

The Early History of Man — Part 4. Living Dinosaurs from Anglo-Saxon and other Early Records.

BILL COOPER

INTRODUCTION

The creation model of origins makes many predictions, one of them being that evidence will be found that tells us that in the recent past, dinosaurs and man have co-existed. There is, in fact, some evidence to suggest that they still co-exist, and this is directly contrary to the evolutionary model which teaches that dinosaurs lived millions of years before man came along, and that no man therefore can ever have seen a living dinosaur. For present purposes we will ignore evidence from the fossil record on this subject as this has been dealt with elsewhere. We will, instead, examine the issue by considering the written evidence that has survived from the records of various ancient peoples that describe, sometimes in the most graphic detail, human encounters with **living** giant reptiles that we would call dinosaurs.

There are, of course, the famous descriptions of two such monsters from the Old Testament, *Behemoth* and *Leviathan* (Job 40:15–41:34), Behemoth being a giant vegetarian that lived on the fens, and Leviathan a somewhat more terrifying armour-plated amphibian whom only children and the most foolhardy would want as a pet. The Egyptians knew Behemoth by the name *p'ih.mw*,¹ which is the same name, of course. Leviathan was similarly known as *Lotan* to the men of Ugarit.^{2,3} Babylonian and Sumerian literature has preserved details of similar creatures, as has the written and unwritten folklore of peoples around the world. But perhaps the most remarkable descriptions of living dinosaurs are those that the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic peoples of Europe have passed down to us.

A BRIEF SURVEY

The early Britons, from whom the modern Welsh are descended, provide us with our earliest surviving European accounts of reptilian monsters, one of whom killed and devoured king Morvidus (Morydd) in about 336 BC. We are told in the original early Welsh account (which Geoffrey of Monmouth translated into Latin and which

still survives in spite of modernist claims to the contrary⁴) that the monster '*gulped down the body of Morvidus as a big fish swallows a little one.*' Geoffrey wrote of the monster under its Latin name, *Belua*.⁵

Peredur, not the ancient king of that name (306–296 BC), but a much later son of Earl Efwarg, had better luck than Morvidus, actually managing to slay his monster, an *addanc* (pronounced athanc: variant afanc), at a place called Llyn Llion in Wales.⁶ At other Welsh locations the *addanc* is further spoken of along with another reptilian species known as the *carrog*. The *addanc* survived until comparatively recent times at such places as Bedd-yr-Afanc near Brynberian, at Llyn-yr-Afanc above Bettws-y-Coed on the River Conwy (the killing of this monster was described in the year 1693), and Llyn Barfog (see Appendix). A *carrog* is commemorated at Carrog near Corwen, and at Dol-y-Carrog in the Vale of Conwy.⁷

In England and Scotland, again until comparatively recent times, other reptilian monsters were sighted and spoken of in many places. Table 1 lists 81 locations in the British Isles alone in which dinosaur activity has been reported (there are, in fact, nearly 200 such places in Britain). But perhaps the most relevant aspect of this, as far as our present study is concerned, is the fact that some of these sightings and subsequent encounters with living dinosaurs can be dated to the very recent past. The giant reptile at Bures in Suffolk, for example, is known to us from a chronicle of 1405:—

'Close to the town of Bures, near Sudbury, there has lately appeared, to the great hurt of the countryside, a dragon, vast in body, with a crested head, teeth like a saw, and a tail extending to an enormous length. Having slaughtered the shepherd of a flock, it devoured many sheep . . .'

After an unsuccessful attempt by local archers to kill the beast, due to its impenetrable hide . . .

' . . . in order to destroy him, all the country people around were summoned. But when the dragon saw that he was again to be assailed with arrows, he fled into a marsh or mere and there hid himself among the long reeds, and was no more seen.'^{8,9}

Aller, Somerset	Llyn Llion, Wales
Anwick, Lincolnshire	Llyn-y-Gader, Wales
Bamburgh, Northumberland	Llyn-yr-Afanc, Wales
Beckhole, North Yorkshire	Loch Awe, Scotland
Bedd-yr-Afanc, Wales	Loch Maree, Scotland
Ben Vair, Scotland	Loch Morar, Scotland
Bignor Hill, West Sussex	Loch Ness, Scotland
Bishop Auckland, Durham	Loch Rannoch, Scotland
Bisterne, Hampshire	Longwitton, Northumberland
Bren Pelham, Hertfordshire	Ludham, Norfolk
Brinsop, Hereford and Worcester	Lyminster, West Sussex
Bures, Suffolk	Manaton, Devon
Cadbury Castle, Devon	Money Hill, Northumberland
Carhampton, Somerset	Moston, Cheshire
Castle Carlton, Lincolnshire	Newcastle Emlyn, Wales
Castle Neroche, Somerset	Norton Fitzwarren, Hereford and Worcester
Challacombe, Devon	Nunnington, North Yorkshire
Churchstanton, Somerset	Old Field Barrows (nr Bromfield), Shropshire
Cnoc-na-Cnoimh, Scotland	Penllin Castle, Wales
Crowcombe, Somerset	Penmark, Wales
Dalry, Scotland	Penmynydd, Wales
Deerhurst, Gloucestershire	St Albans, Hertfordshire
Dol-y-Carrog, Wales	St Leonard's Forest, West Sussex
Dragonhoard (nr Garsington), Oxfordshire	St Osyth, Essex
Drake Howe, North Yorkshire	Saffron Waldon, Essex
Drakelow, Derbyshire	Sexhow, North Yorkshire
Drakelowe, Worcestershire	Shervage Wood, Hereford and Worcester
Filey Brigg, North Yorkshire	Slingsby, North Yorkshire
Handale Priory, North Yorkshire	Sockburn, Durham
Henham, Essex	Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire
Hornden, Essex	Strathmartin, Scotland
Kellington, North Yorkshire	Walmsgate, Lincolnshire
Kilve, Somerset	Wantley, South Yorkshire
Kingston St Mary, Somerset	Well, North Yorkshire
Lambton Castle, Durham	Wherwell, Hampshire
Linton, Scotland	Whitehorse Hill, Oxfordshire
Little Cornard, Suffolk	Winkleigh, Devon
Llandeilo Graban, Wales	Wiston, Wales
Llanraeadr-ym-Mochnant, Wales	Wormelow Tump, Hereford and Worcester
Llyn Barfog, Wales	Wormingford, Essex
Llyn Cynwch (nr Dolgellau), Wales	

Table 1. Above, in alphabetical order, appear the names of 81 locations in Britain where dinosaur activity has either been reported or is remembered. This list **could** be expanded to nearly 200 place-names.

Later in the fifteenth century, according to a contemporary chronicle that still survives in Canterbury Cathedral's library, the following incident was reported. On the afternoon of Friday, 26th September, 1449, two giant reptiles were seen fighting on the banks of the River Stour (near the village of Little Cornard) which marked the English county borders of Suffolk and Essex. One was black, and the other '*reddish and spotted*'. After an hour-

long struggle that took place '*to the admiration of many [of the locals] beholding them*', the black monster yielded and returned to its lair, the scene of the conflict being known ever since as Sharpfight Meadow.^{10,11}

As late as August, 1614, the following sober account was given of a strange reptile that was encountered in St Leonard's Forest in Sussex (the sighting was near a village that was known as Dragon's Green long before

this report was published):

'This serpent (or dragon as some call it) is reputed to be nine feete, or rather more, in length, and shaped almost in the form of an axletree of a cart; a quantitie of thickness in the middest, and somewhat smaller at both endes. The former part, which he shootes forth as a necke, is supposed to be an elle [3ft 9 inches or 114 cms] long; with a white ring, as it were, of scales about it. The scales along his back seem to be blackish, and so much as is discovered under his bellie, appeareth to be red . . . it is likewise discovered to have large feete, but the eye may there be deceived, for some suppose that serpents have no feete . . . [The dragon] rids away (as we call it) as fast as a man can run. His food [rabbits] is thought to be, for the most part, in a coniewarren, which he much frequents . . . There are likewise upon either side of him discovered two great buches so big as a large foote-ball, and (as some thinke) will in time grow to wings, but God, I hope, will (to defend the poor people in the neighbourhood) that he shall be destroyed before he grows to fledge.'^{12,13}

This dragon was seen in various places within a circuit of three or four miles, and the pamphlet named some of the still-living witnesses who had seen him. These included John Steele, Christopher Holder and a certain 'widow woman dwelling neare Faygate.' Another witness was 'the carrier of Horsham, who lieth at the White Horse [inn] in Southwark.' One of the locals set his two mastiffs onto the monster, and apart from losing his dogs he was fortunate to escape alive from the encounter, for the dragon was already credited with the deaths of a man and woman at whom it had spat and who consequently had been killed by its venom. When approached unwittingly, our pamphleteer tells us, the monster was . . .

' . . . of countenance very proud and at the sight or hearing of men or cattel will raise his neck upright and seem to listen and looke about, with great arrogancy.'

