



Plate 1. *Frontispiece.*  
Gold collar from Möne.

**BEOWULF**  
**SWEDES AND GEATS**

**BY**  
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**VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH**  
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## *Introduction: the poem Beowulf*

FOR many years a critical climate has existed in which *Beowulf* has been seen as a tragedy of the fall of the Geats; Beowulf's people are destroyed by the Swedes, their neighbours to the north, shortly after Beowulf is killed by the dragon. The purpose of this study is to re-examine the background of the poem, in the light of what is known about Scandinavia before the Viking Age from history, archaeology and legend. Two presumptions are basic. The first is that the *Geatas* are the *Gautar*, the inhabitants of south central Sweden, the area below the lakes Vänern and Vättern.<sup>1</sup> The second is that *Beowulf* is a work of heroic history, i.e. a poem in which facts and chronology are subservient to the poet's interest in heroic deeds and their value in representing the ethics of an heroic civilization. A poet writing in this mode does not disregard absolute historical fact, history, that is, as we know it. He rather sees it as less important than other considerations, if he uses it at all.<sup>2</sup> He will be reasonably consistent — but within his own limits, and with his own priorities. His account will sometimes mesh reasonably well with history, as in the episode of Hygelac's raid on the Frisian shore. But more often, his work will be a freely-woven structure in which the characters and actions of the past will be part of an ethically satisfying narrative.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, then, the aim is not to examine

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, unless specific indications to the contrary are given, the term 'Swedes' means the ancient inhabitants of central Sweden, with their centre at Old Uppsala in Uppland. On the difficulty of precise location, see below, pp. 258-62.

<sup>2</sup> The question may well be raised whether the poet had the means to know history in a more modern sense.

<sup>3</sup> As Jan de Vries pointed out, the Germanic epic gives the fullest evidence regarding the transmutation of historic fact into heroic history. After surveying a number of traditions, he concluded: '[In heroic poetry] it is to be expected that in the course of the oral tradition the historical facts change out of all recognition.' *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* (1963), 194-209, quotation 203.

or evaluate the 'historicity' of the poem, but rather to study its internal consistency in terms of the art of writing heroic history. What is primarily important is the structure which the *Beowulf* poet created from the facts, myths and high ideals which he knew in connection with certain north Germanic tribes, the noble ancestors (physical or spiritual) of his own race. Much can be learned about the background and context of the poem through other literary sources, through historical writings, and through archaeology; but such evidence will be used here to fill the outlines as they are laid down by the poet's account of an heroic life. I propose first to discuss the passages in the poem which appear to me to be 'pro-Swedish', for want of a better term. A discussion of Beowulf's connections with the various royal houses of Scandinavia follows. The historical background of Scandinavia in the period before the Viking Age is then treated. Finally, the relationship of *Beowulf* to Sutton Hoo is discussed. With these perspectives in mind, we can begin with an examination of the passage dealing with Beowulf's coming to kingship, supposedly a clear indication of the hostile nature of the contacts between Swede and Geat.

I *Beowulf's coming to kingship*

Beowulf's accession to the throne is described in lines 2367-2400 of the poem. The passage is particularly important, since it serves to introduce the last act of a heroic life. Though there are many difficulties in the account, the major problem centres on the relations between Swede and Geat, as outlined above. Particularly upsetting to commentators is the account the poet gives us of Onela, king of the Swedes. R. W. Chambers interprets the passage as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Onela [is] king of Sweden and is spoken of in terms of highest praise. Yet to judge from the account given in *Beowulf*, the Geatas had little reason to love him. He had followed up the defeat of Hygelac by dealing their nation a second deadly blow. For Onela's nephews, Eanmund and Eadgils (the sons of Ohthere), had rebelled against him, and had taken refuge at the court of the Geatas, where Heardred, son of Hygelac, was now reigning, supported by Beowulf. Thither Onela pursued them, and slew the young king Heardred. Eanmund was also slain, then or later, but Eadgils escaped. It is not clear from the poem what part Beowulf is supposed to have taken in this struggle, or why he failed to ward off disaster from his lord and country. It is not even made clear whether or not he had to make formal submission to the hated Swede. But we are told that when Onela withdrew, he succeeded to the vacant throne. In later days he took his revenge upon Onela.

In Chambers's view, then, the villain of the piece is clearly Onela, the 'hated Swede', though we are left with the discomfiting fact that the poet speaks of Onela, as Chambers himself puts it, 'in terms of highest praise'.

Later critics extended the anti-Swedish interpretation further still; the interpretation of Adrien Bonjour is representative:<sup>5</sup>

Beowulf's refusal having led to Heardred's accession, the poet could not but mention the early death of the young king which finally put Beowulf himself on the Geatish throne . . . . Now the circumstances of Heardred's death allow the poet to

<sup>4</sup> *Beowulf: An Introduction* (3rd ed. with a Supplement by C. L. Wrenn, 1963), 5; this book is abbreviated Chambers-Wrenn hereafter.

<sup>5</sup> *The Digressions in Beowulf* (1965), 31-2.

introduce for the first time the Swedish wars in the poem, wars of which we are to hear with an alarming recurrence . . . . Hygd's fears of 'ælfylcum' are here dramatically confirmed, as the Swedish raids find their outcome precisely in her son's death. At the same time her trust in Beowulf is also justified by Onela's retreat, who does not seem particularly eager to fight against Beowulf, now that the hero has ascended the Geatish throne (*let þone bregostol Beowulf healdan*). Thus by showing so conspicuously how Hygd's confidence in him was well placed, the second part also serves the cause of Beowulf. The purpose of the poet is to convey the certitude that Beowulf's power was enough to prevent any attempt at an invasion, even on the part of an hereditary foe — the Swedes, of course . . . . It should be remarked, finally, that the story of Onela and his brother's sons Eanmund and Eadgils provides another (and this time much closer) foil to Beowulf's attitude towards Heardred: the rightful heirs to Ohthere are indeed deprived of the throne by their uncle Onela — a further instance of usurpation sharply contrasting with Beowulf's loyalty and delicacy.

Chambers's awareness of contradictory elements in the account is missing. Onela, in Bonjour's criticism, is a villain who disrupts civil order and who ravages Geatland in his single-minded desire to usurp the throne. A critical structure is built in which the evil Onela is a representative emblem of the struggle to the death between Geats and Swedes, which is to end with the complete destruction of the Geats, shortly after Beowulf's death.<sup>6</sup>

A closer examination of the lines in question is necessary. For purposes of clarity, the text is presented complete and a translation is provided, which will serve as a basis for interpretation.

Oferswam ða sioleða bigong sunu Ecgðeowes,  
 earm anhaga eft to leodum;  
 þær him Hygd gebead hord ond rice,  
 beagas ond bregostol; bearne ne truwode,  
 þæt he wið ælfylcum eþelstolas

<sup>6</sup> The perspective of a kind of Scandinavian total war is most eloquently set by A. Brodeur in *The Art of Beowulf* (1960), 135: 'The historical traditions have to do with the downfall of the Danish and Geatish kingdoms, both of which Beowulf was concerned to uphold; their matter is the tragedies of nations with which he was emotionally as well as politically involved . . . Both these national catastrophes are the ultimate consequence of the defeat and death of Hygelac in Frisia.'

healdan cuðe, ða wæs Hygelac dead.  
 No ðy ær feascafte findan meahton  
 æt ðam æðelinge ænige ðinga,  
 þæt he Heardrede hlaford wære,  
 oððe þone cynedom ciosan wolde;  
 hwæðre he hine on folce freondlarum heold,  
 estum mid are, oð ðæt he yldra wearð,  
 Weder-Geatum weold.

Hyne wræcmæcgas

ofer sæ sohtan, suna Ohteres;  
 hæfdon hy forhealden helm Scylfinga,  
 þone selestan sæcyninga  
 þara ðe in Swiorice sinc brytnade,  
 mærne þeoden. Him þæt to mearce wearð;  
 he þær[f]or feorme feorhwunde hleat,  
 sweordes swengum, sunu Hygelaces;  
 ond him eft gewat Ongenðioes bearn  
 hames niosan, syððan Heardred læg,  
 let ðone bregostol Biowulf healdan,  
 Geatum wealdan; þæt wæs god cyning.

Se ðæs leodhryres lean gemunde  
 uferan dogrum, Eadgilse wearð  
 feascaftum freond; folce gestepte  
 ofer sæ side sunu Ohteres,  
 wigum ond wæpnum; he gewræc syððan  
 cealdum cearsiðum, cyning ealdre bineat.

Swa he niða gehwane genesen hæfde,  
 sliðra geslyhta, sunu Ecgðioewes,  
 ellenweorca, oð ðone anne dæg,  
 þe he wið þam wyrme gewegan sceolde.<sup>7</sup> (2367-2400)

When Ecgðeow's son, the afflicted solitary one, swam across the sea, back to his people, Hygd then pressed upon him the treasury and the kingdom, the (giving of) rings and the throne; she did not trust her son, did not believe that he would know how to (or be able to) protect the country against foreigners, when Hygelac was dead. Despite this, the unfortunate people could not in any way prevail upon the prince (Beowulf) to become Heardred's lord, or take over the kingdom; yet he (Beowulf) supported him among the people with friendly counsel, kindly, with honour, until he grew older and ruled the Geats.

Exiles (*wræcmæcgas*) sought him from across the water,

<sup>7</sup> This and all subsequent citations from *Beowulf* are from Klaeber's third edition (1950), unless specific note to the contrary is given; the edition is abbreviated Klaeber hereafter.

Ohthere's sons; they had rebelled against the protector of the Scylfings, the illustrious lord, that best of sea-kings who ever gave out treasure in Sweden.<sup>8</sup> That was his finish; Hygelac's son suffered a deadly swordblow on account of that hospitality, and Ongendæow's son then went home after Heardred had fallen, let Beowulf keep the throne, rule the Geats: he was a good king!

He (Beowulf) remembered a requital for his lord's fall at a later time (*uferan dogrum*). He became a friend to the destitute Eadgils, the son of Ohthere, established him among his people across the broad water, by means of battle and weapons; he (Beowulf) gained revenge afterwards in a bitter journey, fraught with woe, he deprived the king of his life. So Ecgðeow's son had experienced every sort of hostility, fierce affliction — deeds of glory, until that notable day, on which he was fated to fight against the dragon.

## II *The account of Onela's fall*

The points which I find most striking are the following.<sup>9</sup>

(1) Hygd, Hygelac's queen, did not trust her own son as a ruler, and pressed Beowulf to accept the kingship. She had a specific reason for doing so, since she thought her son incapable of protecting the country from foreigners (*wið ælfylcum*).

(2) Her fears are justified, for the young and unwise Heardred harbours a pair of rebels, Eanmund and Eadgils. The poet's choice of words here is significant. They are *wræcmæcgas*. *Wræcmæcg* is used elsewhere to refer to the devil,<sup>10</sup> and to the Jews in *Elene* who despise Christ's teachings.<sup>11</sup> Too much weight cannot be attached to these uses,<sup>12</sup> but the surrounding context of *wræcmæcg*

<sup>8</sup> See note 14 below.

<sup>9</sup> Chambers found Beowulf's failure to defend Heardred in the battle against Onela significant, in that it lent an aura of improbability to the narrative. I fail to see how this is at all relevant. Beowulf was present at the battle in which Hygelac fell; though he slew the Frankish champion (2501 ff.), and swam home carrying 30 suits of armour, he did not save his lord. It is equally valid, or invalid, to question the whereabouts of Beowulf in both battles.

<sup>10</sup> *Guthlac* 231, 558, *Christ* 363 (in apposition with *hetelan helseadan*), *Juliana* 260 as an *n*-stem form, *wræcmæga*, referring to the devil who disguised himself as an angel in an attempt to deceive Juliana.

<sup>11</sup> *Elene* 387.

<sup>12</sup> First of all because the number of recorded uses is small, second because any firm statements on Old English semantics must await the publication of the new Anglo-Saxon Dictionary.

in the *Beowulf* passage reinforces the negative impression. These two young men did not show proper respect to Onela (i.e. they rebelled against him): *hæfdon hy forhealden*<sup>13</sup> *helm Scylfinga . . .*

(3) Onela is 'the protector of the Scylfings, the illustrious lord, that best of sea-kings who ever gave out treasure in Sweden'.<sup>14</sup>

(4) Heardred's hospitality to these unsavoury guests cost him his life.

(5) Beowulf did not assume the kingship, *but was permitted it by Onela*. The poet states this clearly: *let done bregostol Biowulf healdan, Geatum wealdan; þæt wæs god cyning!* 'Onela let Beowulf keep the throne, rule the Geats; he was a good king!' Since Onela is the subject in 2387-90a, it is at least possible that *þæt wæs god cyning* refers to Onela, *not* to Beowulf. The implications of *let . . . healdan* cannot be established. Onela let Beowulf rule either because he feared him or because he favoured him.

(6) Beowulf does avenge his lord, Heardred, by helping Eadgils regain the throne. Without Beowulf, Eadgils would have been unable to regain power; he was *feasceaft*, destitute. Significantly, Beowulf does not act at once but after a period of time, *uferan dogrum*.

(7) The revenge for Heardred is accomplished by depriving the king (Onela) of his life. The deed is not pleasant, it is done *cealdum cearsidum*. Klaeber glosses *cearsid* as 'expedition that brings sorrow', *ceald* as 'painful', 'pernicious', 'evil'. C. L. Wrenn takes *cearsid* as 'journey

<sup>13</sup> The gloss I use here is that suggested by T. Northcote Toller, *Supplement to an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1921), IV (1). The meanings listed for *forhealdan* range from 'keep back, hold improperly' to 'abuse' or 'not keep morally pure'. I read *for-* as an intensive negative prefix; compare *bærnan* 'burn up', *forbærnan* 'burn up utterly', *brecan*, 'break', *forbrecan*, 'violate', etc. Klaeber's translation is 'rebel against' in the present context.

<sup>14</sup> *brytnade* can be taken as a subjunctive plural in *-e*; in such constructions, i.e. a limiting adjective clause with a genitive depending on a superlative as its antecedent, the subjunctive seems to indicate a totality — in this case, all the possible examples of sea-kings. Parallels are found in *Beowulf* 2129 ff., *Genesis* 6264, and *Daniel* 691 ff. See Bruce Mitchell, *A Guide to Old English* (2nd ed., 1968), 165.4.

that brings grief, disastrous expedition'.<sup>15</sup> Since the revenge for Heardred is fulfilled, the only reason for viewing the expedition as disastrous is that it brings grief to Beowulf. Klaeber sees Eadgils as the subject of *gewræc*, but this interpretation is rejected for the following reasons:

(i) He had no power to fight for himself, because he was *feasceaft*; Beowulf put him on the throne (*folce gestepte*, 2393).

(ii) Beowulf is the subject, centre of interest, and active force in 2391-2400; while it is possible that there could be a subject-shift in 2395, such a shift is by no means necessary and is unlikely, considering Beowulf's active role throughout the passage.

(iii) We are told that Beowulf *lean gemunde leod hryres*; it seems natural to suppose that he felt it necessary to take appropriate action in revenging his lord.

(iv) It is hard to see how the journey in which Eadgils regains the kingship could be a *ceald cearsið* for him, whereas it could much more easily be such for Beowulf. However, the possibility does exist that *cealdum cearsiðum* refers to Onela.

Certainly, *this passage alone* cannot be seen as an attack on the character or actions of Onela, the Swedish king. His reason for coming to Heardred's court is to seek out and crush rebellion. In the course of doing so, both he and Heardred are caught up in the bonds of heroic conduct. Eanmund and Eadgils are in Heardred's protection, and Heardred must fight with and for them; Onela must do battle with Heardred. Heardred's fault is lack of wisdom; he took the wrong side in a civil conflict. And the conduct of Beowulf, when he is permitted the kingship, is governed by convention as well; he must continue his lord's obligations, and must avenge Heardred, and thus is forced into killing the rightful king of the Swedes, in an undertaking that is painful to him.

<sup>15</sup> *Beowulf*, second edition (1958).

