THE GERMANIC EARTH GODDESS IN *BEOWULF*?

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Does Beowulf oppose the Earth Goddess of ancient Germanic religion? The possibility of such an interpretation follows upon the discovery that the name *Gefion*, by which early Danes called their female chthonic deity, may occur in the Old English poem five times. The first two monster episodes – wherein the name seems to occur – have close parallels in Scandinavian literature. Because of these parallels it has long been thought that the Anglo-Saxons who invaded England brought a version of *Beowulf* with them from the continent, where their background was similar to the Danes. Focusing on the places where Gefion's name may be understood to occur – hereafter called "the Gefion passages" – can give us new insight into the meaning of the poem for its original Germanic audience, perhaps in the sixth century.

The five Gefion passages seem to highlight the championing of a new order antagonistic to goddess worship. In light of what appears to be an elaborate thematic statement about patrilineage in the poem, the new order may also have entailed a change in kinship systems. Grendel and his mother may stand as types for earlier, matrilineal tribes. Further, the hall which is the object of struggle between Beowulf and the first two monsters may symbolize the consolidation of new hierarchal social organization among the northern Germanic peoples.

The Roman historian Tacitus in chapter 40 of *Germania*, written at the end of the first century A.D., describes the Angles as worshipping Mother Earth (*Terra Mater*) under the name of Nerthus and practicing her ritual at her sanctuary on an island in the Ocean. H.M. Chadwick identified early Anglian Nerthus, Scandinavian Freyia, and Danish Gefion as "local forms of the chthonic [female] deity... whose cult was known to all Teutonic peoples" (1907, 263, 256, 289). He found Zealand, on which Copenhagen is now located, to be the island of early Anglian

worship. Place name evidence connects Nerthus to it, and both the *Ynglinga Saga* (5) and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (*Gylfaginning* 1) attribute the very creation of it to Gefion (Chadwick 1907, 258-259, 267, 289n1; Turville-Petre 1964, 187-188). Axel Olrik similarly saw the island as Gefion-Nerthus' religious center (1910, 23). Archaeological finds at Rappendum may now have located an actual site of rituals Tacitus described (Glob 1969, 167-169).

Etymologically uncertain, Nerthus may refer to "strength"; it corresponds exactly to Scandinavian *Niorð*. Written sources later than Tacitus describe Niorð as a god, not a goddess, but some Swedish place names indicate that the deity was female. Freyia and her brother Frey first appear as the children of Niorð; titles rather than proper names, *Freyia* and *Frey* mean "Lady" and "Lord." Gefion comes from the root "to give" and emphasizes the providing of well being and fertility. Freyia is often referred to in scaldic verse as *Gefn*, "gift" (Turville-Petre 1964, 171-178). Names like *Gabiae*, inscribed with goddess triads in Celto-Germanic contexts, assert the same *giving* quality attributed to Freyia and denoted in the name Gefion (Ellis Davidson 1964, 112-113; de Vries 1956-1957, 2: 293, 317).

In Old English poetry, *geofon* is a word for ocean which has been seen since Jakob Grimm (1968, 198) as related to the name Gefion of the Danish Earth Goddess (Ellis Davidson 1964, 114). Power to divide land and sea is shown by representations of Gefion in Norse literature; *Ynglinga Saga* (5), for example, describes her creation of Zealand by ploughing a section of Sweden into the sea. In a passage we will look at again, Snorri tells us "*Þa fór hon í Jǫtunheima ok gat Þar iiii sonu við jǫtni nǫkkurum; hon brá Þeim í ynxalíki ok færði Þá fyrir plóginn ok dró landit út á hafit ok vestr gegnt Óðinsey, ok er Þat kǫlluð Selund; Þar byggði hon síðan*" (Snorri 1966, 6) – "Next she went to a giant's home and there begot four sons with a giant. She shaped them in the likeness of oxen, yoked them to a plow and broke up the land unto the sea westwards opposite Odenso; it was called Selund [Zealand], and there she dwelt afterwards" (1932, 3-4). Niorð, Freyia and Frey are also intimately linked with the sea. Niorð is related to water by Icelandic and Norwegian place

names like *Njarðvik* (Niorð's creek) and **Njarðarey* (Niorð's island). Niorð's home in Sweden is *Noatun* (the place of ships, harbor). One of Freyia's names in scaldic poetry was *Mardǫll*, the first part of which probably derived from the Norse word for ocean, *marr*. Frey owned *Skíðblaðnir*, the best of ships (Turville-Petre 1964, 163-178, 189). Each of these deities was invoked for fertility. The role of sea vessels in Teutonic fertility rites has been followed back into the Bronze Age (de Vries 1956-1957, 1: 108ff). The fertility of animals and the earth itself, however, is seen as an older aspect of these deities than the bounty of the sea (Turville-Petre 1969, 261). Tacitus wrongly supposed (*Germania* 9) that some of the Suebi (a division of the Germans which included the Angles) venerated a female earth and fertility deity as the result of the importation of her cult – because her emblem was a ship.

Gefion 1. Line 49.

The Germanic Chthonic Goddess first seems alluded to in line 49. In each of the Gefion passages the word in the poem can be understood as referring to the sea as well as the Goddess who has power over it. This is the only instance of the five where Friedrich Klaeber did not gloss the word in question as "ocean." Recounting the end of Scyld's funeral we are told:

Þā gȳt hīe him āsetton segen gyldenne
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,
Gēafon on gārsecg; him wæs geōmor sefa

(Klaeber 1950, 11. 47-49; all references to this edition, unless noted).

Klaeber translated *Gēafon* (uncapitalized) as past plural of the verb to give, a reading which we have seen to be in keeping with the etymology of the Goddess' name. I would suggest:

Then yet they set for him a golden banner
high overhead, let water bear him,

Gefion, on the waves; the heart was sad for them.

Taking *gēafon* to mean Gefion the Goddess here is rendered more secure by the fact that in Norse mythology Scyld was the husband of Gefion (Chadwick 1907, 267, 289-290). In the quoted passage from *Ynglinga Saga*, we have been told that after Gefion created Zealand by ploughing, she lived there. The passage continues: "*Hennar fekk Skyolder, sonr Óðins; Þau bjoggu at Hleiðru*" – "Skjold [Scyld], Odin's [Othin's] son, took her to wife and they lived in Leidra [Leire]" (Snorri 1966, 6; 1932, 4). We shall examine this reference to Leire again below. Here we may with some confidence conclude that in a poem about Scyld's funeral for an Anglo-Danish audience, the word *gēafon* could probably not have been used without invoking Gefion.

The *Beowulf* poet has already emphasized that Scyld's funeral was conducted according to his own wishes (11. 29-30). *Lēton* (1. 48) makes the Scyldings active agents and Gefion a more passive acquiescent in Scyld's rites. Perhaps she numbers among those whose heart is sad in line 49. Even though Scyld is borne by the sea, the power of the Goddess connected with it is minimized.

