Beowulf off the map

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ABSTRACT

This essay uses maps that have illustrated *Beowulf* since Klaeber's edition as a starting point for an exploration of spatial representation in the poem. It is argued that modern maps do not offer particularly useful tools for understanding the poem, and that 'chorography', that is, the description of regional space, may be a more accurate term for analysis of *Beowulf* than 'geography'. The poem presents a topography intimately connected to the interrelations of different peoples, and the frequent movement between past, present and future times. The final section of the article considers the postmedieval reception of spatial reference in *Beowulf*, disputes the presence of an Anglo-Saxon 'migration myth' in the poem, and raises some implications for genre that result from spatial analysis.

Students of *Beowulf* have for many years encountered, in one form or another, the map that appeared in Friedrich Klaeber's definitive edition of the poem. Entitled 'The Geography of Beowulf', Klaeber's map shows the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula and north-western continental Europe in order to supplement the editor's elucidation of the peoples and places referred to, however obliquely, in the poem (Fig. 1). Located opposite Klaeber's introduction to *Beowulf*, and therefore seen by many readers before they began to read the poem itself, 'The Geography of Beowulf' seems to attempt to bridge modern and medieval space. The rivers Vistula, Elbe, Ems, Rhine, Meuse, and some cities and islands are given their twentieth-century toponyms, but these co-exist with Old English ethnonyms taken from the poem: Sweon, Heaðo-Reamas, Geatas (Gautar), Eotan, Fresan, Francan, Wylfingas, Wendle (Vandals), Gifðas, and of course Dene, whose hall, Heorot, is marked in the position of the settlement of Lejre on Zealand. The toponym 'Angeln', which does not appear in the poem, is nevertheless placed in the vicinity of Schleswig. Klaeber's map appeared to make a scientific statement – a grid of lines of

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Figure 1: Klaeber's 'Geography of Beowulf'. From *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950), p. viii.

longitude and latitude added an air of verisimilitude at once anachronistic and pointless, since no co-ordinates were given – but it was as much a work of conjectural scholarship, and its confident location and glossing of peoples both summarized and masked vigorous, even vitriolic, debate.

There is, however, a more fundamental problem with the map. It is not evident that there is such as thing as a 'geography of Beowulf'. Indeed Klaeber himself expressed doubt on this matter. In the course of the introduction to his edition, Klaeber speculated that the water route used by the poem's Swedes and Geatas 'may very well have been by way of the great lakes, Väner and Vätter' (both of which appear on Klaeber's map), or even by the Baltic Sea and Lake Mälar. But he also expressed an alternative: 'can we be sure that the Anglo-Saxon poet had a clear knowledge of Northern geography? Is it not

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rather likely that he would suppose all branches of the Scandinavians to be seafaring peoples? Certainly the topographical hints contained in the poem could not be used successfully for definite localization'.[1] The poem's 'sea cliffs', for example, 'seem to be a part of a conventional description based on notions of English scenery' while 'nothing but poetic invention seems to be back of the place-names *Hronesnæs* 2805, *Earnanæs* 3031, cf. *Hrefnawudu* 2925, *Hrefnesholt* 2935'.[2] As Klaeber's comments indicate, the assumption that the *Beowulf*-poet was possessed of detailed knowledge of Scandinavian geography carries implications for interpretation of the poem: to apply modern geographic knowledge to the text risks treating it as history rather than fiction, downplaying the role of 'poetic invention' and artistic licence. To these concerns it is possible to add that 'geography' as an independent discipline did not exist in the Middle Ages. Geographic description certainly did exist, but always as part of other arts and genres. Within the seven liberal arts, for example, geography would have been understood as a part of geometry; it is under the sign of Geometria that Martianus Capella introduced a lengthy description of the world in *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. Geography was incorporated within historiography, eschatology, and within encyclopedic compilations such as Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and it is predominantly in these contexts and with these functions that medieval maps appear.[3] The connection between maps and literature was not unknown in the Middle Ages – for example, small topographic diagrams do exist as glosses in a significant number of manuscripts of the works of Lucan's *Bellum civile* and Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum* – [4] but it is rare indeed for a map to illustrate a vernacular literary work in the Middle Ages.

No map accompanies *Beowulf* as it appears in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv. Unlike medieval readers of the poem, however, twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers seem to require cartographic assistance in order to understand and fully appreciate *Beowulf*. Even the ill-fated 2005 Icelandic–Canadian film *Beowulf and Grendel*[5] opened with a faux-antique map in order to contextualize the action to follow. Scholars have occasionally poked fun at Klaeber's lines of longitude and latitude, and sometimes

[1] *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950), p. xlvii.

[2] *Beowulf*, ed. Klaeber, p. xlvii.

[3] M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 311 and 321, lists the known Anglo-Saxon manuscripts for both Martianus and Isidore, as well as references to these works contained in citations and inventories of Latin books. The *Etymologiae* seems to have been one of the twenty odd titles housed in 'the typical Anglo-Saxon library' (p. 127); knowledge of Martianus was far less extensive, though on the increase from the tenth century (p. 44, n. 66).

[4] P. Gautier Dalché, 'Les diagrammes topographiques dans les manuscrits des classiques latins (Lucain, Solin, Salluste)', *La Tradition Vive: Mélanges d'histoire des texts en l'honneur de Louis Holtz*, ed. Pierre Lardet (Paris, 2003), pp. 291–306.

[5] Dir. Sturla Gunnarsson: www.beowulfandgrendel.com.

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questioned the utility of his map,[6] but editors and commentators continue to supply students of the poem with less anachronistic and occasionally more humorous maps of essentially the same geographic area.[7] In his recent *Companion*, for example, Andy Orchard printed a 'Map of Scandinavia in Beowulf's day', designed by Katharine Scarfe Beckett (Fig. 2).[8] This shows almost exactly the same area represented in Klaeber's map; lines of longitude and latitude are banished, along with toponyms, including Heorot, but a scale and compass have appeared in the lower right corner, monsters adorn the North and Baltic seas, and a series of vignettes illustrates key moments and characters from the poem. A Viking ship shuttles between the land of the Geatas and the Danes, where Grendel crouches in his mere. The dragon lurks on his hoard in Beowulf's homeland, while the hero himself appears (along with Breca) battling one of the *nicoras* beneath the land of the Heathoræmas. Beowulf's coastal stronghold, burning after the dragon's attack, is located at the far south of the Scandinavian peninsula but alongside it appears a curved line that represents his funeral barrow, both simultaneously present in literary space-time.[9] And in what is perhaps the map's best and quietest joke, just off the Frisian coast a man appears rowing a boat and regarding seagulls in the water: this escapee from *The Seafarer* is designed to remind scholars and students of Old English literature that, as Scarfe Beckett puts it, 'none of the poems stands in isolation from the others in the corpus – we understand them in relation to each other'.[10] Playfully and self-consciously anachronistic, then, Scarfe Beckett's map is far closer to a medieval map than Klaeber's in its willingness to portray the monstrous within a geographic frame, and in its inclusion of narrative elements.[11]

[6] J. D. Niles, 'Myth and History', *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Exeter, 1997), pp. 213–32, at 225–6; J. Bazelmans, *By Weapons Made Worthy: Lords, Retainers and their Relationship in 'Beowulf'* (Amsterdam, 1999), p. 125.

[7] In their edition of 1998 Mitchell and Robinson print a map explicitly based on Klaeber's, though with longitudinal and latitudinal lines removed. The Hetware are moved to the east of the Rhine, but otherwise the positions of tribes and places (including Heorot) are unchanged*: Beowulf: an Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts*, ed. B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson (Oxford, 1998), p. xiii. See most recently *Beowulf: a New Translation for Oral Delivery*, trans. D. Ringler (Indianapolis, 2007), p. viii, for another adaptation of Klaeber's map (with ethnonyms modernized, including 'Battle-Rams' for Heaðo-Reamas).

[8] A. Orchard*, A Critical Companion to 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge, 2003), p. xiii.

[9] I am very grateful to Katharine Scarfe Beckett for her generous and informative commentary on this map.

[10] Personal Communication, 23 November 2008.

[11] For an interesting departure from the conventional cartographic model, see the 'preliminary conceptual map' of the tribes of *Beowulf*, constructed in 1984 and printed in G. R. Overing and M. Osborn*, Landscape of Desire: Partial Stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World* (Minneapolis, 1994), esp. pp. xv–xix. This image consists of five interlocking rectangles and squares, the

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Figure 2: 'Map of Scandinavia in Beowulf's day', designed by Katharine Scarfe Beckett, from A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge, 2003), p. xiii.

largest and most central of which is marked Denmark (Heorot), and contains a representation of 'Grendelsmere'. Osborn has continued to explore the connection between *Beowulf* and the landscape around Lejre: see M. Osborn, 'Verbal Sea-Charts and Beowulf's Approach to Denmark', *De Gustibus*: *Essays for Alain Renoir*, ed. J. M. Foley (New York, 1992), pp. 441–55, and *Beowulf and Lejre*, ed. J. D. Niles and M. Osborn (Tempe, 2007).

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Most recently, the appearance of a fourth edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf* has seen a subtle shift in the use of cartographic aids to the reader. In this revised and updated edition two maps, one of Scandinavia and one of Britain, appear as part of a preliminary section consisting of figures relevant to the poem (Fig. 3).[12] The caption 'The Geography of Beowulf' has gone, replaced by 'The North Sea Cultural Zone'. The map of Scandinavia shows, again, essentially the same area that appears on Klaeber's map, marking the rivers Rhine, Weder, Elbe and Oder, as well as the lands of Frisia, Jutland, Skåne, Götaland and Uppland, but its sixteen toponyms represent archaeological sites, rather than places explicitly mentioned in the poem. The maps in the revised Klaeber are designed to serve as illustrations of the editors' introduction to the poem, rather than of *Beowulf* itself. Cartography is, then, uncoupled from the poem; at the same time, the decision to print the two overlapping maps, with Britain given the same prominence as Scandinavia, implies an equivalence and parallel between these spaces. As I will suggest, this equation of Britain and Scandinavia derives not from the poem itself, but from modern scholarship.

