



Beowulf in Denmark: Fact, Fiction, & Fantasy



*Eoforlic scionon
ofer hleorberan gehroden golde,
fah ond fyrheard; ferhwearde heold
gubmod grimmon.*

(*Beowulf*, ll. 303B-306A)

["Boar-figures flashed above cheek-guards, gold adorned, gleaming and fire-hard; (the boar) of war-like spirit kept guard over life for the fierce ones."]

The boar was revered throughout the Germanic North for its ferocity and fecundity; *Beowulf* provides perhaps the most famous literary reference to such beliefs. The Viking Age images above from Maughold on the Isle of Man also illustrate how such concepts flowed between Scandinavia and the British Isles, and how they might be writ in stone as well as parchment.

Course Information:

Instructor: C. Fee

Meeting Days and Time: M/TH 11:40 – 1:00

Meeting Place: F24-206

Office: F24-206

Office Hours: M/TH 1:00-2:00, & by appointment

Cell Phone: 29709144

Skype: christopherrichard.fee

E-mail: cfee@gettysburg.edu

Course Webpage: <http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/DIS/DIS-Beowulf-in-Denmark/>

Course Description:

Beowulf in Denmark: Fact, Fiction, & Fantasy

Students in this course explore ancient Denmark and Scandinavia with *Beowulf*—the archetypal Tough Guy—as guide, maneuvering a mystical landscape of trolls, dragons, and witches, plying icy waters with Grettir the Strong, tasting Fafnir's blood with Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer, swearing blood-brotherhood with Boðvar Bjarki, Bear-Warrior, and oh, so much more! Placing the Anglo-Saxon epic in the context of ancient Germanic legend, folklore, and myth, this course helps students to understand the literary geography of the poem, as well as giving them the tools to navigate this topography.

Beowulf is well-known to students of English literature everywhere and even the manuscript itself is now readily available through the *Electronic Beowulf* project. Less familiar, though, are the sites of the epic. The location of the great hall of Heorot has long been postulated to have been somewhere in the vicinity of Roskilde in Denmark. For generations no physical evidence seemed likely to corroborate such suppositions, but recent discoveries at Lejre have reinvigorated this investigation. Archaeological work now is allowing us to place the poem in a physical geography; this opens up more fully our understanding of the world which produced the poem. In addition to a fantastic literary work, therefore, we may now begin to understand *Beowulf* as an artifact in a historical setting.

It is expected that students in this course have read *Beowulf* before; whether or not this is the case, carefully (re-)reading the poem in its entirety in the first week of the course is likely to pay dividends. The emphasis in this course will be to ground the epic in the landscape(s), language(s), and literary tradition(s) of the original narrative(s), as well as within the context of contemporary criticism. A SparkNotes® overview is likely to prove insufficient.

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to help students to attempt to ground the great epic of the Anglo-Saxons in ancient landscapes and literary traditions which help to enrich our knowledge of the mythic, folkloric, legendary, and historical background of the poem, as well as to engage our imaginations and to enliven our reading of the narrative. It is the purpose of this course to help students to gain an intimate knowledge of a poem which weaves together the narrative traditions and material cultures of early Scandinavia with those of Anglo-Saxon England.

Specific Learning Goals:

Students thus will gain from this course a broad understanding of how literature, history, and landscape may shape or be perceived to shape each other. Within the outline of such broad strokes students will develop some detailed knowledge of literary aspects of the poem *Beowulf*, its historical context, its major Old Norse analogues, and sites and objects associated with the epic through archaeology. Thus this course is of special interest to those with an interest in medieval narratives, Germanic languages, the history of Scandinavia and the British Isles, or the confluence between literary traditions and material cultures.

Moreover, embracing the “Europe as Classroom” philosophy and practice of DIS, this course utilizes relevant critical readings concerning the poem *Beowulf* as a nexus of narrative traditions, history, and archaeology in tandem with the on-line *Medieval North Atlantic* multimedia project in order to ground each student’s experiences of the text within specific sites, structures, and artifacts which are informative and evocative. Not incidentally, this course is designed to enrich and to be enriched by potential opportunities to travel to and study *in situ* any number of related sites, objects, and museums throughout Scandinavia and the British Isles.

