The *Beowulf* Codex and the Making of the Poem

It now makes sense to study the *Beowulf* MS separately. The good possibility that *Beowulf* was composed in the early 11th century and the evidence that the poem in the unique MS was copied as a separate codex at about the same time fully justify a new investigation of the extant MS. The MS is certainly a copy, for the scribal errors are, for the most part, manifestly copying errors: but the transmission of *Beowulf* may have only been from the poet’s wax tablets to the extant MS. The present study assumes that the MS we have inherited is extremely close to the archetype. Indeed, if both the poem and the extant MS were done after 1016, there is no other alternative. Paleographical evidence amply supports the thesis. Both scribes have carefully proofread their copies and have made many corrections. The second scribe has even proofread the first scribe’s work. Evidence from the gatherings, and the corroborative evidence from the fitt numbers, indicate that the poem was revised in the course of being copied. The indications are that two distinct poems were combined for the first time in our extant MS, and that many years after the MS was copied, the second scribe was still working with it. He restored a damaged text on the last page, and he made a palimpsest of fol. 179 for a revised text; he also deleted, presumably as part of this revision, three lines from fol. 180v. These statements may well be incredible to those scholars who believe in a long transmission of the poem, but their biases have led them to ignore the paleographical and codicological reasons for making the statements. There is nothing incredible about correcting and revising the MS of a contemporary poem.
The Authority of the *Beowulf* Manuscript

The authority of Old English poetical MSS, in general, is the subject of an influential essay by Sisam, which has been reprinted several times,\(^1\) and is frequently quoted approvingly by conjectural critics. Sisam’s arguments do not inspire confidence in the authority of the poetic MSS, and it is necessary to consider the validity of his arguments before granting the *Beowulf* MS extraordinary authority. Sisam complains that if textual conservatism “has a basis in reason, it implies that the extant manuscripts of Old English poetry represent the original compositions with a high degree of accuracy. Yet there seems to be no modern work which attempts to establish a thesis so fundamental.” The attitude, he feels, “that ‘an accurate scribe did not as a rule depart from the wording of his original except as a result of oversight’ is begging the question, unless the editor goes on to inquire whether the scribes with whom he is concerned were accurate in this sense, and whether, since the assumed date of composition, the transmission of the text has been entirely in the hands of scribes who aimed at copying what was before them.” Applied to *Beowulf*, these strictures would seem to leave the conservative critic at an impasse. Without the original, the degree of scribal accuracy is relatively unprovable. The case is not so desperate, however, if the poem was composed and the extant MS was copied after 1016, for then the transmission of the text might well have been entirely in the hands of the two scribes of our only MS. Even without the original, the scribes’ corrections show conclusively that, while both scribes made some errors, as is to be expected in such a long work, both aimed at copying what was before them.

But Sisam’s thesis, that the quality of scribal transmission was generally bad, can be confronted directly, for the type of evidence he adduces does not prove his thesis. To prove that scribal transmission was exceptionally faulty, we need poems that are preserved in both early

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1. It first appeared as “Notes on Old English Poetry: The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts,” in 1946; it is Chapter 2 of Sisam’s *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*; and it was reprinted again in Martin Stevens and Jerome Mandel, eds., *Old English Literature: Twenty-two Analytical Essays*, pp. 36–51.

2. Sisam (*Studies*, p. 30) is responding to R. W. Chambers’s preface to his edition of *Beowulf*, which Sisam calls a “persuasive manifesto of the school which makes the defence or conservation of the MS. readings its ruling principle.” Ibid., note.
and late copies. The quality of scribal transmission can be accurately traced only in poems preserved in multiple copies, and as Dobbie says, "that little progress has been made in this direction by students of most Anglo-Saxon poetry . . . is to be attributed entirely to the lack of sufficient materials, especially to the small number of the MS sources." Indeed, the only Old English poems whose transmissions can be studied at all are Caedmon's Hymn and Bede's Death Song. Sisam would include the Leiden Riddle and the runic inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross, but this recourse is reaching into the dark. Riddles were certainly transmitted memorially, and the minor variants do not prove scribal corruption. He is quite right when he says that a comparison between the Cross runes and the Dream of the Rood (lines 38–64) "could not favour the hypothesis of accurate transmission," but even he admits that "it would be unsafe to make much of the detailed variants where the conditions of recording are so abnormal" (Studies, pp. 34–35). Certainly the artisan who cut the runes for the Ruthwell Cross cannot be compared to a scribe, nor can it be argued that he omitted great blocks of the original poem by oversight. For all that can be said from the available evidence, the Dream of the Rood was accurately transmitted from the original poem, which is now lost; the runic inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross made no attempt to transmit the original poem accurately, for the artist's medium prohibited it.

The transmissions of Caedmon's Hymn and Bede's Death Song can be, and have been documented. To quote Dobbie again, "In Caedmon's Hymn and Bede's Death Song, which provide a striking contrast to the usual paucity of MS materials for Anglo-Saxon poetical texts, we find an unusually suitable opportunity for this method of study" (Manuscripts, p. 3). Surprisingly, Sisam rejects both as unsuitable evidence, even though the transmissions of these two poems are, in fact, the only evidence there is of scribal transmission from which to draw conclusions. There are seventeen MSS of Caedmon's Hymn, four in the Northum-

3. See Dobbie, Manuscripts, pp. 2–3.
4. It is likely that the Leiden Riddle was transmitted memorially by its scribe, who wrote it on the leftover parchment at the end of his copy of the Latin riddles of Symphosius and Aldhelm. Obviously, the inclusion of the Anglo-Saxon riddle, a creative translation of Aldhelm's "Lorica" riddle, was not planned out in advance, but was merely added by a scribe who hated to waste parchment. See Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, pp. cviii–cx.
brian dialect, and the rest in West Saxon. The mss range in date from the 8th century to the 15th.\(^5\) Sisam’s analysis is brief and may be fruitfully quoted in full:

The exceptional character of Caedmon’s *Hymn* is marked by the many copies in which it appears. If manuscripts later than the tenth century are excluded, the reproduction of the original words is good, with five variants, four minor and one major, of which only the last, *eordan (bearnum)* for *aelda*, can be traced back to the ninth century. But it is a very short piece of miraculous origin, and it has been preserved as a quotation in historical prose texts, either the Latin of Bede’s *History* or the late-ninth-century English translation from it. Here the conditions of transmission are abnormal, and again it is unsafe to rely on the evidence. (*Studies*, p. 35)

This dismissal of the Caedmon evidence is a bit misleading. It would probably be more accurate to say that the many copies of Bede’s *History*, rather than the exceptional character of Caedmon’s *Hymn*, provided the wealth of evidence in this case. Sisam’s short characterization of the variants suggests more scribal corruption than there is in the transmission from the 8th century to the late 10th century. The length of the poem would not insure its accurate transmission: when it was embedded in a Latin text, its brevity might well have caused confusion and led to errors; when it appeared in the Alfriedian translation, it would be hard for a scribe, copying mechanically, to distinguish it from the prose text, and this difficulty equally might have led to errors. The conditions of transmission, then, were difficult, and the general accuracy of the transmission in Anglo-Saxon times is commendable.

The accuracy of the transmission can be illustrated by comparing the earliest Northumbrian version (8th century) with the best West Saxon version (10th century). It may seem unfair to take the best 10th-century MS as a test for the accuracy of scribal transmission, but the point is to show that a late copy can accurately preserve a very early poem, despite modernization of forms. There is no point in taking a late, unique MS, as editors of *Beowulf* generally do, and assuming from the start that it does not accurately preserve its precedential texts. Aside from dialectal

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transliteration, the only significant difference between the 10th-century West Saxon MS (Tanner 10), and the early 8th-century Northumbrian MS (Kk. v. 16), known as the “Moore MS,” is the aelda versus eordan variant:

**MS Kk. v. 16**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nu scylyn hergan} & \quad \text{Nu sculon herigean} \\
\text{hefaenricaes uard,} & \quad \text{heofonrices weard,} \\
\text{metudæs maecti} & \quad \text{meotodes meahte} \\
\text{end his modgidanc,} & \quad \text{and his modgeðanc,} \\
\text{uerc uuldurfadur,} & \quad \text{weorc wuldorfæder,} \\
\text{sue he uundra gihuaes,} & \quad \text{swa he wundra gehwaes,} \\
\text{eci dryctin,} & \quad \text{ecë drihten,} \\
\text{or astelidæ.} & \quad \text{or onstealde.}
\end{align*}
\]

**He aerist scop**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aelda barnum} & \quad \text{eordan bearnum} \\
\text{heben til hrofe,} & \quad \text{heofon to hrofe,} \\
\text{haleg scepen;} & \quad \text{halig scyppend;} \\
\text{tha middungeard} & \quad \text{þa middangeard} \\
\text{moncynæs uard,} & \quad \text{moncynnes weard,} \\
\text{eci dryctin,} & \quad \text{ecë drihten,} \\
\text{aetet tiadæ} & \quad \text{aëter teode} \\
\text{firum foldu,} & \quad \text{firum foldan,} \\
\text{frea allmectig.} & \quad \text{frea ælmihtig.}
\end{align*}
\]

There is simply no evidence here of scribal corruption as the result of a long transmission from 8th-century Northumbrian to 10th-century West Saxon. Even eordan cannot be used to show scribal corruption, for the word is good in the context, and is surely not a corruption of aelda. Moreover, as Dobbie says, “we cannot be absolutely sure whether Cædmon’s original text had aelda or eordu in l. 5” (*Manuscripts*, p. 47). Most scholars believe that aelda is original, but a strong case can be made for eordu. The phrase aelda barnum may well have crept into the text at a very early stage because of the prestige of Bede’s Latin translation, *filius hominum*. It seems most likely that this stock Latin phrase, which Bede may well have used to render the highly individualistic phrase eordu barnum, would lead to the natural English trans-

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6. Dobbie points out that “eordu barnum (or eordan bearnum) is, so far as I know, unexampled elsewhere” (*Manuscripts*, p. 48), though he curiously cites the uniqueness of the phrase as evidence that Cædmon must not have used it.
lation, *elda barnum*. The alternative is that Cædmon extemporaneously created an Old English phrase that corresponded to a Latin cliché.

The evidence of accurate scribal transmission of *Bede’s Death Song* in Anglo-Saxon times is not open to any of the doubts or difficulties that might be raised by the *elda/edoru* variants in *Cædmon’s Hymn*. There are no fewer than twenty-nine copies of *Bede’s Death Song*, ranging from the 9th century to the 16th, included in the Latin text of *Epistola Cuthberti de obitu Bedae* mss. There are three copies from Anglo-Saxon times, ranging from the 9th to the 11th century. They show how good scribal transmission could really be, even when the transmission became complicated by moving into other dialects. Sisam was evidently unaware of a 10th-century non-Northumbrian ms when he dismissed *Bede’s Death Song* as unsuitable for comparison, despite its rich ms history. He says in a footnote: “I omit *Bede’s Death Song*: the Northumbrian text is preserved in Continental mss. from the ninth century onwards; but, for comparison, there is only a very late West Saxon text, equally uniform, preserved in ms. from the twelfth century onwards. Its four variants from the Northumbrian text have no claim to authority” (Studies, p. 35, n. 2). The 10th-century non-Northumbrian text had not yet come to light in 1937 when Dobbie described the ms of *Bede’s Death Song*, but N. R. Ker provided an edition in 1939 in “The Hague Manuscript of the Epistola Cuthberti de Obitu Bedae with Bede’s Song.”

Sisam’s oversight deprived him of an important comparison, for the Hague ms underwent a complicated transmission that partly bridged the formerly sharp cleavage between the continental version and the insular version of the *Epistola Cuthberti*. Dobbie’s later account of the twenty-nine mss of *Bede’s Death Song* in the Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems (p. ci) will help illustrate the significance of the Hague version. Before the discovery of the Hague ms there was uniformity:

Eleven of these manuscripts, all in continental libraries, give the text of the song in the Northumbrian dialect; seventeen manuscripts, all in libraries of the British Isles, present a West Saxon version of the song which differs in some respects from the Northumbrian version. The classification by dialects of the Anglo-Saxon texts of the song is borne out also by the evidence of the Latin texts of the *Epistola Cuthberti*. All of the eleven manuscripts which contain the song in the Northumbrian dialect present a single recension of the Latin text, which may for con-
venience be called the Continental Version. All of the seventeen West Saxons texts of the song are found in a recension of the Latin text which differs in many significant details from the Continental Version, and which may be called the Insular Version.

But the Hague MS did not fall in line with these two distinct transmissions. As Dobbie says, “Its Latin text of the Epistola Cuthberti agrees in the main with the text of the Continental Version, but . . . there are a number of places in which it follows the readings of the Insular Version” (Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, pp. civ-cv).

