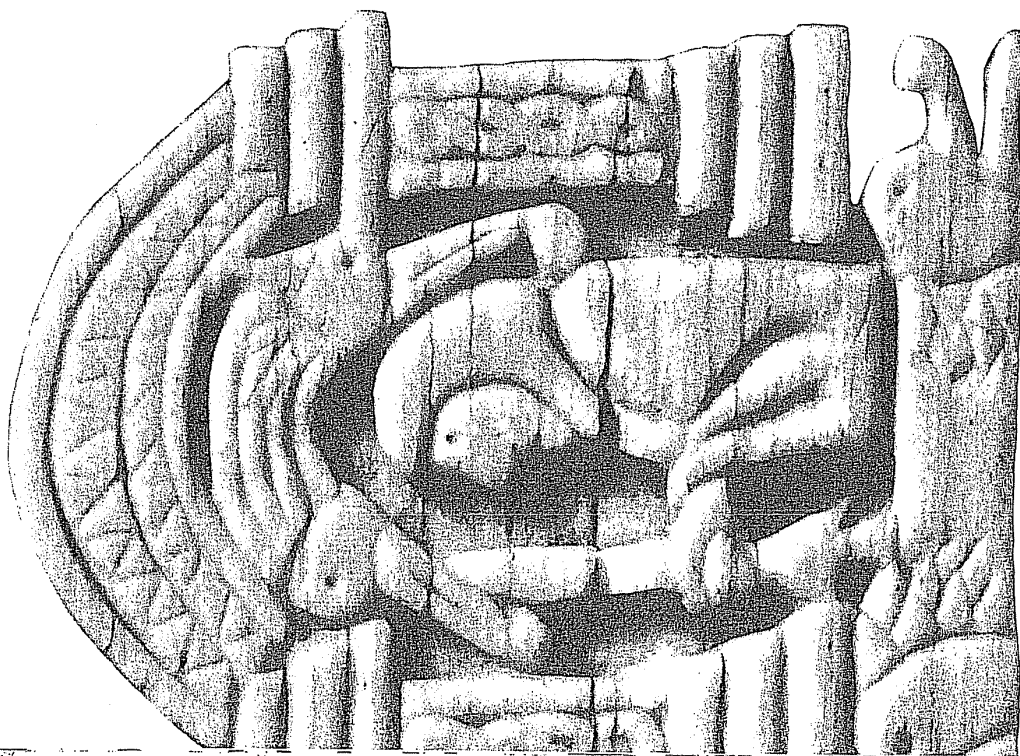
"Of this man let me say, I who administer
 truth and justice throughout our tribe
 as guardian of our people, reflecting on the past—
 that he was well born! Beowulf, my friend,
 before me I see fame, spreading far
 through the whole world—yours! Steadily you hold
 your strength with discernment. You will see how I show
 that friendship we spoke of. And to your own folk
 you shall become an abiding comfort,
 a help to your people.



"Heremod was not so
to Edgewela's sons, to the Honor-Shieldings.
He did *not* turn out as the king they needed,
but took to killing his Danish kinsmen,
furiously slaughtering his friends at the table,
his own companions, until in the end
he turned to his death in solitude,
though God had granted him great strength,
exalting him above other men.
But a blood-thirsty mood grew up in his breast,
and from his gold-hoard he gave no rings
to honor the Danes, and he dwelt without gladness,
so that even he suffered distress from that strife—
destroying his kinsmen. Understand from this
the virtue of giving! This advice I offer you
wise from many winters.

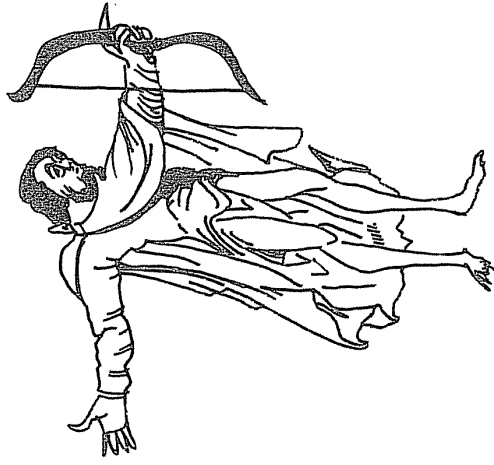
"A wonder it is

how mighty God in great generosity
grants discernment to all sorts of men—
and lands, and rank. He rules all things.
At times he allows to wander in delight
the wilful thoughts of a well-born man:
All the joys men can have he has in his hall,
and he holds the trust of protecting his people.
God grants him such power in his part of the world
—a large kingdom—that he cannot, in his lack
of discernment, foresee an end to it.
He lives in luxury, not hindered in the least
by illness or age; no evil sorrow
shadows his heart, no strife anywhere
draws the hateful blade—for him the world
wends to his will. He knows nothing worse . . .



25. "Change Always Comes"

1740 "Until, within him, arrogance
waxes and grows, and the watcher slumbers
who guards the soul; that sleep is too fast,
bound up in cares, and the killer nigh,
waiting to shoot wickedness from his bow.
1745 Then in that man's breast a bitter arrow
strikes under his guard, the sinister promptings
of a spirit accursed. He cannot shield himself.
What he has had for so long now seems too little.
He lusts after gain, and gives no more
1750 the gold rings of honor; he overlooks
even the beginnings of his own glory,
the gifts which God gave him at first.
And in the end it always transpires
that the feeble flesh declines and fails
until fated, it falls. Then someone else
1755 inherits the rings and hands them out recklessly;
he has no qualms about coffers of gold.



"Shield yourself from conflict with sin,
dear Beowulf, by choosing what is better:
1760 that which endures. Do not be arrogant
now that your power is at its peak—
for a time only, for all too soon
sickness or the blade will snatch your life,
or the fire's assault, or the sweep of the waves,
or brandished sword, or soaring arrow,
1765 or terrible old age . . . or your eye's brightness
will fail and darken, until suddenly death
has overpowered you, noble prince!

"So it was for me. I wielded power
for fifty years, defending the Danes
with spear and sword against assaults
from many a tribe of this middle earth,
so effectively that I knew of no foe
under the heavens. Then look! In my own hall
change came upon me when Grendel appeared,
affliction after feasting when the ancient foe
came on his endless visits to cause me
immeasurable grief. Thanks be to God
that I have lived now long enough
to be able to look at that loathsome head
with my own eyes, at the end of the ancient feud!

"Now, go to your bench, enjoy the banquet
prepared in your honor; we shall pass
much treasure between us by the time morning comes!"
Glad at heart, the Geatish prince
went back at once as the wise king bade
to his place on the bench; and the pleasures of feasting
with those welcome guests began anew
in the hall of the Danes. Shadows darkened
around the warriors. At last all rose,
for the old king with the ashen hair
longed for his bed, and Beowulf, too,
felt an enormous need for rest,
triumphant but weary. At once a hall-thane
courteously offered to accompany him
to the visitors' quarters, and with great devotion
he looked after everything that in those days
a seafaring thane might be thought to need.

1770

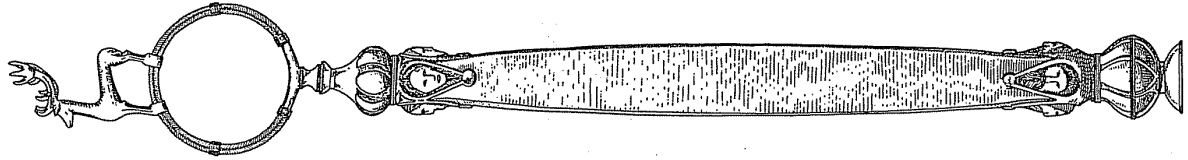
1775

1780

1785

1790

1795



1800 The generous hero lay in a hall
that arched high and golden; the guest slept there
until the black raven blithely announced
a joyous daybreak. When the jewel of the sky
thrust back the shadows, the Geatish thanes
were up and ready, anxious to fare
home to their folk. Far was the journey,
and the visitor eager to board his vessel.

1805

1810 Then Beowulf bade that Hrunting be borne
to Unferth; he told him to take back his sword,
an excellent weapon, and that he wanted
to thank him for the loan of a loyal friend
skilled in warfare; in no way did his words
find fault with that weapon. That was a fine warrior!
And then the athelings were anxious to go,
ready in their armor. Honored by the King-Danes,
1815 Beowulf walked forward to the raised floor
where Hrothgar was, and he hailed him.

26. Taking Leave

Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:
"We seafarers now have this to say:
having come from afar, we are eager to fare
home to our king. Here we have been
royally entertained; you have treated us well.
1820 If there is any way in this world I may earn
more of your love and esteem, my lord,
by heroic deeds, than I already have,
1825 you need only call me and I shall come.



1830 "And if I discover from across the sea
that neighboring tribes are treating you ill
(as monsters did to the Danes for a time),
a thousand or more brave thanes I shall bring
to help at your need. I know that Hygelac,
lord of the Geats and leader of the folk,
young though he is, will urge me on
in words and deeds, to assist you well
as a friend, with esteem and force of weapons,
where you have need of noble warriors.

1835

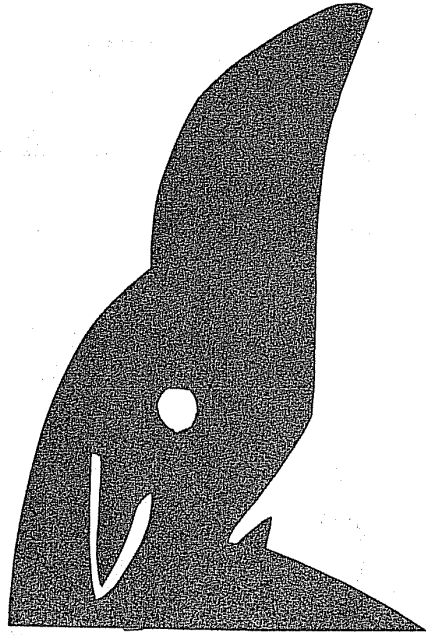
"If Hrethric himself, as the son of a prince,
determines to go to the home of the Geats,
he will find friends there. Faraway lands
are good to visit, if a man has valor."

1840 Hrothgar spoke to him in answer:
"Wise God himself must send those words
into your heart; I have never heard
a young man speak with more discernment.
You are strong in prowess and in presence of mind
and wise in speech. I consider it likely,
if it comes to pass that a spear pierces

1845

Hrethel's son, Hygelac your prince,
or a blade takes him off in battle, or illness
destroys him, and you are still alive,
the Geats will not find a better friend
than you to choose as their champion and king,
as guardian of their hoard, if you wish to hold
that kingdom of kinsmen.

1850



1855 "Your courage pleases me
 better the longer I know you, dear Beowulf;
 you have so performed that these two folk,
 the Danes and the Geats, shall have peace together
 and conflict shall rest, those hostile encounters
 and feuds which once afflicted our people.
 1860 So long as I guard this land and its coffers,
 treasure shall pass between us, fine gifts
 of greeting shall cross the gannet's bath.
 The craft with twisted prow shall carry
 tokens of esteem. I tell you, these people
 are disposed to be firm both in feud and friendship,
 1865 blameless, according to the customs of old."

Then in that hall Hafdane's son
 again gave him treasures, twelve good things,
 and said with these gifts he should go home safely
 to his own dear kinsmen, but come again soon.
 1870 Bending to kiss his friend, the king,
 the leader of the Shieldings, laid his hand
 on Beowulf's neck. Tears blinded
 the gray-haired old man, whose immense wisdom
 led him to expect what he wanted least:
 1875 that never again would they meet, two gallant
 companions in council. The prince was so dear
 that Hirothgar could not withhold a sigh,
 though as a stern Shielding he shut in his heart
 how very much he cared for that man,
 1880 locked it in his breast.



Proudly, Beowulf strode through the grassy meadows, glittering, a warrior in gold. His ship awaited its lordly owner, riding at anchor. Often on that journey, generous Hrothgar was acclaimed for his gifts. That was a king!—blameless entirely, until his strength was taken by age; it destroys many men.

1885

27. Homeward over the Sea

The brave young Geats came striding together onto the shore, their ring-mail shining, hand-woven sarks. The sentinel saw them approach as before, but felt it improper rudely to hail such guests from his high post on the rocks, so he rode down to greet them, saying how welcome they would seem to their friends in the handsome byrnies they were wearing home. Still on the sand, the spacious vessel with twisted prow was loaded with treasures, horses and battle-gear. The mast towered high over Hrothgar's gifts from the Danish hoard. When Beowulf granted a gilded sword to the Shielding who had guarded his ship, that man was accounted a treasure the worthier by his comrades who drank in the mead-hall.

1890

1895

1900



The land of the Danes

was left behind when they launched their ship
 upon the deep waters. Whipping by the mast
 was the sail secured by a rope, and the craft
 crashed through the waves, impelled by the wind,
 swept onward, unhindered, over a sea
 that foamed at its prow. Fleetly it crested
 wave after wave, until well-known cliffs
 of the Geatish shore could be glimpsed from afar,
 distant headlands. Then, driven by the breeze,
 that gleaming vessel glided ashore.

1905

1910

Down to the harbor that guard came hurrying
 who for weeks had been anxiously scanning the waves
 for any sign of those sorely-missed travelers.

1915

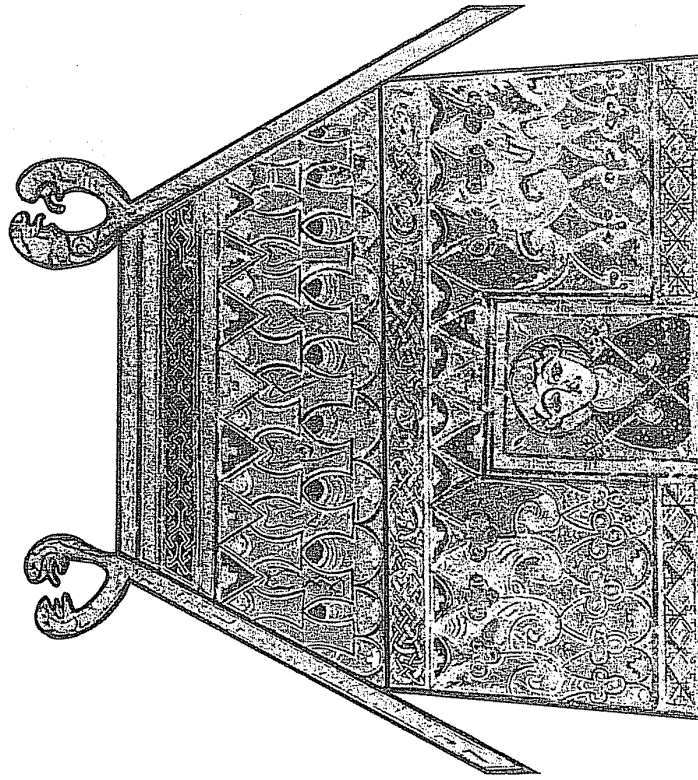
Securely he anchored their ample ship
 with ropes to the shore, lest the raging seas
 should carry away that winsome craft.
 Then Beowulf commanded that the mighty treasure
 be fetched from the hold. Those hardy companions
 did not have to go far to find their king,
 Hygelac, Hrethel's son, waiting at home
 in his fortress by the sea-wall, among his friends.

1920

The building was splendid, the king very bold,
 sitting high in his hall, Queen Hygd very young,
 but wise and accomplished, though the winters were few
 that this daughter of Haereth had dwelt in that castle.
 She was never known to be niggardly
 in her generous gifts to the Geatish people—

1925

1930



*whereas Thryth had been more than miserly
before she became an excellent queen!*

*None of her friends had dared to face her
except her own lord, or dared to look her
straight in the eye, but that she would consider him*

1935

*ripe for the strangler's rope, drawn tight
by fists around his neck, then followed
by a blade descending on him, poor suspect;
the damascened sword clears up all doubt!*

1940

*Such is not a suitable custom
for a lady to practice, lovely though she be,
for a peace-weaver, killing a man on the pretext
that he has accosted her uncouthly.*

*Offa stopped that. At ale men told
of the following consequence: she had become
far less vindictive and dangerous*

1945

*from the first moment that she had set foot,
glimmering with gold and the grace of high birth,
on Offa's threshold, thinking to wed him.*

1950

*On her father's advice she had ventured the voyage
over pale green seas to the prince's hall,
and there on the throne, famed for good things,
she well enjoyed both her generous life
and the love in her heart for that lord of heroes,
for he was accounted, I have heard it said,
the best and truest between the seas
of all the immense kindred of mankind;*

1955

*Offa of the spear was widely respected
in gifts and in war. With wisdom he ruled
over his country, and he fathered Eomer,*

1960

*who flourished to be a support to his friends,
but grim in battle, Garmund's grandson!*



28. Beowulf's Tale

1965 Brave with his men came Beowulf
striding across the wide sands
of the Geatish shore. From the south was shining
the candle of the world, the sun, as they came
to the fortress where they knew that their noble lord,
the young king Hygelac, a hard man in battle
(who had ordered the slaying of Ongentheow),
1970 was giving out rings. To this ruler the news
of the hero's return was quickly told,
that into the courtyard Beowulf was coming,
bearing his linden shield, alive,
hale from his fight, to the Geatish hall.

1975 At once they made room for the warriors, like guests
in their own home, as Hygelac bade,
and Beowulf, the victor, sat down on the bench
across from his kinsman. In courteous speech
Hygelac welcomed his friend with words
1980 both earnest and hearty, while Hygd the queen
moved through that building with a vessel of mead.
Loving her people, she passed the cup
to each warrior's hand, and in that high hall
the king began to question his friend,
1985 urging him to tell (as curiosity tore at him)
what fine adventures the Sea-Geats had found.

"What befell you, Beowulf my friend,
on that sudden journey that you resolved on,
seeking a fight far over the seas,
1990 a battle in Heorot? Could you help at all
to defeat the sorrow of Hirothgar, that famous
king of the Danes? Because of his grief



I sighed myself, having little desire
that my friend should go, no faith in that venture,
entreating you to leave that monster alone
and to let the South Danes settle for themselves
their war with Grendel. Thanks be to God
that I see you at home now, safe and sound."

1995

Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:
"I shall keep no secret, Hygelac my king,
about that battle between us two,
me and Grendel, when we met together
in Hrothgar's hall, that place where he had
formerly caused such cruel sorrow
for all the Shieldings. But I avenged them
so well that in all the world not one
of Grendel's kindred, that greedy race
that dwells in the clutches of malice, has cause
to boast of that fight at midnight. When first
I arrived at that ring-hall to visit its ruler,
he showed me at once (or as soon as he knew
what my purpose was) to a warrior's seat
suitably near to his own son.

2000

2005

2010

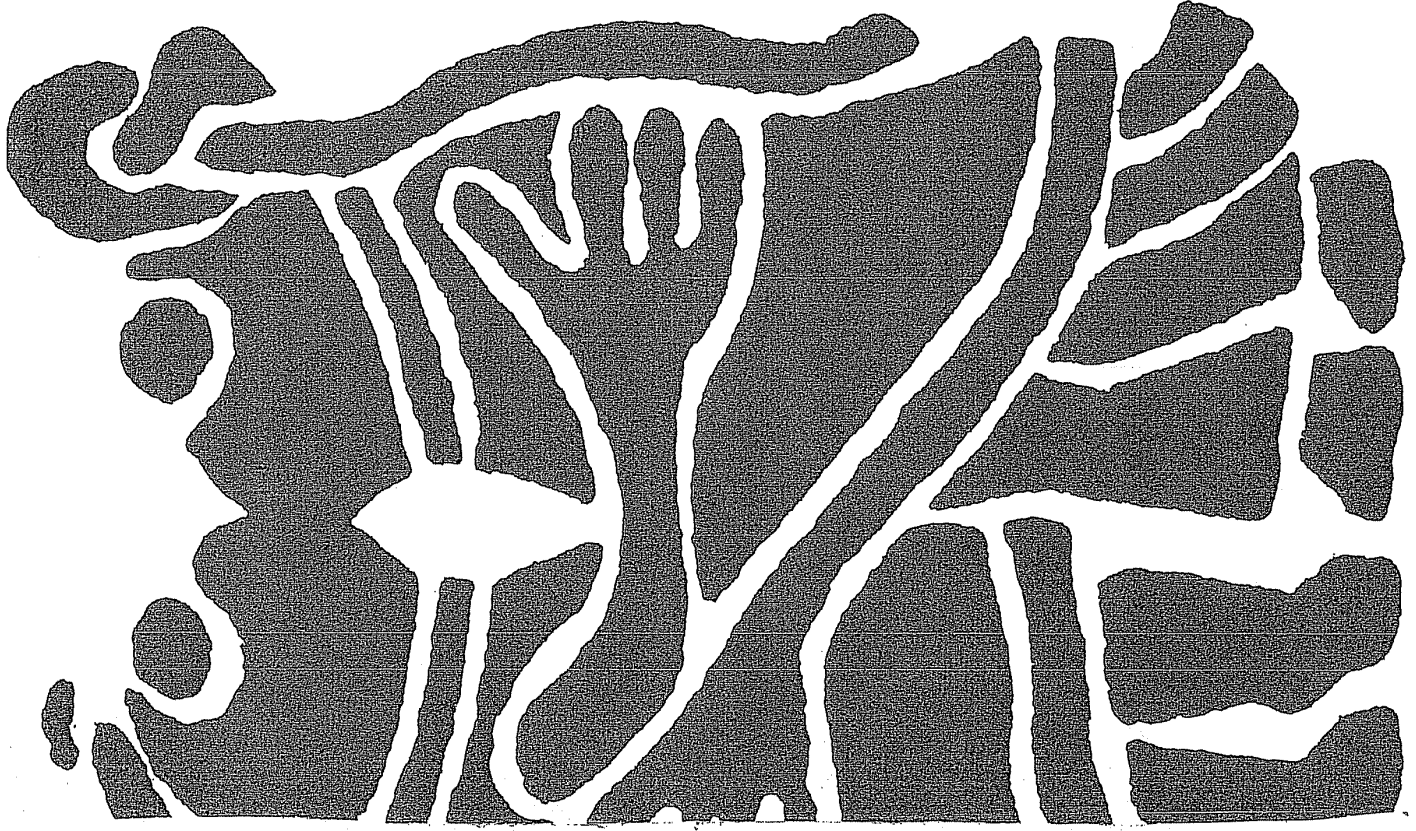
"All were high-spirited. Never have I seen
in any hall under Heaven's vault
more pleasure at mead. At times that pledge
of peace to her people, the queen, would pass
among the young men to rally them, making
presents of twisted rings. At times
it was Hrothgar's daughter who handed around
the ale-vessel to each in turn.

2015

2020

I heard those warriors who sat in the hall
call her Freawaru when they thanked her for
some precious gift. She is promised,
fresh and golden, to Froda's son.
It is her father, the Shieldings' friend
and king, who has planned this, counting on it

2025



to settle a painful feud, with the priceless
gift of his daughter. But it is doubtful
that warriors will leave their spears for long
when a prince has fallen, though the bride be fair!

2030

*"Little may it please the Heathobards' lord
or his people to see a prince of the Danes
enter their hall with that elegant lady,
honored by the elders, and on him shining
an ancient sword, a ring-marked heirloom
a treasure once held by the Heathobards
in the past, when they had the power to keep it . . .*

2035

29. - 30. The Fated Hall

*"Until they squandered in desperate shield-play
their own lives and their loved ones' too.
Then when he sees the ring on that sword
an old spear warrior will speak out,
remembering slayings—his mood is savage—
and grim in his heart will begin to test
the younger man's courage, recalling him
to thoughts of war by saying these words:
'My lord, look well upon that weapon.*

2040

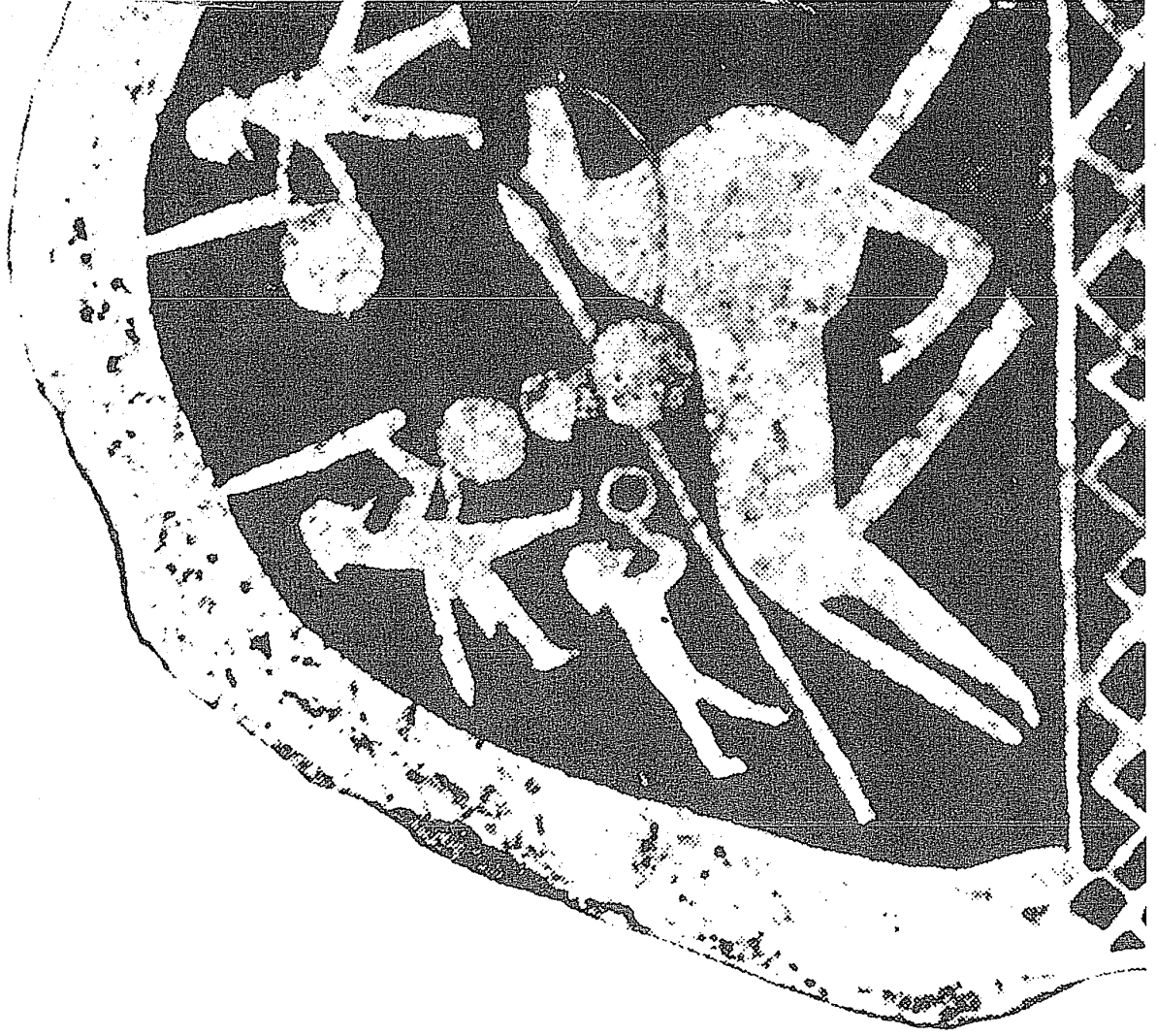
*Is it not the blade your father bore,
glorious in his helmet, gripping it tight,
wielding it splendidly when the Danes slew him?
The proud Shieldings won, when Withergylde
lay dying among our fallen men.*

2045

*Now here the son of those slayers
comes jubilant with his jewelled treasure
into the Heathobards' hall, displaying
that weapon which you by rights should wear!*

2050

2055



"Thus he incites him, saying such words
at each opportunity, until the time comes
when Freawaru's thane, for his father's deeds,
must fall, blood-drenched from the biting sword,
a forfeit, and the slayer will get away free
with his life, for well he knows his own land.

2060

"Then on both sides the pledge will be broken,
the oath of friendship, when desire for feud
wells up in Ingeld, and after his grief,
cooler will be his love for his queen.
I count the less, then, on loyalty,
sincere friendship without deceit,
from the noble Danes.

2065

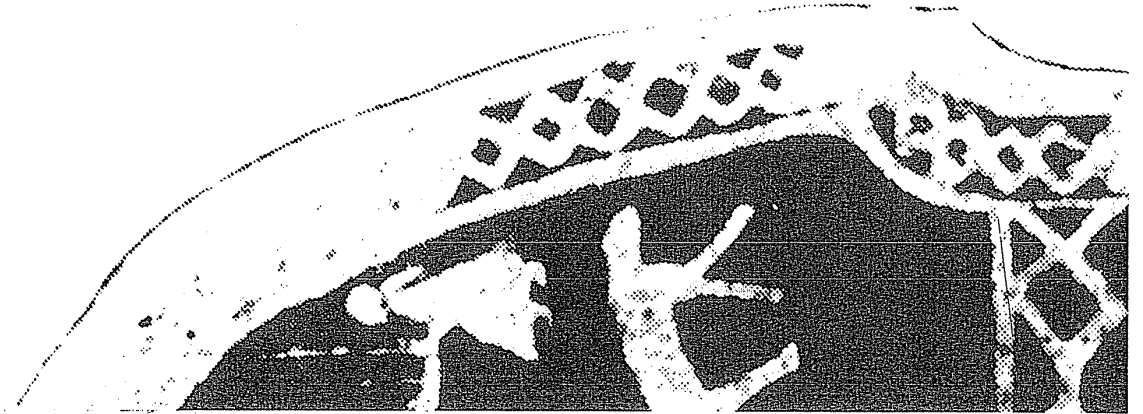
"Now I shall speak
more about Grendel, so that you may imagine,
O giver of treasures, when we came to grips,
what happened to me. When Heaven's gem
had vanished from the sky, the violent guest
came angry in the evening to seek us out
where as yet unharmed we guarded the hall.