. . . an eyewitness account of typically reptilian behaviour.

Again, as late as 27th and 28th May 1669, which fell on a Thursday and Friday, a large reptilian animal was sighted many times, as was reported in the pamphlet: **A True Relation of a Monstrous Serpent seen at Henham (Essex) on the Mount in Saffron Waldon.**¹⁴

In 1867 was seen, for the last time, the monster that lived in the woods around Fittleworth in Sussex. It would run up to people hissing and spitting if they happened to stumble across it unawares, although it never harmed anyone. Several such cases could be cited, but suffice it to say that too many incidents like these are reported down through the centuries and from all sorts of locations for us to say that they are all fairy-tales. For example, Scotland's famous Loch Ness monster is too often thought to be a recent product of the local Tourist Board's efforts to bring in some trade, yet Loch Ness is by no means the only Scottish loch where monsters have been reported. Loch

Lomond, Loch Awe, Loch Rannoch and the privately owned Loch Morar (over 1000 ft or 305 m deep) also have records of dinosaur activity in recent years. Indeed, there have been over forty sightings at Loch Morar alone since the end of the World War II, and over a thousand from Loch Ness in the same period.

However, as far as Loch Ness itself is concerned, few realise that monstrous reptiles, no doubt the same species, have been sighted in and around the loch since the so-called Dark Ages, the most notable instance being that which is described in Adamnan's famous 7th century **Life of St Columba**. There we read that in the year AD 656 Columba, on yet another of his missionary journeys in the north, needed to cross the River Ness. As he was about to do so, he saw a burial party. On enquiry he was informed that they were burying a man who had just been killed by a savage bite from a monster who had snatched him while swimming. On hearing this, the brave Columba, his curiosity aroused and with never a thought for his own safety, immediately ordered one of his followers to jump into the freezing water. Adamnan relates how the thrashing about of the alarmed and unhappy swimmer (Lugne Mocumin by name) attracted the monster's attention. Suddenly, on breaking the surface, the monster was seen to speed towards the luckless chap with its mouth wide open and screaming like a banshee. Columba, however, refused to panic, and from the safety of the dry land rebuked the beast. Whether the swimmer added any rebukes of his own is not recorded, but the monster was seen to turn away, having approached the swimmer so closely that not the length of a punt-pole lay between them. Columba, naturally, claimed the credit for the swimmer's survival, although the reluctance of the monster to actually harm the man is the most notable thing in this incident. The first swimmer had been savaged and killed, though not eaten, and the second swimmer was likewise treated to a display of the creature's wrath, though not fatally. Most likely, the two men had unwittingly entered the water close to where the monster kept her young, and she was reacting in a way that is typical of most species. Gorillas, bull elephants, ostriches, indeed all sorts of creature will charge at a man, hissing, screaming and trumpeting alarmingly, yet will rarely kill him so long as the man takes the hint and goes away. Our second swimmer, utterly lacking his saintly master's fortitude, doubtless began the process of taking the hint in plenty of time for the monster to realise that killing him would be unnecessary.

Yet not even Lugne Mocumin's experience is that uncommon. As recently as the 18th century, in a lake called Llyn-y-Gader in Snowdon, Wales, a certain man went swimming. He reached the middle of the lake and was returning to the shore when his friends who were watching him noticed that he was being followed by . . .

' . . . a long, trailing object winding slowly behind him. They were afraid to raise an alarm, but went forward



Figure 1. This drawing of a man examining the apparently dead body of an unknown sea-creature appears in MS 18 at the Amiens Municipal Library.

*to meet him as soon as he reached the shore where they stood. Just as he was approaching, the trailing object raised its head, and before anyone could render aid the man was enveloped in the coils of the monster. . . .*¹⁵

It seems that the man's body was never recovered.

At about the turn of this present century, the following incident took place. It was related by a Lady Gregory of Ireland in 1920:

' . . . old people told me that they were swimming there (in an Irish lake called Lough Graney), and a man had gone out into the middle, and they saw something like a great big eel making for him. . . .'^{16,17}

Happily, on this occasion the man made it back to the shore, but the important thing for us to notice is that these are only a few of a great many reports concerning the sightings in recent times of lake-dwelling monsters or dinosaurs. Indeed, it is almost needless to point out that perfectly rational people still report such sightings today. However, the British Isles are not the only place where one can find such reports. They occur, quite literally, all over the world,¹⁸ and space forbids further discussion of such a general and largely undisputed observation. We will therefore concentrate our attention entirely on the recorded and most informative evidence that has been left us by the early Saxons and Celts.

ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS

Of particular interest to our enquiry is the depiction in

Celtic and Saxon art of strange monsters and animals, most of whom over the centuries show an inexplicable consistency in their parts and proportions for works of supposedly fictional art. The 8th century Irish **Book of Kells**, for example, contains numerous depictions of everyday animals. There are fish, cats, dogs and birds whose portrayal, though somewhat stylised, is nevertheless anatomically correct. They are readily recognisable. But alongside these are other creatures whose features are not so easily recognised due to the simple fact that they no longer live. These are strange reptilian beasts whose appearances were familiar enough to the Celtic artist who painted them in such meticulous detail, though not to us. In Figure 1 we see, from the pages of another ancient manuscript, a strange and presumably dead aquatic beast actually being examined by a man. The artist himself, perhaps?

In Figure 2 (a and b) we have an even more remarkable scene. The stone in which these strange animals were carved is preserved in the church of SS Mary and Hardulph at Breedon-on-the-hill in Leicestershire. This church used to belong to the Saxon kingdom of Mercia. The stone itself is part of a larger frieze in which are depicted various birds and humans, all of them readily recognisable. But what are these strange animals presented here? They are like nothing that survives today in England, yet they are depicted as vividly as the other creatures. There are long-necked quadrupeds, one of whom on the right seems to be biting (or 'necking' with) another. And in the middle of the scene appears a bipedal animal who is attacking one of the quadrupeds. He stands on two great hindlegs and has two smaller forelimbs. His victim seems to be turning to defend himself, yet his hindlegs are buckled in fear. Is there an animal from the fossil record that we know was a predator who had two massive hindlegs and two smaller forelimbs? We shall shortly be meeting another just like him in a certain written account, but how was this early Saxon artist to know about such creatures if he'd never seen one? Furthermore, do we know other animals from the fossil record who were gregarious, large and long-necked quadrupeds? (Note how the quadrupeds seem to have been feeding off the vegetation that is depicted in the background.) It cannot be pretended that these are mere caricatures of ordinary animals that are indigenous to the British Isles, for none of our present native species have long necks or are bipedal. So how are we to satisfactorily account for them if not as readily recognisable types of dinosaurs that had survived until Saxon times?

Figure 3 provides us with further visual evidence. It is again early Saxon in origin, being a piece of ornamentation from what was once a circular shield. Here we are presented with the likeness of a flying reptile which was known to the Saxons as a *widfloga* (see below). Note the long, teeth-filled jaws and the wings folded along its sides. The shape of the head is equally interesting. Do we know a flying reptile from the fossil record with this shape



Figure 2 (a & b). (a) A most graphic portrayal from Saxon times in stone of an attack upon a herd of grazing Brontosaurus-type dinosaurs by a bipedal predator. (b) gives us a more detailed view of the predator, and its features are most informative. The animal's side and back reveal what appears to be the edges of armour-plating on the animal's hide, a detail that is expressly described in the *Beowulf* account of Grendel (see below), suggesting most strongly that the Grendel species was seen by our forebears on the British mainland (as *Athelstan's* and other charters indicate, as well as in Denmark as *Beowulf* states). The relatively weak and puny forelimbs are also portrayed, as is the creature's unmistakable bipedal stance. Exactly as the *Beowulf* poem describes him, the monster sculptored here is *weres waestmum*, (in the shape of man), 'though twisted'. Could the sagging skin on the underbelly of this apparently adult creature have fooled the Danes into thinking that most of the adult members of the species were female, mistaking its appearance for mammalian-type breasts, and thus the older creature seen with the young Grendel for Grendel's mother?

and features? Again we shall meet his like in a written account shortly.

Figures 4 and 5 likewise portray large reptilian animals that are no longer living. They are surprisingly alike. They are each the figurehead from Danish ships of the Viking era, and they both portray the same type of sea-monster that is also written about, and named, in the account that appears below.

The famous White Horse of Uffington in Oxfordshire is now thought by many to represent, not a horse at all, but an early Celtic dragon (Dragon's Hill stands nearby), and later by several centuries, are the carvings or sculptures in Figures 6 and 7. Such creatures are seen in old churches up and down the country, and most are depictions of animals that are strongly reminiscent of those species of dinosaur that are now (happily) known to us only from the fossil record.

