The dates which have been suggested and accepted by reputable scholars for the composition of Beowulf vary from the seventh century\(^1\) – an old idea and now largely discounted – right up to the early eleventh: that is, composition by the scribes who wrote the poem into the extant manuscript, the Nowell Codex, as late as the reign of Cnut\(^2\) – a new idea and very controversial. One of the latest publications on the topic is Rowland L. Collins’ discussion of the ‘long-recognized relationship’ between the description of Grendel’s mere and the version of St Paul’s vision of hell found at the end of the sixteenth Blickling Homily.\(^3\) Collins demonstrated the similarity of their language (the particular vernacular words) and argued that the two passages must have been directly connected. However, the ‘descriptive elements of Blickling XVI are much closer to one of the redactions of the Visio Pauli . . . than they are to Beowulf’: they share ‘the dark water, the deep pit, the trees . . . on a precipice from which unrepentant sinners are hanging; . . . indeed the only striking divergence between Blickling XVI and the Visio is the temperature of the sinners; in the Visio they burn, while presumably they freeze in . . . Blickling XVI.’ Moreover, the homilist cites only St Paul as his source; and whereas in the homily the description is compacted into

\(^*\) The T. Northcote Toller Memorial Lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Monday, 14 March 1988. In preparing this paper for publication, I gratefully acknowledge the help of Donald Scragg.


‘three lines of vivid prose’ (without any sign of poetic rhythm) from which borrowing would have been easy, in *Beowulf* ‘phrases and images’ are scattered over more than sixty verse lines. Clearly, therefore, the influence is towards *Beowulf*, not away from it.

Ker dated the manuscripts of the Blickling Homilies and of *Beowulf* both to around 1000; but Collins accepted the date of the Blickling Codex as 971 (which is given in the text of Homily XI), so that in his view it would have been chronologically possible for this memorable passage in Homily XVI to have influenced the extant version of *Beowulf*.

However, the influence need not have been so late. Blickling XVI could have had an earlier independent existence. Moreover, the *Visio* passage itself could have had a former independent existence; Collins described it as ‘seemingly tacked-on’ to the homily – ‘just when the homilist seems to be ending, there is a distinct diversion.’ Some of the vocabulary in the *Visio* passage, in particular two terms which Collins picked out as being more securely part of the text of Homily XVI than of *Beowulf*, is crucial here. The phrase *hrimige bearwas* is varied by *hrimige wuda* elsewhere in the homily; it corresponds in *Beowulf* to *hrinde bearwas*, found only in line 1363. Both adjectives are rare, but *hrinde* is the rarer; therefore (according to the normal rules of textual criticism), it is the more likely to be original. Secondly, there is the compound *pystrogenipu*, ‘dark mists’ which appears twice in Homily XVI, but only there. The corresponding phrase in *Beowulf* is *neessa genipu*, ‘the mists of the cliffs’. Could the compound have been the homilist’s own coinage? At the least, it would have been in his mind because of its use earlier in the homily, and therefore both *hrimige* and *pystrogenipu* could have been his own

---


5 On the grounds that some configurations ‘of hair and flesh sides in the gatherings . . . in the Blickling codex . . . seem to be related to . . . an older insular pattern’; Rowland L. Collins, *Blickling XVI*, *Medieval Studies*, ed. Bald and Weinstock, 67–8. If Kiernan’s date for the Nowell Codex (see n. 2) is correct, the Blickling manuscript could be as much as forty years the elder.

6 However, Collins conceded (ibid., 68 n. 4) that the *Visio* passage could have influenced *Beowulf* ‘through some now unknown source . . . Discovery of such a document could always challenge the chronology and influence suggested.’


10 Line 1360; at line 2808 *Beowulf* has *flodagenipu*. The most frequently cited edition is that by F. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (3rd ed., Boston, 1941).
replacements for other terms (such as \textit{Beowulf's hrinde} and \textit{næssa genipu}) in an earlier version of the \textit{Visio} passage. The influence of the \textit{Visio Pauli} on \textit{Beowulf} could therefore have antedated its incorporation into the homily, or the homily's incorporation into the Blickling Homiliary; the date 971 as a \textit{terminus post quern} is not firm.

Another passage of \textit{Beowulf} which has importance in any attempt to date the poem by means of the sources used is its so-called Prologue, concerned with the pedigree of the Danish kings. For convenience of reference, I quote here lines 4–19, 26–63; and (to anticipate the following argument) have placed letters against the lines indicating which sources (or natural extensions of those sources) I think may have been used: \textit{A} = the pre-\textit{æ} \textit{Chronicle}; \textit{B} = knowledge of ship-burial ritual; \textit{C} = Christian comments by poet; \textit{D} = Danish traditions; \textit{G} = \textit{Vita Gildae}. A combination of letters means any or all of the suggested sources may have been used; a slash between letters indicates different sources for the two half-lines.

\begin{quote}
oft scyld sceafing sceapena þrætum, monegum mæþum meodosetla ofteah, egods eorlas, syðan ærest weard feasseaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad, weox under wolcnum, weordymundum þah, of þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra ofer hronrade hyran scolde, gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning! ðæm eafra wæs æfter cenned geong in geardum, þone God sende folce to frofre; fyrenðearfe ongeat, þe hie ær drugen aldonale lange hwile; him þæs Lifreira, wulders Wealdend woroldare forgeaf. Beowulf wæs breme – blæd wide sprang – Scyldes eafra Scedelandum in. . . . Him ða Scyld gewat to gescæphwile felahror feran on Frean ware; hi hine þa æþæron to brimes farode, swæse gesipas, swa he selfa bæd, þenden wordum weold wine Scyldinga – leof landfruma lange ahte. Þær æt hyðe stod hringedstefna isig ond utus, æþelinges fær; aledon þa leofne þeoden beaga breyttan on bearm scipes, mærne be mæste. Þær wæs madma fela of feorrowegum frætwægelæd; ne hyrde ic cymlicor ceol gegeyrwan hildewæpnum ond headwædum, billum and byrnum; him on bearme læg madma mænigo. þa him mid scoldon on flodes æht feor gewitan. Nalæs hi hine læssan lacum teodan, þeodgestreonum, þon þa dydon,
\end{quote}
In this passage, then, the genealogy runs, in descending order, Scyld Scefing – Beowulf – Healfdene – Heorogar/Hrothgar/Halga; and the term ‘Scyldingas’ is used either for the Danes in general (‘he ruled the gracious Scyldings’) or for their kings, the descendants of Scyld (Beowulf Scyldinga). Presumably it originally meant ‘shield-men’, referring to the Danes’ character as defenders of their homeland. Scyld is an eponym, a personification regarded as an ultimate ancestor, and
is to be equated with Scyldus/Skjoldr in the Scandinavian sources.  

Sven Aggesen, writing in the mid-1180s, makes Skjold’s character very clear:


For Saxo Grammaticus (a younger contemporary) Scyldus was preceded by another eponym, Dan, and his sons Humblus and Lotherus, though he gave his name to the dynasty. Saxo was probably conflating two traditions. His Scyldus is a hero-king, defeating a huge bear without weapons as a youth, growing to fine manhood by the age of fifteen and fighting boldly even before he had his full strength. He won back the realm lost by his predecessor, and gave pensions and a share of booty to his warriors. He was a great law-giver, caring for the sick and needy, and reforming the debauched.

However, in his Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta – probably based here on the lost Skjoldunga Saga of about 1200 – Arngrir Jonsson rejects Saxo’s account, and claims Scyldus – from whom the Danes in olden days were called ‘Skiioldunga’ – as the ultimate ancestor. The compiler of the Skjoldunga Saga appears to have strung together Icelandic oral traditions about the ancient history of Denmark on to a

---


14 ‘Skjold is said to have been the first to have ruled the Danes. And as we alluded to his name, the reason that he was known by such a name was because he admirably guarded all boundaries of the kingdom by the protection which his defence afforded. From whom kings were first named “Skioldunger” in the Icelandic fashion. He left heirs after him to the kingdom, namely Frothi and Haldan.’

15 Saxo Grammaticus, The History of the Danes, ii.25. Skjold also appears in the Danish King Lists, which are dependent on Saxo. All are edited in Gertz, Scriptores, 149–51, 161, 167, 175.

16 Arngrir Jonae Opera Latine Conscripta, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (vols.i (text) and iv (introduction and notes), Bibliotheca Arnamagnaeana. 9 and 12, Copenhagen, 1950–57), i. 148–9, 333–4; iv. 89, 107–17, 227. The relevant passage is translated in Garmonsway and Simpson, Beowulf, 120. Snorri Sturluson also briefly mentions Skjold – from whom came the family of the Skjoldungar – as son of Othin. In the Prologue to Snorri’s Edda, Othin gave Skjold Denmark to govern, and his son was Friðleif (ed. Anthony Faulkes, Oxford, 1982), 5–6; and in the Ynglinga Saga, ch. 5 Skjold was husband of the goddess Gefjon, who created the island of Sjælland, on which they dwelt at Lejre (Hemskringla, ed. Bjarni Asalbjarnarson (3 vols., Islensk Forritn. 26–8, Reykjavik, 1941–51), i, 14–15).
genealogy of the Scyldings, who were claimed as the ancestors of a prominent Icelandic family, the Oddaverjar. It appears to have been antiquarian speculation or fabrication, however, which made Sciol-
dus a son of Othin, who assigned Denmark to him and Sweden to his other son Ingo, from whom the Swedes were called Inglings. After Skiol-
dus had subdued Jutland, the first of his conquests, he estab-
lished himself at Hledra in Sjælland.