A comparison of the earliest Northumbrian text, the 9th-century MS 254, with the 10th-century non-Northumbrian Hague MS reveals the accuracy of the transmission of Bede’s Death Song, despite the markedly divergent MS tradition of the Hague text:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9th-C. Northumbrian MS 254</th>
<th>10th-C. non-Northumbrian Hague MS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fore thæm neidfaeræ</td>
<td>Fore ðæm nedfere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>næning uuuirthit</td>
<td>nenig wiordē</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thonsnotturra,</td>
<td>ðoonsnottorra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than him tharf sie</td>
<td>ðon him ðearf riae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to ymbhyegganna</td>
<td>to ymbhyxgenne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aer his hiniongæ</td>
<td>aer his hiniöng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huaet his gastæ</td>
<td>hwet his gastē</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>godaes aethha yflæs</td>
<td>godes oððe yfles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aefter deothdaegæ</td>
<td>ester deaedige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doemid uuerothæ.</td>
<td>doemed wiordē.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three minor scribal slips in the Hague MS which are italicized above. In line 2a the scribe wrote o for c (or closed the right side of the c) in ðoonsnottorra, no doubt influenced by the several other o’s in the word. In 2b he wrote riae for siae: if his exemplar was in caroline script he could have confused caroline s for r, as Ker suggests, though in an insular exemplar, low insular s could be confused for caroline r, as Brotanek argues. The reading ester for effer would seem to favor Ker’s suggestion, but since all of the later Northumbrian mss read aester, the mistake may have been in the Hague scribe’s exemplar. The transmis-

sion of the same error over many centuries is an indication of scribal accuracy in transmission.

If Ker is right, his explanation for the paleographical slips in the Hague text adds another stage to an already long and complicated transmission, from 8th-century Northumbria, southward, where at some point a new recension of the Latin text was made combining the Northumbrian and West Saxon recensions. The Anglo-Saxon text of the song went through the customary modernization of forms reflected in orthographical (for example, wynn for uu, and ᶿ for th), and phonological changes (for example the breaking of a to ea in dearf), presumably all before its transmission on the Continent. Thus, despite the long and complicated transmission, the text of Bede’s Death Song was not corrupted by scribes. As far as we know, the earliest Northumbrian MS and the Hague MS, which are virtually identical aside from modernization in a different dialect, represent the original composition with a very high degree of accuracy. If we count the only other MS surviving from Anglo-Saxon times, the 11th-century Northumbrian Bamberg MS, the conclusion will be the same. Indeed, Dobbie has argued that “the Bamberg text of the Epistola is in some respects a more accurate transcript of the common prototype,” and that “except for the form thae in l. 1, the text of Bede’s Death Song in this MS does not exhibit any significant variation from the [9th-century] St. Gall text” (Manuscripts, p. 55). So the transmission in Anglo-Saxon times of Caedmon’s Hymn and Bede’s Death Song, which Sisam ignores in his study of the authority of Old English poetical MSS, establishes the fact that Anglo-Saxon scribes could be very accurate, that they did undoubtedly aim “at copying what was before them” (Sisam, Studies, p. 30).

While he neglects the only adequate evidence of scribal transmission of Old English poems, Sisam assembles for comparison some questionable evidence that not unexpectedly shows striking variants. Sisam says, “Nearly all the poetical texts depend on a single manuscript; but the contents of three out of the four great codices show a very small overlap” (ibid., p. 31). In fact, he takes only two comparisons from the Exeter, Vercelli, and Junius codices, and neither comparison is convincing. In both cases the overlapping occurs in two distinct poems, or rather, in two distinct reworkings of common source material. His first comparison is between “Soul and Body I” and “Soul and Body II” respectively from the Vercelli and Exeter books. The main differences in these two
poems are not caused by scribal corruption, but by deliberate revision of a common source by different poets. A fair idea of the intentional nonconformity between the two poems can be seen in Dobbie’s discussion of “Soul and Body II,” in his edition of the Exeter Book. The same is true of Sisam’s second comparison, between the parallel sections in Daniel and Azarias, from the Junius MS. and the Exeter Book respectively. They are different poems, and as such they are not relevant in a study of the accuracy or inaccuracy of scribal transmission.

The accuracy of scribal transmission is more of a factor in Sisam’s last comparison, but there is still reason to doubt the validity of the evidence, as Sisam himself seems to acknowledge. “Two manuscripts,” he says, “are available for lines 30–94 of Solomon and Saturn, MS. CCCC 422 of the second half of the tenth century and a fragment in the margin of CCCC 41 which may be a century later” (Studies, p. 32). Ordinarily, Sisam omits such late testimony as the second of these MSS, and it is unclear why he chooses to depend upon it for a major comparison here. As he admits in his note, “it is disadvantageous to use such a late copy, because the great bulk of the poetry is contained in MSS. of the second half of the tenth century . . . and new factors affecting transmission may arise in MSS. written much after that time. I have excluded the poems contained in the Chronicle partly for this reason, partly because they are all late compositions transmitted in an unusual way” (ibid., pp. 32–33, n. 1). The CCCC 41 MS may have been copied after the Norman Conquest. According to Robert Menner, “the ugly insular handwriting shows the effects of points and sharp corners learned from the post-Conquest style of Caroline minuscules, and may be dated at

8. Dobbie realized, of course, that the main differences were not caused by scribal corruption. He says, for example, “The Exeter Book version is shorter than the version in the Vercelli Book, omitting the fragmentary address of the blessed soul to the body, 11. 127–166 of the Vercelli Book text.” G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, eds., The Exeter Book, p. iii; cf. G. P. Krapp, ed., The Vercelli Book, pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

9. As Krapp says, “A comparison of the Prayer of Azariah in AZARIAS with the corresponding passage in DANIEL will show so many dissimilarities of word forms and of word order, so many variations in phrasing, that we can hardly assume that the text of DANIEL at this place was mechanically copied from AZARIAS in the ordinary sense in which Anglo-Saxon scribes copied from their sources. We must assume two separate versions with a considerable amount of variation, both for the Prayer of Azariah and for the Song of the Three Children.” Krapp and Dobbie, The Exeter Book, p. xxxiv; cf. Krapp, The Junius Manuscript, p. xxxiii.
the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century.” And it was certainly transmitted in an unusual way, having been copied as a fragment in the margin. Thus, by Sisam’s own criteria the Solomon and Saturn material should not have been used as a test for the accuracy of scribal transmission in Anglo-Saxon times. If it is counted at all, it carries little weight, and may not tell us anything about the quality of scribal transmission before the Conquest.

After using these three comparisons, each in its own way invalid, to undermine the authority of the poetical MSS, and after dismissing the Cædmon and Bede material, Sisam moves on to the Beowulf MS. His procedure has provided no foundation for presuming a badly flawed copy of the original poem, and his pointed attack on the authority of the Beowulf MS ought to be considered in this light. He correctly anticipates the proper objection to his procedure when he says, “A defender of the manuscript readings might well say that the evidence so far adduced is not ample or varied enough, and might argue that the scribes were well trained, and that they knew more about Old English usage, thought, and tradition than a modern critic can” (Studies, pp. 36–37). He does not meet the first part of this objection at all. The second part would seem to be undisputable, but he says, “I doubt if this holds good for the earlier poetry,” and cites as evidence the following textual cruces from Beowulf:

In Beowulf, recent editors agree that the first scribe writes gara (cyn) 461 clearly and boldly for Wedera (cyn), without sense or alliteration, with no likeness in script or sound, or anything in the surrounding verses to mislead him; and the aberration is passed over in their commentaries. For Cain 1261 (misread as cam) he writes camp “battle.” . . . At a critical point in the Finn episode (1127 ff.), he leaves us the meaningless “Hengest . . . wunode mid finnel unhitme.” Rather different is 1960 f.: “hönon geomor woc hæleðum to helpe,” where, misled by a possible spelling or pronunciation of the initial diphthong, he has taken the proper name Eomer for the common adjective geomor “sad.” . . . All these are proper names, which I have preferred because there can be little doubt about the true reading when a name is miswritten. (Ibid., p. 37)

10. The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn, pp. 2–3. Ker, as Sisam indicates, places the script somewhat earlier; in his Catalogue (p. 45) he says without elaboration that the text is written “in one unusual angular hand of s. xi’ or xi med.” The question has not been settled.
A defender of the MS readings in these cases seems to be in trouble. But even if these were all undoubted errors, *Beowulf* is a long poem and the cruces cited above are widely distributed. The scribes have unquestionably made some mistakes in the course of copying this long poem, but as Sisam readily concedes at the start of his investigation, “single lapses are not necessarily inconsistent with a high general level of accuracy, and that is the quality to be discussed” (ibid., p. 31). Still, the thrust of Sisam’s argument in the present case is that the modern critic easily recognizes four miswritten proper names, while the Anglo-Saxon scribe, who is supposed to know better, displays his ignorance. Unfortunately, the argument precludes learning anything about the poem that the scribe may have known, and that modern critics do not know. For this reason it is potentially useful to reverse the argument, beginning with the assumption that the scribe has not miswritten four proper names.

There is almost certainly some form of corruption in lines 1128–1129 of the Finnsburh episode, but the name Finn was not, strictly speaking, miswritten. Rather, it was combined with another word element, but strange combinations and divisions of words are characteristic of Old English MSS and are not in themselves regarded as scribal corruption in any meaningful sense of the term. An apt example occurs at the beginning of this episode at line 1070a, where the scribe wrote *infres wele*\(^1\) for what the editions print as *in Frewæle*. Similarly, editors know perfectly well that the corruption is not in the name Finn, but in whatever is joined to it at the end. They have solved the problem quite conservatively.\(^2\) For MS *wunode mid finel un hlitme* most of them read, *wunode mid Finne / [ea]l unhlitme*.\(^3\) And since *mid* often takes the accusative in *Beowulf*, the scribe’s error may have been only the omission of an *a* in the word *eal: wunode mid Finn / [e]al unhlitme*. In either case there is no good evidence here that the scribe did not know that Hengest stayed with a man named Finn.

\(^1\) The MS actually reads *infres wele* (fol. 153r16), but the gap between *inf* and -es is from an erasure, the scribe made to correct a copying error. The scribe intended to write *infres wele*, but in either case the combination and division of the words illustrate the point equally well.


\(^3\) The meaning of *unhlitme* is obscure, and many interpretations have been proposed. James Rosier has recently suggested “with lack of choice” in “The Unhlitm of Finn and Hengest.”
There is no reason to assume that proper names are even involved in the other three cruces, *gara*, *camp*, and *geomor*, singled out by Sisam. Surely one ought to be suspicious of the emendation *Wedera* for *ms gara*, for as Sisam himself observes there is no phonological or palaeographical likeness, and there is nothing in the surrounding verses, either, that might have misled the scribe. A more plausible emendation was proposed over a century ago by Benjamin Thorpe, and it is accepted by Whitney Bolton in his revision of Wrenn’s edition of *Beowulf*. To supply the missing alliteration Thorpe read *wara* (genitive plural of *war*; “treaty”); Bolton translates the phrase *wara cyn* “sworn colleagues.” Joseph F. Tuso has recently defended Thorpe’s emendation from a different standpoint, arguing that “*wara* is the genitive plural of the neuter noun *war* (‘seaweed, sand, shore’), and *wara-cyn* (‘the shore people’ or ‘the folk of the sands’) might well refer to the Wylfings, who most probably lived on the sandy Pomeranian coast of the southern Baltic.”\(^{14}\) A chief objection to *wara* is that it ignores palaeography, for it is hard to imagine how the scribe could confuse insular *g* with *wynn*. Malone did not ignore palaeography when in “Ecgtheow” he proposed the emendation *[Wulf]gara*, which he conceived of as another name for the Wylfings. The reading is attractive in that it accounts for the omission of the first syllable by haplography (cf. *Wilfingam* in the on-verse), as well as for *ms gara*; it is unattractive in that it makes Ecgtheow a Wylfin, for which there is no evidence. There are other possibilities. For a start perhaps it needs to be noted that the passage *ða hine gara cyn / for herebrogan habban ne mihte* makes sense if *gara cyn*, “folk of the spears,” is construed as a *kenning* for “spear troop” or *comitatus*. The passage may be translated, “then his spear troop might not protect him because of their fear of war.” John R. Byers accounts for the missing alliteration by assuming that the scribe’s exemplar read *ða hine [wine-] gara cyn*, and that *hine* caused the haplographic error.\(^{15}\) A simpler explanation would be that the scribe copied *hine* for *wine*: *ða wine gara cyn / for herebrogan habban ne mihte*, “then the spear troop might not protect their friend because of their fear of war.” One last possibility can be mentioned in passing. The scribe may have miscopied *gara*, a word with high frequency in *Beowulf*, for the apparently rare synonym

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15. “A Possible Emendation of *Beowulf* 461b.”
wigara,\textsuperscript{16} an error induced by haplography from \textit{wi-} in the on-verse. Certainly, no matter how one solves the crux, there is no longer any justification for accepting Sisam’s premise that \textit{gara} is a nonsensical corruption of the proper name, \textit{Wedera}.