III *The role of Wiglaf in Beowulf's last battle*

Questions are raised here which can only be answered by extending the enquiry further; in fact, the defence of those warriors with Swedish attachments is found elsewhere, in the account of Beowulf's last battle. After a long reign the valiant warrior is engaged with the dragon. His sword fails, the end of his life is at hand. His retainers see him struck by the dragon, but none moves to help his lord — save one:

Hiora in anum weoll

sefa wið sorgum; sibb'æfre ne mæg  
 wiht onwendan þam ðe wel þenceð.  
 Wiglaf wæs haten, Weoxstanes sunu,  
 leoflic lindwiga, leod Scylfinga,  
 mæg Ælfheres; geseah his mondryhten  
 under heregriman hat þrowian.  
 Gemunde ða ða are, þe he him ær forgeaf,  
 wicstede weligne Wægmundinga,  
 folcrihta gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte;  
 ne mihte ða forhabban, hond rond gefeng,  
 geolwe linde, gomel swyrd geteah;  
 þæt wæs mid eldum Eanmundes laf,  
 suna Ohtere[s]; þam æt sæcce wearð,  
 wræcca(n) wineleasum Weohstan bana  
 meces ecgum, ond his magum ætbær  
 brunfagne helm, hringde byrnan,  
 ealdsweord etonisc; þæt him Onela forgeaf,  
 his gædelinges guðgewædu,  
 fyrdsearo fuslic, — no ymbe ða fæhðe spræc,  
 þeah ða he his broðor bearn abredwade.  
 He [ða] frætwe geheold fela missera,  
 bill ond byrnan, oð ðæt his byre mihte  
 eorlscipe efnan swa his ærfæder;  
 geaf him ða mid Geatum guðgewæda,  
 æghwæs unrim, þa he of ealdre gewat  
 frod on forðweg. — Ða wæs forma sið  
 geongan ceman, þæt he guðe ræs  
 mid his freodryhtne fremman sceolde. (2599b-2627)

The mind of a certain one surged with grief: for those who are right thinking, the claims of kinship cannot ever be set aside.

His name was Wiglaf, Weohstan's son, the kinsman of Ælfhere,<sup>16</sup> a Swedish prince; he saw his helmeted lord enduring the heat. He called to mind the honours Beowulf had given him, the rich Wægmunding estate — every one of those land-rights his father had had before him. He could not hold back then; he grasped his yellow linden shield, drew his ancestral sword that was (*mid eldum*?) a legacy of Eanmund, Ohthere's son; Weohstan had become his slayer in battle by means of a sword, and had borne the glistening brown helmet, the ringed mail shirt and the wondrous ancient sword to his kinsmen. Onela granted his kinsman's war-equipment, his battle-equipment to him — and made no mention at all of hostility, though he (Weohstan) had cut down his (Onela's) brother's son. He kept that treasure for many years, the sword and mailcoat, until his child could accomplish deeds of valour, as his father had done; he gave him the war-equipment, all of it,<sup>17</sup> when, full of years, he departed from life on the road hence. That was the first time the young man was fated to experience the onrush of battle with his excellent lord.

The points which I find significant in the passage are these:

- (1). Wiglaf is called *leod Scylfinga*, a Swedish man, or prince.<sup>18</sup>
- (2) The only thing we know about Weohstan is that he slew Eanmund, almost certainly in the course of the battle between Onela and his rebellious nephews. It appears that he was in Onela's service at the time, since Onela

<sup>16</sup> H. B. Woolf suggested ('The name of Beowulf', *Englische Studien* 72, 1937-38, 7-9) that Ælfhere was actually Beowulf's name. His argument was that the vocalic alliteration would fit with his father's name, and he saw a patterning in the sequence *wæg* plus the genitive of a personal name: 'There is another reason . . . for considering Ælfhere Beowulf's true name: the alliteration in line 2604 does not call for a name initially vocalic, and the name of some other kinsman of Wiglaf might just as well have been used — save that Beowulf was, in the opinion of the poet, his greatest relative. The phrase *mæg* plus the genitive of a personal name occurs six times in the poem: in lines 737, 758, 813, 914, 1530, and 2604. In the first five of these, Beowulf is referred to as *Mæg Hygelaces*, and in no one of them is the name of Hygelac necessary for alliteration. Indeed, it seems likely that when the name of a kinsman of Beowulf was used in this way by the poet he naturally thought of Hygelac, who played an important role in the poem; similarly, when the name of a relative of Wiglaf was needed, what more logical to use that of his most famous kinsman, *Beowulf*, known also as Ælfhere?'

<sup>17</sup> All of it = *aghwæs unrim*.

<sup>18</sup> *leod* is used 13 times elsewhere in the singular in *Beowulf*, 10 times as part of a title for Beowulf, once each in the same way for Heorogar, Hroðgar, and once to refer to Wulfgar, as *Wendla leod*. Wulfgar is a high officer at Hroðgar's court, his *ar ond ombiht*. It seems possible to take *leod* as 'prince' in all 13 instances, with the present example as the fourteenth.

gave him gifts of armour, returning what he had won from Eanmund.

(3) The armour which Wiglaf wears, the sword he carries, are his father's trophies from this battle,<sup>19</sup> in which Heardred died, defending his guests, Eanmund and Eadgils.

(4) Despite the fact that Wigstan took and slew Eanmund, who was under Heardred's protection, he was apparently favoured by Beowulf, and must have been accepted among the Geats, since he passed on Eanmund's armour to his son, in Geatland (cf. 2623), and may have held land there.

The translation of lines 2612b-2619 is ambiguous: there is no doubt that Weohstan did kill Eanmund with his own hands, but what *magum* (2614) refers to is not clear, and the meaning of *ætberan* is also hard to establish. Working from analogy, it appears that *ætberan* can mean 'bear away from', or 'bear away to'.<sup>20</sup> Since *magum* is plural, it seems unlikely that the reference is to Eanmund, with *ætberan* as 'bear away from', i.e. 'Weohstan took away [the armour] from his kinsman, Eanmund'.<sup>21</sup>

A more likely translation takes *magum* as a simple plural, *ætberan* as 'carry off to': Weohstan carried off the armour to his kinsmen — and here the question arises, to whose kinsmen? Eanmund's or Weohstan's? There is no way to come to a decision on the basis of the phrase itself; either translation is possible, and only the context can help. Since Onela had the armour to give it to Weohstan, it came into his possession some time before. In the *Beowulf* poet's view, accepted practice for warriors

<sup>19</sup> If Swedes and Geats were such implacable enemies, this alone would have caused a cool reception for Wiglaf among the Geats, and among the supporters of Onela in the land of the Swedes. A parallel is to be found in the Heaðobard feud, where the mere sight of Heaðobard treasures on Danish lords is enough to stir up deadly conflict. Cf. 2016-69.

<sup>20</sup> Bosworth-Toller gloss only 'from' meanings for *ætberan*, but other verbs with the *æt-* prefix have the alternative force, as *ætferian*, 'take away', *æt-don* 'deprive', *æt-fleon*, 'flee away', etc.

<sup>21</sup> It is still perhaps possible that *magum* is a classword, with singular for plural; cf. *broðrum* and *bearnum*, 1074, where the reference is singular, as Hildeburh has lost one from among the class sons, one from brothers.

seems to have been for them to pass on to their lords what they had won in battle.<sup>22</sup> Since Onela is Weohstan's lord, it would be plausible to assume that Onela is referred to in *his magum* — either as one of Weohstan's kinsmen, or one of Eanmund's. More convincing evidence is Wiglaf's title of *leod Scylfinga*, 'prince of Swedes', which he must have gained by descent since the dragon fight was his first battle. It is thus, on the basis of this passage, probable that Beowulf was tied to the Swedes through his connection to the Wægmunding line of Weohstan and Wiglaf. His connection with the Wægmundings cannot be disputed, for he himself stresses it in his very last words, as he speaks to Wiglaf:

Pu eart ende-laf    usses cynnes,  
 Wægmundinga;    ealle wyrd forsweop  
 mine magas    to metodsceafte,  
 eorlas on elne;    ic him æfter sceal. (2813-16)

You are the last survivor of our race, the Wægmundings; fate has taken off all my kinsmen, the illustrious lords, to their appointed lot; I must follow them.

Thus, the picture built up from the account of Beowulf's succession and of the circumstances of his last battle does not easily accord with an interpretation of the poem which has Geat and Swede as implacable foes, while Beowulf is alive.

Scholars have been troubled about the Wægmunding line, and Beowulf's relation to it. Klaeber held that the Wægmundings were a family with Geatish and Swedish relations,<sup>23</sup> and Wrenn identified them as 'the family related (perhaps by marriage) to the Geatish royal house — to which Wiglaf, Wihstan and Beowulf belong'.<sup>24</sup> Hoops held that they were Swedes,<sup>25</sup> and E. Wardale, on the basis of the Wægmunding relation, suggested long

<sup>22</sup> A parallel here is Beowulf's passing on the splendid treasures he had been given by Hroðgar, and gaining lands in return, cf. 2144-51, 2190-99. See also *Widsið* 93-6, discussed below, p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Klaeber, xlv.

<sup>24</sup> Wrenn, *Beowulf*, 316.

<sup>25</sup> Hoops, *Kommentar zur Beowulf* (1932), 276-7.

ago that Ecgðeow, Beowulf's father, was a Swede.<sup>26</sup> A summary article on the question was written by W. F. Bryan in 1936, 'The Wægmundings: Swedes or Geats?'.<sup>27</sup> As far as I can discover, his reasons for concluding in favour of a Geatish origin have never been fully refuted in print, so it seems necessary to do so here. Bryan first restates the 'pro-Swedish' arguments, and finds them a satisfactory explanation of three circumstances:

The first is that Wiglaf's father Weohstan was a follower of Onela, the king of the Swedes, in the war between Onela and Heardred, the king of the Geats, and in this war Weohstan killed Eanmund, Onela's rebellious nephew, who was being supported by Heardred, and Heardred was slain by the Swedes. The second is that Wiglaf himself is called *leod Scylfinga*, that is, a man [or 'prince'] of the Swedes. The third is that Beowulf and Wiglaf (and of course Wiglaf's father Weohstan) were members of the same family, the Wægmundings.

Bryan's major argument against a Swedish attachment is as follows:

There is not the slightest hint in the epic that the Wægmundings as a family had any roots or possessions in Sweden; but there is a clear statement concerning the estate of this family in the land of the Geats. Wiglaf is kindled to his valiant support of Beowulf in the desperate contest with the fire-drake by his recollection of the obligations to Beowulf under which he lay:

Gemunde ða ða are þe he him ær forgeaf,  
wicstede weligne Wægmundinga,  
folcrihta gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte. (2606-8)

He remembered the favours he had had in times past, the splendid Wægmunding estate, every one of the folk-rights (see below) his father had had.

The phrase *wicstede weligne Wægmundinga* seems clearly to refer to the ancestral holding or fief of the family, and the additional *folcrihta gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte* strongly confirms this interpretation: Wiglaf had succeeded his father in the family seat. As this succession had been granted by Beowulf, the king of the Geats, it is obvious that the ancestral home of the

<sup>26</sup> 'Beowulf — the Nationality of Ecgðeow', *Modern Language Review* 24 (1929), 322.

<sup>27</sup> *Modern Philology* 34 (1936), 113-8.

Wægmundings was in the land of the Geats. Since Beowulf, the king of the Geats, is a Wægmunding, as are Wiglaf and his father Weohstan, since there is a perfectly clear implication that the ancestral seat of the Wægmundings lay in the land of the Geats, and since there is nowhere in the poem any association of the family as a family with the land or race of the Swedes, the conclusion seems inescapable that the Wægmundings were not Swedes, but Geats.<sup>28</sup>

This conclusion is far from inescapable. First of all, Onela may well have been *kinsman*-lord of Weohstan, for the reasons adduced above. Secondly, Bryan's idea of an ancestral estate is not in keeping with methods of land-tenure in Anglo-Saxon England. While any question involving Anglo-Saxon land-tenure is necessarily complex, a few certainties can be made out.<sup>29</sup> References to land-tenure elsewhere in the poetry seem particularly appropriate here. In *Widsið*, the wandering *scop* gives up the splendid and extremely valuable gold bracelet he had from Eormenric to his lord Eadgils, in return for the *re-granting* of lands that had been his father's:

þone [hring] ic Eadgilse on æht sealde,  
 minum hleodrihtne, þa ic to ham bicwom  
 leofum to leane, þæs þe he me lond forgeaf,  
 mines fæder eþel, frea Myrginga. (93-6)<sup>30</sup>

The ring which I gave to Eadgils, my beloved lord, ruler of the Myrgings, when I came home, as a repayment for the land he had granted me, my father's estate.

Chambers cited *Beowulf* '2607, etc.' as a confirmation of the above. The case of Deor is even more striking. As soon as he lost favour with his lord, his rival Heorrenda succeeded to his lands:

Ahte ic fela wintra folgað tilne,  
 holdne hlaford, oþþæt Heorrenda nu,  
 leoðcræftig man londriht gepah,  
 þæt me eorla hleo ær gesealde. (38-41)<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> See E. John, *Land Tenure in Early England* (1960), and 'Folcland Reconsidered', *Orbis Britanniae* (1966), 64-129.

<sup>30</sup> *Widsið* (ed. R. W. Chambers, 1912), 217.

<sup>31</sup> Krapp and Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* III (1936), 179.

For many years I had a dependable lord, until now, when Heorrenda, a man skilled in song, came into the lands which the lord had formerly given to me.

The practice of land-holding for longer periods than a single lifetime (or the duration of the king's pleasure) was a later development, and almost certainly originated in the necessity to provide support for the church.<sup>32</sup> In brief, then, on the basis of current understanding of Anglo-Saxon land-holding, it would appear extremely likely that lands granted by Beowulf to Wiglaf are those which had been granted earlier to Weohstan, for his lifetime only. The phrase *folcrista gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte* need imply no more than a life-estate, as Dr Golden has indicated.<sup>33</sup> The fact that Weohstan held such lands does not make him a Geat by descent; it only means that he was rewarded while in the service of a king of the Geats, Beowulf, as his father had been rewarded in his lifetime.

We can now turn to Bryan's other points. He explained Weohstan's presence in Sweden by recourse to Chadwick, who held that Weohstan the *Geat* had taken service with a foreign lord, and was thus forced to fight against his own nation.<sup>34</sup> As Chadwick points out, a characteristic of the retinues of Germanic kings is that

<sup>32</sup> The granting of such lands to lay persons was a very late practice; John discusses early (seventh-century) charters from Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and elsewhere, in his chapters on the origin of book-right (*Land Tenure*, 1-23). He holds that 'it seems reasonable to claim that these charters, for all their variety of formula, share a common legal background, that they intend to confer an essentially similar kind of right on newly-established or recently founded churches. This common legal background is called, in the vernacular, book-right, and land held under its terms, bookland. All the sources take it for granted that both terms have a precise and currently understood meaning' (p. 10). In John's view, this book-right bears 'at least a family resemblance' to the Roman imperial *jus perpetuum* formula of the granting of lands (p. 11).

<sup>33</sup> See John Golden, *Societal Bonds in Old English Heroic Poetry: A Legal and Typological Study* (Cornell University Ph.D. thesis, 1970). Dr Golden cites a range of contexts in Anglo-Saxon law codes in which *folcland* is equated with *folcrist*, and concludes: '... the evidence of laws, wills, charters, and letters seems to suggest that the owner of *folcland* did not have the freedom to dispose of it to his heirs without the king's consent, which might be withheld; and that *folcland* was traditionally given to the king's retainers in reward for their services' (p. 126). I am indebted to Dr Golden for aid on the legal aspects of land tenure in Anglo-Saxon England, and for help in preparing a lecture from an earlier version of this study.

<sup>34</sup> H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (1912), 329-30, 350.

'they were not always composed of born subjects of the king. Bede (*HE* III, 14) says that Oswine, popular king of Deira, attracted noblemen to his service from all sides; and in the Heroic Age such cases appear to have been frequent . . . It is probably due to the same custom that we find so many Teutonic chieftains serving the Romans during the Heroic Age.'<sup>35</sup> Examples of such foreign service are easily found in *Beowulf*. The hero himself was, for a time, Hroðgar's 'man'; his father, Ecgðeow, took allegiance to Hroðgar at one point in his career, though he had married into the Geatish royal line.<sup>36</sup> Hroðgar had Wulfgar, a lord of the Wendels, as his *ar and ombiht*.<sup>37</sup> Beowulf himself found it noteworthy that Hygelac did *not* have to take foreign men into his service, but the passage clearly implies that such a possibility was at least an alternative, in case of need. Particularly noteworthy is Beowulf's acceptance of 'hateful' Sweden as a possible source of warriors for a king of the Geats — in a passage which comes *fifteen lines* after his mention of the battle of *Hreosnabeorh*, in which Hæðcynn fell.<sup>38</sup> The principle is well established, but the argument, surely, is two-sided. If a Geat could take service with the Swedes, the reverse is equally possible. Since it appears that it was a commonplace of Germanic heroic custom for warriors to serve princes who were admirable, whether or not they were members of the same tribe, a review of how Beowulf himself extended his allegiance is called for. In fact, a discussion of Beowulf's dealings with all the three major tribes dealt with in the poem, Geats, Swedes and Danes, will clarify the complex and interrelated series of social bonds in which he was involved.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 350.

<sup>36</sup> See 372-5, 456-7.

<sup>37</sup> See 331b-5. Wrenn's note here is interesting; he identifies the *Wendlas* as the Vandals, and states, 'It seems extremely probable that the Vandals left pockets of settlement in Vendel (Swedish Uppland) and Vendill (modern Vendsyssel) which is the northernmost region of Jutland. Wulfgar, *Wendla leod* (348), prince of the Vandals, may have come from either place, but more likely from Vendel in Sweden, since the point of the passage is that he was a foreign prince who served Hroðgar, not — like so many voyagers abroad — because he had been exiled, but out of motives of high adventure.'