For Sven Aggesen, Sciol-
dus’s son Frotho was quickly succeeded by (that is, eliminated by) his ‘brother’ Halfdan. Saxo has two generations (Gram and Hadingus) between Sciol-
dus and Frotho, but it may well be that he inserted them into the genealogy himself, and that in one of his sources Frotho was also Sciol-
dus’ son. Saxo has much to say about Frotho as a martial king (but none looks like genuine tradition), and calls Halfdan his son. In the Skjoldunga Saga, Sciol-
dus’ son is Leif (called Fridleif from his good peace) and his grandson Frotho, who was succeeded by several other kings, including a Dan and three more Frothos, the last of whom had Halfdan as his son.

The various Scandinavian versions of the Danish royal genealogy more or less concur, therefore, in the three generations Skjold – Frotho – Halfdan, equivalent to Scyld – Beowulf – Healfdene in Beowulf. Skjold and Scyld Scieving are alike in being eponyms who established (or re-established) the Danish kingdom by successful warfare against their neighbours, restoring the fortunes of the kingdom after an inglorious period.

Sven Aggesen and the Skjoldunga Saga agree that Skjold was the first to rule Denmark, but though in Beowulf Scyld was the first of his line, a certain Heremod must have ruled sometime before him. For Saxo and his successors Skjold is the son of Lother, whom Chambers equates with Beowulf’s Heremod. Though some of the characteristics common to Skjold and Scyld Scieving may be commonplace, Beowulf’s

17 Whether by the compiler or an earlier writer; see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Sagnaritun Oddaverjar (Islenzk Fraeði, i, Reykjavik, 1937), 15, 39–42 (English summary, 47–51), and Jakob Benediktsson, ‘Icelandic Traditions of the Scyldings’, Saga-Book of the Viking Society, 15 (1957–61), 48–66. I am grateful to Margaret Clunies-Ross of Sydney University for these references. Benediktsson questions whether Jonsson could have derived the description of Skjold as Othin’s son from the Codex Wormianus manuscript of Snorri’s Edda, but considers it more likely that Snorri got it from the Skjoldunga Saga; see Benediktsson, Arngrimi Jonae Opera, iv. 227.

18 Chambers, Beowulf, 92 n.1.

19 Saxo Grammaticus, The History, i. 37–8, 40–50.

20 The versions of the Danish pedigree discussed above give no sign of influence from the English sources, whereas those which include Scialdun er vêr kollum Skjold as ancestor of Othin are clearly dependent on the West Saxon Genealogy in its later manifestations; see Snorri, Edda, ed. Faulkes, 4–5; R.C. Boer, ‘Studien über die Snorra Edda’, Acta Philologica Scandinavica, 1 (1926–27), 54–150, at 141–5.


22 Chambers, Beowulf, 89–91. In the OE Chronicle’s genealogy s.a. 855 Sceldwea’s father is Heremod. See also David Williams, Cain and Beowulf: A Study in Secular Allegory (Toronto, 1982), 75.
Prologue may therefore reflect some genuine Scandinavian traditions about him.

However, none of these northern sources indicates that Skjold came over the sea as a child, nor that he had a splendid ship-funeral. The first of these elements is found in the genealogy s.a. 855 of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in a Latin translation claimed as his own work by Æthelweard, ealdorman of the south-western provinces at the end of the tenth century.\(^{23}\) I have argued in detail elsewhere that the version of the *Chronicle* translated by Æthelweard occupied a position midway between the earliest version evidenced – that used by the St Neots compiler – and the common archetype (æ) of all the extant *Chronicles* in Old English, since on the one hand it has the chronologica\(\text{l}\) dislocation St Neots lacks, but on the other various features which appear more original than the Old English versions.\(^{24}\) One of these early features is, indeed, that Æthelweard’s genealogy s.a. 855 is shorter than that in the Old English *Chronicles*. As a rule, shorter genealogies are earlier than longer ones: once a prestigiously long set of ancestors has been claimed, none of them is likely to be discarded deliberately – only by accidental omission.

The most remote names in Æthelweard’s version run (Geat) – Tetuua – Beo – Scyld – Scef, and he then adds:

\[\text{Ipse Scef cum uno dromone aduectus est in insula oceani que dicitur Scani, armis circundatis, eratque ualde recens puer, et ab incolis illius terrae ignotus. Attamen ab eis suscipitur, et ut familiariter diligenti animo eum custodierunt, et post in regem eligunt; de cuius prosapia ordinem trahit Athulf rex.}\]\(^{25}\)

No other early source has the two names Scyld and Scef together in the same forms, as Æthelweard and *Beowulf* have;\(^{26}\) but this may be due only to the coincidence that their manuscripts were both written about AD 1000 or a little later.\(^{27}\) Scef is a typically late West Saxon form;\(^{28}\)


\(^{25}\) This Scef, surrounded by arms, came in a ship to an island of the ocean which is called Scani; and he was a very young boy and unknown to the inhabitants of that land. However, he was accepted by them, and they looked after him with solicitous affection as one of their own. and afterwards elected him as king. From his line King Æthelwulf took his descent’. Campbell, *Æthelweard*, 33.

\(^{26}\) Though Æthelweard does not use the patronymic form Seafing.


Scyld is the most frequent form for the word 'shield' in any kind of Old English, but in the OE Chronicle s.a. 855 the name reads Sceldwea. 29

Æthelweard's Scef and Beowulf's Scyld Scefing both came (alone) over the sea, when very young, to Skåne, 30 and became king. However, whereas Æthelweard explicitly stated that the people of the land adopted the child as one of their own though he was unknown to them, this is only implicit in the poetically allusive Beowulf. Yet there is only one possibility of disagreement between them: in Æthelweard the child was surrounded by weapons, but while the poet says that the Danes at his funeral gave him gifts as good as those who first sent him forth, and the objects named are all arms or armour, earlier Scyld had been described as possessing little when he was found. There is no necessary contradiction in describing a young child surrounded by weapons as destitute, however.

I believe Æthelweard took the genealogy from his source Chronicle, 31 but my case depends on arguments concerning the stages by which the West Saxon genealogy acquired names above Woden, who was regarded as the ultimate ancestor in the earliest versions of nearly all Anglo-Saxon genealogies. 32 The first extension backwards was probably to Geat, 33 echoes of whose character as a pagan god or a semi-divine hero seem to have still been heard in ninth-century Britain. 34 Already in Æthelweard's version of the West Saxon pedigree, however, 35 Geat had acquired the four ancestors Tetuua – Beo – Scyld – Scef. As with the group of names from Woden to Geat, some of those added appear to have come from traditions belonging to the Germanic peoples, either to their Heroic Age, or to their semi-
mythical, semi-legendary origins. Sisam remarked on the simple meanings of the names Sceaf, Scyld and Beo – ‘which has suggested a mythological interpretation’. Moreover, Widsith (line 32) mentions a Sceafa as ruling the Lombards, and this indicates that he might have been celebrated in heroic poetry, now lost.

### CONCORDANCE OF GENEALOGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronicle A</th>
<th>Æthelweard</th>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th>Sven</th>
<th>Saxo</th>
<th>Skjoldunga Saga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noe</td>
<td>Sceaf(ing)</td>
<td>Scef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sceaf(ing)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedwig</td>
<td>Sceaf</td>
<td>Scef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hwala</td>
<td>Scyld</td>
<td>Scyld</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hraþpra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itermon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heremod</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sceldwea</td>
<td>Scyld</td>
<td>Scyld</td>
<td>Skjold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaw</td>
<td>Beo</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Frotho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tætwa</td>
<td>Tetuua</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geat</td>
<td>Geat</td>
<td>Goduulf</td>
<td>Hroþgar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godwulf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freþuwulf</td>
<td>Freþuulf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frealaf</td>
<td>Frealaf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freþuwald</td>
<td>Frithouuald</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woden</td>
<td>Vuothend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[a\] Names taken from the B manuscript because of an accidental omission in A.
\[b\] Names taken from the B manuscript because of an accidental omission in A.
\[c\] Below Woden the names read Baldaeg, Brond, Fripogar, Freawine, Wig, Giwis, Esla, Elesa, Cerdic, Cynric, Ceawlin, Cuþwine, Cuþa, Ceolwald, Cenred, Ingild, Eoppa, Eafa, Ealhmund, Ecgbryht, Æpelwulf.