Though the Bible is a source that a modern critic can know as well as an Anglo-Saxon scribe can, the modern critic need not assume that \textit{camp}, at line 1261, is a corruption of the proper name, Cain. The word \textit{camp} means “battle,” as Sisam says, but in a transferred sense it means “strife, struggle, contention.” An example of this usage is given in the Toller Supplement, from Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues}: “Se camp (certamen) in þæs mannnes breoste” (p. 116). The passage in \textit{Beowulf} surely alludes, at least elliptically, to the first murder, but there is no more need to mention Cain’s name in this connection than Abel’s.

\begin{quote}
Grendles modor, 
ides aglæcwif, yrmþþ gemunde, 
se þe wæteregesan wunian scolde, 
cealde streamas, :sibðan camp weard 
to egebanan angan breþer, 
ðæderenmæge; he þa fag gewat, 
морþþ gemearcð mandream fleon, 
westen warode. þanon woc fela 
geosceafðgasta; wæs þæra Grendel sum 
(1258–1266)
\end{quote}

The passage may be translated: “Grendel’s dam, the female monster, was mindful of sorrow, she who was obliged to inhabit the dreadful waters, the frigid streams, from the time when strife arose \([sibðan camp weard]) as a sword slayer to an only brother, a paternal kinsman; then she went stained, marked by the murder, fled human joys, and inhabited the wilderness. From thence arose many fated spirits: Grendel was one of them.” Klaeber points out in his note to line 1260 that “\textit{se þe}, instead of \textit{seo þe}, [is] applied to Grendel’s mother just as in 1497, or \textit{he}, instead of \textit{heo}, in 1392, 1394.” Hence the antecedent for \textit{he} in line 1263 is not \textit{camp}, “strife,” and there is no need to supply an antecedent by emending the text. The antecedent may well be \textit{Grendles}

\textsuperscript{16} See Bosworth-Toller under \textit{wi-gar} and \textit{wig-gar} (pp. 1220 and 1221). In \textit{Beowulf}, compare \textit{wig-freca} (1212, 2496) and \textit{wig-fruma} (664, 2261).
modor, as lines 1392 and 1394 attest, or perhaps the first “sword slayer to an only brother,” whom the Anglo-Saxons knew to be Cain.

Sisam’s last supposed case of a miswritten proper name is at line 1960, where geomor, “sad, mournful,” is presumed to be a mistake for Eomær. The Mercian royal genealogies include four generations of kings, Wærmund, Offa, Angengiot, and Eomær, who provide the impetus for this emendation. It is difficult to see what advantages come with it, aside from alliteration. So far as we know, this Eomær never transcended the itemization of his name in the Mercian pedigree, and yet the emendation forces us to acknowledge him as hæledum to hélpe, Heminges mæg,18 and nefæ Garmundes (1961–1962). In the Mercian genealogies he is not the nephew, nor even the grandson of Wærmund, but the great-grandson: if the genealogies are to be used as a basis for emendation here, it would make more sense to emend geomor to Angengiot, and for that matter, to emend Garmundes to Wærmundes. And if nefæ is understood in its general sense as “offspring,” there is no reason why it should apply to Eomær and not Offa. The Mercian genealogies say nothing about Eomær (or any one else) being Heminges mæg, while the Beowulf poet has already called Offa this at line 1944. The main point of the digression is to praise Offa for putting a stop to his queen’s murderous ways (1944 ff.), hæledum to hélpe, “as a help to his men.” In short, the editorial intrusion of Eomær provides good alliteration but a bad anticlimax. The passage makes excellent sense without emendation:

þonon geomor woc
hæledum to hélpe, Heminges mæg,
nefæ Garmundes, niða cæftig.
(1960–1962)

“They mournful [Offa] arose as a help to his men, the kinsman of Hemming and offspring of Garmund, powerful over [the queen’s] hostile acts.” Moreover, þonon geomor woc alliterates with the on-verse, edel sinne, if, following Malone’s suggestion, it is read as þon ongeomor woc, “then, exceedingly sad, he arose.” The form þon, “then,” though

18. Klaeber needlessly alters ms heminges to Hem[m]inges.
attested, is rare, while *ponon* is extremely common. A conservative emendation would be *ponon [on]geomor woc*, and the error could be explained either as a haplograph or as the scribe’s attempt to correct what he perceived as a ditto graph (*-onon on-*)..

In the four cases cited by Sisam, unwarranted mistrust in the overall accuracy and integrity of the scribe along with unwarranted confidence in modern conjecture encourages radical emendations on a large scale. The premise itself, that all four cases represent bungled proper names, is pure conjecture, and yet Sisam presents it as if it were a fact: “All these are proper names, which I have preferred because there can be little doubt about the true reading when a name is miswritten” (Studies, p. 37). From a conservative view only one proper name, Finn, is involved, and it is not miswritten, though it is confusingly combined with another word element, as frequently happens in Old English MSS. The danger of conjectural criticism is that its ready disregard for MS forms inhibits thinking and rethinking about annoying MS readings by replacing the problems with easy, usually innocuous, alternatives. For instance, there is nothing objectionable or unusual in the conjectural reading *Wedera cyn* at line 461, and no one could have objected to it had it appeared in the MS at this point. It is too bad that *wedera* bears such little resemblance to the unusual MS reading *gara*, for *[We]dera* is plainly a bad conjectural emendation. As we have seen, the lack of alliteration is the only convincing reason for deserting the otherwise acceptable MS reading, *da hine gara cyn / for herebrogan habban ne mihte*, “then his spear troop might not protect him because of their fear of war.” Even this criterion for emendation can be legitimately questioned on conservative grounds, for there is evidence in the *Beowulf* MS that the poet did not always intend to use alliteration, nor even to adhere invariably to the normal on-verse/off-verse pattern of the traditional Old English poetic line.

Alliteration is probably the most obvious feature of Old English poetry, but the fact that *Beowulf* is an alliterative poem does not mean that the poet could not create, in all deliberation, an occasional line without alliteration. The intentional omission of it from time to time in a very long poem like *Beowulf* might better be viewed, in at least some cases, as intelligent variation rather than scribal corruption. The advantage of conservatism in this regard is that it enlarges the field of possibilities within a text, which a conjectural approach, by procedure, narrows. For conjectural criticism tends to be normative, while great
poetry, even interesting poetry, seldom is. Quite properly, a conjectural emendation stands little chance of acceptance if it is in any way unexpected or extraordinary: it must always justify its validity by reference to ordinary rhythm, ordinary meter, ordinary syntax, ordinary sense, ordinariness. It is the declared foe of the unexpected and the extraordinary, the juices of poetry. Hence the conjectural critic of a poem like Beowulf, which emerged from an observable tradition, but which is still a unique poem in a unique ms, is perhaps at times more like a heady scribe in his conceptions than the poet. The critic and the scribe would be inclined to provide alliteration in a line from an alliterative poem, on the assumption that a variation was necessarily an error. Surely no scribe would consciously delete alliteration from an alliterative poem, and it does not make sense to assume that an inattentive scribe could inadvertently insert a meaningful word in the context that does not alliterate in place of a meaningful word from his exemplar that does alliterate. Yet this is the implication in such standard emendations as mund for hand in ms poet he for handgripe minum scolde (965) or lind for hild in ms betoren lefum et pam hildplegen (1073).

The refusal of modern editors to admit the possibility of nonalliterating lines in Beowulf frequently obliges them to make conjectural “restorations” of needlessly presumed lacunae. The price of editorial alliteration can be high. In line 586b the conjectural “restoration” of the word fela to supply alliteration in the stave leads inevitably to a comical effect. In context, Beowulf is giving his version of the Breca episode, to correct Hunferð’s uncomplimentary rendition, and he feels obliged to remark by the way, no ic þaes gylpe, “I never brag about that.” The sense, the syntax (gylpan takes a genitive object), and the meter are unassailable. But for the sake of the alliteration editors interpolate, at Beowulf’s expense: no ic þes [fela] gylpe, “I never brag much about

20. W. P. Lehmann remarks that “this half-line is metrically adequate as the manuscript transmits it, and would accord with Beowulf’s style. It has been emended, however, usually with fela, because it lacks alliteration. Yet the lengthened half-line seems less in agreement with the hero’s manner of speaking than does that of the manuscript.” Unfortunately, Lehmann is not attempting to avoid an emendation: “If we maintain the manuscript reading, we must either assume that a line or more has been omitted, or that the scribe miswrote 586a, possibly the adjective.” See “On Posited Omissions in the Beowulf,” p. 224.
that.” Another costly interpolation to provide missing alliteration occurs in lines 389–390. Hroðgar instructs his messenger, Wulfgar, to welcome Beowulf and his men to the court. The MS reading (fol. 138v8–11) makes excellent sense when punctuated in the following way:

“Gesage him eac wordum þæt hie sint wilcuman
Deniga leodium.” Word inne abead:
“Eow het secgan sigedrihten min . . .”

(cf. Klauber, 388–391)

“‘Say to them in your speech, moreover, that they are welcome among the people of the Danes.’ He announced the speech within: ‘My lord orders me to tell you . . .’” Because there is no alliteration in the second line of this passage, editors invent a great lacuna of two half-lines between leodium and word. Klauber, for instance, interpolates pa to dura eode, “then he went to the door,” to alliterate with the on-verse, and widcud hæled, “the famous warrior,” to alliterate with the off-verse. It seems obvious that both of these passages are marred by editorial alliteration. They ought to be printed without alliteration, the way they appear in the MS.

It is true that textual conservatism runs the risk of conserving scribal blunders as the poet’s intended readings. The risk is greatly lessened, however, in a contemporary MS proofread and corrected by the scribes themselves. In such a MS we have evidence of scribal attentiveness and even a sense of the immanency of the exemplar, upon which the corrections are based. There is indeed a scrap of positive evidence in the Beowulf MS that some of the nonalliterating lines in the poem derive from the scribe’s exemplar. Whether or not the scribe’s exemplar was authoritative remains to be seen. At this point the scribe needs to be defended. For line 1981 (fol. 173v3–4) the scribe first wrote geond þæt reced Hæreðes dohtor, a line without alliteration. After proofreading, the same scribe wrote side above the line, for insertion between þæt and reced. In other words, the scribe noted an error in his copy and corrected the line to read geond þæt side reced Hæreðes dohtor. His correction makes perfect sense in the context, and is metrically sound, but the line still does not alliterate. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the line was not meant to alliterate. Yet even with this proof of scribal attentiveness the line has been subjected to the most
bewildering forms of conjectural emendation. Klaeber emends the scribe’s correction side to heal, an extremely audacious change. Von Schaubert omits the correction entirely, an equally audacious procedure, and then brings hwearf down from the preceding verse for h-alliteration with Hareðes. Wrenn combines the bold conjectural readings of Klaeber and von Schaubert. They all ignore the correction, yet surely it is based on the scribe’s exemplar. The alternative, at least, would seem to be that the scribe, after he finished copying, went back and spoiled his work by inserting spurious words between the lines.

The exemplar is doubtless the source of some variations on the alliterative norm in Beowulf, as well. One must remember that Old English spelling does not always precisely reflect Old English phonology. Thus in line 1 of Beowulf the velar stop [g] in gar- alliterates with the palatal semivowel [j] in gear- because both words begin with the graph g. Occasionally the difference between phonology and orthography causes some inconsistencies that cannot easily be blamed on the scribes of the extant ms. As M. F. Vaughan shows in “A Reconsideration of ‘Unferð,’” this inconsistency is most likely to crop up in words beginning with the graph h, which was phonologically lost or significantly reduced in many linguistic environments. An unambiguous example of the wavering phonological status of h occurs in the adverb hrape, “quickly.” In lines 1576 and 1937, as well as elsewhere, hrape alliterates with h (hilderince, ac he hrape wolde, and handgewryppene; hrape seopðan wæs). But in line 724 it is spelled raþe and alliterates with r (recædes mulpan. Ræpe after þon). Moreover, in line 1390 it is spelled with h, yet still alliterates with r: Aris, rices weard, uton hrape feran (cf. line 1975, Hraþe wæs gerymed, swa se rica bebead). As Vaughan points out, the loss of initial, prevocalic h would similarly account for the vocalic alliteration of handlean (line 1541), hondlean (2094), hondslyht (2929, 2972), and Hunferð (499, 1165, 1488), which editors needlessly emend to h-less forms. While occasional spellings might well be charged to the scribes, these cases show “occasional alliteration” based on phonology. And such anomalies are far more likely to stem from the poet than the scribes, for a scribe’s “blunder” would require him not only to disregard the poet’s use of vocalic alliteration, but also to provide a synonymous, and virtually homonymous, “correction.” In this light perhaps we ought to regard the ms crux geomor, in edel sinne;—ponon geomor woc (1960), as another
instance of phonetic alliteration, since the initial semivocalic.phone \([j]\) followed by the diphthong \(-eo\) would alliterate phonetically with vowels.\(^{21}\) The poet of a contemporary ms, more than his scribes, can plausibly be charged with "blunders" involving phonetic alliteration.

Other possible alliterative variations, and even variations in the basic on-verse/off-verse structure of the lines, should be carefully reconsidered in *Beowulf*, in view of the probable 11th-century provenance of the poem. Early editors would not have been so ready to emend the ms text had they thought that the poem was so late. While we do know a great deal about Old English metrical practice now, the hypermetric lines show us that poets were willing to violate standard meter in ways we are not yet capable of explaining adequately. A possible variation that has not been sufficiently investigated is the use of single half-lines, or of three consecutive half-lines, rather than the traditional two. The only scholar who has clearly acknowledged this usage is Alan Bliss, who warns us that "in Old English poetry as a whole short lines are much more frequent than editors have been accustomed to allow."\(^{22}\) An instance in *Beowulf* may well occur at lines 402–404, where Klaeber interpolates *heaporinc eode* as line 403b. The passage makes excellent sense without the interpolation, which is merely an appositive for a preceding phrase, and the three half-lines alliterate and provide a fresh and effective variation:

Snyredon æt somne: þæ secg wisoðe  
under Heorot hrof, heard under helm, þæt he on heode gestod.

"They hastened together: the man, brave in helmet, led them under Heorot's roof, so that he stood in the hall."\(^{23}\) Perhaps the theory of

21. Edith Rickert first argued for phonetic alliteration on *geomor* in "The Old English Offa Saga," p. 54. Sisam seems to acknowledge this argument when he says that the scribe was "misled by a possible spelling or pronunciation of the initial diphthong." *Studies*, p. 37.