In the last few years scholars have begun to focus with growing intensity on the 'sense of place' expressed in *Beowulf*. The most influential contribution to this area has surely been Nicholas Howe's exploration of 'Beowulf and the Ancestral Homeland' in his study of the Anglo-Saxon migration myth in Old English literature.[13] More recently, two scholars have approached this topic from somewhat different angles: while John D. Niles has studied the 'heroic geography' of the poem in the course of constructing a revised version of Klaeber's map,[14] Fabienne Michelet has discussed the 'spatial *imaginaire*' of *Beowulf*, in particular the poem's representation of centrality and marginality.[15] Despite the differences of their approaches, Howe, Niles and

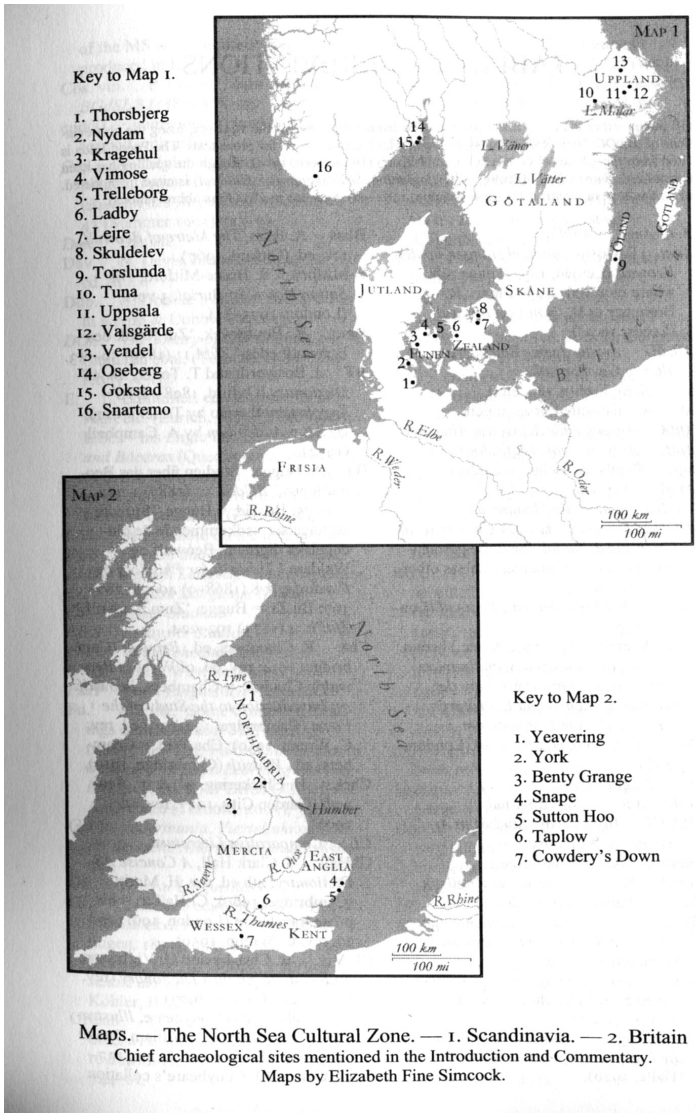
[12] *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), p. xvii.

[13] N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 143–80. Howe briefly returns to his spatial analysis of *Beowulf* in *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, 2008), pp. 188–92. Focusing on 2200–2214a, he argues that the poem contrasts the 'grimly endangered' homeland of Geatland with the 'alluring elsewhere' of Denmark, both viewed 'from the perspective of Englalond'.

[14] J. D. Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 119–40. Niles acknowledges the anachronism involved in superimposing medieval toponyms and ethnonyms on a modern map, but argues that the only alternative would be 'to map those same names onto a chiefly undifferentiated blob; and though maps of that kind were drawn in the Middle Ages, it is hard to see what reason there could be for producing one today' (p. 120). He does not consider the alternative of *not* producing a map.

[15] F. L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford, 2006), esp. pp. 74–114. Michelet defines 'spatial *imaginaire*' in Le Goffian terms as the socially and culturally conditioned 'representations and conceptualizations of

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Maps. — The North Sea Cultural Zone. — 1. Scandinavia. — 2. Britain
Chief archaeological sites mentioned in the Introduction and Commentary.
Maps by Elizabeth Fine Simcock.

Figure 3: Maps of Scandinavia and Britain by Elizabeth Fine Simcock, from *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), p. xvii.

the surrounding world and of the cosmos' (pp. 8–9). See also A. K. Siewers, 'Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building', *Viator* 34 (2003), 1–39; and most recently I. Valtonen, *The North in the 'Old English Orosius': a Geographical Narrative in Context* (Helsinki, 2008), pp. 200–13.

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Michelet all refer to the 'geography' and even the 'poetic cartography'[16] of *Beowulf*. Yet these and other studies have not, I will suggest, confronted the central problem raised by Klaeber: the *absence* of geography in either a modern or medieval sense from the poem. In *Beowulf* there is almost no attempt to locate the events of the poem within a world geography. What is present in the poem is a shifting sense of regional space, at times relatively precise, at others vague. For this reason the term 'geography' is not only somewhat anachronistic but also unhelpful when applied to *Beowulf*.

Instead, I suggest that we might gain a more accurate analysis of the sense of region in the poem by using the term 'chorography'. It must be admitted at once that this term is in some ways no less anachronistic than geography. Chorography literally refers to the description of an area or region (Gr. *khōra*); and, although it could be used as a synonym for geography or as a term for a world map in the classical and medieval era,[17] it was notably defined by Ptolemy of Alexandria as a practice distinct from geography. For Ptolemy, 'geōgraphia' was the 'imitation through drawing of the entire known part of the world', while 'chōrographia' was an independent discipline which 'sets out the individual localities, each one independently and by itself, registering practically everything down to the least thing therein' instead of the 'broader, general outlines' shown by 'geōgraphia'. Ptolemy memorably described the goal of 'chōrographia' as 'an impression of a part, as when one makes an image of just an ear or an eye', as against 'geōgraphia', which sought 'a general view, analogous to making a portrait of the whole head'.[18] I make no suggestion that Ptolemy's *Geographia* was known in Anglo-Saxon England.[19] Nor can it be argued that a concept resembling Ptolemy's understanding of 'chorōgraphia', with its demand for precise delineation of local features, existed as an independent discipline in Anglo-Saxon England.[20] Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the term is more useful than 'geography' for an understanding of *Beowulf* because it denotes the

[16] Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 76.

[17] For example, Strabo seems to use the term to refer to detailed topographic and regional description: *Geography* II.v.27, cf. V.ccxxiv, V.ccxxv. It seems to have been in the sense of 'world map' or 'world description' that the term was used in the early ninth century by the Irishman Dicuil: 'Quem diuus Augustus primus omnium per Chorografiam ostendit'; *Dicuili Liber de mensura orbis terrae*, ed. J. J. Tierney (Dublin, 1967), I.ii.

[18] J. L. Berggren and A. Jones, *Ptolemy's 'Geography': an Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton, 2000), I.i.

[19] On medieval knowledge of the *Geographia* see P. Gautier Dalché, 'Le souvenir de la Géographie de Ptolémée dans le monde latin medieval (VIe–XIVe siècles)', *Euphrosyne* 27 (1999), 79–106. It was not until the rediscovery of Ptolemy's work in the Latin west in the fifteenth century that the category of 'chorography' was used and refined in humanist thought and writing, in relation not only to 'geography', but also to a third term, 'topography'.

[20] The topographic nature of boundary-clauses in Anglo-Saxon charters indicates the existence of careful local mapping for administrative and legal purposes, however. For discussion see,

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conscious description of a part rather than the whole – of regional, as opposed to world space. Unlike texts such as the Old English *Orosius*, which elaborate and celebrate a description of the known world, the regional setting of *Beowulf* and its peoples is invoked repeatedly, and at key moments. Further, I suggest that we should think of chorography not in cartographic terms, as the production of a regional map, but in literary terms. The poem does evoke a 'sense of space', in which one may discern a preoccupation with coastlines, sea-crossings, and the interactions of peoples at once separated and connected by water. Its chorography does not, however, equate to visual representation of such formations and relationships. The use of maps is indeed crucial if one is to understand *modern* scholarly attempts to locate the action of the poem. But perhaps the first step in reading *Beowulf* from a spatial perspective should be to liberate it from cartography: to begin to read it without maps, physical or mental.

BETWEEN SEAS

The cartographic legacy of Anglo-Saxon England is confined to a single artifact, the Cotton world map (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v, 56v), which is usually dated to the tenth or early eleventh century, and is therefore roughly contemporaneous with the *Beowulf* manuscript (Fig. 4).[21] Some aspects of this map can be considered in analogy to the poem. In particular, the Cotton map presents an unusually well-articulated representation of the British Isles and the North Sea coast, with ethnonyms appearing in Old English as well as Latin. Demarcation of 'Suðbryttas' in Brittany, 'Scriðefinnas' on an island (marked 'Island') that may represent Scandinavia, 'Sclaui' and 'Sleswic' in northern continental Europe, and 'Neronorroen' on a peninsula to the east of northern Britain indicates a sustained level of interest in the north-west.[22] However, the map contains many features that lie beyond the scope of *Beowulf*; it is an image

for example, D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), esp. pp. 84–102; N. Howe, 'An Angle on the Earth', *Bull. of the John Rylands Lib.* 82.1 (2000), 3–27.