### Notes

36 Sisam, ‘Genealogies’, 318; see also 307-14.
The Lombards had a tradition that they originated in Scandi­navia, but their legendary history starts with their departure thence. None of their historians mentions any king or duke with a name resembling Sceaf; however, Paul the Deacon relates a founding story about Lamissio, their second king. He was one of septuplet boys born to a prostitute and cast into a pond to drown. The first king, Agelmund, passing by, stirred the boys with his spear, whereupon Lamissio clutched it. The king had him rescued and carefully nurtured, and he became a great warrior. When on an expedition the king was barred from crossing a river by ‘Amazons’, Lamissio killed the strongest of them in a duel in the river and so won passage. In the lands on the other side the Lombards grew careless and the ‘Vulgares’ surprised them, killing Agelmund and carrying off his daughter, and Lamissio was made king. He exhorted the Lombards to vengeance, winning a great victory and much booty. When he died he was succeeded by Lethu (whose paternity is not stated).

Ludwig Schmidt believed this story to be a ‘fabulous expansion of the original myth of Skeaf’. This may be going too far, but we can agree that ‘the germ of the myth is that a hero of unknown origin came from the water to the help of the land in time of need’. Moses is perhaps the best-known of this type of folklore hero. The fact that Æthelweard described Sceaf as surrounded by weapons - which Olrik takes to reflect the concept that the hero finds his life’s work in the cradle – appears to put him into this category. However, to judge from his name, ‘Sheaf’, he may instead (or also?) have been a culture hero, a corn-spirit or an agricultural deity who came over the water to help his future people with a new crop.

n.24) that Scef is best seen as ‘English’ no matter where he is located, since ‘the Lombards themselves knew of no Scef so far as we know’. What is important here, however, is that there is nothing outside this genealogy to connect him with the Danes.


Conjectured by Ludwig Schmidt, Zur Geschichte der Langobarden (Leipzig, 1885), 17 n.1 to be some kind of Germanic water-spirits.


Foulke, Paul, 28 n.1, reporting Schmidt, Langobarden, 50.

See A. Aarne, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, rev. Stith Thompson (6 vols, Copenhagen and Bloomingtom, Ind., 1955), i.119 (A513.2); v.9 (L111.2.1); Olrik, Legends, 392-3. However, Olrik rejects the ‘usual motif of the foundling’ in considering ‘traces of the Scyld motif outside the Scandinavian-English myths about him’, though he includes discussion of Ing (ibid., 413-21).

Chambers, Beowulf, 81–6.
Another ultimate ancestor who may have come from overseas and departed again—though neither a voyage in youth nor a ship-burial is specified for him—is the Ing who has a verse devoted to him in the Old English Rune Poem:

Ing wæs ærest mid Eastdenum
gesewen secgum öf he siðdan est [?eft or east?]
ofer wæg gewat, wæn æfter ran;
ðus heardingas ðone hæle nemdun

(lines 67–70)\(^{46}\)

Ing is presumably the Swedish and Danish eponym (of the Inglingar and the Ingwine), described in the Skjoldunga Saga as brother of Skjold and son of Othin. Hilda Davidson equates the Heardingas with ‘the Hasdingi, the royal dynasty of the Vandals, [who] may have worshipped Ing while they were in South Sweden, and carried his cult to Denmark and further east when they migrated from Scandinavia’.\(^{47}\) Perhaps there was a general folklore tradition among the south Scandinavian tribes of a saviour from overseas, with variant versions attached to various names.

Since Beo’s son is called Tetuua by Æthelweard (Tætwa in the Old English Chronicles) — a name unknown among the Danes or anywhere else in Heroic Age history or literature — and Frotho’s son is called Halfdan in the Scandinavian sources, it may have been the name Scyld alone which was borrowed from the Danish line into the West Saxon. By 858 — the earliest date at which the annal containing the genealogy could have been written into the archetypal Chronicle\(^{48}\) — or soon after, the Anglo-Saxons may well have learnt some Danish traditions, including that of their eponym Skjold (whose name would surely have been easily recognizable to them as equivalent to the OE scyld ‘shield’).

The earliest text in which the Danes are called Scyldings — in the form Scaldingi, which appears to reflect ninth- or tenth-century Norse speech\(^{49}\) — is the anonymous Historia de Sancto Cuthberto (chs.11,
12),\textsuperscript{50} first compiled in Chester-le-Street about 945,\textsuperscript{51} and referring to the attacks on Northumbria in the late 860s by the brothers Ivar and Halfdan. According to legend they were sons of Ragnar Lothbrok, and, while not belonging to the Scylding line, were evidently considered true Danish kings even by their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{52} However, the climate in Wessex may well have been unfavourable to the idea that its kings shared an ancestor with the marauding Danes until after Alfred had begun to convert them (Guthrum in 878, Hæsten's sons by 894 according to the \textit{Chronicle}). Moreover, the \textit{Chronicle} is unlikely to have reached its final pre-æ form (that translated by Æthelweard) before Alfred's reign.\textsuperscript{53}

Whoever was responsible for the 'Æthelweardian' extension to the West Saxon genealogy therefore picked up names somewhat indiscriminately – from the Danes and perhaps also from the Lombards – in order to glorify his kings; and this pedigree-maker was presumably the chronicler who composed the annal \textit{s.a.} 855 in Æthelwold's pre-æ \textit{Chronicle}. For Æthelweard carefully numbers Æthelwulf's ancestors – Scef being the nineteenth – and he would surely not have rejected the chance of connecting himself (through Æthelwulf) with Adam if he had been shown the way,\textsuperscript{54} since he alone prefaces his version of the \textit{Chronicle} with an account of the Six Ages of the World, from Adam onwards.\textsuperscript{55} So it is a reasonably safe assumption that in Æthelweard's pre-æ text of the \textit{Chronicle} the West Saxon
pedigree ended Geat Tætw(a\textsuperscript{56})ing, Tætwa Beowing, Beo Scylding, Scyld Scefing – the final name, as in all other genealogies in Old English, being expressed only as a patronymic.

Sisam supposed that Æthelweard took what he said about Scef from family tradition,\textsuperscript{57} but again it can be argued that it was in his exemplar-Chronicle. Here the revisions which were made to æ (the common ancestor of the extant Chronicles in Old English), as compared to the earlier version of the genealogy which Æthelweard transcribed, must be discussed briefly. Scyld’s name appears in the weak form Sceldeæ;\textsuperscript{58} and just as some of the Danish sources made Skjold a son of Lother, so the Æ Chronicle made Sceldeæ a son of Heremod, separating him and Sceaf. Therefore, some further Danish influence may have been involved.

Three other names (Itermon, Haþra and Hwala)\textsuperscript{59} were added above Heremod, and then came Bedwig\textsuperscript{60} son of Sceaf, who is surely Beo/Beaw son of Scyld with a little misreading, and with a duplication common in genealogies. Sceaf himself stands effectively where he did in Æthelweard’s copy of the Chronicle at the head of the genealogy, but with his provenance strangely changed: Bedwig Sceofing, id est filius Noe, se was geboren in pære earce Noes\textsuperscript{61} – a statement which surely proves that the motif of the hero coming over the sea as a child must have belonged to Sceaf, or what would have been the point of his transmogrification? Nor do I think the statement at all ambiguous; clearly the clause refers to Sceaf, not to Bedwig.

Finally, though it is not immediately obvious from his Latin, Æthelweard’s remarks about Scef’s journey echo quite closely the wording of the brief Chronicle accounts of the coming of the first English invaders.\textsuperscript{62} Therefore the sentences which Æthelweard was

\textsuperscript{56} Forms preserving the weak -a ending in the patronymic are usually held to be the result of creating an Old English genealogy from a Latin list lacking patronymics. However, since the late ninth-century A Chronicle omits the a, whereas the late tenth- and eleventh-century BCD Chronicles usually preserve it, the variation may be due only to date.

\textsuperscript{57} Sisam, ‘Genealogies’, 317; Murray, \textit{Dating}, ed. Chase, 107. Yet this ‘family tradition’ can have gone back only to an artificial creation in the time of Æthelwulf or Alfred.

\textsuperscript{58} This may not be of any great significance in itself: Geat and Sceaf are also found with weak endings, and this may be due to their being first current as patronymics, so that their terminations would not be obvious. However, the addition of weak endings may at times have been deliberate, in order to make common nouns look like proper nouns.

\textsuperscript{59} These names are discussed by J.M. Kemble, \textit{Über die Stammtafel der Westsachsen} (Munich, 1836), 13–14; by Sisam, ‘Genealogies’, 315–6; and in the Appendix to my forthcoming edition of the West Saxon Regnal List and Genealogy.

\textsuperscript{60} In BC; in A all unbiblical names after Hraþpaing are omitted; however, Asser (who used a version of the Chronicle close to A) also has Huala and Beduuig; therefore BC’s form must have stood in æ, and D’s Beowung Beowi must be erroneous; see Asser, \textit{Alfred}, ed. Stevenson (1904), 3; Sisam, ‘Genealogies’, 315 n.1.