22. "Single Half-Lines in Old English Poetry," p. 443. An undoubted example of a single half-line that is used alone on purpose occurs in the refrain of *Wulf and Eadwacer* from the *Exeter Book*.

23. Klaeber emends *heode* to *heo[ŋ]dæ*, but there is no need for the emendation, in view of *helheoðo dræorg*, "mournful hell hall," in *Christ and Satan* (line 699). Most editors do not emend the word.
alliterative variation and of the use of three half-lines should be applied as well to the hypermetric verses in lines 1163–1168. As Bliss notices, line 1166a, *æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga*, is not hypermetrical at all, but a combination of two normal half-lines (cf. *þæt æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga* at line 500). If the entire hypermetric passage is rearranged into normal half-lines some interesting and theoretically tenable variations emerge:

> gan under gyldnum, beage þær þa godan
twegem sæton, suhtegfæderan. þa gyt wæs hiera sib
ætgædere æghwylc, oðrum trywe. Swylce þær Hunferþ þyle
æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga;
gehwylc hiora þis ferhþe treowde,
þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah þe he his magum
nære arfæst æt ecca gelacum. Spræc ða ides Scyldinga:

"[Wealhþeow] went forth under gold trappings, with a necklace to the place where the two brave ones sat, nephew and uncle. Still their kinship endured, each together true to the other. Likewise Hunferð the *þyle* sat there at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings; every one of them trusted his spirit, that he had great courage, though he was not merciful to his kinsmen at swordplay. The lady of the Scyldings spoke then." The alliterative patterns here are:

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<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>a a : x a</td>
<td>x a : a x : x a</td>
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<td>a a : a x : a x</td>
<td>a x : a x</td>
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<td>a a : x x</td>
<td>a a : x a</td>
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In the first and sixth lines the alliteration of the off-verses is on the fourth stress, rather than the third, but in both cases the alliterative variation introduces lines of three verses, rather than two. The envelope pattern is consonant with common rhetorical method in the poem. In the fifth line there is no alliteration in the off-verse unless the pronoun is stressed (cf. *and mìn hláford*, *Maldon* line 224b), producing a verse type D₄. While some stringent metrists might be unhappy with this
arrangement of lines 1163–1168, it should be remembered that they are otherwise hypermetrical. It seems that it would be far easier for an Anglo-Saxon reader of the MS to fall into the meter described above than it would be for him to grasp the hypermetrical or unmetrical arrangement given in modern editions.

We stand to learn much by trusting in the overall accuracy of the scribes of the Beowulf MS, but the question remains whether our trust is warranted. Sisam concludes his attack on the authority of Old English MSS in general with an argument that, if valid, would certainly undermine, if not destroy, the reliability of the Beowulf MS. He says:

As a last resort, it might be argued in defence of the poetical manuscripts that their authority is confirmed because they have passed the scrutiny of Anglo-Saxon readers, who knew things unknown to us. In fact there is hardly a trace of intelligent scrutiny. It is a curious feature of the great poetical codices that no early reader seems to have noticed the most glaring errors left by the scribe. (Studies, p. 38)

In the following sections evidence is presented that will effectively refute this claim. The extensive proofreading done by both scribes, and the nature of their corrections, are proof that the Beowulf MS was subjected to intelligent scrutiny. The Beowulf MS contains scores of erasures and scores of written corrections. In view of this evidence it is impossible to believe that the scribes overlooked about three hundred blunders, the degree of inaccuracy that current editorial emendations and interpolations would have us accept. The Beowulf MS has indeed passed the scrutiny of Anglo-Saxon readers, and they certainly knew things unknown to us.

The Proofreading of the Scribes

There have been few efforts to assess the relative accuracy of the two Beowulf scribes, because their general inaccuracy is usually presumed.24

24. This presumption is, for example, the sine qua non of S. O. Andrew’s interesting chapter “Scribal Error and Its Sources,” in Postscript on Beowulf, pp. 133–152.
The primary reason for the neglect of this subject is, of course, that the two latest scribes in a transmission of the text over several centuries could present only a tiny slice of the vast material that would have to be weighed for a just appraisal. One’s interest in these two scribes, however, should be greatly enhanced as the length of transmission is shortened. If Beowulf was written in the early 11th century, these two scribes become very important characters indeed. But no matter when the poem was created, the fact remains that the scribal errors in the extant copy have never been objectively investigated. All previous investigations are based on editorial emendations, which are often persuasive, but never are and never can be purely objective. There are errors that editors have objectively discovered, but their corrections are necessarily subjective; and there are many defensible readings in the Ms that editors have subjectively perceived as errors. In short, “proof” of scribal error based solely on editorial emendations is circular, and leads to predictable results. The scribes’ erasures and written corrections of their own perceived errors not only isolate real errors, but highlight the kinds of mistakes to which each scribe was susceptible. The greatest value of this evidence, however, is that it proves that the scribes carefully proofread their copy, and effectively discredits the extremely high percentage of error reflected in editorial emendations.

The pitfalls of relying on conjectural emendations of often conjectural errors, rather than on scribal corrections of undoubted errors, are well illustrated in Eduard Prokosch’s “Two Types of Scribal Errors in the Beowulf Ms.” On the basis of emendations, many of which are unneeded, Prokosch claimed that “in an overwhelming number of instances the errors of the first part are phonetic, those of the second part, mechanical”; and he reached the remarkable conclusion that the first scribe wrote therefore from dictation (pp. 196–197), while the second scribe copied “laboriously” from a Ms (p. 204). His proof is so flexible that, if one did not question the validity of the emendations, it would be equally possible to show that the second scribe wrote from dictation too. Prokosch himself admits that the first twenty-one examples of the second scribe’s “mechanical” errors could easily be reconciled with dictation (pp. 204–206), and this is nearly half of the evidence. Much of the remaining evidence is even more open to phonetic explanations than are the twenty-one ambiguous examples, and for that matter, than are most of the examples of the first scribe’s “phonetic” errors.
Certainly *bi werede* could be misheard for *biwenede*, *fela ða* for *se laða*, *wrace* for *wrate*, *fergendra* for *wergendra*, *for speof* for *forsweop*, and *hweðre* for *hraðre*. Prokosch asserts that it is “difficult or impossible” to give phonetic reasons for the omission of endings, but in fact phonetic explanations do very well here: *helm[um]* (syncopation or apocope); *hilderinc[a]* and *rond [e]* (unstressed vowel confused with plosive stop); *fyrena* for *fyra* (excrecent nasal on the part of the reciter); and *sweordū* for *sweorda* (leveling). The proper names, beginning with *geomor* for *Eomer* (initial diphthong), are easily explained as phonetic errors. And the remaining “symptoms of mechanical copying” are for the most part better explained as phonetic errors: *sec* and *ec*- are occasional phonetic spellings for *seg* and *ecg*; *meges* for *maenges* (twice) shows the omission of a medial nasal, Prokosch’s first example of a phonetic error in his discussion of the first scribe; surely *reðes ond hattres* could be misheard for *oreðes ond attres*, *nis* could be misheard for *næs*, *wundum* for *wundrum*, *wat* for *pæt*, *let* for *leg*. The putative dichotomy between the two types of scribal errors in the *Beowulf* ms, or their causes, does not in fact exist.

The scribes’ own corrections of their work, on the other hand, show that they were both copying from exemplars, for the corrections are mostly of common mechanical errors like ditto and haplography. Phonetic errors and the occasional phonetic spellings in both parts of the ms might well have been caused by simple transcription, since it is likely that both scribes read aloud. Silent reading is an early modern phenomenon. If anything, the first scribe seems to have been more susceptible to mechanical errors than the second scribe. At any rate, the extensive proofreading by both scribes unequivocally displays their real interest in *Beowulf*: there can be no doubt that both scribes made determined efforts to present reliable copies. The first scribe’s integrity regarding *Beowulf* is manifest in his alertness to incipient error; and this vigilance contrasts with his equally manifest lack of interest in the prose texts of the Nowell Codex, which he also copied but did not even bother to proofread. This marked difference in attitude also implies that the *Beowulf* ms was copied by the first scribe as a separate codex, originally unrelated to the prose codex. But the second scribe’s interest in *Beowulf* is even more remarkable than the first scribe’s. The second scribe too is clearminded and quick to notice his mechanical mistakes, but there are also signs that he continued to read the text, and to restore
damaged parts of it, long after he finished copying the poem. Moreover, he read the first scribe’s work with a critical eye, as numerous corrections by him in the first part of the MS testify. On the other hand, there are no signs that he read the prose texts, and his failure to do so further suggests that the Beowulf MS was added to the prose codex at a later stage.

The proofreading of these two scribes of Beowulf has only recently gained the attention of scholars. But that the scribes themselves made the extraordinarily large number of written corrections in the MS was firmly established by Westphalen, in his absorbing paleographical and textual study, Beowulf 3150–55: TEXTKritik und Editionsgeschichte (esp. pp. 107–108). On paleographical grounds he determined that the first scribe made no fewer than twenty-six corrections by superscript (that is, interlinearly, above the error or lacuna), and ten additional corrections and completions within the lines. Differences in ink and in the shape of the quill tip show that the first scribe’s proofreading was done at various times. The second scribe makes twelve corrections by superscript in his part of the text, and thirteen additional corrections and completions within the lines in the course of making his copy. On the basis of the identity of the handwriting along with a dissimilarity in the quill tip, Westphalen posits the use of a “‘Korrektur’ feder” (p. 100), for some additional corrections by the second scribe, and accordingly assigns six superscripts and six corrections within the lines to later proofreading. He also reveals that eleven superscripts and three corrections within the lines in the first scribe’s part of the MS were made by the second scribe, though he overlooks the enormous importance of this observation for showing the second scribe’s unusual interest in the accuracy of the entire transcription. In all, Westphalen localizes eighty-eight written corrections in the seventy folios of the Beowulf MS: fifty-one in the first scribe’s part, up to line 1939, and thirty-seven in the second scribe’s part, from line 1939 to the end.

Yet these figures, impressive as they are, represent only about half of the evidence of scribal corrections and proofreading, for they do not include erasures. Westphalen deliberately neglected this part of the evidence, for he was concerned with identifying the script of the correctors. He did realize, however, that there were many erasures, and that they normally derived from the scribes themselves (p. 99, n. 111). It could scarcely be maintained that the written corrections were made
exclusively by the scribes while someone else did the erasing. In most cases, in fact, erasures can be assigned to the scribe who made them, and so they need to be included in an evaluation of the scribal corrections. There are over ninety erasures. Together with the written corrections, then, we have about 180 positive examples of intelligent scrutiny on the part of the scribes on seventy Ms folios. Naturally, erasures and written corrections are sometimes combined, and this overlapping inflates the figures, but the sheer bulk of the erasures and written corrections is testimony to the integrity of the scribes and the reliability of their final copy. The pervasive correction of the Ms by the scribes has never been studied, and of course has never been used by any editor to support the authority of the transmitted text. It is highly suspicious that all of the “glaring errors” perceived by modern editors were not corrected by these Anglo-Saxon correctors whose proofreading seems to have been quite thorough.

In the following pages, written corrections and erasures are considered together. While discussing only representative cases of the scribal proofreading, I have nonetheless tried to present a full picture of the nature and extent of the corrections. Most of the evidence is straightforward and fairly well documented in Zupitza’s notes. I have, however, independently restudied all of the evidence of scribal proofreading, and I was often able to correct and augment Zupitza’s account with aids unavailable to him when he studied the Ms between 1880 and 1882. The value of the simplest aid of all, the modern incandescent light bulb, cannot be overestimated. Today it allows the reader of the Ms to see the script, even when it is faded, damaged, or covered by the 1845 binding frames, more clearly and uniformly than Zupitza was able to see it. The reader today who does not use this aid will experience the same kind of problems that Zupitza records in his notes: “metodes? I thought I saw all those letters pretty distinctly (except the two first strokes of m) on the tenth of September 1880, but on no other day. On the 12th of Sept., 1882, I thought I was able to read [wigendes // egesan]” (p. 144). I first studied all erasures in ordinary daylight (a marvelously protean light in London), then under a high-intensity incandescent or “daylight” lamp, and finally under ultraviolet light. I also tried infrared light, but found it of no special use. Low-level fiber-optic light, which rakes over the surface of the parchment, highlighting imperfections and pebbling, only occasionally helped to identify a deleted reading, and
then only when the light was turned up to its full intensity and held directly over the erasure. In most of these cases, however, I achieved the same result with the daylight lamp. Ultraviolet light was most helpful of all when problems arose: in a significant number of cases deleted readings stood out clearly. My reason for determining deleted readings was, of course, to clarify the kind of error to which the scribe in question was particularly susceptible.

THE FIRST SCRIBE

The written corrections and erasures in the first scribe’s part of the ms show that the first scribe carefully proofread his work. But they also show that he was generally very attentive not only to the mechanical job of copying correctly, but also to the more comprehensive aspects of grammar, syntax, sense, and even of meter and alliteration. Some corrections show that the scribe cared enough about the accuracy of his copy to note even the minutest errors and correct them. For example, on fol. 130v19 the scribe corrects saede to sægde by squeezing a g in between the æ and d.25 The correction is not, strictly speaking, necessary, since the two spellings are phonetically the same in Late Old English: one must assume then that the correction was made purely for the sake of orthographical conservatism. On the next folio (132r15), the scribe erased a false (and misleading) ligature between the i and the n.