2070

Grim was the fate that befell Handscio
in that sudden battle; the belted warrior
was the first to die. That famous thane
fell prey to Grendel, who gulped him down,
his entire body. But the bloody-toothed slayer
thought only of slaughter, and did not the sooner
want to go out again, empty-handed,
from that high hall. He put out his hand,

2075

2080

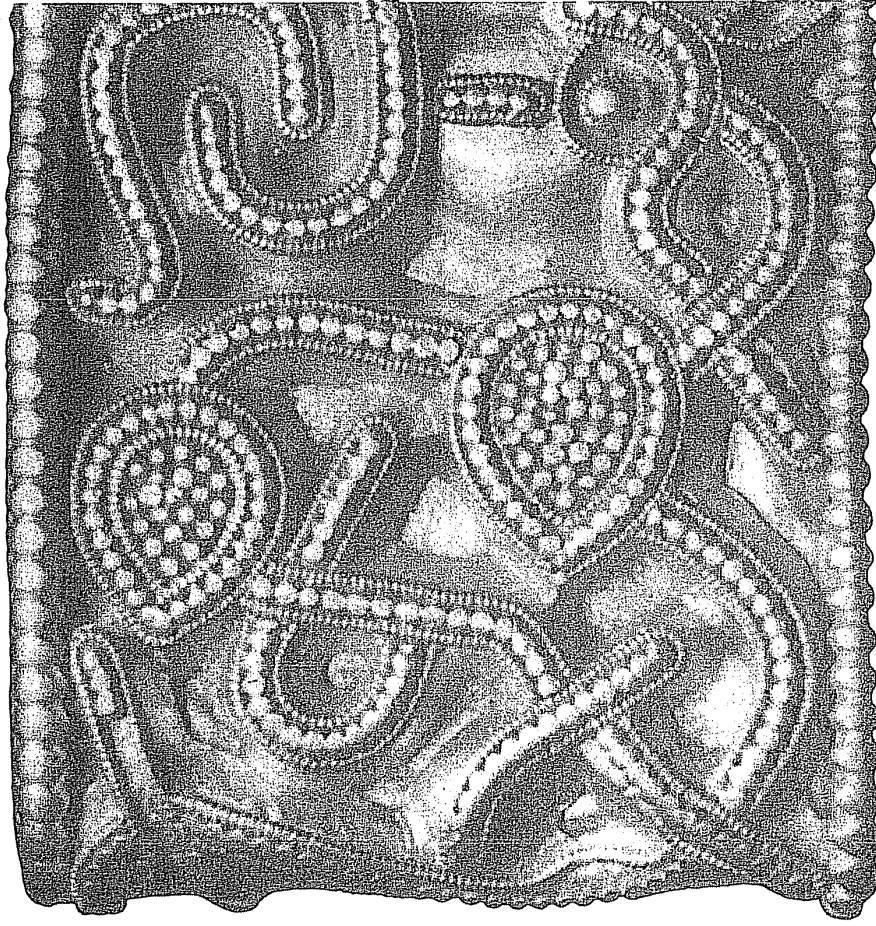


eager to test my strength, and took
firm grip on me. A glove hung from him,
gaping and strange, cleverly strengthened
with bands of ornament, adorned all over,
with devilish skill, with dragon pelts.
The wicked ravager wanted to thrust
me in there, guiltless, one of many,
but it dawned on him that he could not do this
when I sprang to my feet in an angry stance.

"It would take too long to tell how I gave
requit to that killer for every crime,
how I, my lord, brought honor to all
the Geatish folk. He got away,
enjoying his life for a little longer,
but he had to relinquish his right hand
to escape from Heorot, and crawl away humbled
to his dismal end in the depths of the mere.

"Well did the friend of the Shieldings reward me
for that hard battle with the brightest treasures
of delicate gold, after day had come
and we had sat down to the warriors' feast.
There were stories and songs. The astute old Shielding
gave us tales from long ago.

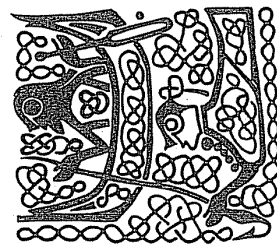
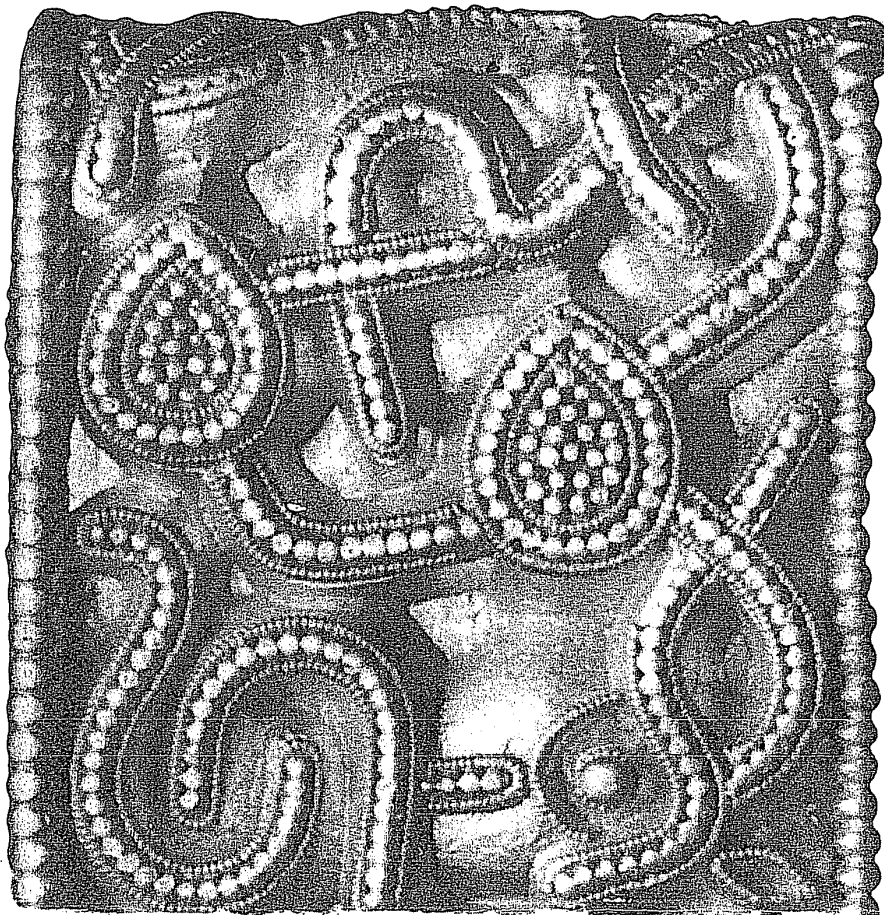
At times he stroked the joyous strings
of the round-harp, at times he narrated a story
that was sad and true, or a tale of wonder,
recounted correctly according to custom.
And then, at times, the intrepid old king,
crippled with age, would begin to recall
his former strength, and would heave a sigh
when, ancient of years, he remembered his youth.



"Thus in that hall for the whole day
we took our pleasure, until once more
night came to men. Then Grendel's mother
was ready at once for her wicked revenge.
Sorrowful she came. Her son had been taken
by death—and the war-hate of the Weathergeats.
Vengeful she came, and boldly she killed
a warrior, and life sped away from Ashere,
a wise old councillor of the Shielding clan,
and when morning came they could not carry
their death-weary friend to do him honor
on the funeral pyre with a flaming brand,
for her fiendish embrace had borne away
his body to the depths of the black tarn!

"To Hrothgar that sorrow was the hardest to bear
of all that had fallen upon his folk,
and at his wits' end he asked me once more
(evoking your name) to perform valor,
to put my life at risk in that pool
in a bid for glory and for bright reward.

"As you know, I found that terrible foe,
the witch who guarded those surging waters,
and for a while it was doubtful which
would win, but the water welled with blood
when I hacked off her head in that battle-hall
with an ancient blade. In agony, she
gasped out her last; my own life was still
unmarked by fate, and with many fine things
the warriors' protector acknowledged my worth.



2145 "Thus in accordance with custom lived
the king of the Danes, who gave me no cause
to feel neglect, for he gave me treasures
equal to the honor that I had earned.
To convey them to you, my valiant Hygelac,
was my first wish, to show my good will,
for all my happiness lies in your hands.
2150 I have few close kinsmen but you, my king."

He bade them bring in the boar head-piece,
the helmet of battle, the frost-gray byrnie
and the gleaming sword, and then he spoke:
2155 "That wise king, Hrothgar, rewarded me
with this noble byrnie, but he wanted you to know
the details of whose bright heritage it was.
He said that his elder brother had owned it
and worn it to battle, yet Hrothgar did not wish
to pass it on to his princely son,
2160 proud Heoroward, though he held him dear.
Now all this is yours to use as you will!"

And then I heard that four swift horses,
matched bays of apple brown,
2165 were added to this bounty. Beowulf granted
a huge treasure of horses and war-gear
to his king—and thus should a kinsman do,
not weave nets to trap another,
designing his death in secret. To Hygelac
2170 Beowulf was ever loyal in battle,
and each was thoughtful for the other's welfare.



2175 I heard that he gave to Hygd that necklace,
 so wondrously made, that Wealtheow the queen
 had given to him, together with three
 of the supple steeds in their glorious saddles.
 She, too, was more glorious, with that gift on her breast.

2180 Thus Edgetheow's son revealed himself
 to be worthy and brave; renowned for his battles,
 he aspired to glory. Never did he strike
 at a dear companion in a drunken rage,
 or know such anger—for he was nourished
 by God's own gift, the greatest strength
 of all humankind. He was humble as a youth,
 and his Geatish comrades had thought him a coward,
 2185 nor had the lord of those hearth companions
 wished to acknowledge his worth on the mead-bench;
 they believed that his spirit was lax and slothful,
 unfit for an atheling! But, destined for fame,
 the prince saw time reverse such opinion.

2190 Now Hygelac, famous for fighting, commanded
 that one of his father's heirlooms be fetched,
 a treasure of gold. Among the Geats
 no sword was known more noble than this!
 He laid it formally in Beowulf's lap
 2195 and added to that gift a great estate
 of seven thousand hides,* with hall and throne.
 They both, in that Geatish realm, had birthright
 to land and privilege, but more of the latter
 fell to him who was higher of rank.

* A "hide" varies according to time and place; sometimes it is as much as 120 acres.

80 2200

Vast were the battles that then developed
in later days, after the death
of Hygelac the king. From behind bright shields
shining swords hewed down his son

2205

Heardred, sought out by invading Swedes
where he stood courageous among his ranks
in the midst of the fray. They had marked him for slaughter.
The broad kingdom came then to Beowulf
who ruled it well for fifty winters

2210

(a noble old guardian of his native land,
wise king to the Geats), until One began—
a dragon!—to rule in the dark of night.

High on the heath he guarded a hoard
inside a stone barrow. Down to it steeply
ran a secret way, and into it wandered

2215

a man who by accident came on that ancient
heathen treasure, and took in his hand
a priceless goblet. Though beguiled by a thief
who came while he slept, the dragon concealed
nothing of his wrath. The neighboring warriors
and farmers found out how great was his fury!

2220

32. Strife Comes Anew

The man had not wished to enter the worm's hoard!

He who performed this fatal act

was a low-born servant in distress,

fleeing from a master's flogging

for some misdeed. He needed shelter

and went inside, but at once he saw

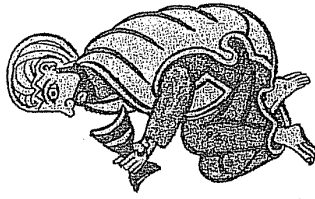
something that made him sick with horror.

There was no mistaking the strangeness that lurked
deep in the rock. The wretch was terrified!

Yet still he reached out for more disaster—
and clutched the cup.

2230





A king's ransom
of ancient treasure lay in that earth-house.

Once, long ago, a noble warrior
had given the matter grave thought
before he hid that vast inheritance,
dear to his people. Death had taken them,
all but him, at some earlier time,
and left him alone of that lofty race,
a friendless guardian of fabulous wealth.

He felt that his own days would be too few
to enjoy those riches. The barrow stood ready,
newly built above the waves
at the edge of a cliff, with no easy access.

Inside it he carried a kingdom's bounty,
priceless rings and plated gold,
a worthy hoard! Then he said these words:

"Keep, earth, now that kings may not,
this treasure of ours! From you we took it
in the beginning—then grievous strife,
death in battle, took each of my brave
and noble kinsmen who had known such joy
in the gabled hall. Who now remains
to brandish the sword or burnish the cup
that we drank from together? They all have gone.

And from the high crown of the helmet crumble
the plaques of gold; the polishers sleep
who were wont to brighten that mask of battle.
And the cloak of mail that endured the clash
of iron swords biting over the shield—

it rusts on the wearer, no longer a ring-shirt
proud to wander the traveler's ways
by a hero's side. No more will the harp
sing happy songs, nor will the good hawk
swoop through the hall, nor the swift stallion
stamp in the doorway. Death has sent out
many of the living from the land of men!"

2235

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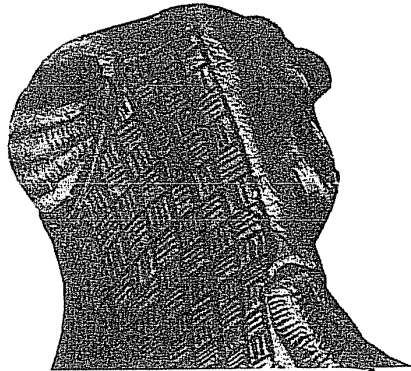
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2260

2265



Thus one man sang his words of woe
 alone, for his lost ones. Sadly he lingered
 days and nights until death's flood
 swept over his heart.

2270

The hoard was found
 standing open by that old dawn fiend,
 he who burning seeks out barrows,
 the smooth evil dragon who soars through the night
 surrounded by flame, striking fear
 into hearts below. He always looks
 for a hoard in a mound, and for many years
 will guard heathen gold. Little good does it do him!
 This time it was for three hundred winters
 he had kept that hoard with a huge craftiness
 in its treasure mound, until one man
 humiliated him. That man carried
 the cup to his lord, begging for deliverance
 at his hands from the whip. Thus the hoard was exposed,
 the treasure diminished, when mercy was given
 to the churl, empty-handed, for his lord was enchanted
 by this golden vessel of long ago—

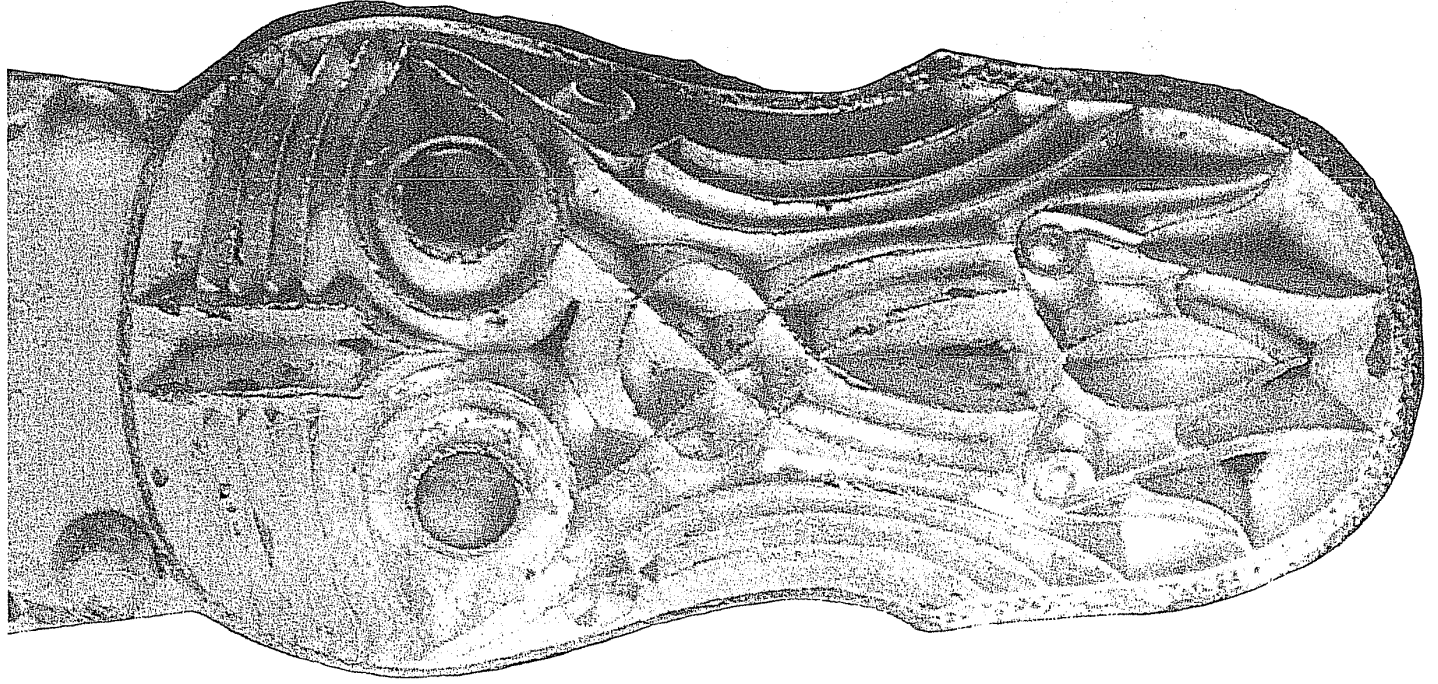
2275

2280

2285

Then the dragon awoke and strife came anew!
 He snaked along that surface of stone
 and found a footprint. The foe had stepped
 all too close to his evil head.

2290



Thus may a man not marked by fate
survive with ease many a venture
by the grace of God! But the hoard's guardian
moved along eagerly, hoping to meet
the thief who had sorely disturbed his sleep.
Blazing with wrath, he blasted around
outside the barrow; no one could be seen
in all that waste. But the thought of war
had stirred him up, and at times he struck inward,
seeking his cup, and he saw again
how someone had tampered with his treasure,
disturbed his gold. That guardian waited
impatiently for the day to pass;
by the time night fell his fury was boundless!
He wished to pay back with a billow of flame
his dear cup's theft. Day drew to a close
as the dragon wished, and he did not wait,
lingering on that cliff ledge, but leapt up with fire,
a coil of flame! A cruel beginning
that was to the folk. Far worse was the end:
they paid for that gold with their giver of rings.



The fiend began to spit out flame,
 to burn the bright buildings, pouring from above
 a stream of fire that men fled from, aghast—
 that hostile sky-worm sought to leave
 2315 nothing alive. The leaping fury
 of his wicked malice was widely seen,
 how he hunted and hated the Geatish folk,
 intent on harm. Then back to his hoard,
 2320 to his secret den, he would shoot before daybreak,
 having fanged those people about with fire,
 with peaks of flame. He put his trust
 in his home to protect him—that hope proved false!

The horrible news was quickly made known
 to Beowulf, that in burning flames
 2325 his home, the best of halls, had perished,
 the gift-throne of the Geats. That brought the gravest
 despair to his heart, the heaviest thoughts,
 for he feared that he might have offended God,
 2330 bitterly angered him, possibly broken
 some ancient law. With a long sigh,
 he mulled over such dark imaginings—
 as was not his custom. The coiling dragon
 had destroyed from outside that island of safety,
 2335 the people's fortress, with fire; for that
 the prince of the Weathergeats planned revenge.
 The protector of warriors, the lord of the troop,
 commanded his smith to make of iron
 an ornate shield, for well he knew
 2340 that a shield of wood could offer no shelter
 against flame. That good old atheling,
 who for years had held the wealth of the hoard,
 was doomed to encounter the end of his days
 in this fleeting life, along with the dragon.



2345 The prince of rings despised absolutely
the thought of advancing with all his thanes
in a great force seeking a solitary flyer;
he did not fear his fight with the dragon
or take much account of that creature's strength,
for he had braved many great battles,
2350 passing safely through difficult straits
from the day that he, alone, had cleansed Heorot
and crushed to death the demon strength
of that loathsome clan.

2355 *Nor was that the least
of his encounters where Hygelac was killed,
the princely friend of the Geatish people,
Hrethel's son, slain on Frisian soil
by a blood-thirsty sword in a mighty battle,
2360 beaten down by the blade. Beowulf survived
that slaughter by means of his skill in swimming,
taking with him thirty trophies
when he launched himself alone on the sea.
Of little value were the Hetwares' victory
taunts at Beowulf as they bore down
2365 with their wooden shields, for few there were
who left him, able to limp back home!*

2370 *After that battle Edgetheow's son
swam to his people across the sea.
There Hygd offered him hoard and kingdom,
rings and throne, for she did not think
that her noble son could hold the ancestral
hall against strangers when Hygelac was dead.*



But even in need the thanes could not
find any means of persuading that man
to be high king over Heardred's head,
the son of his lord, or to rule his land.

2375

Instead, he supported the young prince
among the folk with friendly advice
until he was older. Then two exiles

2380

sought Heardred out, the sons of Ohtere
rebellng against his brother, Onla,
the best of kings who gave kindly treasures
betokening honor between the two seas,
a famous prince. That was fatal to Heardred.

2385

For hospitality, Hygelac's son
received a mortal blow from the sword.

Then Onla left for his own land
when Heardred lay dead, and he allowed
Beowulf to hold that royal hall

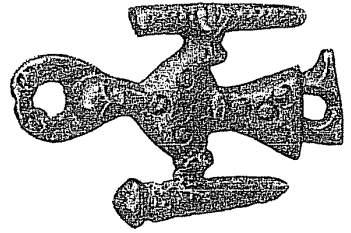
2390

and rule the Geats. That was a good king!

34. The Father's Lament

But Beowulf did not forget that battle,
the fall of his lord, in later days,
when Eadgils, the other son, sought his aid.
He helped him with an army, with warriors and weapons,
across the wide ocean. Then Eadgils avenged
his cold exile: he slew his king!

2395



2400 Thus valiantly Beowulf had survived
 battles and feuds and bitter fights,
 each dangerous quest, until that day
 when he had to confront the fiery worm.
 The ruler of the Geats strode forth in rage,
 one man among twelve, to seek that monster.
 He had found by then the reason for that feud,
 the baleful slaughter, for someone had brought
 the fabulous cup to the hands of his king,
 2405 and he who had wakened the hideous strife
 now made in that troop the thirteenth man,
 a fearful captive. Trembling, he was forced
 to show the way, and he went unwilling
 to where he alone knew the earth-hall lay,
 2410 the underground barrow, close to the ocean,
 the pounding waves. Wondrous ornaments
 filled it within, and a frightful custodian,
 primed for war, held those precious things
 2415 beneath the earth. That treasure was not
 an easy bargain for anyone to get!

The king sat down at the top of the cliff
 and turned to face the friends from his hearth.
 The heart of the lord of the Geats was heavy,
 his mind restless and ready for the slaughter,
 2420 *wyrd* very near, waiting to seek
 his soul's hoard, and to wrest asunder
 his life from his body. Not for long now
 would that warrior's life be wound with flesh!



88 2425

Beowulf spoke, Edgetheow's son:
"I endured in my youth many dangerous battles,
violent encounters; I recall them well.

2430

I was only seven when I was received
by Hrethel, the ring-lord, from my father's hand.
He cared for me and treated me kindly
with gold and feasting, a friendly kinsman.
I was not any less beloved to him
in his athelings' hall than his own sons,
Herebald and Hathcyn and my dear Hygelac.

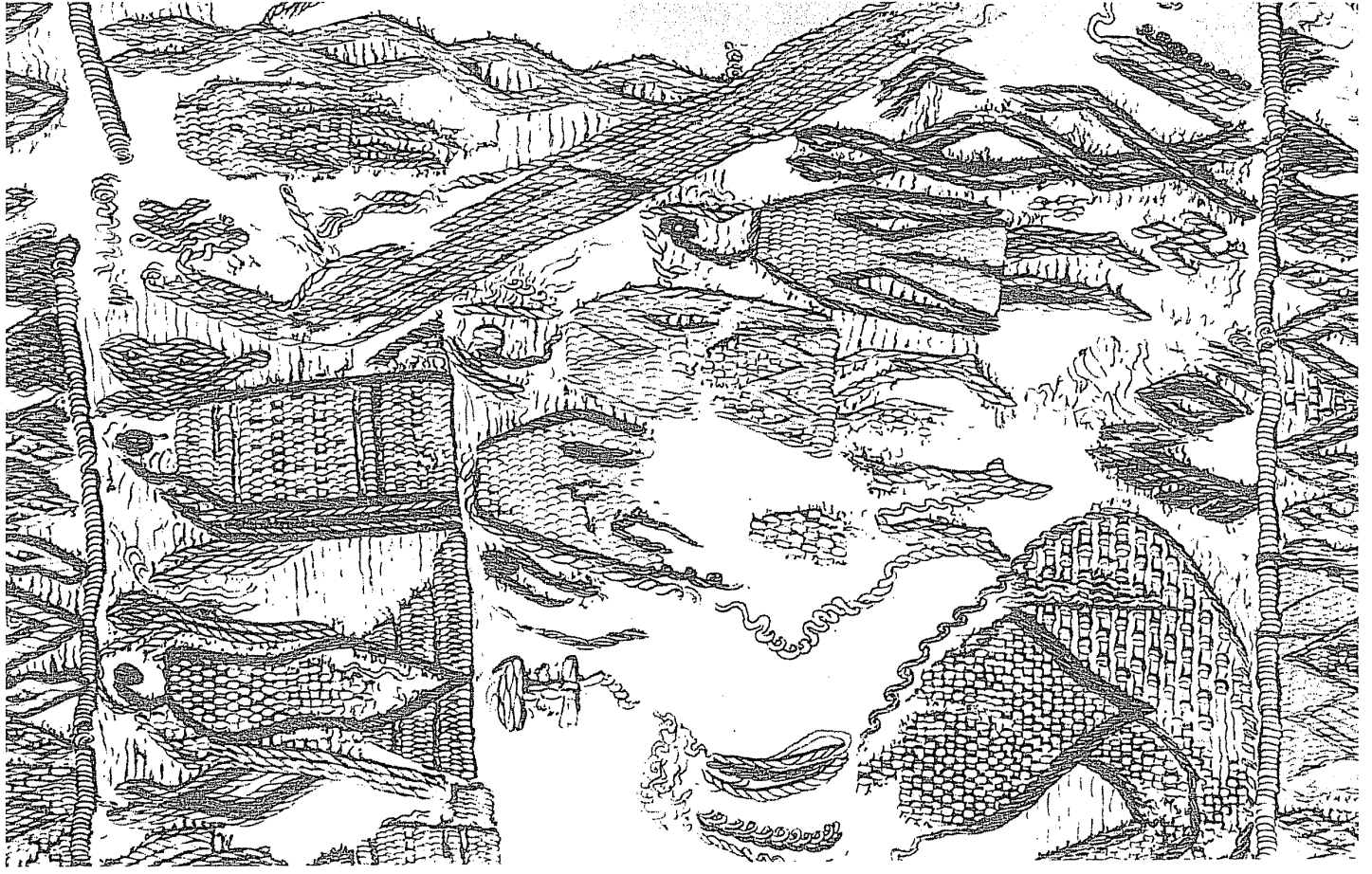
2435

"Untimely prepared for that eldest prince
was the bed of death by a kinsman's deed,
when Hathcyn struck down Herebald
with a bright arrow from his horn-tipped bow:
he missed his mark and murdered his kinsman,
shot his own brother with a bloody dart —

2440

unaccountably, a sorrowful crime
that could not be paid for, painful to the heart,
a valiant life that must go unavenged,
a miserable thing—as for an old man
who can only stand by when his boy is riding
young on the gallows, and a grieving lament
is all he can say, for his own son hangs there
as food for the ravens, and old and infirm
he cannot offer any help at all.

2445



2450 "Then every morning reminds him again
of his boy's dying, and he does not wish for
another son who will guard the ancestral
hall and fortune, when the first has been
exposed to death through some evil deed.

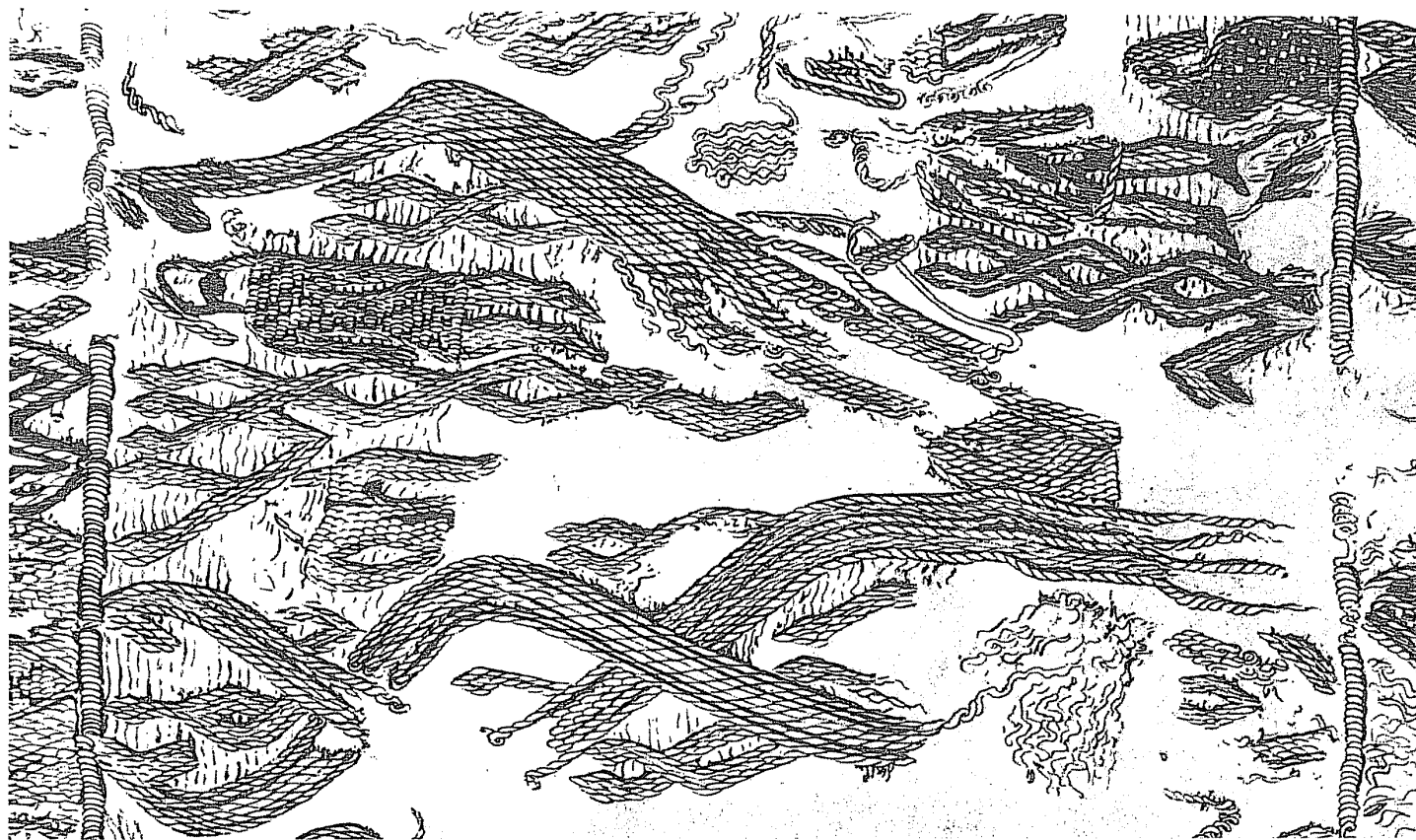
2455 Sadly he sees in his son's dwelling place
a wine-hall empty—the wind has ceased—
a round-harp bereft—the rhythms sleep—
a hale youth in darkness. There is no harp-thrum there,
no songs in the wine-courts as once there were. —

35. Beowulf's Attack

2460 "Then he goes to his couch and begins to chant,
alone, for his lost one. All too large
seem house and lands.