\textsuperscript{61} ‘Bedwig son of Sceaf, that is the son of Noah, who was born in Noah’s Ark’.

\textsuperscript{62} Compare, for example, the beginning of Æthelweard’s annal 494: . . . Cerdic et Cuirc filius suus cum quinque carnis aductis Britanniam in portum qui Cerdoce oran nuncupatur; Campbell, Æthelweard, 11. Conversely, an attempt to render Æthelweard’s Latin concerning Sceaf back into
rendering had most probably been composed for the early *Chronicle*, pointing up Sceaf's aptness as the ultimate ancestor for a royal line which had itself come over the sea.

From Halfdan/Healfdene onwards, it appears to be purely Danish traditions which *Beowulf* is following, in an earlier form than that in the extant Scandinavian sources, but nothing corresponding to the name Beo (or Beowulf as it is in the poem) is found in a comparable position in any of these sources, nor is there to be found in them any reason for calling Skjold Sceaf. Since it seems very unlikely that Scyld and Sceaf (who did not belong to the same tradition) could anywhere have been brought into contact as father and son except in an artificial genealogy such as Æthelwulf's, the obvious place for the poet to have obtained the sequence is from Æthelweard's pre-æ version of the *Chronicle*. From it he would have got a sequence ending something like *Tætwa Beowing, Beo Scylding, Scyld Sceafing se com mid ò. ò. scipe . . .;* and from Danish tradition the sequence (expressed here in English name forms) Hrothgar – Healfdene – Froda – Scyld, and the character of Scyld as a warlike restorer of his nation after previous disasters.

Now, the *Beowulf* poet frequently used the termination *-ing* meaning 'son of', and must have known that the foundling story really belonged to Sceaf. But in order to achieve the effect he wanted, he may have decided to add Sceaf's characteristics to Scyld's: to make the Scyldings' eponym come alone over the sea as a helpless boy, and with a folklore reversal of fortune become the restorer of Denmark's greatness. The cheating involved in giving Scyld attributes which really belonged to Sceaf was partly offset by calling him 'son of Sceaf'.

Old English might read something like: *Se Sceaf com mid ò. ò. scipe on garseges ealond be is genemned Scant, mid wcepnum betined, ò he wæs swipe geang umbor, 7 landleodum uncud, ac hic him onfengen swa swa hira agene 7 feddon mid wælwillendum mode, 7 swa siðdan hie hine to cyminge geccuron; þæm gæþ Æthelwulfes cyminges rihtsederencynn.*


64 Though it does not create any real difficulties in this discussion, the greatest puzzle in this reconstruction is why the Danes have the name Frotho(i) and the English Beo(w) in the same position. Was Frotho, i.e. 'the wise', a title which ousted the original name, as Chambers (*Beowulf*, 92 n.2) suggested? Or was Frotho a fertility god, as Davidson suggested (*Gods and Myths*, 103–4), whose name was replaced by something more innocuous in the Old English? Or is the Beo of the English sources a purely arbitrary addition to the genealogy? Two of the Danish king lists (see n.16) have B0gi as the name of an otherwise unknown son of Lother and father of Skjold, and this may indicate that an ancestor with a similar name to Beo belonged to some Danish tradition. See Alfred Ebenbeauer, 'Frodi und sein Friede', *Festgabe fur Otto Hofler zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Birkhan (Vienna and Stuttgart, 1976), 128–79, for a recent discussion of the Danish royal genealogies, with comprehensive references to earlier scholarship.

65 Hector M. Chadwick (*The Origin of the English Nation* (1st ed., Cambridge, 1907), 276) supposed that Sceving was to be taken as 'child of the sheaf' or 'sheaf-child'. However, Sisam ('Genealogies', 318–20) argued convincingly that William of Malmesbury's account of Sceaf coming with a sheaf of corn at his head was William's adaptation of Æthelweard, and not due to popular tradition. Therefore Chadwick's explanation of Sceving is untenable.
and by ignoring the fact that a foundling story can only be told of the first of his line.\textsuperscript{66}

If this reconstruction is correct, Scyld Scefing and his arrival from overseas cannot have become part of the prologue of \textit{Beowulf} before 858, and almost certainly not before Alfred’s reign. But it could have been any time after that, for though \textsuperscript{Æ}Ethelwulf’s genealogy reached unprecedented and unsurpassable lengths in the \textit{æ Chronicle} and all its descendants (being taken back to Adam), two versions of the pre-\textit{æ Chronicle} survived at least to the late tenth century to be used in Latin chronicles.\textsuperscript{67} Scyld Scefing’s childhood voyage (like the details of the description of Grendel’s mere from the \textit{Visio Pauli}) could even have been added to the poem at the last possible moment, by the scribe who wrote the first part of the poem into the Nowell Codex.

However, the name of Scyld’s son, which is Beo in \textsuperscript{Æ}Ethelweard, Beaw in \textsuperscript{Æ}Ethelwulf’s genealogy in the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, poses a problem. Beo has been taken to mean ‘barley’;\textsuperscript{68} otherwise, it could simply mean ‘bee’, a creature of great importance to the Anglo-Saxons\textsuperscript{69} and to other early Germanic peoples, who may not always have recognized its femininity.\textsuperscript{70} In either case, whether his name is to be interpreted as ‘bee’ or ‘barley’, Beo could (as could Sceaf) have been a culture-hero. In \textit{Beowulf} Scyld’s son has the same name as that of the Geatish hero of the poem, but scholars have queried that such a rare name should be borne by two unrelated heroes in the same poem without comment.\textsuperscript{71} A more telling point is that the half-line \textit{Beowulf}
Scyldinga (53b) is suspect metrically;\(^{72}\) whereas Beo(w) Scyldinga would be quite acceptable. Therefore, the name Beowulf for the Dane may be simply a scribal error.

I have referred to the poet’s giving Scyld an origin really belonging to Scef as cheating; but (confusing as it has been for modern scholars) the gain to the poet was immeasurable: for all kinds of resonances are set up in the Prologue, all kinds of themes suggested which are developed, mostly in the person of the hero Beowulf himself, in the course of the poem. For Beowulf too came over the sea to rescue the Danes in time of trouble; Beowulf too was a king who reigned long and successfully after difficulties in his youth. However, in one respect Beowulf did not parallel Scyld, who had a son, eagerly awaited, since the Danes (the poet tells us) had suffered a long time of distress when without a lord, and (it is implied) a good king is twice as good if he has heirs. Beowulf did not.\(^{73}\)

One other element is woven into the Prologue to the poem: Scyld’s splendid and unusual ship-funeral, which not only balances his own mysterious arrival as a child, but also Beowulf’s own funeral at the end of the poem. It is one of the poem’s most brilliant strokes.\(^{74}\) Therefore, the search for parallels to it has been intense, especially since for the migration and early medieval periods more than four hundred ships or boats have been identified as playing a part in the burial ritual (predominantly of aristocratic males) on nearly three hundred sites in northern Europe.\(^{75}\)

Some archaeologists consider these vessels as no more than ‘part of the equipment of the dead in the same sense as his horses, clothing [and] weapons’.\(^{76}\) When the boat was placed (sometimes inverted) over a burial-chamber, or was burnt among other grave-goods (as were slightly more than half the buried boats), it may indeed have been provided primarily as grave furniture, with perhaps the idea that it would be of use to the spirit in the next world. Knut Stjerna summarized the alternative view: that the ship was primarily for transportation to the land of the dead, which was believed to be some physical distance from the land of the living, and so, to a seafaring

\(^{72}\) It is a type D with a tertiary stress, only found elsewhere in the first half-line and with double alliteration; see Alan J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1958), 57-8, para.64. If Beowulf (the Dane) were emended to Beo, 18a (the only other half-line in which the name occurs) would then become Beo wæs breme – the most basic kind of A verse.

\(^{73}\) This is also emphasized by John C. Pope, ‘Beowulf’s Old Age’, *Philological Essays*, ed. Rosier, 55-64, at 56.

\(^{74}\) See e.g. Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf* (1941), 228; Adrien Bonjour, *Twelve Beowulf Papers, 1940-60*, with Additional Comments (Neuchâtel, 1962), 122-3.


\(^{76}\) Knud Thorvildsen, *Ladby-Skibet* (Nordiske Fortidsminder, 6, Copenhagen, 1957), 95-106 (English summary 113-14); Schönbäck, ‘Custom’, *Vendel Studies*, ed. Lamm and Nordström, 129-31 (see n.81).
people, necessitated a sea-journey. Stjerna thought that these ideas first appeared in the north in the fourth century AD; his evidence being that in some Scandinavian graves a ‘Charon’s obol’ was found ‘in the dead man’s mouth, after the Greek fashion’. More positive evidence for the idea of the journey of the dead is provided by the Gotland memorial stones depicting a ship and by the stone-settings in the shape of ships around cremation burials, which are particularly common in Denmark, for example, at Lindholm Høje.