25. As Robert D. Stevick has rightly observed, “corrections in the manuscript—additions or changes after further text has been copied—often affect the spacing between consecutive morphs.” By studying abnormal spacing features, he discovered a number of fairly certain corrections, which had never been noticed before. Thus on fol. 165r12, the unusually small space between -drihten and selfne suggested to him that the n in drihten was added later, a conclusion virtually confirmed by the make-shift ligature between the e and n. Stevick also infers from the spacing that g was added later to hremig on fol. 171r8–9. It might be added that although the word occurs in the first scribe’s part of the ms, the correction was made by the second scribe, as the distinctive paleographical form of the g clearly shows. The second scribe regularly closes the loop on g with a hair stroke, while the loop is always left open by the first scribe. In this case the second scribe corrected a spelling variant of the first scribe (cf. famig/fami, lines 1909 and 218), not an error. As these two cases illustrate, further study of spacing features in the Beowulf ms may well add appreciably to the vast evidence of scribal proofreading of the poem. See Stevick, ed., Beowulf: An Edition with Manuscript Spacing Notation and Graphotactic Analyses, pp. xxiii–xxv.
of caines, perhaps to avoid confusion between cames and caines.\textsuperscript{26} Minims are often falsely ligatured in insular script (\textit{wundmi} is the most notable example), and the scribe usually makes no effort to disconnect them, for ordinarily no ambiguity results. The correction here, then, is extraordinary, and reveals not only attention to detail, but more important to the sense of the passage. A similar type of correction can be seen on fol. 136v6, where the scribe has altered \textit{fe}st to \textit{fa}st by scraping away the cross-stroke of the \textit{f}. Since insular \textit{f} and \textit{s} are drawn identically, except for the cross-stroke, the error would be hard to notice, and the fact that the scribe has made the correction at all once again shows commendable care for even rather fine details. There are many other corrections of this nature in the first scribe’s section of the MS.\textsuperscript{27}

The other written corrections and erasures in his section break down into three basic categories: the removal of dittographic material; the restoration of material that was inadvertently omitted or was about to be omitted; and the conversion of legitimate, but contextually incorrect words to the contextually proper words. These three categories provide the most compelling evidence that the scribe was generally attentive to his work while he was copying, and that he later subjected his work to

\textsuperscript{26} Klaeber mentions in his note to this line that, “according to Irish belief, Cham inherited the curse of Cain and became the progenitor of monsters.” \textit{Beowulf}, p. 132. Presumably the scribe noted the possible ambiguity and erased the ligature.

\textsuperscript{27} For example \textit{m} is corrected to \textit{n} in \textit{bunden} (first \textit{n}) on fol. 158r19, and in \textit{an} on fol. 146v5; metathesis (\textit{en}/\textit{nec}) is corrected in \textit{velonc}, fol. 137r14; occasional spellings are corrected on fol. 135v11 (\textit{ec-}/\textit{ecg-}), fol. 158v17 (-\textit{un}/\textit{en}), and fol. 160v12 (-\textit{en}/\textit{an}); an apparent homoeographic error (\textit{wynn} for crossed thorn, the abbreviation of \textit{pet}) is rectified on fol. 170r19; a point is erased after \textit{mapsum} on fol. 158v14, a cross-stroke on the \textit{d} of \textit{sceadun} is erased on fol. 172v3, and an extra \textit{l} in \textit{sceal} is erased on fol. 170v11. A number of minor dittographs are also corrected by erasure: \textit{gry(r)e} on fol. 158r16-17; \textit{finda(a)n} on fol. 160v2; \textit{ealzge(a)stel}lan on fol. 167v5-6, and probably \textit{st(l)eapa} on fol. 157v3; cf. the “dittophone” \textit{wear(d)ban} on fol. 167r22. Omitted letters are restored by the scribe in \textit{sidne} (fol. 139v13), \textit{eft} (fol. 143v15), \textit{gehwylcre} (fol. 147v1), \textit{beado} (fol. 154r11), \textit{gesellum} (fol. 162v11), \textit{wearp} (fol. 163v12), \textit{loganes} (fol. 164r1), \textit{heapu} (fol. 166v6), \textit{gewex} (fol. 167v3), \textit{breost} (fol. 167v10), \textit{feh}d (fol. 168v3), and \textit{gyn} (fol. 168v21). These examples alone are enough to show that the scribe subjected \textit{Beowulf} to much more careful scrutiny than he did the preceding three prose texts, and they also show later proofreading, since most of the superscripts have been made with a very sharp quill tip, different from the one used to write the text.
careful proofreading. The last category shows special care and intelligence in proofreading, for in order to notice that a meaningful word was incorrect the scribe would presumably have to have checked the context of the passage in which the mistake occurred. Some of these cases are so equivocal that the mistake could have been allowed to stand without seriously impairing the meaning. In such cases it is clear the poem has also been examined with great care. The other two categories also provide valuable evidence of the scribe’s attentiveness, for the corrections often show at exactly what point the scribe realized that he was making an error. In most instances, the scribe’s lapse of attention was fleeting, and the errors themselves thus help illustrate his clearmindedness while copying.

The removal of dittothraphic material may be indicative either of later proofreading or of the recognition of an error in the course of committing it. Sometimes it is impossible to tell whether or not the ditto was noticed immediately, and then it is best merely to assume that the mistake was picked up in proofreading. Instances of dittoths presumably noted and corrected after proofreading are frequent. On fol. 135v15, however, a dittothraphic *hlaeford* has not been erased, but rather crossed out, apparently in the same ink used to copy the text on the folio. In this case it seems that the scribe crossed out the dittoth right after he made it, intending to erase it when he proofread. Usually there are no such clues as these. On fol. 169v11 an extra *to*, still fairly visible in ordinary light, was erased between *apeiling* and *to*. On fol. 141r20 it appears from the very meager traces that a second *man* was erased between *man* and *afre*. Ultraviolet light showed nothing whatever, but there is no trace of an erased descender below the lower minim line, eliminating the other obvious dittoth, *afre*. A dittothographic *ende* was probably erased at the beginning of line 2 on fol. 168v. As Zupitza says, “*Staf* cannot well have originally stood at the beginning of this line, but there is nothing in [Thorkelin] AB, between *ende* and *staf*; perhaps a word (ende???) erased before staf?” On fol. 161v13 *ge* between *ge* and *nearwod* is erased, and on fol. 149r20 *moste* is erased between *moste* and *selfes* (here Zupitza conjectured that *selfes* had been erased, but *moste* shows up clearly under ultraviolet). The scribe could have erased these dittoths anytime after the text was copied.

It is not always impossible to tell when a dittoth was noticed. For
example, on fol. 146v3 the scribe started to write *sona* a second time, no doubt coaxed toward the dittograph by the combination of the letters, *on* a-, following *sona* in his exemplar. However, we can be sure that he noted his error as soon as he had drawn the *s*, for he has erased the top of the *s*, and used the bottom for the left side of the *o* in *on*. If he had completed the dittograph, there would have been a space between the erased *s* and the *o*, and less of a gap between the *n* of *on* and the *a* of *arn*. The fact that he made the erasure when he did proves that he was quite attentive in his copying at the time of the (imminent) mistake. Another clear example of a dittograph corrected while the scribe was in the process of making it can be found on fol. 154r12–13. Ultraviolet light confirms Zupitza’s claim that the words *on beel* (at the end of line 12) and the word *gearu* (at the beginning of line 13) were erased. The scribe was probably led into the dittograph when his eye skipped from the *wæs* preceding *epgesyne* to the *wæs* preceding *on beel gearu* at the start of the same line. But it must be emphasized that although the erasure is not written on, the error was only a temporary lapse of attention. The scribe realized his error after writing *gearu*, or he would have gone on to recopy *et pæm ade wæs*, as well. A correction of this nature obviously shows that the scribe was, despite his error, attentive enough to his work, and anxious enough to present an accurate copy, to stop copying repetitiously. The examples given earlier from the prose texts showed that he was not usually so attentive when copying those texts. Moreover, he did not even bother to correct all of the dittographs in them, even when, as in the cases cited above, it can be ascertained that he recognized he was recopying material and stopped.

One’s confidence in the scribe’s work on *Beowulf* also grows by examining the places where the scribe started to omit material, but caught his error and corrected it. A scribe who did not care much about the text he was copying would be sorely tempted to let the omission go, and to continue copying even though he had created a contextual lacuna. An example of this type of carelessness was seen in the St. Christopher fragment. There is no comparable evidence of deliberate irresponsibility in the *Beowulf* ms. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that the first scribe was particularly careful not to commit this error. He starts to omit the word *bote* on fol. 133r20: he first wrote *to*, but noted his omission before going on to *banum*, for he was able to convert *to* to *bote*
simply by writing a b over the t, and adding te.28 There are several cases in which the scribe was about to omit considerably more than a few letters. For fol. 147A(131)r6, Zupitza comments: “after ræste an era-
sure of some five letters, of which the first seems to have been h, the
second was possibly a.” Under ultraviolet light, however, the erased
material distinctly emerges as he on. In all probability the scribe’s eye
moved down a line in the exemplar after he had copied ræste. The same
words, he on, now properly end line 7. We know that the scribe was
immediately aware of his oversight though, for the next word he copies
is rehtæ; if he hadn’t noticed his error at once he would have written
fæng, and an entire ms line would have been lost from the text.29

There are other less spectacular losses that would have been sus-
tained had the scribe not been alert in the course of making his copy, or
had he not proofread his work carefully afterward. A particularly
meticulous correction can be seen on fol. 156v13, where the scribe has
inserted the word he as a superscript between ðeoden and under. The
correction is not absolutely essential either to the sense or to the syntax,
and the omission does not affect the alliteration or the meter. It is a good

28. Similarly, on fol. 134r9 the scribe first omitted en from healfdenes, but he noted
the omission before proceeding to the next word, so that he was able to change the s
to n by a bit of erasing and overwriting, and to add the es where it belonged. At the
bottom of the same page, line 19, the scribe started to write perf instead of pearf, but
noted the mistake as soon as he wrote r or he would not have been able to change it
to an a and write rf after it.

29. A more complicated example, but one not open to proof since ultraviolet light
was of no use, apparently occurs on fol. 147r14. Zupitza felt that the erasure in this
line might have removed a ditographic feorh, but the remaining ink traces immedi-
ately after feorh and before ealgian do not support his guess. With the daylight lamp,
ite seem to be the letters after feorh, and ht the letters before ealgian. If so, the scribe
started to skip a line in his exemplar, copying hie meah- from line 15, and using the
h in feorh as the first step in his mistake. After writing meah- he realized what he
was doing and resumed copying correctly. If he had not noted his mistake, lines 796-
797 would have been collapsed in one line, reading wolde freadrihtnes feorhie meaht
sua. Alliteration and meter would have been retained, but not a vestige of sense. A
similar disaster was averted on fol. 152r14, where the b in beowulf was corrected from
an original f (according to Zupitza, an original v). The scribe started to copy feoh,
immediately below beo- in line 15, but caught his error before finishing the word. His
alertness prevented him from producing a contextual lacuna, a line without allitera-
tion, and a passage claiming that Beowulf had reason to be ashamed of the costly gifts
Hröðgar gave him (no, “not at all,” would have been omitted).
example of responsible proofreading. A far more significant omission is restored, again by superscript, on fol. 168r3. The scribe first wrote *snyttrum*, but later corrected the reading by adding *un-* above the line to read *unsnyttrum*. It was a crucial correction, involving as it does the difference between “wisdom” and “folly.” In a case like this, the scribe was probably reading the text, not just mechanically proofreading. It should not be necessary to make such an obvious point were it not for the ubiquitous assumption that the scribes were ignorant of the meaning of what they were copying.

There is an extremely interesting erasure on fol. 140v19. It seems from the FS and from the MS under ordinary light that an *f* and one or two additional letters, the last of which had an ascender, were deleted here. These outward appearances suggest that the scribe’s eye moved down a line in his exemplar, and that he consequently began to copy *fah* from line 20. Under ultraviolet light, however, the first letter appeared almost certainly to be caroline *s*, the second letter probably an *æ*, and the third an *l*. The *æ* could have been an *e* that came to look like an *æ* through smudging (perhaps the ink was still wet when the erasure was made); but the amount of space between the *s* and the *l* favors *æ*. The erasure raises some fascinating questions. There is no simple answer as to how the error came about. If the questionable vowel was an *e*, one may conjecture that the scribe unintentionally started to write *medosele*, instead of *medoheal* (both of which mean “meadhall”), by the power of suggestion: he had just written *boorsele* (line 17) and he was about to write *drihtsele* (lines 19–20). Or perhaps he started to copy dittographically from *-sele* in line 17, or to omit the material preceding *-sele* in line 20. In all of these cases, which start from the assumption that the vowel was an *e*, the scribe caught his mistake after writing only *sel-*, and one can conclude with certainty that the scribe’s lapse was momentary. If, however, the questionable vowel was an *æ*, the word he first wrote was *sæl*, which also is synonymous with *heal* and *sele*, but in this case there is no obvious explanation for the scribe’s error. The word *medoheal* may have been corrupted phonetically to *medosæl*, but this explanation means that the scribe knew the word *sæl*, a word for “hall” that only appears in poetry. If this was his mistake, it implies that the scribe should be credited with more knowledge of the poetry he was copying than he usually is. But whether he wrote *medosæl*, or started to write *medosele*, the erasure is testimony to the
scribe’s desire to copy accurately, for in either case the scribe deleted a perfectly good reading. The only conceivable reason why he should have gone to this trouble is that the perfectly good reading was not the reading of his exemplar. In the corrections of this kind the scribe dramatically demonstrates that his copy is, or attempts to be, trustworthy.