[21] On the Cotton map, see in particular P. McGurk, 'The Mappa Mundi', *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany (British Library Cotton Tiberius B.v. Part I)*, ed. P. McGurk, D. N. Dumville, M. R. Godden, A. Knock (Copenhagen, 1983), pp. 79–86; E. Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed their World* (London, 1997), pp. 74–80; also B. Englisch, *Ordo orbis terrae: die Weltsicht in den Mappae mundi des frühen und hohen Mittelalters* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 245–58, 590–1, P. Barber, 'Medieval Maps of the World', *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and their Context*, ed. P. D. A. Harvey (London, 2006), pp. 1–44, at 4–8, Valtonen, *The North in the* '*Old English Orosius*', pp. 221–51. For the map as an example of the hyperreal, see M. K. Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: Old Media, New Media, and Early Medieval Studies in the Late Age of Print* (Gainesville, 2007), pp. 110–58. P. D. A. Harvey has argued strongly that the map ultimately derives from an ancient Roman original: see *Medieval Maps* (London, 1991), pp. 21–5.

[22] On the names, and for the suggestion that 'Neronorroen' refers to Norway rather than Denmark, see McGurk, 'The Mappa Mundi', pp. 81, 86–7; Valtonen, *The North in the* '*Old English Orosius*', pp. 231–41.

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Figure 4: London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.V, 56v. The Cotton or 'Anglo-Saxon' world map. East at top.

of the known world that extends from the columns of Hercules in the far west to Taprobana in the east, and from Scythia, and Gog and Magog, in the north to Ethiopia in the south. Its manuscript context suggests that the map may have been read in conjunction with the themes of pilgrimage and the computus, and it has been plausibly though not certainly connected to Priscian's translation of

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the *Periegesis* of Dionysius, a copy of which appears in the same manuscript.[23] Versions of other surviving medieval maps were almost certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England, and – especially if a broad definition of 'map' is allowed, including purely verbal maps – it is undeniable that from the 'age of Bede', and certainly by the tenth and eleventh centuries, a culture existed in which both global and local mapping practices were known within educated circles.[24] Yet to what extent can such a culture usefully be connected with *Beowulf*?

Classical and late antique geographic sources left Scandinavia and north-west Europe generally peripheral areas. That is not to say that they were not represented, and medieval texts on occasions supplemented classical descriptions of the north-west with more detailed information about the region.[25] Scandinavia, or 'Scandza' (Scanzia, Scada, Ganzmir), could appear as an island, as it does on the Cotton map, or as a peninsula; the cartographic evidence suggests that the toponym could be considered to be synonymous with 'Norwegia'.[26] 'Suevia' is arguably used on some medieval maps to represent Sweden, though it may in fact refer to Swabia or the land of the Suevi; more definitely, Matthew Paris's world maps designated a 'Suescia', while an inscription on the Ebstorf *mappa mundi* (probably *c.* 1300) refers to a 'Sweonia interior'.[27] 'Dacia' was used on several world maps to designate Denmark (as well as the Roman province in modern Romania and eastern Hungary). The 'terminus Danorum et Saxonum' is represented on two surviving medieval *mappae mundi* (the twelfth-century

[23] McGurk questioned the connection between the Cotton map and the *Periegesis*, but Edson argues that although the map 'was probably not specifically made to illustrate the poem', it may have been used for this function: *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 76–7.

[24] C. Delano-Smith and R. J. P. Kain, *English Maps: a History* (London, 1999), pp. 8–12; P. D. A. Harvey, 'Maps in the Age of Bede' (Jarrow Lecture, 2006). Just a few pictorial maps survive from Anglo-Saxon England. The only surviving map that can be definitively dated to Bede's lifetime is the plan of the Tabernacle within Solomon's Temple in the Codex Amiatinus; Bede also incorporated Adomnán's plans illustrating *De locis sanctis* into his own work of the same name. In addition, manuscripts of Bede's *De natura rerum* and *De temporum ratione* contain diagrams showing the division of the known world into three *partes*, or the division of the entire earth into five zones. A zonal map appears in the same manuscript as the Cotton world map. It seems likely that a manuscript of Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography* was brought to Anglo-Saxon England by Archbishop Theodore: Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 32, 177, and there is evidence that it was available in Southumbria in the early ninth century: S. Keynes, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*: London, BL, Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols. 104–9', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005) I, 47–67, at 54–5.

[25] See A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005).

[26] For a comprehensive survey, see L. S. Chekin, *Northern Eurasia in Medieval Cartography: Inventory, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Turnhout, 2006). McGurk, 'The Mappa Mundi', p. 81, emphasizes the unusual and precocious nature of the Cotton map's representation of northern Europe.

[27] Chekin, *Northern Eurasia in Medieval Cartography*, p. 248.

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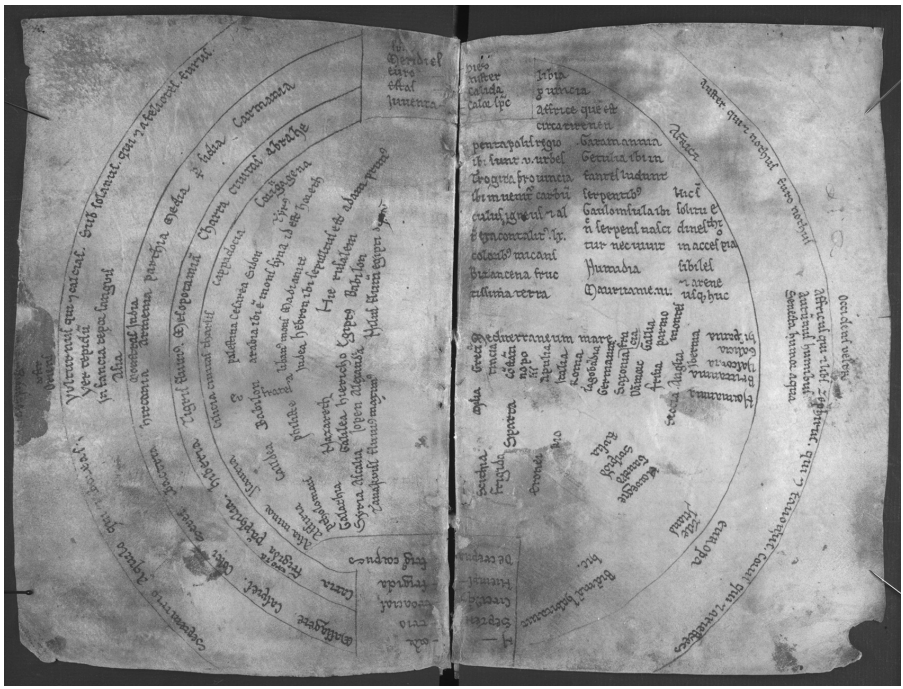


Figure 5: Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, GKS 1812 4º, 5v-6r. Thirteenth-century Icelandic map. South at top. The earth divided between the *partes* of Asia (left half of map), Africa (upper right quadrant), and Europe (lower right quadrant), surrounded by Ocean and with winds marked in outer circle. The toponyms 'Tile', 'Island', 'Norvegie', 'Gautland', 'Suiþiod', and 'Rusia' appear within Europe on a north-west axis.

Sawley map and the Hereford map), and 'Danmorc' appears on the remarkable thirteenth-century 'Icelandic map', which also arranges the toponyms 'Tile', 'Island', 'Norvegie', 'Gautland', 'Suiþiod' and 'Rusia' schematically, on a north-west axis (Fig. 5).[28] But there was no stable spatial order for the representation of these peoples and places, and consequently no consolidated 'image of Scandinavia' can be said to have existed before at least the fifteenth century. No surviving medieval map fits the description of the region given in *Beowulf*, which is why modern editors have resorted to modern maps.

A world image is invoked only once in *Beowulf*, when towards the beginning

[28] Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, GKS 1812 4º, 5v–6r. The manuscript contains miscellaneous astronomical and calendrical material, including extracts from Bede's *De natura rerum* and John of Sacrobosco's *De sphera*; the map is immediately preceded by a list of Icelandic bishops: Chekin, *Northern Eurasia in Medieval Cartography*, pp. 69–71; R. Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 70–2, 419–24.

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of the poem, and just prior to Grendel's attack, the *scop* in Heorot utters the song of creation. The *scop* praises God's creation of the earth, 'wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð', with the sun and moon to provide light for land dwellers.[29] This description can be equated to the fairly standard medieval conception, present in both classical and Norse cosmography, of the known world as an expanse surrounded by an encircling ocean, around which the sun and moon revolve. The 'wang' is divided into regions made fertile by the Almighty, and subsequently populated. In the immediate wake of these lines, however, the focus of the poem turns to the local with the announcement of the onset of Grendel. Thereafter the sense of a world image, immanent in the *scop's* description of creation, is scarcely visible.

In only one phrase in the poem does a world geography, arguably, linger: the formulaic expression *be sæm tweonum* ('between the two seas'), used characteristically to describe the extent of a ruler's greatness or fame. It has usually been supposed that the phrase originated in a reference to the North and Baltic seas, derived from the pre-migration position of the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons.[30] Some commentators have argued that *be sæm tweonum* could be understood, alternatively, as a generic expression unmoored from specific geographic content, and meaning simply 'throughout the earth'.[31] A further possibility is that the phrase refers to the encircling and equatorial seas of medieval cosmographical theory, as expounded in texts such as Macrobius's *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*.[32] The evidence from the poem is ambiguous on this point. At times 'between the two seas' does appear to invoke a world geography, as in the description of Beowulf's prowess at 857b–861:

[29] *Beowulf*, ed. Klaeber, 4th ed., 89b–98: 'a beautiful expanse as far as water surrounds'. All further references to *Beowulf* are to this edition unless otherwise stated. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[30] E.g. N. Outzen, 'Das angelsächsische Gedicht Beowulf, als die schätzbarste Urkunde des höchsten Alterthums von unserm Vaterlande', *Kieler Blätter* 3 (1816), 307–27, at 318.