Though an established burial custom does not necessarily reflect belief, one cannot assert that the burial-ship was never associated in the minds of the early Scandinavians with the journey to ‘the other side’. Therefore, it is legitimate to consider here ship- and boat-burials in the Scandinavian archaeological record as manifestations of at least some of the same ideas as those underlying Scyld’s literary funeral. In the following brief survey I shall disregard cremation burials, and concentrate on the more princely inhumations, which are themselves conveniently concentrated in time and place.

First, in Uppland in central Sweden, there are some cemeteries called ‘Vendel’ from the type-site, which seem to have served settlements of one household only. In them, most of the burials were cremations, but there was typically one male inhumation burial per generation, most frequently in a boat. At Valsgärde, for which the longest sequence is evidenced, the boat-burials begin in the mid-sixth century and continue (with some diminution in richness in the ninth century) into the eleventh. The goods were disposed in the boats as if for a long voyage:

In the prow the provisions [mostly joints of meat] and cooking equipment, close to midships the more personal equipment, such as gaming-board, dice and playing pieces, dishes, drinking vessels and small chests containing small tools etc. . . .

There was a distinct concentration of weapons around and above the dead man’s bed amidships . . . It is very likely that the position of the body corresponded to the space which was usually used as sleeping-quarters . . .

The stern of the burial-boat was often completely empty. Dogs on leashes were also found in the boats, either in the prow or amidships, and horses were tumbled into the sides of the burial-pit. None of the burial-boats appears to have had a mast. Those buried in the boats

---

80 Since cremation adds a further element of uncertainty in interpreting the ship-burial ritual. However, some cremation burials with ships may have been royal; for example, one was apparently among the goods burnt on the pyre beneath ‘Othin’s howe’ at Old Uppsala; H. Shetelig, ‘Ship Burials’, Saga-Book, 4 (1904–05), 326–63, at 331–2.
MAP 1: Early boat-graves

1  up to c. AD 600
2  c. AD 600–800
Ve Vendel
Va Valsgärde
SH Sutton Hoo
certainly had considerable hereditary power; nevertheless, in spite of the richness of the arms and armour, these were not royal graves: they did not contain anything which could be interpreted as regalia, or any fine gold-and-garnet cloisonné work. 81

When in 1939 the seventh-century ship-burial was excavated at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, both archaeologists and Old English scholars quickly found parallels to Beowulf. 82 In some ways the Sutton Hoo ritual was closer to Scyld’s than that of the Vendel graves, which it much resembles: there were no sacrificed animals in the ship; and it was clearly royal, and abundantly supplied with weapons, regalia and other treasures. If the ship had had a mast, it had been removed, and amidships was a plank-built burial-chamber, inside which the body (if there were one) and all the grave-goods were placed, with cooking equipment to the east, drinking and eating vessels and personal equipment including a sword and purse near but not on the body in the centre, and other weapons and regalia to the west. 83 Moreover, as Hilda Davidson pointed out, if ‘the Sutton Hoo ship was rowed along the Deben to the point where she was pulled up the hill to the grave prepared for her, then it is possible that the departure of a dead chief on his ship, rowed towards his last resting-place, was a practice witnessed up to the seventh century by the people of East Anglia’. Such a scene might well linger in folk-memory. 84

However, ship-burials are most widespread and frequent in the Viking period, particularly along the Norwegian coast, some of the most princely being around the Oslo fjord. They appear to be isolated chieftains’ burials; and Alfred Smyth has argued that the man buried at Gokstad between 870 and 890 is to be identified with a king of Vestfold, also known as Olaf the White, who became king of Dublin in 853, and who had been a close ally of Ivar (son of the legendary


82 See articles in Antiquity, 14 (1940), 6–87, especially H.M. Chadwick, ‘Who was he?’, 76–87; also S. Lindqvist, ‘Sutton Hoo and Beowulf’, Antiquity, 22 (1948), 131–40; C.L. Wrenn in his supplement to the 3rd ed. of Chambers, Beowulf, 508–23; Rupert L.S. Bruce-Mitford, ‘Sutton Hoo and the Background to the Poem’, in Girvan, Seventh Century, 85–98.


84 ‘Archaeology and Beowulf’, in Garmonsway and Simpson, Analogues, 350–60, at 358. Davidson also remarked that ‘there is a close link between objects . . . as described in Beowulf and archaeological evidence from the sixth and seventh centuries A.D.’, ibid., 359; see also Rosemary J. Cramp, ‘Beowulf and Archaeology’, Medieval Archaeology, i (1957), 57–77. However, this may be archaism, and need not preclude later composition of at least parts of the poem.
Ragnar Lothbrok) in England until 866. 85

The mounds covering the Viking ship-burials are often very large; but though their arrangement resembles that in the Vendel cemeteries, there is often the addition of a sturdy burial-chamber (sometimes built across the boat, and even resting on stone walls). In the Gokstad ship, right behind the mast, which was cut off short, was a gable-roofed burial-chamber of 'great wooden beams'. In it, a richly-clothed man about fifty years old had been laid on a bed with fine bed-clothes. Disturbed artefacts including buckles, ornaments for straps and mounts from a box, a leather purse and a board-game were found nearby. Before the mast were boats, beds and kitchen equipment; and also in the ship were a sleigh and the remains of a peacock, and just outside it the bones of horses and dogs. In undisturbed Viking ship-burials weapons were found near the body; Shetelig lists those in a mound on the island of Karmøy as two swords, two spears, a round quiver with two dozen arrows, as well as smithing tools.

Ship-burials were not usual in Denmark, though 'a very small number . . . have been found in Denmark and Schleswig, of which the most spectacular is that from Ladby.' 87 At this site were a few modest inhumations, one cremation, and a richly-furnished ship-burial of the mid-tenth century, with no signs of a burial-chamber, but in which a splendidly-clothed body had probably lain on a feather bed ‘just aft of midships’. The excavator surmised that a local chief with extensive overseas contacts had emulated a Norwegian burial. 88 Viking boat-burials are not known from England, 89 though they have been found in the western isles of Scotland and the Isle of Man, mostly dating from the later ninth or early tenth centuries. 90 While some may have been chieftains’ burials, their grave-goods cannot compare to those at Valsgärde, Sutton Hoo or Gokstad.

If we compare the funeral ritual evidenced in the Vendel and Viking ship-burials with Scyld’s, there is one specific area of simi-

---

85 Smyth, Scandinavian Kings, 101–53; for Gokstad, see 109–10. Doubts have been thrown on the possibility of identifying the Gokstad king as Olaf GeirstaSaalfr, e.g. by Torleif Sjovold, The Viking Ships (Oslo, 1954), 7, 30–1; it appears to me that this is carrying academic caution too far, though identification with Olaf the White is less certain.


87 Gerhard Bersu and David M. Wilson, Three Viking Graves in the Isle of Man (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, 1, London, 1966), 92.

88 Thorvildsen, Ladby-Skibet.

89 A boat found at Walthamstow was long regarded as a Viking burial, but carbon-14 dating has shown that it is sixteenth-century or later; see Valerie H. Fenwick, ‘Was there a Body beneath the Walthamstow Boat?’, International Journal of Nautical Archaeology, 7 (1978), 187–94.

MAP 2: Boat- and ship-burials from the Viking period (c. AD 800–1050)

1 cremation grave
2 inhumation grave
G Gokstad
K Karmøy
L Ladby
I Île de Groix
larity: he was also laid amidships, with precious objects, arms and armour, around him. It was probably not consonant with the poet's purpose to mention sacrificed animals, kitchen equipment or even a burial chamber; we cannot assume that he was unaware of the part they played because he does not describe them. However, the fact that Scyld's funeral ship had a mast, and, by implication, an efficient sail,\(^91\) and its attribution to a *Dane*, may indicate that the poet had a Viking burial in mind. If it had been an earlier burial (Vendel or East Anglian) which he recalled, would it not have been more appropriate for Beowulf himself? That Viking chiefs had ship-burials may well have been common gossip among the English, who would not always have distinguished between Norwegians (who did) and Danes (who did not). Indeed, Ragnar Lothbrok's 'Danish' family appears to have originated in the ship-burial area of south-east Norway.\(^92\)

All ship-burials differ from Scyld's funeral, however, in that their destination was known -- and, indeed, if comparison is made with archaeological remains, it could hardly be otherwise. For a ship of the dead which sailed out to an unknown destination across the sea we have to turn to literary sources, beginning with the Norse Sagas.\(^93\) Sigvardus Ringo (father of Ragnar Lothbrok) in the *Skjöldunga Saga*,\(^94\) and King Haki in the *Ynglinga Saga*, ch.23,\(^95\) when mortally wounded, ordered themselves to be placed on board ships which were then launched, and sailed out to sea, driven by an offshore wind. King Haki's ship was laden with weapons as well as with dead men; and Sigvardus Ringo's funeral had 'royal pomp', so that his ship was certainly also envisaged as laden with treasures.