Outcomes Assessment:

How will we know that students in this course have achieved the course objectives? Students will demonstrate their growing mastery of the material in a number of ways: literary and historical knowledge will be cultivated and illustrated through class participation and the composition of discussion board entries; retention and synthesis of the major themes of the course will be facilitated and manifested in the successful completion of final projects and exams. A much more significant measure of the success of this course, however, would be evidence of student interest in and conversance with the ancient cultures of Northern Europe: This course will have been successful if students—perhaps long after the present semester—are empowered and inspired to choose to seek out and to attempt to contextualize related texts, objects, and locations. If it results in or enriches subsequent forays into epic literature, or later visits to Roskilde or Lejre or the British Museum or Sutton Hoo, this course will have been amply successful.

Field studies (Required Course Component):

Each Field Study will involve one or more structured exercises and/or activities to help to place the experiential component within the academic context of the course, but have no fear: Full and thoughtful participation in each field study will result in a very high grade for that course component.

Wednesday, 15 February, from 1:00-5:00pm

We will begin the term with a visit to the National Museum in Copenhagen, the holdings of which are particularly rich in relevant areas of Prehistoric Denmark. We will pay special attention to burial rituals, grave goods, votive offerings, and bog sacrifices, placing the literary funeral scenes of the Anglo-Saxon epic into the context the continuum of related literal practices in Denmark from the Stone Age to the Conversion to Christianity.

Wednesday, 2 May, from 1:00-5:00pm

Near the end of the term we will have the opportunity to travel to the possible site of the historical Heorot at Lejre. Reenactments and recitations are to be expected! Given this course's emphasis on situating *Beowulf* in the landscape of Denmark, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ground the lessons of the classroom in the soil of the Danish countryside!

Specific Course Requirements:

Weekly Workload:

Each week is organized around a discussion of a particular section of the primary text(s), related critical readings, and relevant site visits to the *Medieval North Atlantic* or other multimedia resources. The reading for any given day is generally in the range of no more than about 20-30 pages, including both primary and critical texts. **Please note that the reading from *Beowulf* is listed by line numbers, and as there are about 40 lines to a page, most of these readings are quite short.** Most of the critical articles are no more than 10-15 pages in length, and the discussion of anything longer most likely would be divided over a couple of class periods. The emphasis in this course, then, is on gaining an intimate knowledge of a representative sample of the relevant materials, and not on mastery over a huge volume. That said, students are expected to have completed the assigned readings in advance of each class session, and to demonstrate familiarity with the material both through Discussion Board entries and class participation.

Preparation & Participation:

Each student is expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable. One need not be a big talker to do well in this class (although it doesn't hurt!), but one does need to be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This is always a touchy and somewhat subjective area to evaluate, so do us both a favor by trying to put in your two cents!

Discussion Board:

You must participate **at least** once weekly in our on-line class Discussion Board (available through DIS Forum); such participation must include an insightful and informed discussion (250 or more words) of the issue of the week (a question or comment which I post on the forum page for that week), as well as **at least** two follow-ups (50 or more words each) to the discussion of your peers. The Discussion Board provides an excellent opportunity for you to explore those issues which interest, intrigue, annoy, or confuse you; in any case, both your primary discussion and your follow-ups should show evidence that you have absorbed and digested the week's reading, as well as the ensuing class discussion. The Discussion Board is meant to supplement and to formalize casual out-of-class discussion and contact with your peers, and thus it takes on a special significance; please feel free to participate several times a week, and to post additional comments and questions as you see fit. I will read your thoughts carefully and eagerly. You must complete your primary discussion of the issue of the week **each week by Sunday at midnight**, and your follow-ups must be posted by **Wednesday at midnight**. As the Discussion Board is meant to spur and extend class discussions, the minimum required posts may not be made up. If the majority of the class consistently utilizes the Discussion Board fruitfully, there will be no need to institute a series of comprehension quizzes in its place. We will begin contributing to our Discussion Board after the first week of class. Furthermore, the unexpected crops up in all our lives from time to time, rather like a threatening sail on the horizon. For that reason, any student may fail to complete the required posts for any one (1) week with no penalty. Each student thus should submit, on time, 1 primary discussion and 2 follow-up posts for each for at least 10 of our 12 weeks of class.