THE WRITTEN ACCOUNTS

But now we come to the most notable records of all. They are written works that are remarkable for the graphic detail with which they portray the giant reptiles that the early Saxons, Danes and others encountered in Northern Europe and Scandinavia. In various Nordic sagas the slaying of dragons is depicted in some detail, and this helps us to reconstruct the physical appearance of some of these creatures. In the *Volsungassaga*,¹⁹ for example, the



Figure 2(b). slaying of the monster *Fafnir* was accomplished by Sigurd digging a pit and waiting, inside the pit, for the



Figure 3. A portrayal (from a Saxon shield) of a flying reptile with its wings folded along its sides. Comparison of this with a modern reconstruction of a Pterodactyl or similar at rest is again most informative. Note particularly the protruding neck, and the shape of the head, particularly the long tooth-filled jaws. These features are well known to us from the fossil record.

monster to crawl overhead on its way to the water. This allowed Sigurd to attack the dinosaur's soft under-belly. Clearly, *Fafnir* walked on all fours with his belly close to the ground.

Likewise, the *Voluspa* tells us of a certain monster which the early Vikings called a *Nithhoggr*, its name ('corpse-tearer') revealing the fact that it lived off carrion. Saxo Grammaticus, in his *Gesta Danorum*, tells us of the Danish king Frotho's fight with a giant reptile, and it is in the advice given by a local to the king, and recorded by

Saxo, that the monster is described in great detail. It was, he says, a serpent . . .

... wreathed in coils, doubled in many a fold, and with a tail drawn out in winding whorls, shaking his manifold spirals and shedding venom . . . his slaver [saliva] burns up what it bespatters . . . ["yet", he tells the king in words that were doubtless meant to encourage rather than dismay], *... remember to keep the dauntless temper of thy mind; nor let the point of the jagged tooth trouble thee, nor the starkness of the beast, nor the venom . . . there is a place under his lowest belly whither thou mayst plunge the blade* . . .²⁰

The description of this reptilian monster closely resembles that of the monster seen at Henham (see above), and the two animals could well have belonged to the same or a similar species. Notable, especially, is their defence mechanism of spitting corrosive venom at their victims, a mechanism that may have been similar to that in today's Bombardier Beetle. Frotho's monster, however, would seem to be the larger of the two.

But it is the epic poem *Beowulf* that provides us with truly invaluable descriptions of the huge reptilian animals that, only 1400 years ago, infested Denmark.²¹

BEOWULF: THE HISTORY

The *Beowulf* poem itself survives in a single manuscript copy that was made in about AD 1000 (see



Figure 4. The head of an aquatic monster as portrayed on the ship-burial at Oseburg. It was known to the Viking sea-farers of the day either as a *nicor* or an *ythgewinnes*.

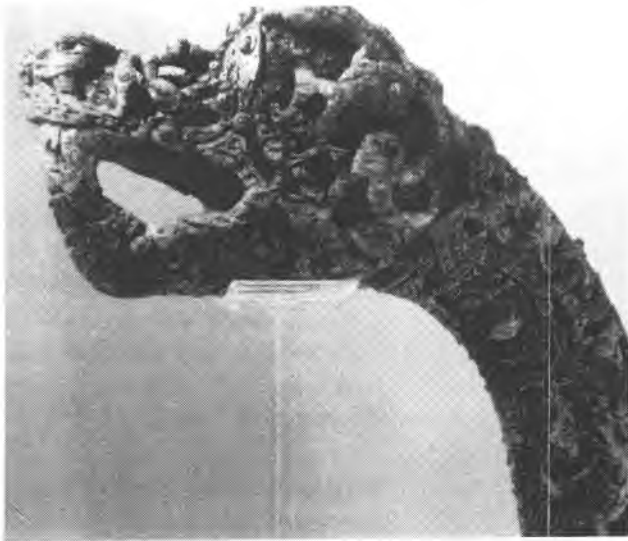


Figure 5. Also the head of an aquatic reptilian monster common in the sea lanes around Denmark and Sweden during the early Middle Ages.

Figure 8). Moreover this manuscript (British Museum. Cotton. Vitellius A. XV.) is often stated by modern critics to be a copy of a mid-8th century Anglo-Saxon (English) original. This original is in turn described as an essentially Christian poem. Yet, the continually repeated assertion of the supposedly Christian origins of the poem fails

noticeably to take into account the following facts.

Firstly, there are no allusions whatever in the poem to any event, person or teaching of the New Testament. There are definite allusions to certain facts and personages contained in the Old Testament, namely to God, the Creation, to Abel and to Cain, but these are no more than those same historical allusions that are to be met with in the other pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon genealogies and records that we have already studied. Like those records, and whilst likewise showing a most interesting historical knowledge of certain events and personages that also appear in the **Genesis** record, the poem clearly pre-dates any knowledge among the Anglo-Saxons of Christianity *per se*.

In view of this, it is hardly surprising to find that the sentiments of the poem are strongly pagan, extolling the highly questionable virtues of vengeance, the accumulation of plunder, and the boasting of and reliance upon human strength and prowess. Allusions are also made to blatantly pagan oaths, sacrifices, sentiments and forms of burial. There are no exclusively Christian sentiments expressed anywhere in its 3182 lines.

Nowhere in the poem is any reference made to the British Isles or to any British (or English) king or historical event. This is simply because the **Beowulf** pre-dates the migration of the Saxons to those isles. And what are we to make of the following passage?:

*‘ . . . forþam Offa waes geofum ond guthum garcene
man wide geweorthod wisdome heold ethel sinne*



Figure 6. A carving on the tympanum of Everton Parish Church in Nottinghamshire, England, portraying two large dragons.



Figure 7 (a & b). (a) A carving at Dinton Parish Church in Buckinghamshire, England. The bipedal nature of these creatures, together with their long tails and distinctive head-shape invite comparison with 7(b), an illustration of a remarkably similar creature from Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Serpents*, published in 1608. Could the rather ridiculous looking wings of Topsell's monster have come about through the original eyewitness account having mistaken from a distance the markings of armour-plating for wings? Comparison with Figure 2(b) reveals how easily this could have happened. The 'wings' apart, note the woodcut's surprising similarity to a modern reconstruction of a Tyrannosaurus.

thonon Eomer woc haelethum to helpe . . .' (lines 1957–1961, emphases mine).

Alexander translates this:—

*'So it was that Offa [king of the continental Angles], brave with the spear, was spoken of abroad for his wars and his gifts; he governed with wisdom the land of his birth. To him was born Eomer, helper of the heroes. . .'*²²

The Offa who is mentioned here was the pre-migration ancestor of his 8th century namesake, King Offa of Mercia (AD 757–796), whom we have already met (along with this same ancestor), in the early Saxon genealogies. We have also met Eomer in the same genealogies,²³ where his name is rendered Eomaer and where he is, strictly speaking, the grandson, and not the son, of Offa. These ancient genealogies were clearly fresh in the mind of the writer of *Beowulf*, which again tells us something of the times in which the poem was composed.²⁴

There is, moreover, no sycophantic dedication of the poem to any Christian Anglo-Saxon English king, not even to that King Offa whose ancestor is immortalised in the poem and under whose auspices some modern scholars suggest the poem was written.

Many other scholars would plumb for an even later date for the poem, yet the characters in the poem can be historically dated to the late 5th and early 6th centuries, years that long preceded the adoption of Christianity by the Saxons. In other words, the poem belongs firmly to the pagan times of which it treats.

Beowulf, the character in whose honour the poem was written, was born the son of Ecgtheow in AD 495 (see

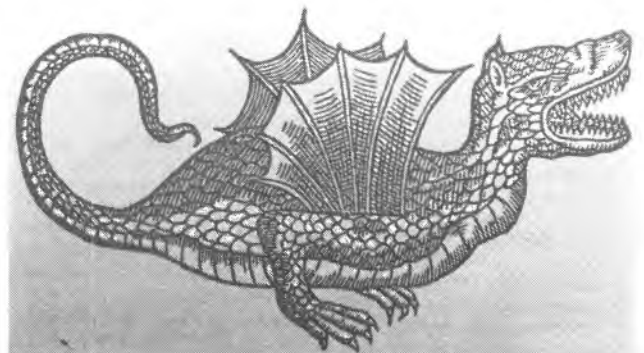


Figure 7(b).