"Such was the heaviness
the lord of the Geats felt after the loss
of his son; he could not right that slaughter
by punishment, or even permit
the relief to himself of hating the slayer
for his violent deed, though he was not dear to him.
That sorrow weighed so sorely upon him
that he gave up life's joys, and chose God's light.
But he gave to his sons, as a good man does,
his landed wealth, when he passed away.

For this unorthodox interpretation of lines 2456-57, see Neophilologus 62 (1978), pp. 442-446.



"Then again there was war between the Weathergeats
and the Swedish folk across the sea —
hard battles after Hrethel died.

2475 Ongentheow's men were mighty and bold,
active warriors, who did not want
to sue for peace, but at Sorrowhill
fell on the Geats and slaughtered them fiercely.

2480 My kinsmen were valiant; they avenged all that
by strenuous fighting, and I have found
that the Swedish leader bought his life
at a high price. But to Hathcyn, now king
of the Weathergeats, that war proved fatal.
I recall that Hygelac avenged Hathcyn.

2485 A blade struck down his brother's slayer;
though Ongentheow launched an attack upon Eofor,
the Geat split open the old Scylfing's
masked helmet. His hand remembered
many a battle, and did not hold back
the killing blow.
2490

"I, too, requited
the gifts of my prince, as was most proper,
with my bright sword on that battle field;
he had given me the holdings and the hall I was born in.

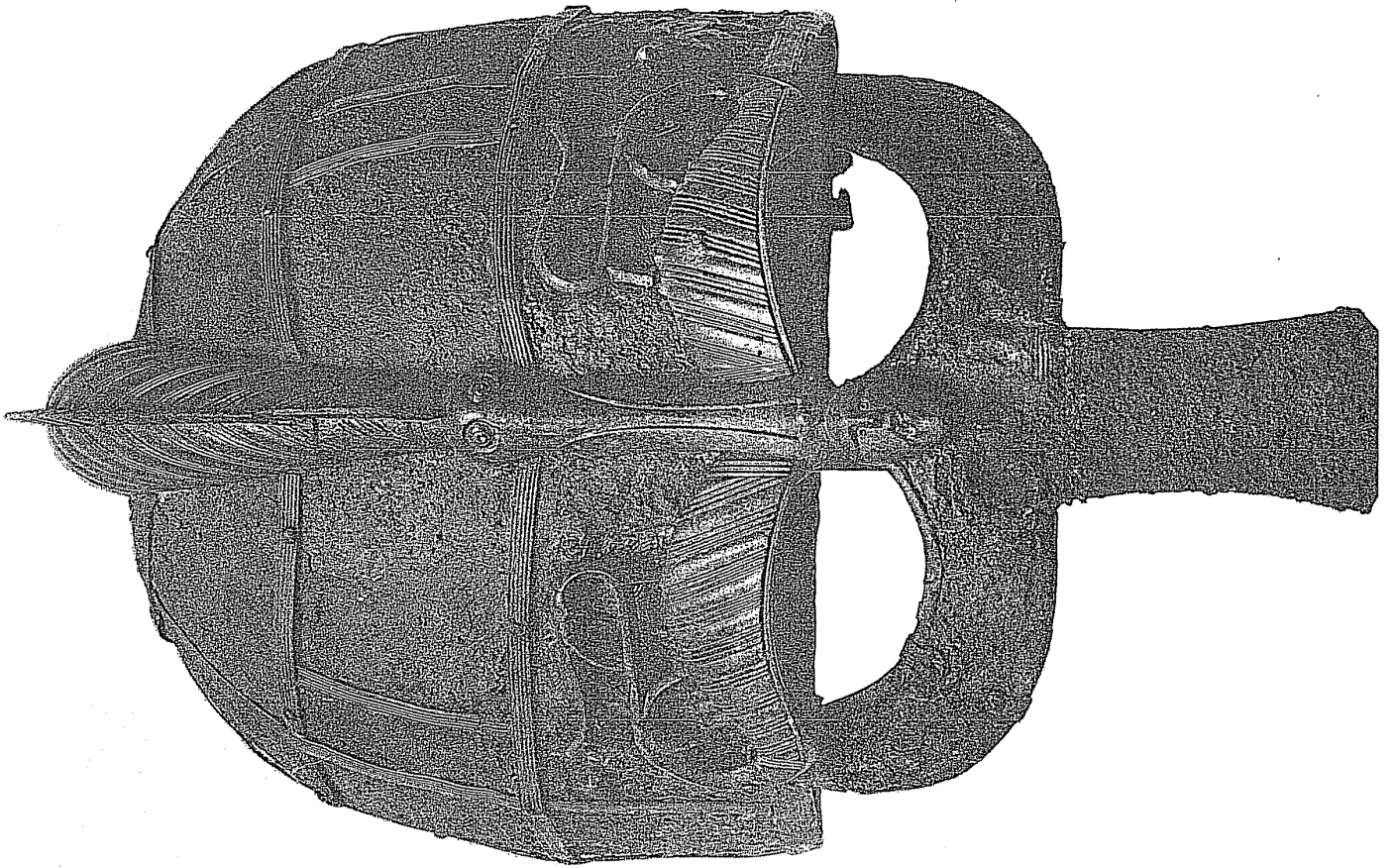
2495 He had no reason to seek a courageous
man of less might from among the Gifphas
or the Danes of the Spear, or the Swedes themselves,
to buy loyalty there, for keen was my longing
to stand with my king in every conflict,
to show my love so long as this sword
endures, which so often has given me aid;
2500 it fell to me in my fight with Dayraven,
the Huga, whom I slew with my bare hands.
He did not manage to bring to his master
that bright adornment, the Danish necklace,

2505 from Hygelac's body, for in that battle
he fell, bearer of the Frisian standard —
and not by the sword; beneath my grip
his body broke. But now the blade
that shines in my hand shall fight for this hoard!"

2510 In brave words Beowulf vowed
his last deed: "I have endured
many a battle, yet again I must,
as wise guardian of the Geats, seek conflict
with that murderous dragon, if he dares
to come to me out from his earthen hall."

2515 Then final words he spoke to his friends,
standing there masked in their shining helmets:
"I would bear no sword or weapon to that battle
if I knew another way to fight that worm,
to carry out my boast with honor
and come to grips, as I did with Grendel.
But this time I fear hot battle fumes,
dragon breath and deadly venom,
so I'll fight the beast with shield and byrnie,
and I shall not flee a foot's space
from that barrow's guardian. But what *wyrd*, and God,
decree, will happen. My spirits are high,
and I need no boast to inspire me now.

2525 "Wait here above, my byrned warriors,
shining in your armor, to see which of us shall
better survive this violent quarrel
down on the cliff side; and remember, this quest
is not within anyone else's power
but mine alone, to match him in strength
and quell him nobly. With courage I shall
gain that gold, or grim will be
the defeat that claims the life of your friend!"



Helmeted and fierce, the brave fighter
 rose with his shield; in his shining byrnie,
 trusting in his solitary strength, he went
 clambering down the stones, no cowardly man!
 Then he who had ventured on violent battles,
 when manly virtue had counted for much
 in the clash of tribesmen, came upon
 an arch of stone standing in the wall
 through which a fiery stream came flowing
 out from the mound, nor could any brave man
 pass without burning to penetrate
 deep to that hoard through that dragon flame.

2540

2545

Then the Weathergeat let a single word
 burst out in fury from his breast;
 stout-hearted, he stormed, and through the gray stone
 that bright and vivid voice resounded.
 Hate was awakened! When the hoard's guardian
 heard human speech, there remained no space
 to ask for friendship, for billowing forth
 from beneath the gray stone came noxious smoke
 from the monster's hot breath. The barrow thundered!
 On the cliff's ledge the Geatish lord
 swung his shield to face that stranger.

2550

2555

This fired the heart of the fearsome serpent
 with battle fury. Already Beowulf
 had drawn his sword, an heirloom shining
 with tempered edges. Terror came
 raging at each enemy from the other!

2560

2565

The prince took his stand behind his steep
 and curving shield, as the dragon coiled
 abruptly together. Beowulf waited.

The gleaming worm came at him; gliding
 smooth in its flames, it sped to its fate.
 But the time that Beowulf's shield protected
 his life and limb was less than he hoped for

2570





when first he had thought of having it forged
to wield in that battle—for *wyrd* did not
decree him victory. But his valiant hand
had swung the sword, and down it struck,
so hard against those gleaming scales
that the bright edge blunted against the bone.
It bit less nobly than its king had need of
in such bitter straits!

2575

2580

Then the barrow's guardian,
enraged after that ferocious swing,
spat out flames that billowed far
around the battle. Beowulf did not

boast of his victory, for his naked blade,
that weapon so long a willing companion,
had failed him at need. That famous son
of Edgetheow did not find his journey easy
when it came to leaving the land of his kinsmen:
against his wishes he would have to go
to a dwelling elsewhere—as all are doomed
to take their leave of this fleeting life.

2585

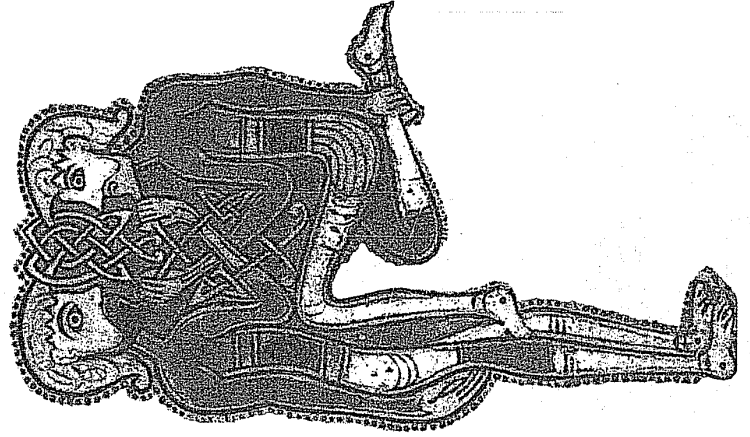
2590

Then again those enemies clashed together.
The guardian of the hoard took heart, his breast
swelling with rage, and the erstwhile ruler
found himself trapped in the heart of the fire!

2595

Not at all did those champions so carefully chosen
from his comrades leap up to stand by their leader,
valiant in the fight, no, they fled to the woods
to save their lives—except one, whose sorrow
tore at his heart. The ties of kinship
can never be ignored by a noble man!

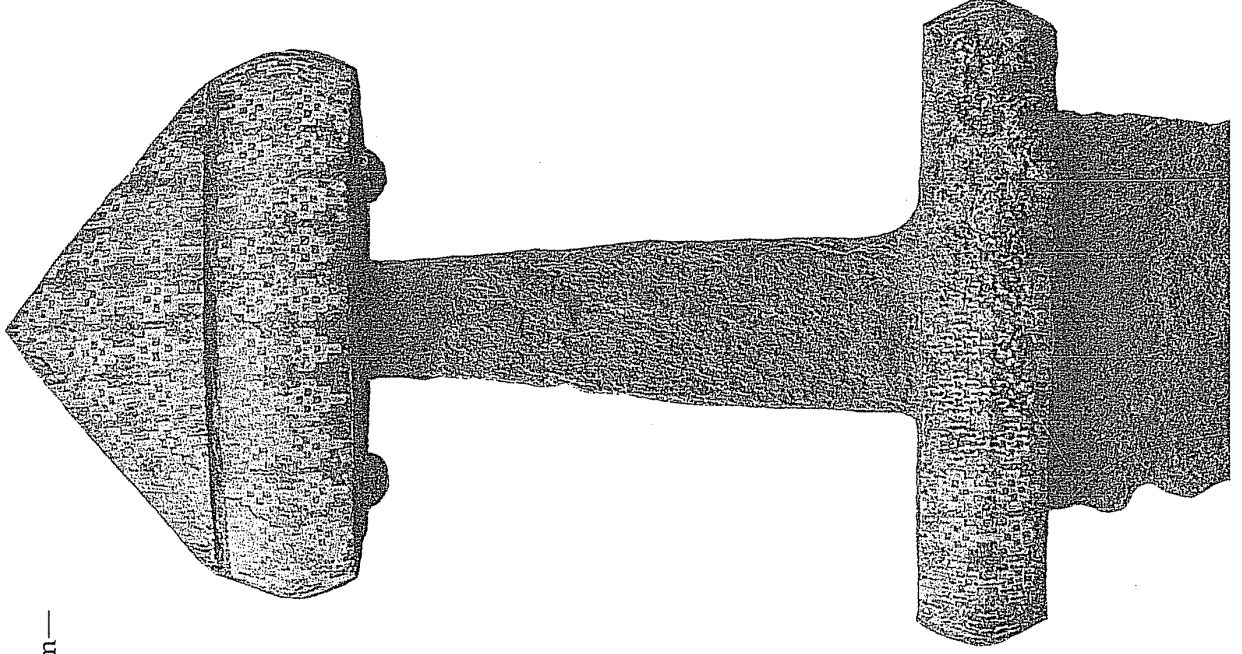
2600



He was called Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
 a beloved shield warrior, a Shilfing prince
 of Swedish kindred. He saw that his king
 was suffering from the heat beneath his helmet,
 and recalling those good things he had granted him —
 the wealthy home of the Wagmunding clan
 and every folk right his father had owned —
 he could not restrain himself from stretching
 for his lindenwood shield and his lambent sword.

*That sword was famous to folk as the heirloom
 of Eanmund the Swede, Ohtere's son
 who was slain as he stood on Geatish soil,
 killed by Weohstan. To his Shilfing kinsman
 Weohstan took those battle trophies,
 helmet and byrnie and ancient blade,
 and Onla granted him Eanmund's gear,
 his nephew's armor, saying nothing
 about the slaying of his brother's son.
 For many years Weohstan kept that weapon
 and the byrnie, bright treasures, until his son
 could perform such deeds as his father did.
 Then among the Weathergeats Weohstan gave him
 that priceless war-gear when he passed away,
 a wise old fighter.*

This was the first time
 that the young champion had had a chance
 to stand in battle beside his lord.
 His courage did not fail, nor his father's heirloom
 falter at that fighting, as the fiend discovered
 later, when they came to clash together.



Wiglaf spoke, saying many words
 of censure to his friends. His heart was sad:
 "I remember that time, drinking our mead
 in the lofty hall, when we promised our lord
 who was giving us weapons of gold to engage us,
 that we would repay him for that precious gear
 if need occurred, requite him in action
 for helmet and sword. Such was the reason
 that we were the men whom he chose from his warriors
 for this venture, remembering our vaunted worth
 at the giving of weapons. He had thought we were
 eager to wear helmets and hurl our spears.
 Our lord had planned to do this alone;
 the protector of the Geats undertook it without us,
 he who had gained the greatest glory
 among men for his deeds, but the day has come
 that Beowulf needs the combined strength
 of all his warriors.

2635

2640

2645



"Let us go to his aid,
 and help our leader lapped round by that heat,
 by those grim flames! God knows
 that I should prefer the fire to devour
 my body with my lord than to live without helping him!
 A shameful thing if we bore home shields
 after this fight, unless we first
 had felled the foe to save our friend,
 our generous prince. It is not a just
 return for his bounty that alone of the band
 he should suffer affliction, and fall in battle.
 For myself, I shall share my shield and helmet,
 byrníe and sword with Beowulf!"

2650

2655

2660

As he waded then in his shining war-gear
 through the deadly smoke, he said to his lord:
 "My king and kinsman, this is your calling.
 In the days of your youth you swore that you
 would never give up your noble purpose
 so long as you lived! My lord, single-minded,
 you must now try to protect your life
 with all your might. I shall help you!"

2665

After those words, the angry worm
 launched his attack for a second time.
 Brilliant and shining in sheets of flame
 and waves of fire he sought his foes,
 burning Wiglaf's shield to the boss!
 Not even his byrnie could offer him aid,
 so the brave youth dived beneath his dear
 kinsman's iron shield, when his own
 was gone in the blaze. Then again the king
 remembered valor, and swung his mighty
 blade with great strength, so it struck down hard
 on the beast's head—and broke apart!

2670

2675

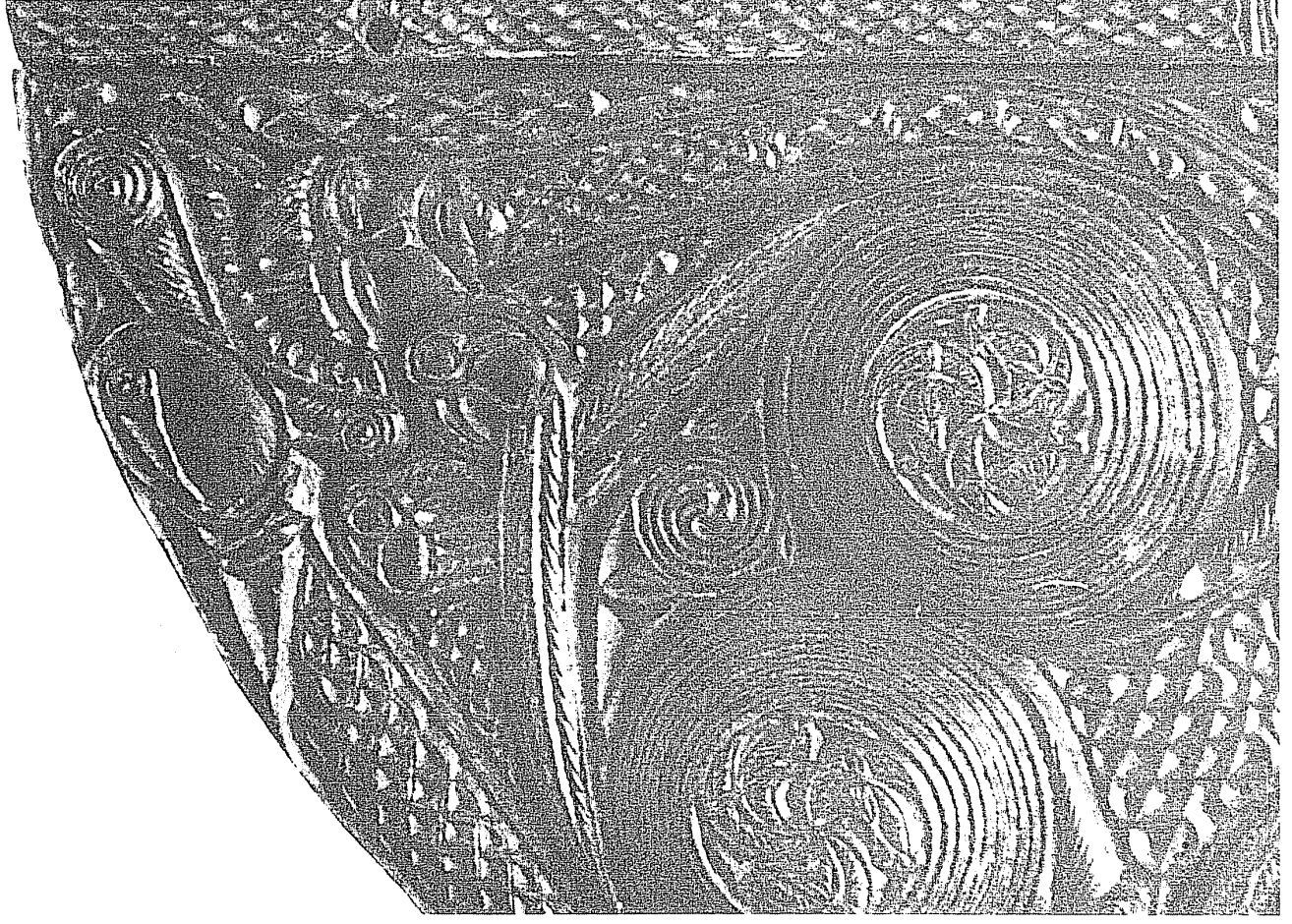
2680

Nagling was the name of that noble sword,
 but it failed at battle. Beowulf was not granted
 success with any blade of iron;
 his hand was too strong. No sword could help him.
 They tell me his swing would overtax
 the mightiest blade when he brandished it,
 and in battle he was none the better for it.

2685

Then to the attack for the third time
 rushed the fierce fire-drake, intent on his feud,
 charging at that hero when he saw his chance,
 raging with fire, gripping him around
 the neck with his terrible fangs! And now
 Beowulf's life-blood drenched his body!

2690



37. The Slaying of the Dragon

Then at need, I heard, Wiglaf made known
at his king's side his strength and courage,
the hardy keenness that was his heritage.

2695

He did not heed that dragon's head
but burnt his hand in helping his kinsman,
striking a little lower down

2700

so that his sword went slicing into
that fearsome beast, and the billowing flames
began to diminish. Then the lord of the Geats
came to his senses, remembered the *sax*
beneath his mail, and drawing that knife,

2705

plunged the blade in the dragon's belly!
They felled the beast; combining their strength,
the two noble kinsmen had cut him down
both together. Thus should a man be,
a thane at need!

To Beowulf that

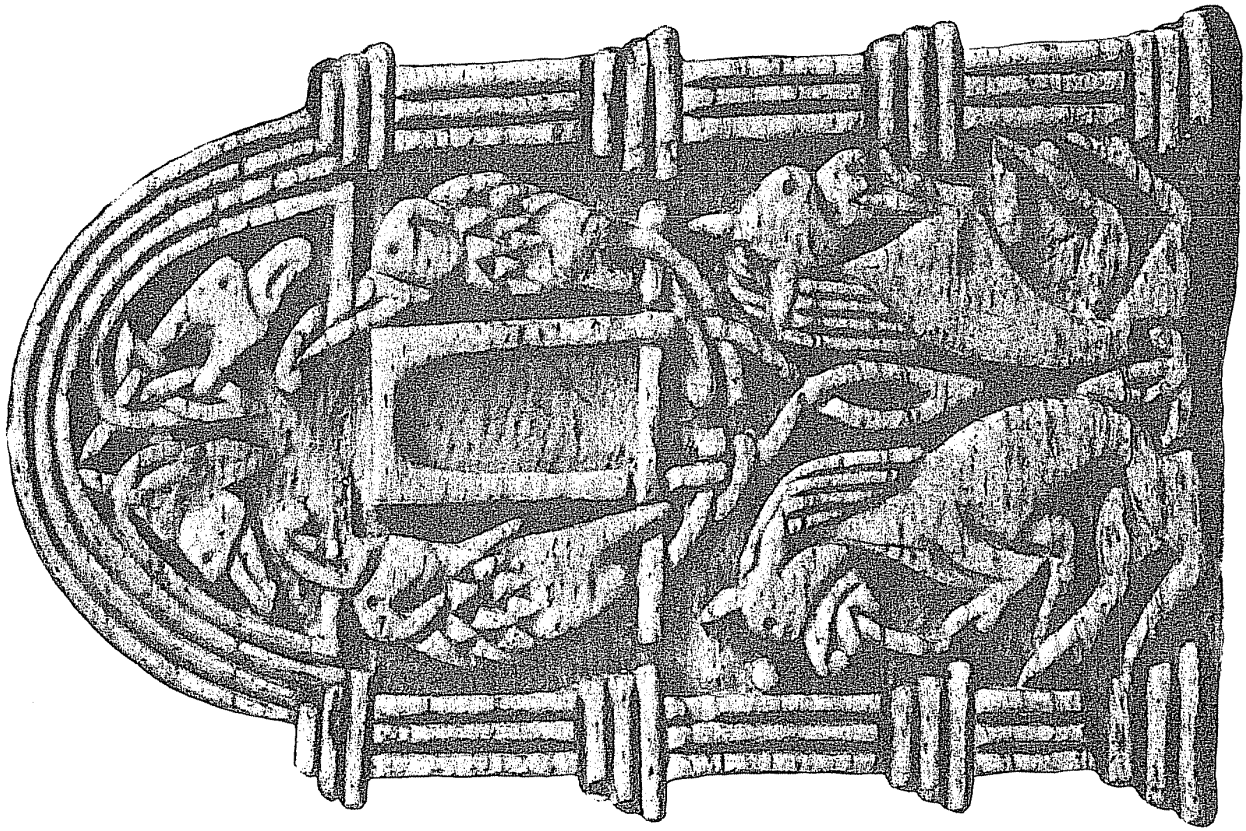
marked the last of his mortal victories,
of his deeds in this world, for that wound the dragon
had given him began to grow,

2710

to fester and burn, and soon he found
that within his breast a bitter poison
was welling up. The old warrior

2715

sat down to think (and deep were his thoughts)
on a seat by the wall, observing how the work
of giants, great arches of jutting stone,
supported that ancient place with pillars.



Then with cool water gentle Wiglaf
began to refresh his failing lord,
to lave away the blood, and loosen
the helmet from that weary head.

2725

Beowulf spoke, despite the pain
of his dreadful wound, for he knew full well
that he had played out his allotted portion
of pleasure on earth; that was all passed away,
and death had come incalculably near:

"Now I would give my battle gear
to my heir, had I been granted any
son of my flesh to safeguard my memory
beyond my life. For fifty years

2730

I have kept these people safe; no king
dwells among neighboring tribes who dares
to seek me out with brandished swords
and terrify us. In my time I abided

2735

what fate would bring, held fast to my own,
sought no strife nor swore unrightfully
vows unkept. Because of all this

2740

I take pleasure, even now in pain from my wounds,
that the Ruler of Men has little reason
to accuse me of the murder of kinsmen
when life leaves my body.

"Now quickly, go look
at the hoard that is stacked beneath that gray stone,
now that the dragon lies dead, dear Wiglaf,
sorely wounded, bereft of his wealth.

2745

Hurry, so that I may have the time
to admire that treasure, that mound of gold
and ruddy jewels, and then the more gently
in sight of that brilliance I may abandon
the life and lordship I have held for so long."

2750

38. The Treasure in the Mound

I heard that Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
on hearing these words of his wounded lord,
obeyed him, and went in his ring-mail byrnie,
woven for battle, into that barrow.

2755

There the young prince, as he passed along
the bench, saw many a jewelled brooch,
and gold things glittering all over the ground,
wondrous weapons hanging high on the wall
in the den of that dragon, the old dawn flyer,
and drinking goblets, their polishers gone,
sockets agape where garnets had been,
and helmets rusty with age, and rings
twisted with cunning. Easily may treasure,
gold in a mound, overpower the mind
of anyone human, heed it who will!

2760

2765

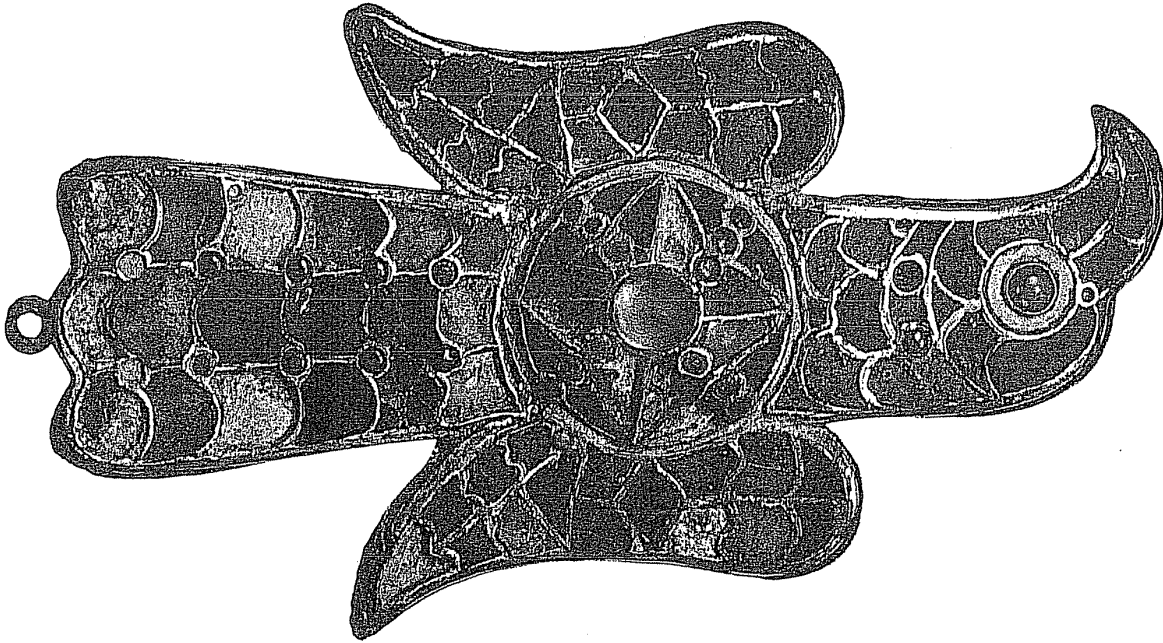
He also saw hovering, high over the hoard,
a golden banner, the greatest of woven
wonders, and from it a light poured forth,
showing him further along the floor
the glowing wealth. But no glimpse of the dragon
was there to be seen, for the sword had destroyed him.

2770

Then those riches, I heard, were ransacked by
one man alone, who laid in his arms
all that he wished of that giant-wrought wealth,
goblets and dishes, and the golden banner,
that brightest of beacons. The old lord's blade
with its edges of iron had earlier slain
him who had guarded those heaps of gold
for a long time with the terror of fire
hot before the mound, surging up murderously
at the darkest hour—until he died.

