History of the English Language

Miami University ILR

Fall, 2004

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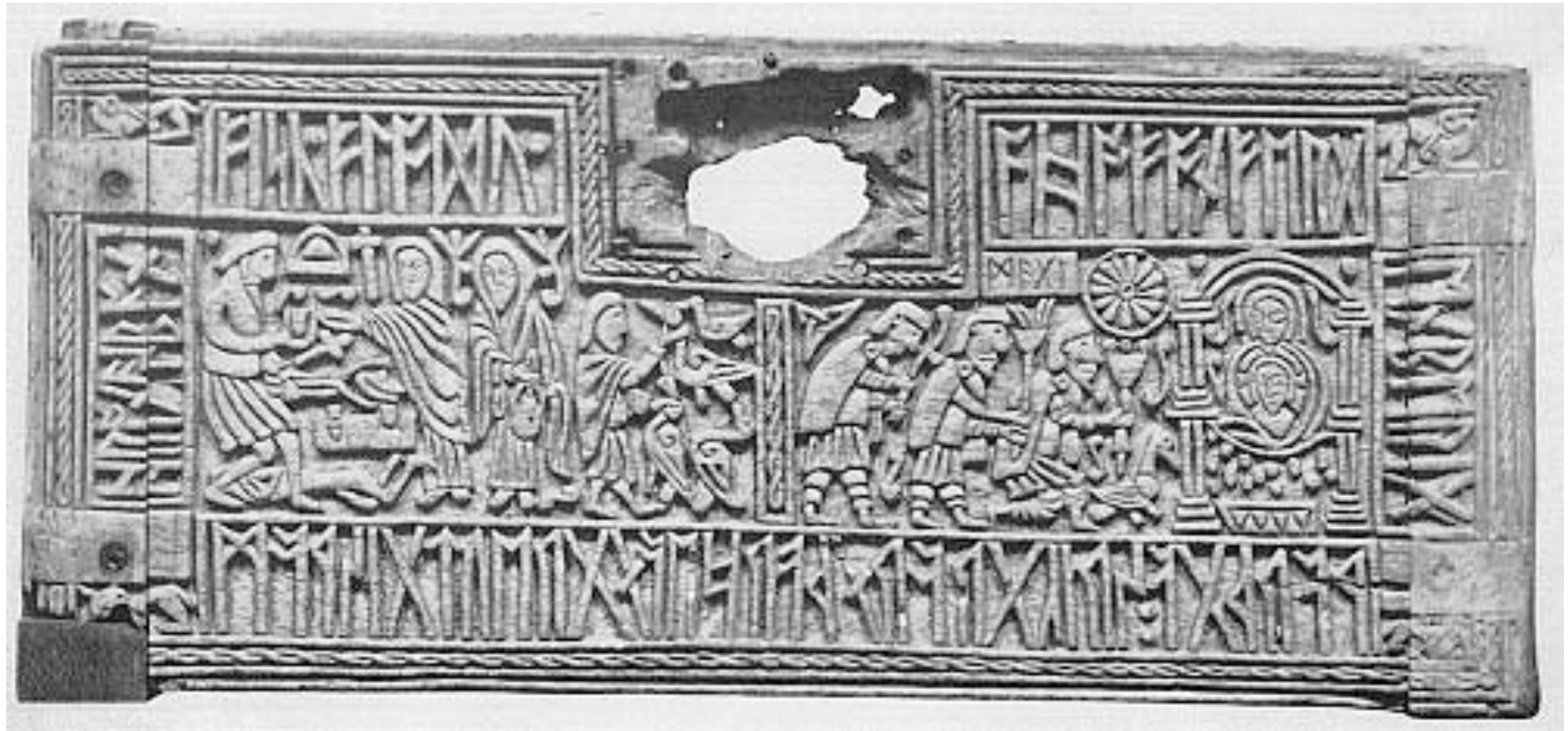
Roman Ruins at Bath

Anglo-Saxon England

Hadrian's Wall

the Franks Casket

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

- 300-year history (9th-12th)

- Inspired by Alfred?