[31] *Beowulf*, ed. Mitchell and Robinson, p. 296, s.v. *tweone*. OE *sæ* could be used to translate Lat. *mare*, as in Aelfric's *De temporibus anni*, I.x. The expression *be sæm tweonum* notably appears in the Old English *Exodus*, lines 443–6 (God's speech to Abraham), and line 563 (Moses' speech). Lucas glosses the phrase as 'perhaps meaning "in entirety"', and mentions its possible derivation from Ex. XXIII.31, between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, or Num. XXXIV.6–12, between the Mediterranean and the line of the Jordan: *Exodus*, ed. P. J. Lucas (London, 1977), p. 131. Howe discusses the phrase in *Migration and Mythmaking*, pp. 89–92, noting its sweeping sense of 'everywhere', but arguing that its three appearances in *Beowulf* simultaneously contain a local reference to the Baltic and North Seas and a much more broad meaning, because '[t]he Germania between these seas is "everywhere" for this people, because it is there that the hero is known and celebrated' (p. 90).

[32] Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. J. Willis (Leipzig, 1963), 2.9. The editors of *Klaeber's Beowulf* suggest along similar lines that 'the expression [*be sæm tweonum*] may rather denote the seas located at the edges of the known world': p. 165.

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monig oft gecwæð
þætte suð ne norð be sæm tweonum
ofer eormengrund oþer nænig
under swegles begong selra nære
rondhæbbendra, rices wyrðra[33]

Elsewhere a more restricted topography seems to be invoked: Æschere is said to be the dearest companion to Hroðgar *be sæm tweonum* (1297b); Hroðgar himself is styled by Beowulf

woroldcyninga
ðæm selestan be sæm tweonum
ðara þe on Scedenigge sceattas dælde;[34]

and the description of Offa as 'ealles moncynnes mine gefræge/ þone selestan bi sæm tweonum'[35] could be read as a qualification (the best of the region) or as hyperbole (the best of the entire known world). Even if we allow that the phrase conjures up a world geography in all instances, however, it is clear that the world space is envisaged only in conjunction with superlatives, and only in association with great rulers. Most significantly, the world is invoked as the measure of virtue, whether conceived as military prowess, loyalty and love of companions, generosity to retainers, or all of these things. At moments of heightened poetic diction the world appears, usually as a backdrop to the figure of a king, and never subject to detailed description.

As only a glance through the glossary of proper names in a modern edition of *Beowulf* reveals, though, detail of a more local, regional kind is remarkably prevalent in the poem. As Klaeber noted, coastal topography recurs throughout, from the departure of Scyld at the beginning through to the funeral of Beowulf. Two episodes early in the poem allude to a more specific chorography: the journey of Beowulf and his men to the land of the Danes, and the flyting with Unferð.

Having heard of Hroðgar's miseries at the hands of Grendel, Beowulf resolves to provide the old king with assistance. He leads fourteen other handpicked men to a ship lying at the ready in a harbour: 'on yðum,/ . . . under beorge', where the water meets the sand ('sund wið sande').[36] At this point Beowulf's expertise is emphasized: 'sea-skilled', he shows his men the way to the shore ('landgemyrcu', literally 'land-boundaries') (209b). The journey that

[33] 'Many often said that south or north, between the two seas across the vast earth there was no other under the sky's circuit better amongst shieldsmen or more worthy of a kingdom.'
[34] *Beowulf*, 1684b–1686: '[to] the best of worldly kings between the two seas who gave out coins in Scedenigge [Skåne]'.
[35] *Beowulf*, 1955–6: 'the best of all mankind, I've heard, between the two seas'.
[36] *Beowulf*, 207a–213a: 'on the waves . . . under the cliff'.

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follows lasts just seven and a half lines. The ship, bird-like ('fugle gelicost'), is blown by the wind over the sea for at least a day, until the men sight land – more cliffs ('brimclifu', 'beorgas steape', 'side sænæssas'), symmetrically balancing the 'beorg' from which they departed.[37] The subsequent exchange with the coast guard establishes more than just generic coastal description, however. The guard swiftly identifies the land on which the Geatas have arrived as 'of the Danes' (242a, 253b), and, on learning of the origin of Beowulf and his men, he envisages their return journey 'to Wedermearce' (298b). Despite its apparent vagueness, then, the early part of the poem reveals a consistent preoccupation with borders and boundaries. Not only is its chief monster a 'mære mearcstapa' ('renowned border-stepper') (103a), it sketches out with relative economy a coastal chorography expressed in terms of ethnic identity, in which the 'border of the Geatas' lies around a day's travel across the sea from the land of the Danes. Hroðgar's hall, of course, lies some distance inland, but the return of the guard to the coast, emphatically announced at lines 318b–19, reminds us of a broader context of threats to the border from without. That sense of a regional chorography is developed in the two descriptions of Beowulf's contest with Breca that constitute the flyting episode.

The first, briefer, description by Unferð describes some kind of a contest (swimming or rowing) between the two men at sea as the result of a 'dolgilp'.[38] The time of year is winter (516a), and the contest lasts for seven nights (517a). The men are initially described in terms of their command of the sea (they cover it with their arms, move their hands quickly, and glide over it), but before long the conditions and the length of time leave them 'on wæteres æht'.[39] According to Unferð, Breca wins the competition because of his greater strength. In the morning (presumably of the eighth day) the ocean carries him 'on Heaþo-Ræmes', from where he seeks his homeland, 'lond Brondinga',

[37] *Beowulf*, 217–224a. The length of time the voyage takes is disputed: Klaeber thought line 219 ('oð þæt ymb antid oþres dogores') might mean one day and 'a reasonable space of time of another day', but doubted that 'the distance from Beowulf's home to the coast near Hleiðr could really have been covered in so short a time': *Beowulf*, ed. Klaeber, 3rd ed., p. 137; Osbern and Overing tried to prove Klaeber wrong in their recreation of Beowulf's voyage: *Landscape of Desire*, pp. 1–12. Several critics, such as T. Burns Haber, *A Comparative Study of the Beowulf and the Aeneid* (Princeton, 1931), pp. 121–8 and T. M. Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery: Homer, Virgil, and the Medieval Legacy* (Ithaca, 1976), pp. 145–59 have argued for Virgilian influence in the description of the voyage to Denmark.

[38] *Beowulf*, 509a: 'foolish boast'. For an assessment of the arguments, see R. Frank, '"Mere" and "Sund": Two Sea-Changes in *Beowulf*', *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature. Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. P. Rugg Brown *et al.* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 153–72, and R. D. Fulk, 'Afloat in Semantic Space: Old English *sund* and the Nature of Beowulf's Exploit with Breca', *JEGP* 104 (2005), 456–72; for detailed analysis of the entire exchange, see Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 247–56.

[39] *Beowulf*, 516b: 'in the water's possession'.

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where he possesses people, a stronghold, and rings (519–523a). Beowulf's reply to Unferð is much longer (seventy-six lines against twenty-two), and contains important additional information, yet it is structurally similar. The episode is subtly refigured as the result of a vow (535–536a, 'wit . . . gebeotedon'), but again it concludes with one of the contestants – Beowulf, this time – reaching land. Whereas Unferð describes the contest in terms of the opposition of the two men not only to each other but also to the sea itself, Beowulf introduces a new factor: the sea-monsters ('merefisc', 'meredeor', 'nicor') who assail him, and who eventually pay with their lives, to the relief of seafarers, who apparently were previously menaced by the beasts. The sea-monsters only strike after five nights, when the two combatants, hitherto inseparable, are driven apart by the surging waters and the north wind (544–8).

Crucially, Beowulf appears to trump Breca not only in his tally of nine sea monsters (574b–575a, 'ic mid sweorde ofsloh/ niceras nigene') – versus, presumably, nil – but in his eventual landing place. Like Breca, he reaches land in the morning (of the sixth day?), and once more we see the description of a coastal topography: the waters carried him so that 'ic sænæssas geseon mihte,/ windige weallas'.[40] But it is no insignificant detail that the sea is said to have carried him 'on Finna land' (580b). The poem gives no indication as to the precise location of this land, and consequently one cannot be dogmatic about its meaning.[41] It seems reasonable, however, to follow the Old English *Orosius* here, in which 'Finnas' are described among the northern-most inhabitants of Scandinavia;[42] the Heaþo-Ræmas, by contrast, are generally thought to refer to a tribe located further south.[43] Neither Beowulf nor Unferð states where the competition began, nor what its purpose was, whether it was a race, or perhaps more likely an endurance test to see who could last longest and get furthest. But it is possible to infer that the two contestants leave the land of the Geatas, travel north (hence the disruptive effects of the wind), and reach the modern-day Norwegian coast – in the case of Beowulf, but perhaps Breca too, entering the North Sea. Beowulf accuses Unferð of speaking only of Breca's journey, and his counter-narrative establishes a triumph that is both spatial

[40] *Beowulf*, 571–572a: 'I was able to see sea-cliffs, the windswept walls.'

[41] See Valtonen, *The North in the 'Old English Orosius'*, p. 208, for different possible localizations, and the suggestion that '*Finna land* . . . may have functioned as a euphemism for a distant land, no particular place in the remote north'.

[42] *The Old English 'Orosius'*, ed. J. Bately, EETS ss 6 (London, 1980), e.g. p. 14: 'He [sc. Ohthere] sæde þeah þæt [þæt] land sie swiþe lang norþ þonan, ac hit is eal weste, buton on feawum stowum styccemælum wiciað Finnas . . .' For discussion of the term 'Finnas', possibly a reference to the Sami, in the Old English *Orosius* see Valtonen, *The North in the 'Old English Orosius'*, pp. 373–86.

