

Beowulf and the Beowulf MS
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ENGL 4301
Studies in Selected Authors: Tolkien

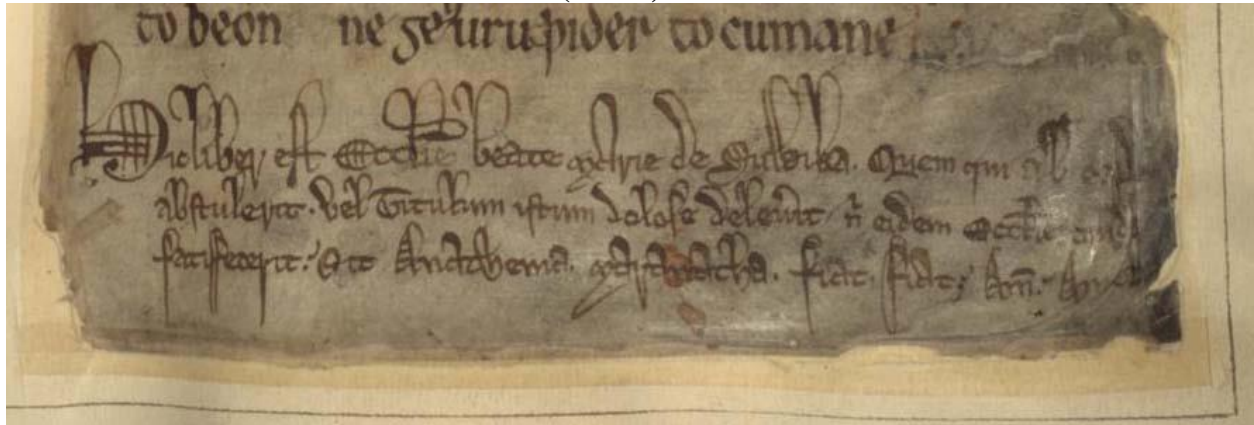
The Beowulf MS

- London, BL, Cotton Vitellius A.xv
- A composite manuscript - one volume bound in 17c from a tenth- and a twelfth-century manuscript
- Ended up in collection of Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631), whose family donated it to the British Museum (BL is now a separate unit)

The Southwick Codex

- Twelfth-century MS from a monastery at Southwick
- Philosophical and religious texts
 - Soliloquies of St. Augustine - an internal dialogue on the nature of the soul
 - fragmentary Gospel of Nicodemus - apocryphal gospel most famous for the tradition of the Harrowing of Hell
 - Debate of Solomon and Saturn - a dialogue between two figures representing Christianity and paganism in the form of a riddle game
 - fragmentary Life of St. Quintin - Roman martyr tortured and killed for preaching in Gaul

Titulum / Anathema - Southwick Codex (fol. 2r)



Hic liber est Ecclesie beate Marie de Suwika. Quem qui ab eadem abstulerit. Vel Titulum istum dolose deleuerit nisi eidem Ecclesie condigne satisfecerit. Sit Anathema. Maranatha. Fiat. Fiat. Amen. Amen.

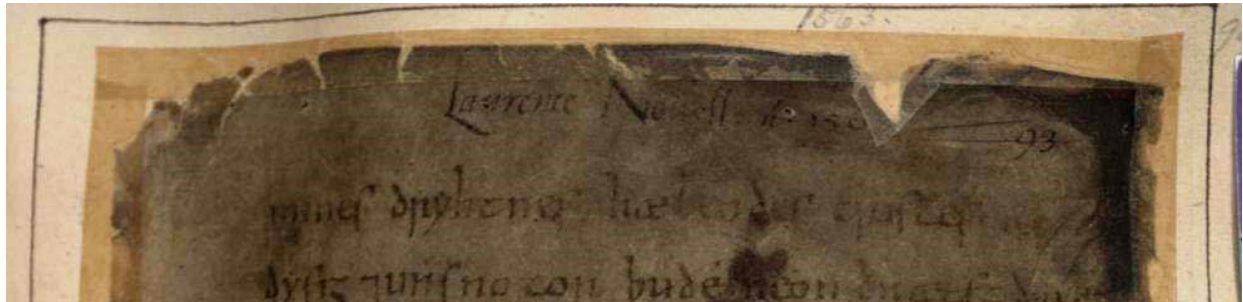
This book is of the Church of St. Mary in Southwick. Whoever removes it from there or fraudulently erases this legal notice, unless he suitably does penance / makes satisfaction to the church, let him be anathema from the Lord. Let it be so, let it be so. Amen, amen.