<sup>38</sup> See 2490-2509 cited below, pp. 252-4.



passage quoted above, we do know that Ecgðeow was widely travelled, or at least widely known. He had to flee to Denmark at one point in his life, because of a feud among the Wylfings, in which he slew Heaðolaf. Hroðgar became his lord.<sup>40</sup> It is also apparent that Ecgðeow's name alliterates with the Swedish house, Ongenðeow, Ohthere, Onela, etc. But no great structure can be built on this slight evidence alone. Kemp Malone has presented a case for Ecgðeow as a Wylfing, with two stages in his argument.<sup>41</sup> His first is based on a new emendation in the passage in which Ecgðeow's feud among the Wylfings is discussed. The lines are as follows:

- 459 Gesloh þin fæder fæhðe mæste;  
 wearð he Heaðolafe to handbonan  
 mid Wilfingum; ða hine *gara cyn* (MS reading)  
 for herebrogan habban ne mihte.  
 Þanon he gesohte Suðdena folc  
 ofer yða gewealc, Arscyldinga.
- 465 Ða ic furðum weold folce Deniga . . .
- 470 Siððan þa fæhðe feo þingode:  
 sende ic Wylfingum ofer wæteres hrycg  
 ealde madmas. He me aðas swor.

The now generally accepted emendation of the non-alliterative *gara cyn* in 461 is to *Wedera cyn*, i.e. the Geats. Malone says of this:

*Wedera* makes great difficulties of interpretation. We are asked to believe that King Hreðel of the Geats refused asylum to his own son-in-law, for fear of the avengers of Heaðolaf! Such conduct on the part of Hreðel would have been proper enough, it is true, if the deed had taken place in his own kingdom. In a case of homicide, the banishment of the slayer for a period of years was a punishment (or a precautionary measure) not infrequently resorted to among the ancient Germans, and this irrespective of the merits of the case . . . The slaying of Heaðolaf took place among the Wylfings, not among the Geats; his slayer was therefore presumably banished from the land of the Wylfings and *gara cyn* is nothing more than an alternative form of the Wylfing name, a form here used for stylistic reasons. (Namely, to avoid repetition.) Now, the

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 459-72.

<sup>41</sup> 'Ecgðeow', in *Studies in Heroic Legend and Current Speech* (1959), 108-15.

only extant alternative name for the Wylfings is *Vulgares*, the name which Paulus Diaconus uses for the tribe. I therefore emend *gara cyn* to *Wulgara cyn*. The emendation presupposes that the scribe, in copying the text before him, skipped the alliterative syllable and wrote *gara* instead of *Wulgara*. One may compare the same scribe's *elan* for *Onelan* in l.62.<sup>42</sup>

Malone makes a further supposition on the basis of this new reading, namely, that Ecgðeow was a Wylfing in origin. He states:

If so, we can understand why after his banishment from his proper tribe, he went to the Danish court. Hroðgar's wife, Queen Wealhðeow, was herself a Wylfing, as appears from *Beowulf* 620, where she is called *ides Helminga* [Helm is called a ruler of the Wylfings in *Widsith* 29 RTF] and Ecgðeow presumably hoped that she would prove a friend in time of need. Certainly Ecgðeow won favor with King Hroðgar, who, as we have seen, gave him asylum and even settled his feud with the avengers of Heaðolaf by a money payment. He was able to act as peace-maker in virtue of his friendly relations with the Wylfings, a relationship strengthened by a royal marriage. It seems less likely that Ecgðeow was by birth a man of the Geatas, since in that case he would hardly have escaped from the land of the Wylfings with a mere sentence of banishment; a stranger in a strange land, he could have saved his life only by flight; and there is no indication of such a flight in our text, where on the contrary (as the commentators have recognized), everything points to a judicial sentence of banishment for a term, followed by an open and dignified departure. One may contrast the situation in *Beowulf* 2061 f., where the bane *is* a stranger in a strange land, and saves his life by flight.<sup>43</sup>

Such a view is admittedly based on slender evidence, but it has a logical basis, once Malone's emendation is accepted. A motivation for Ecgðeow's departure for Denmark is provided — and further possible links with the Swedish line are provided through the *ides Helminga*, *Wealhðeow*, Hroðgar's queen. E. V. Gordon studied her name and related Old English and Scandinavian name-forms some years ago, and his arguments, briefly summarized, are as follows:<sup>44</sup> *Wealhðeow* is generally

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 110-11.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> 'Wealhðeow and Related Names', *Medium Ævum* 4 (1936), 169-75.

taken as a descriptive, with a meaning 'British servant' or 'foreign servant'. Gordon held that the *wealh* 'foreigner' element was reserved for non-Germanic peoples, and that since Wealhðeow is *ides Helminga*, she could not be *wealh* in this sense. Gordon held that name-elements in *-ðeow* are 'not Anglo-Saxon in type, and are presumably Scandinavian in origin or formed under Scandinavian influence'.<sup>45</sup> OE *Ecgðeow* and *Ongendæow* have ON equivalents in *Eggþér* and *Angantýr*,<sup>46</sup> and though no direct equivalent for Wealhðeow can be found, a corresponding masculine form exists, *Valþjófr*. Gordon provides evidence, in numerous parallels in ON and other Germanic languages, for taking the respective elements of Wealhðeow as from Gmc *\*wala*, 'chosen', 'beloved', and OE *ðeow*, as a word of restricted, semi-religious meaning, 'servant', 'devotee'. Accordingly, we may interpret *Valþjófr* and its cognate forms OHG *Waladeo* and OE *Wealhþeow*, which means literally 'chosen servant', as denoting a person devoted to some god or power which was expected to show special favour . . . . OE *Ongendæow* (ON *Angantýr*, OHG *Angandeo*), seems to be a name of the same kind, the first element being identical with ON *angan* 'love', 'special favour'.<sup>47</sup>

It has already been pointed out that *Ecgðeow*'s name alliterates with the Swedish line; it is also interesting to note that the *second* element of the name works into series with *Ongendæow*, and *Wealhðeow*, by front variation, a practice which was frequently employed.<sup>48</sup> Of course,

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 169. On the incidence of the rare names in *-þeow* in the North see e.g. Kr. Hald, *Personnavne i Danmark*. I. *Oldtiden* (1971), 29-30.

<sup>46</sup> With *-týr* explicable as a substitution for *-þér*, because of false etymology.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 171-2.

<sup>48</sup> H. B. Woolf, *The Principles of Germanic Name-Giving* (1939), points out in his Conclusion (p. 253): 'In both England and on the Continent front- and end-variation were practised in equal proportions. The number of names linked by common initial themes and those joined by identical final themes is approximately the same for such important groups as the Mercians, the Bernicians, the Deirans, the West Saxons, and the Langobards. Yet there are some deviations in one direction or the other. The East Anglians, the Merovingians, and the Gothic Amalings, for example, made greater use of front variation, and the Kentishmen preferred end-variations.' An East Anglian association of course tempts one to summon up the splendours of Sutton Hoo, but the temptation is best resisted; see below.

we have no way of knowing Wealhðeow's nationality; but since her name is of a Scandinavian type, and finds its closest parallel in Ongenðeow, a king of the Swedish line, it might be conjectured that she may have had her origin among the Swedes. We know that there was a royal marriage between a Swedish king and a Danish princess, from lines 59-63 of the poem; an unnamed daughter of Healfdene was [On]ela's queen.

The very tentative suggestion to be made on the basis of the above is that there may be some relationship between Ecgðeow, Wealhðeow, and Ongenðeow, between the Wylfings and the Swedes. Any further information on the Wylfings is hard to trace. The context in which the *Wulfings* are mentioned in *Widsið* associates them with northern tribes, both Danish and Swedish, so we are no closer to localization on the basis of this source.<sup>49</sup> Dr J. N. L. O'Loughlin surveyed the available material for the localization of the Wulfings (MHG *Wulfinge* and ON *Ylfingar*).<sup>50</sup> He cited three pieces of evidence which point to Östergötland as their place of origin: (1) *Beowulf* 459-72; (2) the inscription on the Rök stone — itself in Östergötland — which in his view 'refers to Theodric, lord of the Mærings, the equivalent of MHG Dietrich, whose faithful followers were the Wulfings'<sup>51</sup>; and finally (3) *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 4, which tells that Hjormundr, son of Hjorvarðr Ylfingr, was made king of Östergötland. The passage in *Beowulf* dealing with Ecgðeow does indeed imply, as Dr O'Loughlin states, 'that the Wylfings were neighbours of the Geats, and that they were separated from the Danes by the sea'.<sup>52</sup> But this vague location could just as well locate the Wylfings in

<sup>49</sup> *Widsið*, 28-31:

Sigehere lengest	Sæ-Denum weold,
Hnæf Hocingum,	Helm Wulfingum,
Wald Woingum,	Wod Þyringum,
Sæferð Sycgum,	Sweom Ongendþeow . . .

<sup>50</sup> 'Sutton Hoo — the evidence of the documents', *Medieval Archaeology* 8 (1964), 1-19.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

north-central Sweden. The Rök inscription may speak of *BiodrikR . . . skati Mæringa*, but a lord who ruled the Mærings (?) is not *ipso facto* a lord of the Geats, even though the inscription is carved on a stone in Östergötland. Finally, the evidence of *Sögubrot* is not to the point here.<sup>53</sup> We are not really any further on with the localization of the Wulfings.

The conclusions to be reached on the basis of a study of Beowulf's father are these. It would appear, at the very least, that he is not *directly* in the Geatish royal line. What little we know of his career encourages the belief that he was a wandering warrior of considerable reputation, who served among the Geats and Danes, and who had an unfortunate feud among the Wylfings. If Malone's arguments and hypotheses are accepted, he is a Wylfing.<sup>54</sup> There is a closeness between his name-type and that of Wealhðeow and Ongenðeow. Beowulf's relation with the Wægmundings' line may be through his father — and, as has been pointed out above, the Wægmundings may have very strong connections in Sweden.

### V *Beowulf and the Danes*

The relationship between Hroðgar and Beowulf is complex; on the first mention of Beowulf's name in Hroðgar's presence, the succession of challenges through which Beowulf and his men have passed is ended with Hroðgar's immediate recognition of the hero:

Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende;  
 wæs his eald-fæder Ecgþeo haten . . .  
is his eafora nu  
 heard her cumen, sohte holdne wine. (372-6)

<sup>53</sup> See below, p. 269. It may be noted that the best source of the text of *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* has the name *Hervarðr*, not *Hjörvarðr*, *Ylfingr*; cf. C. af Petersens and E. Olson, *Sögur Danakonunga* (1919-25), 13/22.

<sup>54</sup> So Malone supposes in *Studies*, 109 (cf. note 41 above).

I knew him as a boy; his revered father was called Ecgþeow . . . his valiant son has now come here, seeking a faithful lord.

This probably means that Beowulf accompanied his father when he fled to the Danish court after his feud with the Wylfings. It is plausible to suppose that Beowulf was very young during this visit, since Hreðel took over his fostering when he was seven (cf. 2428-33). After the cleansing of Heorot, Wealhðeow refers obliquely to a closer relationship between Hroðgar and Beowulf in a speech addressed to her lord:

beo wið Geatas glæd, geofena gemyndig,  
nean ond feorran þu nu hafast.  
Me man sægde, þæt þu ðe for sunu wolde  
hererinc habban . . . (1173-6)

The impression of adoption which this passage gives is further confirmed by the fact that Beowulf is seated among the *geoguð*, the untried warriors, next to Hreðric and Hroðmund (1188-91). Since Beowulf is obviously entitled to sit among the *duguð* by his many exploits, it might be concluded that he has been placed among the *geoguð* to show his closeness to the young Danish princes.

The further exchanges between Hroðgar and Beowulf show the closeness of their relationship, though they are not as explicit as the statement by Wealhðeow, and the place of Beowulf in the hall by Hreðric and Hroðmund.

Thus, it is clear that Beowulf had close associations with the three major tribes in the poem. His mother was a Geat, and his upbringing, for the most part, was provided by Hreðel, king of the Geats. He spent time at the Danish court as a child, and later went back to form a very strong personal bond between himself and Hroðgar, which resulted in a firm basis for friendly associations between Danes and Geats. Finally, through the Wæg-mundings, and perhaps directly through his father, he may be connected with the Swedish royal line. One further cross-connection is interesting, between Denmark and Sweden. We are told in the opening of the poem that

Healfdene's daughter married [On]ela.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Hroðgar's sister was Onela's queen — a further reason for Beowulf to wish to avoid killing Onela. The close relations between all the major houses is best indicated in a genealogical chart, most of which is based on explicit statement in the poem. See Figure 1.

## VI *The accounts of Geatish-Swedish conflicts in Beowulf*

Aside from a mention of Onela as husband to a Danish princess,<sup>56</sup> and a descriptive epithet for Hygelac, *bonan Ongenðeowes* in 1968, the Swedes play no part in the poem until the attack on Heardred by Onela in 2379-2400, as has been discussed above. They are again mentioned in Beowulf's speech of reminiscence before his fight with the dragon (2472-89). He tells us that there were raids on the Geats after Hreðel's death; they attacked in a terrible way, not wishing peace, and did a good deal of damage to the Geats in the battle of *Hreosnabeorh*. Though Hæðcyn fell, Hygelac gained revenge in the slaying of Ongenðeow. This account of the battle is very brief, some 18 lines only. It is immediately followed by Beowulf's assertion of his own usefulness to Hygelac, set in terms which are surprising to those who believe in the implacability of the Swedish-Geatish conflict:

Ic him þa maðmas, þe he me sealde,  
geald æt guðe, swa me gifeðe wæs,  
leohtan sweorde; he me lond forgeaf,  
eard eðelwynn. Næs him ænig þearf,  
þæt he to Gifðum oððe to Gar-Denum  
oððe in Swiorice secan þurfe  
wyrsan wigfreca weorðe gecypan . . . (2490-96)

As it was granted me, I repaid in battle the treasures which he [Hygelac] had given me, by means of my gleaming sword. He

<sup>55</sup> 59-63. See further Malone, 'The Daughter of Healfdene', *Studies*, 124-41 (cf. note 41).

<sup>56</sup> 62-3; cf. pp. 249, 251-2 above.

# BEOWULF AND HIS 'DESCENTS' — (*ÆDELU*)

Swedish tree

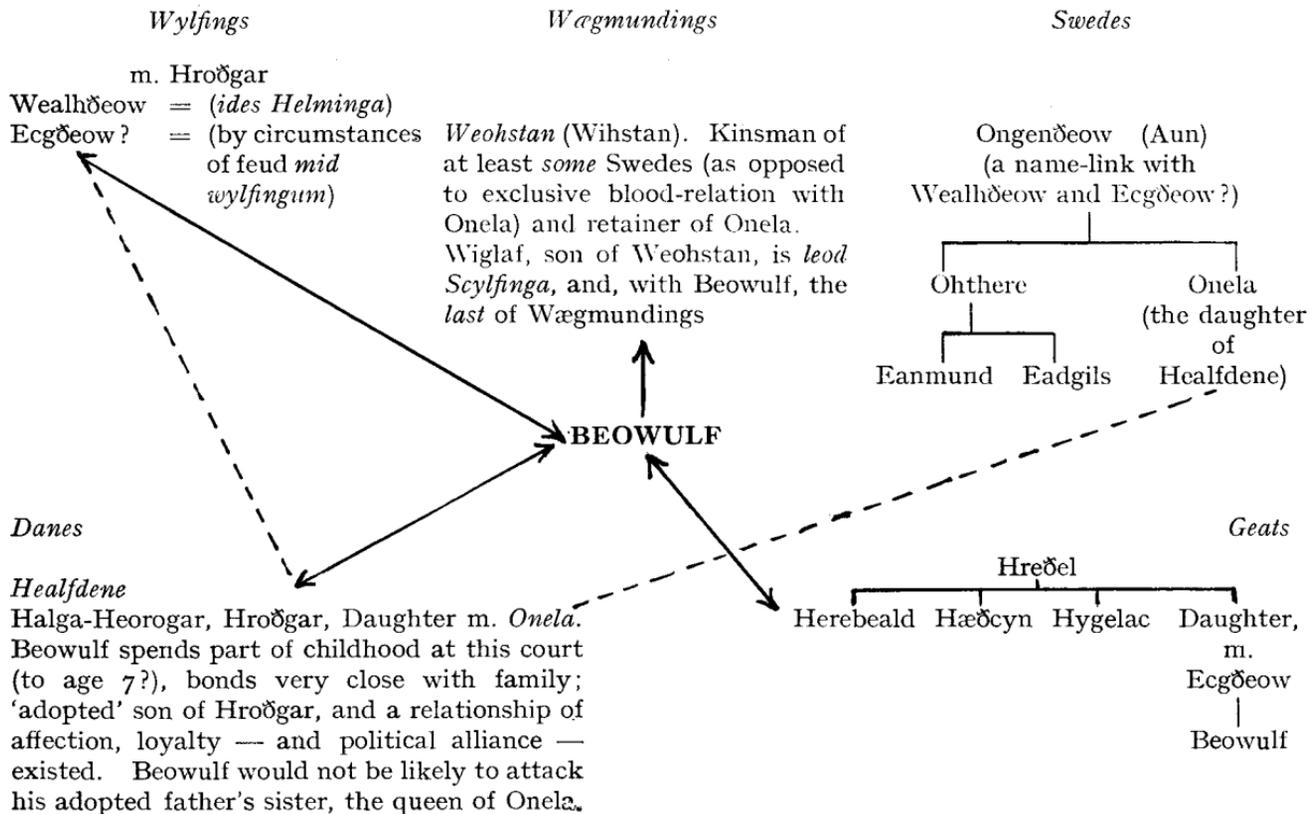


Fig. 1.

gave me land, a place to dwell, noble bliss. He had no need to seek out a less good warrior from among the Gepidae, the spear-Danes, or from among the kingdom of the Swedes, buying him with treasure . . . .