[43] For different possibilities see *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. 149, n. 6.

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and temporal: he travelled further north than Breca in a shorter time – and, of course, with a superior harvest of monsters.

Like Beowulf's flyting with Unferð, the Old English *Orosius* contains two accounts of northern explorations apparently given to a king (Alfred) – one, Ohthere's, to the northernmost extent of the Scandinavian peninsula, and the other, Wulfstan's, to the east into the Baltic area. The similarities do not quite end there, since Ohthere emphasizes the Finnas' prowess at catching sea-beasts, such as walruses, seals and whales, to the extent that 'he syxa sum ofsloge syxtig on twam dagum'.[44] The land of the Northmen is coastal, and its interior includes 'wilde moras'.[45] Both Wulfstan and Ohthere identify a territory called 'Denamearc', as well as land belonging to the 'Sweon'.[46] The geographic boundaries of these entities are not precisely defined, although there is some evidence to suggest that the extent of the Danish lands was understood to encompass parts of the Scandinavian peninsula, as well as Jutland and the Danish islands.[47] Wulfstan even describes crematory practices among the 'Este' not unlike those represented at key moments in *Beowulf*. The spatial knowledge and some of the ethnographic preoccupations of the Old English *Orosius* appear, in other words, similar to those of *Beowulf*. But here we come up against the same problem seen in discussions of 'the geography of *Beowulf*' – a tendency to superimpose a modern map of Scandinavia upon medieval descriptions which appear, by contrast, frustratingly imprecise. The Latin description of Orosius operates by repeated identification of spatial relationships to the four points of the compass. While the accounts of Ohthere and Wulfstan retain this mode to some degree, they also introduce the mode of the itinerary, in which a narrator gives an account of a journey, including reports of an ethnographic nature. The effect is to supplement – to supply, add to, but also interrupt – geographic description. A regional chorography emerges; not, that is, a map, nor a history, but a verbal description of a coherent set of spatial juxtapositions and ethnic interrelationships. We are told, for instance, that 'þa Cwenas hergiað hwilum on ða Norðmen ofer ðone mor, hwilum þa Norðmen on hy, 7þær sint swiðe micle meras fersce geond þa moras . . .'[48] Topography

[44] *Old English* '*Orosius*', p. 15: 'as one of the six he killed sixty in two days'. For discussion of this phrase see Valtonen, *The North in the* '*Old English Orosius*', pp. 308–9.

[45] *Old English* '*Orosius*', p. 15.

[46] *Old English* '*Orosius*', pp. 15, 16.

[47] See Bately's commentary: *Old English* '*Orosius*', pp. 195–6, and compare Valtonen, *The North in the* '*Old English Orosius*', pp. 344–54.

[48] *Old English* '*Orosius*', p. 15: 'the Cwenas sometimes make raids on the Northmen across the highland, sometimes the Northmen do the same to them, and there are very great fresh-water lakes beyond the highlands'. On the 'Cwenas', see Valtonen, *The North in the* '*Old English Orosius*', pp. 386–402.

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here is of secondary importance to the interaction of two peoples, and the presence of valuable resources.

INTERRELATIONS

The distinction between the Heaþo-Ræmas and the Finnas made in the Breca episode allows at least the possibility that the *Beowulf*-poet was working with a clear if schematic regional setting in mind, in which certain peoples were known to live further north than others. It also suggests that the audience of the poem may have possessed a rough idea of the locations of different ethnic groups.[49] This is something slightly different from the cataloguing that takes place in poems like *Widsiþ* and *Deor*. In *Widsiþ* a large number of ethnonyms are provided, encompassing more or less the known world, with an emphasis on Germanic tribes. Yet, at least in the form in which the poem survives, it is difficult to discern an underlying order in their presentation. Occasionally, spatial and ethnic congruence is apparent in *Widsiþ*, as in the sequence in lines 82–84a: Israelites, Assyrians, Hebrews, Jews, Egyptians, Medes, Persians. However, there are many more spatial discontinuities than continuities, perhaps most spectacularly seen in 76: 'Mid Creacum ic wæs ond mid Finnum ond mid Casere'.[50] An examination of the ethnonyms and toponyms in *Beowulf*, by contrast, reveals that the former tend to be deployed to elaborate something approaching a sense of region, while the latter tend to be restricted to specific coastal features such as headlands, or interior features such as woods, only occasionally denoting something like an expanse of territory.[51]

Apart from the many references to Danes, Geatas and Swedes, there are at least sixteen ethnonyms in *Beowulf*, some of which have been the subject of extended critical discussion: Brondingas (521b, Breca's people), Brosingas (1199b), Eotan (902b, 1072a, 1088a, 1141a, 1145a),[52] Finnas (580b), Francan (1210a, 2912a), Fresan/Frysan (1093b, 1104a, 1207a, 2912a, 2915b), Gifðas (2494a),[53] Heaðo-Beardan (2032b, 2037b, 2067a),[54] Heaþo-Ræmas (519a),

[49] The spatial knowledge and expectations of the poem's audience were not addressed by D. Whitelock in her seminal study, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951).

[50] *Widsiþ*, ed. K. Malone, rev. ed. (Copenhagen, 1962): 'I was with the Greeks and with the Finnas and with Caesar'.

[51] Malone argued that ethnonyms should be understood as toponyms and translated as such: K. Malone, 'King Alfred's Geats', *MLR* 20 (1925), 1–11; 'King Alfred's Gotland', *MLR* 23 (1928), 336–9.

[52] The debate about *Beowulf*'s references to Jutes has recently been reopened by Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems*, pp. 124–30, who argues that four of the poem's five references to *Eotan* refer not to Jutes, but to the Frisians, using the 'pet name' of 'giants' (he thinks the fifth reference literally refers to giants).

[53] Glossed by most modern editors as 'an East Germanic people', Lat. 'Gepidae': *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. 248.

[54] See the discussion in *Widsiþ*, ed. Malone, pp. 162–5.

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Helmingas (620b, Wealhþeow's people), Hetware (2363a, 2916a), Hugas (2502b, 2914a),[55] Merewioingas (2921a),[56] Wendlas (348b), Wægmundingas (2607b, 2814a), Wylfingas (461a, 471a).[57] Arguably the terms used to describe the poem's monstrous races ('ylfe', 'eotenas' and 'gigantas', 'orcneas') should also be understood as part of its conspectus of peoples.[58] In all, the names of peoples in *Beowulf* constitute a plausibly Baltic/Scandinavian set of signifiers, one notably without direct reference to the English.[59] As for toponyms, the poem mentions Earnanæs and Hronesnæs, both landmarks on the Geatish coast (3031b; 2805b, 3136b), Hrefnawudu and Hrefnesholt (2925b, 2935a, Ravenswood), Hreosnabeorh (2477b, a hill in the land of the Geatas),[60] Freslond (1126b, 2357b, 'land of the Frisians'), Scedenig (1686a, that is Skåne, the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula), Swiorice (2383a, 2495a), and Wedermearc (298b); Heorot itself can be considered a toponym. Apart from the Finnesburh episode and the many references to Danes and Geatas, it is notable that the majority of ethnonyms and toponyms come from the second half of *Beowulf*. This concentration is indicative perhaps of a broadening of the poem's focus, and a shift of theme from the successful inter-regional collaboration exemplified by Beowulf's success against the monsters in the land of the Danes to the succession of inter-regional feuds that populate the poem after Beowulf returns to the Geatas.

Consideration of the use of ethnonyms and toponyms in the poem further suggests three thematic clusters – moments at which the poem opens out to show us a regional space, and, crucially, interrelation of regional players.

[55] The Hetware are usually glossed as Frankish, and identified with the Latin 'Attuari/Chattuari'; an association of the Hugas with the 'Chauci' has been rejected by more recent scholarship, and they now tend to be localized to the area between the Seine and the Loire: for discussion of both ethnonyms, see W. Goffart, 'Hetware and Hugas: Datable Anachronisms in *Beowulf*', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981), pp. 83–100.

[56] On the use of the term 'Merovingian' in the poem, see the recent debate between T. Shippey, 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again: *damnatio memoriae* and the *usus scholarum*', *Latin Learning and English Lore* I, 389-406, and W. Goffart, 'The Name "Merovingian" and the Dating of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 36 (2007), 93–101.

[57] On Swedes, Wægmundingas and Wylfingas, see R. T. Farrell, 'Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats', *SBVS* 18 (1972), 224–86.

[58] See A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 66–74.

[59] The references to Offa (king of the continental Angles) at lines 1949 and 1957 have been seen by many commentators as a point of identification for the poem's English audience. See, for example, Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems*, pp. 67–71. For other possible indirect references to English peoples and places in the poem, see S. Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1993), R. North, *The Origins of Beowulf: from Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006).

[60] See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, p. 172, for the suggestion that this toponym should be emended to 'Hrefnaburh' ('raven's stronghold').

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These are, unsurprisingly, interlinked. One, woven through the poem, is the disastrous raid on Frisia by the Geatish king Hygelac. The story is proleptically introduced at the moment when, following his fight with Grendel, Wealhþeow presents Beowulf with the 'Brosinga mene': we are told that the necklace was (later) worn by Hygelac when he was killed by the Franks (1197–1214a). It is analeptically repeated when Beowulf's ascent to the Geatish throne is narrated, and again when, at the end of the poem, a messenger warns of the dangers facing the Geatas following the death of Beowulf (2354a–2366; 2913b–2921). Apart from the Brosingas, Hygelac's raid calls for reference to Frisians and Franks, and the specific Frankish or Frankish-aligned tribes, the Hetware and the Hugas. The episode of Hygelac's raid and death has historiographical attestation in the form of Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum* as well as later accounts in the chronicle of Fredegar and the *Liber historiae Francorum*. It is possible that the *Beowulf*-poet knew of the event from one such source,[61] but whatever the poet's source(s) of information on this matter, so significant is Hygelac's raid that it might be best to regard this event as a nodal point of the poem,[62] a moment which connects several different narratives: Beowulf's life and legend, the history and fate of the Geatas, Danish–Geatish relations, Swedish–Geatish relations, and the doomed nature of peace-weaving through gift-giving.