2775

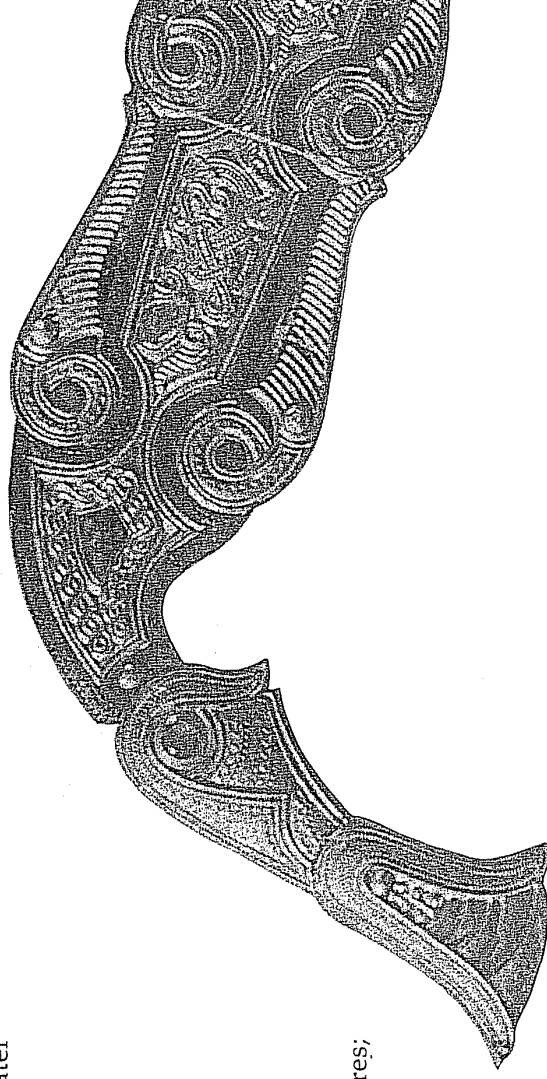
2780



Wiglaf was in the wildest haste
to get back with the treasures, tormented by
the question of whether he would come upon
his prince alive, the Weathergeats' lord
whom he had left dying for his deed of courage.
Bearing that fabulous wealth, he found
his leader bloody, that life at the ebb.
Then Wiglaf, once more, caressed him with water
to soothe him, until the spear of his words
burst through his breast, and Beowulf spoke,
in pain, looking upon the gold:

"For all this magnificence I must needs
give words of thanks to the wise Lord,
eternal God, for this gold I see,
for letting me gain such a gift of wealth
for my dear people before my death!
I have traded my life for these splendid treasures;
they will fulfill the needs of the folk—
I, their lord, may be here no longer.
After the pyre ask them to build me
a mound shining above the shore
at Whalesness, high and whitely gleaming,
to remember me by, and for seafaring men
to speak of as Beowulf's barrow, whenever
they see it from a distance when driving their ships
on the misty paths of the perilous seas."

That bold leader then lifted from his neck
his golden necklace, and gave it to Wiglaf
with his blade and byrnie and the brilliant helmet,
and commanded the youth to use them well:
"You are the last of our Wagmunding line;
wyrd has lured all the others away,
my courageous kinsmen, called to the death
of athelings, and I must go after them!"



Those were the last words from the old lord's heart, before having to taste the hostile flames of the pyre, but his soul went forth to find the judgment of the just.

2820

39. Wiglaf's Words

Sick at heart the young man saw his dearest friend painfully faring beyond his reach, stretched there on a rock at the end of life. The slayer, also, lay there dying; that terrible dragon was curved like a bow, though bent no longer to hold the guardianship of the hoard in wicked bitterness, for the blade had deposed him.

2825

That hammer's legacy, hard and sharp, had cut him down in his coiling attack, and now he lay dead near the barrow door—no more to arch through the still air of midnight, to float through the heavens flaunting his riches, a sight to remember!—for he sank to earth, a sky-demon quelled by the strength of that hand.

2830

Indeed, I have heard that rare is the hero (though he were daring in every deed) who would not have failed in such a feat—braving the venom of dragon breath

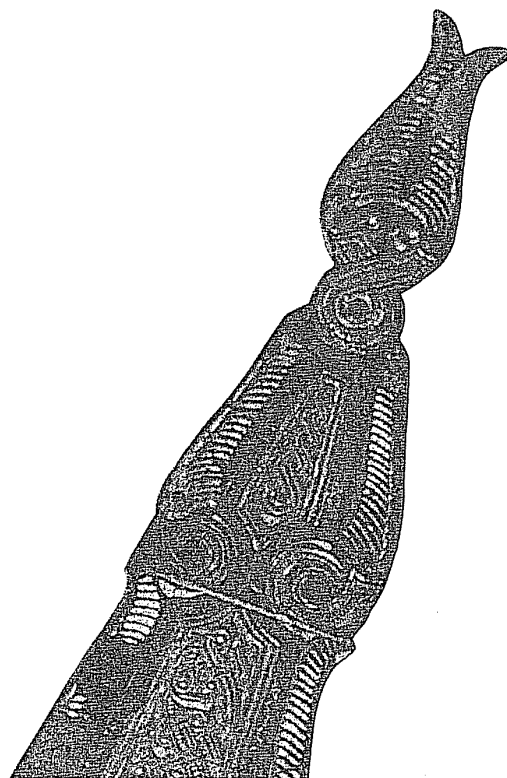
2835

or running his hands through that golden hoard, if he came upon its fiery keeper

2840

awake in the cave! To Beowulf was a king's ransom of gold required; but man and monster had met the end of this fleeting life.

2845



It was not long then
 before the traitors slunk out from the trees,
 all ten together, having broken their troth,
 not daring to acknowledge their lord's great need
 for their spears in battle. Bright in their armor,
 but shamefully bearing their shields, they came
 forward to the place where their prince lay dead,
 and regarded Wiglaf. Wearily he sat,
 as a comrade should, near his lord's shoulder,
 trying to revive him, to no avail.
 Much as he cared to, he could not manage
 to keep life burning in the breast of his king,
 nor move the Lord's will in any manner,
 for God in justice and judgment had ordered
 the day and its deeds, as he always does.

2850

2855

And then from Wiglaf those craven warriors
 found rough words ready for their return!
 Thus he spoke, the son of Weohstan,
 sadly to those friends he had formerly loved:
 "This must be told, for it is the truth.

2860

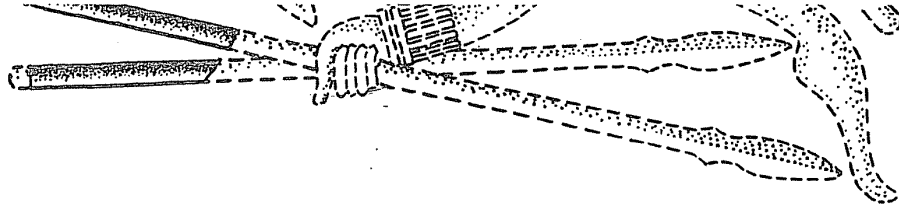
Beowulf gave you gold and byrnies for battle,
 the warriors' armor you are wearing now.
 When on the mead-bench you sat making merry,
 he would pass a helmet to a hall companion,
 or a byrnie, or whatever he could find that was beautiful
 from home or afar to honor his friends—
 a loyalty that was completely lost,
 thrown away on thanes like you!

2865

2870

"When war came upon him, the king of our people
 had no cause to boast of his battle companions!
 Yet the God of Victories helped him avenge
 his life by his own hand when high deeds were needed.
 And I, in my own way, tried to offer
 protection at battle, indeed attempted
 to persevere beyond my power,

2875



and the deadly foe seemed the feeble for it.
After I struck him, the flames less strongly
flowed from his jaws. But defenders too few
stood by our king when strife came upon him.

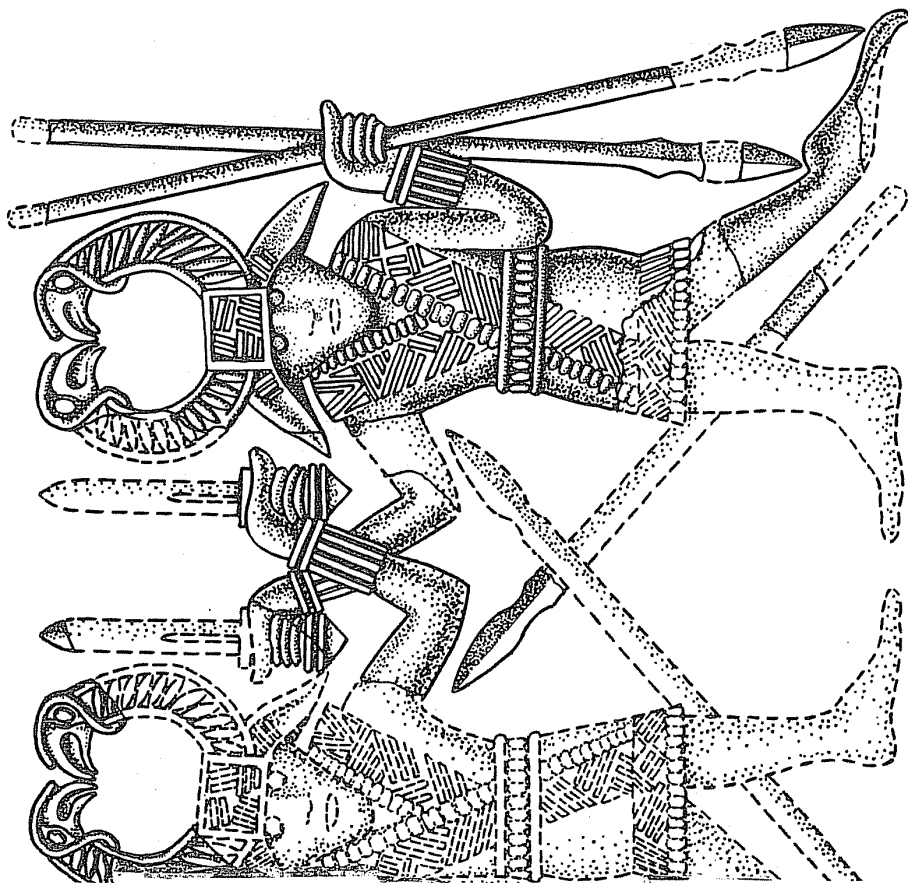
"Now giving of treasure to honor your troth
must end, and your kinsmen, because of you,
must lose their right to enjoy this land
and the comfort of living among loyal friends,
when the athelings hear how men will harken
far and wide to your defection,
your inglorious deed. Death is better
to every warrior than life without honor!"

40. Hygelac's Arrogance

He ordered then that the outcome of the fight
be announced above, where the shield-bearing nobles
had sat, sad in mind, all morning, all day,
waiting, expecting one of two things:
the return of their lord, or the last day
of his dear life. Little did that man
who rode up to the headland hide his news;
his voice rang out with all the truth:

"Now gone is our joy, our generous prince!
The lord of the Geats lies on his deathbed,
stretched out in slaughter by the serpent's deed!
Endlong beside him his enemy lies
slain by the *sax*. With the sword our king
could find no way of wounding that monster,

the wicked destroyer. Now Wiglaf, the son
of Weohstan, sits in watch over Beowulf,
one man beside his friend who is slain,
keeping guard with a grieving heart
over friend's head and foe's.



"Now our people may find

*that the time has come for an era of trouble,
when the Franks and the Frisians hear of the fall
of our strong king. Hard was the strife*

*destined for the Hugas when Hygelac's fleet
of proud ships sailed for Frisian shores;
the Hetwares repelled him with superior might
and brought it about that the king in his byrnie
should not survive to divide his loot*

with his fighting men, but fell among them!

*Since that victory, the Merovingian
king of the Franks has denied us all kindness.*

*"Nor do I expect we can count on peace
or good faith from the Swedes, for when Ongentheow slew
Hathcyn, the son of Hrethel, in battle
at Ravenswood, it was widely known
that arrogance had prompted the Geatish people
to join in that feud of the Shilfing folk.*

*They had launched an attack upon Ongentheow's troops,
but fiercely he had returned their foray,
cut down the ruler of the Geats, and rescued
his lady, Onla and Ohtere's mother,
a gaunt old woman stripped of her gold.*

*Grimly he pursued his Geatish foes,
but they found a refuge in Ravenswood
(with difficulty, for their leader was dead).*

*"Then the king surrounded those wretched few
whom the sword had left, and promised them sorrow
all night long, saying when the light
of day revealed them, vengeful blades
would hack down some, while others would hang
high on the gallows as a game for the crows!*

*But dawn brought help and relief; they heard
the sound of Hygelac's well-known horn,
his trumpet of war, as hot on their tracks
their lord came to save his beleaguered band.*



*"Then the bloody swathe of the Swedes and the Geats,
the track of their slaughter, was readily seen,
how they stirred up feud and strife between them.*

*Wise old Ongentheow went with his kinsmen,
grimly, to seek the safety of his fortress,
a good stronghold on higher ground.*

*He had heard much of Hygelac's valor
and did not have faith in his own defences—
that he had the power to parry the attack*

*of the Geats, or to save the Swedes' bright gold,
or their women and children. So in Ravenswood he went
to seek his refuge. But the Geats pursued*

*the Swedes, and Hygelac's banners were seen
flashing victoriously over the fields*

when his men pressed forward to harry that fortress.

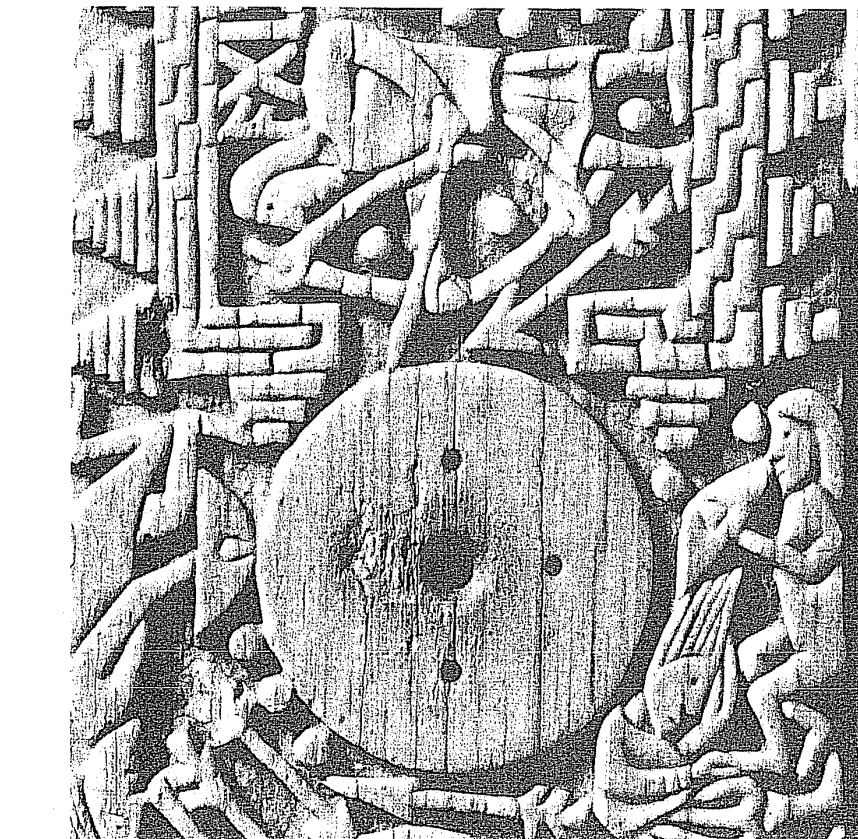
*"There the silver-haired king of the Swedes
was brought to bay with a shining blade,
and that mighty ruler had to submit
to the angry judgment of Eofof the thane.*

*Wulf, his brother, had struck the old warrior
so fiercely that the blood jetted forth from the veins
under his hair. But the old Shilfing,
never afraid, with a far more vicious
onslaught, had quickly requited that thrust
in the time it took him to turn around.*

*Then Wulf was unable to raise his weapon
to repay the old king for the powerful blow
that had cut right through the crest of his helmet.*

*He began to waver, wet with blood,
and dropped to his knees—but he was not doomed yet!
He recovered in the end, though the wound nearly killed him.*

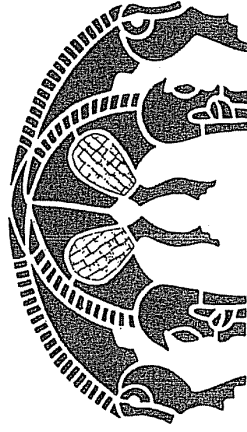
*Eofof the brave, seeing his brother
lying still on the ground, raised high his sword,
a jewelled weapon wrought by giants,
and struck past his shield at that Shilfing helmet
across from him, killing the king of the Swedes!*



"At last the Geats turned to attend their fallen.
 They raised up those wounded who were able to walk,
 and took them to join in the jubilant victory.
 Eofof the thane took King Ongentheow's
 royal byrnie, robbing him also
 of hilted sword and shining helmet;
 he bore these accoutrements of the king
 to his prince, Hygelac, who promised him
 fitting reward among the warriors.

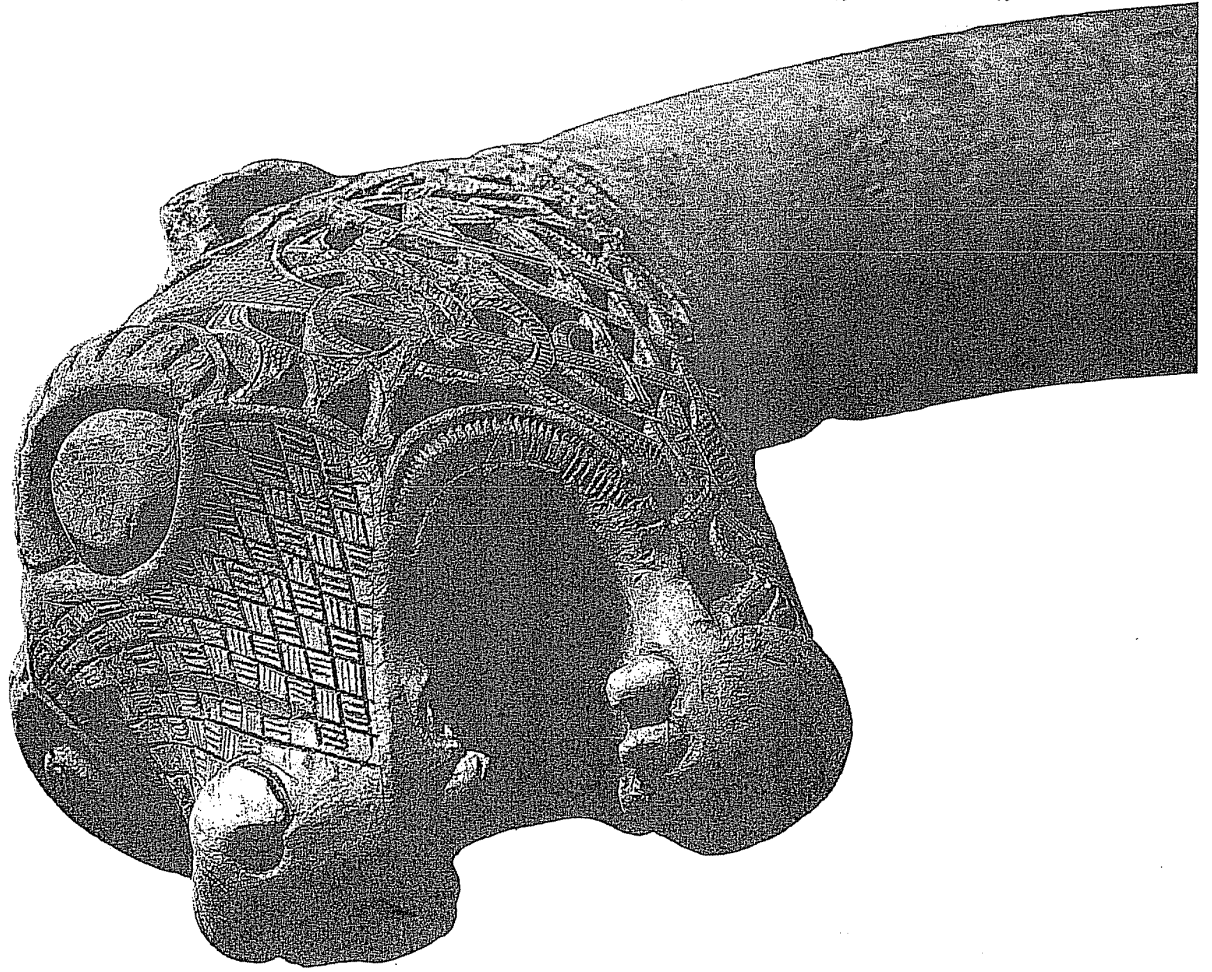
"He did as he said; Hrethel's son
 acknowledged that battle with noble treasures
 when they all came home. To Wulf and Eofof
 he granted homesteads of a hundred thousand
 hides of land, and a hoard of rings.
 No one could blame him, they had been so brave.
 Then he gave to Eofof his only daughter
 as wife, to grace a worthy dwelling.

"That is the feud and the conflict of foes,
 the enmity of thanes, that leads me to think
 that the men of Sweden will seek us out
 when they hear of Beowulf's latest battle —
 how that hero has fallen, who formerly held
 our hoard and kingdom against the hatred
 of vengeful lords, a valiant leader
 who honored his warriors, and altogether
 behaved nobly!



3010 Let us go to look on the king of the Geats,
 and carry our giver of golden rings
 to his lofty pyre. What burns with our lord
 shall not be meager, for there is the mighty
 hoard of gold so grimly bought,
 and paid for at last with his own life,
 fabulous treasures. The flames must devour them,
 3015 the fire embrace them, with none held back
 to be worn by a warrior, or a beautiful woman
 who graces her neck with a gleaming jewel.
 Sad must she go, bereft of gold,
 to pace, alone, down alien paths,
 3020 now that our lord has passed beyond laughter,
 harp song and happiness. Now shall the hand
 of the warrior on many cold mornings grasp
 for his ashen spear; not at all shall singing
 rouse him from dreams, but the dark raven,
 3025 eager for thanes, will call out many things,
 asking the eagle how well he ate
 when with the cruel wolf he plundered corpses!"

3030 Many and true were the terrible things
 that messenger said; not much did he gild
 his facts or words. Then the warriors,
 with grief-stricken faces, rose to their feet
 to see the harrowing sight at Eaglesness.
 On a sandy ledge of the cliff they saw,
 3035 lying on his deathbed, the lord who once
 had given them rings; now he had reached
 the end of his life. But the lord of battles,
 that warrior of the Geats, died a wondrous death!—
 for also they beheld, hard by their king,
 the amazing creature whom he had killed,
 3040 his mortal foe. That huge fire-drake,
 a horrible monster scorched black with the heat
 of his own flames, lay fifty feet long,



stretched out on the sand. By night he had sprung
in joy to the skies, then sailed back down
to seek his den. He was now quite dead,
never more to coil in his earthy cave.

3045

Nearby stood cups and beautiful goblets;
plates lay there, and precious swords
eaten through by rust. For a thousand winters
they had been buried in the bosom of the earth.
Once that mighty hoard had been woven
around with a spell, so that its splendor
could not be disturbed by anyone tampering
with all its gold, unless God himself,
the High King of Victories, revealed the power
of opening the hoard to whom he wanted,
to whatever man seemed meet to him.

3050

3055

42. The Rifling of the Hoard

Clearly the dragon was doomed to fail
in wickedly trying to keep the treasure
hidden in darkness! Indeed, that guardian
struck down his foe, but that feud was well
and quickly avenged.

3060



Where the man of valor
shall meet his death as ordained by fate
is always a mystery, when he may no longer
live with his kinsmen in the lofty hall.
So it was for Beowulf, when ready for battle
he approached the mound. How his departure
from the world would occur, he could not foresee.
Those long-ago princes who placed that treasure
in the ground until doomsday had cursed it grimly,
saying that he would be guilty of sin,
bound by the worship of wicked idols,
tormented by greed, who touched that gold.
(He was not wracked by gold-fever. Rather
had he wished it granted by the owner's good will!)

Wiglaf spoke, the son of Weohstan:
"Often the will of one man brings
exile to many, as it does to us.
We could not persuade our noble king,
protector of the Geats, to take our advice
not to meet that guardian of the mound,
but to let him lie where he had for so long,
dwelling in his lair until the world's last days.
But Beowulf held to his high destiny,
and the hoard is won. That *wyrd* was too harsh
that prompted thither the prince of our land!

"When it was granted that I might go
inside that barrow and see all around,
an entrance by no means easily won
to that earthen house, in haste I took



as much with my hands as I could hold,
 and bore that burden of brilliant treasure
 outside to my king. He was still alive then,
 wise and aware, an old man wearily
 speaking in sorrow. He wished me to say
 farewell, and to bid you to build a mound
 where the pyre was, as high as his deeds were heroic,
 a beacon as great as of men he had been
 the worthiest of warriors in all the world,
 so long as he had been granted life
 for the giving of rings.

3095

3100

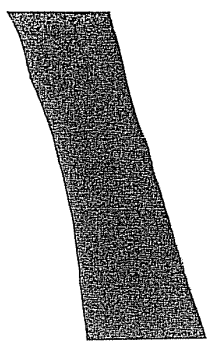
"Now let us go
 to gaze once more on the gold in the mound,
 at those shining treasures. I will show you the way,
 so that you may have the joy of beholding
 that abundant wealth. Let the bier be made ready
 quickly, by the time that we have returned,
 so that we can carry our beloved king,
 our dear prince, to the place where he
 must rest in the keeping of the High Ruler."

3105

That brave young warrior, Weohstan's son,
 commanded those nobles to announce to others,
 to hall-lords and fighters, that they should fetch
 wood for the pyre and bring it to the place
 where the king would lie. "For the leaping flame
 now must devour the noblest of men,
 who has often stood in a shower of iron,
 a blizzard of arrows impelled by the bow
 over the shield-wall, feather-clad shafts
 obediently aiding the flight of the barb."

3110

3115



3120

Carefully, then, Wiglaf culled
seven of the best from Beowulf's band
of Geatish thanes, and in gleaming armor
the eight warriors went together

3125

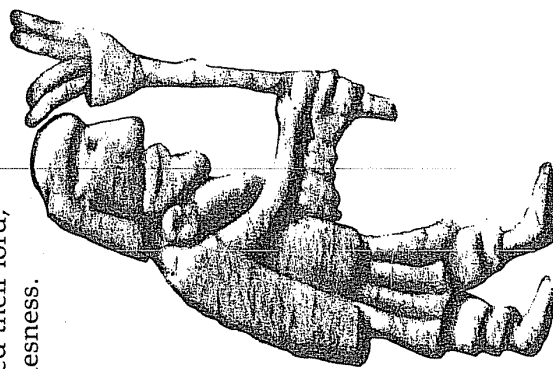
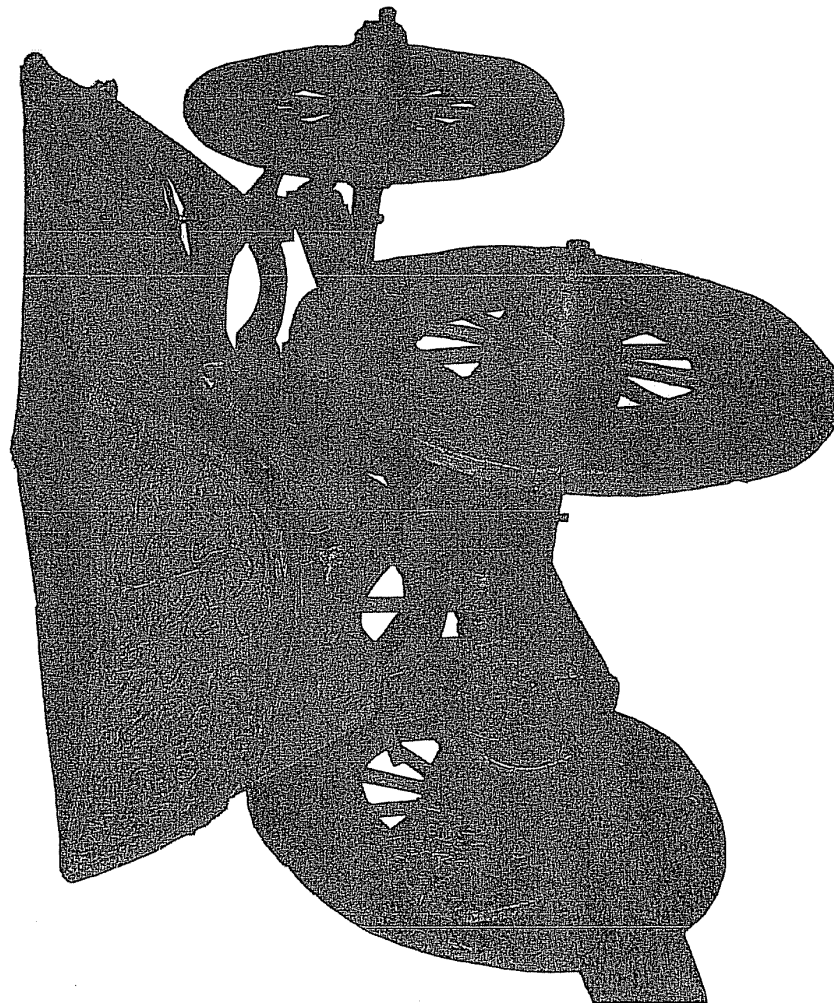
beneath that dark roof. Wiglaf raised
a flaming torch as he went in front.

3130

Lots were not cast for whom should carry
that gold away, now that no guardian
gave any thought to those precious things
that were left in the mound. Little did those men
who heaped up the treasure so hastily
have scruples at fetching it out! And the fire-drake—
they shoved him over the cliff, let the shining
waves enfold him, take him away!

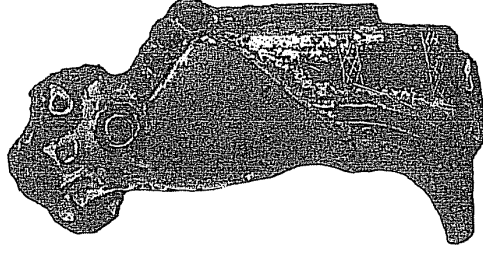
3135

They loaded a wagon with all the wealth
of countless treasures, and carried their lord,
their white-haired king, to Whalesness.



43. Lament for Beowulf

The Geatish people prepared for him
 a huge pyre high on the headland,
 splendidly hung with helmets and shields
 and shining byrnies, as he had bidden.
 The lamenting warriors then laid their lord,
 their mighty prince, in the midst thereof,
 and a few were assigned to set alight
 that fire on the cliff top. A cloud of woodsmoke
 rose up dark from the roaring flame
 encircled with weeping—the wind subsided—
 until the blaze had broken that bone-house,
 hot within.



Sad at heart,
 the last companions mourned for their prince,
 and a woman with her hair bound up bewailed
 the passing of Beowulf. In a song of despair
 and suffering, she told of sorrows to come,
 of how she feared greatly days of grief,
 many a raid of ravaging warriors,
 the shame of slavery. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then they raised for the ruler of the Weathergeats
 a mound on the hilltop, high and broad,
 to be seen from afar by seafaring men,
 a warrior's beacon, built in ten days.
 Around the ashes of that atheling
 they set an enclosure so fairly designed
 that the wisest men should find it worthy,
 and they placed in the mound the precious treasure
 of rings and jewels from the ravaged hoard,

3165

the twisted gold they had taken earlier.
They let the earth hold that princely hoard,
left it in the ground, where still it lies,
as useless to men as it was of yore.