But in a ritual practice whose vestige is perhaps seen here, the Goddess had endured, and her consort was ephemeral. A tradition of sacred fertility kings, whose claim to regality consisted of being the mate of the goddess, is known in Scandinavia prior to the late 5th century, and Chadwick saw the title *frēa Ingwine*, applied to Hrothgar (1. 1320), as possibly a relic of such a practice (1907, 252-253). Gefion's relation with Gylfi, a king of Sweden, may be preserved in exactly this light (Ross 1978, 159-161). Even the priest in the ritual described by Tacitus has been understood as the husband of Nerthus, as have bog-men, most dating from after 200 B.C., found especially in Denmark (Chadwick 1907, 256, 320-323, 342-343; Turville-Petre 1964, 172; Glob 1969, 156-192; Schutz 1983, 323, 336; Bennike and Ebbesen 1986). In addition to direct evidence for this tradition we may seek insight from an analysis of Irish sources, for Francis Byrne has found the closest European parallels for archaic features of Irish kingship in

pre-Christian Scandinavia. A ritual mating with the local Goddess seems to have been the basis of inauguration of each of the 150 tribal kings reigning at any given date in Ireland in the first centuries A.D. The earliest traditions about Medb, for example, identify her as the Goddess whose wedding periodically created a king at Tara (Byrne 1973, 7-27; Dillon 1946, 38-41; Mac Cana 1955-1956, 1958). In line 49 of *Beowulf* we appear to have token acknowledgement of the deity who, along with a tradition which made ritual marriage with her the basis for elevation of a chosen male, has been superseded.

What replaced her ritual was dynastic rule by the Scyldings. That Scyld modified an older tradition is clearly implied by *Ynglinga Saga* (5), for we are told first that Gefion dwelt (*byggði*) in Zealand, then that she and Scyld dwelt together (*bjoggu*) at Leire on the island. It is likely on the face of it that socially significant changes are involved in the distinction. The scope of such changes will perhaps be clearer after consideration of three aspects of Gefion's background. Veneration of the Germanic female earth deity apparently: (1) derived from the Neolithic period; (2) was rooted in the culture of tribes emphasizing a female kinship system; (3) took place in the context of egalitarian social relations.

Descent from the Neolithic of religious practices honoring Gefion has already been strongly hinted by *Ynglinga Saga*, for it links her with two of the technologies which originated in that epoch: domestication of animals (her ox-sons) and agriculture (ploughing). A stone engraving from Züschen of cattle yoked to a cart confirms the antiquity of the goddess cult described by Tacitus; the engraving, found in a burial monument, has been interpreted as a stone age representation of Nerthus (Schutz 1983, 106-107, 336). The Züschen artifact dates from about 2000 B.C. when the use of copper was already known, but identification of Zealand as a special place for the female chthonic deity's veneration provides a clue that her cult may have been organized there much earlier.

Archaeologists observe familiarly that Zealand offers the highest concentration of Neolithic tombs in Denmark (Glob 1967, 68). These are enormous monuments, commonly but not

exclusively megalithic, in which communal burial was often practiced. Lili Kaelas has recently identified Zealand as the "nucleus" of the oldest megalithic tombs in the area, "urdolmens" (1983, 80). Figure 1 dramatically illustrates the importance of Zealand in the Neolithic. It diagrams areas of Scandinavia where polygonal or rectangular stone chambers were in the majority. Zealand shows high densities of both types, and indeed has the greatest concentration of megalithic tombs in Europe (Jażdżewski 1973, 71). These evidences of the island's central significance in the Neolithic make it conceivable that the "the chthonic [female] deity... known to all Teutonic peoples" had been associated with it from that era. We may note also Byrne's finding that sites at which the ancient Irish tribal kings were inaugurated regularly show a "close association... with Neolithic burial mounds" (1973, 20). A connection between the thousands of Neolithic communal tombs of Denmark and Grendel's Mother will be proposed below.

Chadwick forcefully propounded two aspects of the veneration of Gefion I am focusing on here, ending *Origin of the English Nation* on the note that matrilineal social organization, lasting from the stone age, "survived until the iron age was well established" (340). He found that agricultural tribes based on blood relations on the women's side had constituted Germanic society since the Neolithic, and he astutely (Gough 1961, 552-553) used matrilocal residence (which he called Beena marriage) as evidence of matriliny (328-340). Subsequently Bertha Philpotts and E.A. Thompson have also concluded from written evidence that a shift from matrilineal kinship was underway among the Germans at the beginning of the historical period (Philpotts 1913, 270; Thompson 1965, 17) [Note 1]. Traces of widespread European matriliny descended from the Neolithic have been seen in the archaeological record (Childe 1964, 123; Gimbutas 1989, xx; Green 1986, 73), as has a belief system in which a Goddess was primary (Crawford 1957). A method for discerning matrilineal social organization from settlement data has been proposed (Battaglia 1990).

Considerable social parity in the late prehistoric period is increasingly being attested by archaeology . A recent study of

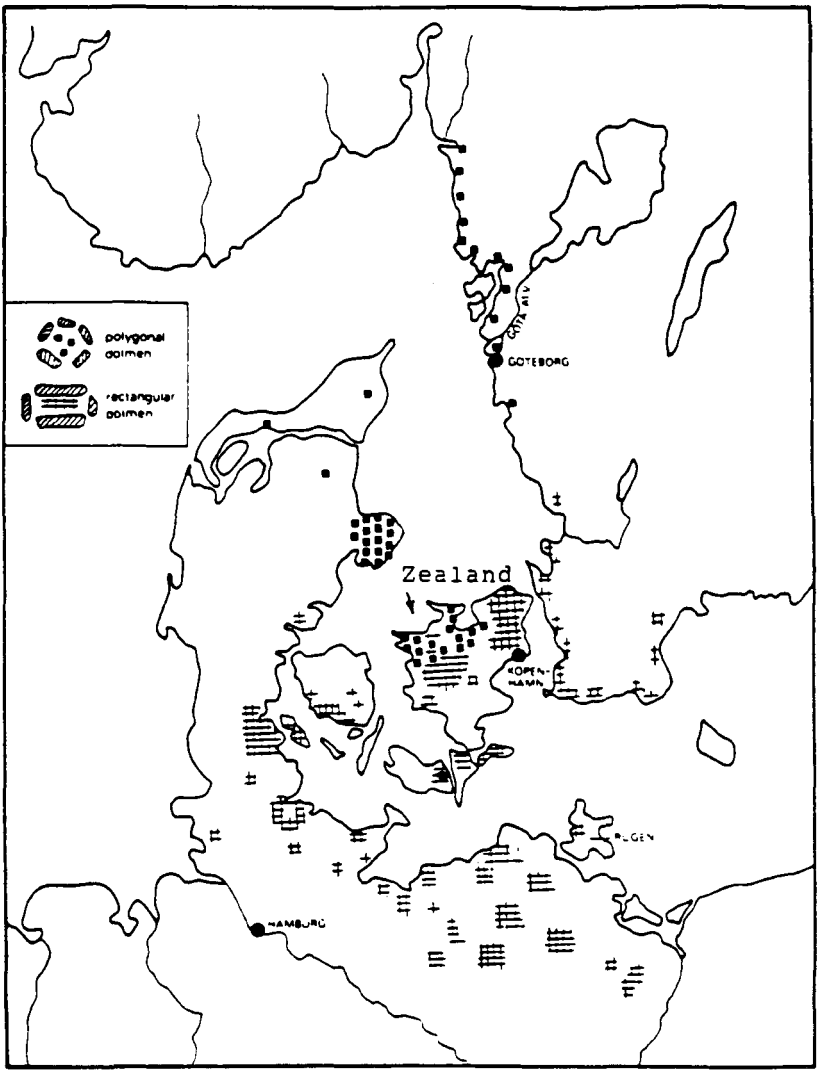

FIGURE 1: Areas where rectangular and polygonal Neolithic chambered tombs predominate in Germany and Scandinavia (after Kaelas).