The second thematic cluster occurs in the course of the Finnesburh episode, which calls for references to Frisians and Jutes, as well as Danes. Both Hygelac's raid and the Finnesburh episode establish something of the spatial as well as political relationships between the Danes and the Geatas on the one hand, and the Frisians and Franks on the other. The key element here is not land but water. The story of Hygelac's attack on the Frisians/Franks concludes, in one of its tellings, with Beowulf's return to the land of the Geatas over the sea, bearing the war-gear of thirty warriors (2359b–2362). The extraordinary tension of the Finnesburh episode results from the inability of the Danes to cross the sea from Frisia to Denmark in winter time. The change of seasons enables the return of the Danes, and their subsequent revenge mission, culminating in the death of Finn and the seizure of Hildeburh.

The third thematic cluster is the narration of the Swedish–Geatish wars by, respectively, the poem's narrator, Beowulf, and the messenger, in a continuation of the speech that starts with the warning about the perils faced by the

[61] Goffart, 'Datable anachronisms' and 'The Name "Merovingian" and the Dating of *Beowulf*', argues for the likelihood of the *Liber historiae Francorum* as the source, Shippey against: 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again'.

[62] For analysis of the narrative significance of Hygelac's raid, see especially A. G. Brodeur, *The Art of 'Beowulf'* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 78–87, and M. Lapidge, '*Beowulf* and Perception', *PBA* 111 (2001), 61–97, at 70–2.

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Geatas and the story of Hygelac's raid. As Klaeber noted long ago, the land of the Swedes ('Swiorice', 'Sweoðeod') is described as separated from the land of the Geatas by water.[63] The sons of the Swedish king Ohthere seek refuge with Hygelac by coming 'ofer sæ' (2380a); their rival, Onela, against whom they have rebelled, is described as the best of sea-kings (2382, 'selest sæcyninga'); Beowulf subsequently supports Eadgils, one of Ohthere's sons, in a battle to reclaim his inheritance 'ofer sæ side'. Beowulf describes the feud between the Swedes and Geatas as taking place 'ofer wid wæter', 'ofer heafo';[64] and the messenger describes the Swedish king Ongenþeow's apprehension about Geatish 'sea-men' and 'sea-faring warriors' (2954a, 2955a). It is important, in my view, not to try to superimpose a modern map of Scandinavia onto these descriptions – the topography is imprecise in terms of direction and distance, but what is clear is that the poet has in mind peoples who dwell on or near to water, which they must cross to reach each other. As in the Danish topography in the first part of the poem, though, refuge may be sought in strongholds, or in a wood such as Ravenswood.

The theme of exile, inherent in the narration of the Swedish–Geatish conflicts, is consistent with a number of references in the poem to personal origins in ways that indicate an interest not simply in ethnic identity, but also in people who are, ethnically and therefore geographically speaking, out of place.[65] Beowulf himself is the son of an exile (of unspecified ethnicity) who sought refuge at Hroðgar's court. Early in the poem we are told that Hroðgar's messenger and go-between in Heorot, Wulfgar, is a man of the Vendels (348b, 'Wendla leod'). No explanation is given for how Wulfgar has found employment with Hroðgar, but a telling indication of the practice of employing foreign warriors is given in Beowulf's narration of Hygelac's reign shortly before he attacks the dragon. Hygelac bestows land on Beowulf, with the result that:

> Næs him ænig þearf
> þæt he to Gifðum oððe to Gar-Denum
> oððe in Swiorice secean þurfe
> wyrsan wigfrecan weorðe gecypan.[66]

[63] *Beowulf*, ed. Klaeber, 3rd ed., p. xlvi.

[64] *Beowulf*, 2394a ('across the broad sea'), 2473a ('across the wide water'), 2477a ('across the seas').

[65] A point cogently made by P. Wormald, 'Bede, Beowulf and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974*, ed. R. T. Farrell, BAR 46 (Oxford, 1978), 32–90, at 34, drawing on R. Girvan's 1935 study, *Beowulf in the Seventh Century*.

[66] *Beowulf*, 2493b–2496: 'He had no need to seek an inferior warrior and to buy him at a price among the Gifðas or the Spear-Danes or in Sweden.'

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It is not only mercenaries or exiles who are marked as ethnically different, however. Hroðgar's queen, Wealhþeow, is herself a lady of the Helmingas (620b, 'ides Helminga')[67] and she is not the only foreign queen in the poem: Hildeburh and Freawaru are both Danes among, respectively, the Frisians and the Heaðobards, while the tyrannical Modþryðo (or Þryð, or Fremu) is reformed through marriage to the Angle Offa.[68]

Perhaps most curious of all are Beowulf and Wiglaf themselves. We are explicitly told that this pair are 'Wægmundingas' – yet the meaning of this signifier remains unclear. Although by the end of the poem he identifies as and with the Geatas, Wiglaf certainly appears to be part Swedish (at least, his father fought on their side, and he is even introduced as a 'leod Scylfinga'). Ethnic duality may help to make sense of the apparent confusion that surrounds Beowulf's role in the Geatish–Swedish conflicts: grandson of Hrethel, protector and avenger of Heardred, and eventually king, yet apparently entrusted with the kingdom by the Swedish king Onela.[69] However Beowulf's and Wiglaf's genealogies are read, the poem seems at times to insist on interspersal of ethnic identity. That is, *Beowulf* is careful to mark the identities of outsider figures – people who have originated from different ethnic groups, but who operate within the structures of their host peoples, whether as queen, courtier or warrior. The interspersed nature of ethnic identity in the poem is by no means the same thing as the postcolonialist notion of hybridity,[70] nor does it indicate any kind of dissolution of ethnicity. Instead, it contributes to the construction of a world in which identity derives from interpersonal relations rather than from a relationship to land. Consistent with other early medieval expressions, then, the idea of nation resides with a people, and not with a spatially defined entity.[71]

It is possible to take this account of spatiality in *Beowulf* further by connecting it with the poem's repeated and fluent movement between present, past and

[67] Farrell argues that Wealhþeow is a Wylfing: 'Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats', pp. 245–50.

[68] For a summary of recent discussion of the vexed question of Offa's queen, see the notes on lines 1931–62 in *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. 222–6.

[69] For discussion of this contested aspect of the poem, see Farrell, 'Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats', N. E. Eliason, 'Beowulf, Wiglaf and the Wægmundings', *ASE* 7 (1978), 95–105, and more recently M. D. C. Drout, 'Blood and Deeds: the Inheritance Systems in *Beowulf*', *SP* 104 (2007), 199–226, at 216–18. It may be time to reconsider Eliason's position that it would be 'unthinkable or even ridiculous' (p. 98) for Beowulf to be half-Swedish.

[70] For definition and discussion, see J. Kraniauskas, 'Hybridity in a Transnational Frame: Latin-Americanist and Post-Colonial Perspectives on Cultural Studies', *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, ed. A. Brah and A. E. Coombes (London, 2000), pp. 235–56.

[71] For instance, Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 9.2.1: 'Gens est multitudo ab uno principio orta, sive ab alia natione secundum propriam collectionem distincta, ut Graeciae, Asiae.' ('A *gens* is a multitude descended from a single origin, or distinct from another *natio* according to a particular grouping, as in "the people of Greece", "of Asia".')

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future time. References to regional spaces and to peoples and their conflicts tend to come at moments in the poem when the recent past or the near future is invoked. For example, the accounts by Unferð and Beowulf of the competition between Beowulf and Breca, or Hroðgar's discussion of Beowulf's father, Ecgþeow, each involve travel, whether because of exile or for sport, across seas but within a region in the recent past, or, at least, within the living memory of the teller. Similarly, Beowulf's anticipation of the troubles that will follow the marriage of Freawaru and Ingeld, which he confides in Hygelac, projects inter-ethnic conflict into the near future. These contrast in the poem with references to what might be thought of as a 'deep past', a legendary and biblical time associated with origins (whether of Scyld Scefing, the dragon's hoard, or of Grendel and his mother and Cain). Is it in conjunction with 'shallow' past and future time that we see the region? The poem's preoccupation with coastal topography can, in this regard, be seen to achieve its ultimate end in the proleptic description of Beowulf's barrow. At Hronesnæs, Beowulf commands, his barrow should tower, indeed it should become something that seafarers name after him: 'þæt hit sæliðend syððan hatan/ Biowulfes Biorh' (2806–2807a).[72] It may seem strange that, in a poem so apparently unconcerned with precise signification of space, its hero should express the desire to be remembered as a toponym, but given the text's emphasis on the coast as the meeting point of sea and land, a site of origin and end, it feels wholly appropriate for Beowulf to envisage his memorial on land, yet seen from the sea. It might be noted, however, that Beowulf's vision of his monument shades into the 'deep' time of Scyld's arrival: there is no telling for how long seafarers will look upon his *biorh*.

'IN PATRIAM UNA EPOS'

My discussion so far has sought to establish that the range of ethnographic and topographic reference in *Beowulf* has the effect of constructing a region, with a set of interrelations reflected in the fates of individuals as well as peoples. I have also suggested that the poem manages to create a sense of regional history, intimately connected with the sea, extending back into the distant past, and forward to an uncertain future. In the final section of this article I will explore two implications of my argument that this regional space is one that cannot properly be apprehended by means of a map. What happens when we start to view *Beowulf* 'off the map'? The first implication, I suggest, is that it might be more profitable to see *Beowulf* as a poem about a region and its peoples rather than a poem about an ancestral homeland. A review of the history of *Beowulf* scholarship reveals that the maps of *Beowulf*

[72] 'So that afterwards seafarers will call it Beowulf's barrow.'