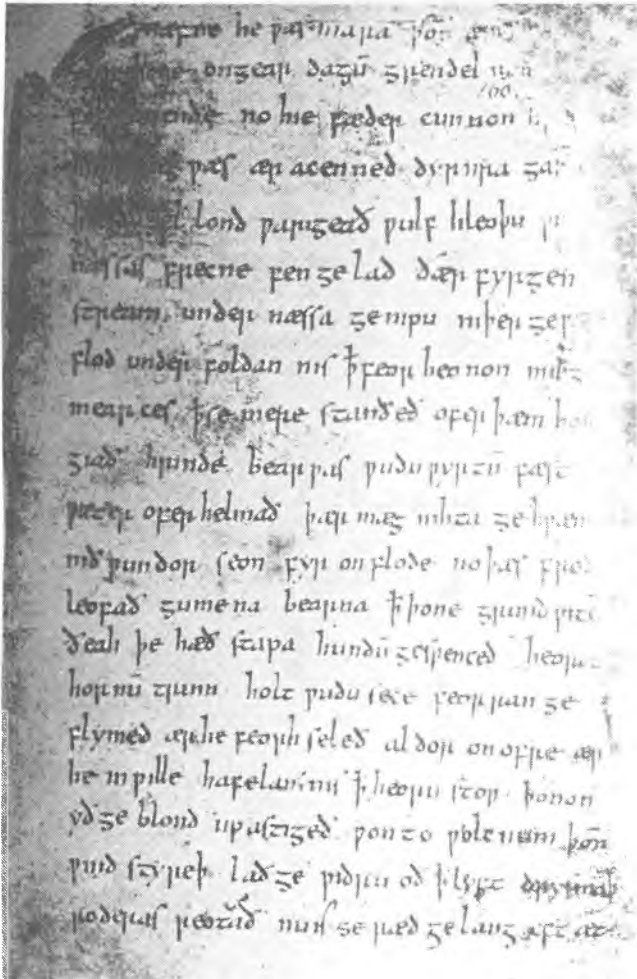


Figure 8. A page (folio 160a) of MS. Cotton. Vitellius. A. XV., showing lines 1355–1376 of the *Beowulf* epic. On this page is described the location of Grendel's lair, a large and dismal, swampy lake. The name Grendel can be seen on the second line down.

Table 2). At the age of seven, in AD 502, he was brought to the court of Hrethel, his maternal grandfather (AD 445–503) who was then king of the Geatingas, a tribe who inhabited what is today southern Sweden (and whose eponymous founder, Geat, also appears in the early genealogies). After an unpromising and feckless youth, during which years were fought the Geatish/Swedish wars, in particular the Battle of Ravenswood [*Hrefnawudu*] in the year AD 510, Beowulf undertook his celebrated journey to Denmark, to visit Hrothgar, king of the Danes. This was in AD 515, Beowulf's twentieth year. (This was also the year of his slaying the monster Grendel which we shall examine shortly.) Six years later, in AD 521, Beowulf's uncle, King Hygelac, was slain.

Hygelac himself is known to have lived from AD 475–521, having come to the throne of the Geatingas in AD 503, the year of his father Hrethel's death. He is independently mentioned in Gregory of Tours's *Historiae* (sic!) *Francorum*, where his name is rendered

Chlochilaichus.^{25,26} There, and in other Latin Frankish sources,²⁷ he is described as a Danish king (**Chogilaicus Danorum rex**), not a Geat, but this is the same mistake that our own English chroniclers made when they included even the Norwegian Vikings under the generic name of Danes. The *Liber Monstrorum*, however, did correctly allude to him as **rex Getarum**, king of the Geats. Saxo also mentions him as the **Hugletus** who destroyed the Swedish chief **Homothus**. Homothus, in turn, is the same as that Eanmund who is depicted in line 2612 of the *Beowulf* poem.²⁸ (See also Table 3.)

On Hygelac's death, Beowulf declined the offer to succeed his uncle to the throne of the Geatingas, choosing instead to act as guardian to Hygelac's son, prince Heardred, during the years of Heardred's minority. (Heardred lived from AD 511–533. He was therefore in his tenth year when he became king.) Heardred, however, was killed by the Swedes in AD 533 (he had given shelter to the Swedish king Onela's nephews — see Table 3), and it was in this year that Beowulf took over the reins of kingship. Beowulf went on to rule his people in peace for fifty years, dying at some 88 years of age in the year AD 583. The manner of his death, though, is particularly relevant to our study, as we shall see.

BEOWULF AND THE DINOSAURS

But first, we must dispel one particular and erroneous notion that has bedevilled studies in this field for years. Since the poem's 'rediscovery' in the early 18th century (although it was brought to the more general attention of scholars in the year 1815 when it was first printed), scholars have insisted on depicting the creatures in their translations of the poem as '**trolls**'.²⁹ The monster Grendel was a troll, and the older female who was assumed by the Danes to have been his mother, is likewise called a troll-wife.

The word '**troll**' is of Nordic origin, and in the fairytales of Northern Europe it is supposed to have been a human-like, mischievous and hairy dwarf who swaps troll children for human children in the middle of the night. For good measure, trolls are sometimes depicted as equally mischievous and hairy giants, some of whom lived under bridges or in caves.

Now, this would be all well and good but for the singular observation that the word '**troll**' is entirely absent from the original Anglo-Saxon text of *Beowulf*! The poem is full of expressions that we would call zoological terms, and these relate to all kinds of creatures (see Table 4). But none of them have anything to do with dwarves, giants, trolls or fairies, mischievous or otherwise. And whilst we are on the subject, the monster Grendel preyed on the Danes for twelve long years (AD 503–515). Are we seriously to believe that these Danish Vikings, whose berserker-warriors struck such fear into the hearts of their neighbours, were for twelve years rendered

INTRODUCTION TO TABLES 2 AND 3.

Virtually every edition of the *Beowulf* epic (and virtually every commentary on the poem), will take pains to assure the reader that what he is reading is NOT an historically accurate account of events or personages. *Beowulf* is described as a moral tale composed several centuries after the times of which it treats, a good yarn, and so on and so forth. What it does not do is embody real history. However, the best test for historicity that can be applied to any document from the past, be it chronicle, epic poem or prose narrative, is the test of its genealogies and personal names. Are the men and women mentioned in the work characters who are known to us from other contemporary sources? Can the genealogies be verified? If they can, then we are dealing with an account that we can rely on as history. If their information is demonstrably wrong or fictitious, and if it is seen to contradict other accepted historical sources, then clearly the rest of the matter can be dismissed as mere fiction. Thus, and in the light of the persistent modernist assertion that *Beowulf* is merely fiction, we shall examine the complex genealogies that are embodied within the poem in the sure knowledge that no compiler of fairy-stories ever went to such enormous lengths to add circumstantial verisimilitude to his tale as we find in the *Beowulf*. The following evidence will speak for itself.

I have relied on Klaeber (third edition, reference 20) for much of the information contained in the notes, and for the dates which, as he points out, are estimated as closely as the poem and its external corroborative sources will allow. The pivotal date on which most of the others depend and are calculated, is AD 521, the year in which King Hygelac was slain by the Franks as depicted in Gregory of Tour's *Historiae Francorum*. However, having verified *Beowulf's* extraordinary historical accuracy on almost all points of the narrative, even those minor insignificant and insubstantial points that only an authentic historical narrative can yield, Klaeber still denies the essential authenticity of the narrative. It is a peculiar position in which many a modernist scholar has found himself . . .

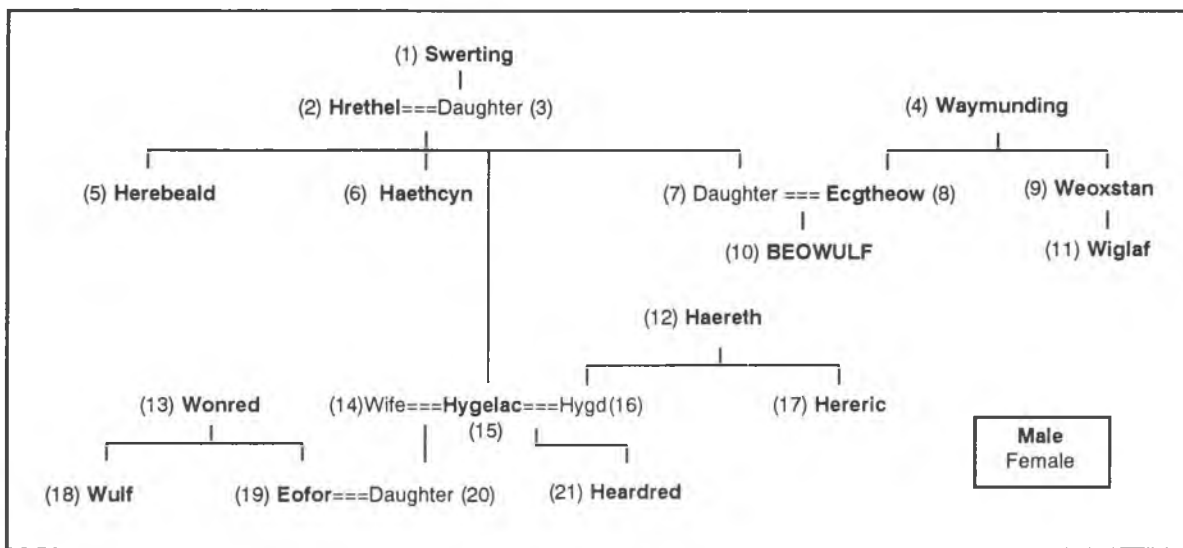


Table 2. THE GEATISH ROYAL HOUSE.