Individual Research Project:

This short paper should concern a key site from *Beowulf* or one of its primary analogues in tandem with a multimedia presentation suitable for inclusion on the *Beowulf in Denmark* website. The emphasis should be on rigor rather than bulk, and the focus should concern how a sense of place permeates some aspect of the narrative. The articles required for this course and the bibliographies thereof give a good indication of the types of critical readings which might well inform such an effort. The paper should be in the range of 1500 words, and the presentation should contain about a half dozen slides or equivalent. You will have great latitude in your choice of subject, which will be made in consultation with the instructor. Ideally, this project will align with some aspect of one of the Field Studies. **Examples of suitable short research papers may be found through the *Medieval North Atlantic* project or the *Beowulf in Denmark* homepage.**

Midterm Exam:

The Midterm Exam will cover the primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. In other words, all assigned course material is fair game, including that which we have not discussed in class. The exam will be divided into three sections: Short-answer identifications; passage identifications; and essay questions concerning major themes which we have discussed in class.

Final Exam:

The Final Exam also will cover the primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. It will have the same format as the Midterm Exam, and will be comprehensive.

Course Evaluation:

Preparation & Participation:	+/-10%
Discussion Board:	+/-10%
Field Study Participation:	+/-10%
Individual Research Project:	+/-20%
Midterm Exam:	+/-25%
Final Exam:	+/-25%

ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.

Course Primary Texts:

Beowulf. Pages 28-98 in Trapp, J. B. *Medieval English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. **(Available through DIS Forum)**

Byock, Jesse L., trans. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Penguin, 1998. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

---., trans. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Penguin, 2000. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Scudder, Bernard, and Ornlouf Thorsson, trans. *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. London: Penguin, 2005. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Short poetic selections including *Judith*, the *Battle of Maldon*, the *Seafarer*, and the *Wanderer*. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Optional Electronic Text:

Kiernan, Kevin, and Ionut Emil Iacob. *Electronic Beowulf: Third Edition* [CD-ROM]. London: British Library, 2011. **(Relevant Selections examined in class; students need not procure their own copy)**

Course Critical Readings (Available through DIS Forum):

Andersson, Theodore M. "Sources and Analogues." In *A Beowulf Handbook*, 125-134 & 146-148. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1997.

Campbell, James, Eric John, Patrick Wormald, and P. V. Addyman. *The Anglo-Saxons*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1991. Pages 32-33, 54-55, & 69.

Christensen, Tom. "Lejre Beyond Legend—the Archaeological Experience." *Journal of Danish Archaeology*. 1991: 163-185.

- . "A New Round of Excavations at Lejre (to 2005)." In *Beowulf and Lejre*, 109-126. Tempe, Ariz: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.
- Cramp, Rosemary. "The Hall in *Beowulf* and Archeology." In *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr*, 331-346. Kalamazoo: Medieval Inst. Pubs., Western Michigan Univ., 1993.
- Fee, Christopher. "*Beag & Beaghroden*: Women, Treasure and the Language of Social Structure in *Beowulf*." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin de la Societe Neophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society* 97, (1996): 285-294.
- . "The Norse Dragon-Slayer Hero." In *Mythology in the Middle Ages: Heroic Tales of Monsters, Magic, and Might*, 3-26. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2011.
- . Various short selections from *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Frank, Roberta. "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History." In *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, 53-65. Kalamazoo: Medieval Inst. Pubs., Western Michigan Univ., 1982.
- . "*Beowulf* and Sutton Hoo: The Odd Couple." In *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*, 317-338. New York, NY: Garland, 1999.
- Hills, Catherine M. "*Beowulf* and Archaeology." In *A Beowulf Handbook*, 291-310. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1997.
- Hines, John. "*Beowulf* and Archaeology-Revisited." In *Aedificia Nova: Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp*, 89-105. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2008.
- Howe, Nicholas. "The Uses of Uncertainty: On the Dating of *Beowulf*." In *The Dating of Beowulf*, 213-220. Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, 1998.
- Hughes, Robert C. "The Origins of Old English to 800 A.D." In *Beowulf: A Prose Translation : Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, 60-67. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Niles, John D. "Beowulf's Great Hall." *History Today* 56, no. 10 (October 2006): 40-44.
- . "Myth and History." In *A Beowulf Handbook*, 213-232. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1997.
- Osborn, Marijane. "Legends of Lejre, Home of Kings." In *Beowulf and Lejre*, 235-254. Tempe, Ariz: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.
- . "The Lejre Connection in *Beowulf* Scholarship." In *Beowulf and Lejre*, 287-293. Tempe, Ariz: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.
- Owen-Crocker, Gale R. "Image, Fact, and the Critical Imagination: Teaching Anglo-Saxon Studies through Archaeology." *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 107-127.