It seems clear that despite the conflicts with the Swedes, normal contacts could be made, and a member of that tribe could have been accepted into the Geats without difficulty. The next topic in the reminiscence is the Frisian battle in which Hygelac fell (2490-2509). There is a parallel in the two brief accounts. The keynote appears to be revenge. Hygelac avenged Hæðcyn by slaying Ongenðeow; Beowulf avenged Hygelac, repaid him for past favours, by killing Dæghrefn, the Frankish champion. Beowulf says nothing further about Swedish-Geatish conflicts before he dies; what is more important, his last speech is decidedly not full of dreadful omens; he has died protecting his people, who will (he thinks) gain from the treasure. He leaves his personal treasure to Wiglaf, who is the strongest figure in the kingdom after himself (2794-2818).

It is in the speech of the Messenger (2900 ff.) that we hear of further conflicts between the two tribes. He expects times of difficulty for the Geats, attacks from the Franks and Frisians, now that Beowulf is dead (2900-2921). Peace and good faith from the Swedes were also not to be expected. The whole past history of the conflict is reviewed. Beowulf has mentioned the attacks of the Swedes on the death of Hreðel (2472-83); the Messenger gives an account of the subsequent attack of the Geats on the Swedes (2922-98). The Geats had taken off Ongenðeow's queen, and a great deal of treasure; Ongenðeow attacks the party, kills Hæðcyn, and the rest of his band, lordless, escape to Hrefnesholt, where they are taunted with threats of execution during the night that follows. Hygelac, with another party, attacks at dawn, and drives off Ongenðeow and his men; Ongenðeow is killed by Wulf and Eofor, retainers of Hygelac. The account of Ongen-

ðeow's final battle is very lengthy, and is full of details which bear witness to his great valour (2964b-88).

This account of constant attack and counter-attack must be seen in its proper perspective. Are these full-scale battles, or plundering raids? The distinction I make is a real one. Is it probable that the entire nation was committed in any given battle, or is it more likely that affairs of war took place on a smaller scale? There is much evidence to show that the latter is far more probable. First, since the gaining of booty through battle was in a sense the business of a Germanic king, it seems hardly likely that each and every battle would have been fought with the resources of the country totally committed. As Girvan stated long ago, 'In early times, and especially in northern Europe, the body [of warriors] cannot have been really large.'<sup>57</sup> Beowulf set out to rid a nation of monsters with a retinue of fourteen. *Beowulf* is full of accounts of sudden outbreaks of hostility and skirmishes. Scyld is a good king, not only because he established a great kingdom, but because the tribute he exacted from surrounding tribes enabled him to keep a court of great splendour;<sup>58</sup> Hygelac dies while plundering the Frisians; the Danes and Frisians cannot keep peace, even when the reasons for a Danish visit appear to be friendly;<sup>59</sup> the Heoðobards are bound to strike against the Danes, even though Hroðgar had attempted to mend the feud by giving his daughter to Ingeld, their ruler.<sup>60</sup> More to the immediate point is the seldom-stressed mention by Hroðgar of discord between Geat and Dane, which had not been settled so very long since when Beowulf arrived to slay the monster:

<sup>57</sup> R. Girvan, *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1935), 45-6. As Peter Hunter Blair recently reminded us (*The World of Bede*, 1970, 32), Ine's laws define a group of up to seven men as thieves, one of seven to thirty-five as a band, and over thirty-five as an army (*here*).

<sup>58</sup> 8-10.

<sup>59</sup> See 1063-1159.

<sup>60</sup> 2020-70.

Me þin modsefa

licað leng swa wel, leofa Beowulf.  
 Hafast þu gefered, þæt þam folcum sceal,  
 Geata leodum ond Gar-Denum  
 sib gemæne, ond sacu restan,  
 inwitniþas, þe hie ær drugon,  
 wesan, þenden ic wealde widan rices  
 maþmas gemæne, manig oþerne  
 godum gegrettan ofer ganotes bæð;  
 sceal hringnaca ofer heafu bringan  
 lac ond luftacen. (1853-63)

Dear Beowulf, your spirit pleases me more and more as time goes on. You have brought about a peace between two nations, Spear-Danes and Geats; wars will end, the terrible enmities which they have endured in the past; while I rule this great kingdom, there will be an interchange of gifts, and many a man will greet another with good things across the expanse of the sea, the gannet's bathing-place; the ringed ship will bring gifts and tokens of regard over the seas.

It is Beowulf's act that establishes the peace for as long as Hroðgar lives, and thus ends trouble with his country's neighbours to the south. It is thus in a context of almost continual raid and counter-raid between all sorts of people that the Geatish-Swedish conflicts must be seen: they are nothing unusual. New alliances could be established, or peace or treaty broken, very quickly.

### VII *The calamity of Beowulf's death*

There is much about the speeches at the end of the poem to suggest that they are mood-pieces rather than reasoned accounts of what is to come. The loss of Beowulf is a calamity — this is the central message. The mention of Franks and Frisians in the Messenger's speech (2910-13) hearkens back to ancient times; Beowulf had ruled for a long time, and Heardred was on the throne before him. From a purely realistic point of view, if the Franks and Frisians had wanted revenge, they could have

had it on several earlier occasions — after they had killed Hygelac, or while Heardred, that weak ruler, was on the throne. The conflicts with the Swedes of which the Messenger speaks were only a second stage; in the third, Beowulf became involved when he supported Eadgils against Onela. The mood *may* be right, for if Onela's proper line had reasserted itself, Beowulf's act in killing Onela, the rightful king of Sweden, would be seen as another attack of the Geats on the Swedes and a treacherous interference with the properly established succession, as the *Beowulf* poet viewed it. The important point here is that Beowulf himself, though he reviewed his life and actions before he died, and regretted his lack of children to succeed him, saw no terrible calamity in store for his people. It is only in the speech of the Messenger (2999-3007) that such fears are mentioned. The Geatish woman's lament, briefly reported (3150-55), is almost certainly ritual lamentation,<sup>61</sup> though it has its basis in the hard facts of primitive tribal warfare, and the fall of a king did often bring attack from outside.

#### VIII *The end of the Geats as reported in 'historical' sources*

But though fears of further hostility may well have been justified in the dramatic context of a great hero's death, it is in vain that we search for conclusive evidence in any 'historical' source for the end of the *Gautar* about A.D. 550. Many modern Scandinavian historians who have written on the Geatish-Swedish question have held that the extension of Swedish domination over Götaland took place at a much later date, and that the *Gautar* had

<sup>61</sup> Professor Tauno Mustanoja develops a case for ritual lamentation at the funerals of Germanic heroes in his 'Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68 (1967), 1-27. He concludes of this lament: '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).

a semi-independent existence until a considerably later time. Dr Sisam has recently drawn attention to a number of considerations which indicate that the Geats survived for a very long time after 550.<sup>62</sup> He cited the title of the present Swedish king as *Sveriges, Götes, och Vendes Konung*, and an Icelandic tradition in which the Geats are treated as a distinct people.<sup>63</sup> Harald Fairhair (c. 900) is said to have fought many battles against them, and to have won part of their territory. Finally, Dr Sisam tells us that Ailnoth, a Canterbury monk, in his life of St Knud of Denmark (d. 1086) spoke of five peoples in Scandinavia — Danes, Swedes, Geats, Norwegians and Icelanders.

Since some British scholars have recently maintained that the fall of the Geats could well have taken place c. 550, it seems necessary to review the evidence for their continued survival. Professor Gwyn Jones considers Tacitus's testimony shows that about A.D. 100 the Swedes were 'more powerful and better organised in their Uppland province than any of the tribes that surrounded them'.<sup>64</sup> He holds further that the date at which they gained supremacy over their southern neighbours, the Geats, is 'bewilderingly uncertain', and may have taken place as early as *post* 550 or as late as c. 1000.<sup>65</sup> Dr O'Loughlin has recently stated as a strong probability that 'barbarian Swedes' overthrew the Geatish kingdom 'a decade or two before the middle of the sixth century'.<sup>66</sup> The first point to make in a revaluation of the evidence is that Tacitus's account of the states (*civitates*) of the *Sweones* is not clear evidence for the supremacy of the *Svear* over their southern neighbours, Geats, or anyone

<sup>62</sup> K. Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (1965), esp. 51-9. I wish here to acknowledge my debt to Dr Sisam; the implications raised by this chapter of his are the basis of the present article.

<sup>63</sup> See Lee M. Hollander 'The Gautland Cycle of Sagas', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 11 (1912), 61-81, 209-17.

<sup>64</sup> *A History of the Vikings* (1968), 34.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See note 50 above. Dr O'Loughlin's arguments will be discussed below.

else. Tacitus speaks of the tribe as good sailors with powerful fleets, a respect for wealth, and a universally accepted king.<sup>67</sup> But other classical informants, Ptolemy and Procopius, writing closer to our time, do not attribute such importance to the *Svear*. Ptolemy, composing a world map some half a century after Tacitus, lists seven tribes as inhabiting the island *Skandia*, one of which is the *Goutai*, another the *Souionai*, Geats and Swedes, certainly. His placement of the tribe accords with later accounts, see Figure 2.<sup>68</sup> Procopius's account is of particular

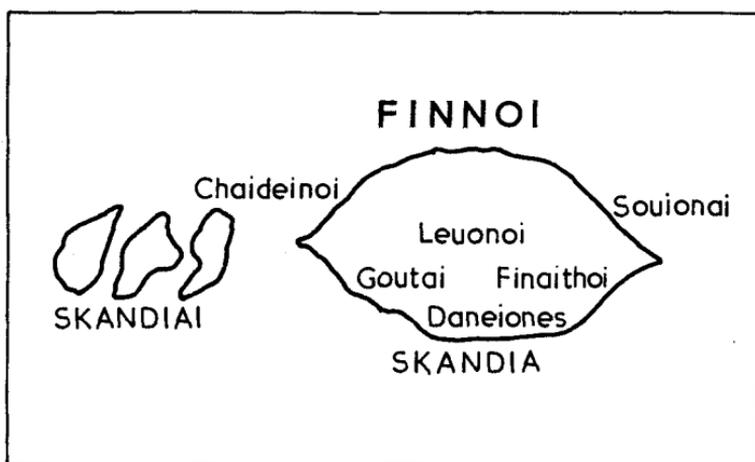


Fig. 2. Ptolemy's map of Scandinavia.

importance, since his informants were reputed to be natives of the island.<sup>69</sup> Writing *c.* 550, he tells us in his

<sup>67</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* (trans. by Maurice Hutton, 1914), 326-7. Much has been made of Tacitus's term, *civitates Suionium*, with *civitates* equated with the other peoples of Sweden. A more likely interpretation has been given by Professor Musset: '...les *civitates* citées par Tacite chez les *Suiones* correspondent sans doute aux cantons autonomes (*hundari*...) qui se fédérèrent au nombre de 4, 10, et 8 (Fjädrundaland, à l'ouest; Tiundaland, au centre; Attundaland, à l'est, sur la côte) en trois régions dont l'union, au moyen âge, formera l'Uppland' (*Les Peuples Scandinaves au Moyen Age*, 1961, 23). This interpretation is supported by Jerker Rosén in his entry 'Rikssamling — Sverige', in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon för nordisk middelalder XIV* (1969), 268-71.

<sup>68</sup> See G. Schütte, 'A Ptolemaic Riddle Solved', *Classica et Medievalia* 13 (1952), 236-84. After a study of name-forms, Schütte concluded that the *Goutai* are the ON *Gautar*.

<sup>69</sup> *History of the Wars* (ed. and trans. by H. B. Dewing, 1914-40), Vol. 6, *The Gothic war continued*, 415-21.

history of the Gothic wars that the island of *Thule* (which can only be equated with Scandinavia) had thirteen very numerous nations, one of which was the *Gautoi*, who were especially powerful. When the Eruli were defeated by the Lombards, they went off and settled close to this tribe, who can readily be identified with the *Gautar*. Finally, Jordanes, in his *History of the Goths*, tells us of a large number of tribes, including *Svehans* and *Svertidi* (= *Svear*), *Gauthi-gothae* and *Ostrogothae*, probably the inhabitants of Väster- and Östergötland.<sup>70</sup>

On the basis of the above survey, it is my interpretation that the account given by Tacitus of the *Sweones* has been over-valued, since the *Gautar*, or *Gautoi*, seem to be at least equally prominent in such early sources as we have available to us.<sup>71</sup>

It is significant that the mid-Swedish lowland, with its great lakes Vänern, Vättern, Hjälmaren and Mälaren, is about equally divided between the Geats and Swedes. Professor Stenberger describes this area as the 'heartland of Sweden', for it offered both fertile clay plains and comparative ease of communication by water<sup>72</sup> (see Figure 3). In the early Iron Age (c. 400 B.C. - A.D. 50) impressive cemeteries are known from Öster- and Västergötland, Öland and Gotland, and also from Uppland and Värmland. For some reason, there is little evidence of settlement in south central Sweden. Gotland and Öland have a distinctive and somewhat favoured

<sup>70</sup> See J. Svennung, *Jordanes und Scandia: kritisch-exegetische Studien* (Skrifter utgivna av K. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala, 44: 2A, 1967).

<sup>71</sup> Sir Thomas Kendrick concluded his survey of the early sources for Scandinavian history on an even more pro-Geatish note: 'It can be inferred that by the time of the sixth century the kingdoms of Götaland, particularly that of the Västgötar, had risen to such strength and power that they seriously challenged, if indeed they had not overthrown, the supremacy of the Swedes' (*History of the Vikings*, 1930, 76).

<sup>72</sup> M. Stenberger, *Sweden* (1962), 17. It is most probable that sixth-century settlements would have been largely confined to these 'heartland' plains, with numerous lakes for transport. It is also probable that conflict would have arisen there, between the Geats on the west and the Swedes to the east. The dense woodlands south of this area inhibited settlement and development until a much later period.

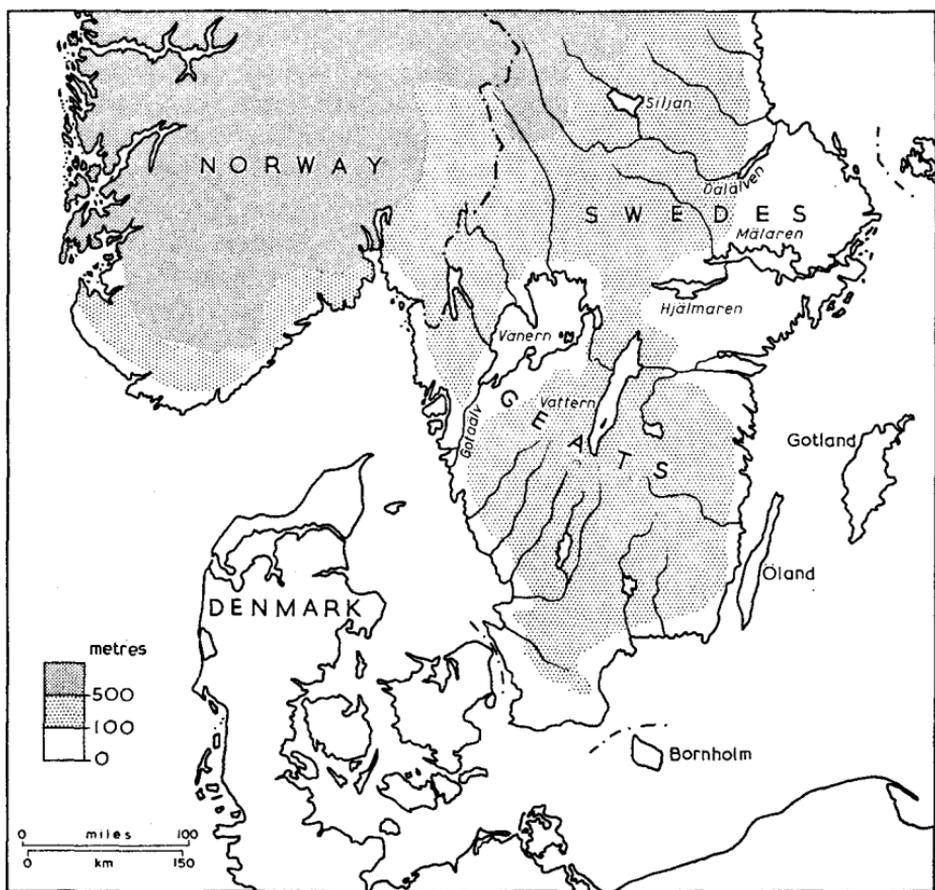


Fig. 3. South Scandinavia.

place in Swedish archaeology, because of their placement on major trade routes, and also their agricultural richness. One must concentrate on the heartland region of Sweden in order to trace the development of the Geats and Swedes.