3170

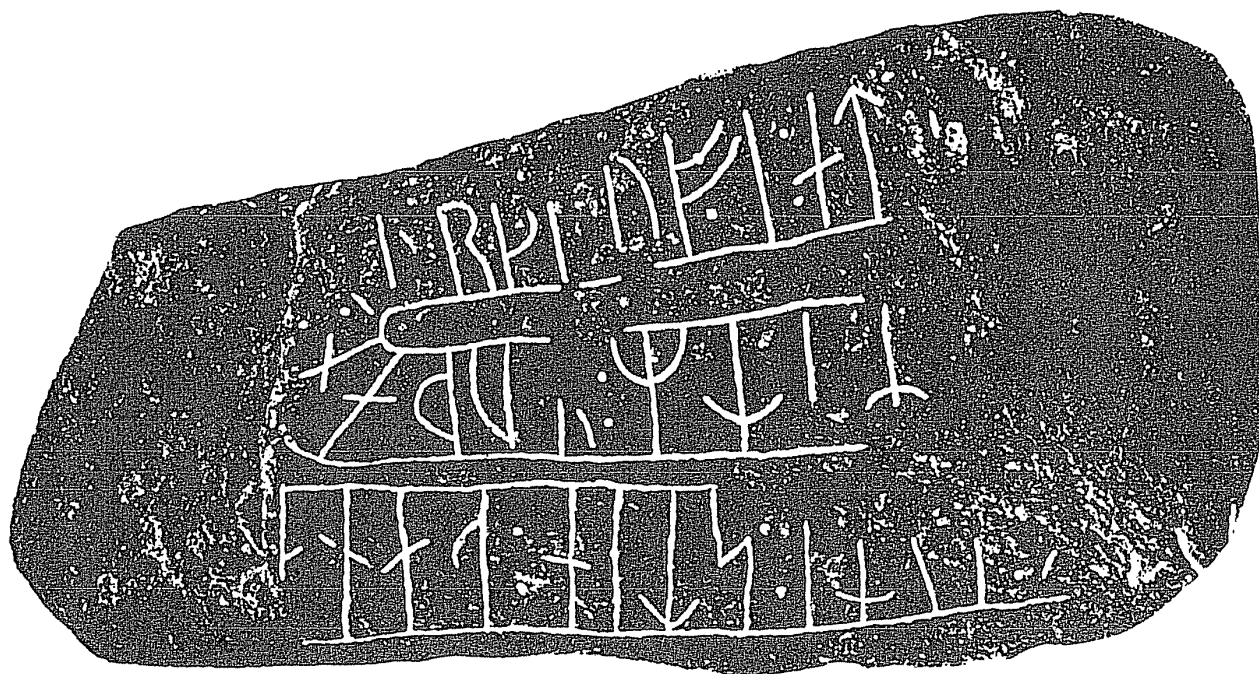
Then around the barrow rode the bravest
of the sons of athelings, twelve in all,
expressing their sorrow and mourning their prince,
wishing to declare what that warrior was like.

3175

They chanted of his courage, acclaiming his deeds
and his generous manhood—as it is meet
that a man should salute his lord in words
and love him in his heart, when at last he must
go forth from his failing cloak of flesh.

3180

And thus the Geatish people grieved
at the death of their prince: his hearth companions
said that he was, of the world's rulers,
the kindest of men and the gentlest of kings,
the most loving to his people, the most longing for esteem.



Appendices for BEOWULF



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The Finnsburg Fragment



Though this battle poem is called a fragment, it is probably very nearly complete, with only a few lines missing at the beginning and the end. It is technically a "heroic lay," and concerns an event which is seen from a more humane and thoughtful perspective by the *Beowulf* poet (lines 1068–1159). One can learn a great deal about the style of *Beowulf* by comparing the two treatments.

It is also of great interest to readers of *Beowulf* to have independent accounts of historic or traditional events that are mentioned in the poem. As the history in *Beowulf* is continental, most of the sources by which we can confirm it are Scandinavian or Latin. But the "Finnsburg Fragment" is an Old English poem (existing only in George Hickes's 1705 transcription, as the manuscript was lost); it tells us of an event in Frisia which is already a historic tale when related in sixth-century Heorot. If it commemorates a fifth-century battle in Frisia, the Hengest of the fragment and episode may well be the same Hengist who, according to the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, led his Germanic mercenaries to Britain in 449, first to aid the British king Vortigern and then to oust him.

The hero of the fragment is not the warrior Hengest but his young leader, the Danish prince Hnaef. As Hnaef is still alive here, whereas the episode in *Beowulf* begins with the scene of his sister Hildeburh mourning his and her son's deaths, the fragment must precede the episode in the order of events. The two contending forces are the Danes, in the guest hall, and the Frisians, outside. The fragmentary opening is usually thought to be a question asked by one of the Danes when he sees a flash in the darkness outside, though it can also be read as part of a statement.

" . . . Horns aflame?"

Then Hnaef began chanting, young chieftain in war:

"No dawn is this rising, nor a dragon flying,
nor is it the horns of this hall aflame—

5 it is them, bearing arms at us! Birds cry out,
the wild wolf howls, the war-spear roars,

shield answers shaft! Now shines the moon
wandering in the clouds. Now deeds of woe

rise to perform the strife of this folk.

Therefore, awake now, warriors mine!

10 Hold high your shields, think hard of courage,
turn to the battle, bear yourselves bravely!"

Rose many a gold-armored thane, then, girding on weapons.

To one door strode the splendid warriors

15 Sigferth and Eaha, swinging their swords,

and to the other went Ordlaf and Guthlaf,

and Hengest himself came hard in their tracks.

Outside, Guthere was pleading with Garulf

not to fight in that first attack

or flaunt his armor before those doors,

20 for fierce was the warrior who wished to take it.

But high and clear keen young Garulf
 hurled his question: who held those doors?
 "My name is Sigferth," said he, "of the Sedgas,
 a prince well known for experienced warfare.
 For you the outcome is already certain,
 which fate you will choose, if you challenge me!"

25

Then a roar of slaughter arose in that building.
 Shields held high by the warriors were shattered,
 bone-helmets burst, the hall-floor boomed,
 until at that fight Garulf fell,
 the first of those dwelling in Finn's land,
 Guthlaf's son. And good men around him
 fell as corpses where the raven flew
 black and shining. Sword-light blazed
 as though all Finnsburg were on fire!

30

35

Never have I heard of warriors more worthy,
 of sixty who bore themselves better in battle
 or gave more in return for shining mead,
 than those young heroes did to Hnaef.
 They fought five days, and not a man fell
 of that hardy band, and they held the doors.
 At last, wounded, a warrior lay dying.
 He said that his battle-shirt had been broken,
 that hardest of byrnies, and his helmet pierced too.
 Then at once the leader of those warriors asked
 how others were bearing up under their wounds,
 or which of the young men . . .

40

45

Later in the fight Hnaef himself is slain. His place as leader of the Danish
 party is taken by Hengest, who eventually must agree to a truce with the
 Frisians when neither side has the force to continue fighting.

BEOWULF: A Reconstructed Chronology of Events



The poet gives us Beowulf's three great fights in a chronological sequence which provides the basic linear organization of the poem. Intwoven between these fights, however, occur many references to Scandinavian feuds, which add historical authenticity but are not presented chronologically. As this distorted sequence of unfamiliar events in ancient Scandinavia is one of the most difficult barriers for the modern reader of *Beowulf* to overcome, I offer the following reconstruction for easy reference.

This chart is based on Klaeber's reconstruction, especially p. xlv. As he admits, the only date verifiable by outside evidence is Hygelac's death ca. 521 (now thought by some to have taken place in 524); the other dates, calculated from Hygelac's death, are guesses based on legends, contemporary accounts, and archaeological finds. Beowulf and Wiglaf (but not Wiglaf's father Weohstan, O. N. Véstein) represent the only family group mentioned below whose existence is not in some way confirmed by evidence outside the poem. Bracketed dates place *Beowulf* in a larger and more English historical context; these events are not referred to in the poem.

Key to tribes

- D Danes
- F Frisians
- G Geats
- HB Heathobards
- S Swedes

[449]	[Bede's date: Hengist and Horsa come to Vortigern's aid in Britain.]
495 G, S(?)	Beowulf born, son of Edgetheow (a Swede?), grandson of the Geatish king Hrethel on his mother's side.
498 HB, D	Froda kills Haldane of the Danes; Froda's son Ingeld born.
499 HB, D	Heorogar, Hrothgar, and Halga (Danes) kill Froda.
502 G	Hathcyn accidentally kills his brother Herebeald.
503 G	Their father King Hrethel dies of grief, and Hathcyn becomes king of the Geats.
503 G, S	Swedes attack Geats at Sorrowhill: FIRST SWEDISH-GEATISH FEUD begins.
510 G, S	Hathcyn and Hygelac attack the Swedes and abduct their queen. In the ensuing BATTLE OF RAVENSWOOD both Hathcyn of the Geats and Ongentheow, the Swedish king, are killed. Hathcyn's brother Hygelac becomes king of the Geats and Ohthere king of the Swedes.
515 G, D	* <i>Beowulf</i> kills <i>Grendel</i> and <i>Grendel's Mother</i>
[518]	[According to the tenth-century <i>Annales Cambriae</i> , Artorius (King Arthur?) wins an important battle at Mt. Badon.]
518 HB, D	Hrothgar, who with his brothers Heorogar and Halga had killed King Froda in vengeance for their father's death, gives his daughter Freawaru in a "peace-weaving" marriage to Froda's son Ingeld to forestall a renewal of the feud.
520 HB, D	Ingeld attacks after all, burns down Heorot, but is then

defeated by Hrothgar and Hrothulf (according to the poem *Widsith*).

524 G, F

Hygelac of the Geats is killed in his ill-fated Frisian raid; Beowulf escapes by swimming, after killing Dayraven.

524 G

Hardred, Hygelac's son, becomes king of the Geats with Beowulf acting as regent.

525 D

Hrothgar dies; his nephew Hrothulf comes to (usurps?) the throne. (Hrothulf, of dubious morality in *Beowulf*, is the great hero-king Hrolf Kraki in Icelandic saga.)

532 G, S
533 G, S

SECOND SWEDISH-GEATISH FEUD begins. Death of the Swedish king Ohtere (Ottar Vendel-Crow, buried at Vendel in Uppland, Sweden). His brother Onla seizes the throne, while his sons Eanmund and Eadgils seek refuge in the Geatish court. Onla attacks the Geats, kills their young king Hardred; Beowulf (by Onla's permission?) becomes king of the Geats. In the battle Eanmund is killed by Weohstan, Onla's champion. Weohstan is the father of Wiglaf, who is Beowulf's only surviving relative and his most loyal companion. (Eadgils' desire to avenge his

brother's death, a family feud rather than an element in the national wars, would cause his enmity not only toward Weohstan but, in case of Weohstan's death, toward his son Wiglaf as well—and if Wiglaf becomes king of the Geats after Beowulf this could serve as an excuse for the Swedes to attack yet again.)

Beowulf supports Eadgils in war against Onla.

Eadgils is laid in a mound at Old Uppsala.

This date is a poetic fiction: note the date of Beowulf's birth. **Beowulf dies in battle with a fire dragon*. Wiglaf probably succeeds him as king of the Geats. (THIRD SWEDISH-GEATISH FEUD begins? Flight of the survivors abroad?)

[625]

[A cenotaph ship containing rich treasures analogous to those described in *Beowulf* is buried in a mound at Sutton Hoo in East Anglia.]

[800?]

[A masked helmet is lost at Coppergate, in York, rediscovered in 1982.]

[750–1035?]

[An English poet, at sometime during the Anglo-Saxon period, composes *Beowulf*, about a Scandinavian hero.]

Names in BEOWULF



Numbers in parentheses refer to lines of the poem.

Abel (107). Adam's son in *Genesis*, slain by his brother Cain.
Ashere (1323, 1329, 1422, 2122). Hrothgar's warrior and friend, slain by Grendel's mother.

Beowulf (19, 54). The son of Shield Shefing, a Danish king, whose name is given as "Beow" in genealogies outside the poem. Not the hero of the poem.
Beowulf (207, 343, and passim). The hero of the poem. His name, spelled *Biowulf* in the second part of the manuscript, means "bee-wolf," which may be a kenning (standard metaphor) for "bear."

Breca (506, 517, 524, 532, 583). Beowulf's competitor in a youthful swimming match; he later became a ruler of the Brondings.

Brondings (521). Tribal name; see entry for **Breca**.

Brosings (1199). Tribal name; the owners of a famous necklace, the Brosinga mene ("necklace of the Brosings"). This name recalls the Brisingamene, Freya's necklace in the *Elder Edda*.

Cain (106, 109, 1261). Emended from *Beowulf* manuscript *canes* and *camp*, this is the name of Adam's elder son in *Genesis*, slayer of his brother Abel.

Danes (1 and passim). Tribal name; the inhabitants of Denmark, ruled over by Hrothgar in the time of the poem. Also called "Spear-Danes," "Bright-Danes," "Ring-Danes," "North-, South-, East-, and West-Danes," "Shieldings" (the kindred of Shield), "Honor-Shieldings."

Dayraven (2501). A Huga warrior whom Beowulf slays, possibly to avenge the slaying of Hygelac, his king.

Eadgils (2393, 2395). A son of the Swedish king, Ohtere, supported in battle against Onla by Hardred, king of the Geats after Hygelac's death.

Eaglesness (3032). The site of the dragon's lair, a Geatish headland.

Eanmund (2612, 2617). A Swedish prince, Eadgils's brother (see entry above), slain by Wiglaf's father, Weohstan, in the second Swedish-Geatish feud (ca. 533).

Edgelaf (499, 590, 980, 1465). Unferth's father, a Dane.

Edgetheow (263 and passim). Beowulf's father, probably a Wagnunding.

Edgewela (1710). Referred to only once as a Danish ancestor, otherwise unknown.

Eofor (2486, 2964, 2977, 2986, 2993, 2997). The Geatish slayer of King Ongentheow of the Swedes. The name means "boat."

Eomer (1960). Son of the Angle king Offa. A tyrannical figure in Germanic literature.

Eormenric (1201). A historical king of the East Goths (died ca. 375 A.D.)

Finn (1068, 1081, 1128, 1147, 1150, 1156). The king of the East Frisians, at whose stronghold the "Finnsburg episode" and "The Fight at Finnsburg" take place.

Finnmarch (580). The land where Beowulf comes ashore in his swimming match with Breca "is usually identified with Finnmarken in the north of Norway" (Klaeber), the land of the Finnish Lapps.

Fitela (880, 889). The nephew of Sigemund in *Beowulf*, nephew (and son) of Sigurd in Old Norse sources; the name is cognate with the second element of Old Norse *Sinfjötli*.

Franks (1210, 2912, 2921). Tribal name, etymon of modern "French."

Freawaru (2023). Hrothgar's daughter, betrothed to Ingeld of the Heathobards to settle a feud (see *Froda* below).

Frisians (1094, 1207, 2506, 2912, 2915). Tribal name; inhabitants of what is now part of the Netherlands.

Frisian land (1126, 2357). Frisian slaughter (1070). See entry above.

- Froda** (2025). King of the Heathobards, the father of Ingeld; slain by Hrothgar of the Danes.
- Garmund** (1962). Father of Offa, king of the Angles.
- Geats** (194 and passim). Tribal name; Beowulf's people, the inhabitants of what is now southern Sweden. They are also called the "Sea-Geats," "Weather-Geats," "Battle-Geats," the "Hrethlings," etc.
- Gifþas** (2495). Tribal name; the inhabitants of a district north of the lower Danube in what is now Germany. They were dispersed by the Lombards in the sixth century.
- Grendel** (102 and passim). The monster slain by Beowulf in Hrothgar's hall; according to the poet, of the kindred of Cain (lines 1265–66).
- Guthlaf** (1148). A warrior of the Danish contingent at Finnsburg.
- Haereþh** (1928). The father of Queen Hygd, wife of the Geatish king Hygelac.
- Halga** (61). A Danish prince, the younger brother of Hrothgar and the father of Hrothulf.
- Hama** (1198). A character occurring in Middle High German epic and Norse saga, a friend turned enemy of Eorðenric (see entry above).
- Halfdane** (57 and passim in kinship formulas). A king of the Danes, Hrothgar's father.
- Handscio** (2076). A Geatish warrior slain by Grendel.
- Hardred** (2204, 2375, 2388). Hygelac's son, who becomes king of the Geats after Hygelac's death.
- Hathcyn** (2434, 2436, 2482, 2924). A Geatish prince, Hygelac's elder brother (see entry for *Herebald*).
- Heathobards** (2032, 2037). Tribal name; the people of Froda and Ingeld.
- Heatholaf** (460). A Wyfing warrior slain by Beowulf's father.
- Heatho-Raemes** (519). Tribal name; a tribe living in southern Norway, where Breca came to shore in his swimming match with Beowulf.
- Helmings** (620). Tribal name; Wealtheow's people.
- Hengest** (1083, 1091, 1096, 1127). Leader of the Halfdanes after Hnaef's death at Finnsburg; possibly the warrior to whom Bede refers as Hengist (see *Jutes*).
- Heorogar** (61, 468). Hrothgar's elder brother, a prince of the Shieldings.
- Heorot** (78, 166, 403, 432, 593, 766, 991, 1017, 1177, 1267, 1278, 1279, 1302, 1331, 1587, 1671, 1990, 2099). The great hall of the Danes built by Hrothgar, probably corresponding to the royal dwelling at Fleithir (Leire) in Norse tradition. The Old English name means "Hart."
- Heoroward** (2161). Heorogar's son, a Danish prince mentioned only here.
- Herebald** (2436). A Geatish prince, Hygelac's eldest brother, slain accidentally by his brother Hathcyn, much as Baldur the Beautiful was slain by Höth in Norse myth (the names are notably similar).
- Heremod** (901, 1709). A king of the Danes who slays his companions at the table; an exemplary type of the king who goes wrong.
- Hetware** (2363, 2916). Tribal name; the Frankish inhabitants of the lower Rhine.
- Hildeburh** (1071, 1114). King Finn's Danish wife, who sees her son and her brother slain on opposing sides at Finnsburg.
- Hnaef** (1069, 1115). A prince of the Halfdanes, Hildeburh's brother.
- Hoc** (1076). A ruler of the Halfdanes, father of Hnaef and Hildeburh.
- Hrethel** (374, 453, 1847, 1923, 2357, 2429, 2474, 2991). A king of the Geats, Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.
- Hrethric** (1189, 1836). A Danish prince, one of Hrothgar's two sons (probably the elder).
- Hrothgar** (61 and passim). The king of the Danes who established Heorot.
- Hrothmund** (1189). A Danish prince, probably the younger of Hrothgar's sons.
- Hrothulf** (1181). Hrothgar's nephew, the son of his brother Halga; a great king in Norse saga literature, where he is known as Hrolf Kraki, but of dubious character in *Beowulf*.
- Hruntung** (1457, 1490, 1660, 1807). Unferth's sword, which he lent to Beowulf for use against Grendel's mother.
- Hugas** (2502, 2914). Tribal name; the Franks.
- Hunlafing** (1143). A warrior of the Danish contingent at Finnsburg.
- Hygd** (1926, 2172, 2369). Hygelac's wife, queen of the Geats.
- Hygelac** (195 and passim). The king of the Geats, Beowulf's lord.
- Ingeld** (2065). The son of Froda, betrothed to Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru to settle the Heathobard-Danish feud. (See *Froda* above).
- Ingwine** (1043). Tribal name; the Danes ("Ing's friends").
- Jutes** (902, 1072, 1088, 1141, 1145). Tribal name. In my view, the *Eotenas* of *Beowulf* are the Jutes, a contingent of whom Hengist led to England in 449 A.D. according to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. A case has been made recently, however, for translating the word, which also means "giants," simply as "enemies" where it occurs in *Beowulf*.
- Merovingian** (2920). The king of the (Merovingian) Franks.
- Nagling** (2681). Beowulf's sword, which he uses unsuccessfully against the dragon.
- Offa** (1944, 1949, 1958). A historical king of the continental Angles.
- Ohthere** (2380, 2612, 2931). A historical king of the Swedes, the son of Ongentheow.
- Onla** (Old English Onela, Old Norse Ali) (62, 2381, 2387, 2617, 2931). A historical king of the Swedes, son of Ongentheow; foe of Hrolf Kraki (Hrothulf) in *Hrolf Kraki's Saga*.
- Ongentheow** (Old Norse Angantyr) (1969, 2475, 2486, 2923, 2928, 2949, 2985). A historical king of the Swedes.
- Oslaf** (1148). One of Hengest's Danish warriors at Finnsburg.
- Ravenswood** (Old English Hrefnawudu, Hrefnesholt) (2925, 2937). A forest in Sweden where a major battle in the Geatish-Swedish wars takes place.
- Shiefing** (4). Patronymic of Shield, "first" king of Denmark.
- Shield** (4, 18, 26). The mythical king of Denmark celebrated in the first 52 lines of *Beowulf*.

- Shieldings** (30 and passim). Tribal name; the Danes, or "followers of Shield."
- Shilfings** (2487, 2603, 2927, 2967, 2980). Tribal name; the Swedes, the Swedish dynasty.
- Sigemund** (876, 881, 884). The son of Wael (Old Norse *Völsungr*), who in *Beowulf* performs the deeds of Sigurd the dragonslayer in Norse literature.
- Sorrowhill** (Old English *Hreosnabeorh*) (2477). The Geatish site of a major battle in the Swedish-Geatish wars.
- Swedes, Swedish** (see also *Shilfings*) (63 and passim). Tribal name, inhabitants of the east central part of what is now modern Sweden. (See *Geats*.)
- Swerting** (1202). Hygelac's grandfather, a Geat.
- Thryth** (1931). A type of the evil queen, who reformed when she married Offa of the Angles.
- Unferth** (vs *Hunferth*) (499, 503, 530, 1165, 1465, 1488). Hrothgar's "thule" or official orator.
- Wagmundings** (2607, 2813). Tribal name; the kinship group to which Wiglaf and Beowulf both belong.
- Wael** (877, 896). Sigemund's father.
- Wayland** (454). The famous smith of Germanic legend, mentioned also in other Old English poems.
- Wealththeow** (612, 665, 1162, 1216, 2173). Hrothgar's wife, queen of the Danes. (The name, meaning "foreign" or "Celtic" "captive," has led some to suggest that she might be British.)
- Weathergeats** (Old English *Wederas*, *Weder-Geatas*). See *Geats*.
- Weathermark** (298). The land of the "Weather-Geats." The name-element *weather* suggests "storm," and the name is closely analogous to "Wuthering Heights."
- Wendels** (348). Tribal name; probably the Vandals, or the inhabitants of Vendel in Uppland, Sweden, or of Vendill in North Jutland.
- Weohstan** (2602, 2614, 2620, 2623, 2752, 2862, 2907, 3076, 3110). Wiglaf's father, a Swedish follower of Onla.
- Whalesness** (2804, 3136). A promontory on the Geatish coast where Beowulf's barrow was built.
- Wiglaf** (2602, 2631, 2673, 2694, 2730, 2745, 2752, 2783, 2790, 2810, 2852, 2860, 2906, 3076, 3120). Beowulf's only surviving kinsman, "the last of the Wagmundings," and the only warrior who stands by him in the dragon fight.
- Withergyld** (2051). A Heathobard warrior slain by a Dane.
- Wulf** (2965, 2971, 2993). A Geatish warrior wounded by Ongentheow of the Swedes. (See *Eofor*).
- Wulfgar** (348, 360). A prince of the Wendels, serving as an official at Hrothgar's court.
- Wylfings** (461, 471). Tribal name; the tribe antagonized by Beowulf's father when he slew Heatholaf.
- Yrmenlaf** (1324). A Dane, younger brother of Ashere.

On Translating BEOWULF



Beowulf is an intensely social poem. Beowulf the hero fights in succession three monsters who threaten the hall of fellowship, where treasures and courtly words are exchanged at the feast. The two isolated Grendel-kind threaten the community of the hall; the dragon in his miserliness threatens the very principle of exchange and giving. The form of the poetry in which this story is told is as communal as the content, a part of the ritual of hall-telling far older than any words we have on paper. I have tried to approximate that form as closely as I could, to capture the ancient "music" of the poem, so long as it does not impede the flow of the story itself.

In an Anglo-Saxon hall, the alliterative stressed meter, the densely packed diction, and a formal delivery heightened the language of poetry and distinguished it from prose—and also made it memorable when poetry was entirely an oral art. In this translation I have attempted to imitate the meter. Not long ago translators were adamant that imitative meter was out of the question for Modern English. Henry Cecil Wylid went so far as to say, "Attempts to reproduce the rhythm of the old meter and to preserve its regular alliteration have produced a form that cannot give pleasure to modern readers. Alliteration . . . cannot properly be insisted upon as an essential of the verse." But such brilliant modern poets as Basil Bunting in Northern England and more recently John Peck in America have been rehabilitating that meter for us. I believe that today it can be insisted on, if delicately controlled, and that it must be insisted upon, if the translator intends to offer any true impression of the nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Just as the deeper preoccupations of the society are mirrored in the monster-killing story of *Beowulf*, so are the stylized traditions of that society reflected in the surface structure of the poem.

The Meter

The Old English verse line, usually printed in two separate half-lines in the editions, normally contains four beats or stresses, with two stresses and at least one alliteration in each half-line. The third stress of the four-stress line is called the head stave because it always carries the alliteration, as in these two lines:

1785 Glād at heārt, the Géatish prince
went bāck at ōnce as the wise king bāde . . .

Glad alliterates with *Geatish*, the third stressed word of the line, and *once* alliterates with *wise*. From this we see that the sound is significant, not the alphabetical letter, for *o* alliterates with *w*. *Went* does not carry the metrical alliteration because it is not stressed. In this second line there is additional alliteration on the *b*'s of the first and fourth stresses, a feature that occurs in the original at points of narrative importance, such as the first line of the poem: "we gárdéna in geárdágum." In this line the main alliteration is on *g*, occurring in the head stave, the third stressed syllable, and there is also secondary alliteration on *d*. In the Old English verse line the head stave may alliterate with either of the two previous stressed syllables, or with both, but not with the last; in formal Anglo-Saxon versification, to alliterate with the same sound on both head stave and fourth stressed syllable would be a mistake.

In my translation I have not been so rigid; I frequently alliterate not on the head stave but on the last stressed syllable, as throughout the following passage:

2688 Then to the attack for the third time
 rushed the fierce fire-drake, intent on his feud,
 charging at that hero when he saw the chance,
 raging with fire, gripping him around
 the neck with his terrible fangs. And now
 Beowulf's life-blood drenched his body.

On the whole, alliteration on the final stressed syllable is a heavy rhetorical technique that is best reserved for intense or exciting passages, like this, where the content can absorb it.

My principle for representing the metrical form of the poem is to produce a four-stress line with at least one alliteration connecting the first two stresses with the last two. But I have adopted various stratagems and emphasized others that are used in Old English in order to tone down the force of this feature for modern ears. For example, I may alliterate on an internal syllable, as on two of the lines above: *attack* and *time*, 2688, and *raging* and *around*, 2691. Or I may alliterate on a syllable of relatively lesser stress, as in the second line below:

1776 when the ancient foe
 came on his endless visits to cause me
 immeasurable grief.

Here alliterative *came* is one of the four stressed syllables in line 1777, but it receives less emphasis than does non-alliterating *endless* (which is linked through assonance with *ancient* and *immeasurable*). Similarly, in line 1759 the alliteration is subdued syntactically:

1758 Shield yourself from conflict with sin,
 dear Beowulf, by choosing what is better.

Here the word Beowulf contains the stressed syllable alliterating with *better*, but is deemphasized by being in a parenthetical clause. In the first line above, 1758, the alliteration is on *sh* and *s*; this is not acceptable in Old English prosody, though alliteration between one vowel and any other, strangely enough, is:

758 No wise man among the Shieldings
 had ever expected that anyone
 could break that beautiful antlered building.

In addition to muting the alliteration by such methods as these, I have

used other expedients such as breaking the rhythm, usually by relocating the caesura as in lines 2692 and 1759 above, or by proceeding from many syllables in one half line to very few in the following. So long as the four stress rhythm is maintained, the number of syllables in a line is variable.

King Alfred says in the preface to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Rule* that he translated sometimes word by word and other times meaning by meaning; any translator works to some degree by "meaningful mouthfuls." While working in phrasal units, I have tried specifically to keep the integrity and sequence of the half line intact. This is not always possible to do if one's first aim is to preserve the sense; the minimal liberty, which I have sometimes taken, is simply to reverse half lines for syntactic clarity.

I have preserved the drafts of my work on a single line which proved more difficult to translate into alliterative meter than I anticipated. A review of these drafts will demonstrate both my procedure and the sort of difficulty I encountered. The line did not seem to offer particular problems:

2706 Feond gefyldan—ferh ellen wræc

This may be literally translated:

"The fiend they felled—life courage conquered."

Dropping "fiend," since "dragon" was immediately antecedent in line 2705, I began with this outline translation using Klaeber's vocabulary gloss on *ellen*. Usually such a trial run with a list of synonyms occurred only in my head; I actually put this one down on paper in order to see more clearly what I was doing:

They felled him, —ing his life with (their) valor
 courage
 strength
 zeal

My first attempt at a verse line was:

They felled him, destroying his life with their strength.

This line "gallops" metrically, but I felt it would be acceptable if surrounded by more static lines. The pair *destroying* and *strength* contains nice alliteration on *str*, an alliteration which moreover links the two concepts across the half lines. But in this context the connotation of *strength* is incorrect. It is Wiglaf's and Beowulf's *zeal* that has overcome the dragon, or even more precisely their courage-in-kinship. The poet makes a point of this. So I tried:

Diction and Formula

It will be obvious from this example that the choice of word is, if not precisely dictated, certainly modified by the verse form. How much the Anglo-Saxon poet was controlled by his verse is a matter of debate among scholars. As a practicing poet my opinion is this: *always* there is an appropriate word available to fit your structure and your meaning if you "dowse" for it long enough and are patient and dedicated enough. Old English is more limited in vocabulary than Modern English in some respects, more liberal in others; just as Eskimo is notable for its many words for kinds of snow, so is Old English for its many poetic terms for warriors and the sea. The translator into modern English is limited by our lack of synonyms in these areas, but in other areas has more resources on which to draw than the original poet had. I think it balances out.