Social and Religious Organization in Bronze Age Denmark found that pronounced social stratification was not part of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia and northern Germany and, further, that at the end of the period a "decline occurs in social complexity" and a "more egalitarian social organization" emerges (Levy 1982, 55, 70, 113-115; for Zealand, Kristiansen 1978, 182). One study which appears to challenge such conclusions nonetheless states that as of the third century A.D. the elite which existed in Danish society were still "commoners who tilled their own fields" (Jensen, 1982, 249). The Chauci have been characterized as "a free peasant society enjoy[ing until the first century A.D.] a balanced egalitarian social structure, reflected in the equality of property ownership" (Schutz 1983, 320). Reported aspects of the cremation urnfields of Schleswig-Holstein, the Anglo-Saxon homeland, are of considerable interest. "Cultural... [and] population continuity" between 1100 B.C. and 500 A.D. has been indicated. In the Bad Segeberg field of 3000 grave deposits between 500 B.C. and 50 B.C.: the burial urns had seen household use, suggesting routine connection with work-a-day affairs among the deceased; neither weapons nor imported articles were part of grave inventories; male and female burials cannot readily be distinguished; and conclusions of social differentiation are not allowed by the very uniform grave equipment. As Herbert Schutz sums it up: "The evidence of the early cultural phases points to an egalitarian society" (1983, 314-316, 350).

Two studies of Danish burial practices have now distinguished a "northern" zone where until about 400 A.D. "socially egalitarian clan structures" ("*socialt udglattende slægtsstrukturer*") continued; women held prominent positions while status was indicated with "no noteworthy degree of wealth" ("*ikke hvad vi vil kalde rigdom*") (Ringtved 1986, 103, 105 [Figs. 8, 12], 169; Hedeager and Kristiansen 1981, 127).

Returning to the situation in *Beowulf*, Line 15 can be seen as showing that portions of Scandinavian society continued to enjoy egalitarian social relations within the time frame of the poem: the Danes were leaderless (*aldorlēase*) until Scyld came. Coercive government is certainly represented by Scyld's

terrifying his neighbors and forcing them to pay tribute. Although a recent study found the exercise of centralized power by Germanic rulers to be the result of external influences, Chadwick's judgment that this passage in *Beowulf* shows the "ambition" and "the extent of the power of some kings during the migration period" seems more plausible (Swanton 1982, 24; Chadwick 1907, 178-179).

But an actual Danish king named Scyld who gave name to the dynasty probably never existed: "the Scyldingas did not get their name because they were really descended from Scyld, but Scyld was created in order to provide an eponymous father to the Scyldingas" (Chambers 1967, 77). From the clear identification of Scyld with raiding, weapons and treasure, we can conclude that warlords with *permanent* retinues had emerged in Denmark by the fifth century (Ringtved 1986, 197; Hedeager and Kristiansen 1981, 158). Thompson provided a historical analysis of such transformations among earlier Germans which had made fighting "a regular and highly respected means of passing one's life" (1965, 53; cf. Chadwick 1907, 180-181). As Lotte Hedeager put it in her archaeological view of this process in the late Roman period: "war, pillage and robbery were necessary measures to sustain the system" (1987, 133, 138). Continuing autocratic kingship begins in Denmark with the Scyldingas, "sons of (the) shield," although Scyld himself was fictitious.

Written records provide sketchy and sometimes conflicting accounts of the first Scylding rulers, before figures of doubtless historicity appear, the first of whom is the Healfdene of our poem (Chadwick 1907, 152). Several Scylding encampments, i.e., sites where a lord with his retinue resided, may have existed in Denmark contemporaneously with each other and with matrilineal tribal organizations of long standing. Perhaps the camp of the Honor-Scyldings (11. 464, 1710) was such a site. But two early sources identify Scyld himself with Leire: *Ynglinga Saga* (5), as we have seen, and *Skjoldunga Saga* (Chambers 1967, 365).

Both the historical Hrothgar and his nephew Hrothulf are associated with a court *at Leire* which Chambers believed to be

the site of Heorot: "we may be fairly sure that the spot where Hrothgar built his 'Hart Hall' and where Hrothulf held that court to which the North ever after looked... was Leire, where the grave mounds [now] rise out of the waving cornfields" (1967, 19-20). Labeling Heorot "greatest of hall buildings" (*healærna mæst*, 1.78) the *Beowulf* poet claims central power for its king in a hierarchal social order. As Hedeager explained a recurring change in Germanic society: "The old tribal structure based on ties of kinship and alliance transformed gradually into... [a] class-divided state" (1987, 137; Ringtved 1986, 169). The great hall may have consolidated and celebrated a new institution in Denmark, the king whose standing warband enforced his authority.

Furthermore, we have seen *Ynglinga Saga* call Scyld a son of Othin. There is considerable reason to believe that the new kingship established at Leire was the center of a new religious practice, involving worship primarily of male gods. The ninth-yearly sacrifice of men and animals at Leire was described by Latin chronicler Thietmar. Chadwick has analyzed the ritual as an early example of *The Cult of Othin*, and he argued that *Beowulf* shows this religion was already known to the Danes (1899, 24-27, 53; 1907, 245). Axel Olrik, while questioning Thietmar's location of the sacrifice, understood the chronicler to have described a ritual actually conducted until the mid-tenth century and associated with the residence of the Danish kings which had, in the time of Hrothgar, been at Leire (Olrik and Hollander 1919, 330-333). Healfdene's holding a "great sacrifice at midwinter" ("*blót mikit at miðjum vetri*" [Snorri, 1907, 251]) for the extension of his own life, and keeping prisoners for a time before "hanging them" ("*suspendio consumpsit*" [Saxo 1859, 80]) may be additional indicators that the ritual which Thietmar described was practiced by the Scyldings. Since "the cult of Othin seems to have been practiced chiefly, if not exclusively, at the courts of kings and nobles" (Chadwick 1899, 28, 70; Turville-Petre 1972, 14-19; Hald 1963, 107-109), we may presume that the religion's emphasis on martial glory provided a rationale for the emerging system of social inequality. The hall which the historical Hrothgar appears to have erected at Leire

can be understood as representing another innovation in Denmark: a system of belief in which male gods were central and which justified new social conditions.