If one accepts modern Västergötland, Östergötland, Dalsland (and perhaps Bohuslän) as roughly equivalent to the former kingdom of the *Gautar*, and Uppland, Södermanland, Västmanland and Närke as the primal territory of the Swedes, an impression of equal prosperity in the period from about 50 B.C. to about A.D. 550 cannot be avoided.<sup>73</sup> (See Figure 4.) In the Roman Iron Age (c. 50 B.C. - A.D. 400) Roman imports are found in approximately equal numbers in Geatish and Swedish territory (cf. Figure 5). Most of these imports date from the third and fourth centuries, and trade apparently grew more important later in the period.

This picture does not change significantly in the later Iron Age (c. A.D. 400-550), the time of the great migrations and the immediate pre-history of the events spoken about in *Beowulf*. This period has been called the Golden Age of Scandinavia, because of the plentiful supply of gold which was available from southern sources. The greatest hoard of gold laid down in this period was found near Tureholm in Södermanland in the territory of the Swedes. But the second largest, some seven kilos of gold bullion, came from Timboholm near Skövde in Västergötland, as did some of the most splendid gold collars in the Scandinavian heritage, those from Älleberg and Möne (see Frontispiece).

<sup>73</sup> The extension of Geatish control before the Viking Age is very hard to establish. The territory I list as theirs is a conservative estimate. Gwyn Jones (*op. cit.*, 43) describes the *locale* of the Geats as follows: 'Gautish origins are to be sought in Västergötland, but they were a strong people and spread steadily into Östergötland, Dalsland, Närke, Värmland and part of Småland.' Unfortunately, he does not cite reasons for this delimitation of Geatish territory. S. Tunberg, in *Götarnas Rike* (Västergötland A:4, Bidrag till landskapets kulturhistoria och naturbeskrivning, 1940), gave a much wider extension of Geatish territory. He held that in its time of greatest prosperity, this Geatish kingdom included all of Småland and Öland, Bohuslän, Dalsland and Värmland, in addition to the original Väster- and Östergötland. Steuberger says of the early Iron Age: 'Impressive cemeteries are known from many areas, particularly the central Swedish provinces of Öster- and Västergötland, Öland and Gotland, but also Uppland and Värmland' (*Sweden*, 1962, 119).

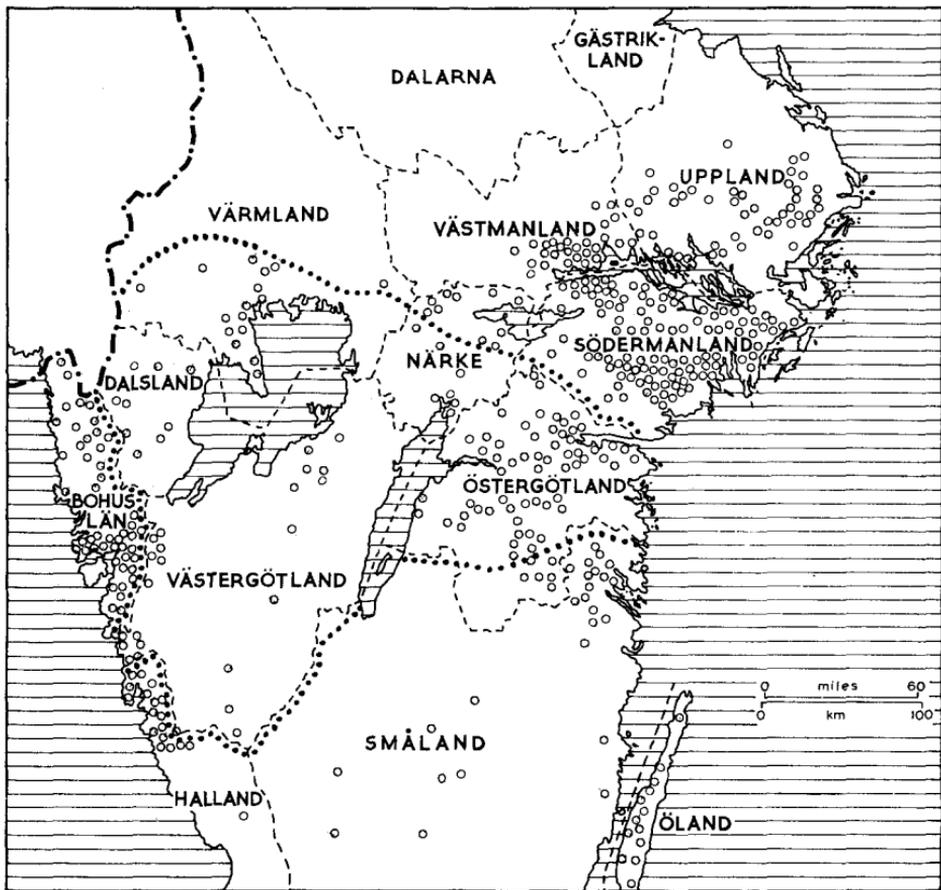


Fig. 4. Iron Age hill forts c. A.D. 450-550.  
 (Probable Geatish territory enclosed by . . . .)

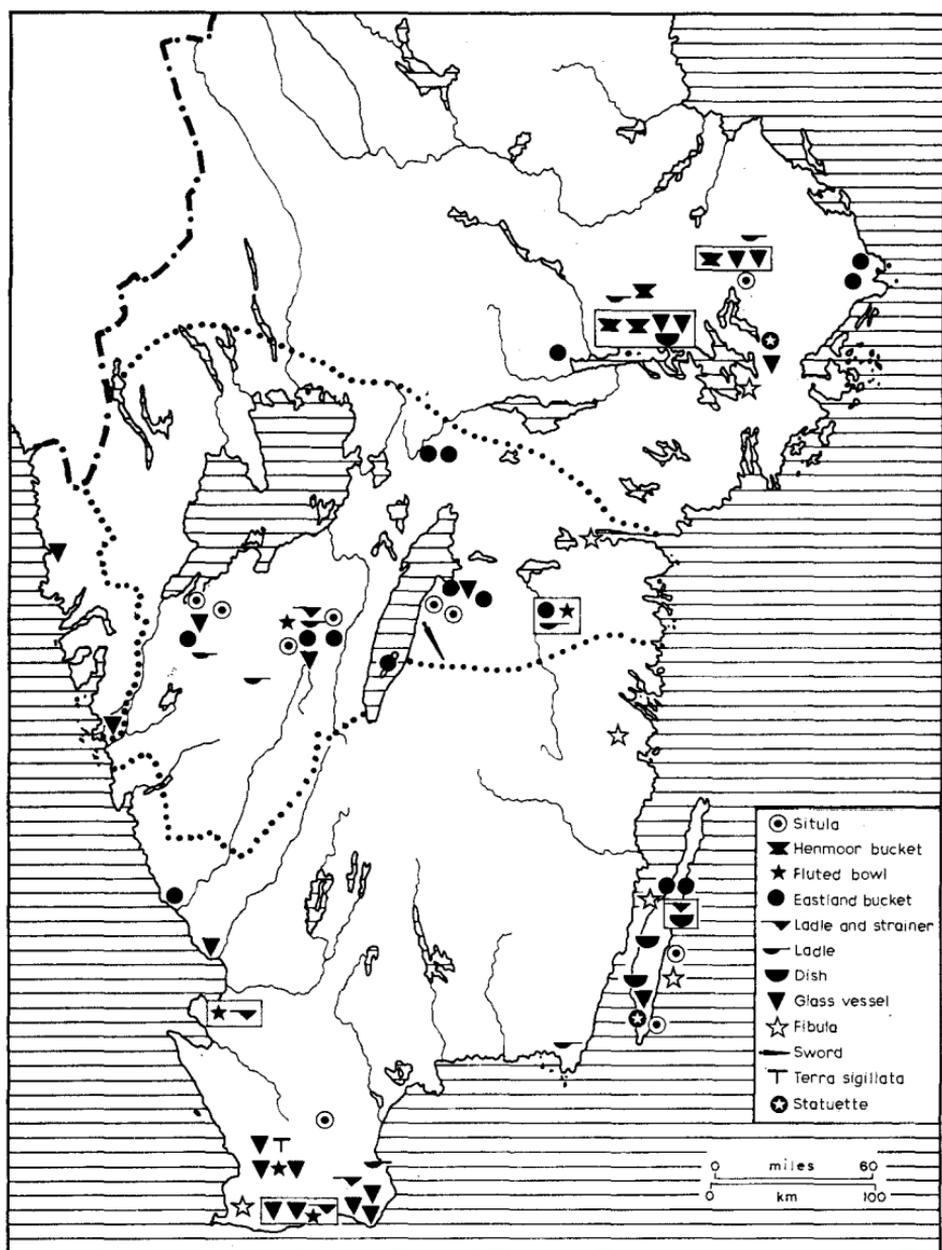


Fig. 5. Roman imports.  
 (Probable Geatish territory enclosed by . . . .)

About the year 500, the region around Mälaren, centred on Uppland, gains a special prominence, for it is there that we find a series of massive burial mounds, at Old Uppsala, at Husby near Vendel, and elsewhere.<sup>74</sup> But does this Uppland prosperity mean that we have no evidence of a continuing culture in the Geatish areas? The answer most surely must be no. Once again, finds of treasure in the period from c. 400-550 show an east-west distribution across central Sweden, with southern, coastal outliers (Figure 6).

Whatever one makes of Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* and the lines it incorporates from *Ynglingatal*, the tradition reflected there shows clearly that the Geats were very much a power until many generations after the middle of the sixth century, when their line was supposed to have been stamped out.<sup>75</sup> The saga meshes with *Beowulf* in some of the kings it names: in the Old English poem the succession is *Ongentheow, Onela, Ohthere, Eadgils*. *Ynglinga saga* (and apparently *Ynglingatal*) list Aun, Egill, Óttarr and Aðils in the corresponding places; the relations between these lines are discussed in the Appendix. But what is to the point here is the insecurity of the kings of the *Svear*, their relations with the *Gautar*, and the survival of a 'Gautic' kingdom.

When Aun, that peaceful king, was threatened by Hálfðan of Denmark, he ran for sanctuary to West Gautland. When Áli drove him out of his kingdom a second time, he sought refuge in the same place. He was no fighter. His son Egill also had a reputation for peace, and was kept from his kingdom for a good while by his thrall Tunni. Óttarr, according to Snorri's account, was

<sup>74</sup> On the problematical relation of these mounds to *Beowulf*, see the Appendix.

<sup>75</sup> Snorri himself was very much aware that what he wrote was tradition, not history; see the Appendix. The account I give in the following paragraphs is from chapters 25-39 of *Ynglinga saga*. The translation quoted is from *Heimskringla*, ed. by Erling Monsen and transl. with the assistance of A. H. Smith (1932), 25.

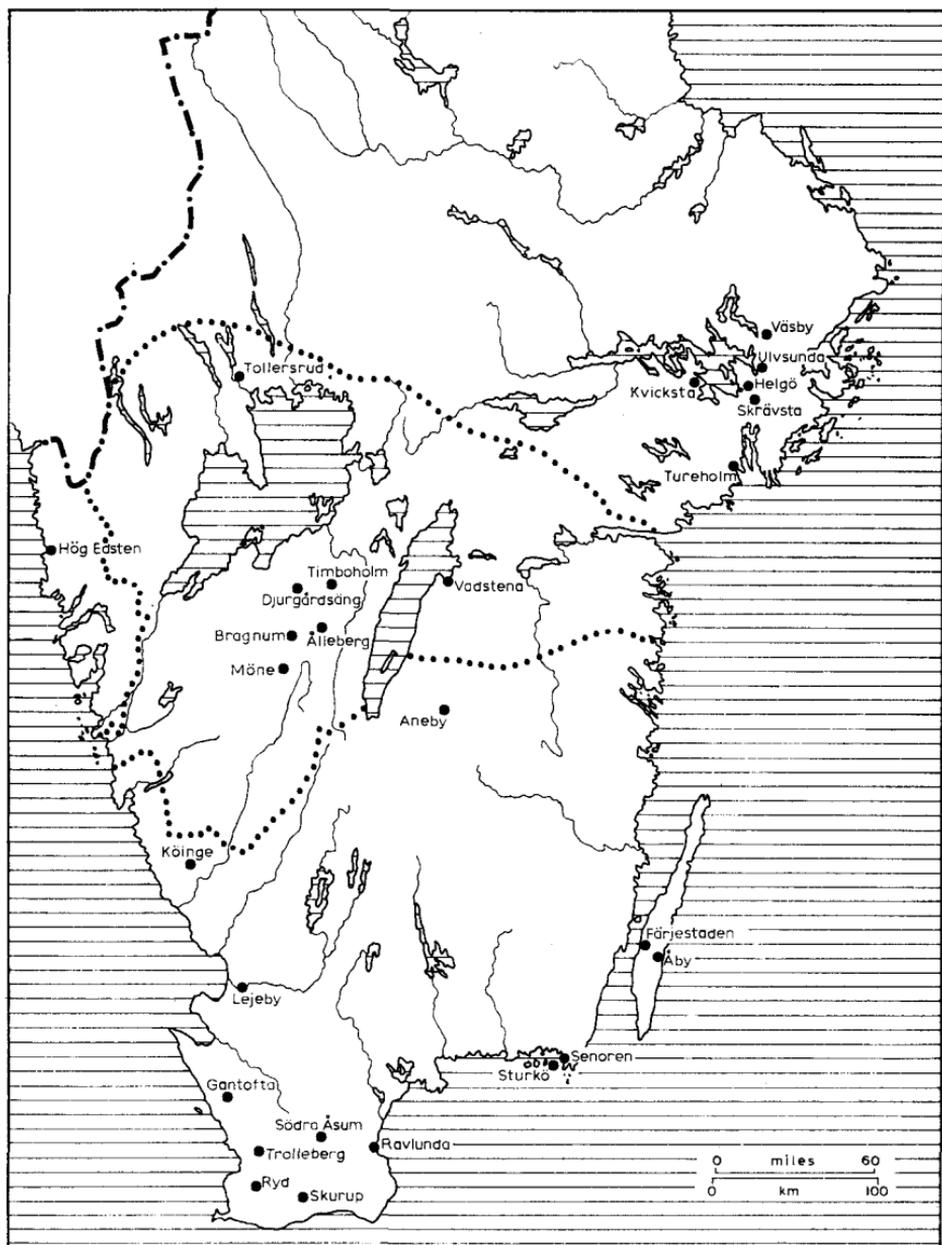


Fig. 6. Treasure burials c. A.D. 400-550.  
 (Probable Geatish territory enclosed by . . . .)

also not good in battle, for he was defeated by the Danes and made sport of after he fell; Aðils, Egill's son, fled from Helgi, king of Denmark. In the reign of Eysteinn, the next in the line, Danish, Norse and 'sea kings' made many raids on the kingdom of the *Svear*; Eysteinn's fate was to be burned alive by such a raider, Sölvi. The reigns of the next two kings were more successful, for Yngvarr and Qnundr both built up the kingdom, and made peace with the Danes. Ingjaldr, Qnundr's son, married a Gautish princess. The relations between the kingdom of the *Svear* (eastern Sweden) and the Gautish kingdom is made clear by implication in this account from *Ynglinga saga* in the Monsen-Smith translation:

When [Ingjaldr] was grown up, Anund wooed for him Gauthild, the daughter of King Algaut, the son of Gautrek the Generous, the son of Gaut, from whom Gautland took its name. King Algaut seemed to think that his daughter would wed well if she wed the son of King Anund and if he were like his father. The maid was sent to Sweden (East Sweden) and Ingjaldr held a bridal feast with her.