But there is one important resource the translator does not have that the poet did, and that is a "high-context culture" in which the communal audience would share backgrounds and assumptions. In addition to the meter and delivery, which would immediately mark the words being uttered as the high rhetoric of poetry, there are a number of rhetorical devices the audience would expect and respond to, devices such as variation, ironic understatement, word play, echo and envelope patterns, and dramatic retardation, among others. I comment on some of these in the notes. Here I want to discuss one particular pattern of diction native to the verse form and familiar to the hall-audience: the oral formula.

The oral formula is a recurrent syntactical pattern in which the elements may vary: "Unferth spoke, the son of Edgelaf" (499), "Beowulf spoke, the son of Edgetheow" (529). Such phrases have been described in terms of Anglo-Saxon jewelry as filigrees of gold into which the poet could lay at will the gems from his word-hoard; the gems were his own, the filigree into which they were laid was manufactured by tradition. Formulas are of many patterns. Another one recurrent in *Beowulf* is "That was (adjective) (noun)," often used climactically. It first appears in *Beowulf* in the description of Shield Shefing: *þæt was god cýning!* (11), "That was a good king!" (line 11). Later in the poem, when Hildeburg stands looking over the battlefield where her son and her brother have died fighting on opposite sides, *þæt was geomuru ides!* (1075), "That was a sad woman!" And later yet, Grendel's pool evokes the formula in negative terms: *Nis þæt heoru stow!* "That is not a happy place!" (1372).

Knowing that my audience will not recognize standard formulas as the poet's audience did, I have not been faithful to this feature, often omitting, for example, "that was" in the formula described above. I have, however, tried to preserve such direct repetitions as "in those long ago days of this fleeting life" (lines 790 and 806). The two translations I have immediately at hand, good ones, ignore this repetition.

They felled him, destroying his life with their spirit.

Spirit is an acceptable synonym for *zeal*, but in proximity to *life* the nuance is again inaccurate, taking on through association a spirituality which is certainly not in the original. My next attempt was:

They felled him, overcoming his life with their courage.

But technically one "overcomes" one's enemy, not his life. So I varied it once more, using now Klaeber's alternative gloss on *wrac* in this context, "drove out," to change the verb:

They felled him, deprived him of life with their pluck.

This is obviously the sort of translation one avoids at all costs; though again the meaning is "correct" in dictionary terms, the associations of the word *pluck* turn the achievement of these heroes into a Hardy Boys' adventure. But *prowess*, containing the sense of heroic achievement and excellence as well as of courage, has precisely the connotation needed here. Beowulf—

2705 plunged his blade in the dragon's belly.

They felled him, deprived him of life with their prowess,
the two kinsmen, cutting him down
both together. Thus should a man be,
a thane at need.

With this I sat back, very pleased with my achievement. For a minute. Then with horror I saw what I had done, or rather what the hazards of language had outrageously done to my translation: "Felled" by those kinsmen who had "cut him down," the dragon had turned into a tree!

I took a break to clear my head, and began again. Professor Robinson has observed in his introduction, "Translation is the art of taking as few losses as possible in a losing battle." I finally settled on:

They felled the beast; combining their strength,
the two noble kinsmen had cut him down
both together . . .

Perhaps as many losses as gains even with this version. Until writing this essay I had not noticed the amazingly obvious intrusion of Shakespeare into line 2707. He is the most difficult of all English poets to keep out.

I have been sparing with compounds. This practice distinguishes my translation most vividly from the "Anglo-Saxon" verse of Pound and his followers, and it was a reluctant choice, because compounding is an important element in Anglo-Saxon poetic diction. But I felt that the grittiness and density of such diction interfered with my primary aim: to achieve clarity in a resonant narrative verse that moves as freely as prose. Perhaps I shall come to regret, as Nabokov regrets about his first translation of *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, making the poem "much too readable." If so, my major regret will be the simplification of compounds. But now, I think it will be a boon to the reader.

As a further boon I have deleted certain of those characters whom Klaeber lists in his glossary of names, when they appear simply as patronyms; I have also, at many points, named a character where the poet uses merely a pronoun. I have simplified the spelling of certain names to make them more easily pronounced in Modern English.

Following Marianne Moore's "ban on dead words," I have avoided diction which has been deadened, especially by Victorian translators' attempts to medievalize a text, but I have on the other hand included a series of Old English words which have a technical meaning and give a flavor to the poem that I like: *byrnie*, *atheling*, *shope*, *thane*, *wyrd*, *sark*, *mere* and *thule*. These, too, I have spelled so that they will be given the proper pronunciation, or some equivalent of it, by a modern reader untrained in Old English orthography. I am fond of these words, and justify their inclusion against Miss Moore's ban by the fact that they are not archaic so much as actively foreign, words transferred over from the language (and the society) of their origin. I translate these words in footnotes on their first appearance.

I have concentrated on reproducing the sound structure of the language in the alliterative verse form, in the names, and in the few untranslated words listed above. So far as I am aware, in only the first word of the poem, *what* for *hwæt*, have I allowed the sound actually to dictate meaning. There the liberty seemed justified. Other than the *what* exception, I have tried to reproduce, within the strictures of the meter, the meaning of the words as I understand them, either literally or approximately. When my understanding of the meaning varies significantly from Klaeber's (upon whose text my translation is based), I discuss the discrepancy in a note.

There are passages of heightened rhetoric in the original. These are marked most overtly by the transverse alliteration mentioned earlier, by variation (a sequence of phrases saying nearly the same thing in different ways), and by expanded meter (longer lines). I try to capture the feeling of such passages through diction. But I consider it a mistake to heighten the diction when the poet does not foreground a passage himself—a mistake, but a temptation, especially when the passage offers undeveloped material. The question here, and it is one that all literary translators must face, is how

far is one at liberty to "improve" the text, if one feels in tune with it? Even a conscientious balancing, introducing more "quality" into one passage because it was lost in another, may shift the poet's emphasis, though to some degree such balancing is inevitable. All literary translations come of a partnership in which the junior partner will leave his or her mark, showing greater or less dedication to preserve the original depending on how much desire there is to make it a personal document. Among recent translators of *Beowulf*, one introduces a meter marked by a frequent caesura after the first word of the line, another, a fine one, tries to compensate for the puns lost in translation by introducing his own, a third emends the text (following suggestions by certain scholars) without warning the reader that he is doing so. Believing that my readers would like to think that they are enjoying the same poem that might have been chanted in an Anglo-Saxon hall, I have tried to avoid such temptations to "improve" on the original, either by introducing personal stylistic elements as those translators above have done, or even by developing suggestions dropped, intentionally or not, by the poet himself. (I should acknowledge here my debt to previous translators; even those I am criticizing have done much to influence my own choices, and that influence marks another form of junior partnership. As John Ciardi said of his predecessors in translating Dante, "Without their failures I should never have attempted my own.")

For the Anglo-Saxons, honor, luck and fate were related concepts having connotations different from what they have for us today. I have not translated the words for these ideas consistently, even though they are key words in the moral structure of the narrative. I have felt it best at each occurrence to give such concepts the nuance that will convey to a modern audience the meaning that they have in Old English, or that I believe they have, within each particular context in this poem. For example, *Beowulf* would identify himself with the role of the Germanic warrior-hero (see lines 1386–87); it is by praiseworthy deeds, by first making a commitment then carrying it out, that such an identity is first established and then maintained. *Beowulf* is the most courteous of warriors, but that courtesy does not include the concept of modesty, as it would for a Christian knight of the later middle ages. Saying what one hopes to be capable of and then carrying out those words in deeds is the proper behavior of a warrior. This is demonstrated by the whole interchange between Unferth, *Beowulf*, *Wealthow* and *Hrothgar* in lines 499–661. After the verbal match with Unferth which reveals *Beowulf*'s previous experience as a monster-slayer, *Beowulf* says he will "behave with fitting courage" when Grendel comes that night, even if he dies in the attempt. *Wealthow* the queen "liked well those noble words/ of the Geat's pledge." Later we are reminded of that pledge when *Beowulf* "remembered his evening speech, stood up, /gripped fast against (Grendel)" (759–60). Because the nuance of the

significant word here, *beot*, is so different from "boast," as it is often translated, I have given it particular attention, translating it almost uniformly as "pledge," which is what it more properly means. "Pledge" avoids the negative connotations of "boast," connotations inappropriate to the noble act Beowulf is pre-performing in words.

Related to this problem of terms associated with honor is the last word in the poem, *lofgeornost*, which may be translated literally "most eager for glory." This is probably the most discussed word in Old English poetry. The discussion is analogous to that of Plato's *aretê*, in that the usual translation of this Greek word, "virtue," carries a moral nuance lacking in the original, which more properly means "excellence." It seems to me that saying Beowulf was "most eager for glory" comes as near to the heroic feeling of the original as describing his and Wiglaf's slaying of the dragon as an act of "pluck." Again Christian modesty has intervened to create a moral ambivalence perhaps not present in the original—certainly not present to those who use the word in the world of the poem, where *lof* is a quality to be sought by warriors. In view of this heroic context, I have translated the last word of the poem "most earnest for esteem." As well as retaining the social basis of Beowulf's desire ("glory" is egocentric whereas "esteem" implies the positive judgment of others), this translation preserves the dignity implied in *lofgeornost*, the final word of praise by the Geatish people for their beloved, grave and noble warrior king.

The Italics

My primary purpose for using italics is aesthetic, for clarity and style. Many people reading *Beowulf* for the first time find it difficult to organize the story in their minds, simply because it is unlike anything else they have ever read. *Beowulf* is a highly digressive poem; the fairy tale exploits of the hero appear side-by-side with factual history, mythic history, moral comment and scriptural allusion so that at one moment the reader may be engrossed in the main story and at the next moment floundering in a digression, sometimes without any apparent change of subject or even of pronoun reference for guidance. I have italicized these digressions, and while the italics represent visually on the page one of the poem's outstanding characteristics, at the same time they alert and orient the reader as the poet moves from narrative into commentary.

The italics also highlight and distinguish a major theme of the poem which I believe reveals the Anglo-Saxon poet's purpose in composing a story about a Scandinavian culture hero, a hero of another time and place. I have said above that *Beowulf* is a social poem; I believe that the poet's purpose was political, to realign the antecedents of his society in a way more acceptable to his contemporaries. I have on the whole italicized only the lengthier asides which put the action within this larger perspective.

In the first part of the poem, set in Denmark, the italicized passages consist chiefly of scriptural allusions not accessible to the pagan protagonists, to whom scripture has not yet been revealed, or of moral commentary or reflection intended as an aside to his audience by the poet. In the second part of the poem, set in the land of the Geats, the italicized passages are mostly episodes and digressions having more to do with Scandinavian history than with Beowulf's exploits as a hero. In the case of the Finnsburg episode (a historical digression), I have continued the italics to include Wealtheow's apparent response to the story, a response which may be interpreted as predictive of historical events to follow. Another long italicized passage, 2032-2143, contains Beowulf's assessment of the Danish court, again predictive, followed by an account of his exploits in Denmark, essentially a summing up of his previous two monster fights. Every passage in italics contains some material relevant to cosmic, Scandinavian or moral history. The reader intent only on the heroic story may skim over these asides, which are invaluable for the wider view they afford but are not precisely part of the narrative.

That they may be skimmed over does not mean that these passages should be undervalued. Much of the grandeur of Beowulf in the Danish part of the poem is the result of his heroic role in a monster feud having cosmic origins which he cannot perceive. Much of the tragedy in the Geatish part of the poem is the result of his and his people's sacrifice when surrounded by historical forces of destruction even more potent than demon or dragon. Those passages that add the further dimensions of scriptural and Scandinavian history are there if you want to see them, but they are not the main story. They function rather like a harmonic development in music, not part of the main tune but capable of turning a folksong into a symphony.

Here is a list of the passages I have italicized and their most important subject matter:

Lines	Subject (with available dates)
105-114	Cain's exile and progeny.
178-188	Comment on the heathen Danes.
898-915	Sigemund and Beowulf contrasted with Heremod.
1063-1191	The Finnsburg story and Wealtheow's response to it.
1197-1215	The story of Hama, and the fall of Hygelac in Frisia (ca. 521).
1261-1276	Grendel's descent from Cain.
1688-1699	The engraving of the Flood and the runes of the giant sword-hilt.
1931-1962	The story of Offa and Thryth.
2032-2143	Beowulf's report to his king on politics in Heorot and his slaying of the two monsters.

- 2354–2396 The Frisian raid (ca. 521) and Beowulf's regency; the death of Onla (ca. 535) in the Swedish-Geatish feuds.
- 2425–2509 Beowulf's reminiscences about King Hrethel and the slaying of Herebeald (including "The Father's Lament," 2444–2459), the death of Ongentheow (ca. 510) in the Swedish-Geatish feuds, and the Frisian raid (ca. 521).
- 2611–2625 The history attached to Wiglaf's sword: Weohstan's slaying of the Swedish Eanmund (ca. 533).
- 2910–3007 The Frisian raid (ca. 521), and Ongentheow's death (ca. 510) at the Battle of Ravenswood.

As may be seen from the contents, these passages are not those isolated by Adrien Bonjour in *The Digressions in Beowulf*, passages which contain much of immediate interest for the plot (such as the burial of the dragon's treasure). Rather these extend and authenticate the world of the story for the poet's audience and for us. They set the exploits of the Geatish hero within a framework that first recognizes the nobility of ancestral pagans by aligning them with the "right" side in the cosmic feud between good and evil, and later salvages their historical obscurity by offering an epic conclusion to their tribal existence on the continent. I like to think that the Anglo-Saxon poet celebrated Beowulf as a Scandinavian culture hero sanctioning the poet's own ancestral past.

Having designed this text for oral as well as for silent reading, I begin and end the italics at points convenient for continuity. When a break occurs

at the half-line, I have usually maintained alliteration before and after the italicized passage so that the reading need not falter.

My hope is that this version of Beowulf reads as easily as a prose narrative but with some of the compulsive power of a poem, whether it is being read silently or aloud, as a whole or abridged. My hope is that it is so transparent that one may pass through it into the world the poet envisioned, of an age before his own.

The Pictures

The pictures accompanying the text add a dimension of quite a different kind, making the world of the poem real by translating verbal descriptions into visual images. Only with recent archaeological discoveries has it become clear how accurately the *Beowulf* poet is describing the objects of worth in his poem; the monsters may be highly symbolic aggressors, but the poet's reconstruction of the material culture of the society upon which they prey accords largely with the facts. For example, a few decades ago in England a great treasure was discovered in a mound at Sutton Hoo in East Anglia, containing among other objects some fine Swedish armor and a sixth century masked helmet that corresponds in detail to helmets described in *Beowulf*. Just recently another, later, such helmet has been discovered in York; it is reproduced on the dust jacket of this book. I have concluded the picture series with a Swedish memorial stone upon which the final lines of *Beowulf* are echoed in a runic inscription.

Place and Date
of the Artifacts



The many pictures of artifacts and manuscript drawings throughout the text show how other artists, roughly contemporary with the Anglo-Saxon poet or with the earlier period of his story, have depicted many of the same objects or features that he mentions, from helmets with boars' heads above the cheekplates to the dragon biting around his victim's neck. These artifacts from outside the story, designed by artists who knew nothing of

Beowulf, give the poem a credibility within a material dimension that has not been available before.

As much as possible the illustrations for this translation have been chosen from artifacts and manuscripts contemporary with the poem or its events. Those few which come from a later date are based on traditional themes.

Jacket front panel: Anglo-Saxon helmet discovered at Coppergate in York on 12 May 1982. England, probably late seventh or early eighth century. Frontispiece: Mask helmet found in the ship cenotaph at Sutton Hoo, England. Ca. 600 A.D.
p. vi Centerpiece, Book of Durrow, folio 192^v. Ireland, ca. 680 A.D.
Facing p. 1: Initial (inverted) from the Lindisfarne Gospels, folio 90^r. England, ca. 700 A.D. Spear Warrior: Design from a picture stone found at Skokloster, Uppland. Sweden, ca. 700 A.D.
p. 2 Twisted Prow: Detail of the reconstruction of the ship found at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
p. 4 Harp-Lyre: Reconstruction of an instrument excavated at Sutton Hoo, England. Ca. 600 A.D.
p. 5 Satan in the Mouth of Hell: Detail from Bodleian Library MS. Junius

11; 10, 3. England, tenth or eleventh century. The mouth of Hell is often a dragon's jaws. In Celtic and Scandinavian tradition alike, the head of the dragon frequently resembles that of a lion, perhaps following Byzantine models and deriving ultimately from the Far East; the reptilian dragon head is of a later period.
pp. 6-7 Head: Wooden carving on a sleigh found in the ship burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
pp. 8-9 Ship with Twisted Prow: Detail from a picture stone found at Tjängvide, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 700 A.D.
p. 10 Coppergate Helmet: Anglo-Saxon, probably late seventh or early eighth century (see cover).
p. 11 Boar's Head over Cheekplate (drawing): Detail from the Coppergate Helmet (see above and cover). The same detail occurs on the masked

- helmet excavated at Vendel (grave XIV) in Sweden and on the Sutton Hoo helmet, both ca. 600 A.D.
- pp. 12-13 Mounted Warrior: Ornament from the Book of Kells, folio 89^v. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 14 Warrior's Face: Detail from the detached crest of a helmet found at Vendel in Sweden (see p. 91).
- p. 15 Man Stroking Beard: Phallic bronze figure from Lunda, Sweden. Ca. 1000 A.D.
- p. 17 Wayland in his Smithy: Detail from the front of the Franks Casket. England, eighth century.
- pp. 18-19 Gathering: Detail from the Book of Kells, folio 7^v. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 21 Man's Head: Wood-carving on a ceremonial cart found in the ship burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 22 Man Struggling with Monsters: Detail from the cart, above.
- p. 23 Sun Symbol: Detail from a picture stone found at Vallstenarum, Götland. Ca. 500 A.D.
- p. 25 Man Stroking Beard: Amber carving from Denmark. Viking period.
- p. 26 Roaring Beast: Head of stem post of Viking Ship found in Belgium. Ca. 800 A.D.
- pp. 28-29 Ornament: Bronze plate anchoring the carrying strap on the back of the Sutton Hoo shield. England, before 600 A.D.
- p. 30 Ornament: Silver gilt brooch found in Götland, Sweden. Sixth century.
- p. 31 Claw: Detail from an ornament on the front of the Sutton Hoo shield. England, before 600 A.D.
- p. 32-33 Sigemund Slaying the Dragon: Design carved on a stone in Ramsund in the parish of Jäder, Södermanland, Sweden. Eleventh century.
- p. 34 Fighting Stallions: Detail from a picture stone found at Hablingbo, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 500 A.D.
- p. 35 Claw: Detail from an ornament on the front of the Sutton Hoo shield. England, before 600 A.D.
- pp. 36-37 Tapestry: Section from a tapestry (technically an embroidered linen) found at Skog. The three figures have been said to represent Odin (with one eye), Thor (with his hammer), and Freyr (with a sheaf of wheat). Sweden, making use of earlier pagan traditions, twelfth century.
- p. 38 Helmet Crest: Detail of the Sutton Hoo helmet. England, before 600 A.D. (see frontispiece). "The Sutton Hoo helmet, alone among Scandinavian helmets, shows a crest or projecting ridge inlaid with wires, a decorative technique invited by its iron construction" (R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford). This feature corresponds to the *wula* of Beowulf, line 1031, "twisted with wires."
- p. 39 Eagle: One of a pair of fibulae from Vallstenarum, Götland, Sweden. Seventh century.
- pp. 40-41 Ring-Bearers: Detail from a picture stone found at Lärbro Tängelgård, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 700 A.D.
- p. 42 Snarling Beast: Carved bed post from a find at Gokstad, Norway. Ca. 900 A.D.
- p. 43 Lady with a Cup: Silver figurine found at Köpling, Öland. Sweden, eighth or ninth century.
- p. 44 Golden Collar: Necklace with filigree masks found at Älleborg, Sweden. Ca. 500 A.D.
- p. 45 Goblet: Silver cup with silver gilt ornament found at Himlinghøje, Zealand. Denmark, fourth century.
- p. 46 Boar-Helmeted Warriors: Bronze die (for a helmet plate) from Torslunda, Öland. Sweden, ca. 500 A.D.
- p. 47 Cain Killing Abel: Detail from Aelfric's Paraphrase of the Scripture (B.L. Cotton MS. Claudius B. IV), folio 8^v. England, eleventh century.
- p. 48 Warrior: Gaming piece found at Uig, Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Scandinavian, ca. 1100 A.D.
- p. 49 Warrior and Monster: Bronze die (for a helmet plate) from Torslunda, Öland. Sweden, ca. 500 A.D.
- pp. 50-51 Serpent: Brooch found on Öland, Sweden. Seventh century.
- pp. 52-53 Ship Attacked by Monster: Detail from a picture stone found at Klinte Huminge on Götland, Sweden. Ca. 800 A.D.
- pp. 54-55 Ship Attacked by Monster: Detail from a picture stone found at Lärbo Tängelgård on Götland, Sweden. Ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 55 Hag: Hollow figure of gold plate found at Trønninge, Holbaek, Denmark. Fifth century.
- p. 57 Golden Hilt: Sword from Snartemo, Norway. Sixth century.
- p. 58-59 Three Figures: Detail from the right side of the Franks Casket. England, early eighth century.
- p. 60 Aghast Queen: Gaming piece found at Uig, Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Scandinavian, ca. 1100 A.D.
- p. 63 Well-Born Man: Detail from the lid of the Franks Casket. England, eighth century.
- p. 64 Archer: Detail from the Utrecht Psalter, folio 7^r, illustrating Psalm 11:2 (Douay 12): "For lo, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart" (RSV). Netherlands, ca. 820 A.D.
- p. 65 Sceptre (drawing): A stone rod carved with faces and surmounted by an iron ring and a bronze stag found in the cenotaph at Sutton Hoo. England, ca. 600 A.D. (82 cm.)
- pp. 66-67 Raven: Detail from the right side of the Franks Casket. England, eighth century.
- pp. 68-69 Ship: Detail from a picture stone found at Riddare, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 800 A.D.

- p. 70 Hall: Detail from the Book of Kells, folio 202^v. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 71 Coin: Issue of the reign of Offa, a descendant of King Offa of the poem. England, ca. 775 A.D.
- pp. 72–73 Lovers: Block print after one of many small gold plaques found at Helgo, Sweden. Eighth or ninth century. (Courtesy of Karen Reynolds Glosecki.)
- p. 74 Battle Scene: Detail from a picture stone found at Klinte Hunninge, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 800 A.D.
- pp. 76–77 Ornament: Golden sword scabbard mounting found in Sweden. Sixth century.
- p. 77 Sea Witch: Drawing of bronze mount from Solberga, Sweden. Ca. 700 A.D.
- p. 78 Warrior's Face: Pendant from Hagebyhöga, Sweden. Viking period.
- pp. 80–81 Furious Beast: Carved wooden animal head from the ship burial excavated at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 81 Man with Cup: Detail from the Book of Kells, folio 201^v. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 82 Dragon Head: Belt-end mount of bronze gilt found at Vendel in Uppland, Sweden. Ca. 600 A.D.
- p. 83 Goblet: "The Jelling Cup" found at Jelling in Jutland, Denmark. Ca. 950 A.D.
- p. 85 Woman's Head: Detail from a gilt bronze fibula found at Aagerup, Zealand, Denmark, Viking period.
- p. 86 Ruler: Small silver figure from a grave find at Birka, Sweden. Ca. 900 A.D.
- pp. 86–87 Man and Looming Dragon: Detail from the Book of Kells, folio 292^r. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- pp. 88–89 Hanging Tree: Detail from a tapestry found in the ship burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 91 Masked Helmet: Helmet from a grave-find at Vendel in Uppland, Sweden. Ca. 600 A.D.
- pp. 92–93 Warrior Striking Dragon: Detail from a doorway carving of the stave church at Hylestad, Norway, drawing on earlier traditions. Twelfth century.
- p. 93 Interlaced Men: Detail from the Book of Kells, folio 253^v. Ireland, ca. 800 A.D.
- p. 94 Sword Hilt: Weapon found at Broa, Götland, Sweden. Ninth century.
- p. 95 Hero and Beast: Fragment of a relief sculpture found at Rosemarkie, Scotland. Eighth century.
- p. 96 Dragon Biting Warrior: Detail from a bronze plaque now in a museum at St. Germain-en-Laye, France. Eighth century.
- p. 97 Great Arches: Detail from the back of the Franks Casket. England, eighth century.
- p. 99 Garnet Bird: Eagle fibula, Visigothic. Sixth century.
- pp. 100–101 Dragon with Folded Wings: Ornament from the front of the shield excavated at Sutton Hoo, England. Before 600 A.D.
- p. 103 Spear Warriors (drawing): Detail from the helmet excavated at Sutton Hoo, England. Before 600 A.D.
- p. 104–105 Battle Scene: Detail from the lid of the Franks Casket. England, eighth century.
- p. 106 Interlocked Boars (drawing): Detail from the gold and garnet shoulder brooch excavated at Sutton Hoo, England. Ca. 600 A.D.
- p. 107 Wolf's Head: Carved animal head from the ship burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800 A.D.
- pp. 108–109 Winged Dragon: Gilt-bronze figure found in Sweden. Eighth century.
- p. 110 Wagon: Reconstruction of a cart found in the ship burial at Oseberg, Norway. Ca. 800.
- p. 111 Man with Torch: Detail from the Magi panel of the Franks Casket (front). England, eighth century.
- p. 112 Lamenting Woman: Figure of a woman with her hair bound up, in bronze gilt and pewter, found at Tuna, Uppland, Sweden. Eighth or ninth century.
- p. 113 Memorial Stone: Stele found at Ivla, Småland, Sweden. The verse-inscription in runes uses phrasing similar to the last two lines of *Beowulf*, describing the fallen hero as "gentle with his folk and generous with food, in great esteem (*lofi*) with all people." Viking period.
- p. 116 Death-Knot: Detail from a picture stone found at Lärbro Tängelgård, Götland, Sweden. Ca. 700 A.D.
- p. 118 Decoration: Roundel based on the Fuller brooch. England, mid-ninth century.
- p. 120 Decoration: Roundel based on the Fuller brooch. England, mid-ninth century.
- p. 123 Decoration: Roundel based on the Fuller brooch. England, mid-ninth century.
- p. 129 Decoration: Roundel based on the Fuller brooch. England, mid-ninth century.
- p. 133 Decoration: Drawing of a harness mounting found in boat grave VI at Valsgård in Uppland, Sweden. Seventh century.

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Notes to the Translation



These notes mainly concern customs and interpretations of the action. The language of the text itself is discussed only when there is a dispute about meaning, or when the translation offers an unorthodox interpretation of a passage and I feel I must defend it, or when the expression is so fine in the original that I feel compelled to call critical attention to it.

Like the translation, the notes are based for the most part on Klaeber's edition, from which I often quote. The other scholar most often cited is C. L. Wrenn, also an editor of the poem and my tutor at Oxford. The influence of R. W. Chambers' monumental *Beowulf: An Introduction* (London: Cambridge University Press, third edition, 1959) may be found throughout these pages, as can that of my first teacher of *Beowulf*, Fred C. Robinson.

Three Anglo-Saxon letters are used in these notes in Old English words: æ("ash"), ð("eth") and þ("thorn"). The first is a vowel sound with the value of the *a* in ash, the others are *th* sounds.

1 *Hwæt* is a standard formulaic opening for a heroic poem in Old English, often translated "lo!" or "listen!" It has been suggested that *hwæt* may have been accompanied by a loud thrum on the round-harp, or more technically the "harp-lyre," that is often mentioned in association with poetry recited in the hall.

4 Shield (Old English *Scyld*) is known in Scandinavian legend as Skjoldr and is described by Saxo Grammaticus as a great king and warrior, but the accounts of his wait-like arrival and his magnificent ship-burial at sea are thought by some scholars to be derived from English legends about Sheaf (Shield's father). Sheaf's wonderful arrival appears in the chronicles of Ethelward and William of Malmesbury, and until quite recently there existed in England a custom of floating a sheaf of wheat down a river on a shield to ensure the fertility of the fields. The Danes, however, were called the sons of Shield (Scyldingas), which probably originated from a descriptive nickname, like Spear-Danes, and in turn gave rise to a myth about a racial ancestor, "Shield." (An ancestor who is created on the basis of a name already in use, to explain it, is called "eponymous.") The poet himself may have shifted the arrival story from Sheaf to Shield in order to retain the myth and the evocative ship-burial, the ritual of which is echoed at the end of the poem, and to connect this myth with the "ancestor" of the Danes whose strong rule made possible the kingdom which Heorot later dominates. The Shield prelude also sets the tone for the whole poem. Klaeber compares Shield's destiny to that of Tennyson's King Arthur, "from the great deep to the great deep he goes." A closer and more relevant analogy is the swallow parable of King Edwin's hall-councillor: "He quickly flies through the hall, comes in through one door and through the other door out again he goes,

from winter into winter again . . . thus is this life of man: what went before or what follows after we do not know" (Bede, *History*, II, 13).

5 "taking their mead-seats": As often is his practice, the poet refers here to the whole (the hall) by the part (the mead-seats), in much the same way as someone might refer to his "country seat" or "ancestral seat" today, meaning a big country house that has been in the family for a long time. The mead-bench, probably rather resembling a church pew, was a highly important ritual object in early Germanic society, as the dispensing of mead was one of those ceremonies which bound society together. To "deprive a tribe of its mead-seats" was to destroy its spirit.

36 "by the mast": Shield was probably placed in a seated position with his back against the mast, like the dead warriors in the Vendel ship-graves excavated in this century. The findings of burial goods at Sutton Hoo in 1939 show that the descriptions of treasures in the burials of Shield and Beowulf need not be ascribed to "poetic extravagance" as they formerly were. This early Anglo-Saxon treasure, containing items from places as remote as Sweden and Byzantium, has been described as "the most valuable treasure ever found on English soil."

49 One authority states categorically, "We know from Scandinavian graves . . . that the illustrious dead were buried . . . in ships, with their bows to sea-ward; that they were, however, not sent to sea, but were either burnt in that position or mounded over with earth." It is of course difficult to prove that there was or was not actual sea-burial, since any remains would be lost to archaeology; in Norse literature the ships were sometimes set on fire as well as being "given to the sea." Both Shield's coming and his going, however, appear to be highly metaphorical.

53 The narrative of Beowulf's adventures begins here, with the first numbered fit. The first fifty-two lines have been called an "exordium" and a "prelude."

69-70 For the translation "a mighty hall . . . that the sons of men should hear of forever" see Fred C. Robinson's textual study of these lines in *TSL*, 11 (1966), 151-160.