The Nowell Codex

- Probably first decade of eleventh century (David Dumville), though possibly as late as 1016 or so (Kevin Kiernan)

- Two scribes - handwriting changes at l. 1939, f. 172v
- Five texts that deal with monsters or humans acting monstrously
 - Fragmentary passio of St. Christopher - the torture and death scene, not his acts
 - Wonders of the East - marvels supposedly found in India - illustrated
 - two gatherings had been transposed in binding and not fixed until 19th century
 - The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle - purports to be a letter that Alexander the Great sent home describing his battles with monsters and the marvels he sees in India
 - Beowulf - one leaf had fallen out in copying and wasn't properly placed until 19th century
 - fragmentary Judith - deuterocanonical text about a Jewish woman who helps her town of Bethulia withstand the Assyrians by tricking and beheading Holofernes
- Judith in same writing as second scribe of Beowulf, added later

The Nowell Codex



- “Laurence Nowell, 1563” - date of ownership on 93v?
- Dates: 1515-1571
- Secretary to Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth I, MP for Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, and Lord High Treasurer
 - First cousin was also named “Lawrence” - dean of Lichfield
- Author of Vocabularium Saxonicum, the first A-S dictionary
- Cartographer - pocket map of England, survey of Irish east coast
 - Started an atlas of England, but never completed it
- Friend of William Lambarde, first editor of A-S law codes (Archaionomia)

How we know about the poem

- George Hickes, 1703-05, wrote an Anglo-Saxon grammar and dictionary; consulted the MS
- Humphrey Wanley catalogued the BL texts and described contents of poem in 1705; he noted Beowulf as poem about a Dane, not a Geat
- 1787 - Grimur Thorkelin, a Danish scholar, saw Wanley's description and, being interested in Danish history, had a scribe copy it (A); later came over to England and transcribed the poem himself (B)
 - Many of the lost letters from the edges we know only from the transcripts
 - One leaf fell out and was misplaced - causes some confusion in numbering
- Thorkelin published the first edition of Beowulf in 1815

Difficulties with Beowulf - what we don't know

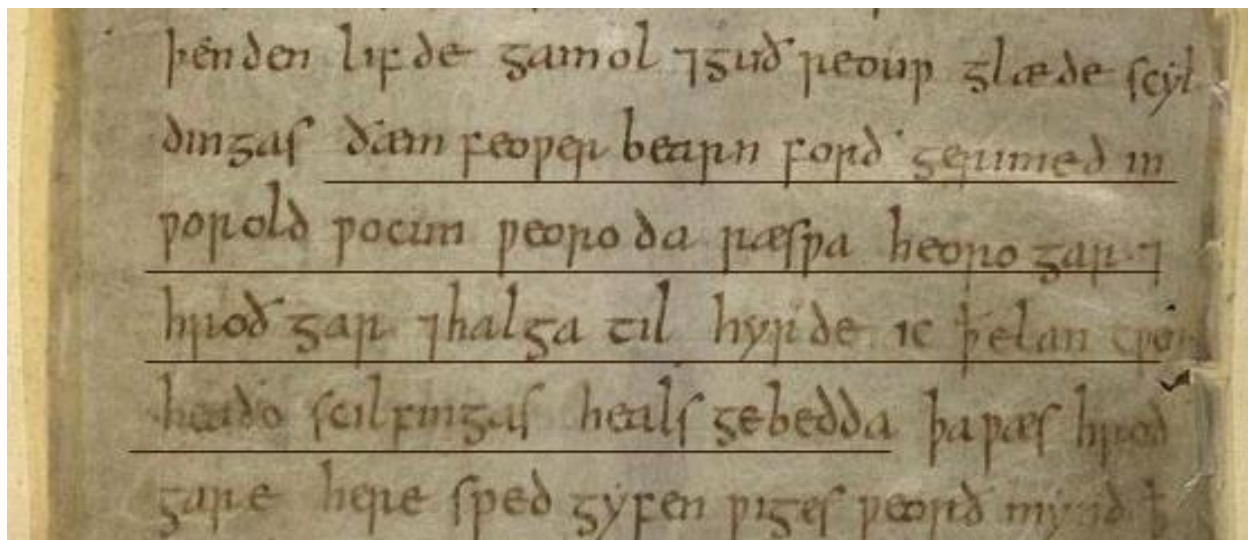
- Date - 8th to 11th centuries have been proposed
 - Michael Lapidge, “The Archetype of Beowulf” in ASE 29

- Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia*
- Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf* (Oxford UP, 2007)
- Language - West Saxon, Mercian, Northumbrian, Anglian forms, both early and late - date and place obscured
- Provenance - a variety of owners - if we don't know who had it or where it was, how do we know anything about the author, the audience, etc?
- Author - Lay? clerical? one? two? oral traditional? composite poem?
 - Kevin Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*
- Audience - lay? clerical? literate? oral?