\(^91\) The earliest Scandinavian evidence for a mast is late sixth century, on 'type B ship representations from Gotland'; however, sails get bigger and masts presumably stronger on the later picture-stones (Lindqvist, *Bildsteine*, i. 62–73, dating 108–23). Mast and sail are depicted on an early seventh-century strapend from northern France; Bruce-Mitford (ed.), *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial I*, 422, 433; D.M. Goodburn, 'Do we have Evidence of a Continuing Saxon Boat-building Tradition?', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 15 (1986), 39–47, at 45–6. However, ships found in burials do not appear to have had masts before the Viking Age, and maybe it was not until then that keels and sturdy masts became a fixed feature of warships as well as trading vessels; see Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics* (London, 1982), 95–100. The Bayeux Tapestry shows a warship lowering its mast, which (Detlev Ellmers comments, *Frühmittelalterliche Handelsfahrten in Mitteleuropa* (Offa 28, Neumünster, 1972), 128, 143) would have been far harder for a merchant ship at this period.

\(^92\) Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*, 17–21. The classic case of confusion is the report in the *Chronicle* of the first Viking raid in the south of England, with the comment 'these were the first ships of Danish men', whereas the E *Chronicle* describes them as from the Hardanger district in Norway; Earle and Plummer, *Chronicles*, i.54–5; ii.59.


Though these funeral ships had an unknown destination, they were set alight, as Scyld's was not. Whether such fiery funerals ever really took place is impossible to know; but it is much more difficult to imagine that a king's body and accompanying treasures would have been simply pushed out to sea, where they would have been in danger of returning, or of falling into the hands of strangers or even enemies, who might maltreat the one and plunder the other. Such funerals appear to belong strictly to the realm of legend; and Stjerna made comparisons with Celtic stories in which dying kings were carried away on boats attended by ladies; and, more relevantly, with the 'Lady of Shallot, in the romance of Lancelot, [who] orders her body to be laid on a ship, richly adorned, and that the ship shall be allowed to drift whither the wind carries it, without any helm.

More recently – but now nearly twenty years ago – the Celtic connections of Scyld's funeral seemed to be reinforced when Angus Cameron compared it to the death-bed instructions of St Gildas, as described in his *Vita* by a monk of Rhuys in Brittany (where the saint was claimed to have spent most of his adult life). The relevant passage runs:

Deinde discipulos protestatus est dicens: Per Christum vos filios meos moneo, ne contendatis pro corporis mei cadavere, sed mox ut spiritum exhalavero, tollite me et in navim deponentes supponite humeris meis lapidem ilium, super quam recumbere solitus eram: nemo autem ex vobis in navi mecum remaneat, sed impellentes earn in mare permittite ire, quo Deus voluerit. Providebit autem Dominus sepulturae mihi locum, ubi fuerit ei placitum . . . Et reddidit spiritum quarto kalendas Februarii senex et plenus dierum.

These directions must first be put into their hagiographic context: indeed, for a saint to be miraculously transported on an unsteered ship appears to be one of those motifs which (like St Gildas' funeral ship) tends to drift where God willeth, and come to rest wherever appropriate.

97 Stjerna, *Essays*, 104, 107
99 ‘Then he testified to his disciples, saying: I charge you through Christ, my sons, not to contend for the remains of my body; but as soon as I have given up the spirit, bear me away, lay me down in a ship, and under my shoulders place the stone on which I was wont to lie down. Let no one of you remain with me in the ship, but push the ship into the sea, and let it drift whither God willethe. The Lord will provide for me a place of burial, where it shall seem good unto Him . . . And he gave up the ghost on the 29th January, an old man and full of days,’ *Vita Gildae Auctore Monacho Ruiensi* (*Vita I,* in *Gildae De Exciduo Britanniae, Fragmenta, Liber de Paenitemita, ed.* Hugh Williams (Cymmrodorion Record Series, 3, London, 1899), 317–89; at 366–8; also Ferdinand Lot (ed.), *Mélanges d'Histoire Bretonne (VIe–XIe Siècle)* (Paris, 1907), 207–83, 431–76; at 458–9.

100 Hippolyte Delehaye (*The Legends of the Saints*, transl. Donald Attwater (London, 1962), 23) claims ‘There is no theme more hackneyed in popular hagiography than the miraculous arrival of the body of a saint in a derelict vessel; nor anything more commonplace than the miraculous stopping of a ship in order to . . . confirm a church in the lawful ownership of a
tions of a little group of Rhenish saints – Werenfrith, Maternus, Lubentius and Arnulf – most closely resemble Gildas’, in that their bodies (or relics thereof) were placed alone on a ship, so that God might manifest where they should be buried.

The motif appears in its most naturalistic form in the *Life of Werenfrith*, an Anglo-Saxon missionary in the Netherlands (a companion of Willibrord) who died in the mid-eighth century, according to his *Vita* while preaching at Westervoort. He was revealed as a saint by the fragrance of his corpse, possession of which was then disputed between the inhabitants of Westervoort and those of Elst, the centre of his mission. Certain better ones of the priests (*quidam presbyterorum meliores*) cited the story of the Ark of the Covenant which had been put on a driverless waggon to reveal God’s will. But in order to discover on which side of the Rhine the saint’s body should rest, it was first put alone on a ship, which went straight across to the other side, as if it had an angelic oarsman. There, the corpse was put on a waggon drawn by two cows unused to the yoke, who took it straight to Elst, where it was buried with honour. 101

Maternus was apparently a historical early fourth-century bishop of Cologne, about whom an ‘extravagant legend’ developed, in which he was sent to Gaul by St Peter himself. 102 According to it, Maternus died at Cologne, and people came from both Tongeren and Trier (which he had also evangelized) to claim his body. Instead of the ‘better ones of the priests’, there was one angelic counsellor, and the unmanned ship with the saint’s body moved against the current, to land at Rodenkirchen, just outside Cologne but in the territory of Trier, where it was taken for burial. 103

A Lectionary of Saints tells us that Lubentius was martyred in his parish at Kobern, but God prevented his burial there because of the great sins of the inhabitants. His corpse was placed alone on a ship, which descended the Moselle to its confluence with the Rhine, then (miracle of miracles!) went upstream to the confluence with the Lahn, and then up the Lahn to Dietkirchen, where he was honourably laid to rest. 104

Finally, there is Arnulf, 105 who was recognized as a saint only by
MAP 3: Places named in legends of post-mortem voyages of saints
miracles at his tomb. His marvellous translation is mentioned under 970 in the *Chronicle* of Mosomum (Mouzon on the Meuse), which was taken as far as the year 1033. After many vicissitudes, the saint’s relics were placed on a ship at Warcq; but while the otherwise empty vessel was tied up, waiting for Archbishop Adalbero of Rheims to decide who would go on it, an eagle flew down and seated itself on the prow, and soon divine power moved the ship against the flow of the river, to Mouzon.

It has not been possible, on the evidence that I have been able to accumulate so far, to see plainly the chronological spread of this motif from one saint to another; but the naturalism of the Werenfrith version indicates that it is the earliest extant, and perhaps even the original – once a miracle has been accepted for one saint, later writers have to outdo it with exaggerated details. The motif is therefore hagiographic rather than Celtic; given its distribution, it may well have first arisen in the area of the lower Rhine among the Anglo-Saxon missionaries, and only later have spread further afield. By what means and at what date it reached Rhuys in Brittany is probably irrecoverable, but I do not think it would have been before the ninth century at the earliest.

Gildas’ version resembles Werenfrith’s and Maternus’ in having the element of contention, but some features differentiate it from all the others. The saint, awaiting his death on the island of Houat where he is said to have lived for some years formerly as a hermit, gave instructions for his body to be placed on the ship not so that God should decide between rival claimants connected by the flow of a river-system, but so that it should sail across the open sea. His instructions were carried out, but the ship sank while monks from *Cornugallia* (probably Cornuailles in Brittany) were planning to seize it. Three months later, in answer to their prayers, the Rhuys monks found it in a creek, with the saint’s body ‘whole and unharmed, just as it was when placed in the ship by themselves’, and took it to Rhuys. The writer of the *Vita* may have been attempting to combat the claim that his body was entombed near Carnoët in Cornuailles.

Cameron picks out six points of similarity between Gildas’ and Scyld’s funerals: (1) that the form of the funeral is due to the specific instructions of the dying man; (2) that he was to be placed on a ship; (3) that he was to be given treasure (Gildas’ bedstone was all he had); (4) that the ship was to be allowed to go where God willed (compare *Beowulf’s* *in Fream wære*, line 27); (5) that no-one would know its destination; and (6) that it would have been a winter funeral. This is an impressive list, but the destination of Gildas’ ship was surely not to remain forever unknown – the revealing of God’s will is the whole

---

106 Williams, *Gildas*, 368 n.2.
point of the hagiographic motif. Moreover, *Beowulf* shares all these elements except the last (minor) one with some or other of the parallels already cited: the second and fourth with the Rhenish saints; the first and perhaps the fourth with the Lady of Shalott; and the first, second, third and fifth with Sigvardus Ringo and Haki.