To this picture of what Heorot may have stood for, a third innovation should be added and that is patriliny, a kinship system based on relations through men. The opening lines of the poem seem to announce this theme, for *cyning* and *ætheling* in lines 2 and 3 are in form patronymics (Chadwick 1907, 315); the declared subject is thus the glory and courage of central figures of male kinship systems. Scyld's hereditary kingship would not even have been possible without such a system. The establishment of patrilineally inherited kingship (and hierarchy) among the Danes may be reflected in a statement of Snorri. He tells us Healfdene was assured in response to the sacrifice already referred to: "*Þat myndi Þó vera CCC vetra, er engi myndi vera i ætt hans kona eða ótíginn maðr*" – "that for three hundred years there would be no women among his descendants, and no man of common rank" (1907, 251; Garmonsway and Simpson 1968, 126). Hedeager sees a shift to a "strongly patrilineal" system from one in which women formerly had more significant roles (1987, 128 [on bilateral kinship, see note 7 below]). Heorot is said to be the greatest mead hall the children of men, *yldo bearn* (l. 70), had ever heard of. Word choice throughout *Beowulf* emphasizes male kinship.

Grendel, who opposes Heorot, is said to have been driven *mancynne fram* (1.110), literally "from man kin;" for clarity I will translate such phrases "from male kin." The poem says the Christian deity thus punished the kin of Cain for the murder of Abel. But if the historical Hrothgar's court was not Christian, this charge may well not have been part of the case against Grendel in the original work from which derive *Beowulf* and *Grettis Saga* (Chambers 1967, 50-53; Chadwick 1959). At any rate, following the exile from male kin, "every misbegotten thing awoke," with *untȳdras* (1.111) being the word used to complain about Grendel's lineage system. Several of the specified creatures, most clearly giants and elves, share a connection with large stones in Scandinavian mythology (Turville-Petre 1964, 235; Glob 1967, 148-150; Motz 1982, 71;

Schutz 1983, 169-170), which suggests that traditions concerning them originated in the Neolithic. We have already seen that the matrilineal tribes of early Germany may have descended from that epoch. The poem's original audience perhaps understood Grendel (and the other misbegotten creatures) as representing old matrilineal tribes whose religion and egalitarian social order had suffered from the martial consolidation which made Heorot possible [Note 2]. Grendel, we are shortly told, was the "enemy of male kin," *fēond mancynnes* (1.164).

"(Male) relative (by marriage)" has been suggested as an original meaning for *mæg*, the common word for kinsman in the poem (Markey 1987, 315). Such a usage may have developed in a society where men married into a (female) family (by blood).

The most telling indication of patrilineal kinship being a key issue in the poem is that the very first words out of the hero's mouth apparently commit him, his followers and his nation to the new order. "*Wē synt gumcynnes Gēata lēode*," says Beowulf (1.260): "We are of male kin, people of the Geats." *Gumcynnes* emphatically specifies patriliny. The next line – "*ond Higelāces heorðgenēatas*" ("and Hygelac's hearth companions") – presumably associates Beowulf and his men with a hall, and thus identifies them as agents of a hierarchal social order. This declaration is followed by the naming of Beowulf's father (11. 262-263).

Gefion 2. Line 362.

Having satisfied the shore guard with his espousal of social organization comparable to that of the beleaguered Danes, Beowulf is conducted to the king. In asking Hrothgar for an audience for the Geats, Wulfgar appears to use Gefion's name for a second time:

Hēr syndon geferede,	*feorran cumene*
ofer Geofenes begang	*Gēata lēode* (11. 361-362).
Here have arrived,	come far
over Gefion's realm,	people of the Geats.

When Gefion was last named, she shared in the loss at Scyld's

funeral. Since then, however, a kingship based on patrilineal heredity has been established and the hall of inequality has been built. In these lines it is possibly implied that the long trip of the Geats over water has been daring, because Gefion now represents a potential adversary. At any rate, Danes still appear to believe in her.

Begong, translated here as "realm," recurs in the poem, apparently counterposing domains of earth and sky. Beowulf's killing of Grendel will lead to the observation that no one "under the realm of heaven," *under swegles begong* (l. 860), was better than he. Grendel's mother will be said to "guard the realm of water," *flōda begong... behēold* (ll. 1497-1498). Hrothgar will describe himself as having had no adversary *under swegles begong* (l. 1773) for fifty years. Having defeated Grendel and his mother, Beowulf will offer to return to Hrothgar "over the realm of water" (l. 1826) if he hears of further trouble, and later will demonstrate his continuing power against water spirits by swimming back to his homeland "over the realm of waters" (l. 2367) with the battle gear of thirty men after Hygelac is killed.

Gefion 3. Line 515.

In Unferth's account of Beowulf's swimming match with Breca, the Goddess' name again seems to be mentioned. I have always found the episode curious: Why is Beowulf so hostile to the sea that he must swim with a sword in his hand? Perhaps because water was especially thought the domain of the chthonic female deity. We have already seen linguistic and literary evidence of this association; archaeological testimony may also be considered in the form of ritual deposits of valuables in wells and bogs, sometimes clearly linked with goddess rituals and sometimes on sites continuously in use from the Neolithic (Lauring 1958, 135, 109; Ellis Davidson 1964, 40-41). Goddess figurines have been found in association with such deposits (e.g., Glob 1969, 152-154, 180-183); when male and female votive pairs have been recovered in marsh contexts, the female deity often has been more emphatically rendered (Schutz 1983, 331-334).

"Gefion welled up in waves," "*Geofon ȳðum wēol*" (l. 515), says Unferth, when Beowulf and Breca made test of the waters for pride. Although Beowulf's corrective version of the story does not mention Gefion by name, the phenomena she was said to be responsible for – welling up and waves – both recur. Beowulf, indeed, says he had more hardship from waves, *earfeðo on ȳðum* (l. 534), than any other man. The swimmers carried swords to protect themselves from whales, Beowulf says, presuming from them a hostility so virulent that the weapons had to be carried unsheathed. The water welling up, *wado weallende*, (l. 546) separated Beowulf from Breca after he had made a point of staying near him through five nights. It was precisely waves becoming rough – *hrēo wæron ȳða* (l. 548) – and stirring up the spirit of the ocean fishes which incited the attack. The ocean acted malevolently to divide the swimmers, and its agitation caused the sea denizens to attack. Beowulf was dragged to the bottom, *grunde* (l. 553), dispatched that attacker, but again met creatures whose favorite terrain was the sea ground, *sægrunde* (l. 564) – a development which will become more significant in the next Gefion passage. Beowulf killed nine sea-beasts [Note 3]; God's candle of light came in the morning. Beowulf repeats the claim that he was more distressed on the ocean streams than any other man, and says that he fought the hardest fight ever heard of under heaven's vault. Water welling up again (l. 581) this time supported him and carried him to land.

The enmity of Gefion possibly hinted in line 362 now seems explicit in Beowulf's description of a prior event. The Goddess' realm apparently rose up against him, but neither the ocean nor its creatures could best him. He had, he said, more sea strength (l. 533) than any other man. This episode can be understood as a debate within the poem about the past and future of the Scandinavian people. Beowulf's adolescent victory over Gefion's water monsters may refer to a change which had already taken place among some of the northern European tribes.