Ingjaldr's most splendid deed was to burn up six kings in the celebration of his coming to kingship, including King Algautr of West Gautland; he took their dominions under his control, and took tribute from them. This legend perhaps reflects the growing power of the *Svear*; but Ingjaldr was fifth in line after Aðils, and Aðils is the last of the kings of the *Svear* who can be paralleled in *Beowulf* in the figure of Eadgils. Furthermore, though kingdoms were *subject* to him, they were not destroyed. Among Ingjaldr's other difficulties, Hogni and Hildir would often ride up into the Swedish kingdom from their dominions in East Gautland, and slay his men. Thus, the general drift of the traditions preserved in the *Ynglinga saga* will not support an early suppression, much less a destruction, of the kingdom of the *Gautar*.

The evidence presented by Curt Weibull on the question

of Geatish survival is formidable.<sup>76</sup> Briefly summarized, his major points are as follows. The earliest record of Sweden as a political unit comes in the middle of the eleventh century, in a document which records the oldest drawing up of a boundary between Sweden and Denmark.<sup>77</sup> Documents of the late ninth century often quoted to support the concept of a unified Sweden, Rimbert's *Vita Sancti Anskarii* and Wulfstan's northern voyages as reported by Alfred, deal only with the eastern and coastal regions, and tell us nothing about what is going on in the west of Sweden.<sup>78</sup> Such documents as do deal with the west, the accounts of the wars of Norwegian rulers from the time of Harald Fairhair onwards, have their heroes engaged in combat with the *Gautar*, Weibull stresses, right up to the end of the tenth century.<sup>79</sup> Weibull's further assumptions are, first that the *Gautar* did not have the same seafaring traditions as the Swedes, and thus were not as prominent, and second, that the major impetus of the Swedish expansion *c.* 800-1000 was to the east, and it was only after the year 1000 that they

<sup>76</sup> 'Om det svenska och det danska rikets uppkomst', *Historisk Tidskrift för Skåneland* 7 (1917-21), 301-60. Weibull believed that the *Geatas* of *Beowulf* were the Jutes, and cites *Ynglingatal* to indicate that there were many military contacts between Denmark and Sweden in the early period (319-20). One of the major reasons he cites for this belief is Adam of Bremen's accounts of the time it took to travel from Västergötland to Uppland and from Västergötland to Jylland (Denmark) respectively. Towards the end of the eleventh century Västergötland-Uppland would take over three weeks by land, but a sea journey from Jutland to Uppland would take no more than a week (316). But is this argument really significant when *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga* tell us of conflicts between *Gautar* and *Stear* as well, and secondly, when one considers the ease of travel on the large inland lakes in central Sweden? Thirdly, it seems natural to assume that conflicts would most naturally occur in border-country, and any statistics on travel-time are not to the point. Thus, I re-affirm the identity *Gautar-Geatas* stated earlier in this paper.

<sup>77</sup> As quoted by Weibull, *op. cit.*, 348. See also his 'Den äldsta gränsläggningen mellan Sverige och Danmark', *Historisk Tidskrift för Skåneland* 7 (1917-21), 1-18. It is well known that the laws of Västergötland were distinctive; the main manuscript of the older laws is dated to the 1280s, that of the younger Västgötalag to *c.* 1350. See Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, *Svenska landskapslagar V* (1936), xi-xxxvii.

<sup>78</sup> Weibull, *op. cit.*, 349-50.

<sup>79</sup> To quote from Weibull, *op. cit.*, 351: 'During the time up to the end of the tenth century all battles fought by Norwegian kings against Sweden which are recorded in the Norwegian-Icelandic scaldic poetry deal exclusively with Geats. Thorbjørn Hornklofi calls Harald Fairhair enemy of the Geats... Guthormr sindri says of Hákon the Good that he "made the Geats liable to taxation". According to Glúmr Geirason Haraldr gráfeldr reddened his sword in the blood of the Geats. Einarr Skálaglamm reports that Hákon Jarl wished to destroy the lines of the Geats.'

began to turn their attention primarily to the west, towards Norway and England.<sup>80</sup>

### IX Evidence for the end of the Geats c. A.D. 550

What evidence is cited by those who hold for an earlier date for the collapse of the Geats? Dr O'Loughlin cites *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkonungum* which relates that Hjormundr, son of Hervarðr Ylfingr, was king of Östergötland.<sup>81</sup> But this text probably represents a corrupt tradition,<sup>82</sup> and is contradicted by a wide range of Norse sources cited above, which give overwhelming support to the continued existence of the Geats. Dr O'Loughlin's other reasons are no more convincing; he holds that the silence of *Beowulf* about events in Scandinavia after A.D. 530, and the end of the import of Scandinavian wares in England about that time set a limiting date of c. 550.<sup>83</sup> If we accept a chronology for the poem based on the date of Hygelac's raid on the Frisian coast as reported by

<sup>80</sup> Weibull cites the speech by Thorgrý the Lawman to Óláfr Skötkonung at the Uppsala Thing; the point of it is that the people were not in favour of attacking Norway, while they would happily follow in an attempt to regain eastern (Baltic) lands (cf. *Heimskringla*, ed. and transl. cited, 286). He also cites King Óláfr's aid to Eiríkr Jarl of Norway, and subsequent Swedish-Norwegian alliances (*loc. cit.*, 354-6). This view is further supported by Sven B. F. Jansson in his study *Swedish Vikings in England — The Evidence of the Rune Stones* (Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture, 1965). Scanning the several hundred stones which deal with Viking expeditions and foreign trade, he concludes: 'Not only during the ninth but also during the tenth century Sweden's external interests were directed eastward... all the runic inscriptions that mention Swedish voyages to England belong to the last phase of the Viking age, that is to say, principally to the period between 1000 and 1050. No such inscriptions have yet been found prior to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century. In this connection it is interesting that the great majority of the Anglo-Saxon silver coins that have been dug out of Swedish soil belong to the same time; most of them were struck between 990 and 1050' (4-5).

<sup>81</sup> 'Sutton Hoo — the Evidence of the Documents', *Medieval Archaeology* 8 (1964), 3. Cf. note 53 above.

<sup>82</sup> See Bjarni Guðnason, *Um Skjöldungasögu* (1963), 313 (English summary): 'Sögubrot is without doubt a contaminated text, having in all probability undergone expansion of subject-matter and stylistic dilution and bears clear signs of interference.'

<sup>83</sup> *op. cit.*, 16.

Gregory of Tours,<sup>84</sup> the hero of the poem dies after the middle of the sixth century, and we can hardly expect the poet to write further on Scandinavian history. Secondly, the life of legend is not to be equated with the import of goods; people wrote about Eormanic or Theodoric without themselves having contact with the Gothic kingdom, and the Scandinavian traditions reflected in *Beowulf* may well have had currency long after a first period of active contact had ceased.

Professor Gwyn Jones, with considerable caution, cites the Sparlösa stone and Alfred's account of Wulfstan's voyages as evidence to support a claim that the Geatish fall took place *c.* 800.<sup>85</sup> The limitations of the Wulfstan account have been noted above,<sup>86</sup> and the most recent interpretation of the Sparlösa stone differs from the one which reads in it a statement that Alrikr, son of King Eirikr of Uppsala, ruled over Västergötland about the year 800.<sup>87</sup> Thus the claims for the fall of the Geats about 550 do not have solid support. A realistic view, based on such scant evidence as we have, is that the *Gautar* were gradually dominated by the *Svear*, and that they were gradually subsumed into the larger kingdom of Sweden, while maintaining their cultural identity in many respects. This process was not completed until well after A.D. 1000. There is no evidence for a destruction of the *Gautar* as a people at any time. This account does not contradict what is said in *Beowulf* about the relations between the

<sup>84</sup> For the text of Gregory's account and other historical sources, see Chambers-Wrenn, 2-4.

<sup>85</sup> *A History of the Vikings* (1968), 79.

<sup>86</sup> p. 268.

<sup>87</sup> Sven B. F. Jansson (*The Runes of Sweden*, 1962, 15) holds that the inscription is 'only understood in part'. Niels Åge Nielsen, in the latest published account of this difficult inscription, 'Freyr, Ullr and the Sparlösa Stone', *Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (1969), 102-28, gives no reading of any word which resembles Västergötland. Erik and Alrik are mentioned in one part of the inscription; Öjuls appears to be Erik's son, and Alrik comes in as well. Uppsala is mentioned. But connecting these names into a consecutive account in which we can be sure of relations seems quite impossible. Elizabeth Svärdström considers that the widely variant current interpretations of this sadly defaced monument make a definitive interpretation impossible. See her *Västergötlands runinskrifter* (Sveriges runinskrifter 5, 1958), 195-229.

two powers. They engage in a series of battles, with victories on either side. Quite naturally, once they have lost a strong ruler, the Geats fear incursions from without — but there is no mention of tribal destruction in *Beowulf*, and none in history.

### X *Beowulf and Sutton Hoo*

In interpreting the many problems of Geatish and Swedish relations in *Beowulf*, one might expect aid from the splendid treasure-trove at Sutton Hoo. Indeed, in his supplementary chapter to Ritchie Girvan's *Beowulf and the Seventh Century*, Dr Bruce-Mitford speaks of 'the clue that the ship-burial as a whole may provide to the poem's place of composition and to the transmission of its Scandinavian themes to the Anglo-Saxon *milieu* — two of the major problems to do with the poem still unsolved'.<sup>88</sup>

Both in this publication<sup>89</sup> and in the British Museum *Handbook* of 1968, Dr Bruce-Mitford states that there is a direct connection between Swedish Uppland and Sutton Hoo. His statement in the *Handbook* is intended for a general audience, but the major points are presented:

The most plausible explanation of the hard fact of the Swedish connection seen at Sutton Hoo is that it is dynastic. The evident antiquity of some of the Swedish pieces at Sutton Hoo, especially the shield, suggests that the connection goes back into a period earlier than the burial. The most likely explanation seems to be that the dynasty of the Wulfingas was Swedish in its origin, and that probably Wehha, said to be the first of the family to rule over the Angles in Britain, was a Swede.

However, the names in the genealogy of the *Wulfingas* do not seem to have had any parallels or analogues amongst those of the royal house of the *Svear*, the people whose territory lay

<sup>88</sup> Rupert Bruce-Mitford, 'Sutton Hoo', added to *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1971), 96.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, *passim*. (Since Dr Bruce-Mitford distinguishes between Geats and Swedes on the last page of this chapter, I assume that 'Swedish' earlier in the piece = *Svear*.)

to the north of the Mälars lake, and some of whose kings are buried at Old Uppsala. The names of the East Anglian royal genealogy, on the contrary, seem to find their affinities amongst those of the royal house of the Geats, the traditional enemies of the Swedes, who occupied the areas of central Sweden, south of lakes Vännen and Vätten [*sic*], in the territories now known as Västergötland and Östergötland. Beowulf, we may recall, was a Geat. The picture at the Scandinavian end is thus not wholly clear, and may at any time be modified by fresh archaeological discoveries. The specific, direct, east-Scandinavian link with the Vendel culture of Sweden, however, transcending the parallels and similarities common to many parts of western Europe, from north Italy to Kent and Sweden, seems to be quite clearly established . . . <sup>90</sup>

We are faced with a paradox of several strands; Beowulf is a Geat, the Old English poem is written from a Geatish perspective — yet Sutton Hoo links most closely with the *Svear*, the traditional enemies of the Geats, as they are called. Name-affinities for the East Anglian royal genealogy are found not among the *Swedes*, but among the Geats — contrary to what we might expect. There have been various attempts to resolve the paradoxes presented here. Dr O'Loughlin in a study cited above argues that the East Anglian dynasty (i.e. the Wylfings) was Geatish in origin, and that the Swedish treasures at Sutton Hoo are 'trophies of earlier battles against Swedish kings'. He supposes that the Wylfings had settled in East Anglia towards the end of the fifth century, and that there was a second influx of Geat exiles 'after the final overthrow of the Geat kingdom a decade or two before the middle of the sixth century by the barbarian Swedes'.<sup>91</sup>

A directly contrary solution was suggested by Professor Sune Lindqvist, who held that the Wylfings were 'in origin Swedes, a branch of the Royal House of Uppsala and the descendants of Wiglaf', who is called a *leod Scyldinga*, a Swedish prince, in the poem.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial — A Handbook* (1968), 69-71.

<sup>91</sup> O'Loughlin, *op. cit.*, 15-16.

<sup>92</sup> 'Sutton Hoo and *Beowulf*', *Antiquity* 22 (1948), 131-40, quotation 140.

Both of these completely opposed solutions assume a very great deal. Professor Lindqvist bases his claim on a single epithet, the title of Wiglaf. Dr O'Loughlin accepts the validity of the regnal list presented in MS Cotton Vespasian B VI, which Ker dates to the first part of the ninth century.<sup>93</sup> The lateness of the document would not be particularly disturbing, if Anglo-Saxon genealogies were remarkable for their consistency and truthfulness. But as Dr Sisam has clearly demonstrated, the typical Anglo-Saxon royal genealogy is far from trustworthy. He states explicitly that 'as historical records, all the genealogies in their early parts fail because fact, fiction, and error cannot be distinguished'.<sup>94</sup> In addition, any connection of the *Wuffingas* of East Anglia either to the *Svear* or *Gautar* is based on very slender evidence indeed.<sup>95</sup>

### XI *The larger context of the Sutton Hoo finds*

It seems necessary to examine the ground afresh. In the light of the discussion of Geatish-Swedish relations presented above, the first question that comes to mind is

<sup>93</sup> N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (1957), 268. It is perhaps significant that the MS is in a Continental hand, which distances it still further from English sources.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953), 287-346, quotation 329.

<sup>95</sup> In 1950 Dr Bruce-Mitford said of the *Wuffingas*: 'Nothing is known of the origins of this ruling family, and there is no reason why they should not have come from Sweden' — R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, 'The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial — recent theories and some comments on general interpretation', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* 25 (1950), 75. (This paper is referred to as 'Recent theories' hereafter.) Stenton saw the more recent parts of the East Anglian genealogy as 'a credible pedigree of the early East Anglian kings' in its later stages, and supported Bruce-Mitford's concept of a Swedish origin by suggesting that in the seventh century Æðelhere's adventures 'may have taken him into the Scandinavian north, for intercourse in and before his time between England and Sweden is attested by many objects in the varied deposits at Sutton Hoo' ('The East Anglian kings of the seventh century' in *The Anglo-Saxons* . . . ed. Peter Clemons, 1959, 42-52, quotations 48 and 51). Dr O'Loughlin, *op. cit.*, 2, note 5, disagreed with this view and promised further study of the problem. We must await further research, and perhaps new discoveries, before the relations of the *Wuffingas* of East Anglia either to Geatland or Sweden are fully established.

this: Is it possible that some of the objects Bruce-Mitford cites as Swedish may have had their origins in Geatish territory?

The distribution map in Figure 7 locates the objects which are cited as Swedish parallels for the Sutton Hoo material. It shows that while there is an Uppland concentration, a significant proportion of the 'Swedish' material comes from other parts of the country. The helmet and shield are apparently most closely paralleled in Vendel material, but parallels from Gotland exist for the shield (Plates 2-5); the highly distinctive beaded-elbow cloison in the jewellery seems Uppland-oriented,<sup>96</sup> and the loose 'sword-ring' is probably Swedish,<sup>97</sup> but of the four known Swedish sword-pommels which are closely similar to the Sutton Hoo piece (Plate 6), one is from Uppland, one from Södermanland close by,<sup>98</sup> but the other two come from far distant areas, Hög Edsten, Kville parish, Bohuslän (Plate 7) and Stora Sandviken, Sturkö parish, Blekinge. The closest parallel Dr Bruce-Mitford cites for the difficult Sutton Hoo purse-decoration showing a man and two beasts is a plate for impressing helmet-decorations from Torslunda, Öland<sup>99</sup> (Plates 8-9). The whetstone (Plate 10) at Sutton Hoo is highly distinctive and has been seen as Swedish, but whetstones are frequently found in burials from Gotland as well as from Vendel and Old Uppsala graves<sup>100</sup> and they are also known from burials in Celtic areas. It must be admitted that Boat Grave 12 at Vendel has faces in the details of decoration of a shield-boss and a rectangular mount which

<sup>96</sup> Found on the Faversham brooch, the Sutton Hoo pieces, and on a fragment (possibly a pyramid for decorating a sword) from the western mound (Odenshöj) at Old Uppsala. See 'Recent theories', 50-53 and Pl. XIV, d.

<sup>97</sup> See Vera I. Evison, 'The Dover Ring-Sword and other Sword-Rings and Beads', *Archaeologia* 101 (1967), 63-118. Miss Evison sees Swedish connections for the sword at Coombe, Kent, and the Sutton Hoo ring, but views these as 'isolated examples of foreign influence, rather than the re-introduction of the sword-ring custom to England' (81). The sword-ring, in her view, had flourished here only until the middle or end of the sixth century.

<sup>98</sup> Väsby, Hammarby parish, and Skrävsta, Botkyrka parish, respectively.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce-Mitford, 'Recent theories', 69 and Pl. VIII.

<sup>100</sup> *Handbook*, 21.