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discussed at the beginning of this article are the products and successors, conscious or unconscious, of several generations of speculation and argument about the text's geography. Early students of the poem, often motivated by nationalist impulses, attempted to pin down the location of *Beowulf* in parts of modern-day north Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and in more than one instance, England. This activity began immediately upon publication in 1815 of G. J. Thorkelín's edition of the poem. Thorkelín, an Icelander in Denmark, had confidently proclaimed the poem an 'Epos de Scyldingis': it was, he felt, a monument of the old Danish world ('monument[um] veteris orbis Danici'), which his edition had brought back from a long exile: 'after more than one thousand years, an Epic returned from exile into the fatherland that was once its own'.[73] He included no map to guide the reader, but in an 'index of proper names' Thorkelín explained that *Beowulf's* 'Dene' encompassed the three kingdoms of the Danes, Swedes and Norwegians. The poem's 'Norþ-Dene' were Norwegians; its 'East-Dene' Swedes or Geatas; its 'Suþ-Dene' the insular Danes, including the inhabitants of Zealand, as well as Danes who held the southern shore of the Baltic sea; and the 'West-Dene', those who held northern Jutland. The Geatas he glossed as Gothi, the name under which went the Swedes, or eastern Danes.[74]

Nicholaus Outzen, reviewing Thorkelín's edition, asserted in contradiction that the people called Danes in *Beowulf* were 'the inhabitants of our present Duchy of Schleswig'. The author of the poem, Outzen thought, was Anglo-Saxon, but one who remembered his continental homeland: '[f]rom this very fatherland of ours, which may well have been his own immediate fatherland too . . . he therefore chose his heroes, perhaps his ancestors . . . and their actions for the subject of his song – and at the same time, in the love of his fatherland, he imparts such detailed topographical knowledge as a foreigner would find it very hard to acquire and preserve so well.'[75] Yet in the same year William Taylor, also reviewing Thorkelín, argued that:

[73] *De Danorum Rebus Gestis Secul. III & IV. Poëma Danicum Dialecto Anglosaxonica*, ed. G. J. Thorkelín (Copenhagen, 1815), p. vii: 'Inter omnia monumenta veteris orbis Danici, qvae tempus edax rerum nobis reliqvit, admirabile de Scyldingis Epos publici nunc juris factum eminet'; p. ix: 'Optimo igitur successu et uberrimo cum fructu domum reversus sum, et in patriam una Epos, qvod suum olim fuerat, post plus qvam mille annos postliminio rediit.'

[74] *Poëma Danicum Dialecto Anglosaxonica*, pp. 259–60, 265.

[75] 'Das angelsächsische Gedicht Beowulf', p. 314 ('Bewohner dieses unsers Herzogthums Schleswig'), pp. 325-6 ('Von diesem unserm Vaterlande, das vielleicht auch gar sein unmittelbares Vaterland gewesen sein mag, . . . hat er deswegen seine Helden, vielleicht seine Vorfahren . . . gewählt – und beurkundet mit seiner Vaterlands Liebe zugleich auch eine so genaue topographische Kenntniß, die ein Auswärtiger nicht leicht in einem so hohen Grade sich erwerben, und so fest behalten kann'); translation from *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, ed. T. A. Shippey and A. Haarder (London, 1998), p. 130.

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[Beowulf's] origin must have been from Gothland, the south-western part of Scandinavia, of which Gottenburg is the chief town. He was, however, become an East-Dane. Now this epithet is applied either with respect to Denmark, or with respect to England. If he was an East-Dane of the Danes of Denmark, he dwelled near Lubeck; if he was an East-Dane of the Danes of England, he dwelled in East-Anglia. The latter appears to us most probable; because, in order to visit Higelak, he is not described as passing the Sound; and because his expedition against the Frieslanders announces a rover of the German sea, not of the Baltic. This being admitted, the name Gar-Dence, or Danes of the Yare, which is repeatedly applied to the crew of *Beowulf*, must be interpreted to mean Danes sailing from the port of Yarmouth.[76]

No clear consensus emerged. In 1833, relying in part on the poem's 'occasional geographical allusions', J. M. Kemble opined that Beowulf 'was an Angle of Jutland or Sleswic'.[77] Heinrich Leo sifted the poem's references to places and peoples and argued that it originated in 'German Angeln', at least sixty years after the death of Hygelac.[78] Daniel Henry Haigh in 1861 perhaps took the palm when it came to tendentious localizations of *Beowulf* with his claim that the poem was the composition of a Northumbrian *scop*:

all the events he records [not including, of course, the giant and dragon stories] . . . occurred in this island, and most of them in Northumbria, during the fifth and sixth centuries . . . This [Heorot] I have no doubt is Hart in Durham. Its situation, about two miles from the coast, agrees very well with the distance of Heort from the shore, indicated in the poem; and it is just the distance from the coast of Suffolk, Hygelac's territory, for Beowulf's voyage to have been accomplished in the time specified.[79]

Against such attempts one can set the position of pan-Scandinavianist sceptics such as N. F. S. Grundtvig, who in 1841 took Kemble and Leo to task for locating *Beowulf* on the map:

far less would I dream of working out, from Bjovulf, either an ethnographical or a topographical map of the Nordic area. Therefore I regret that both Mr Kemble and Mr Leo did dream of it, the former pulling at all the oars to move Gothland to Angeln, the latter sparing no effort to squeeze, if possible, the whole of Scandinavia into the 'Cimbric peninsula', which he sees as part of the great 'Germania', paying no heed to

[76] W. Taylor, review of Thorkelín, *De Danorum Rebus Gestis*, in *The Monthly Review* 81 (1816), 516–23, at 522; *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, p. 135.

[77] *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf, the Traveller's Song and the Battle of Finnes-burh*, ed. J. M. Kemble (London, 1833), pp. xii, xvi–xvii. Subsequently Kemble substantially revised his understanding of the poem.

[78] *Bëówulf, dasz älteste deutsche, in angelsächsischer mundart erhaltene, heldengedicht . . . Ein beitrag zur geschichte alter deutscher geisteszustände* (Halle, 1839), p. 19; translation from *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, p. 229.

[79] D. H. Haigh, *The Anglo-Saxon Sagas; an Examination of their Value as Aids to History* (London, 1861), pp. 3, 20–1.

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how narrow a space there still remains in the islands alone for the poem's North- and South-, East- and West-Danes.[80]

Two broad trends can, then, be discerned in the discussion of geography within the history of *Beowulf* criticism (both of which are evident in Klaeber's comments). On the one hand, there is unmistakably the desire to locate the poem by equating its toponyms and places with modern-day places; on the other, the denial of any geographic specificity, with an insistence on the poem's vagueness. Of course, it is this very lack of specificity, allied to energetic philological invention, that has made it possible to assert the poem's location in, variously, Scandinavia, the Baltic, Schleswig and England.

The assumption that *Beowulf* must in some way memorialize a homeland, either lost or present to the poem's author and audience, has remained a bedrock of much criticism of the poem since its nineteenth-century reception. The question has continued to be not *whether* the poem commemorates homeland, but rather, *which* homeland? In the past two decades the most influential reiteration and development of this position has come from Nicholas Howe. Towards the end of *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, Howe presents a detailed and subtle exploration of the poem. Building on Fred C. Robinson's description of *Beowulf*'s 'appositive style', Howe reads the poem in terms of the relationship between its Anglo-Saxon audience and their collective memory of the land from which they migrated:

> To speak figuratively, *Beowulf* has an appositive geography in which one term is explicit (the pagan north) and the other is implicit (Christian England). The poet's practice of portraying his characters' journeys and also of setting his digressions in distant places creates a pattern of response for his audience. For only as they make this imaginative journey back to the continental homeland can they appreciate how conversion altered their condition as a Germanic people.[81]

As attractive and elegant as this formulation is, a view of *Beowulf* as a 'chorographic' text raises some problems with it. The first of these is that, like many others, Howe unproblematically assumes 'the north' as a crucial element in

[80] 'Bjovulfs Drape eller det Oldnordiske Heltedigt', *Brage og Idun* 4 (1841), 481–538, at 525 ('og langt mindre kunde det falde mig ind efter *Bjovulfs-Drapen* at udkaste enten et *ethnografisk* eller *topografisk* Kort over *Nörreleden*. Jeg maa derfor beklage, at det er faldet baade Mr. *Kemble* og Hr. *Leo* ind, af hvilke den Förste lægger alle Aarer ombord for at sætte *Gothland* over til *Angeln*, og den Anden sparer ingen Möie for, om mueligt, at sammenpresse hele *Skandinavien* paa den '*Kimbriske Halvöe*', som han naturligviis regner til det store 'Germanien', uden at ændse, hvor snevert Rum der da bliver paa *Öerne* alene til Drapens Nord og Syd, Öst og *Vest-Daner*'); translation from *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, p. 245.

[81] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 176; Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, 1985).