The Cimbri who shocked Rome in the late second century B.C. may have been the first Northern Teutonic people of the

early historic period to install patriliny and hierarchy in place of more communal matrilineal relations. Classical sources refer to them as ruled by kings (Chadwick 1907, 310). Difficult to detect in the archaeological record, they have been recently described as pushed into "social imbalance" by an "unfavorable environment," especially the loss of farmland due to marine incursion (Schutz 1983, 350; Kristiansen 1978, 182). Chadwick has seen them as providing at least an early antecedent of *The Cult of Othin* in the North (35-38). In the vernacular record, however, the Geats are considered the first people in the North to worship Othin, as is suggested by the facts that *Gautr*, the equivalent of Geat, is one of the names of the god in Old Norse and, most significantly, that he was called *Gautatýr*, that is, "God of the Geats" (Chadwick 1907, 270; see Chadwick 1959, 186). Possibly relevant are three "representations of one-eyed faces, presumably representing the god Odin" from north Jutland in the early Roman period (Liversage 1980, 132). As a war god whose cult was aristocratic, Othin was the mayor Northern deity most antithetic to the peaceful, settled, egalitarian communities in which matrilineal tribes may have continued from the Neolithic. Its funereal and other practices were suited to traveling bands and in many ways insisted on the primacy of men. For example, in the practice called suttee the wife of a chieftain was killed upon his death and buried with him (Chadwick 1899, 27-28, 45-46, 56-57, 70).

Referring to an old contest and suggesting that Beowulf had trouble with Gefion because of his own pride, Unferth may imply that accommodation is possible with the matrilineal agriculturalists who venerate the Goddess. The peacefort, *freoðoburh*, of line 522 may have come into existence because such an agreement had been worked out in the past. Since fortified sites of the Early Iron Age are such a rarity in Northern Europe we perhaps should consider in relation to this *Beowulf* reference the sites Borremose, Priorsløkke, and Olmer's Dyke (Liversage 1982, 87-93). Beowulf's reply to Unferth, however, disdains any possibility of accord. His unsheathed sword was defense, not provocation. He acted so fiercely only because of the adversity he faced.

Beowulf ends by taunting Unferth and even his whole people for cowardice. With three slighting references to Unferth's ethnicity in six and a half lines (11. 595-601), closing with alliteration between *Gār-Denum* and *Gēata*, Beowulf boasts that Geatish courage and strength will be demonstrated to Grendel not very long from that moment (11. 601-603). Geats have precisely the power Danes lack. No resolution except battle victory is conceivable.

Gefion 4. Line 1394.

In the previous passages what appears to be the name of the Danish Earth Goddess occurs in the speech of the *Beowulf* poet, of Wulfgar and of Unferth. Beowulf's reply to Unferth, while claiming recognition for his own achievements, undercut the importance Unferth attached to Gefion. But the Goddess' name next seems to occur in the mouth of Beowulf himself in the form of a boast that her power will not avail against him. This comes in the midst of his preparation to fight Grendel's mother. The episode involving her brings to a crescendo several of the themes we have been following.

A list of anti-patrilineal offenses is cited against Grendel or his kin, beginning with the charge that his maternal line descended from a twisted father-kin murderer. When Grendel's mother is introduced we are told that she had to dwell in terrible water since the point in Judeo-Christian time when Cain killed his brother, "kin on his father's side," *fæderenmæge* (1. 1263). Relationship through the male parent apparently made the crime worse. From that deed came many fated spirits, of whom Grendel was one (11. 1265-1266). Second, Grendel is again called "enemy of male kin," *mancynnes fēond* (1. 1276). Third, Hrothgar's people "do not know of any father" for Grendel – *no hīe fæder cunnon* (1. 1355). So being without proper father lineage is also charged against Grendel's line. If Grendel and his mother represent the matrilineal tribe, the institution itself is impugned as originating in patrilineal murder, maintaining an enmity against male kinship, and amounting to systemized bastardy.

After this indictment Hrothgar describes the secret land,

country of wolf cliffs [Note 4], held by the monster and his kin. "There the mountain stream disappears downward under the darkness of the bluff, water under the earth. Not far from here measured by miles," he goes on, "stands the lake over which hang frosty trees; a wood with roots fast covers-over the water:

ðær fyrgenstrēam
under næssa genipu *niÞer gewīteð*
flōd under foldan. *Nis Þæt feor heonon*
mīlgemearces, *Þæt se mere standeð*
ofer Þæm hongiað *hrinde bearwas,*
wudu wyrtum fæst *wæter oferhelmað*
(11. 1359-1364).

The compound of *helm* in the last word of this passage suggests that the trees protect the lake.

Beowulf's boast will begin by saying that his enemy will find no protection (*helm*, 1. 1392), and other aspects of this landscape will be invoked. But the passage continues with Hrothgar saying: "There may be seen each night a grim wonder, fire in the water. No one lives, of the children of men, so wise that he knows that bottom" –

Þær mæg nihta gehwæm *niðwundor sēon,*
fȳr on flōde. *Nō Þæs frōd leofað*
gumena bearna *Þæt Þone grund wite*
(11. 1365-1367).

The ground under the lake entails an ultimate, something completely unknown to men's progeny. *Grund* may have had an ancient association with the Germanic Earth Goddess. Many, if not all, instances of the word in *Beowulf* seem to evoke her presence. We have already seen the word used twice in the swimming match to refer to the place where, curiously, the sea creatures preferred to be; apparently they were strongest there. At Grendel's Mother's lake we now see water departing under the earth. This figure serves, thematically, to assert the primacy of the earth power, even over water. Water may cover ground

elsewhere, but here water is seen as *being covered by* earth. Furthermore, the sea in which Beowulf swam against Breca and Grendel's Mother's lake are both shown to have ground under them. The chthonic aspect of the Goddess is primary, even though she has power over the sea and it has been described as her realm.

No "children of men" (*gumena bearna*) know the ground at the bottom of Grendel's Mother's lake. Denoting a male relationship, the phrase may emphasize an antagonism between the new order and Grendel's kin. But, not specifying a kinship system, the phrase does not so clearly designate patrilinealists as words like *gumcynnes* and *mancynnes* used elsewhere. For in fact, members of matrilines have commonly recognized biological paternity. But the possibility that members of a patrilineal system are meant here is borne out in the repetition of *bearn* a few lines later. Responding to Hrothgar, Beowulf is called *bearn EcgÞēowes* (l. 1383), "child of Ecgtheow," his male parent.

Despite the fearsomeness of Grendel's Mother's domain, Beowulf immediately declares himself ready to win fame by enacting vengeance for her attack on the hall. He promises that the perpetrator of that raid (referred to by the male pronoun) will find no escape into the eerie landscape he has been told about:

Ic hit Þē gehāte: *nō hē on helm losaÞ,*
nē on foldan fæÞm, *nē on fyrgenholt,*
nē on Gyfenes grund, *gā Þær hē wille*
(11. 1392-1394)

I promise it to you: he will not escape into
refuge,
Neither in the embrace of the earth,
nor in the mountain wood,
Not (even) in the ground of Gefion, go where he
will.