The remainder of the corrections of the first scribe to be considered fall roughly into this same category. They all convert meaningful, but incorrectly copied words into the right words, presumably the words of the scribe’s exemplar, since there would be no reason to make the corrections otherwise. This category does not count false starts, immediately corrected by the scribe. Two examples of false starts occur in line 12 of fol. 169r: instead of r in geswearc the scribe first drew an ascender, but he erased it; and he first wrote dryt instead of dryht, but again he corrected the error at once. Another example occurs on fol. 134r5 where he changed wenan to wendan; both are real words, but wendan is the correct one in the context. The spacing informs us that the scribe realized his error before proceeding to the next word. The scribe is to be commended for picking up these errors and correcting them, particularly the last, for it shows that he was clearheaded in the course of copying, and was not content to leave an error even when faced with a recognizable word. A lazy scribe would be inclined to move on, hoping the error would go undetected.

The corrections that properly belong in the third category are of a different kind entirely. They are most impressive because they were made in all probability as a result of unusually careful proofreading. They all involve real words that sometimes even make sense in the context, but are nonetheless noted as errors by the scribe and corrected. Together they tend to prove better than anything else that the scribe was paying attention to sense and syntax, to grammar, and even to alliteration while he was proofreading for mechanical errors. Hence these corrections should most effectively dispel the false notion that the Beowulf MS was not subjected to intelligent scrutiny after it was copied.

On fol. 129r10, the letter erased between hron and rade, which shows up clearly under ultraviolet light, is an e. The correction of hrone to hron shows that the scribe was attentive to the meaning, for a form with final e following the preposition ofer would not in itself have signaled an error. Thus he must have realized that hron- was here part of the poetic compound hronrade and accordingly that the inflection
belonged at the end of the compound. Presumably the exemplar had *hron*, too, but it is not likely that the scribe would have made the erasure unless he was certain of the meaning of the phrase. On fol. 135v15 the word *hige* was altered from the original word *hine*, “him,” by writing a *g* over the *n*. A masculine accusative singular form here is entirely proper, and *hine* even makes some sense if it is taken in apposition to *hlaforde*. The error would seem to be hard to detect, and then hard for the scribe to acknowledge. The correction to *hige*, an exclusively poetic term, suggests that the scribe was paying close attention to the sense of the text. Two corrections on fol. 138r17 and 18 lead to the same conclusion. The scribe must have been following the sense and the syntax to change *pis* to *his* and *holdre* to *holdne*, for both corrections involve the emendation of recognizable words. So too on fol. 138v20 the scribe alters the word *headōreaf*, “brave in battle,” to *headoreaf*, “war-dress.” Here the error implies that the scribe was at home with the language of heroic verse, for the erroneous *headōreaf* is an exclusively poetic term, while *headoreaf*, the correction, is a *hapax legomenon*.

An analogous case occurs on fol. 139r5. There the form *wæs*, instead of the expected imperative form *wes*, appears followed by a small erasure of about one letter. The interchange of *e* and *e* is characteristic of the spelling of the poem, but *wes* is invariably the form elsewhere. The spelling *wæs*, therefore, is not technically incorrect, but it is still decidedly unusual. The erasure, when viewed under ultraviolet light, explains why *wæs* and not *wes* appears here. The *s* has been written over the descender of an original *r*, and the second stroke of the *r* and an *e* have been deleted. In other words the scribe, anticipating the next word, *bu*, wrote the second person singular past *indicative* (or *subjunctive*) of the verb “to be,” *were*, instead of the imperative, *wes*. Apparently the scribe made the error thinking he was correcting an error in his exemplar. When he realized that his “correction” was not right, he changed the form back to the imperative but did not change the vowel, nor was there any compelling reason to do so. Obviously the scribe would have no reason to change *were bu* to *wes bu* unless he fully comprehended the sense of the passage. A curious parallel to this interesting correction occurs on the next page, fol. 139v2. Under ultraviolet light it is fairly certain that a *t* was erased after *sceal*, and *scealt* is the second person singular present indicative of *sculan*. If the scribe was following the sense of the poem, he might have momentarily
thought that Beowulf was again directly addressing Hroðgar, as he does earlier with \textit{wæs} \textit{þu}, at the beginning of this same speech. On fact, the scribe may have begun to write the enclitic form, \textit{scealtu} (that is, \textit{scealt þu}). In any event, the correction indicates that the scribe ultimately understood the meaning.

The correction of \textit{him} to \textit{his} on fol. 147A(131)r15 is particularly minute, and shows the scribe’s desire to preserve the reading of his exemplar, despite the slight change in meaning caused by the error. Thus \textit{ne wæs him drohtod þær}, “the way was not there for him,” might well have been kept in place of the corrected reading, \textit{ne wæs his drohtod þær}, “his way was not there.” On fol. 149r6 he alters \textit{fyrena} to \textit{fyrena} by means of a superscript \textit{a}, thus changing “crime” or “wickedness” from accusative singular to plural, or perhaps only correcting a leveled spelling. There was even less need to change \textit{at sæce} to \textit{at sæcc} on fol. 165v3. The phrases are synonymous, and \textit{sæce}/\textit{sæcc} can be in fact orthographical variants of the same feminine (\textit{j}o-stem) noun, \textit{sec} (\textit{o}). The reason for the alteration was probably to distinguish the poetic word \textit{sæcc} from the common word \textit{sæc}, both of which could appear as \textit{at sæce}, “at strife,” in the dative singular. The fact that the scribe made the alteration suggests that he recognized the distinction.

In a significant number of additional cases, an Old English word that does not make any sense in the context has been altered to the right word. Many of these contextually incorrect words are so similar in appearance to the contextually correct words that it is highly unlikely that the scribe would recognize the error if he were merely proofreading mechanically. It seems, rather, that he was reading his copy with comprehension and noticed from the faulty sense that he must have made a mistake. Thus on fol. 148v16 either \textit{cuðne} or \textit{cuðre} was corrected to \textit{cuðe} by erasure. All three are possible inflected forms of the adjective \textit{cuð}, “well-known.” In this and the following examples, the scribe’s understanding the sense of the passage would certainly help identify an error more readily than would simple proofreading. And in any case a lazy scribe would not be inclined to correct a legitimate grammatical form, nor even to notice that the legitimate form he had miscopied differed so slightly from the form in his exemplar. The large number of corrections of this sort is a fairly sure sign that the scribe was reading and understanding the text he had copied.

On fol. 154v17 the scribe corrects \textit{gewitiað} to \textit{bewitiað} by erasure
and superscript. On fol. 155v9 he changes *hunferpe* to *hunferp* by erasure. Zupitza says “a letter seems to have been erased after this word,” and ultraviolet light reveals that the letter was an *e*. The correction indicates that the scribe understood the sense and the syntax of the passage. He is obviously attentive, besides, to alliteration, as his correction of *wide* to *side* on fol. 157r5 shows. The words are synonyms, and there would be no reason for the scribe to make the change if he did not realize that the alliteration had been marred by the error. Other indications of his overall care can be seen in the alteration of *bone*, “that,” to *bonne*, “then,” on fol. 158r19; in the change of *gesah*, “beheld,” to *geset*, “sat,” by superscript on fol. 161v2; of *meag*, “kinsman,” to *mel*, “time,” by superscript on fol 163v13; of *werede*, “defended,” to *wenede*, “entertained,” by erasure of the *r* descender on fol. 169v18; of *wac*, “weak,” to *wat*, “knew,” by adding the top of a *t* to the *c* on fol. 170r5; and of *stefne* to *stefna*, a change in inflection or a correction of a leveled spelling, by superscript *a* on fol. 171v17. All of these corrections strongly suggest that the scribe was reading the text, and recognized an error through the lost sense. All of these mistakes were incorrect Old English words or word forms that bore a close resemblance to the correct words or word forms, and the fact that the scribe uncovered the errors is a tribute to his intelligence and reliability.

**THE SECOND Scribe**

The second scribe played a far larger role than the first in the transmission of the text of *Beowulf*. There are compelling reasons to believe that he read the poem repeatedly over many years and that his prolonged interest in it included restoration of damaged sections as well as corrections. His ordinary corrections can be categorized in the same way as the first scribe’s: the removal of ditto material; the restoration of omitted material; and the conversion of meaningful, but incorrect words, to the proper words in the context. As with the first scribe, there is also a smattering of miscellaneous corrections, some of which overlap with the main categories. Since the corrections by both scribes range from the erasure of a ligature or an extraneous minim to the restitution of a major passage that was about to be omitted, a high degree of confidence in the authority of the preserved MS is warranted. Certainly, the extent of the corrections throughout the MS undermines the rationale for
making conjectural emendations in the first place. I shall begin an analysis of the second scribe’s proofreading by considering some corrections that have been persistently ignored by modern editors, who have resorted to emending the scribe’s corrections.

Emendations of words the scribe actually corrected show a lack of respect for the scribe, though in fairness to the emenders, it must be said that the readings in question present extraordinary problems. One problem has already been discussed in another context: the lack of alliteration in line 1981 forced Klaeber in his edition, for example, to change side (the scribe’s correction) to heal. Basic respect for the scribe, rather than mechanical application of the alliterative rule, suggests that occasional nonalliterating lines were deliberate variations from the rule. Many other nonalliterating lines in Beowulf, all of which have been emended solely to supply alliteration, support this conclusion. There is less at stake in the editors’ disregard of another correction on fol. 186v21, where, according to Zupitza, “a letter [was] erased between l and a in glaw: that it was e is not quite certain.” In fact, this case may not even be an erasure, for everything after gl- is blurred, and the word may have been accidentally smudged right after it was written. The uncertainty is reflected in the Thorkelin transcripts: A reads glaw, while B reads gleap. It is remarkable that, while editors accept Zupitza’s statement that gleaw was deliberately changed to glaw, not one editor prints glaw. For instance, Klaeber emends (un)glaw to unslaw, “not blunt, sharp,” while the Wrenn-Bolton edition prints ungleaw, and wrenches out the dubious translation, “very sharp, very keen” (note, pp. 280–281). These examples are representative treatments of the problem: in the first case, the scribe supposedly changes ea to a, but mindlessly lets the critical error, g for s, stand uncorrected; in the second, he mindlessly changes a correct reading. Both explanations presuppose that, in going to the trouble of making an erasure, the scribe blundered.

To some extent it does not really matter here whether the scribe wrote -gleaw and accidentally smudged it, or consciously changed the spelling to -glaw. The two are variant spellings of the same word, glossed by Bosworth-Toller as “clear-sighted, wise, skillful, sagacious, prudent, good.” With the un- prefix the word would most probably

30. Cf. the variants gleawnes/glauwnes in Bosworth-Toller (p. 480).
mean “unwise, unskillful, imprudent,” and the like. What seems most important here is the editors’ scorn for the scribe, and their prejudgment of the meaning of the passage. Beowulf has just entered the dragon’s barrow wielding a sword:

\[
\text{Sweord ær gebræd,}
\]
\[
god guðcyning, \quad \text{gomele lafe,}
\]
\[
ecgum ungl(e)aw.
\]
\[
(2562–2564)
\]

The assumption that \textit{ungl(e)aw} modifies \textit{sweord \ldots gomele lafe} is by no means self-evident. The immediate antecedent, \textit{gomele lafe}, is feminine accusative singular, while \textit{ungl(e)aw} is either masculine or neuter, and either nominative or accusative singular. If the word modifies the subject, \textit{god guðcyning}, a direct translation of the passage would be, “The good war king, unskillful (or imprudent) with swords, had already drawn his sword, the ancient heirloom.” Editors have naturally resisted this literal translation of \textit{ungl(e)aw}, for it is uncomplimentary to Beowulf; nonetheless the words “unskillful” and “imprudent” accurately foreshadow the outcome of Beowulf’s fight with the dragon:

\[
\text{Nægling forbærst,}
\]
\[
geswac æt sæce \quad \text{sweord Biowulfes}
\]
\[
gomol ond grægmæl. \quad \text{Him þæt gifode ne wæs,}
\]
\[
þæt him irenna \quad \text{ege mihton}
\]
\[
helpan æt hilde; \quad \text{wæs si hond to strong,}
\]
\[
se ðe meca gehwane \quad \text{mine gefræge}
\]
\[
swenge ofersohte.
\]
\[
(2680–2686)
\]

“\textit{Nægling broke apart, Beowulf’s sword, ancient and gray colored, failed in battle. That was not granted to him, that the edges of swords might help him in warfare; his hand was too strong, which overtaxed with its blow each sword, as I have heard.”}\textsuperscript{31} In view of these lines there

\textsuperscript{31} When Beowulf lies dead, the poet reiterates the theme:
\[
\text{sweorðe ne meante}
\]
\[
on ðam agliceænan \quad \text{enige þinga}
\]
\[
wunde gewyrceæn. \quad (2904–2906)
\]

“With his sword he could make no wound at all on that monster.”
is no reason to doubt that the poet wrote, and the scribe faithfully copied, that Beowulf was *ecgum ungleaw*, “unskillful with swords.” The only doubt is whether *ungleaw* came about through accidental smudging or careful proofreading.