Notes to Table 2.

- (1) Swerting: This is Hrethel's father-in-law's surname, not his forename. Swerting would have flourished from about AD 425 onwards. He was defeated by Frotho, whom we met earlier killing a dragon. Swerting planned to put Frotho to death, but in the ensuing battle both men slew each other. Swerting's daughter, unnamed, married Hrethel.
- (2) Hrethel: AD 445–503. Having reigned over the Geats of southern Sweden, Hrethel died of grief a year after his eldest son's tragic death. (See 5 and 6).
- (3) Swerting's daughter: name unknown.
- (4) Waymunding: This is the surname of Beowulf's grandfather. He would have lived during the latter half of the 5th century.
- (5) Herebeald: AD 470–502. He was killed by his younger brother Haethcyn in a hunting accident.
- (6) Haethcyn: AD 472–510. Haethcyn came to the throne in AD 503. From that time war broke out between the Geats and the neighbouring Swedes culminating in the famous Battle of Ravenswood (*Hrefnawudu*) in the year AD 510. Just before this battle, Haethcyn was killed by Ongentheow (see Table 3, person 1) after having captured the Swedish queen.
- (7) Daughter: name unknown.
- (8) Ecgtheow: Beowulf's father, otherwise unknown.
- (9) Weoxstan: Paternal uncle to Beowulf, he surprisingly helped Onela gain the throne of Sweden (see Table 3, person 4). He and his son, Wiglaf (11), are henceforth known as *Scyflingas*, or Swedes, to denote their treacherously aiding the Swedish king.
- (10) BEOWULF: AD 495–583. The subject of the epic that bears his name.
- (11) Wiglaf: Beowulf's cousin. Otherwise unknown from external sources, Beowulf adopted him as his heir. (See also Weoxstan [9]).
- (12) Haereth: Father of Queen Hygd (16).
- (13) Wonred: Father of Eofor and Wulf.
- (14) Wife: name unknown.
- (15) Hygelac: AD 475–521. The pivotal date, AD 521, and from which all other dates are here calculated, is provided by Gregory of Tour's *Historiae Francorum*, where he mentions Hygelac's raid on the Franks. During this raid, Hygelac was slain by Theodebert, the son of Theoderic, the Merovingian king of the Franks.
- (16) Hygd: Hygelac's queen.
- (17) Hereric: Queen Hygd's brother, he was uncle to prince Heardred.

- (18) Wulf: Eofor's elder brother.
 (19) Eofor: In the year AD 510, Eofor slew Ongentheow, king of the Swedes (see Table 3, person 1).
 (20) Daughter: name unknown.
 (21) Heardred: AD 511–533. In AD 532, diplomatic relations between the Geats and the Swedes were ruptured by Heardred's granting asylum to Onela of Sweden's rebellious nephews. Heardred was killed the following year by Onela's forces.

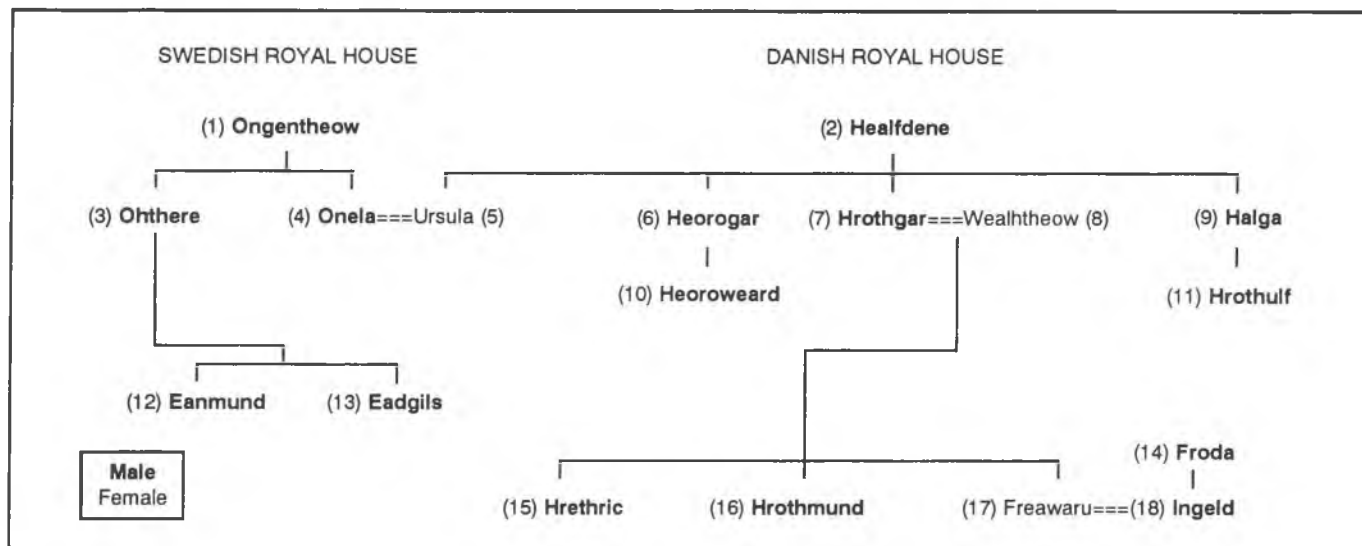


Table 3. THE SWEDISH AND DANISH ROYAL HOUSES.

Notes to Table 3.

- (1) Ongentheow: AD 450–510. King of Sweden, he has been identified as the Angeltheow of the early (pre-migration) Mercian genealogies (see *CEN Tech. J.*, 5(1):21). In other early Nordic sources his name is also given as Angantyr and Egill. His queen was taken captive by Haethcyn and Hygelac (see Table 2, person 6 and person 14) and he was killed in the ensuing battle of Ravenswood by Eofor and Wulf (see Table 2, person 18 and person 19 respectively).
- (2) Healfdene: AD 445–498. Otherwise known as Halfdan, he is celebrated in other sources as the father of Hrothgar (Hróarr) and Halga (Helgi). According to the *Skjoldungasaga*, his mother was the daughter of Jomundus, king of Sweden. His seat of power, which *Beowulf* tells us was called Heorot, is today marked by the village of Lejre on the island of Zealand.
- (3) Ohthere: AD 478–532. His name is rendered Ottar in early West Nordic sources. His burial mound containing his ashes is still known as Ottarshögen.
- (4) Onela: AD 480–535. Otherwise Ali in old West Nordic sources, namely the *Skáldskaparmál*; the *Ynglingasaga*; the *Ynglingatal*; and the *Skjoldungasaga*.
- (5) Ursula: Originally Yrsa. In the *Hroffssaga* and *Skjoldungasaga*, she is depicted as Healfdene's eldest child, not his youngest as given in the *Beowulf*.
- (6) Heorogar: AD 470–500. According to the *Beowulf*, he died within two years of inheriting his father's crown at 28 years of age. He is one of only two names of the Danish royal house that are not attested in other records (see also 16).
- (7) Hrothgar: AD 473–525. Otherwise Hróarr, he was king of Denmark.
- (8) Wealhtheow: She was a descendant of the Helmingas, and was renowned for her tactful and diplomatic ways. Intriguingly, her name means Celtic Servant.
- (9) Halga: AD 475–503. He is known as Helgi in other Scandinavian sources and as Halgi Hundingsbani in the Eddic poems.
- (10) Heorowearð: Born AD 490. Heorowearð did not inherit the crown on his father Heorogar's death. This may have been due to his minority (he was 10 when his father died), although other young lads have taken the crown at even earlier ages. Lines 2155 ff of the *Beowulf* may hold the clue to this. His father refused to pass on to him the royal standard, helmet, sword and breastplate, an extraordinary act that normally denotes that the son has lost his father's respect. How he lost it we are left to imagine.
- (11) Hrothulf: AD 495–545. Renowned in other Scandinavian records as the son of Halga, he was, according to the *Skjoldungasaga* (cap. XII) and the *Ynglingasaga* (cap. XXIX), orphaned as a boy of 8. But he was adopted by Hrothgar and his queen at the Danish royal court. He was counted as one of the *suhtergefaederan* (close relatives of the king) and he occupied the seat of honour next to Hrothgar. However, he later attempted (AD 525) to usurp the throne from his cousins Hrethric and Hrothmund (see 15 and 16).
- (12) Eanmund: AD 503–533. He was known as Eymundr in the *Hyndluljóth* (cap. XV) and as Aun in the *Ynglingasaga*. Saxo latinised his name as Homothus. He was slain by Weoxstan (see Table 2, person 9).
- (13) Eadgils: Born AD 510. He became king in AD 535, and was known as Athils in other Nordic sources.
- (14) Froda: King of the Heathobard's (a Danish people), his lineage (not given in the *Beowulf*) is of great interest to us. We have already seen how the pre-Christian Saxons, Irish and early Britons all traced their royal descents through various lines from Japheth. Froda's line is likewise given as beginning with: Japhet Noa sun, fadir Japhans . . . Sescfe [Sceaf], Bedvig, Athra, Itermann, Heremotr, Scealdna (otherwise Skjoldr — the founder of the *Skjoldungas* or *Scyldings*), Beaf, Eat, Godulfi, Ginn, Frealaf, Voden. Allowing for natural spelling variations and for omissions, this almost exactly corresponds with the Anglo-Saxon lineage of Woden that we have already seen (*CEN Tech. J.*, 5(1):21). And then appears Froda's own line from Woden: Skjoldr, Fridleifr, Fridefrode, Frode Fraekni (14 in the above Table), Ingialdr Starkadar (see 18) and so on. (This information is preserved in the *Langfethgatal* [i.e. *Vetustissima Regum Septentrionis Series Langfethgatal dicta*, a 12th century manuscript copy of a much

earlier original source]). Thus, we can now add the Danes to the list of those ancient (pre-Christian) peoples who independently traced their lineage back to the Genesis patriarchs.