Whether his opponent enters the earth like the disappearing stream, is covered by a strange wood like the lake, or even gets

to the ground never seen by children of men and is protected by Gefion herself, Beowulf promises to seek out and destroy the adversary. He is prepared to combat the Germanic Earth Goddess herself. The creature he meets may be the Goddess' representative or, more specifically, a guardian spirit.

When Beowulf enters the mere he is perceived immediately by the one who "guarded the realm of waters" – *flōda begong... behēold* (11. 1497-1498).

Earlier Wulfgar announced the arrival of the Geats *ofer Geofenes begang*. "Gefion's realm" was there seen as a kenning for water. Here someone who guards the "realm of water," clearly, would be closely allied with Gefion. This guardian aspect of Grendel's Mother, repeatedly invoked, for example *grundhyrde*, "ground-keeper" (1. 2136), seems an important link with the tradition of female guardian spirits (O.N. *dísir*) which lasted throughout the first millennium in northern Europe. The tradition is most elaborately preserved in Scandinavia, where public pagan practice held on the longest. O.E. *ides*, used twice in *Beowulf* of Grendel's Mother [Note 5], may be related to O.N. *dís* (singular, female guardian spirit) and has been found sufficiently alike for cross influence even if the etymologies are separate (Turville-Petre 1964, 222).

The subject area is very complicated; I will only sketch the possibilities and problems of seeing Grendel's Mother in this tradition. A *dís* was usually female, and possessed conflicting aspects, sometimes acting like what is called in Christian legend a guardian angel (Ellis Davidson 1964, 61; Turville-Petre 1964, 232), but also having power over the dead and choosing who would die. In this capacity she might be feared, and it is an expansion of this aspect, merged with other types of feminine power, which is exemplified in Grendel's Mother and a host of dangerous female figures of Germanic mythology.

As Hilda Ellis Davidson put it: "the heathen Germans believed in fierce female spirits doing the commands of the war god, stirring up disorder, taking part in battle, seizing and perhaps even devouring the slain" (Ellis Davidson 1964, 62). The ferocity and battle prowess of some of these figures is not open to question, despite a recent objection that Celtic rather

than Germanic tradition has made Grendel's Mother so formidable [Note 6]. If the warrior females of early Germanic myth turn out to be more bloodthirsty than their Celtic counterparts, it may be because women officiating at human sacrifice were part of Teutonic experience from the second century B.C. Cimbri to the tenth century A.D. Viking Rus (Chadwick 1899. pp. 37-38, 47-48; Smyser 1965). The Cimbri priestesses and the Rus angel of death were patently serving the war god like the spirits described by Ellis Davidson. But as mythological figures the *dísir* probably antedate the Cimbri by many centuries.

That the *dísir* are figures of antiquity is suggested by place names which refer to them. The word *Disin*, probably meaning "meadow of the disir," by which five sites in south-east Norway are called, "appears to date from the prehistoric period." The element of the word which means *meadow* "was often applied to places of public worship." For these reasons E.O.G. Turville-Petre has concluded that "the cult of the *dísir* was of great age." Thus belief in these spirits can be seen as dating from long before classical authors wrote about the people of the North. Place names link the *dísir* with large stones throughout Scandinavia. In Iceland rocks are commonly called *Landdísasteinar* (stones of the land-*dísir*); Norway records *Disahroys* (stone pile of the *dísir*); in Sweden is found *Diseberg* (rock of the *dísir*) (Turville-Petre 1964, 225).

These connections hint that the *dísir* derive from the Neolithic period, whose responsibility for agriculture and megalithic architecture has already been noted. The concept of *dísir* may have developed from a practice of ancestor veneration associated with the funerary monuments of that era. Over four thousand megalithic communal tombs are known in Denmark and hundreds in southern Sweden; non-megalithic communal barrows constructed during the same period can be found in lesser numbers on the Danish mainland (Ellis Davidson 1967, 38; Jażdżewski 1973, Figs. 3, 1). Colin Renfrew, who developed the analysis that Neolithic communal tombs were created as territorial markers, said the users of each monument consisted of "an extended family or lineage, all its inhabitants tracing

their descent, or that of their spouse, back to a common ancestor" (1973, 137). If the common ancestors were female, and thus the groups matrilineal, the concept of powerful female forbears looking out for their family trees might readily have evolved over time (Hempel's *matronae*, 1966). The presence of "*Idun*" as a Goddess name on Zealand (Olrik 1910, 23) makes possibly important the semantic relationship Brate drew (1911-12, 147-148) between that name and the *dísir*.

In the archaeological survey *Pagan Scandinavia* Ellis Davidson remarked that the continued use of Neolithic communal tombs over a long period "implies fixed ritual continuing over centuries. One purpose of the rites at the tomb must have been to ensure the continuing fertility of the soil" (39).
Characterizing ancient fertility beliefs which survived into the historical period, she stated elsewhere: "In the fertility religion, the emphasis is not so much on a world of the gods to which man attains after death if he fulfills certain conditions as on the veneration of dead ancestors, and the need for the living to remember them at various feasts and festivals, to visit their graves, and perhaps to sit on their burial mounds for wisdom and inspiration" (1964, 155). One passage in which the *dísir* seem to be dead ancestors has been summed up with the observation: "fertility cults cannot always be distinguished from the cults of the dead" (Turville-Petre 1964, 225).

Neolithic communal burial rituals may have given rise to belief in the *dísir*. Such a background would explain the repeated association of these spirits with clans or lineage groups. As Turville-Petre put it: "one of the functions of the *dísir* was to support the clan by promoting the fertility of its women" (1964, 224). Large standing stones at the corners of some Neolithic communal tombs in North Germany are still known as "guardian" stones (Schutz 1983, 101). We may note also that Scandinavian elves have been considered "male counterparts of the *dísir*," and that the association of elves with ancient burial mounds is very pronounced in folklore (Turville-Petre 1964, 231; Ellis Davidson 1964, 153-158). In origin the *dís* would thus have been like the Irish banshee, literally *ben síde*, "woman of the mound," with *síde* commonly referring to

megalithic monuments of the prehistoric period (Byrne 1973, p. 20).

In scaldic poetry the word *dís* means goddess. The *dísir* were objects of worship and their feast was celebrated at winternights. In fact the feasts of the *dísir*, the elves and the other fertility deities all seem to have taken place at "about the same time." Freyia herself is called *Vanadís*, that is, *dís* of the Vanir, the Scandinavian chthonic, fertility deities (Turville-Petre 1964, 221-226, 231), which may mean she was understood as their ancestor and guardian [Note 7].

One of the parallels to *Beowulf* in Germanic literature can be found in the Icelandic saga of Orm, son of Storolf, the *Orms-Þáttr Stórólfssonar*. In an episode which is seen as related to the English poem, Orm fights to the death in a cave a she monster and her son. The incident gives dramatic evidence of the ferocity of Germanic warrior females. But the story is also of interest because of the presence of a megalith, a great stone ("*bjarginu*," Chambers 1967, 188) which seemed too big for any man to move, blocking the hero's entrance to the cave.