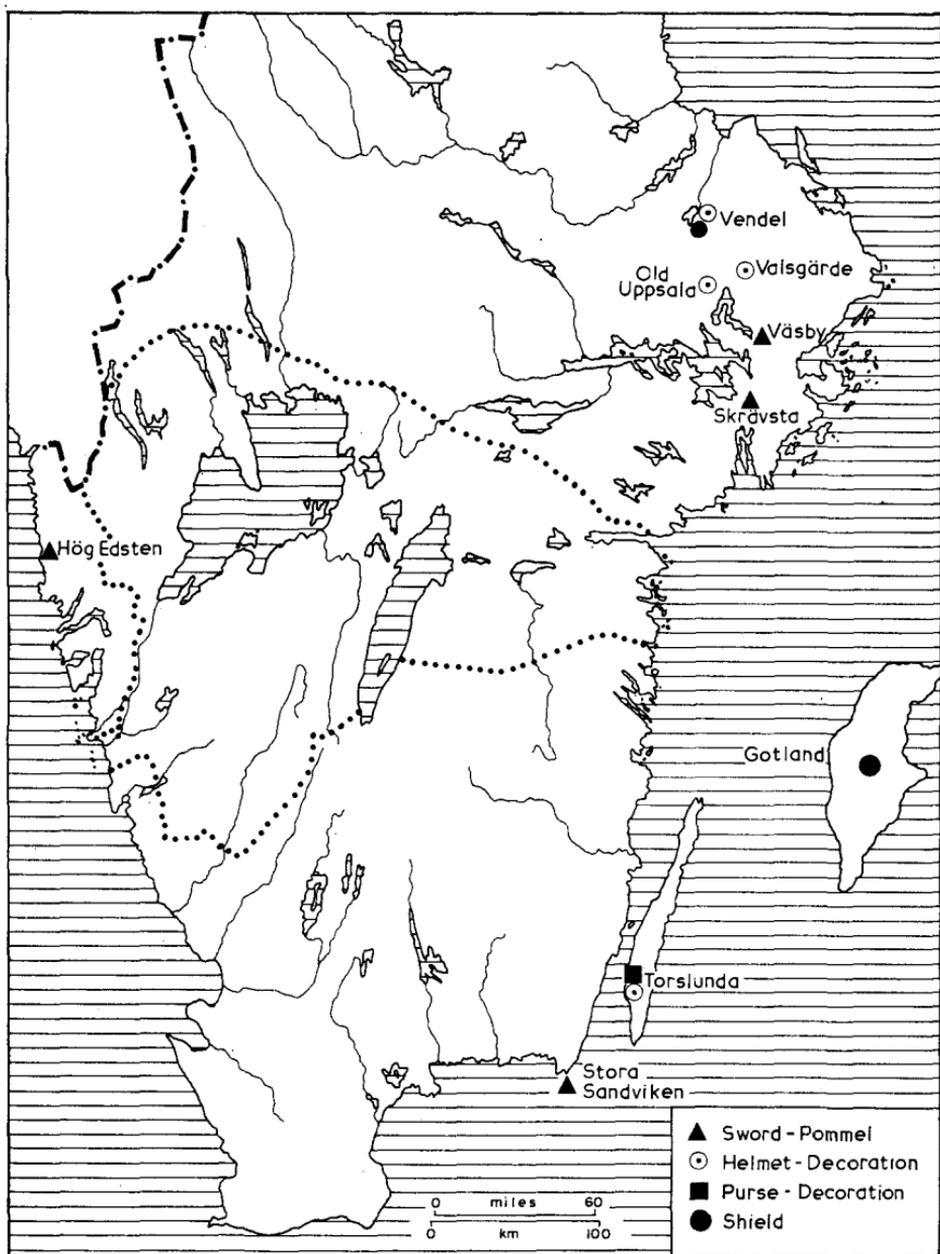


Fig. 7. Parallels for Sutton Hoo material.  
(Probable Geatish territory enclosed by . . . .)

closely resemble the faces on the whetstone; but Dr Bruce-Mitford's discussion of the piece in the 1968 *Handbook* does not lead us to a Swedish origin for it:

Nothing really comparable to it is known, but several less monumental and less finely shaped stones of fine grain or of schist, which might be regarded as whetstones, and which terminate in carved heads at least at one end, and are probably of this period, are known. Three are from the Celtic north and west, one from an Anglo-Saxon grave at Hough-on-the-Hill, Lincolnshire. One of these, from Lochar Moss in Dumfriesshire, is of substantial proportions, and that from Hough-on-the-Hill is also of large size, but relatively crude in aspect. Nothing is known to approach in sophistication, size, complexity of finish, the fantastic piece from Sutton Hoo.

This is a change from the view he expressed in 1950, when he regarded the whetstone as associated more closely with Swedish materials.

There is a second figural scene on the Sutton Hoo helmet, in addition to the man flanked by beasts cited above. I refer to the plate which shows twin warriors with horned hats and spears (Plate 11). When Dr Bruce-Mitford wrote in 1950, he cited two Uppland parallels for this plaque, a helmet from Boat Grave 7 at Valsgårde, and a very small fragment from the east mound at Old Uppsala. A similar scene on one of four bronze dies from Torslunda, Öland, was also cited.<sup>101</sup> Recent discoveries have been made in Kent and Lincolnshire of pieces which have on them figures which are claimed as parallels for the Sutton Hoo plaque. I refer to the so-called 'Finglesham Man', published by Sonia Chadwick Hawkes and others (Plate 12),<sup>102</sup> and the 'Loveden Man', published by Kenneth R. Fennell (Figure 8).<sup>103</sup> The first of these is found as decoration on a buckle, and the second is the central figure (in a repeated motif) on one of the bands of bronze sheet-metal which decorated a bucket

<sup>101</sup> 'Recent theories', 49-50.

<sup>102</sup> Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, H. R. Ellis-Davidson and Christopher Hawkes, 'The Finglesham Man', *Antiquity* 39 (1965), 17-32.

<sup>103</sup> *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 3 (1969), 211-15.

found at the cemetery at Hough-on-the-Hill, Lincolnshire. Both are seen as early in date.



Fig. 8. Loveden Man.

While too much is not to be made of such comparatively slight evidence, the implications are interesting. If all these objects can be associated, then the sphere of this motif is not limited either to Uppland or to Sweden. Even before the publication of the Finglesham and Loveden figures, Holmqvist concluded his discussion of the figured metal work found at Sutton Hoo, Vendel, Torslunda (Öland) and elsewhere by saying:

This picture as a whole strikes one as genuinely Germanic, and there is much to suggest that it was more widely spread among

the Germanic tribes than the material preserved to us would at present suggest. The intense concentration of such work in Sweden (helmets and gold-embossed work) does not necessarily prove that it was an exclusively Scandinavian phenomenon. The embossed panels from Sutton Hoo show it to have been practised in England too — assuming, of course, that the Sutton Hoo helmet is not itself Scandinavian — and the Pliezhausen brooch and several other continental specimens indicate that the art was popular on the continent also.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, my conclusion on the basis of the above survey is that the objects of the Sutton Hoo treasure which are claimed as Swedish are not all of Uppland origin, and that recent research has tended to lessen, rather than to reinforce, this relationship.<sup>105</sup>

But what of the fact of ship-burial itself? Dr Bruce-Mitford refers to the Sutton Hoo ship burial in his most recent published work as a 'royal ship-burial of an east-Scandinavian type'.<sup>106</sup> While it is true that rich ship-burial is only known in East Anglia and in Uppland as early as the first half of the seventh century,<sup>107</sup> the burial customs typical of Uppland sites are not found at Sutton Hoo.<sup>108</sup> Dr Bruce-Mitford has pointed out that

<sup>104</sup> W. Holmqvist, *Germanic Art during the First Millennium B.C.* (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar 9, 1955), 51-2.

<sup>105</sup> Mr George Speake of the Institute for Archaeology, Oxford, has written on 'A Seventh Century Coin-pendant from Bacton, Norfolk, and its Ornament', *Medieval Archaeology* 14 (1970), 1-16. His suggestions regarding the piece are yet another indication of the wider sphere of the relations between south-eastern England and Sweden. He holds that the pendant is 'an apprentice product of the Sutton Hoo workshop' with its closest analogues in south Swedish C-bracelets of the fifth and early sixth centuries. I am indebted to Mr Speake for much useful discussion of the Swedish material, and for his generous loan of a proof-copy of his paper.

<sup>106</sup> *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1971), 90.

<sup>107</sup> A ship burial which pre-dates the Uppland burials is known from Augerum parish, Blekinge. It was excavated in 1895 by Oscar Montelius, and was discussed more recently by Birgit Arrhenius, 'Båtgraven från Augerum', *Tor* 6 (1960), 167-85. Dr Arrhenius's conclusions (183) on the relations of this boat-burial are interesting: 'The Uppland boat grave cemeteries seem often to be situated at or near trading centres. The Augerum grave shows that the Lyckeby river was of some importance as a trade route, and it is interesting in this connection to note that two gold hoards have been found on the islands of Sturkö and Tjurkö at the approaches to this river. The Sturkö hoard comprised 4 gold bracelets and 2 Roman solidi; that from Tjurkö yielded a sword pommel with garnet inlay [*sic*]. The closest parallels to the pommel are to be found in the Vendel culture in Uppland and the Sutton Hoo ship burial in England, the latter thus bearing witness to the same connections as the finds from the Augerum ship-burial.'

<sup>108</sup> 'Recent theories', 64.

there are no animal or human sacrifices in the English instance, and the Sutton Hoo boat was not covered by a low, flat-topped circular mound typical of the Swedish boat-graves. In fact, as he remarked in an earlier publication, 'The only thing that appears distinctively Swedish about the funeral arrangements is the use of a boat.'<sup>109</sup> A recent review of boat-grave burials, written because of the many finds in the past fifteen years, calls for a reconsideration of the custom, because of the 'high degree of local variation in the construction and treatment of the boats'.<sup>110</sup> I am not qualified to say how this affects the East Anglia-Uppland relationship; but it seems that the distinctive similarity between boat-burials in these two areas lies merely in their early date.

If we begin our relation of the Sutton Hoo material to the poem *Beowulf* with the ship as our starting-point, the way is indeed rough. Dr Bruce-Mitford tells us:

The Sutton Hoo burial shows . . . that ship inhumation, with provision of grave-goods similar to that of Scyld, was being practised in an Anglo-Saxon setting, in a royal context and on a scale comparable with Scyld's funeral, as late as the second quarter of the seventh century . . .<sup>111</sup>

While this is true, the uncomfortable fact remains that there is no ship-burial in *Beowulf*. Scyld is laid in a vessel, and his treasures are piled about him. The ship is then let loose, to sail where it will, in God's keeping. The most convincing parallel yet cited for this practice comes from an unexpected quarter, the life of St Gildas, written by a monk of Ruys in Brittany. Mr Cameron has recently commented on the relations between the burials of Scyld and St Gildas, and cites the following parallels:

- (1) Both 'sea burials', if such they may be called, were undertaken at the express wish of those so honoured.
- (2) Both had treasure laid on their bodies, Scyld his golden

<sup>109</sup> 'Recent theories', 64.

<sup>110</sup> See Jenny-Rita Næss, 'Grav i båt eller båt i grav', *Stavanger Museum Årbok* (1969), 57-76, quotation 76.

<sup>111</sup> *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1971), 88.

pile of weapons and treasures, Gildas his pillow-stone (presumably, the only 'treasure' a Celtic monk would have).

- (3) Both were sent into the Lord's keeping; *On frean wære* as *Beowulf* has it, and *quo Deus voluit* in the *Gildas Vita*.<sup>112</sup>

## XII *The relation of Sutton Hoo to Beowulf re-examined*

In many ways, particular treasures from Sutton Hoo shed light on *Beowulf*. The helmet, with its thick iron crest, almost certainly provides an example of the troublesome *wala, wirum bewunden* of 1031, and the lyre, or harp, is one example of the kind of instrument used by the *scop* in *Beowulf* and among the Anglo-Saxons. But in the present state of knowledge, it is dangerous to attempt to regard *Beowulf* as a product of the same *milieu* as produced the Sutton Hoo treasures, and still more dangerous to take *Beowulf* as a record of the historical Scandinavian background of the East Anglian court. The poem is *not* history, but heroic legend, in the sense in which the term was defined earlier in this essay. Its general treatment of the period nicely parallels the broader outlines of what is known of early Scandinavian history, though in particular respects it is clear that *Beowulf* and *Ynglinga saga* represent different traditions. The relation of the background of *Beowulf* to Sutton Hoo has tended to be caught up in a paradox which is created by the juxtaposition of Sutton Hoo, with supposed exclusively Uppland connections, with the Geatish perspective in *Beowulf*. This inconsistency is lessened when a slight modification is made on both sides. From

<sup>112</sup> Angus Cameron, 'St. Gildas and Scyld Scefing', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969), 240-6. Cameron also makes the important point that as long ago as the beginning of the present century Axel Olrik held that there was no evidence for a belief in a sea-journey to the afterworld in Scandinavia, but that such beliefs were common in Celtic literature.

the point of view of the archaeological evidence, it seems probable that what have been called Swedish elements are not paralleled only in the Uppland area. Secondly, the pro-Swedish passages in the poem should not be dismissed, in an attempt to create a drama of Geatish annihilation.

What is more important still, *Beowulf* has no necessary direct connection with Sutton Hoo. The poem may be the product of a seventh-century East Anglian court-poet; it may have been written in an Anglo-Scandinavian community in the ninth century; it may be a product of Mercia in the eighth century; or it may have originated in Bede's Northumbria.<sup>113</sup> All that we know for certain is that it was written down about the year 1000. The place of origin most generally acceptable is Northumbria, for there is impressive evidence there of both material culture and a fertile intellectual *milieu* admirably suited to the production of such a poem.<sup>114</sup> As a literary critic, it is my belief that the intellectual background is far more important than material culture for the production of poetry. We know almost nothing about the state of East Anglian culture in the seventh century, and though new discoveries may of course be made, the burden of proof is very much on those who wish to make *Beowulf* a product of this culture.

### Conclusions

And it is here that I am moved to state what might well be seen as a kind of heresy. *Beowulf* is more

<sup>113</sup> For an eighth-century Mercian localisation, see D. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (1951); for a ninth-century date, see L. Schücking's 'Wann entstand der Beowulf?', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 42 (1917), 347-410. The Northumbrian argument is so generally known as not to require documentation.

<sup>114</sup> This is not the place to re-open the question about the Christianity of the poem. I use the view that the poem is the earliest product of what Professor Charles Donahue defines as 'Insular' Christianity — that is, a kind of ethical stance which was capable of the productive assimilation of an heroic past. His arguments are set forth in 'Beowulf — a reconsideration from a Celtic stance', *Traditio* 22 (1965), 55-116.

Scandinavian, more 'Swedish', if one must be pressed, than Sutton Hoo. For while some of the Sutton Hoo treasures are Swedish in orientation, they constitute a small part of the whole. Sword-pommel, helmet and shield are major items, but there are Frankish coins, fragments of imported silks, a Coptic bowl from Alexandria, and Celtic hanging bowls. *Beowulf*, on the other hand, deals almost exclusively with Scandinavian affairs, the relations of Geat, Dane, and Swede, in the troubled times of the late migration period. Sutton Hoo is a very significant, though limited, find, firmly fixed in reality — in place and (in a somewhat less precise sense) in time. *Beowulf* is a work of fiction, which celebrates with honour and solemnity the heroic Northern past.

In the current state of knowledge about the period before the Viking Age in Scandinavia, it is tempting to draw together whatever information we have to make a satisfying whole, and *Beowulf* is easily overtaxed as evidence, as it pre-dates most, if not all, of the accounts extant from Scandinavia. This paper, written from the point of view of someone whose interests are focussed on Anglo-Saxon literature, has been an attempt to set some slightly different perspectives on the poem's form, and the picture it presents of early Scandinavian history. *Beowulf*, Sutton Hoo, and early Scandinavian archaeology and legend all somehow enrich one another, but the relation between all or even any two members of the series is not easy to define. It is sincerely hoped that further research and new discoveries, particularly in the field of archaeology, will soon supersede the tentative suggestions made here.