- (15) Hrethric: Born AD 499. Known in other records (the **Bjarkamal** and Saxo [ii]) as Hrorekr and Roricus respectively, he was slain by Hrothulf (see 11) in AD 525.
- (16) Hrothmund: Born AD 500. His is one of the only two names in this genealogy that cannot be verified from other surviving sources. (See also 6.)
- (17) Freawaru: Born AD 501. She married Ingeld of Sweden in AD 518.
- (18) Ingeld: Identical with Ingjaldr illrathi of **Ynglingasaga** fame, his prowess was sung for ages in the halls of Scandinavia. Indeed, his fame is referred to in a somewhat indignant letter written in AD 797 by Alcuin to Bishop Speratus of Lindisfarne: '**Quid enim Hinieldus cum Christo?**' — What has Ingeld to do with Christ? This was written in rebuke of the monks of Lindisfarne who loved to hear the old pagan sagas retold in cloisters. Yet it is to such monks that we owe the often clandestine preservation of works like the **Beowulf** and the old pagan genealogies, which have in turn yielded such vital information concerning our forebears' unexpected knowledge of the Genesis patriarchs. Ingeld himself married Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru, in the year AD 518. In the **Langfethgatal** (roll of ancestors) he is listed as Ingjaldr Starkadar fostri.

helpless with terror by a hairy dwarf, even a 'giant' one? For that is what certain of today's mistranslations of the poem would have us believe.

By the time of his slaying the monster Grendel in AD 515, Beowulf himself had already become something of a seasoned dinosaur hunter. He was renowned amongst the Danes at Hrothgar's court for having cleared the local sea lanes of monstrous animals whose predatory natures had been making life hazardous for the open boats of the Vikings. Fortunately, the Anglo-Saxon poem, written in pure celebration of his heroism, has preserved for us not just the physical descriptions of some of the monsters that Beowulf encountered, but even the names under which certain species of dinosaur were known to the Saxons and Danes.

However, in order to understand exactly what it is that we are reading when we examine these names, we must appreciate the nature of the Anglo-Saxon language. The Anglo-Saxons (like the modern Germans and Dutch) had a very simple method of word construction, and their names for everyday objects can sometimes sound amusing to our modern ears. A body, for example, was simply a bone-house (*banhus*), and a joint a bone-lock (*banloca*). When Beowulf speaks to his Danish interrogator, he is said quite literally to have unlocked his word-hoard (*wordhord onleoc*). Beowulf's own name means bear, and it is constructed in the following way. The *Beo*-element is the Saxon word for bee, and his name means literally a bee-wolf. The bear has a dog-like face and was seen by those who wisely kept their distance to apparently be eating bees when it raided their hives for honey. So they simply called the bear a bee-wolf. Likewise, the sun was called *woruldcandel*, literally the world-candle. It was thus an intensely literal but at the same time highly poetic language, possessing great and unambiguous powers of description.

The slaying of Grendel is the most famous of Beowulf's encounters with monsters, of course, and we shall come to look closely at this animal's physical description as it is given in the Beowulf epic. But in Grendel's lair, a large swampy lake, there lived other reptilian species that were collectively known by the Saxons as *wyrmcynnes* (literally wormkind, a race of monsters and serpents). Beowulf and his men came across them as they were tracking the

female of Grendel's species back to her lair after she had killed and eaten King Hrothgar's minister, Asshere. (The unfortunate man's half-eaten head was found on the cliff-top overlooking the lake.)

Amongst them were creatures that were known to the Saxons and Danes as giant *saedracan* (sea-drakes and sea-dragons), and these were seen from the cliff-top suddenly swerving through the deep waters of the lake. Perhaps they were aware of the arrival of humans. Other creatures were lying in the sun when Beowulf's men first saw them, but at the sound of the battle-horn they scurried back to the water and slithered beneath the waves.

These other creatures included one species known to the Saxons as a *nicor* (plural *niceras*), and the word has important connotations for our present study inasmuch as it later developed into *knucker*, a Middle English word for a water-dwelling monster or dragon. The monster at Lyminster in Sussex (see Table 1) was a *knucker*, as were several of the other reported sightings of dinosaurs in that country. The pool where the Lyminster dragon lived is known to this day as the Knucker's Hole. The Orkney Isles, whose inhabitants, significantly, are Viking, not Scots, likewise have their *Nuckelavee*, as do also the Shetland Islanders. On the Isle of Man, they have a *Nykir*.

However, amongst the more generally named *wyrmas* (serpents) and *wildeor* (wild beasts) that were present at the lake on this occasion, there was one in particular that was called an *ythgewinnes*.³⁰ Intrigued by it, Beowulf shot an arrow into the creature, and the animal was then harpooned by Beowulf's men using *eoferspreotum* (modified boar-spears). Once the monster was dead, Beowulf and his men then dragged the *ythgewinnes* out of the water and laid its body out for examination. They had, after all, a somewhat professional interest in the animals that they were up against. However, of the monstrous reptiles that they had encountered at the lake, it was said that they were such creatures as would sally out at mid-morning time to create havoc amongst the ships in the sea lanes, and one particular success of Beowulf's, as we have already seen, was clearing the sea lanes between Denmark and Sweden of certain sea-monsters which he called *merelifa* and *niceras*. Following that operation the carcasses of nine such creatures (*niceras nigene* — Alexander mistakenly translates *nigene* as seven) were

SAXON TERM	LITERAL MEANING	LINE	CREATURE DENOTED
1. <i>aelwiht</i>	alien monster	1500	Grendel (female)
2. <i>atol aglaeca</i>	the terrifying ugly one	732	Grendel (male)
3. <i>andsaca</i>	adversary	1682	Grendel (male)
4. <i>angenga</i>	solitary walker	449	Grendel (male)
5. <i>atol</i>	terrible	165	Grendel (male)
6. <i>atelic</i>	horrible	784	Grendel (male)
7. <i>attorsceatha</i>	venomous foe	2839	Flying reptile
8. <i>brimwylf</i>	she-wolf of the lake	1506	Grendel (female)
9. <i>cwealm cuma</i>	death visitor	792	Grendel (male)
10. <i>daedfruma</i>	evildoer	2090	Grendel (male)
11. <i>deathscua</i>	death shadow	160	Grendel (male)
12. <i>deofl</i>	devil	2088	Grendel (male)
13. <i>draca</i>	dragon	2290	Flying reptile
14. <i>eacen craeftig</i>	exceedingly powerful	3051	Flying reptile
15. <i>ealdorgewinna</i>	life enemy	2903	Flying reptile
16. <i>ellengaest</i>	powerful demon	86	Grendel (male)
17. <i>ellorgaest</i>	alien spirit	807	Grendel (male)
18. <i>ent</i>	giant	2717	Flying reptile
19. <i>feond</i>	fiend, enemy	101	Grendel (male)
20. <i>feondscatha</i>	dire foe	554	Grendel (male)
21. <i>feorhbealu</i>	life destruction	2077	Grendel (male)
22. <i>ferhthgenithla</i>	deadly foe	2881	Flying reptile
23. <i>fifelcyn</i>	race of monsters	104	Grendel (species)
24. <i>gastbona</i>	soul slayer	177	Grendel (male)
25. <i>geoscaftgast</i>	demon sent by fate	1266	Grendel (male)
26. <i>gesaca</i>	adversary	1773	Grendel (male)
27. <i>graedig</i>	greedy, ravenous	121	Grendel (male)
28. <i>grimlic</i>	fierce, terrible	3041	Flying reptile
29. <i>gromheort</i>	hostile hearted	1682	Grendel (female)
30. <i>grundwyrge</i>	hellish monster	1518	Grendel (male)
31. <i>gryrefah</i>	terrible, variegated colouring	3041	Flying reptile
32. <i>guthsceatha</i>	enemy, destroyer	2318	Flying reptile
33. <i>haethstapa</i>	heath stalker	1368	Stag
34. <i>heorowearh</i>	accursed outcast	1267	Grendel (male)
35. <i>hordward</i>	treasure guardian	2293	Flying reptile
36. <i>hringboga</i>	coiled (or wrapped) creature	2561	Flying reptile
37. <i>idese inlicness</i>	the likeness of a woman	1351	Grendel (female)
38. <i>inwitgaest</i>	malicious foe	2670	Flying reptile
39. <i>lathgeteona</i>	loathly spoiler	974	Grendel (male)
40. <i>ligdraca</i>	fire dragon	2333	Flying reptile
41. <i>lige gesa</i>	fire terror	2780	Flying reptile
42. <i>lyftfloga</i>	air flier	2315	Flying reptile species
43. <i>manfordaedla</i>	wicked destroyer	563	Sea monster
44. <i>manscatha</i>	wicked ravager	712	Grendel (male)
45. <i>mearcstapa</i>	march stalker	103	Grendel (male)
46. <i>meredeor</i>	sea beast	558	Sea monster
47. <i>muthbona</i>	mouth slayer	2079	Grendel (male)
48. <i>nearofah</i>	cruelly hostile	2317	Flying reptile
49. <i>nicor</i>	water monster	845	Lake monster
50. <i>nihthealu</i>	night evil	193	Grendel (male)
51. <i>nithdraca</i>	hostile dragon	2273	Flying reptile
52. <i>nithgaest</i>	malicious foe	2699	Flying reptile