In order to appreciate the scribe’s intelligence, and understand his efforts to perfect his transcript, we must no longer reject the scribe’s corrections as blunders in themselves. Indeed, the corrections and the mistakes they rectify need to be examined with more care. For example, Zupitza inadequately characterizes a complicated correction on fol. 176v20 by saying, “*hladan* altered from *bledan*.” There is no attempt to understand how the scribe came to write the nonsense word *bledan*, when his exemplar read *hladan*. There are two alterations here—*b* to *h*, and *æ* to *a*—and they should be kept separate. The *b* was a simple mechanical error, a dittograph induced by the initial *b* in the preceding word, *bel*, and may have been corrected to *h* immediately. In any event the scribe meant to write *hleðdan*, which may be a legitimate variant of *hladan* in the scribe’s or the poet’s speech or spelling. In *Beowulf* the same variants are recorded for the past participle (*hladen*, 1897, 3134, but -*hlæðen*, 868). Thus, the change of *æ* to *a* may be nothing more than a spelling normalization; but no matter what it is, it shows the scribe attending to minor details. If the scribe were ignorant, careless, and lazy, *bleðan* would still be the reading of the ms—and it might not have been emended to *hladan* by modern editors.

Scribal ineptitude is always assumed in order to explain the correction of *hæðmūr* to *hæru* (by erasure) on fol. 173v5. As in the case of *ungleaw/unglaw*, editors either keep the uncorrected reading *hæðnum*, or emend the correction (usually to *hæleðum*). Once again, the implication in either case is that the scribe blundered while trying to make a correction. Chambers’s defense of the uncorrected reading *hæðnum* includes a rare explanation for such supposedly irrational behavior on the part of the scribe:

*Hæ(ð)num* may be a proper name signifying the Geatas, or some tribe associated with them. So Bugge, who interprets “dwellers of the heath” (of Jutland) in accordance with his theory of the Geatas being Jutes. But the evidence of any name corresponding to *Hæ(ð)nas* in Jutland is not satisfactory. The *Hæ(ð)nas* would rather be identical with the O. N. *Hei(ð)nir*, the dwellers in *Heidmork*, Hedemarken, in central Scandi-
navia. Warriors from this district might well have been in the service of Hygelac; or the poet may be using loosely a familiar epic name. (p. 97n)

Unfortunately, _haðnum_ would have meant “to the heathens” to any Anglo-Saxon unfamiliar with this hypothetical epic name, and this confusion, Chambers says, explains the scribe’s mistake: “The last transcriber of _Beowulf_, not understanding the name, and taking it for the adj. ‘heathen,’ may then (as Buggs supposes) have deleted the ð, not liking to apply such an epithet as ‘heathen’ to Hygelac’s men.”32 The explanation will never do. It is interesting, though, that the explanation depends entirely on the assumption that the scribe understood what he was copying and was following its sense from the beginning of the poem, even though he had only been copying for about forty-five lines. This assumption does not accord well with the overall rationale for emendations, which needs to maintain mechanical transcription and ignorance or indifference to the meaning. But there is a more serious problem: if the scribe did not understand the putative tribal name, it cannot be cogently argued that he deleted the ð and arrived at a legitimate variant (cf. O. N. _Heinir, Heiðnir_) by sheer coincidence.

Those editors who emend the corrected form _haðnum_ have a more logical argument. They believe that the scribe did not finish his correction, that he intended to write in a correction after erasing the ð. This explanation is quite possible, though the usual emendation, _haeleðum_, is a bad guess. If the scribe had wanted to make this correction he could have inserted _le_ as a superscript between _æ_ and ð, and _nû_ could have been easily converted to _um_. He certainly would not have erased the ð, and he probably would have erased the _n_. A better emendation, assuming the correction was left unfinished, would be (Hygd) _lidwæge baer/haenum to handa_, “Hygd carried the cup by hand to those of inferior rank.”33 The poet has made a special point of contrasting Hygd’s humility with the arrogance of Offa’s queen. The _ms_ spelling _haenum_ for _heanum_ can be defended as a late Old English occasional spelling showing smoothing of the diphthong _ea_ (cf. _Ræmas_, line 519). Thus the scribe may have knowingly departed from the usual conservative

32. See Chambers’s edition (p. 97n).
33. Toller Supplement (p. 523), _hean_, 1b: “_of inferior rank:_—Heanra cempa miles ordinarius.”
spelling simply to avoid further erasing, just as the first scribe used the unusual spelling wes for the imperative wes when he corrected were on fol. 139r5. Once again, there is no reason to assume that the scribe blundered when he made his correction. The fact that he noticed that haeðnum, a word that can work in the context, was wrong is striking testimony of careful proofreading.

An especially vexing corrected reading on fol. 172v8, which is always emended in the same way, will help illustrate the range of difficulties that sometimes attend these Ms cruces. The scribe is supposed to have written on hoh nod, and to have altered the reading to on hohsnođ by inserting a caroline s between the h and the n afterward. The problem is that on hohsnođ is lexically obscure, a unique form with no clear pedigree. It helps that a verb was needed in the context: the -od ending readily suggested a class 2 weak verb, *onhohsnian, though its meaning remained obscure, and a past participle was syntactically unworkable. The Bosworth-Toller dictionary lists this hypothetical verb, and glosses it on the basis of the general context, “(?) to abominate, detest” (p. 754). This solution, of course, was all admitted guesswork, to fill a lexical void. A believable etymology was needed, and well supplied by the suggestion of a denominative verb, from hoh-sinu, “hamstring,” with the transferred meaning, “to restrain, weaken.”

This etymological argument is more persuasive guesswork, but it still ignores a central problem: even if the etymology is accepted, a first preterit, not a past participle, is needed to complete the sense of the passage. Accordingly, all editors emend the corrected form onhohsnođ to onhohsnođ[e]. Yet this procedure only obscures the problem, rather than solving it. The need for an emendation vitiates the explanation of the word. Whatever the word means, an emendation is insupportable here, for the scribe’s correction shows that his attention was directed to an error, and one must assume that he corrected it. Beginning with the reasonably confident assumption that the word was right after the correction, -snođ must be a strong preterit. Class 6 verbs have an ablaut with o in the first preterit, and a in the infinitive. There is no strong verb snadan recorded, but there is a weak verb snædan, “to slice,” which apparently derives from snadj, the first preterit of the strong verb sniðan, “to cut.” In view of its apparent etymology, the original (or variant) form of the weak verb was

34. Dobbie provides a convenient review of opinion in Beowulf and Judith, p. 217.
*snadan.\(^{35}\) Analogy would then account for the strong preterit, *snod*. In short, the corrected MS reading could be a solecism, like the naive preterit “brang” from “bring.” This solution is not inconsonant with an educated Anglo-Saxon, though, for in late Old English times such solecisms were in the process of transforming the weak and strong classes of all English verbs. If *-snod* is so understood as an analogical preterit, the verbal compound *onhohsnod* makes excellent sense in the context. The word element *hoh* is not necessarily the substantive “heal,” and instead may be related to the adjectives *hohful*, “mindful, careful, anxious, troubled,” and *hohmod*, “having an anxious mind, anxious” (Bosworth-Toller, p. 549). The verbal compound *onhohsnadan* can be literally translated, “to cut in anxiety,” a meaning that fits the passage in question very well: “Indeed that [the behavior of Offa’s queen] cut in anxiety the kinsman of Hemming.” The natural preterit was *onhohsnaede* (or *-snade*), but an analogous preterit, *onhohsnod*, would have been a natural creation, paralleled elsewhere in *Beowulf* (*scepede/schod*, lines 1514 and 1887). And the scribe’s correction strongly suggests that the scribe understood *onhohsnod*.

These seemingly intractable MS cruces can indeed be solved without resorting to emendation only by relying implicitly on the basic intelligence of the scribe. And it is imperative to trust a MS reading, no matter how extraordinary that reading might be, if it has actually been corrected by the scribe. Editorial emendations of these cruces may seem to be more sound, but this false security is an illusion created by appealing to readings more familiar to us, and by destroying, without any positive evidence, the scribe’s credibility. There is considerable positive evidence that the scribe is trustworthy. Many minor corrections have been made by him throughout his section of the MS, and these corrections alone attest to both careful copying and intelligent proofreading.\(^{36}\) The point can be further demonstrated by grouping corrections in main categories. As with the first scribe, the removal of dittographs reveals much about


the attentiveness of the second scribe both while he was copying and again while he was proofreading. The second scribe did not make many dittographic errors, and those he did make he corrected later by erasure. On fol. 176v19 he erased a dittographic bronđe. On fol. 181r14 ultraviolet light confirms Zupitza's guess that leđod was erased (presumably an original ū was lost in the fire damage at the end of the line). On the verso, line 7, the scribe wrote gege, but immediately corrected the second ge to tr, or he would not have been able to complete the word getruwode correctly. Another minor dittograph was averted on fol. 182v16, where the scribe started to write he twice. After writing the second h, however, he noted his error, erased the long first stroke, and then used the second stroke of the h for the first stroke of y in yldrā. Here it is plain how quickly the scribe rectified his mistake. There are only two other certain dittographs in the second scribe's work. On fol. 189A(197)v19 a second his is erased at the end of the line, and on fol. 198r9 a second hyrdē in the middle of the line. There are other possible cases, but even admitting these, the second scribe was not as prone as the first to making dittographic mistakes, and none of his dittographs exceeds a single word.

The second scribe was more prone than the first to omit letters, and sometimes words; but, as was also true of the first scribe, he regularly noted his error in the act of making it. For instance, on fol. 176v14 he started to skip un- and write hyre, but he was aware of his oversight as soon as he had drawn the h, which he erased. On fol. 177v13, he started to skip -ld- in scyldunga, but noticed his mistake soon enough to convert the first three minimis of un to ld, and complete the word correctly. A comparable correction is made on fol. 183r17; the scribe started to omit

37. Zupitza mistakenly says that the u (he means the r) was altered "it seems, from the beginning of e." Malone confines the dittograph to the g (Nowell Codex, p. 88), but the bottom of the original dittographic e is quite clear beneath the r.

38. Zupitza is perhaps right in suggesting that dittographic manigr(a) was erased on fol. 176r6, though the "perpendicular stroke" preceding this proposed reading is hard to account for (cf. Malone, Nowell Codex, p. 80). Malone is probably right in his ingenious deduction, based on Thorkelin A and B, of an erased dittograph on fol. 182r3: "At the end of line 3, AB have ge and a blank space (A) or a dot (B); one may conjecture that the illegible letter was b, perhaps imperfectly erased to correct a case of dittography." Ibid., p. 89. A dittographic to may have been erased between hilde and to on fol. 198r11.
the \( r \) in \( wyrme \), but made his correction by writing the \( r \) over the first two minims of the \( m \) he had drawn. A correction is made in a similar way on fol. 187r13. He began to write \( hafde \), instead of \( hafde \), but the spacing tells us that he corrected the error, by using the \( e \) as the \( a \)-loop in the \( a \)-ligature, before writing the \( f \), which is properly ligatured to the corrected \( a \). On fol. 194v15, he was supposed to write \( efnde \), but wrote \( es\); to correct his error he wrote an insular \( f \) over the high caroline \( s \). Still another omission noted at once can be seen on fol. 184r8, where the scribe started to write \( ungefelice \), but stopped after making the \( f \) and finished copying \( ungedefelice \) correctly. Apparently the \( f \) was erased at once, even though the erasure was not written on, for it would have been difficult to erase the \( f \) and not damage the \( d \).

Sometimes, however, the scribe did not notice that he had omitted a letter or letters at least until after he had completed copying the line in which the mistake occurs, and possibly not until he proofread later. Corrections of this nature are regularly made by superscript insertions, since there would be no room within the line for corrections once the entire line had been copied. An example of an error that, judging by the difference in the quill tip and ink, was noted in proofreading can be seen on fol. 184v16, where the scribe altered \( headoric \) to \( headorinc \). Another example occurs on fol. 192v7, where \( e\wtilf \) is corrected to \( ed\wtilf \) with another pen and ink. On fol. 187r3 the scribe omitted the \( r \) of \( searwum \), but inserted it by superscript very soon after, to judge from the likeness in pen point and ink. The same may be said of the correction of \( fa\de \) to \( fah\de \) on 193v9, and of \( me\d \) to \( ma\g\d \) on 195r2. On fol. 196v19 -\( g\mu m \) had to be inserted above the line after \( stren\-. The source of this omission can probably be found in the word \( geba\d \), which follows it. The scribe may have confused \( strenge \) with \( stre\g\u \). Because of the lack of spacing between the words, \( ge \) could be construed with either \( strenge \) or \( geba\d \), and \( strenge \), dative singular, rather than plural, is a perfectly good reading here. The fact that the scribe picked up this well-camouflaged omission is excellent testimony to his care for an accurate text. The scribe omitted a few entire words, too, that he also later inserted by superscript. On fol. 186r3 he first wrote, by haplography, \( ac \d\ae \), instead of \( ac \ic \d\ae \). He may have thought at first that he was correcting a dittograph in his exemplar, but then realized that he had made a mistake. On fol. 188v13 he omitted \( d\ae g \) between \( se \) and \( cuman \), but corrected the oversight, perhaps helped by
the lack of meaning and alliteration his error produced. There is an unparallelled marginal insertion of an omitted word on fol. 189A(197)r4. The word *sceal*, flanked by dots, appears in the margin; the place in the text where the insertion belongs is redundantly marked by an ∞ above the line, a colon between *urum* and *sword*, and a comma beneath the colon.\(^{39}\) The margin was resorted to here because the *g*-loop from line 3, and the abbreviation for *m* and the high Caroline *s* in line 4, did not leave room between lines 3 and 4 for the customary interlinear correction. The usual interlinear correction is made on fol. 193r11, where the scribe inserts *ne wene*, omitted in the course of copying.