## Appendix

The relations between the Old Uppsala burial mounds and the accounts of Swedish kings in *Beowulf* and in Scandinavian sources are very complex. Briefly stated, the problems are as follows. *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri tells us, is based on oral tradition, both 'historical' and mythical, and on Þjóðólfr of Hvin's *Ynglingatal*. Snorri's own words establish the limits of the credibility of his work better than any commentary can do: 'In this book I have had written the old narratives about the chiefs who have had realms in the Northlands and who spoke the Danish tongue, even as I have heard wise men, learned in history, tell, besides some of their family descents even as I have been taught them; some of this is found in the family successions in which kings and other men of great kin have traced their kinship; some is written according to old songs or lays, which men have had for their amusement. And although we know not the truth of these, we know, however, of occasions when wise old men have reckoned such things as true' (*Heimskringla*, transl. cited in note 75 above, xxxv). When *Ynglinga saga*, with the citations from *Ynglingatal* it includes, is set against *Beowulf*, it is clear that the two represent traditions which are different in many respects. The line of the Swedish kings in *Beowulf* is Ongenðeow-Ohthere-Onela-Eadgils; Onela is Ohthere's brother, Eadgils is Ohthere's son. In *Ynglinga saga*, the descent is Aun, Egill, Óttarr, Aðils. The *Saga* further mentions *Áli*, a Dane who attacks Aun, and drives him from his kingdom, and *Áli*, from Uppland in Norway, who attacked Aðils. They fought on the ice of lake Vänern, and Aðils won. This battle is also documented in Arngrímur Jónsson's paraphrase of *Skjoldunga saga*: 'Post-haec ortis inter Adillum illum Sveciae regem et Alonem, Opplandorum regem in Norvegia, inimicitiiis,

praelium utrinque indicitur: loco pugnae statuto in stagno Waener, glacie jam obducto' (*Arngrimi Jonae Opera* . . . I, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana IX, 1950, 346). The traditional interpretation is that of Chambers: 'We are told how Athils (=Eadgils) king of Sweden, son of Ottar (=Oththere), made war upon Ali (= Onela). By the time the *Ynglingatal* was written it had been forgotten that Ali was Athils' uncle, and that the war was a civil war' (Chambers-Wrenn, 6). But Chambers's account strains the translation somewhat. As I read it, *Aðils konungr átti deilur miklar við konung þann, er Áli hét inn upplenzki* means essentially that the two were in conflict, not that Aðils made war on Áli.

But how readily can we relate the Old English and Norse accounts? There is no person named *Angantýr* in *Ynglinga saga* or *Ynglingatal*, which is the name we would expect to correspond to OE *Ongendæow*. (Malone's suggestion that Ongendæow is a 'surname' for Egill is interesting, but too speculative for general acceptance; see his *Widsið*, 1962, 158-90.)

Does archaeology help here? In his Preface to *Heimskringla* Snorri tells us that in Scandinavia there was first an Age of Burning, and that this was succeeded by a Mound Age, first in Denmark, later in Sweden and Norway. In *Ynglinga saga* we are told that Hálfðan, the Dane who drove Aun from his kingdom, was buried in a mound at Uppsala, and that Aun and Egill were so honoured (ch. 25-6). Óttarr, according to Snorri, was laid *on* a mound, in Vendel, Denmark (i.e. Vendsyssel, North Jutland), as a mark of disrespect: *Danir . . . létu þar rífa dýr ok fugla hræin* (ch. 27). Aðils died at Uppsala; he too was laid in a mound.

Archaeologists are in agreement that the mound at Husby, in the parish of Vendel, some 27 km north of Uppsala, is quite possibly Óttarr's mound, and that Snorri's account is based on a confusion of names, Vendel-Uppland = Vendel-Jutland, just as in the account of Áli

he has confused Uppland in Norway and Uppland in Sweden. In the year 1677, a search for relics of antiquity was made throughout Sweden, and the people of the Husby district were then calling the mound Ottarshögen (S. Lindqvist *Uppsala högar och Ottarshögen*, 1936, English summary, 329-31; conclusion, 352). Lindqvist holds that on the archaeological evidence and the traditional name-evidence: 'Ottar and some of the generations immediately following him can — thanks to their being mentioned in *Beowulf* — be looked upon as historical personages with far greater right than most of the others mentioned in the Y[nglinga] T[al].' But M. Stenberger is far less sure about the relation between Öttarr, the mound at Vendel, and history: 'It is possible that the huge grave-mound in Vendel really was built over the remains of the ancient king mentioned in *Ynglingatal* and *Beowulf*, but it is impossible to prove it' (*Det forntida Sverige*, 1964, 537).

The problems associated with the Uppsala mounds are much more vexing. There are three major mounds, known as the east mound, the west mound, and the centre mound. Lindqvist (*op. cit.*, 334-5) gives the traditional names for the tumuli; the eastern is known as Odin's, the centre as Frey's, and the western as Thor's. The eastern mound was excavated in 1846-7, and the western in 1874; the centre mound has not yet been fully investigated. The artifacts recovered in excavation are very few, and any firm decision on them hard to establish, for as Lindqvist tells us, 'With regard to certain objects, particularly those of iron and bone, it appears that the finds in the eastern and western mounds have been mixed up' (*op. cit.*, 341). From the archaeological side, without entering into a full discussion of the finds, one can only say that relations between *Beowulf*, the Swedish kings mentioned in that poem, and the Uppsala and Vendel tumuli are indeed tenuous. The only externally verifiable date is that of Hygelac's raid on the Frisian coast, as

reported by Gregory of Tours, which is dated 'after 515, probably after 520, but before 530' (Chambers-Wrenn, 3).

On archaeological grounds, Lindqvist (*op. cit.*, 344-5) dates the mounds as follows: eastern mound, *c.* 500; western, 'hardly before the middle of the sixth century'; centre mound (on the basis of position and structure, since it is yet to be excavated), 'most probably in its original form from the fifth century', with an added part, from 600 at the earliest. But this dating is disputed by Nils Åberg, who from an investigation of decorative motifs on the finds would date these mounds considerably later, to the middle of the seventh century (see his 'Uppsala högars datering', *Fornvännen* 42, 1947, 257-89, English summary 288-9). It is best to follow the caution of Professor Stenberger here. He concludes that the Old Uppsala mounds are possibly to be attributed to Aun, Egill, and Aðils, but that it is even more difficult to do this than to associate the Vendel mound with Óttarr, and no sure conclusion is possible (*Det forntida Sverige*, 537).

In conclusion, then, we are left in doubt as to the relations between *Ynglinga saga* (and *Ynglingatal*), the Uppsala mounds and the *Beowulf* account. Chronology cannot be finally established which relate any *two* of the series. *Ynglinga saga* has *four* kings in mounds at Uppsala (Hálfdan, Aun, Egill, Aðils), and one mocked by the Danes in Vendel, Jutland, while we have three Uppsala mounds which might be associated with the written account. *Ynglinga saga* and *Ynglingatal* do not completely correspond with *Beowulf* on the names of the kings. What is still more important is that the quality of the Swedish kings in the account in *Beowulf* is far superior to that in the Norse account; the former appear courageous and successful in war, the latter are a miserable lot, who consistently lose battles, and are often driven from their lands. Thus, all three sources of evidence vary in important respects.







Plate 2. Helmet  
from Vendel,  
Uppland,  
grave 14.



Plate 3. Helmet  
from Sutton Hoo.

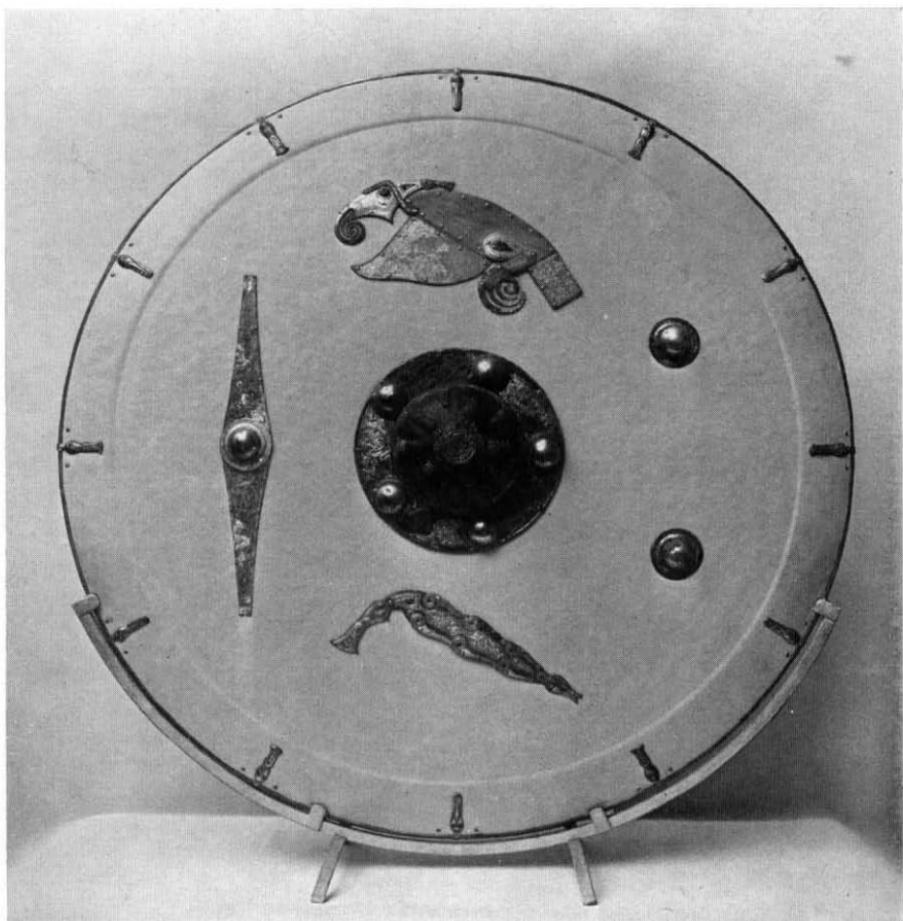
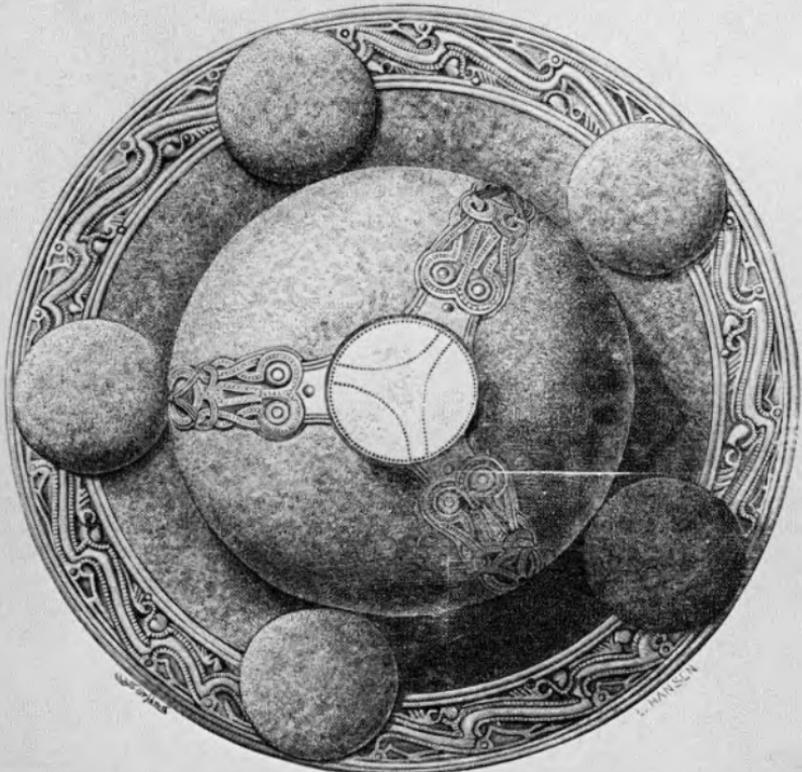
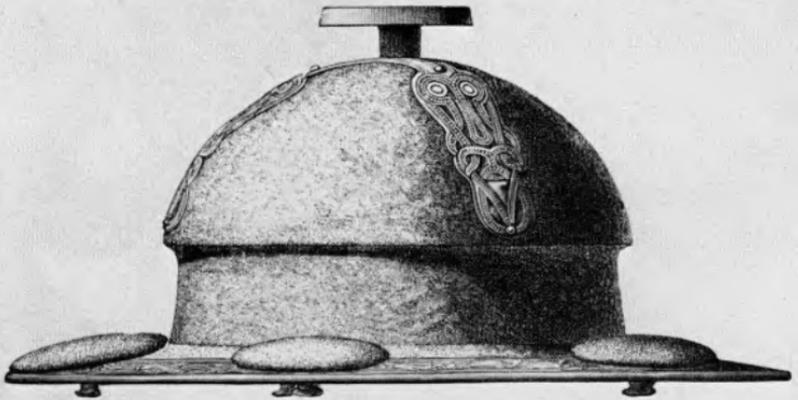


Plate 4. Shield from  
Sutton Hoo.



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Plate 5. Shield-boss  
from Gotland.

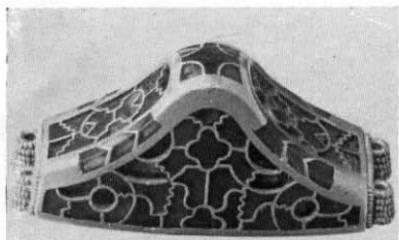


Plate 6. Sword-pommel from  
Hög Edsten, Kville, Bohuslän.



Plate 7. Sword-pommel from Sutton Hoo.

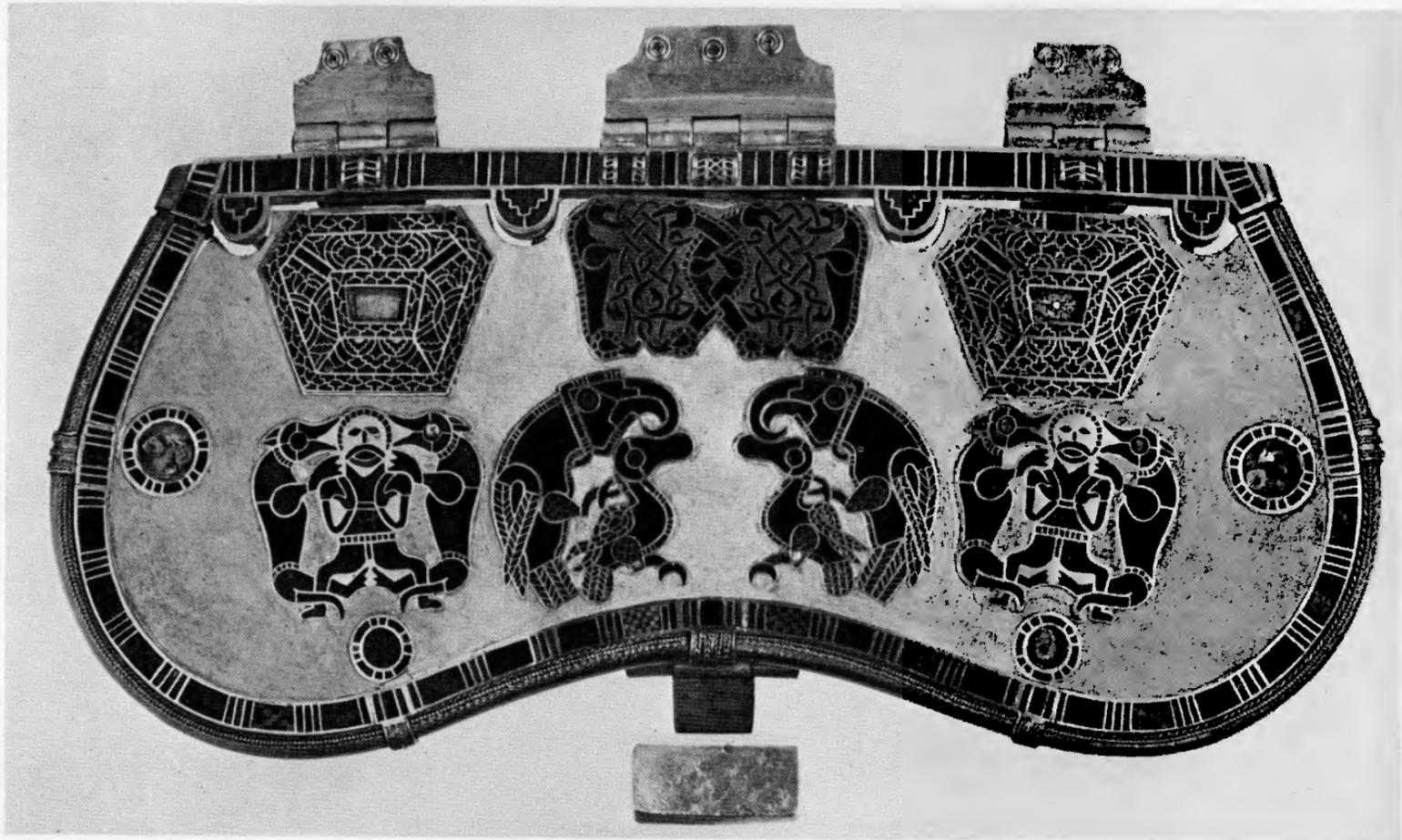


Plate 8. Purse from Sutton Hoo.



Plate 9. Die for impressing  
helmet-decorations from  
Torslunda, Öland.



Plate 10.  
Whetstone from  
Sutton Hoo.

Plate 11.  
Helmet-plaque  
from Sutton Hoo.



Plate 12.  
Buckle from  
Finglesham.