- 1st narrative prose in a European vernacular

- several traditions

A-S Chronicle: 449

- Angles, Saxons, Jutes

- Invited by Vortigern

- Traditionally 449

- Hengest and Horsa

- Called descendants of Woden (Odin)

A-S Chronicle: 793

- beginning of Viking harassment of English

- 'Fiery dragons' in the air, pestilence, storms

- portent of Viking attacks on Lindisfarne

A-S Chronicle: 878

- Alfred's battles with Viking invaders

- establishment of Danelaw

- conversion of the Danes

A-S Chronicle: 1066

- Harold defeats Vikings at Stamford Bridge

- Battle of Hastings

- Oppression

Halley's comet (Bayeux tapestry)

Bede's Ecclesiastical History

- Pope Gregory appoints Augustine 597

- Canterbury 597

- Northumbria mid-seventh

- Irish missionaries & monasteries

- Synod of Whitby: reconciliation

Bede: 673-735

Bede: conversion of Edwin

- Northumbria, mid-7th century

- Missionary Paulinus, priest Coifi, other

- Sparrow in the hall

- Comitatus ideal

- Destruction of idols/ Pagan v. Christian

Bede: Caedmon

- Illiterate brother at Whitby

- Vision of stranger

- Holy songs using traditional Germanic verse

- 'Caedmon's Hymn'

- 'School of Caedmon' existence unclear

Old English poetry

- 2 half-lines per verse/caesura/4-stress

- alliteration: 1 and/or 2 + 3

- vocabulary & variation

- heroic, elegaic, religious

- kenning: metaphors

- litotes: ironic understatement

Caedmon's Hymn

- Simple lyric

- Variations on 'God': guardian (2), ruler, glory-father, creator, lord (3)

- 'Middle-earth'

Deor

- Figures of Germanic legend -- some unknown

- Allusive treatment, assumes recognition

- Unusual stanzaic structure

- Weland/Beadohild story

- Related to personal sorrow

- Theme of exile from comitatus

Finnsburh fragment

- How long is it?

- Story recurs in Beowulf

- Related to Hengest the settler?

- Theme of divided loyalty

- Swearing allegiance to lord's killer

- Violation of comitatus

Waldere

- Another tale from Germanic legend

- Lovers ambushed; later ballad subject

- Speeches

- Weland, sword

The Battle of Maldon (1)

- Another fragment

- Actual event of 893

- Was Byrhtnoth foolish?