53.	<i>orcneas</i>	monsters	112	Monsters general
54.	<i>saedeor</i>	sea beast	1510	Sea monster
55.	<i>saedraça</i>	sea dragon	1426	Sea monster
56.	<i>sceadugenga</i>	walker in darkness	703	Grendel (male)
57.	<i>scinna</i>	demon	939	Grendel (male)
58.	<i>scucca</i>	demon	939	Grendel (male)
59.	<i>scynscatha</i>	hostile demon	707	Grendel (male)
60.	<i>searogrim</i>	fierce in battle	594	Grendel (male)
61.	<i>theodsceatha</i>	waster of peoples	2278	Flying reptile
62.	<i>thyrs</i>	giant	426	Grendel (male)
63.	<i>weres waestmum</i>	the shape of a man	1352	Grendel (male)
64.	<i>widfloga</i>	wide flyer	2346	Flying reptile
65.	<i>wiht unhaelo</i>	unholy monster	120	Grendel (male)
66.	<i>wildeor</i>	wild beast	1430	Lake monster
67.	<i>wohbogan</i>	coiled (or wrapped) creature	2827	Flying reptile
68.	<i>wrecend</i>	avenger	1256	Grendel (female)
69.	<i>wyrm</i>	serpent	1430	Lake monster
70.	<i>wyrmcynn</i>	race of serpents	1425	Monster species
71.	<i>ythgewinnes</i>	wave-thrasher	1434	Lake monster

Table 4. ZOOLOGICALLY APPLIED TERMS IN THE *BEOWULF*.

laid out on the beaches for display and further inspection, and it is these *niceras* that are the creatures so consistently portrayed on the figureheads of Viking ships (see Figures 6 and 7).

FLYING REPTILES

The last monster to be destroyed by Beowulf (and from which encounter Beowulf also died in the year AD 583) was a flying reptile which lived on a promontory overlooking the sea at Hronesness on the southern coast of Sweden. Now, the Saxons (and presumably the Danes) knew flying reptiles in general as *lyftfloga* (air-fliers), but this particular species of flying reptile, the specimen from Hronesness, was known to them as a *widfloga*, literally a wide (or far-ranging) flyer, and the description that they have left us fits that of a giant *Pteranodon*. Interestingly, the Saxons also described this creature a *ligdraca*, literally fire-dragon, and he is described as fifty feet in length (or perhaps wing-span?) and about 300 years of age. (Great age is a common feature even among today's non-giant reptiles.) Moreover, and of particular interest to us, the name *widfloga* would have distinguished this particular species of flying reptile from another similar species which was capable of making only short flights. Modern palaeontologists have named such a creature *Pterodactyl*.

But what of another reptilian monster that was surely the most fiercest of all the dinosaurs encountered by Beowulf?

GRENDEL

It is too often and mistakenly thought that the name Grendel was merely a personal name by which the Danes knew this particular animal. In much the same way as a horse is called Dobbin, or a dog Fido, this monster, it is assumed, was called Grendel. But, in fact, Grendel was the name that our forebears gave to a particular species of giant reptile. This is evidenced in the fact that in the year AD 931, King Athelstan of Wessex issued a charter in which a certain lake in Wiltshire (England) is called (as in Denmark) a *grendles mere*.^{31,32} Other place-names mentioned in old charters, *Grindles bec* and *Grendeles pyt*, for example, were likewise places that were (or had been) the habitats of a particular species of animal. Grindelwald, literally Grendelwood, in Switzerland is another such place. But where does the name Grendel itself come from? What was its origin, and what information does it convey? Well, there are several Anglo-Saxon words that share the same root as Grendel. The Old English word *grindan*, for example, and from which we derive our word *grind*, used to denote a destroyer. But the most likely origin of the name is simply the fact that Grendel is an onomatopoeic term derived from the Old Norse *grindill*, meaning a storm or *grenja*, meaning to bellow. The word Grendel is strongly reminiscent of the deep-throated growl that would be emitted by a very large animal and it came into Middle English usage as *grindel*, meaning angry.

To the hapless Danes who were the victims of his predatory raids, however, Grendel was not just an animal. To them he was demon-like, one who was *synnum beswenced* (afflicted with sins). He was *godes ansaca* (God's adversary), the *synscatha* (evil-doer) who was *wonsaeli* (damned), a very *feond on helle* (devil in hell)! He was one of the *grundwyrgen*, accursed and murderous monsters who were said by the Danes to be descended from Cain himself. And it is descriptions such as these of Grendel's nature that convey something of the horror with which the men of those times anticipated his raids on their homesteads.

But as for Grendel's far more interesting physical description, his habits and the geography of his haunts, they are as follows.

Between lines 1345–1355 of the poem, Hrothgar relates to Beowulf the following information when describing Grendel and one of the monster's companions:

'Ic thaet londbuend leode mine seleraedende secgan hyrde thaet hie gesawon swylce twegen micle mearcstapan moras healdan ellorgaestas. Thæra oðer wæs thaes the hie gewislicost gewitan meahdon idese onlicnes, oðer earmsceapen on weres waestmum sraeclastas traed naefne he wæs mara thonne aenig man oðer thone on geardagum Grendel nemdon foldbuende . . .' (emphases mine)

. . . the best translation of which is Alexander's:—

*'I have heard it said by subjects of mine who live in the country, counsellors in this hall, that they have seen such a pair of huge wayfarers haunting the moors, otherworldly ones; and one of them, so far as they might make it out, was in woman's shape; but the shape of a man, though twisted, trod also the tracks of exile — save that he was more huge than any human being. The country people have called him from of old by the name of Grendel . . .'*³³

The key words from this passage, and from which we gain important information concerning the physical appearance of Grendel, are *idese onlicnes* when referring to the female monster, and *weres waestmum* when referring to the male. Those Danes who had seen the monsters thought that the female was the older of the two and supposed that she was Grendel's mother, but what exactly do the descriptive terms tell us that is of such importance? Simply this: that the female was in the shape of a woman (*idese onlicnes*) and the male was in the shape of a man (*weres waestmum*). In other words, they were both **bipedal**, but larger than any human.

Further important detail is added elsewhere in the poem concerning Grendel's appearance when the monster attacked the Danes for what was to prove the last time. In lines 815–818, where we are told in the most graphic detail how Beowulf inflicted a fatal injury on the monster (Beowulf held the creature in an armlock, which he then twisted — '*wrythan*' — line 964), the following information is derived:

'Licsar gebad atol aeglaeca him on eaxle wearth syndolh sweotol seonowe onsprungon burston banlocan.'

Which may be translated thus:

'Searing pain seized the terrifying ugly one as a gaping wound appeared in his shoulder. The sinews snapped and the (arm)-joint burst asunder.'

(my translation)

For twelve years, the Danes had themselves attempted to kill Grendel with conventional weapons — knives, swords, arrows and the like. Yet his impenetrable hide had defied them all, and Grendel was able to attack the Danes with impunity. Beowulf considered all this and decided that the only way to tackle the monster was to get to grips with him at close quarters. The monster's forelimbs, which the Saxons called *eorms* (arms) and which some translate as claws, were small and comparatively puny. They were the monster's one weak spot, and Beowulf went straight for them. He was already renowned for his prodigious strength of grip, and he used this to literally tear off one of Grendel's small arms.