In fact, it is only the presence or absence of cremation, and the change of tone consequent on the one burial being that of an ascetic hermit-saint, and the others those of powerful pagan autocrats, which cause the differences between Gildas’ and the Saga funerals. Since the Saga accounts are so much later, could they (and, indeed, the funeral journey of the Lady of Shalott) have been affected by the hagiographic motif? Or could Gildas’ death-bed instructions have been affected by Viking custom? Could the emphasis on Gildas’ bedstone, for example, have been intended to contrast with the Vikings’ feather beds?

For much of the ninth and tenth centuries, local chroniclers recorded Viking raiders who must have passed by the Rhuys peninsula. In 835 the Vikings raided the monastery on the island of Noirmoutier at the mouth of the Loire, and in 843 sixty-seven ships of men from Vestfold (the district of the Norwegian ship-burials) sacked Nantes. In 846 they overwintered at Noirmoutier, now abandoned by its monks. Ten years later, the Vikings were again outside Nantes; some went on to Brittany. They must have passed Rhuys on their way to sack the rich abbey of Redon in 868; and in 886 they again devastated Nantes. In 888 Alan the Great of Vannes organized a successful resistance, but in 911 the area to the east of Brittany was ceded to the Vikings and became Normandy. After this it is not always easy to tell if the attacks on Brittany are by new Viking raiders or by these settlers. In 912 the Vikings attacked the Loire again, and in 913 or 914 ‘Danes’ destroyed the abbey of Landévennec near Brest. In 919 all Brittany was devastated, and many of the nobility fled (either then or in 931). The monks of Rhuys took their holy relics to Berry. Brittany remained under Norman control until 937; but it was not until 939 that Duke Alan Barbatorta decisively defeated them; and after his death the Viking attacks began again. The monastery of St Gildas de Rhuys was not re-established until 1008.

Moreover, not far to the east of the Rhuys peninsula an unrecorded Viking was cremated on the Île de Groix. Scattered through a thick layer of ashes under a cliff-top mound were more than 800 clincher rivets and 200 nails from a large Viking ship – with a mast probably of non-local pine – and fragments of about twenty shield-
bosses, along with cremated bones from an adult male, from a younger person (a woman?), from dogs and 'some small birds'. Fine jewellery, 'rich cloth of gold', bronze bowls, personal effects, riding and kitchen equipment were also recognizable. In the centre was an unburnt iron cauldron surrounded by weapons and smith's tools. The excavators commented on the similarity of the burial to those in the Vestfold and Vestland districts of Norway, but Arbman conjectured that the Viking interred here was (to judge from the continental weapons and other material found) a sea-king, perhaps 'a second-generation Scandinavian who had lived more or less permanently on the island' - whose strategic position must have made it 'an excellent den for pirates'.

MAP 4: Viking raids on Brittany

The ship-cremation appears to belong somewhere in the middle of the tenth century, 111 but if there had been a Viking settlement on the island for more than a generation, it is quite possible that the monks of Rhuys could have learnt something of Viking customs from it as well as from the recorded raiders before their enforced move to Berry.

Something virtually identical to Gildas' proposed ship-funeral must have been in the poet's mind, 112 for it neatly supplies all the details in the Prologue not found in the English or Scandinavian sources; and I have demonstrated this by placing against the lines of the quotation from Beowulf (above, pages 9–10) letters indicating sources I think are being used. Without similarity of names (as with Æthelweard's story of Scef), or of diction (as with the version of the Visio Pauli), a direct connection between Beowulf and the Vita Gildæ cannot be proved, but remains very probable. Any direct influence, however, must have been towards Beowulf, not away from it, for, even if affected by Viking custom, Gildas' funeral directions constitute a version of a known hagiographical motif. In any case, influence from an allusive poem in English on a Breton saint's life in Latin is virtually unimaginable, whereas the reverse is as feasible as the influence of the Visio Pauli on Beowulf. 113

Unfortunately, scholars are divided in their opinions about the date of composition of Gildas' Vita. Ferdinand Lot believed that the Life was compiled as a whole by Vitalis, the second abbot of the revived monastery – about sixty years after the writing of the Beowulf manuscript. 114 Hugh Williams, however, argued for a date in the 880s for the account of Gildas' life and death, and considered the chapters concerning the subsequent history of the Rhuys foundation as a later

111 Viking archaeologists are not agreed on the date of the Île de Groix burial; M. Muller-Wille puts it in the second half of the tenth century (‘Das Schiffgrab von der Île de Groix (Bretagne) – Ein Exkurs zum “Bootkammergrab” von Haithabu’, Berichte über die Ausgrabungen in Haithabu, 12: Das archäologische Fundmaterial III der Ausgrabung Haithabu (Neumünster, 1978), 48–84); James Graham-Campbell in the first half (personal communication).

112 I cannot forbear to speculate that what may have called it forth was the poet's reading the last entry in the pre-æ Chronicle: the account of the three Irishmen who came in 891 to King Alfred in a boat without oars, because they wanted for the love of God to be in exile, they did not care where. This speculation is unfortunately too uncertain to provide another reason for dating the composition of the prologue after 891. Æthelweard has more detail concerning this visit, but at least one mistranslation and some obfuscation of language; therefore this note relies more on the Old English account, the essence of which must have been in the pre-æ Chronicle; Campbell, Æthelweard, 48; Earle and Plummer, Chronicles, i.82.

113 Similarly slender evidence for the influence of a Breton Saint's Life on an Anglo-Saxon text is provided by the use of the term Ormesta for Gildas' De Excidio in Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 25, ed. James E. Cross (King's College London Medieval Studies, 1, 1987), 65–6, 156 – only paralleled in the Vita of St Pol de Leon. The possibility of another link between the Vita Gildae and Beowulf is still more tenuous, yet needs to be mentioned. Gildas too was a dragon-slayer, but had a much easier time of it than Beowulf, and there appears to be nothing which forces us to connect the two. Hearing that the inhabitants of Rome were being killed by the noxious breath of a dragon which lived in a cave in a mountain, Gildas got up early, climbed with a staff in his hand to the mouth of the cave and there commanded the dragon, in the name of Christ, to die, which it did; Williams, Gildas, 344–5.

addition. Only a detailed stylistic study can resolve the matter; but for the present I accept Williams' arguments: chapters 1–31 appear to me to resemble the oldest Breton saints' lives (of the late ninth century), and are different in tone and preoccupations from the later chapters. Moreover, the circumstantial account (however fictitious) of how the Rhuys monks obtained Gildas’ remains would have had far more point if it were written before they were moved to Berry.

Though individual links between Brittany and England certainly took place earlier, it is about the time of the abandonment of Rhuys that the clearest evidence for contact begins. About 919, a ‘multitude of Bretons’ fled from the Danes to England with Mathuedoi, count of Poel, whose son Alan (later called Barbatorta), became Athelstan’s godson, and may have been brought up at his court. Refugees appear to have gone to England again about 931; and in 936 Alan returned with Athelstan’s help. Athelstan had many Breton relics, and many manuscripts written in Brittany came to England at this time. A great deal of Breton ecclesiastical influence (which begins earlier than, and is independent of, the ‘Benedictine Revival’) is found in tenth-century English texts, especially in Winchester liturgies and in charters and penitentials.

However, there were also strong links between Brittany and the monastery of St Benoit-sur-Loire at Fleury in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The monks of St Pol-de-Leon took their patron, his Vita and other manuscripts there for refuge. Gildas’ Life was extant only in a manuscript from the Fleury library, which may even have had a

---


116 Edward the Elder is said to have entered into confraternity with St Samson’s monastery at Dol (Joseph Armitage Robinson, The Times of Saint Dunstan (Oxford, 1923), 73). A letter survives from a Breton who went to England in time of peace, and obtained permission from Athelstan to remain; I am grateful to Caroline Brett for allowing me to see her paper, ‘A Breton Pilgrim in England in the Reign of King Athelstan’, before publication.

117 It seems necessary to postulate two separate refugee periods: in 919 Athelstan was not yet king; but in 931 Alan Barbatorta (who led an army in 936) would have been too old for baptism; see Dudonis Sancti Quintini De Moribus et Actis Primorum Normanniae Ducum, ch.41, ed. Jules Lair (Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 23.2, Paris, 1865), 71, 185; Merlet, Nantes, chs. xxvii, xxix, 82, 89, n.4. Some of the refugees may have been buried at St Mary’s church in Wareham; see Edmund McClure, ‘The Wareham Inscriptions’, English Historical Review, 22 (1907), 728–30.