78 Heorot: In the Norse analogues the Danish court is named Hleithr (Latin Lethra, probably modern Leire), which alliterates, as does Heorot, with the names of the royal family, Hrothgar, Hrothulf, etc. The Anglo-Saxon name of the hall in *Beowulf* and in *Widsith* (line 49) was probably symbolic of royalty; a hart cult in both Celtic and Germanic tradition is well attested by archaeological finds as well as literary references. (Sigurd, for example, is surrounded by hart symbolism.)

82–85 The poet continually foreshadows events to come, some of which do not even take place in the poem, like the burning of Heorot. “The sword-hatred of a son-in-law” is clarified by Beowulf himself in lines 2024–69 (see note).

88 It is the nature of such “exiled demons” to be angered by the sounds of good fellowship in the hall, but the *Beowulf* poet gives this theme a peculiarly Christian twist. Through the *stowe*’s song of creation, the hall, where the inhabitants lived happily “until One from Hell began to perform evil deeds,” is identified with Eden by means of a scriptural passage addressed by the poet exclusively to us, his Christian audience.

106 The idea of the descent of monsters and evil spirits or giants from Cain and of the destruction of the giants by the Flood (see lines 1688–93) is ultimately derived from the scriptural narrative by a continuous reading of the Cain story (Genesis 4) through the account of giants (Genesis 6:2–4), Jehovah’s disgust (6:5–7), and the story of Noah (Genesis 7). According to Irish belief, Cham, the son of Noah, inherited the curse of Cain and became the progenitor of monsters. In the *Beowulf* manuscript, *caines* (line 107) is altered from original *caines* (Cham?), which has suggested to some scholars a Celtic background for the *Beowulf* poet.

112 *orcs*, Old English *orc-neas*, refers to the walking dead.

156–158 “to settle with gold . . . compensation” is legal terminology; Grendel’s relationship to the Danes is here presented as a feud, under the rules of which a slaying may be paid for in *wergild* (I accept the OED explanation “man gold” rather than “covenant gold”), whereby peaceful relationships may theoretically be renewed. The “bright compensation” (158) is gold, and the contrast between the brightness of the gold as a sign of renewed friendship and the darkness of Grendel (159) is, of course, symbolic.

168–169 A more literal translation, highlighting the problems, might be as follows: “He could not approach that gift-throne, the treasure in front of the lord (the Treasure, i.e. altar), because of the Lord?”, nor know his (the lord’s/the Lord’s) love.”

This is one of the great cruces in the poem, not because any particular word is difficult, but because editors and commentators have disagreed about what the words refer to. Most editors have attempted to unravel it (literally) either by making the *gíftstol* (gift-throne) the throne in Heorot and making the lord Hrothgar, or by changing the location of the lines to come between 110 and 111, so that *he* can refer to Cain and the throne and lord both take on Christian connotations.

Since Latin writers of the period take full advantage of the figure called *seria*, where classical allusion is interwoven with the contemporary subject, I suspect that the skilled and literate *Beowulf* poet is doing something similar here, interweaving Christianity with his subject in such a way that Grendel is identified with Cain (as elsewhere in the poem) and the throne of Hrothgar with the throne of God, while yet keeping the main focus on the action in Heorot. The fact that “mankind’s foe . . . that fiend in exile” is the logical antecedent of the pronoun *he* very much enhances the double focus.

While *mynd* (168) can mean “love,” it might better be translated “remembrance” or even “communion”—keeping both the Christian and secular implications, since the Old Norse *minni* drink was a memorial toast to dead kinsmen to aid them in the other world. The point being made here is that Grendel, “the terrible one who goes alone,” has no communion (the most vital thing in life for Christians and pagans alike) with anybody.

175–188 The idol worship of the Danes and the poet’s Christian exhortations mark the most vivid contrast in the poem between pagan (or in this case heathen) and Christian belief. The Christian poet offers only two alternatives for the afterlife, the embrace of fire or of the Father (183–188); he has himself set up the debate, so actively engaged in by some scholars while scorned by others, concerning the destiny of Beowulf’s soul.

204 *hæl*, which I have translated “lots,” is found in Wülker’s *Glossaries* in various forms, meaning “augury,” “omen,” “divination.” For an imaginative reconstruction of the way runes might have been used as lots, and a series of practice “games” of increasing complexity for the modern reader, see my and Stella Longland’s *Rune Games* (Routledge, 1982).

259 *wordhord unleafc* “unlocked his hoard of word-treasure” is a formulaic opening for a formal speech, found in *Widsith*, *Andreas*, and other Old English poems.

308 Gold-ornamented halls abound in folk tales and in the Norse sagas. Adam of Bremen gives a second-hand description of the great pagan temple at Uppsala with its serrated

ornament which looked to his informers like a golden chain hanging above the roof between the gables. This is only one of several pieces of evidence suggesting that roofs of important halls really did sometimes gleam with gold, and that perhaps we should not ascribe the poet’s description of Heorot entirely to poetic fancy, as scholars did the extravagant-ship-burials before the discovery of the Sutton Hoo treasure. Germanic and Celtic chiefs had immense gold hoards, and much of the ritual of the society was based on display; one felt safe with one’s fellows glittering with golden armor in a high and gold-adorned hall.

320 The road to Heorot was formerly thought to be imagined by the poet as paved after the Roman fashion, but the archaeologist Rosemary Cramp has pointed out that stone roads leading to important Germanic halls have been found in countries where the Romans did not penetrate. In 1815 the earliest critic of *Beowulf*, a Dane named Grundtvig, picked out this detail as proof that the poem was composed in England where Romans had built *stanfah* (“stone paved”) roads; from this he argued that *Beowulf* was therefore not a translation from a Scandinavian original, as the earliest editor had supposed. But the integral Christian element in the poem, which was composed before Christianity was a familiar faith in the Scandinavian north, gives us all the proof we need that *Beowulf* is an English poem.

325 (and 397) It was the rule at all periods to deposit weapons outside before entering a hall. In provincial Swedish almost every church porch is called *våpenhus* “weapon house,” because the worshippers used to leave their arms there before they entered.

359 “Before the shoulders” is a standard term meaning “in front,” but with the implication of a relatively lower status. Hildeburh’s son is placed in this relationship to Hnaef on the funeral pyre at Finnsburh, *eame on eazle* “at his uncle’s shoulder” (1117), but the dead fire-dragon lies *on efn* “just beside” (2903) and *widerræhtes* “opposite” (3039) in relation to Beowulf, with no intimation of lesser importance.

408–409 Such an immediate identification of kinship and valor is typical of self-introduction both in epic poetry and in the diplomatic interchanges of actual tribal society. It would stand as an insult to Hrothgar’s nobility to be approached by a stranger not able to establish an honorable position in the hierarchy of noble men.

433–441 Beowulf’s chivalry “makes a modern impression,” says Klaeber. Beowulf decides to fight the monster on the latter’s own primitive terms, hand to hand, not knowing beforehand that Grendel cannot be harmed by ordinary weapons.

446 Most editors explain this “hiding of the head” as the custom of covering the dead man’s head with a cloth. The sense of the passage is simply that nothing will remain of Beowulf if cannibalistic Grendel has his way. I suspect that the “hiding of the head” involves a custom rather more grim than that postulated by Klaeber and others: why is it necessary for Wiglaf to hold “guard over the heads” of Beowulf and the dragon later (2910), and why does the made of Ashere’s head (1420–22) have such ritual impact? Anne Ross, in *Pagan Celtic Britain*, offers interesting speculations and archaeological evidence concerning prehistoric head cults in Britain.

454 Wayland: Klaeber says, “If a weapon or armor in Old Germanic literature was attributed to Wayland, this was conclusive proof of its superior workmanship and venerable associations. The figure of this wondrous smith—the Germanic Vulcanus (Hephaistos)—symbolizing at first the marvels of metal working as they impressed the people of the stone age, was made the subject of a heroic legend which spread from North Germany to Scandinavia and England.” The myth of Wayland persisted into recent times: there is a Wayland the Smith’s Cave in Berkshire, and Sir Walter Scott refers to Wayland in *Kenilworth*. 459–472 Beowulf’s father had been involved in a feud after which the Geats compelled him to leave their country for fear of reprisals. He sought out Hrothgar, who paid compensation (wergild) to the Wyfings on his behalf; in return Edgetheow “swore oaths” of peace or allegiance to Hrothgar. (The only difficulty with this simple explanation is that it is based on an editorial emendation of the text, *garr cyn to wædan cyn*, i.e., the Geats. Kemp Malone suggests that Edgetheow was a Wyfing in origin who received a judicial sentence of banishment for a term, in *Studies in Heroic Legend and Current Speech*, pp. 108–115.)

466 “jewelled kingdom” is a return to the manuscript text, *gimne rice*, for which Fred C. Robinson argues in *Speculum*, 52 (1977), p. 191.

501 "unbound his battle-runes" is a phrase describing manner of speech rather than an interesting pagan custom concerning rune-staves; but as Unferth is a *thulé*, a word that has associations with oratory, the phrase may have technical implications. Recently, Carol Clover, in a paper on "Ritual Insult in Germanic Tradition," related Unferth's taunt directly to the Scandinavian traditional word-battle described in the sagas. Unferth's name, which Klaeber interprets as *unfriðr*, "mar-peace," suggests also that it is his official function to taunt such newcomers as Beowulf. The effect of his taunt is to provoke Beowulf to recount his boyhood feat in such a way as to give him added credibility as a monster-killer.

570 "God's beacon," the sun, enables Beowulf to see the shore after the storm. Notice other descriptions of dawn and the references to the sun and to the breaking forth of light throughout the poem.

572-573 This is almost proverbial. "Fortune favors the brave," but it by no means renders manly courage unnecessary. Wrenn points out that "the same idea is almost exactly repeated in 2291-3," but with God mentioned instead of *wyrd*.

587-589 Believing that *þinum broðrum* is what Klaeber calls a "generic plural" like *bearmum ond broðrum* at line 1074, I have translated this as a singular. Unferth has murdered his kinsman, probably the worst crime possible in a tribal society, yet he remains a prominent and respected statesman. Though there are analogues for this, it is very odd. Beowulf tells Unferth that he will receive his due reward in Hell, even though his mental powers are great, in "the most specifically Christian language so far found in the poem" (Wrenn). Is Unferth a "civilized" member of the clanna Cain? It should be noted that Beowulf appears to have an innate understanding of good and evil, divine judgment and punishment; this is called "natural knowledge" by theologians, and is described by Paul in his letter to the Romans as a type of religious understanding available to all men, including noble pagans. The poet is, however, very careful to keep comments about scriptural history, which could only be known to those in the poem through a teacher, separate from their understanding. Beowulf can know about judgment and damnation, but not about Cain.

620 "The Helming lady" must be a member of that Wyfing tribe among which Beowulf's father slew Heatholaf (lines 460-461), as Helm is called a ruler of the Wyfings in *Widsith*, line 29. Some have suggested that the Wufingas of East Anglia (and of the great Sutton Hoo treasure) are descendants of the Wyfings mentioned in *Beowulf*; others argue against this interesting but speculative identification.

622-624 The royal lady is here directing that Germanic drinking ceremony which seals heterogeneous members of the tribe and its followers into a dedicated group. Her approach to Beowulf is a separate ritual as she offers him the cup, not in his turn where he sits among the others, but after it has gone the round.

660-661 Hrothgar's promise of a reward is what is expected of a good king (compare 20-25); it does not detract, in the modern sense of payment or bribery, from the nobility of the hero, but rather does both him and his "gold friend" honor.

697 *wigspeda gewiðfu*, "weaving of luck in battle" is usually taken as a mere figure of speech, like *hel* in line 852. But in *Njal's Saga*, Chapter 157, a man called Dorrud looked through a window-slit in a woman's house, "and there he saw women with a loom set up before them. Men's heads were used in place of weights, and human entrails in place of the warp and woof: a sword served as the treadle and an arrow as the batten." As the women wove they spoke verses that would "weave war-luck" in the battle of Clontarf.

703 The sleep of the Geats in this situation has aroused much speculation; it has been suggested that both this sleep and the fact that Beowulf waits on his bed while one of his retainers is being devoured are features of the original story which the poet has not successfully adapted.

710-722 Klaeber, comparing the Grendel fight to a more straightforward monster fight in Old Norse prose, objects to the interrupted narrative presented here by the poet. Many modern critics find it among the most satisfyingly artistic passages of the poem. Renoir, speaking of it in cinematic terms, visualizes Grendel's approach as long shot, medium shot, close-up, extreme close-up: "He came in the dark night . . . he came from the moor . . . he came to the building . . . a horrible light poured out of his eyes . . ." The stylistic device of

variation, in which the same thing is said in more than one way, is used by the poet to build up dramatic tension and meaning simultaneously.

725 *fagne flur* "decorated floor" or "colored floor": Most recent commentators on this line refer to the place name Fawler, shown by charters to have been derived from Old English *fag flor*, and they mention the well-attested fact that Roman mosaic floors have been found near at least two villages of this name. This has suggested that the "colored floor" in Heorot may have been conceived by the poet as a mosaic floor. Elsewhere in the poem, however, a wooden floor is suggested. This by no means cancels out the possibility of a highly ornamented floor, perhaps with a painted design at least in part based, like certain "carpet pages" of such manuscripts as the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, on Roman pavements.

726-727 Several demonic characteristics are shared by the monster Grendel and the Green Knight of the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Both seem to be drawn by harmonious music to the hall; both seem to cast those in the hall into a magical trance (*as al were shippað upon slepe*, *SGGK*, line 244; the *Gawain* poet perhaps incorporates this traditional element better than the *Beowulf* poet does); both glance around the hall with a demonic light in their eyes (*Beowulf* 727, *SGGK* 119-202). The structures of these two stories also bear many similarities.

727 "light like a flame": Fire imagery is connected with demonic beings throughout *Beowulf*. 740-782 These lines, on folio 148 of the manuscript, were found between lines 91 and 92 (folios 133 and 134) by those who first recorded their examination of the poem in modern times. Presumably the person who bound *Beowulf* together with Augustine's *Soliloquies* into the codex now known as "The Nowell Codex" accidentally misplaced this folio in his binding. In part because of this displacement, for a century the poem was thought to be about "Beowulf, a certain Dane who waged wars against the kings of Sweden" (Langebeek). It is an interesting exercise to read the text this way (remembering that I have clarified many pronouns which were loosely or not at all identified by the poet) in order to sample the kind of difficulties that were faced by the earliest modern readers of the poem.

740-745 The description of Grendel devouring Handsclio passes so quickly in a heightened oral reading that I think it explains why Beowulf did not intervene to save his friend's life: he did not have time!

748-749 There are differences of opinion about the form of this first hold in the great wrestling match. Does Beowulf rise to a sitting position, supported by his arm, or does he reach out to grasp Grendel's arm? The effect achieved by Crossley-Holland in his translation seems to me to parallel that intended by the poet: Beowulf immediately grasped Grendel's evil intentions and set himself against that arm. He doesn't stand up until 759. (Chambers, in the note on these lines in his edition, offers a different account.)

765-769 The combat in Heorot is described partly in ironic terms as a "dinner party" for Grendel. He enters the hall with delighted anticipation of a meal (730-734), enjoys his main course (Handsclio, 740-745), Beowulf remembers his after dinner speech (758-759), "ale" is shared out (767-769), and finally Grendel sings a "lay" (782-788). E. B. Irving, Jr., discusses this ironic substructure in *A Reading of Beowulf* (London, 1968). The general intention of this passage would seem to be (as Irving has suggested) that the noise in the hall is much like that of a wild drinking session, but without the kind of fellowship usually involved (see the note on *myrne*, 169). The irony is extended even further by the references to Heorot's "mouth" through which Grendel enters (723-725) and to the flames which will in turn "swallow" the hall (781-782).

836 Scholars are still undecided whether the arm has been hung inside or outside the hall: the general opinion is that it is outside. Eilert Ekwall says, "The placing of Grendel's arm above the entrance reminds me of a custom prevalent in the countryside of Sweden at least till about fifty years ago, viz, to nail a dead hawk or kite or other bird of prey over the door of the stable or perhaps some other house, doubtless for protection or luck. Grendel's arm may have been placed over the door of Heorot not only as a trophy."

874 *worðum wirtlan* "to mingle his words": Wrenn suggests that this is an allusion to the practice of variation, the repetition of similar ideas in different words so typical of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Others have argued that it refers to the Germanic method of composition by oral

formulas, or that it means "to weave words" rather as serpentine ornaments are "woven" or interlaced in Anglo-Saxon art. Yet another group of critics believes that the phrase refers to *paronomasia*, or word-play. Word-play does occur in this passage. It was noticed years ago that through lines 867–871 there are echoes of *seg* and *mund*, and it may be that here the *Beowulf* poet is offering us an example of the very practice that he claims for Hrothgar's *shops*. I favor this argument, but no one knows exactly what *wordum wrixlan* refers to.

874–900 Klaeber points out that the Sigemund story given here is an epitome combining two separate stories, one about the hero's adventures with his nephew Fitela, and another about his dragon fight. Wrenn says, "Here, more clearly than in some of the other episodes and digressions, we see the deliberate and most effective art of the poet." The parallel with *Beowulf*'s later fight with the dragon, and the contrast in that he loses his life in that fight, would be apparent immediately to an audience familiar with these stories.

885 *dom* "glory" after his death was the Germanic hero's chief aim in life, the purpose of his great deeds.

887 In *Cotton maxims II* we are told, *Draca seal on hlazwe, frod, freztum wlcinc* "the dragon will bide in the barrow, wise, proud of his treasures." This theme, as well as that of the heat of devilish beings, is picked up again in the second half of the poem.

901–915 Klaeber comments at length upon the Heremod digression and its Danish historical and legendary analogues, which show Heremod to have been a traditional figure in the legendary history of Denmark; even the connection with Sigemund is traditional. But, while the earlier scholar Müllenhoff's interpretation of Heremod as simply an allegorical personification of *here-mot* "warlike disposition" is thus proved invalid, the king does have this allegorical function in *Beowulf*; through aptness of name rather than allegory *per se*. (Another digression on Heremod comes in Hrothgar's long speech, at lines 1709–22.) The chief purpose of the Heremod digression is, as the poet makes clear in lines 913–915, to describe *Beowulf* in terms of what he is not: he is not like Heremod. A basic message of the first part of the poem is contained in the stories of these two famous men: Be like Sigemund, who won esteem by active valor, killing the dragon, not like Heremod, who was so oppressed by his own misery that he murdered his friends.

916–917 The Sigemund-Heremod digression is bracketed between references to horse racing. This device, used often by the poet, is called an "envelope pattern." The whole poem is contained within the envelope pattern of heroic funerals.

947 It was a standard practice and one way of ensuring loyalty and friendship to adopt a child from another powerful tribe or family. (See the note below on lines 2428–29.)

978 *dom* "judgment": This is the first direct reference to a *dom* different from that esteemed or glory won by secular deeds (see the note on 885). For pagan *Beowulf*'s "natural knowledge" of the Creator and his ways, see the note on lines 587–588.

994–996 Long picture tapestries, six to nine inches wide, were found in the Oseberg ship-burial. The Bayeux tapestry is about one and a half feet wide by 132 feet long. These so-called tapestries, really embroidered picture strips, were traditionally hung along a hall to decorate it for a banquet, much as we use banners and bunting today in our much rarer hall ceremonies.

1007–08 The theme of sleep after the banquet is here being used metaphorically: all men sleep in death after the banquet of life. (On another level, however, it concludes the ironic sub-theme of Grendel's "party" at Heorot.)

1053–54 Hrothgar compensates the Geats for their loss of a man by paying them *weergild* "man gold." This is a standard legal practice, but one which also does the dead man honor. (See the note on lines 156–158.)

1065–70 Hrothgar's *shops* is singing about how disaster came upon Finn's son(s) and Danish Hnaef, so that they fell in slaughter in Frisia. While the *shops* sings something like the *Finnisburg Fragment*, the poet meditates upon the tragedy resulting from that well-known fight. The *shops*' preoccupations are heroic, as is appropriate; the poet's are humane. "He dwells on the pathetic situation of Queen Hildeburh and on the spiritual conflict of Hengest" (Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 58).

1071–72 This is negative understatement. Indeed, Hildeburh had great reason to curse the troth-breaking Jutes (or "enemies"), if they were responsible for the deaths of her son and her

brother. Kaske makes a good argument for translating the word *eotenias* in this passage "giants" as elsewhere in the poem, meaning here "enemies." I offer my reason for retaining the usual translation "Jutes" in the note on line 1141.

1080–85 On the morning after the fight ends (it went on for five days, according to the *Finnisburg Fragment*, but this may be poetic exaggeration), Finn finds that he has too few men to drive Hengest from the hall he occupies. Hengest, on the other hand, does not have enough men to break out from the hall successfully. A treaty seems the only solution, though there is a loss of honor for all concerned.

1102 "Making peace with the slayers of one's lord was entirely contrary to the Germanic code of honor." (Klaeber)

1117–18 It would appear to be Hildeburh who is singing. It is customary for a woman to sing at the funeral pyre, perhaps for the purpose of calling down good spirits to help the soul of the departed warrior in his journey "elsewhere." See the note on lines 3150–55 below.

1118 "The warrior ascended": It seems to me that Grimm's suggestion, "The warrior's spirit rose into the air," is by far the best of the many explanations proposed. Others explain that Hnaef is here being lifted onto the pyre.

1129 "He cast no lots" to prepare for an ocean-going venture by reading the omens. I translate *unliffime* thus because I believe that such divination was a standard practice in the seafaring culture of the ancient north.

1141 The Jutes are, according to Klaeber, Frisians under King Finn (Klaeber, p. 232). They are mentioned four times, at lines 1072, 1088, 1141 and 1145, but never do I find that they are clearly aligned with one side or another; one can construct an argument either way. As there is a tradition that a mercenary warrior Hengist (a Jute) was hired at about this time by a Celtic king, Vortigern, to come to fight for him in Britain, and this Hengist also turned out to be an oath breaker (though without the excuse of vengeance for a beloved lord), I like to think that the two are the same, that Hnaef's warrior Hengest fulfilled his duty toward his dead lord by avenging his slaying, but could not then return to Denmark because he or his Jutish comrades (or his Jutish foes of family feud, serving King Finn) had instigated the fight in the first place (lines 1071–72), on what was intended to be a peaceful visit. Therefore, when the Danes took home the queen and the plunder, the Jutes who had been their companions turned their sights toward that "green and pleasant land" across the sea, and spearheaded the invasion of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes that eventually changed the name of that land to Engleland. This is pure conjecture; there is no way of proving it. But an alternative translation for *he Eotenra bearn* in line 1141 is "he, a man of the Jutes"; the translation as I have rendered it accords with Klaeber's interpretation that the Jutes are fighting on the side of the Frisians and that Hengest is a Dane, but either rendering is grammatically valid.

1143–44 Some have suggested that *him . . . on bearn dyde* means that the sword was plunged into Hengest's breast. But *Cotton Maxims II* (25–26) makes it clear that, just as the spear shall be in the hand, the gem on the ring, the mast on the ship, and the dragon in the barrow, so the proper place for the sword is ready in the lap: *Sweord seal on bearnne, driflic isern*. To the sword name (or kenning) "Light of Battle" compare the evocative use of such sword-light as an opening for the *Finnisburg Fragment* and later in this poem: "Sword-light flashed/as though all Finnsburg were on fire!" (See also the speculations below on line 1570.)

1148 Guthlaf and Oslaf are probably identical to Guthlaf and Ordlaf in the *Fragment*, line 14.

1149 This is probably the journey made to Frisia the year before. Guthlaf and Oslaf are complaining a great deal about the sudden attack after the sea journey.

1164–68 "Gull" suggests some event to follow that will contradict this scene, and may be a hint about Hrothulf's disloyalty (for a forceful argument against this proposal, see Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf*). Unferth, sitting at their feet, here seems to me to function almost as a symbol of faithlessness between kin. "They trusted his *ferthæ* 'courage,' even though the very name Unferth should serve as a warning. (Further hints of disaster occur at *Beowulf* 82–85 and *Widsith* 45–46; in this latter poem we are told that "Hrothulf and Hrothgar held peace together for a very long time.")

1175–87 The standard interpretation of *Wealthow's* speech is that it is an ironic fore-shadowing of the disaster that is to befall her sons. But is it not possible that *Wealthow*,

whose duty as queen is to keep peace between kinsmen and arouse warriors to their proper tasks, comprehends the danger of the situation: young sons, an old king, and a powerful nephew of the king? Some have said that she is worried lest Hrothgar should plan to leave part of his kingdom to Beowulf, whom he has "adopted." I believe that Wealtheow recognizes this adoption as a ceremonial to do Beowulf honor (it is accompanied with lavish treasures), and that she is taking the opportunity suggested by this adoption, perhaps reinforced by the idea of peace-weaving gone wrong in the lay about Finnsburg, to suggest to Hrothgar that he should make a firm provision to leave the kingdom to a strong kinsman, like Hrothulf, whom she believes will be kind to her boys (it is impossible to be sure whether the poet's tone here is ironic or not), in order to prevent tragedy before it has the opportunity to arise. This is the line taken by Hygd later in the poem when she offers the rule of the Geatish kingdom to Beowulf over her own son's head (lines 2369–76).

1197–1201 Hama is apparently an adventurer who robbed Eormentric, a king of the East Goths who died by his own hand around 375 A.D., of the precious *Brosinga mene*, possibly identical to the *Brsinga men*, the magical necklace of Freya in Old Norse legend. In *Þiðræk's Saga* it is told that a certain Heimir fled the enmity of Eiríknir and later entered a monastery, bringing with him all his treasures. Possibly "eternal gain" implies that Hama entered a monastery, choosing eternal over secular wealth, and the monastery may be the "bright city" to which he carried the *Brosinga mene*.

1202–14 This is the first of the allusions to Hygelac's Frisian expedition, an ill-judged raid on which he lost his life. At 2172 Beowulf gives the necklace to Hygelac's queen Hygd; she may have given it to Hygelac to wear for luck on this particular raid.

1214 *Heal swæge onfeng*, which I have understood as "the hall received the sound" and paraphrased "applause had greeted . . ." has been amended by some editors to *heals-bege onfeng* "he (Beowulf) accepted the necklace." This makes good sense, but I believe that, as in the case of the Finnsburg digression, the poet has been meditating on the history behind a lay being sung by the *stowe*; in this case the lay is an "appropriate" story to accompany the giving of a priceless necklace, the story of the *Brosinga mene*. After the song is over, there is applause: *heal swæge onfeng*.

1239–40 The hall is being cleared of tables, which are lifted from their trestles and hung on the wall. It is then *brædded* throughout with beds and pillows. These are laid directly on the broad benches on which the warriors will sleep. The "beds" (or "feather-beds") are probably soft eiderdowns, like thick sleeping bags or quilts; we still use such old-fashioned mattresses in my home in Yorkshire. The verb *bregdan* (past participle *brædded*), used for a quick action like the drawing of a sword, suggests the fluffing up of the feather-beds that is necessary before they can be slept on comfortably.

1261–66 The Cain theme is recapitulated, and in 1266–76 the Grendel story is summarized, almost as though the story had been broken off and were being continued at a different time. The same kind of summarizing of what has gone before occurs following line 2000, when Beowulf reports on the events in Denmark to his lord, Hygelac. It has been suggested that *Beowulf* was designed to be presented before an audience as a three-part sequence.

1262 Cain uses a sword rather than the more traditional jawbone of an ass both in the poem and in certain medieval illustrations of this episode from Genesis.

1331 In view of the fact that Grendel's tracks had been followed to the mere the morning after he was defeated in Heorot (837–852), it is inconsistent that the poet should have Hrothgar "know not whither" Grendel's mother carried her grisly load. A recent commentator has suggested retaining the manuscript reading and translating "I know not *whither* . . ." that is, whether Grendel's mother bore the corpse away at all, or ate it on the spot. I prefer to read the emended "whither," believing that as is frequently the case, the poet is more interested in the suggestive mood he is creating than in the consistency of his story: Grendel's lake is a weird, shadowy, *imprecise* place.

1345–76 The description of the monsters' dwelling place is a kind of set piece, one of the most famous passages of the poem, and perhaps the poet's justified eagerness to include it helps to account for Hrothgar's inconsistent ignorance. Three apparently conflicting analogies for this passage have been pointed out by scholars, with the purpose of explaining particular details:

1. Lawrence showed, with references to the *Grettingsaga*, that the scene seems to be a waterfall with a pool before it and a cave behind it; if this is taken strictly, then the sea monsters are yet another inconsistency. Yet of course one then immediately thinks of landlocked Loch Ness and the first written reference to the monster there that is almost contemporary with *Beowulf*, and of the pictures of monsters goggling at the rudders of ships on the Gotland stones.
2. There seems to be an allusion here to the Christian Heli; the burning lake, the bottomless deep, the *wyrmias*, and the misty wasteland all are echoes of other early accounts of Hell both in Latin and in Old English literature. There are especially close parallels to the seventeenth Blidding Homily, which is based on a Visio Pauli, about the wanderings of Paul in the desert.
3. There seem to be classical echoes as well. "In fact," Klaeber says, "those passages which we are tempted to regard as 'Vergilian' are especially striking in this section."

The landscape of the mere, then, seems to be intended as an allusive series of montage effects culminating in a suitable lair for monsters, rather than as a place one could plot on a map. (Nevertheless, each time I read about it, I see an exaggerated version of the landscape I live in myself, the bleak moors, the cavernous mountain Ingleborough, and the tarns of the high fells in my area of the Yorkshire Dales. There is even a Grendel figure, Yordas the giant, who dwells in a local waterfall cave and is said to eat little boys, and up near Black Shiver Moss is a sinister shake-hole called "Batty Wite Hole.")

1570 *Lixte se leoma* is usually taken to refer to the firelight mentioned in line 1516, and so I have translated it "the flame leapt up." Yet Beowulf has just cut off the head of Grendel's mother and her blood is running down the sword. Presumably her blood is hot like that of her son (1616) and of Sigemund's dragon (897). Can it be the sword, then, that is called a *leoma* "flame" like the sword *beadoleoma* of 1523, lighting up the hall? The golden banner in the dragon's lair pours forth light by which Wiglaf can see the treasures (2769–71). The sword that gleams in the presence of the enemy is a standard folklore motif (familiar to readers of Tolkien), and may account for the "burning" at the beginning of the *Finnsburg Fragment* and the flashing light of battle later in that poem.

1588–90 Klaeber says, "To an unprejudiced reader it may seem natural enough that the head of Grendel, the chief of the enemies, is cut off and carried home in triumph. But, as an additional reason, the desire of preventing the ghost from haunting Heorot has been cited." (In Scandinavian fairy tales a troll must be beheaded in order to destroy it completely.) A further reason for the beheading may stem originally from Celtic sources, like the Norse myth of Mimir's head kept by Odin to foretell the future. It was an early Celtic custom to preserve the articulate dead heads of powerful friends and enemies for this purpose, or simply for "luck"—a more tangible quality then than now.