Grendel, however, is also described, in line 2079 of the poem, as a *muthbona*, that is, one who slays with his mouth or jaws, and the speed with which he was able to devour his human prey tells us something of the size of his jaws and teeth. Yet, it is the very size of Grendel's jaws that would have aided Beowulf in going for the forelimbs, because pushing himself hard into the animal's chest between those forelimbs would have placed Beowulf tightly underneath those jaws and would thus have sheltered him from Grendel's terrible teeth. We are told that as soon as Beowulf gripped the monster's claws (and we must remember that Grendel was only a youngster, and not by all accounts a fully mature adult male of his species), the startled animal tried to pull away instead of attacking Beowulf. The animal instinctively knew the danger he was now in, and he wanted to escape the clutches of the man who now posed such an unexpected threat and who was inflicting such alarming pain. However, it was this action of trying to pull away that left Grendel wide open to Beowulf's strategy. Thus, Beowulf was able in the ensuing struggle eventually to wrench off one of the animal's arms, as so graphically described in the poem. As a result of this appalling injury, the young dinosaur returned to his lair and simply bled to death (see Figure 9 and caption).

As for his haunts and habits, Grendel hunted alone, being known by the understandably frightened locals who sometimes saw his moonlit shape coming down from the mist-laden moors as the *atol angengea*, the terrifying solitary one. He was a *mearcstapa* (literally a march-stepper), one who stalked the marches or outlying regions ('*haunting the moors*', as Alexander renders it). He hunted by night, approaching human settlements and waiting silently in the darkness for his prey to fall asleep before he descended on them as a *sceadugenga* (literally



Figure 9. Was Beowulf's method of mortally wounding Grendel entirely novel, or was he merely employing a tried and tested strategy? This illustration is from an extremely early Babylonian cylinder seal, and it portrays a man seizing and about to amputate the forelimb of another (or the same?) type of bipedal monster.

a shadow-goer, a nightwalker). Gliding silently along the *fenhlith* (the waste and desolate tract of the marshes), he would emerge from the dense black of night as the *deathscua* (death's shadow). The Danes employed an *eotanweard* (literally a giant-ward, a watcher for monsters) to warn of Grendel's appearance, but often in vain. So silent was Grendel's approach when he was hunting in the darkness of the night that sometimes the *eotanweard* himself was surprised and eaten. On one particular and long-remembered night, no less than thirty Danish warriors were killed by Grendel. Little wonder then that Beowulf was rewarded so richly and was so famed for having killed the monster.

In all, a comprehensive and somewhat horrifying picture of Grendel emerges from the pages of Beowulf, and I doubt that the reader needs to be guided by me as to which particular species of predatory dinosaur the details of his physical description fit best. Modern commentators who have been brought up on evolutionary ideas are compelled to suggest that monsters like Grendel are primitive personifications of death or disease, and other such nonsense. (It had even once been suggested that he was a personification of the North Sea!!) But really, the evidence will not support such claims. One modern and refreshingly honest publication on the poem makes a far more telling comment:—

*In spite of allusions to the devil and abstract concepts of evil, the monsters are very tangible creatures in Beowulf. They have no supernatural tricks, other than exceptional strength, and they are vulnerable and mortal. The early medieval audience would have accepted these monsters as monsters, not as symbols of plague or war, for such creatures were a definite reality.*³⁴

CONCLUSION

The study of living dinosaurs from the ancient records is a fascinating one, and we have here examined only a few of the surviving examples. One or two of the accounts (not dealt with here) that have come down to us could, arguably, be dismissed either on the grounds that they are plainly fanciful or that they are so hopelessly muddled that no accurate knowledge can be gleaned from them. But the vast majority of the accounts, such as these that we have examined, are sober and detailed reports of the not always malevolent creatures that our forebears encountered. The flying reptiles of Wales (see Appendix) that survived until very recent times are just one further example. Those of the North American Indians³⁵ are another. The reports are surprisingly consistent, and together they give the lie to those scurrilous charges that are so often laid by modernist scholars at our ancestors' proverbial door.³⁶ You can only say so often that records and traditions are fake, and that their authors are either habitual and unscrupulous liars and fraudsters, or else the most gullible fools in history. There comes a point when either it has to be acknowledged that there is substance to the reports, or the reports themselves are ignored. Modernists have chosen the latter course.

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24. It also verifies the pre-Christian origins of the Mercian (and other) pedigrees, proving that the early genealogies were in existence before the Saxons migrated to England, modernist assertions of late monkish forgeries notwithstanding.
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29. This is the one flaw that mars Michael Alexander's otherwise excellent translation of *Beowulf*, Penguin Classics (Ref. 22). Klaeber (Ref. 20) also, and surprisingly, makes the same mistranslation.
30. *Ythgewinnes* = literally a wave-thrasher, evidently a surface-swimming monster rather than a creature that swam at depth like the *saedracan*. This would explain the ease with which the *ythgewinnes* was harpooned from the shore of the mere.
31. *Cartularium Saxonicum*, W. de Gray Birch (ed.), ii., p. 363 ff.
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36. Sceptics on this subject are no new thing. Three hundred years ago, their often stultifying academic presence led one 17th century scholar to pen the following:
*'To save a maid, St George a dragon slew,
 A pretty tale if all that's told be true.
 Most say there are no dragons, and 'tis said,
 There was no George . . . let's hope there was a maid!'*
(John Aubrey)
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APPENDIX

THE FLYING REPTILES AND OTHER DINOSAURS OF WALES

Flying reptiles were a feature of Welsh life, a more common feature than many might think, until surprisingly recent times. Indeed, as late as the beginning of this present century, elderly folk at Penllin (Glamorgan) used to tell of a colony of winged serpents that lived in the woods around Penllin Castle. As Marie Trevelyan tells us:

'The woods round Penllyne Castle, Glamorgan, had the reputation of being frequented by winged serpents, and these were the terror of old and young alike. An aged inhabitant of Penllyne, who died a few years ago [around the turn of the century], said that in his boyhood the winged serpents were described as very

beautiful. They were coiled when in repose, and "looked as if they were covered with jewels of all sorts. Some of them had crests sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow." When disturbed they glided swiftly, "sparkling all over", to their hiding places. When angry, they "flew over people's heads, with outspread wings bright, and sometimes with eyes too, like the feathers in a peacock's tail." He said it was "no old story invented to frighten children," but a real fact. His father and uncle had killed some of them, for they were "as bad as foxes for poultry." The old man attributed the extinction of the winged serpents to the fact that they were "terrors in the farmyards and coverts."

An old woman, whose parents in her early childhood took her to visit Penmark Place, Glamorgan, said she often heard the people talking about the ravages of the winged serpents in that neighbourhood. She described them in the same way as the man of Penllyne. There was a "king and queen" of winged serpents, she said, in the woods round Bewper . . . Her grandfather told her of an encounter with a winged serpent in the woods near Porthkerry Park, not far from Penmark. He and his brother "made up their minds to catch one, and watched a whole day for the serpent to rise. Then they shot at it, and the creature fell wounded, only to rise and attack my uncle, beating him about the head with its wings". She said a fierce fight ensued between the men and the serpent, which was at last killed. She had seen its skin and feathers, but after the grandfather's death they were thrown away. That serpent was as notorious "as any fox" in the farmyards and coverts around Penmark.^{37,38}

The authenticity of the above account is enhanced in many points, not the least of which is the fact that it is not a typical account. The creatures concerned were not solitary and monstrous dragons, but small creatures who lived in colonies. They had to be exterminated, unfortunately, because of their predilection for the local poultry, but they were not large animals. We must bear in mind that many 'dinosaurs' known to us from the fossil record were, in fact, quite small, some no bigger than birds. The old folk who remembered the Welsh serpents agreed that they were very beautiful creatures to look at, especially when they were in flight.

A different kind of winged reptile nested on an ancient burial mound, or tumulus, at Trellech a'r Betws in the Welsh county of Dyfed. It seems, though, to have been a larger species than those of Penmark and Penllin.

But whilst we are in Wales it is worth noting that at Llanbadarn-y-Garrag, Powys (is *Garrag* a corruption of *carrog*, or vice versa?) the church contains a carving of a local giant reptile whose features may be familiar to some of us. They include large paddle-like flippers, a long neck and a small head. We would call it a *Plesiosaur*.

Apart from those Welsh locations mentioned in the

main body of this article, Glaslyn (Snowdon) is another lake where *afancs* have been spoken of and sighted, one as recently as the 1930's. On this occasion, two climbers on the side of the mountain looked down onto the surface of Glaslyn and they saw the *afanc*, which they described as having a long grey body, rise from the depths of the lake to the surface, raise his head, and then submerge again.³⁹

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Bill Cooper is a keen student of Bible history, archaeology and palaeoanthropology, and has been a regular contributor to the **Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal**. He resides in Middlesex, England. The subject of living dinosaurs in early records was introduced by Mr Cooper initially in *Anglo-Saxon Dinosaurs As Described in Early Historical Records*, Creation Science Movement (England), Pamphlet Series, no. 280.