- Themes of loyalty

- Speech of old retainer/heroic code

Hige sceal þe heardra,

Hige sceal the heardra,

Thought must (be) the harder,

heorte þe cenre,

heorte the cenre,

heart the keener,

mode sceal þe mare,

mode sceal the mare,

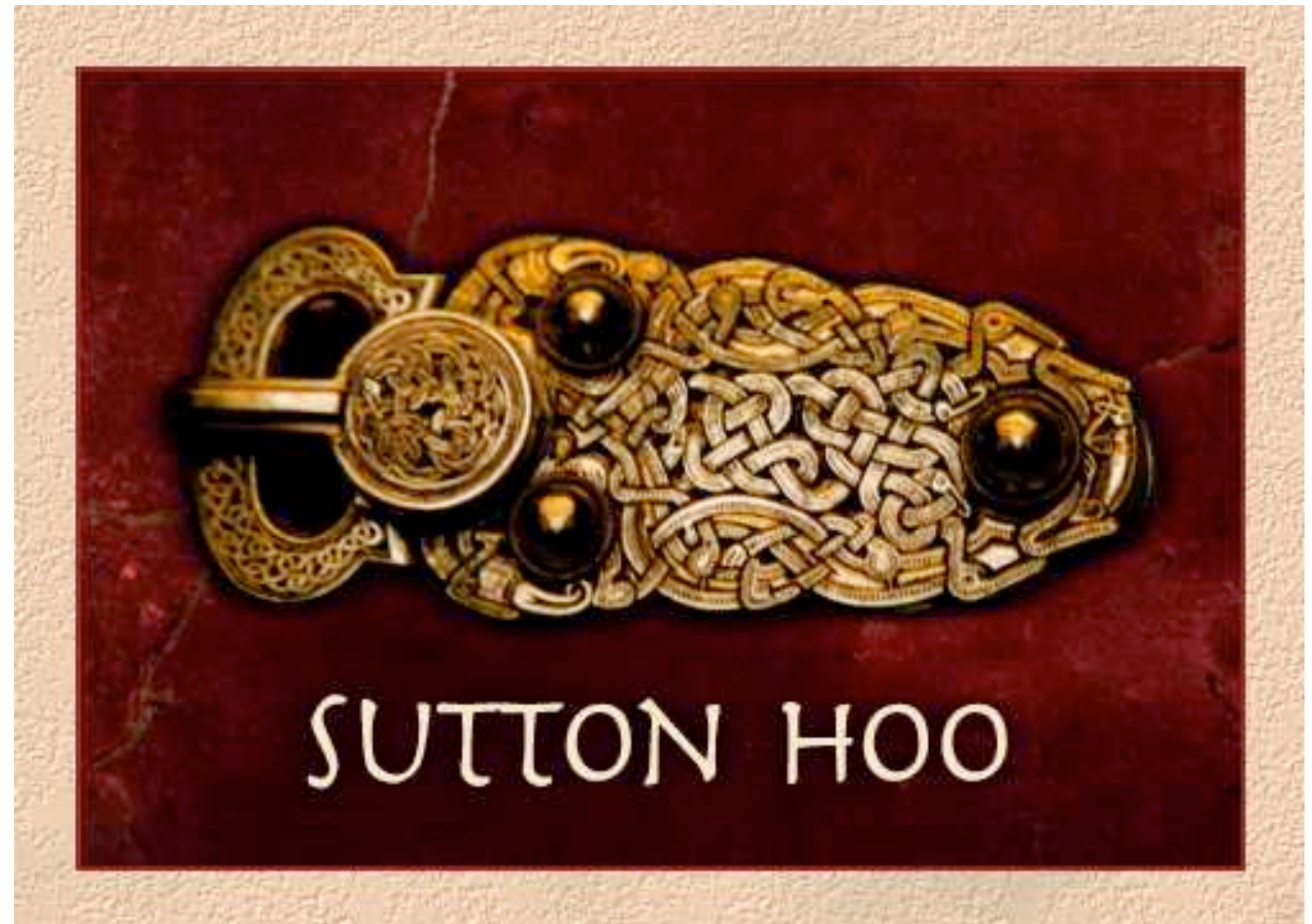spirit must (be) the greater,

þe ure mægen lytlað.

the ure mægen lytlath.

as our strength grows less.

Sutton Hoo (1)