The Problem with Editions and Translations

- Medieval scribes made mistakes and intentional changes
 - What's on the page may not be author's intent - print bias
 - O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song* - key text in this regard
- Editors make changes too - big debates on when to emend the text and when to go with the MS
 - all reasons for emendation have underlying assumptions that may or may not be true
- Translators rarely work from the MS - depend on editions
 - Editors' work dictates what the translator does
 - 200 years of scholarship on the poem affects translators
- Is there really such a thing as "the" text of Beowulf?
- Are we really reading a medieval text or are we reading a modern text that reflects centuries of change?

The Children of Healfdene



- f. 130r - ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worlde wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda
- ... to whom four children [came] forth in order, woke in the world, leader of the host, Heorogar and Hrothgar and the good Halga; I have heard that [?was ?to ?On] elan queen of the Battle-Scylfings, a dear bed companion.

The Children of Healfdene - Thorpe

MS: ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda

1) Ðæm feower bearn
forð-gerimed
in world wocon,
weoroda ræswan,
Heorogar ond Hroþgar
ond Halga til

To him [Healfdene] four children
brought forth in order
awoke in the world,
leaders to the people,
Heorogar ond Hrothgar
and Halga the good

hyrde ic þæt Elan cwen
Heaðo-Scylfinges healsgebodda.

I heard that Elan the queen [was]
the dear bed-companion of the Battle-Swede.

(*The Anglo-Saxon Poems Beowulf, The Scop or Gleeman's Song, and The Fight at Finnesburg*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, 1875)

The Children of Healfdene - Dobbie

MS: ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda

Ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed
in worold wocun, weoroda ræswan,
Heorogar ond Hroðgar ond Halga til;
hyrde ic þæt *** wæs Onelan cwen,
Heaðoscilfingas healsgebodda.

To him four children brought forth in order
woke in the world, leaders to the people,
Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the good;
I have heard that *** was queen to Onela,
the dear bed-companion of the Battle-Swede.

(*Beowulf and Judith*, ed. E.V.K. Dobbie, ASPR 4, 1953)

The Children of Healfdene - Klaeber

MS: ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda

Ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed
in worold wocun, weoroda ræswa[n],
Heorogar ond Hroðgar ond Halga til,
hyrde ic þæt [..... wæs On]elan cwen,
Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebodda.

To him four children brought forth in order
awoke in the world, leaders of the people,
Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the good;
I heard that was the queen of Onela,
the dear bed-companion of the Battle-Swede.

(*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 1950)

The Children of Healfdene - Sedgefield

MS: ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda

Ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun, weoroda ræswa, Heorogar ond Hroðgar ond Halga til; hyrde ic þæt (Sigeneow wæs Sæwe)lan cwen, Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebodda.	To him, the leader to the people , four children brought forth in order woke in the world, Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the good; I have heard that Signy was the queen of Sævila, the dear bed-companion of the Battle-Swede.
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(*Beowulf*, ed. W.J. Sedgefield, 1913)

Source: *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* - Haldan (Beowulf's Healfdene) has a daughter named Signy who was married to Sævil - noted by Friedrich Kluge and followed by Sedgefield

The Children of Healfdene - Magoun

MS: ðæm feower bearn forð gerimed in worold wocun weoroda ræswa heoro gar 7 hroð gar 7 halga til hyrde ic þæt elan cwen heaðo scilfingas heals gebedda

Ðæm feower bearn forþ-gerimed in worold wocon: weoroda ræswan, Heoru-gar ond Hroþ-gar and Halga til; hierde ic þæt [Yrse wæs An]elan cwen, Heaðu-Scielfingas heals-gebodda.	To him four children brought forth in order were born in the world: leaders of the people, Heorugar and Hrothgar and Halga the good; I heard that Yrse was the queen of Anela, the dear bed-companion of the Battle-Swede.
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(*Beowulf and Judith*, ed. F.P. Magoun, rev. Jess Bessinger, 1966)

Source: Ursa / Yrse / Ursula is the mother of Hrolf (Beowulf's Hrothulf) in *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*.

Summary - History, MS, and Text

- Whenever *Beowulf* was written - 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th century - it was copied into this MS in the early eleventh
- Why would people commit time, effort, resources to copy these poems in this MS at this time?
- These texts all deal with the Other (monsters, invaders), which reflects the anxiety that the English felt over foreign-inspired reforms, foreign invaders, and succession issues
- As members of a print culture, we have certain expectations of texts; in medieval studies, we have to be aware of a work's context in its manuscript