120 Williams, Gildas, 317.
copy of the earlier *Life* for Vitalis to augment. There was further strong influence from Fleury on the English Benedictine Revival, which may have begun soon after the restoration of St Benoit by Odo of Cluny in 930, for Oda (Archbishop of Canterbury, 940-58) is said to have made his profession as a monk there, and certainly chose to send his nephew Oswald there for instruction in monastic discipline. 121

To sum up: the Prologue to *Beowulf* has one clear source which provides one clear *terminus post quem*: the genealogy of Æthalwulf from the pre-æ *Chronicle* translated by Æthelweard, which *could* not have been fabricated before 858, and probably *was* not before Alfred’s reign. The Prologue may also have been influenced by the account of Gildas’ funeral directions in his *Vita*, written by a monk of Rhuys probably around 900. 122 Knowledge of the *Vita* is most likely to have reached England sometime after about 920. Two elements in the Prologue which are less precisely datable are the legends of the Danish royal house, which may have been known in England in earlier centuries, but which certainly would have come there along with the ‘Great Army’ in the 860s or any time thereafter; and the knowledge of ship-burial ritual, which was available in East Anglia in the sixth and seventh centuries, but may have been reinforced during the Viking Age. All in all, the reign of Athelstan (924-55) appears the most probable for the composition of the Scyld Scefing Prologue to *Beowulf*. 123

As to the audience towards whom the Prologue was aimed, Patricia Poussa’s suggestion of the Christianized inhabitants of the Danelaw deserves attention. 124 The history of the remarkable family whose founder (Byrhtferth tells us) was said to have come over with Hinguar (Ivar), and which included an archbishop of Canterbury (Oda, 940-58) and two archbishops of York (Oscytel, 956-71, and

121 Vita Oswaldi, ed. James Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*, I (Rolls Series, 71, London, 1879), 399-475, at 413; see Joseph A. Robinson, *St Oswald and the Church of Worcester* (British Academy Supplemental Papers, 5, London, 1919), 41-2. It is tempting to conjecture that Oda’s contact with Fleury began in 936 when (according to Richer) he is said to have gone to Francia to negotiate the return of Louis d’Outremer; see Robert LaTouche (ed.), *Richer, Histoire de la France* (888-995), ch. ii.4 (2 vols., Paris, 1930), i. 130-1; Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, I, c.500-1042 (2nd ed., London, 1979), 344 n.5.

122 The Andreas poet (often believed to have been influenced by *Beowulf*) may have intended to give Andreas a funeral like Scyld Scefing’s; the interpretation of the passage is difficult; see C.M. Doherty, ‘The Journey-Motif in the Longer Old English Poems’ (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Macquarie University, N.S.W., 1987), 87 n.

123 R.L. Reynolds (‘An Echo of *Beowulf* in Athelstan’s Charters of 931-33 A.D.’, *Medium Aevum*, 24 (1955), 101-3) has suggested that the proems of some of Athelstan’s charters show familiarity with the poem.

Oswald, 972–95), is proof enough of the penetration of these Anglo-Danes into tenth-century English life. The composer of the Prologue was clearly not only well-versed in Scandinavian traditions, but also probably Latin-literate and with the resources of a (monastic?) library to hand. To judge from his authorial comments in lines 13–17, he also believed that God was watching over the destiny of the pagan Danes. The patron (and perhaps the poet himself), then, may have been proud of a Danish heritage, and desirous of seeing pagan ancestors in the best possible light.

Most modern critics, when discussing the date of Beowulf, seem to regard the poem as we have it in the Nowell Codex as the creation of one man, with one date of composition. I wonder, however, if they are not chasing a chimera. True, it is the only version we have any evidence for; but that may be due solely to the accidents of survival. No substantial poem in Old English is extant in more than one manuscript; and the brief poems which are found in two sometimes vary greatly. Often this is due to scribal corruptions; but two poems found in early Northumbrian as well as late West Saxon versions have apparently deliberate changes. In the Northumbrian Mail Coat Riddle the last two lines are supported by the Latin original, but have been replaced in the later version by a conventional riddle ending. The text of the Dream of the Rood found carved in runes on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross consisted of about fifteen lines; that written into the Vercelli Book about AD 1000 has 156 lines. This may be partly due to selectivity on the part of the rune-carver; but in some places the Vercelli Book version appears to have been internally expanded and all the lines after 78 have been claimed as an inferior addition.

Substantial Middle English poems preserved in more than one manuscript also vary considerably. Sometimes this is due only to an attempt to update and clarify the text; but a later scribe also drastically

125 Robinson, Oswald, 38–51. For Byrhtferth as author of the Vita Oswald, see Michael Lapidge, ‘Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the Early Sections of the Historia Regum attributed to Symeon of Durham’, Anglo-Saxon England, 10 (1982), 97–122, further references at 99 n.11.

126 Fred C. Robinson has pointed out that, though the poem is full of reminders that its characters are heathen, it only depicts those aspects of paganism which would be the least shocking to Christians; Beowulf and the Appositive Style (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1985), ch.2, 29–59.

127 The inspiration for the following argument derives from work by Bernadette A. Masters for her Ph.D. Thesis for the University of Sydney, ‘Le Moulin a Paroles: Reévaluation de l’Art de la Manuscriture au Moyen Age’ (1987).


129 Michael Swanton (ed.), The Dream of the Rood (Manchester, 1970), 41, points to the defective metrical arrangement of the Ruthwell Cross lines.

130 E.g., line 39; Ruthwell ongyrede hine god almeztig = Vercelli ongyrede hine pa geong heleð (pat wes god elmhtig).

abbreviated the immense Layamon's *Brut*, often combining parts of lines to form new ones which lack the alliteration of the earlier version.\textsuperscript{132} The three manuscripts of *Sir Orfeo* all differ widely; moreover, in the earliest of them, the Auchinleck, the prologue attached to *Sir Orfeo* in the other manuscripts is found with another poem.\textsuperscript{133} Diane Speed, in her recent edition of six medieval romances, remarked:

there has been an increasing recognition of the difficulty of identifying any single 'correct' form for works such as these when the concept of authorship was not as individual-oriented as our own and when both conscious and unconscious modifications almost certainly arose with each new performance or copying.\textsuperscript{134}

Scholars are right to emphasize that we can only know the poem as we have it in the Nowell Codex; it would be pointless to try to reconstruct the shape and content of any putative earlier versions. Yet earlier versions of at least parts of the poem there must have been. Even the strongest supporter of early eleventh-century composition, Kevin Kiernan, assumes the use of earlier material when he claims that the join between two poems, one on Beowulf's youth, the other on his old age, was only made in the extant manuscript.\textsuperscript{135} H.L. Rogers, on the other hand, assumed a reworking of the whole of the originally pagan material by a Christian poet, claiming that it had been most effective for Beowulf's fight with Grendel, and least effective for the dragon fight.\textsuperscript{136} It is unlikely that scholars will ever agree what forms any 'Ur-Beowulfs' may have taken; but clearly it is not out of the question that the poem we have in the Nowell Codex is the product of development over a considerable period. A Prologue concerned with the ancestors of the royal Danish house, and a description of Grendel's mere influenced by a version of the *Visio Pauli* may (or may not) have been among the latest additions or alterations before the poem was written into the Nowell Codex somewhere about the year 1000.

I end as I began, with Rowland Collins:

A poem as rich and as reminiscent as *Beowulf* could only arise from important societal traditions and narratives and it could only reach the literary form in which we have it after long gestation and sustained social thought. The traditions which

\textsuperscript{132} *Layamon: Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie (EETS, 250, 277, 2 vols., Oxford, 1963–78). As an example of thorough-going reworking, see the story of Hengist and Horsa; from about line 6880 until about 7360 the scribe of London, British Library Cotton Otho c.xviii has some rewording in every line, as compared to Cotton Caligula A.ix.


\textsuperscript{134} Diane Speed, *Medieval English Romances* (2 vols., Sydney, 1987), ii. 323. David N. Dumville has also drawn attention to the effects on a piece of literature of a period of oral transmission, such as cannot be ruled out for at least some of the *Beowulf* material; 'Beowulf and the Celtic World: The Uses of Evidence', *Traditio*, 37 (1981), 109–60, at 149–54.

\textsuperscript{135} In *Dating*, ed. Chase, 17.

contributed to this masterpiece were not welded to each other mechanically or quickly. Whether the poem as we now have it was conceived in the eighth, ninth, tenth, or even early eleventh century does not affect either the fact that the manuscript was produced not far from the year 1000 or the certainty that the poem builds its narrative from the ancient Germanic antecedents of the English people. This suggested documentation of some growth in the poem . . . [underlines] the great richness, the consummate skill, and the magnificent inventiveness which the author and his assistants (whether original, editorial or scribal) brought from the centuries of Germanic, Christian, and English tradition. 137

In the present state of research we can see this ‘magnificent inventiveness’ welding together disparate traditions more clearly in the Prologue than anywhere else in Beowulf. In spite of all the conjecture, what is certain is the consummate skill of the poet who wove together references from English and Danish ancestral legends (whether traditional or fabricated), from his knowledge of ship-burial ritual and from hagiography to provide a seamless introduction which was appropriate at all levels for the greatest of the Old English poems. 138