Webster, Leslie. "Archaeology and Beowulf." In *Beowulf: A Verse Translation : Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, 212-236. New York: Norton, 2002.

Suggested Further Reading (Available through DIS Forum):

Niles, John D. "Beowulf and Lejre." In *Beowulf and Lejre*, 169-233. Tempe, Ariz: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.

On-line Resources:

<http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/MedievalNorthAtlantic/index970x650.html>

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/young_explorers/childrens_online_tours/sutton_hoo/sutton_hoo.aspx

http://www.pastperfect.org.uk/sites/yeavingering/images/sparrowclip_c.html

<http://www.bagbybeowulf.com/video/index.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june00/beowulf.html>

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0503/resources_geo.html

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/09/photogalleries/anglo-saxon-gold-hoard-pictures/photo3.html>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/anglo_saxons/stories_and_pastimes/

<http://www.history.com/shows/clash-of-the-gods/videos#battle-of-beowulf-and-grendel>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/oct/19/viking-burial-ship-found-scotland>

Mon, Jan 23 Start of Semester

Thu, Jan 26 Start of Classes

Week 1: All Aboard the Way-Back Machine! Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England, Old English Language and Literature, the Age of Migrations, and the World of *Beowulf*. **Primary Reading:** Scyld Scefing's Funeral Ship: Donoghue, ll. 1-63. **Critical Reading:** Campbell, Hughes. **Multimedia Tours:** Viking Ship Burials (MNA).

Week 2: A Hero Is More than a Sandwich: Introduction to the *Beowulf* Manuscript and the History of Hero-Making. **Primary Reading:** Read over the first 63 lines again on your own; in class we will look at the opening passage in the original Old English of the manuscript. **Critical Reading:** Howe. **Multimedia Tours:** Sutton Hoo (BM) and *The Electronic Beowulf*.

Thu, Feb 09 – Sat, Feb 11 Short Study Tours

Week 3: Fixin' Up the Medieval Man-Cave: The Great Hall & the Hero. **Primary Reading:** The Description of Heorot and the initial coming of Grendel: Donoghue, ll. 64-188. **Critical Reading:** Cramp, Niles (2006), Owen-Crocker. **Suggested Further Reading:** Niles (2007). **Multimedia Tour:** Yeavinger Saxon Royal Palace (Pastperfect).

Week 4: Who's Your Hero? Introducing Beowulf, the Man, the Myth, the Legend! **Primary Reading:** The Hero Comes to Heorot and the Feast at Heorot: Donoghue, ll. 189-661. **Critical Reading:** Hills, Webster. **Multimedia Tour:** Viking ships at Roskilde (MNA).

Week 5: Getting' All Medieval on a Zombie.... **Primary Reading:** Beowulf's Battle with Grendel: Donoghue, ll. 662-835; Grettir's Fight with Glamr, *Grettir* Chapters 32-35 (pages 75-86); Boðvar Bjarki at the Court of King Hrolf, *Hrolf Kraki*, Chapter 23 (pages 44-52). **Critical Reading:** Andersson, Fee, *GHK* ("Germanic Demigods and Spirits"--101-108; "Heroic Battles with Monsters"--127-130; "The Sagas"--147-148; "Norse Echoes of English Heroic Sagas"--155-158). **Multimedia Tour:** Benjamin Bagby Old English Performance of *Beowulf*: on-line DVD Clip Excerpt from Scene 6: Beowulf vows to Battle Grendel Unarmed (lines 672-702a).