- Site near Woodbridge in SE Sussex, 1939

- Richest burial ever discovered in Britain

- Anglo-Saxon ship & treasures

- King Raedwald of East Anglia (died c. 627)?
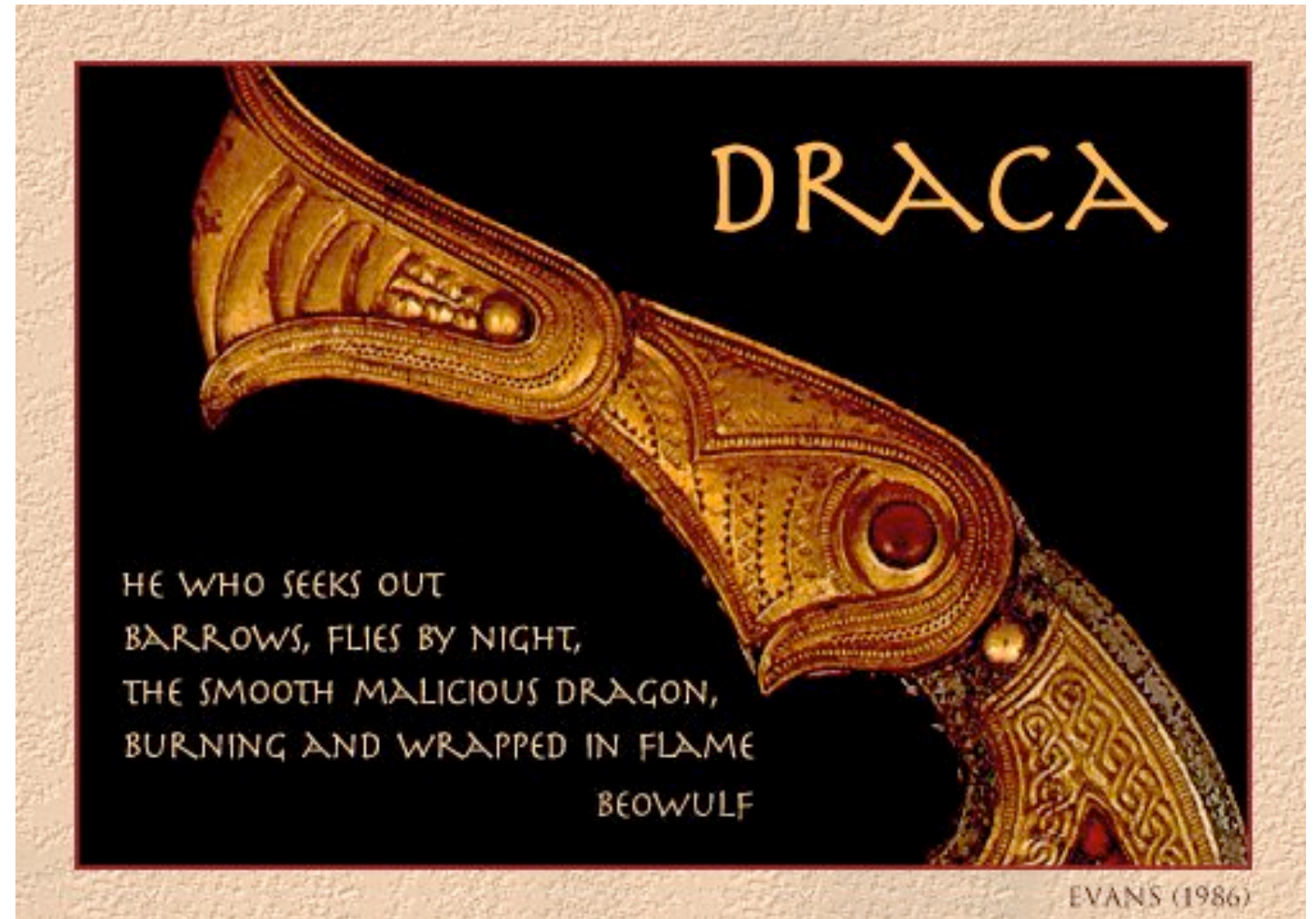
- Baptized, reverted to paganism

Belt buckle

Dragon staff

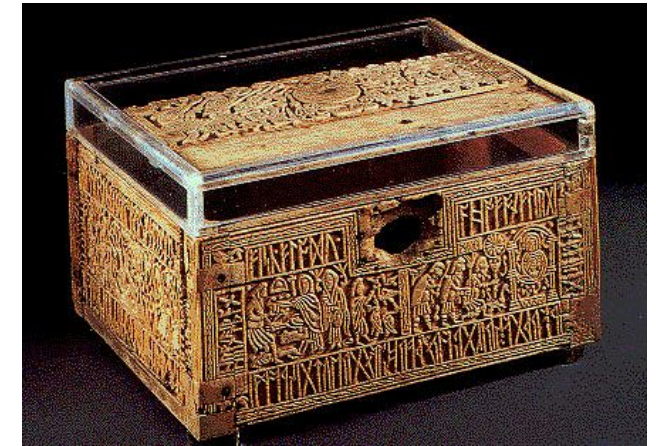Clasps

CLOISONNÉ

EVANS (1986)

the Franks Casket (1)

the Franks Casket (2)

- Whalebone box, early 8th century

- Runic carvings of OE verse

- Mixture of cultures:

- Roman (Romulus and Remus)

- Pagan Germanic (Weland & Beadohild)

- Christian: Adoration of the Magi

the Franks Casket (3)

front panel

the Franks Casket (4)

Weland & Beadohild

the Franks Casket (5)

Adoration of the Magi

The Dream of the Rood

- Cross as speaker

- Several lines carved on the Ruthwell Cross in Scotland

- Cross as Christ's thane

- Heroic ideal in Christian terms

The Wanderer

- 'Elegaic' poems from the Exeter Book

- Theme of exile

- Bleak nature poetry mimics mood

- Fate ('Wyrd')