I am not aware of anything about Grendel's Mother which so pointedly associates her with the Neolithic as the *bjarg* in the *OrmsÞáttr*. But her decided connection with snakes is suggestive of the *dísir* who, in *Krakumál*, for example, use poisonous snakes to dispatch Ragnar Loðbrók to the afterlife (Chadwick 1899, 10; for other literary contexts, Chadwick 1959; for iconography, Levy 1982, 105; Ringtved 1986, 148; Shetelig and Falk 1978, 207). "Many of the family of snakes," *wyrmcynnes fela* (l. 1425), were found at Grendel's Mother's mere, and the sword hanging in her underwater hall is *wyrmfāh* (l. 1698), "snake-ornamented."

Gefion 5. Line 1690

Social institutions – matrilineal tribes – and part of the belief system – female guardian spirits – of Goddess religion appear to have been maligned in the part of *Beowulf* examined so far. When next Gefion's name may be seen, the challengers of Hrothgar and Heorot have been vanquished and the poem consolidates Beowulf's physical victory by attacking the Goddess

on the level of ideas. Her champions destroyed, Gefion herself seems to be pictured as not worthy of sympathy. The sword brought back from the mere evokes the criticism:

Hrōðgar maðelode –
ealde lāfe,
fyrngewinnes,
Gifen gēotende
frēcne gefērdon;
ēcean Dryhtne;
Þurh wæteres wylm
hylt scēawode,
on ðæm wæs ōr writen
syðÞan flōd ofslōh,
gīgante cyn; [Note 8]
Þaet wæs fremde Þēod
him Þæs endelēan
Waldend sealde
(11. 1687-1693).

Hrothgar spoke – looked at the hilt
old remnant, on which was the beginning written
of ancient strife, when a flood slew
Gefion gushing, the race of giants;
they suffered terribly; that was a people foreign
to the eternal Leader; to them for that a final payment
through water's whelm, the Wielder gave.

Gefion's flood may be said to have wiped out the giants. Two criticisms of the Goddess would seem to be involved. She is painted as (1) originating conflict on earth; and (2) having been treacherous to her followers, if the giants can be so understood.

The first of these assertions is peculiar: a primeval flood is represented as an original act of aggression, the first great adversity seen on earth. Gefion performed the first genocide, eliminating a race of human-like creatures. The charge perplexes even more when we realize that it flies in the face of the character of the Earth Goddess recorded in Tacitus. The Roman historian said that during Nerthus' holiday the tribes who worshipped her: "make no war, take no arms; every weapon is put away; peace and quiet are then and then alone known and loved" – "*Non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata*" (*Germania* 40). Thus a reinterpretation of the Goddess appears to be advanced in *Beowulf*. What are we to make of the poem's

assertion that, uncharacteristically warlike, she was the initiator of strife on earth?

Probably an important clue is that she acts against the giants. This passage has traditionally been seen as a reference to Christian mythology [Note 9]. But part of the plausibility of seeing Gefion in the poem is that it brings into perspective the giants of Northern legend.

These are often found in close relation to the earth deities (Motz 1982, 75-76). In the excerpt from *Ynglinga Saga* quoted earlier Gefion bore four sons to a giant, enabling her to plow Zealand, her homeland, into existence. After a war among the gods, Niorð, by then male, married the giantess Skaði, a relationship which is paralleled by Freyia's brother Frey mating with the giantess Gerð (Turville-Petre 1964, 165). Various crises in Asgarð, the male-ruled pantheon of late Scandinavian mythology, were caused by the desire of a number of giants (Hrungnir, Thrym, etc.) for Freyia. Although only one episode of "unseemly behavior" by Freyia is recorded, there are hints even in the late texts that she may have encouraged such attentions (Ellis Davidson 1964, 115). In light of their inclusion with giants among the *untÿdras* of line 111, it may be significant that she was also accused of sexual intercourse with *elves* (Turville-Petre 1964, 130; dwarves 141). Furthermore, "a close link between the giant people of the deep and those who dwelt in the depths of the earth" has been noticed, with the suggestion even being made that Aegir, the sea god, "should perhaps be among the giants rather than the gods" (Ellis Davidson 1964, 130-131). I sketched above (note 3) a comparison between his nine daughters and the *niceras* killed by Beowulf.

The association of giants with large stones has already been cited as a link between them and the Neolithic. More telling is the nomenclature in which folklore has fused with archaeology. The six hundred Neolithic passage graves of Denmark are known as *jættestuer*, translated "Giants Tombs" in the work of P.V. Glob (1967, 87). Presumably the immense size of these tombs is responsible for the title, as it has been for the North German folk practice of calling Neolithic passage graves, as at Wienberg in Schleswig, "giants' beds" (Schutz 1983, 94, 101).

The architecture may have given rise to the belief that giants had dwelt on earth during the Neolithic period.

In light of the possibility that Northern European society was made up of matrilineal tribes in the Neolithic, two indications that females had special significance in the identity of Scandinavian giants deserve attention. Various sources report a forceful circumstance: the river which divided the world of men from the world of giants was swollen by, or perhaps comprised of, the urine or menstrual blood of giantesses. Less emphatically, in a history of Norway attributed to Thor in the tenth century, female members of a race of giants were the inhabitants against whom Thor contended to make the country safe for men (Turvillle-Petre 1964, 78-80, 90-91).

We may believe that the original Germanic audience of *Beowulf* understood giants as the followers or at least allies of Gefion. Her rendering them extinct was thus an act of great treachery. The effect of this passage would therefore have been to spread confusion in the mind of anyone who still believed in the female earth deity.

We need not, and perhaps should not see the Biblical story of Noah as the original referent of the flood described here. Marine transgressions as a result of deteriorating climate are a well attested feature of the geology of northern Europe in the millennium from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. "Around 500 B.C. Denmark registered a 2°C drop in temperature.... By 300 B.C. inundations along the shores of the North and Baltic Seas and a rise in the ground water level had brought about a reduction of inhabitable land at a time when the area appears to have experienced an increase in the population" (Schutz 1983, 241; Iverson 1973, 106; Kristiansen 1978, 180; but Jensen 1982, 196-197). The "free peasant society" of the Chauci, described earlier, underwent a reorganization which introduced hierarchy among them early in the second century A.D. Pressure of the advancing sea was clearly a factor in the changes. An extensively excavated Chauci settlement north of Bremerhaven about which these conclusions have been reached had to be abandoned in the fifth century A.D. as a result of the incursion of the North Sea: "The increased salinity of the low-lying areas deprived the

villagers of their drinking water, turned the meadows into salt marshes and in the end forced the inhabitants to give up their way of life" (Schutz 1983, 320-321). In *Social and Religious Organization in Bronze Age Denmark*, Janet Levy has described the beginning of this climatic shift in terms which are suggestive here: "The possible agricultural failures related to a major climatic change ... would have led to a loss of faith in ... fertility rituals" (110) [Note 10]. A crisis of faith in the Germanic earth deity seems precisely what the fifth Gefion passage of *Beowulf* was designed to evoke.