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the poem's spatial orientation. Yet it is not clear that the poem conceives of its region as northern, precisely because it does not articulate a geography in which the lands of the Danes, Geatas and so on might be contrasted with a, or the, 'south'. North, south, east and west appear to be relative, not absolute, terms in the poem – and indeed from the perspective of medieval geography the British Isles and Scandinavia were as much associated with the far west as with the far north.[82] Similarly the poem makes no identification of its peoples as 'Germanic'. The validity of this term may be assumed by inference from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, where Bede referred to *Germania* alongside *Gallia* and *Hispania* as parts of Europe separated from Britain by the sea, and famously identified *Germania* as the region from which the Angles, Saxons and Jutes migrated.[83] Yet even in Bede the notion of 'Germania' is neither a well-defined nor straightforward one. As one recent commentator has noted apropos of the 'migration myth', the 'image of a coherent origin was entirely absent in Bede's piecemeal account'.[84] Crucially for the present discussion, while Bede does include the Danes in a list of peoples in Germania in the *Historia ecclesiastica* at V.ix, he does not include other Scandinavian peoples.[85] Nor was his inclusion of the Danes a necessary and obvious move: the early-eighth-century geography of Anonymous of Ravenna clearly separates the 'patria Germanorum' from Dania ('patria Northomanorum'), and the 'patria Scirdifrinorum vel Rerefenorum'.[86] The problem in interpreting *Beowulf* as a text about *Germania* and its peoples is, then, two-fold. First, it cannot be maintained with certainty that its author understood the peoples of the poem to be Germanic, since the

[82] Gildas, *De excidio Britonum*, ed. M. Winterbottom (London, 1978), III.i: 'Brittania insula in extremo ferme orbis limite circium *occidentem*que versus divina, ut dicitur, statera terrae totius ponderatrice librata ab Africo boriali propensius tensa axi . . .'; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: 'Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et *occidentem* locata est', my emphases. Howe explained Bede's location of Britain as the result of his reliance on Pliny's *Historia naturalis* and the fact that he begins the *Historia ecclesiastica* from the vantage point of Rome, before shifting perspective to 'one looking from the island south towards Rome': *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 133.

[83] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, OMT (Oxford, 1969), I.i, I.xv.

[84] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 301. Cf. the description of *Germania* in the *Old English* '*Orosius*', p. 12, in which the region is rapidly broken down into a mosaic of ethnicities.

[85] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, V.ix: 'Sunt autem [in Germania] Fresones, Rugini, Danai, Hunni, Antiqui Saxones, Boructuari. Sunt alii perplures hisdem in partibus populi paganis adhuc ritibus seruientes . . .' ('Now these people are the Frisians, Rugians, Danes, Huns, Old Saxons, and *Boruhtware*; there are also many other nations in the same land who are still practising heathen rites . . .').

[86] *Itineraria Romana* vol. 2: *Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia et Guidonis geographica*, ed. Joseph Schnetz (Stuttgart, 1990), I.xi, IV.xii–xiii. Cf. Merrills's discussion of Bede's ethnic terminology: *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, pp. 300–7.

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inclusion of Scandinavian peoples in *Germania* was by no means automatic practice for early medieval authors. Second, despite the fact that the poem evinces a much more detailed knowledge of north-western Europe than available in classical, and classically derived sources, *Beowulf* at no point names its region. For that would be the 'geographic' thing to do.

As a related point, one must note Howe's insistence on the dichotomy between 'the continental homeland' and insular England. The term *continent* is itself anachronistic (since Europe, Asia and Africa were customarily described as *partes*); more importantly, the action of *Beowulf* cannot be described as taking place in anything that resembles a continent. Its spaces are, as previously noted, coastal, perhaps even peninsular: land always appears alongside and between bodies of water. So it is hard to see in what sense the poet might have conceived of the lands of Danes, Geatas, and Swedes as constituting something continental, still less a homeland. This difficulty seems to be the result of Howe's attempts to adapt the poem to the argument of his book that a 'myth' of migration runs through Old English literature – an argument repeatedly juxtaposed and inflected with the experience of modern American mythologies of migration.[87] Without a clear sense of a dichotomy between continent and island, Germanic centre and English periphery, the implicit relation between the setting of *Beowulf* and its Anglo-Saxon audience becomes rather less obvious. As Michelet has more recently observed, the poem seems to wish to unsettle centres, and the centre-periphery binarism.[88] Given this, it seems hard to maintain that *Beowulf* would have been read for its representation of a homeland unless, like some early critics of the poem, one is inclined to read its action as taking place entirely within Schleswig, or England. For which is the homeland – the land of the Geatas, the land of the Danes, Sweden, Frisia or the waters in between? A study of the poem's sense of region does not encourage any alternative suggestion as to its motivation and likely audience. But it might enable us to view the poem less as a meditation on modern constructs such as 'the north', or 'the pagan north', or classico-modern constructions such as *Germania*, and more as a meditation upon human relations within and across a specific part of the world characterized by the conjunction of land and sea.

The second implication brought by a reconceptualization of the spatiality of the poem away from geography and towards chorography involves genre. The tendency within Beowulfian criticism to locate the poem's action within a 'homeland', and to seek to specify its geography, was in its initial formulation intimately connected with its categorization as an epic. The specificity of

[87] E.g. *Migration and Mythmaking*, pp. 1–2, 4, 31, 56, 60, 176, 178.

[88] Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, pp. 113–14: 'not only Heorot or Beowulf's hall, but also Grendel's mere and the dragon's barrow are centres in the poem'.

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the poem's references to places and peoples led early critics from Thorkelín onwards to identify the poem as grounded, as generically epic rather than romance or pure mythology, and to argue about precisely which national/racial culture it represented. The equation between geography and epic was perhaps made most concisely by W. P. Ker in 1912, when he commented that the story of *Beowulf* 'is not in the air, or in a fabulous country like that of Spenser's *Fairie Queene*; it is part of the solid world. It would be difficult to find anything like this in later medieval romance. It is this, chiefly, that makes *Beowulf* a true *epic* poem – that is, a narrative poem of the most stately and serious kind.'[89] Like almost all aspects of *Beowulf*, of course, its genre has attracted debate and difference: Kemble concluded that the poem was essentially mythical, later nineteenth-century proponents of *Liedertheorie* saw it as a combination of lays, and J. R. R. Tolkien memorably and polemically insisted that '*Beowulf* is not an "epic", not even a magnified "lay". No terms borrowed from Greek or other literatures exactly fit . . . It is an heroic-elegiac poem; and in a sense all its first 3,136 lines are the prelude to a dirge.'[90] Following the move away from oral-formulaic theories, critics of the poem are now perhaps more inclined to see it as a learned, literary work, imbued with traces of classical and Christian-Latin epic, though certainly 'heroic'.[91] But despite the poem's generic indeterminacy, maps continue to linger as part of its paratext.

If we were to classify *Beowulf* as a romance, however, the necessity of cartography might seem less obvious. No less than epic, romance narratives characteristically contain toponyms. A core generic feature is the journey. Yet modern editors rarely supply romance texts with maps. *The Song of Roland*, the *Lais* of Marie de France, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Canterbury Tales* – all, usually, are published map-free, despite the fact that all contain quite detailed, and indeed much debated, topographies. Even though scholars have carefully plotted many of the places mentioned in these texts, such maps have not succeeded in becoming part of the critical apparatus for any of them.[92] Why? The map's traditional function as a representation of the real and romance's (postmedieval) divorce from history seem to act as a barrier to their union. Geographic accuracy is not a concern of romance: real place names are mixed

[89] *English Literature: Medieval* (London, 1912), pp. 33–4. Ker's emphasis.

[90] J. R. R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: the Monsters and the Critics', *PBA* 22 (1936), 245–95, at 275. See further T. A. Shippey's valuable survey, 'Structure and Unity', *A Beowulf Handbook*, pp. 149–74.

[91] E.g. Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 132–7; North, *Origins of Beowulf*; D. Anlezark, 'Poisoned Places: the Avernian Tradition in Old English Poetry', *ASE* 36 (2007), 103–26.

[92] I base these assertions on a survey of ten modern editions of *The Song of Roland* and five editions each of the *Lais*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Canterbury Tales*, none of which contains a map. For maps of 'Gawain country', see R. Elliott, 'Landscape and Geography', *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. D. Brewer and J. Gibbon (Cambridge, 1997), 105–17.

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with fantastic and mythical, implausibilities of travel are rife, detail comes in and out of focus. All of the preceding sentence after the colon could, of course, be validly said of medieval maps. It may be, then, that it is not the absence of spatial representation from romance that has prevented editors from supplying maps, but rather its superabundance. Romance plays fast and loose with reality and so may only map incompletely on to modern cartography: in other words, there is a mismatch between romance space and a modern map, even though (some of) the same places are present on both. But is the same not also the case with epic and 'heroic' narrative? Homer's geography inspired but also baffled countless commentators; medieval epics such as the *Nibelungenlied* are noted for their tendency to mix fantasy with accurate and historically verifiable reference to places. In the same text precise references to Danubian Austria coexist with mythical entities such as 'Nibelungland', while the capital of Iceland is given as 'Isenstein'.[93] So if one reason that editors tend not to map romance is that it is difficult to construct *realistic* maps of romance topography, then it might equally be said that to apply a realistic map to an epic, or a 'heroic poem', is to distort its text. Conversely, if romance cannot be mapped because its spatial reference is too vague – or too much a mixture of the specific and the vague – we should look carefully at the spatial reference of epic to see whether it is equally unclear.

The purpose of this article is not to call for a ban on maps illustrating *Beowulf*. There can be little doubt that the maps in editions of *Beowulf* help the reader to gain some grasp on the spatial interrelations that the poem describes. But readers need also to think about the disjunctions between modern maps and the Old English poem, and to realize that any map – with or without lines of longitude – is anachronistically appended to the poem. *Beowulf* is not a geographic text. It is a poem that describes not a single adventure but several; not a single place, but several; relations between not two peoples but between many. In doing so it constructs something that cannot, ultimately, be reduced to a homeland: the space *Beowulf* writes is regional, a periphery without a centre, whose overriding motifs are exile, mixture, loss – and survival.

[93] See A. T. Hatto's brief discussion of 'the geography of the poem', in *The Nibelungenlied*, ed. A. T. Hatto, rev. ed. (London, 1969), pp. 396–9. Editions of the *Nibelungenlied* are also normally published without maps, though such images have appeared in commentaries on the poem such as O. Ehrismann, *Nibelungenlied: Epoche–Werk–Wirkung* (Munich, 1987), p. 310 ('Ortsangaben zum Nibelungenlied').

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