- Christian consolation

The Seafarer

- Another elegy about exile in the Exeter Book

- Vivid pictures of seafaring life

- Famous translation by Ezra Pound

The Wife's Lament

The Husband's Message

The Ruin

- Possibly Bath

- Roman baths built on Celtic sacred site

- Goddess Sula, Aquae Sulis

- 'Enta geweorc' -- work of giants

- Stoic lament for transitoriness of life

- Appropriately, a fragment

Riddles

- Part of Exeter Book collection

- Keen observation of the natural world

- Virtually the only humor in OE literature

- Playfulness

- Sense of world as metaphor

Beowulf -- introduction

Hƿæt! Ƿe Gardena
Hwæt!   We   Gardena
Listen!   We   (of the) Spear-Danes

in geardagum
in   geardagum
in   yore-days

þeodcynninga
theodcyninga
(of the) tribe-kings

þrym gefrunon
thrym   gefrunon
glory   have heard

hu þa æþelingas
hu   tha æthelingas
how   those worthy (ones)

ellen fremedon.
ellen   fremedon.
(deeds of) courage performed.

Beowulf -- the text

- Emblematic poem for Old English

- Much remains unknown

- Single manuscript

- Anywhere from 8th-10th centuries

- Presents stories from continental Germans

Beowulf -- key questions

- Who wrote it?

- Where does it fit into Anglo-Saxon literature?

- When was it written? (Offa 122?)

- For whom was it written?

- How was it written?

Beowulf -- key oppositions

- Folk-tale vs. history (75, 129)

- Men vs. monsters (91, 92

- Good vs. evil

- Light vs. dark (113, 144)

- Fate ('wyrd') vs. action (88)

- Pagan vs. Christian (97, 117,

Beowulf -- cultural basis

- Oral vs. literate cultures

- 'Shame cultures' vs. 'guilt cultures'

- Set in the heroic past

- Identification with Geats? Danes? Swedes?

Beowulf -- oral-formulas

- Pre-literate society

- Poets memorized overall plots, brief formulas

- Performance, not text (remember Caedmon)

- How do they get written down?

- Is this the origin of Beowulf (95)?

Beowulf -- tragic figures

- Hrothgar (103)

- Hygelac (129, 133)

- Wealhtheow (103-4), Freawaru (124)

- Hildeburh (100), cf. Finnsburh Fragment

- Hengest

- Hrethel (135)

Beowulf -- key passages

- Death of Scyld Scefing (74)

- Grendel's mere (108)

- Hrothgar's sermon (117)

- 'Lay of the Last Survivor' (130)

Beowulf -- design for irony

- The pattern of 'until' (99, 117, but 119)

- Grendel's mother acting out of revenge (105)

- Hrothgar, Heorot are doomed (76)

- The Geats are doomed after Beowulf's death

- Revenge (106, 108)

- Treasure consumed by fire (131, 154)

Beowulf -- 'ubi sunt'

- 'Where are' . . . glories of the past

- coupled in Beowulf with dark futures

- Origin in religious literature

- Frequent theme in OE literature

- cf. 'The Ruin' and other elegies

- cf. François Villon

Beowulf

- What does it all mean?

- Is endless warfare our fate?

- Is there a way out?

- Is there meaning in the struggle?

- Pagan vs. Christian eschatology

- 'Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics'

The medieval worldview (I)

- Amalgam of Greek, Roman, Jewish, Islamic and Christian elements

- Perfect things precede imperfect things

- Earth at the center (or bottom)

- Everything has its natural place

The medieval worldview (II)

- Properties: hot, cold, wet, dry

- Elements (external) – Humors (internal)

- Earth (cold + dry) – melancholy

- Water (cold + wet) – phlegm (phlegmatic)

- Air (hot + wet) – blood (sanguine)

- Fire (hot + dry) – choler (choleric)

The medieval worldview (III)

- No action except through a mean

- Theophanies were not appearances of God

- Hierarchies of angels/plenitude

- Seraphs, Cherubim, Thrones

- Dominions, Princedoms, Powers

- Virtues, Archangels, Angels

Medieval cosmology

- Sky (ouranos) and Nature (physis)

- Comes from Aristotle

- Spherical earth

- Spheres for intelligences/planets

- Worlds of light and music

- God as Prime Mover (Primum Mobile)