The religious and social changes this paper has focused on possibly occurred first in the North among the Cimbri. So consideration is warranted of their own tradition, recorded by Strabo, that a hostile sea had forced them to leave their lands: "they were driven out of their habitations by a great flood tide" – μεγάλη πλημμυρίδι ἐξελαθεῖεν ἐκ τῶν τόπων [*Geography*, 7.2.1]. It may well be that a complaint against the female earth deity as the originator of strife had been part of the cult of Othin for hundreds of years before being recorded in *Beowulf* line 1690.

The similarity to the story of Eve may not be the result of literary borrowing.

ENDNOTES

1. This view has been challenged by an ambitious work in which Alexander Murray mainly contends against a theory of continental scholars that patrilineal clans existed in Germanic prehistory (Murray 1983). He believes that early Germanic kinship was bilateral and did not entail clan organizations, and thus he argues as well against "the British school of matrilinealists." Murray does not consider what contribution the evident matrilineal kingship of the Picts, lasting until 842 A.D. (Anderson 1973), may have made to the "remarkable vitality of the matrilineal viewpoint among British historians." Murray's study has been thought by a reviewer to "dismiss inconvenient evidence with undue rapidity" (Charles-Edwards 1986), and the point is well taken.

Chadwick is said to have "denied" that "the tribe was an aggregate of clans, that the clan was intimately bound up with the village, and formed within the tribe what we can call a political or judicial unit" (26). But in fact Chadwick's words were: "We need not hesitate to believe that the tribe itself was made up of a number of local communities under chiefs of their own, each of whom probably possessed a stockaded village where he practiced *blót* [sacrifice] and administered justice under his sacred tree" (1907. p. 323). Whether village heads were "really chiefs of clans" Chadwick had not sufficient evidence to say, but organizations of kindred seemed to him to have been much more important in the Roman period than they would be later (see Ringtved 1986, 169-201).

Tacitus' statement that village farmland was worked "*ab universis in vices*" ("by everyone in turn") is dismissed by Murray as evidence of only "individual or family ownership" (56), not corporate kin activity [Concerning constant modification of Danish and German field boundaries, see Liversage

1980, 127 and Schutz 1983, 322]. Tacitus' observation that "neither chance nor casual grouping makes the squadron or the wedge, but family and kinship" (*Germania* 7) is seen as "not a description of military organization *at all*" by Murray (55, my italics), whose translation of *propinquitates* as "friends" does not accord with *propinqui* in chapter 13.

Murray states that "a certain amount of rhetoric" (60) inflated Tacitus's report that a maternal uncle's relation to sister's son was more important among some of the Germans than father's to son; but his grounds are unlikely, namely that Tacitus's description was colored by Herodotos' and Polybius' accounts of other peoples. Chadwick had found the displacement of the king of the Quadi by two sons of his sister worthy of special attention because it is "the only case of succession to a Suebic kingdom of which we know in early times," and he judged that "the further we go back in native tradition the more prominent become the traces of [a matrilineal] system (1907, 331-334). Murray's "particular interest" in this Quadi event was limited to "the fact that maternal relationship was no bar to the accession" (62).

Even in Murray's view matrilineal descent groups may have existed in Germanic prehistory ["optative features," 64], but he dismisses such matters as "conjectural."

2. Nora Chadwick has pointed usefully in this direction (1959, 200, 186), although overemphasizing eastern Baltic associations of the monsters.

3. The nine sea beasts may be compared with the nine "maidens of mighty strength, dwelling beneath the sea... familiar in both Scandinavian and Irish traditions" and "linked with the giantesses of the underworld who play an important part in Norse mythology" (Ellis Davidson 1964, 175). The god Heimdall, son of these nine mothers, is in some ways an early male version of Freyia. Like her, he is of the Vanir, the fertility gods; his name is the counterpart of "*Mardǫll*," which expresses her relation to the sea; and he sometimes took the form of a seal – suggesting relationship between his family and the *nicereas* of *Beowulf* (Ellis Davidson 1964, 172-176; Turville-Petre 1964, 147-155). The god of the sea who is the father of Heimdall's mothers is the other deity which Grimm associated with the name Gefion (1968, 193, 198). Heimdall has been likened to the Irish deity "Manannan mac Lir in that he is closely associated with the sea... and above all he is a begetter of children" (Chadwick 1958, 112). Nine mothers of a single son are also known in Irish legend (Ellis Davidson 1964, 130-131). In both Norse and Irish mythology, such figures may reflect a marriage tradition, elaborately associated with Manannan mac Lir in the West (Chadwick 1958, 109), of sacral kingship for the consort of the goddess.

4. Wolves live among the condemned in a poem whose hero is named after one – an irony not lost on environmentalist Barry Lopez (1978, 141, 208). The fate of the species, perhaps foreshadowed in Beowulf's killing of nine sea beasts, may likewise be anticipated in the summary slaying of a water creature from Grendel's Mother's lake by a Geatish bowman (1. 1432f).

5. Lines 1259 and 1352; Three times of Wealtheow, 11. 620, 1168, 1649; Twice of Hildeburh, 11. 1075, 1117; Once of Modþrýðo. 1. 1941.

6. The "feline nature" of the she-monster of the episode of *Orms Þáttr Stórólfssonar* which is compared to *Beowulf* has been said to "lack tangible parallels in Icelandic Saga" (Puhvel 1979, 19n7). But a term used in the *Orms Þáttr* for the she-monster, *ketta*, "she-cat," is exactly the word used for the female monster in some versions of the *Grettis Saga* episode which is related to Beowulf's fight with Grendel's Mother (Cf. Chambers 1967, 186 with 189n2). Moreover, Norse mythology describes the Goddess Freyia as having a feline aspect. Her legendary chariot was drawn by cats; "for this reason she might be called 'owners of cats' (*eigandi fressa*)" (Turville-Petre 1964, 176). Furthermore, gloves of catskin were worn by leaders of the ritual known as *seiðr* which Freyia was said to have originated (Ellis Davidson 1964, 117-120). The she-monster of *Orms þáttr* was also likened to an ox (Puhvel 1979, 18n7), another beast elaborately associated with Freyia (Turville-Petre 1964, 256) as with Gefion (*Ynglinga Saga*, above).

7. This analysis bears on issues raised by Murray. Other signs of ancestor worship in Germanic and Scandinavian tradition are not lacking (Chadwick 1907, 339-340; Philpotts 1913, 272-273; Hempel 1966; Brate 1911-12; Turville-Petre 1963; Bennike and Ebbesen 1986). These can only be

understood as pointing to the persistence of a monolineal kinship system. For ancestor worship cannot be sustained in a society where the kinship group is constituted bilaterally (Philpotts, 1913, 272). In Renfrew's schema the descent groups attached to tombs may have been patrilineal or matrilineal (he did not speculate), but the kinship system was monolineal.

8. Semicolon follows Wrenn 1973.

9. Whitelock 1951, 5-7. Crucial to her argument, the obscurity of *Christian* references to giants requires a late date for composition of the poem.

10. Levy's assumption that differences in female sumptuary goods reflect the ranking of husbands and fathers – despite the slight variation in male sumptuary sets (79) – makes some of her conclusions about an "elite" questionable.

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