Sat, Mar 03 – Sun, Mar 11 Long Study Tours

Week 6: Party Time at Heorot: Getting' Down to the Song of the Scop. **Primary Reading:** The Celebration at Heorot and the Story of Hildeburh: Donoghue, ll. 836-1250. **Critical Reading:** Fee, *GHK* ("Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Saga as History"—166-168), Frank (1982), Niles (1997). **Multimedia Tour:** Clash of the Gods: Battle of Beowulf and Grendel.

Week 7: Don't Go Messin' with Mama's Little Monster! **Primary Reading:** The Revenge of Grendel's Mother; Beowulf's Descent into the Mere & Battle with Grendel's Mother: Donoghue, ll. 1251-1650; Grettir in the Lair of the Water-Hag, *Grettir* Chapters 65-66 (pages 150-153); *GHK* ("Grettir's Descent into the Water-Troll's Cave" & "Beowulf's Journey into Grendel's Mere"—124-126). **Multimedia Tours:** Grettir Sites (MNA). **Critical Reading:** Christensen (1991).

Week 8: Monday: My Cup Runneth Over...: Cup-bearing, Gift-giving, Status, and Symbols on the Home Front in Heorot: Donoghue, ll. 1651-2199. **Primary Reading:** The Cup-bearing and Gift-giving Sequences. **Critical Reading:** Fee, *Beag & Beagbroden*. Thursday: The Virgin Heroine on the Home Front: The Old English *Judith* and the Rhetoric of Heroism in the Age of Danish Raids. **Primary Reading:** *Judith*.

Sat, Mar 31 – Sun, Apr 15 Optional Study Tours/Adventure Trips

Week 9: Monday: *Survivor*, Medieval-Style: Last One on the Island Buries all the Loot! **Primary Reading:** The Lone Survivor Passage: Donoghue, ll. 2200-2509. **Critical Reading:** Frank (1999). Burial Mounds (MNA). Thursday: The Hall-less Thane Laments His Lonely Life: The Lone Survivor of *Beowulf* Meets the *Wanderer* & the *Seafarer* of the Old English Elegies.... **Primary Reading:** The *Wanderer* & the *Seafarer*.

Week 10: Fighting the Five-Alarm Fire: Dragon Slaying 101. **Primary Reading:** The Dragon's Rage and Beowulf's Final Battle: Donoghue, ll. 2510-2820; Sigurd Slays Fafnir, *Volsungs* Chapters 15-20 (pages 59-66). **Critical Reading:** *MM* ("The Norse Dragon-Slayer Hero"—pages 3-26) and *GHK* ("Sigurd the Dragon Slayer" & "Beowulf's Battle with the Dragon"—pages 130-133). **Multimedia Tours:** Anglo-Saxon Hoards (National Geographic).

Week 11: Monday: In Praise of the Last Good Thane: Of Wicglaf, Aelfwine, Final Battles, and Danish Pirates. **Primary Reading**: The Battle of Maldon. Thursday: The Hero's Final Journey: Death and Dying in the Germanic North. **Primary Reading**: Beowulf's Death and Funeral: Donoghue, ll. 2821-3182; "Baldr's Dreams" & "Baldr's Death;" Ibn Fadlan's "Rus Ship Burial on the Volga". **Critical Reading**: Hines. **Multimedia Tour**: Scottish Ship Burial (Guardian)

Fri, May 04 – Sun, May 06 Optional Study Tours/Adventure Trips

Week 12: Beowulf in Denmark? Fact, Fiction, or Fantasy? Conclusions & Loose Ends. **Critical Reading**: Osborn "Legends of Lejre" & "The Lejre Connection," Christensen (2007).

Sat, May 12 – Sun, May 13 Reading Days

Mon, May 14 – Fri, May 18 Final Exams

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change