1605–11 The sword melts like an icicle, and the powerful metaphor leads into an image of God the Father "unwinding the water ropes" of ice in the springtime. This is in some sense analogous to Beowulf's "cleansing" of the waters of the lake (1620).

1652 The culture hero returns from the underworld with shamanistic "sea treasures," as do Gilgamesh and Aeneas. The magical hilt is proof of his power which the king will adopt as a focus for prophetic wisdom. Such magical treasures, having the power of breaking a paralysis which holds warriors in thrall, appear even in Joyce's *Ulysses*, where Stephen's sword-like ashplant and Bloom's moly-like potato free them from the Crecean Nighttown and aid them with the wisdom to progress past their stultifying fantasies.

1667 The melting blade picks up the candle and icicle motifs of 1570–72 and 1605–08.

1669–70 Beowulf's code and vocation are implicit in his announcement that he avenged "wicked deeds, the deaths of the Danes," as was proper. His narrow (and natural) view of the feud, thinking that it is now over, is corrected by Hrothgar's broader vision in his "sermon."

1677–99 The hilt is described. Before speaking, Hrothgar "looked on the hilt," and it focuses his royal, hence more than human, wisdom, much as the sacred pagan well in Carlisle apparently focused the second sight of St. Cuthbert (Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, 27). Just as enemy heads aided the prophecies of Irish warriors in ancient sagas (or even uttered the prophecies), and certain sacred pools of water aided in the wisdom of Celtic and English saints, so in ancient Rome a lamp with shaded flame was sometimes used (this may have been in Paul's mind when he said that we see now as through glass, darkly). Christians traditionally

focus their meditation upon a cross, hoping either for supernatural inspiration or more simply the stillness of mind which begets wisdom; the crossed hilt of a sword has been known to serve the same purpose.

The text tells us that two things are "written" on the hilt: the beginning of the ancient fight (which is given a setting *for us alone* in the context of scriptural history in lines 1689–93) and the name of the first owner, in runes. A combination of runic and nonrunic inscriptions is not uncommon; technically Hrothgar should be able to read runes. But we are not told that he reads what he is looking at, and even if he did, the scriptural history, whether in runes, Roman letters, or pictures, would be unintelligible to him without a context for it: he doesn't know scriptural history. Like any sacred focus for meditation, the object is primarily an aid for gathering one's wits, not intended for discursive understanding about the object itself. Nevertheless, Hrothgar's subsequent homily on the recurrent inward feud of mankind's enemy suggests that he gets the gist at least of the ancient warfare theme inscribed on the hilt. This is the "natural knowledge" of good and evil that Paul says is available to a noble pagan in his letter to the Romans in the New Testament.

1700–84 Hrothgar's advice may be divided into three sections: (1) the exemplum of Heremod, (2) a generalized exposition of the dangers to which the "fortunate man" is exposed, (3) Hrothgar's personal experience. Each section concludes with direct address to Beowulf. (The line division is 1700–24a, 1724b–68, 1769–84.)

1702 Hrothgar as *ethelweard* "guardian of the native land" is a guardian in the ritual sense quite as much as in the sense of war lord. He is the gold giver (and thereby the binder of the community), the keeper of customs, the judge, and here the priest. The same epithet is applied to Beowulf at line 2209.

1705–07 These are expanded lines, containing more than four beats in the Old English; such lines are often reserved for formal statements of great significance, as here. Hrothgar's advice concerns how that dangerous commodity, "fame," must be mediated through wisdom, since Beowulf is to become "an abiding comfort" to his people. Hrothgar's friendship (1707) is expressed with the gift of regal advice as well as treasure.

1719 An essential manifestation of Heremod's evil character was that he "gave no rings" to the Danes. Hence he did not fulfill the function of the king as a focuser of human worth, binding the community in a radiating net of aspiration and achievement. His slaughter of comrades at the banquet table is almost a corollary of his ruggardness about rings: he does not value his men.

1831 "The author is inconsistent in representing Hygelac here as still young (see 1968), whereas several years before he had given his daughter in marriage to Eofor (2997–98)—Klaeber.

1931–62 This sudden introduction of a character from right outside the story has evoked a great deal of critical discussion but, as Irving remarks repeatedly in his *A Reading of Beowulf*, the poet has a habit of describing persons in terms of what they are not: Hygd is not like Thryth. He also takes great pleasure in high contrast, like juxtaposing noble Sigemund and ignoble Heremod. It seems to me that there is a strong parallel between the "evil shadow" figures Heremod and Thryth: both were miserly and both slaughtered their friends. Hygd, like Wealtheow, is the epitome of a peace-weaver, known for her generosity and for "loving her people" (1982). The significance of the story of Thryth (as of Heremod) would seem to be that as you cease to honor your people with rings, you may turn to slaying them. Thryth has fallen into this neurotic position, and it is only her marriage with the hero Offa that saves her.

Offa, who is referred to in sources other than *Beowulf*, is thought to have lived in the second half of the fourth century, and is known primarily for a heroic fight mentioned in *Widsith* (35–44). Klaeber, after a long exposition of sources and stories concerning both the fourth century Offa of continental Anglia and his descendant Offa II of Mercia in England (roughly contemporary with the composition of *Beowulf*), concludes only that "the poet was interested in the old Anglian traditions . . . that are concerned with persons belonging to English (i.e., pre-English) stock."

1936–38 The manner in which Thryth's victims are slain, first having a rope twisted around their necks to strangle them, then being pierced by a blade to finish them off, corresponds exactly to the description of ritual slaughter by the Arab Ibn Fadlan in his *risala*, when he

observed such rituals among the Scandinavian Rus in the mid-tenth century. A similar ritual slaughter is depicted upon the Franks Casket as I interpret it (see my article concerning the right side of the casket in *Neophilologus Mitteilungen*, 73 (1972), 30–34, where further references may be found).

1969 The text describes Hygelac as "Ongentheow's slayer," but only by proxy did he kill the Swedish king; later (2484–90) it is made clearer that Hygelac wreaked vengeance upon his brother's slayer through the hand of Eofor. I have taken the liberty, here as elsewhere, of spelling things out, paraphrasing "Ongentheow's slayer" as "Hygelac . . . who had ordered the slaying of Ongentheow."

2000–2162 Beowulf's report to his king about the events in Denmark not only sums up what happened there but shifts the focus: the monsters become more folkloristic and the political situation becomes more real. Details are added, like the name of the slain Geat Hondshio and the "glove" carried by Grendel, which makes him more troll-like than ever; and one sees Beowulf's political acuity as he sets Freawaru's graciousness against the feuds surrounding her marriage to Ingeld the Heathobard, and offers no optimism about how the tense situation will be resolved.

2024–69 The story of Ingeld's revenge for the slaying of his father Froda is told by Saxo Grammaticus with slight changes: Klaeber gives a full summary of Saxo's account.

2039–2143 This long section comprises both fits 29 and 30. I have titled the whole "The Fated Hail" as it contains, first, Beowulf's anticipation of the way the Danish-Heathobard feud will break out again, a feud that will lead to a battle in Heorot (See *Widsith*, 45–49), and presumably to the burning of the hall alluded to in *Beowulf* 82–85; and, second, his abbreviated account of the two monster fights (2069–2143). I have divided the feuds part of the section from the monster part with a picture in the text.

2152 Editors vary on interpreting the Old English compound as "boar head-sign" or "boar-head sign," the latter denoting a banner with the figure of a boar's head on it. Since elsewhere in the poem the images of boars are associated with helmets, I have chosen the first interpretation; it corresponds to the ritual helmets crested with boars in the Swedish helmet plates from Torslunda (see the illustration in fit 19) and an actual such boar crest found at Bentley Grange in England.

2195 A hide of land has been described as the amount of land required to maintain one free household, or the amount that may be plowed by an ox in a year. The actual acreage varies greatly according to place and period. In his *History* (III, 24), Bede mentions that the size of North Mercia is seven thousand hides, the same land measure that the poet gives us for Beowulf's estate.

2200 It is here that Klaeber breaks the poem, marking this as the beginning of Part II and noting that what follows is "much broken up by digressions." As I have put the digressions in italics, the last third of the poem may be read either as a relatively fast narrative about the dragon and the death of Beowulf, or more slowly and with fuller significance as an interweaving of human strife having discernible historical causes and nonhuman disaster which strikes when all seems peaceful and men least expect it.

2211–31 Much of the text here is illegible in the manuscript, and has been reconstructed by the editors.

2223 Old English *þeow* "servant" is a reconstruction based upon all that remains visible of this word, only the first letter, thorn (th). Other possible reconstructions are *þeof* "thief" and *þegn* "thane."

2228–31 The text is still very uncertain here, but what seems indisputable, especially when supported by later passages, is that a cup was stolen from the dragon's hoard, and this theft was taken by the dragon as an overt action demanding vengeance.

231–81 The history of the hoard in these lines is dominated by the "Lay of the Last Survivor" (lines 2233–70), a passage which, like the description of Grendelsmere and the later "Father's Lament," has occasionally been abstracted from its context to stand alone as evocative poetry. Though it may be thus abstracted, its link with the rest of the poem is seen by Bonjour to go beyond the setting of mood and the establishing of the history of the hoard: "The story of the destruction of a people and the lament of the wretched man who survived the catastrophe

foreshadow the very situation in store for the Geats after Beowulf's death" (*Digressions*, p. 69). What follows the lament, the information about the nature of dragons, is found also in *Cotton Maxims II* (see the note to line 887): it is the nature of a dragon to seek out buried gold and to guard it. The juxtaposition of these two passages, about the burial of the gold and the dragon, has led some to suggest, most recently G. V. Smithers and Jorge Luis Borges, that, like Fafrir of the Sigurd story, the last survivor himself turned into the dragon to guard the gold. This is not what the poem says.

2287 Klaeber says, "Probably not 'strife was renewed,' but (lit.) 'strife arose which previously did not exist.'" In context of the Great Feud, established for us the audience and related to scriptural history in the first part of the poem, the dragon is not simply a creature coming out from the existential darkness to strike at the fellowship of men, but an envoy of evil. In this sense, recurrent strife against mankind is indeed "renewed."

2329-31 Some recent commentators would capitalize Ancient Law and Beowulf's fleeting perception here may well be related to his natural knowledge of good and evil. But these verses need not be understood in terms of such a Christian perspective from Beowulf's point of view; he is king, the guardian of the gift throne that has been burnt, and it is a perfectly natural mythic response to feel that the disaster may have been directed against him personally, and to cast around for what he has done to deserve it "as was not his custom." Margaret Goldsmith assumes that if Beowulf felt such pangs, then he was indeed guilty of some spiritual crime (which she identifies as avarice).

2333-36 Miss Goldsmith doubts the virtue of Beowulf's motives, but here the poet makes those motives entirely clear: the dragon burnt down the Weathermark hall, destroying the gift-throne and the security of the Geats, and "for that" the king planned to seek revenge. It was his duty as *ethelweard* "protector of the native land." The gaining of the dragon's gold, a secondary motive of the fight, could be interpreted as seeking a compensation for the destruction of the kingdom's treasure. Just as it honors a slain kinsman to obtain *werigild* "man gold" for him, so it both will retrieve the honor and strengthen the kingdom of the Geats to obtain "ethelgild" (my word) for the gift-throne, the heart of the kingdom, that has been destroyed.

2361 Klaeber's note suggests that Beowulf is carrying "thirty sets of armor" with him while swimming. This is hard to imagine; even if he has the strength of thirty men in his arm, the awkward picture presented by this interpretation is grotesque. Hence I have translated *hilegetra* "war-equipments" as "trophies," with the implication that he has taken a helmet here and a sword there, but not the complete gear of all thirty of the enemies he has slain. Even so it is hard to conceive, and Fred C. Robinson offers an ingenious alternative solution, that the poet does not specify quantity, and that the number thirty found at the text in this place, in Roman numerals, is possibly the displaced missing fit number XXX (see the note on lines 2039-2143 above).

2428-29 It was one method of securing peace between tribes or households to place a child in the care of others for his education. Bede was placed in a monastery at the age of seven (*History*, V, 24). In Germanic societies a noble man was often responsible for the training of his "sister's son," and bore a special relationship to him, as Sigemund did to Fitela (see 875-889). This explains why it was so particularly distressing to Hildeburh to see her son and her brother dead as enemies on the battlefield, and she lays them together on the funeral pyre in the relationship that they should have borne in life. It was an essential function of the peace-weaving practice whereby a king would give his daughter in marriage to the son of a foreign household (as Hrothgar planned to give Freawaru to Ingeld of the Heathobards) that the child of that union would then return to the mother's native home, where her brother would assume a sort of "godfather" role for him, thus intensifying the kinship bond between tribes. Beowulf is "sister's son" to Hygelac, and gives that relationship all the respect demanded of him by his culture.

2434-43 When a Germanic warrior was murdered, it was important both to his spirit in the afterlife and to the peace of mind of his kinsfolk that honor should be done him by offering *werigild* (man gold), just as it is important in a Christian society that the dead should receive proper formal blessing. Because Herebald's death is an accident, no redress, either in punishment of the slayer or in *werigild*, can be taken; the death is literally "unaccountable." His inability to resolve his dear son's death causes Hrethel to fall ill (an illness to which today we

might give a psychological name); with this grief upon him, he dies (lines 2462-71).

2444-62 This passage, called "The Father's Lament," is the only extended simile (or comparison) in the poem of the kind familiar in Homeric epic and used by Milton. It is offered by Beowulf as an analogy to the helplessness felt by Hrethel when his son dies in circumstances unsuitable for vengeance. The prominence given to *wyrd* in that accidental slaying and "the poignant atmosphere of grief and sadness" in "The Father's Lament" together "prepare the central theme and dominant mood of the end of the poem" (Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 34).

2456-57 The manuscript text of 2456 and my interpretation of the words *rote* "round-harp" and *ridend* "rhythms" in 2457 differ from Klaeber's interpretation, "the wind-swept resting place deprived of joy" where "riders sleep." The chief improvement in my reading is grammatical concord between noun and verb in 2457b, and a clarification of its relationship to 2458a. (Though I use the word "round-harp" in my translation, I have argued in my article on these lines that the poet is actually using a technical term for an instrument more like a harp-zither, a *rotta*; as this word is like the name of a later English instrument which is quite different, I have suppressed it in favor of the more usual harp instrument.)

2501 By slaying Dayraven, Beowulf avenged Hygelac's death in battle on the ill-advised Frisian expedition. Such vengeance was the duty of a loyal follower, and to be expected, but Beowulf's description suggests the novelty of taking vengeance bare-handed. Klaeber notes that Dayraven (*Daeghreft*) is a Frankish, non-Anglo-Saxon name.

Sources outside *Beowulf* help to clarify the tangle of tribes and names attached to this expedition, which seems to have actually taken place early in the fifth century. Hygelac sailed through Frisian waters to land and ravage on Hetware shores, but then made the mistake of letting the main part of his fleet sail for home with the booty. With his remaining small force he was overtaken by Theodebert, the son of the Frankish king Theoderic (the Merovingian of line 2921), who defeated him with a much larger force, and in that defeat he was slain. Hygelac's enemies in that final battle appear to be Frisians, Hetwares, and Franks, united in a single force under the Merovingian ruler.

2538-2711 Klaeber notes three distinct phases in the dragon fight, just as there were three phases in the fight with Grendel's mother. In the first phase (2538-91) Beowulf fights alone and damages his sword; in the second (2592-2687) Wiglaf intervenes; and in the third (2688-2711) the two kinsmen succeed in slaying the dragon.

2600-01 Such truisms as this offer us an insight into the preoccupations of Germanic society. Here it is offered as a contrast to the attitude of the battle shirkers as they flee, and at the same time as a keynote for what will follow, summarizing the motivation of Wiglaf, who stands for the highest ideal of the thane in his tribal society.

2611-25 The digression on the sword which Wiglaf brandishes so bravely in his lord's defense suggests a future scene in the land of the Geats rather like the Heathobard invasion of Heorot. With the defender of the kingdom dead, the Swedish king will not long stand for the ignominy of a slain kinsman's weapon being borne by a Geatish son of the slayer.

It has been suggested that Weohstan, Wiglaf's father, is the Wehha of the East Anglian genealogies, and that Wiglaf himself may have taken what remained of the Geats to England after the loss of their greatest warriors, their king, and their treasure, in order to try to preserve their clan as a separate entity unendangered by Swedish invasion. Such a speculation does suggest a solution to the problem of how the armor of a Swedish warrior happened to be among the equipment buried in the East Anglian cenotaph at Sutton Hoo in England.

2697-99 As Klaeber notes, this passage may be interpreted in either of two ways. Does "he did not heed the dragon's head" mean that he paid no attention to the flames the beast was spewing and plunged his sword hand in anyway, or that he did not aim for the head but had the good sense to strike lower?

Margaret Goldsmith's comments on "heeding the head" are of interest. She quotes Gregory and Augustine on Genesis 3:15 *obscurabit caput*, which both writers take "as an injunction to be vigilant against the Devil's suggestion" (p. 233). In any case, "right thinking" is stressed throughout the fight (see the note below). It is up to the reader whether this is to be interpreted as the common sense needed to fight dragons or as moral vigilance.

2703 *geuold his gewitte*, which I have translated "came to his senses," marks a sub-theme of the dragon fight. As Irving says, in this part of the poem Wiglaf stands out against those whose

"refusal to act has meant the obliteration of their heroic identity" (p. 169). Yet not only is the need to act stressed, and in particular the need to act as sibb-athelings (lines 2600–01 state this theme), but also the need to act wittingly, in contrast to performing mere intoxicated valor. 2705 Dragons are vulnerable only in their stomachs, just as trolls can only be destroyed by cutting off their heads. When Beowulf comes to his senses and ceases flailing about with his useless sword, he goes to work like a butcher, "writing off" the worm with a single clean knife-thrust into what he well knows to be the dragon's vital spot.

2715–19 Compare *The Wanderer*, lines 88–89:

Who then thinks wisely about this wall-place
and deeply ponders this dark life . . .

Likewise in *The Ruin* ancient walls bring reflections about life and death. As Beowulf looks at the securely built barrow (described in terms which are touched with allegory), he meditates upon the passing of his days and speaks of kinship and the deeds he has done in the world. This sequence of object regarded, meditation, and formal speech seems to be an Anglo-Saxon poetic convention particularly in connection with ancient walls.

2717 Klaeber quotes a passage from Saxo Grammaticus in which that historian wonders whether giants could be responsible for the megalithic tombs of his country; here as elsewhere "giants" are understood to be members of a race inhabiting the land in the past (the Romans in England are sometimes referred to as "giants" in connection with their ruins). No one who has been in the presence of a megalithic monument will find the idea of giants wholly absurd.

2741–42 As mentioned above (note to 913–915), much of the characterization of Beowulf is in terms of what he is not. Here a theme built up throughout the poem (with some suspense, in Hrothgar's cautionary sermon) is resolved: In his treatment of his kinsmen, Beowulf is utterly unlike Cain, Unferth, Heremod, Hnaef, Thryth, Hathcyn, and, in a sense, Onla.

2756 The dragon's cave is described in terms which simultaneously suggest a hall with benches along the wall and a large stone grave covered with a mound, typical of northern Europe.

2766 Both *oferhigian*, which I translate "overpower," and *hygd*, which I translate "heed," have been variously interpreted. *Oferhigian* has been compared with modern dialect *over-hye*, "to over-reach, overtake," and with *ofer-hyd*, *oferhydig* "proud," *Hyde*, according to some, means *hide*, "heed," according to others means "hide." Both *hydan* and *hædan* have been used before in the poem in connection with heads (446 and 2697), and here the two senses of these verbs seem to be blended, to suggest (partly through the association of the two alliterating syllables, *hig* and *hyd*, with *hygd*, *gehygd* "thought") that whoever may hide the gold, it will overpower the mind of every man, no matter who attempts to beware of that event. G. V. Smithers suggests that this is an example of the poet's distrust of gold, but the distrust is entirely consistent with the view expressed later (3069–75 and 3167–68) about gold in the ground. It is hoarded gold, gold that is no longer serving the social function of binding men together through its use as a token of worth, that isolates men, giving them wolfish thoughts and making them dragonish. Much of the poet's preoccupation throughout this section of the poem seems to be a concern about self-seeking individualism as opposed to a commitment to the group.

2769 The banner glows like Grendel's eyes and (possibly) the bloodied sword in Grendelsmere. A standard, perhaps for a banner, was found in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, and one is mentioned in Shield's ship-burial, where it is carefully placed at that warrior's head. That in the Sutton Hoo cenotaph was placed, in relation to the armor and weapons, above where the head would have been had a body been there.

2799 Manuscript *minne* was first emended by Ettmüller to *mine* "my," to make it agree with *feorhlige* "life," and this has been accepted by editors since. But in view of Beowulf's lament that he has no *yrfeueard* (2731) (which Klaeber glosses "heir" but which means "guardian of *yrfe*"), and if *yrfe* is to be taken as cognate with Old Norse *erfi* "grave-ale," perhaps there is meant to be suggested in manuscript *minne* something like Old Norse *minni* "drink in loving memory," and this emendation is ill-advised. Perhaps the unemended text of this line should be translated, "I have sold *minni* for a hoard of treasure" in comparison with *Christ and Satan* 577: "He sold the Son of God for a treasure of silver." If the line means something like this,

then the act represents an extraordinary sacrifice on Beowulf's part, since he would believe that *minni* "loving remembrance," like *lof* "esteem, glory," assures the recipient of a kind of pagan immortality. Another possibility is that *minne* is the masculine accusative pronoun meaning "what is mine," that is, his life. In either case he is giving up what is most important to him in exchange for the gold that he thinks will aid his people. This reading is in direct contradiction to Margaret Goldsmith's. She claims that lines 2749–2800 "emphasize the poverty of Beowulf's barter, his life the price of a mouldering hoard which brings no good to anyone in the story. This is the very antithesis of the Christian exchange of worldly wealth for everlasting life" (*The Made and Meaning of Beowulf*, p. 239). What she overlooks is the fact that the principle she cites is individual and spiritual, whereas Beowulf's function in the poem is almost wholly social and secular.

2800 This is usually interpreted as a direct command to Wiglaf: "Watch over my people." But it seems to me likely that Beowulf is saying that the treasures will take care of the needs of his people, now that he may not remain among them, and that the verb is in the present third person plural with future meaning.

2802 Editors recognize a Homeric parallel in Beowulf's description of the barrow he wants his people to build for him. Wrenn quotes the *Odyssey* (24): "Then around them [the bones of Achilles] did we, the holy host of Argive warriors, pile a great and glorious tomb, on a jutting headland above the broad Hellespont; that it might be seen afar from off the sea by men, both by those who now are, and by those who shall be hereafter." Klaeber cites other parallels in classical literature, but none are so close in manner of expression. The rites of Odin in the *Ynglinga Saga* are similar.

2814 Klaeber emends manuscript *forspeof* to *forsweop* "swept off" on the basis of line 477; Wrenn, however, argues convincingly for a more conservative reading *forspeon*, which he translates "lured away." One is tempted to think of the classical concept of the Fates spinning out the lives of the warriors to their "measured end" and of the women who weave war-luck in *Njál's Saga* (see the note to line 697). The reading *forspeon* ("spun out completely"?) could bear such a construction.

2819–20 This passage marks a real point of suspense in the poem in the context of the Father/fire alternatives for life after death given in lines 185–188. "The judgment of the just" is ambiguous, and can refer either to the judgment accorded to righteous pagans (the secular glory that will live after them) or to the judgment given by the Righteous, in a Christian sense. (It is in this sense, of course, that Margaret Goldsmith takes it, pp. 178–179, in her argument that Beowulf is condemned.)

2891 Tacitus (*Germania*, 6) says that among the Germanic tribes suicide was the last refuge from disgrace (much as falling on one's sword was the Roman response to a humiliating defeat).

2911–12 and following. The prediction of trouble at the death of a powerful king is a standard feature both of epic poetry and of tribal encomium. In this case the poet has built up the atmosphere of feuds surrounding the Geats so forcefully that it seems probable that the prediction is no mere rhetorical gesture, but will come true. Some Swedish historians like to think that the fall of the kingdom to the Swedes after Beowulf's death was a historical event marking the foundation of the Swedish kingdom as a political entity, and establishing that kingdom as the oldest continuous political state in Europe.

2922–98 Klaeber points out that this battle in Ravenswood is the only detailed account of a real battle in *Beowulf*. He calls attention to Saxo's account of the slaying of Athilus (Eadgils) and its similar details.

3014 Here it is said that the dragon's treasures must be burnt on the pyre, but later (3163–68) the poet tells us that they were buried in the new mound.

3026–27 The wolf and birds of prey as "beasts of battle" are a standard motif of heroic poetry, but in *Beowulf* the poet has withheld use of the combination until this point, when it is presented most evocatively, and not heroically at all, as the climax of a prophecy of doom. (For the general tone of lines 3018–27 compare the lament of the last survivor, 2262–66.)

3049 Klaeber suggests that the treasure has lain buried in the place chosen by the last survivor for three hundred years (2278), but that it was possibly buried elsewhere before that.

An alternative explanation of this discrepancy could be that the treasure was buried a thousand years ago, but the dragon has only been guarding it for the last three hundred. I suspect, however, that in relating mythical events of prehistory, the poet used both three hundred years and a thousand to represent "a long time," without the intention of being specific.

3051-57 and 3069-75 The curse laid by "those long-ago princes" upon the "heathen treasure" (2216) has evoked much comment. But surely the poet's own comment that God would allow the appropriate man to open that hoard, and Beowulf's avowed purpose in obtaining it for his people (2794-2800), not to feed his own greed, suggests that, although he met his death in the dragon fight, the part of the curse that mentions idol-worship was not applicable to him. Believing that the poet at all times regards Beowulf as a noble pagan, doing the best he can within his limited sphere of spiritual understanding, I have translated the great crux of lines 3074-75 accordingly. These two lines and 2819-20 give us our only clues concerning the state of Beowulf's soul at death, and the poet has made it clear at the beginning of his poem that this is a crucial matter (183-188). My solution leaves unsolved only the problem of the concord of *goldwaete* (which I translate "greedy for gold"). Klaeber emends the text and translates, "unless God's grace had before more readily favored those eager for gold," which I do not find a happy solution. Nor do I believe with Margaret Goldsmith that these two lines tell us that Beowulf was damned.

3077-78 Most have taken Wiglaf's remark about "the will of one man" as critical of Beowulf's heroic stance and a reflection of the poet's view. Garmonsway has suggested that it represents Wiglaf's failure to perceive the transcendent standard of conduct by which Beowulf acted, yet Wiglaf recognizes Beowulf as a hero of high destiny only a few lines on (3084). To me the speech seems to carry the ambivalence expressed by the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, "It was joyful to me, yet hateful also."

3137-82 We have three accounts of funeral obsequies in *Beowulf*, at the beginning, middle, and end of the poem. Shield's funeral contained no burning, only a ship sent out to sea; Hnaef's contained the pyre but no further ceremony; and Beowulf's, grander than either of the others, has both, first the pyre and then the burial, in this case on a mound overlooking the sea rather than a sea-burial, with a goodly display of treasure at each stage. The discovery of the treasure-burial at Sutton Hoo in 1939 aroused particular excitement among *Beowulf* scholars, not only because objects found there were so similar in detail to some of those described in the poem, but also because this "richest of treasures found on English soil" offered an archaeological parallel to the lavishness of Beowulf's burial, which had before been thought merely an indication of the poet's fanciful imagination.

3145 Howell D. Chickering, Jr., on the basis of a reasonable emendation by Sophus Bugge, personifies the flame as a dancer in his translation. In his Commentary he remarks on how fire has been personified earlier in the poem, and he says, "Here it is 'awakened' and then takes its proper place in the ritual as a roaring warrior doing a funeral dance" (p. 377).

3150-55 The text greatly obliterated here, has given rise to much discussion including one full book on these lines alone.

Wrenn believes that the "woman with her hair bound up" must have been Beowulf's widow, but this goes against the feeling of the poem that he is a warrior-king unencumbered with such personal relationships. The figure of such a woman appears in silver and pewter, on tapestries, and specifically in the funeral context on the Götland picture stones contemporary with the poem. In the *risala* of Ibn Fadlan an old woman called the "Angel of Death" presides over the funeral ceremonies of a chieftain who dies while the Arab traveler is sojourning among the Rus. In *Thorfinn's Saga* there is an illuminating parallel to the practice of singing associated with prophecy (though not in the funeral context). A spæwife is preparing for her trance, and says that she needs a woman who can sing the song called *Varhlöktur*; a girl is found who knows the song and is persuaded to sing it, though reluctantly because she is "a Christian woman." She sings it well, however, and the priestess thanks her, adding that many spirits have come among them "which before were separate from us and would grant us no obedience, and now many things are evident to me of which I was previously unaware."

But the briefly reported lament in *Beowulf* may not be true prophecy at all; in a heroic society it is often customary to foretell disaster at the death of a great king, both as an expression of his value to his people and of fear about what they may really feel to be the case, now that they are without his protection. Professor Tauno Mustanoja relates the lament to other modern and fictional examples of ritual lamentation in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 68 (1967), 1-27, and concludes, "It was simply a woman's ritual song of lament, and as such it was an essential traditional feature in the funeral ceremony and had to be included in the description" (p. 27).

3166-68 As gold was the life-blood of ancient Scandinavian society, and its chief worth was to give men honor, it loses all vitality and value when buried; Klaeber quotes *Greifissaga*, 18: "All treasure which is hidden in the earth or buried in a howe is in a wrong place." The loss of the gold so sacrificially won is the final ironic futility of the poem, but at the same time the treasure also is a great gift of love and honor in the face of fate, first from Beowulf to his people; then from the people to their dead king. This double evaluation of the loss of the gold, holding two conflicting elements in balance, is an example of a practice raised to an art by this poet. 3182 The last word in the poem is *lofgæornost*, which I translate "most longing for esteem." In terms of the heroic ethic, when his men apply this word to Beowulf it is with unqualified praise, echoed by the later runic inscription on the Iva stone that I have chosen to illustrate these lines. Other commentators, however, of such eminence as Professors Tolkien and Robinson, have found the phrase, which may also be translated "eager for glory," ambiguous at best in the context of the Christian perspective of the poem.

The student who wishes to go further into matters of criticism and scholarship not mentioned in these notes may wish to consult Beowulf: a Guide to Study, a manual prepared for this translation. It may be ordered directly from

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