All of the omissions discussed so far range from a single letter to two small words. The second scribe was on the verge of skipping a much more significant portion of the text on fol. 192v16. Ultraviolet light confirms Zupitza’s impression that *benヌ* was erased between *wel* and *reste*.\(^ {40}\) The scribe wrote *bennum se-* (though possibly without completing the *e*-loop) before he caught his error; the strangely shaped *r* in *reste* is written over *se-* (that is, over a low insular *s* and the main stroke of the *e*; cf. *seoc* in line 18). If the scribe had not been alert, a contextual lacuna would have resulted from the middle of line 2902a to the middle of line 2904a.

The last group of corrections to be considered from the second scribe’s part of the MS consists of meaningful words (but wrong for the context) subsequently altered to the correct words. This type of correction, as has already been stressed, is particularly indicative of scribal attentiveness, not only to simple copying, but also to the sense of what he was copying. Some of the corrections are extremely minute, and the errors would have been hard to find were the scribe not meticulously looking for mistakes. He changes the possible oblique-case noun *sine* (“sight”), to the correct word *sinne* (“his”), on fol. 180v8; the string of minims would make the error difficult to find. On fol. 187r14 he corrected *wear∂* (“became, hap-

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39. In the MS, but not in the FS, there are faint traces preceding *sceal* of a letter that Zupitza identified as another ∞ (“which, however, is almost entirely gone”). Perhaps, instead, we have here the “old insular device of *h* in the margin answering ∞ in the text,” used to mark locations for marginal insertions (Ker, Catalogue, p. xxxvi). Two examples of this device can be seen in Ker’s edition of The Pastoral Care (MS Hatton 20, fols. 63r and 82v).

40. What looks like a point in the FS in the center of the lacuna is actually a hole in the vellum, no doubt caused by the erasing.
pened”) to weard (“guardian, keeper”) by erasing the cross-stroke. He changes þon (þonne, “then”) to þone (“that”) on fol. 189v16, and before he went on to the next word, as the spacing tells us. On fol. 196v6 he has altered þurh (“through”) to burh (“fortified place”) by erasing the descender of the þ. There are several minor changes in inflection. Thus on fol. 185v2 an (“alone”) is changed by superscript to the weak declension ana, a change reflecting a particularly subtle difference in the meter. Within the line on fol. 189r19 dogorgerime is altered to dogorgerimes, or from dative to genitive, a change showing careful attention to sense and syntax. The same is true of the change of maðma to maðmum, genitive plural to dative plural, on fol. 194v3. The spacing shows that the scribe made this correction before proceeding to the next word.

A more significant correction occurs on fol. 182v19, where forgolden was altered to forhealden by adding h above the line and by altering go to ea. It is worth noting that forgolden is not a copying error and that it makes good sense in the context. The word forgyl丹 is frequently used in Beowulf in the sense of ironic recompense:41 in this sense the passage could have been translated, “the sons of Ohtere repaid the protector of the Scyldings” (for banishing them). Forhealden, “rebelled against,” also fits the context, and presumably was the word in the scribe’s exemplar, a word he somehow confused in his mind with forgolden. The mistake looks like one a clever scribe might make by anticipating the sense. Surely a lazy, unintelligent scribe would have let an error like this stand.42 A similar case occurs on fol. 184r19, where hrore is altered to hroðre by means of a superscript ð. An inattentive scribe

41. See lines 114, 1541, 1577, 1584, 2094, 2305, 2843, and 2968.
42. According to Andrew, “there is one kind of corruption which our text has escaped, viz. that which is imported by a too clever scribe who thinks that he knows what his author ought to have written and ‘mends his book’ accordingly. Our two scribes were immune from this weakness; they were conscientious, if unintelligent, copyists who set down what they saw or thought they saw in their book (perhaps itself a copy) without worrying about sense or metre.” Postscript, p. 145. One could easily argue that the second scribe’s cleverness (and comprehension of the text) led to the corruption, forgolden, and his desire for a strictly accurate transcript led to the correction, forhealden. It might be noted in passing that Andrew’s conception of how the scribes worked does not attempt to explain the different spellings in the two parts of the MS; and that his astonishing implication that the scribes’ exemplar was not a copy would mean that the MS was contemporary with the poem, if they copied what was before them.
could have understood to hrore as “too strongly,” but instead this scribe corrected the reading to hroðre, “joy, benefit.” He was clearly following the sense of the text on fol. 189A(197)r13 when he inadvertently wrote fyrwyrimum instead of fyrwyllum. The error could have been induced by ditography (from yr in fyr), but it was more plausibly caused by the context of the dragon episode (fyrwyrm, “fire-dragon”). In either case, the correction shows that the scribe noted an error, despite its being an acceptable word in the general context. The same alertness was needed for his correction of hogode, “he thought, resolved” (or forhogode, “scorned”) to horde, “hoard, treasure,” by erasing the g and writing r over o on fol. 190r21. Only careful proofreading and an implicit trust in his exemplar would lead the scribe to make this correction. On fol. 192v6, he has changed dæl ("share, portion") to dæd ("deed, action") by deleting the l with dots and adding a d. Dæl could easily be defended in the context. All of these corrections show how careful the scribe was to preserve the readings of his exemplar. He was not mechanically copying a text he did not understand. On the contrary, the combined evidence suggests that he was absorbed in the poem. The bulk of corrections clearly shows that he was neither ignorant nor lazy, that he read the entire poem, that he understood what he read, and that he strove for an accurate transcript.

It cannot be argued that the scribes, by careful transcription in the first place and by diligent proofreading afterward, succeeded in transmitting a flawless copy of their exemplars. But it cannot be argued either that they made and overlooked hundreds of blunders; yet all current editions of Beowulf imply this rate of error, for they all contain hundreds of editorial emendations. The scribes’ removal of ditographs can give a rough idea of the degree of thoroughness in their proofreading. There is only one ditograph in all the seventy folios that was not erased.43 In the first scribe’s section, the word hilde at the bottom of fol. 151r20 is repeated as the first word at the top of fol. 151v. It is even

43. Anyone might have erased these ditographs, of course, and, as we shall see, someone other than the scribes altered four fit numbers by erasure, most likely in early modern times. But the erasure of ditographs implies careful reading of the text, and no one was reading the text carefully (if at all) after the Old English period until modern times. It is quite safe to assume that one or the other of the scribes, who undoubtedly made the written corrections, made the erasures, too.
possible because of its unobtrusive location that this dittograph was noted by one or both of the scribes, yet harmlessly left as a catchword. An erasure at the end or the beginning of the folio might well have been more unsightly than the error itself. But even if hilde was overlooked by both scribes, the change of page helps excuse the oversight, and it is, after all, their only oversight of this kind. The scribes’ accuracy in picking up omissions cannot be demonstrated so conclusively, for omissions whether real or imagined are equally invisible. However, the cause of an omission is ordinarily homoeography, a mechanical error like dittography, whereby the scribe’s eye skips from one word to another because of some similarity. One can infer from their respective interpolations that von Schaubert believed the scribes overlooked forty-one omitted words, while Klaeber believed they overlooked fifty. Sisam would increase the number considerably. Yet we have seen how frequently the scribes have restored letters and words they omitted or started to omit. There is no compelling reason to assume their copying and proofreading in this respect were appreciably less efficient than they were in removing dittographs.

At the same time it should be acknowledged that dittographs can be removed at any time without an exemplar, while omissions are most likely to be restored only with an exemplar. It should also be admitted that the later proofreading was perhaps not a word-for-word collation with the exemplar, for Anglo-Saxon scribes may not have used the rigorous methods of modern proofreading, and Anglo-Saxon readers may not have been troubled by minor, obvious mistakes. Perhaps the scribes picked up any omissions they overlooked while copying (and they noticed many while copying) simply by rereading the Beowulf MS, and referring to the exemplar whenever an ostensible problem arose. This procedure is fallible enough, compared to modern attempts at total precision in proofreading, but it is not altogether unreliable when used by an intelligent, interested, and tutored reader, who makes a number of readings. It is obvious from their corrections that the scribes were well-qualified proofreaders of Beowulf, and that the proofreading was done

44. Perhaps an exemplar was read to a scribe while he checked his copy for errors. Under this method of proofreading, a scribe would be likely to overlook minor errors like the confusion or metathesis of letters, or the ambiguity of sloppy ligatures, but unlikely to overlook major omissions.
in several stages. Under these circumstances, it is improbable that major blunders, like contextual lacunas of any length, would have been continually overlooked. The kinds of mistakes that could be missed again and again are trivial mechanical ones: the failure to make the sign of abbreviation, or to cross an eth; an extraneous minim here and there; the omission of a letter or two; confusion between similar insular letters, like c and t, r and n, a and u, low s and f, and the like; false ligatures and spuriously combined letters in general. Errors like these could easily remain invisible, especially to someone who knew the text well.

There can be no doubt that the second scribe came to know the text very well indeed. As already mentioned, he played a larger role in the transmission of Beowulf than the first scribe. There is proof that he read it repeatedly over many years, perhaps decades, watching over the physical condition of the Ms, and repairing damages as they occurred. A good instance can be seen on fol. 192v2. Something (perhaps dampness that had penetrated the vellum) caused the ink to bleed in many readings in the upper third of the page. Between the first two lines, above the erasure in line 2, the scribe has written the words eowrū cynne·. Under ultraviolet light the same words, eowrū cynne, emerge with startling clarity in the area of the erasure, which shows that the superscript constitutes a restoration, not a correction. One must assume that the original words deteriorated in time, and that the erasure and restoration were made considerably later than the original transcript. The same holds true for the scribe’s extensive restoration of the last page. When the poem still was a separate codex, its outside covers, fols. 129r and 198v, were subject to wear and tear. The damage to the bottom right-hand corner of the first page was no doubt caused by early readers gripping the Ms by the corner.45 The damage to the last page was pervasive. The even fading of the text on this page suggests that it may have been subjected to direct and prolonged exposure to sunlight. In any event, Zupitza noted that nearly all of the text had to be freshened up by a late hand (p. 144), and Westphalen has shown in a convincing paleographical argument that the restorer was the second scribe, who after ten years or so had slightly modified his script in quite predictable ways.

45. The vellum has worn thin in this area, and the shine-through from the verso makes the fs somewhat misleading. It is worth noting that ultraviolet light partly confirms Grein’s conjectural restoration (see Klaeber, Beowulf, p. 11) [geong g]uma, for the lacuna on line 18: the first two letters are ge·.
The Beowulf Codex and the Poem

The Palimpsest and the New Text of Folio 179

The scribe also worked on fol. 179, lines 2207–2252, long after he had originally copied the text. Zupitza noted at the start of his transcription of this most badly damaged folio: "All that is distinct in the fs. in fol. 179 has been freshened up by a later hand in the ms." In the 1960s Westphalen made the stunning discovery that the folio is in fact a palimpsest, and he once again identified the script as the second scribe’s, but written about twenty years later than the original. The ordinary purpose of a palimpsest is, of course, to eradicate an old text in order to provide parchment for a new one. Believing as he did that Beowulf was an 8th-century poem imperfectly preserved in a late 10th- or early 11th-century ms, Westphalen was unable to realize the full significance of his discovery: he naturally concluded that the original text on fol. 179 must have been accidentally erased, and that the second scribe made a rather feeble effort to restore the original text. In other words, Westphalen was forced to subordinate his discovery to Zupitza’s thesis that the folio had been freshened up by a later hand. There is conclusive evidence, however, that the palimpsest was made for the usual reason, to provide parchment for a new text. The text on fol. 179 is a late revision, not a restoration.

Westphalen is probably right that it was mainly the “ungewöhnliche Schriftbild” in general, not any peculiarities in the script, that led Zupitza to assert that all that was legible on fol. 179 had been freshened up by a later hand (Westphalen, p. 41). It is sure, at any rate, that Zupitza never justified his claim on the basis of any dissimilarity in the script. With fol. 179 Zupitza was faced with the sudden appearance of a folio that had been obviously damaged after copying, where clear and distinct letters and fragments randomly stood out sharply in the middle of weak traces and effective gaps, and where parts of lines appeared to have been deliberately effaced while the vellum was wet. He reasonably enough deduced that something had happened to the original text, and that the fragmentary text that remained must have been freshened up by a restorer. Unfortunately, Zupitza never explained his theory. We have only the listing in his notes to the transcript of fol. 179 of sixteen separate cases of letters that he claimed had been inaccurately freshened up. He asserted in these notes, moreover, that the original letters were clearly discernible beneath the mistakes of the restorer. It will be helpful
to quote these notes here, since they constitute Zupitza’s only explicitjustification for assigning the text of fol. 179 to a later hand:

r2: *wintru* is owing to the later hand, the *u* standing in the place of an original *a* (cf. the fs.)
r4: *o* in *ón* written by the later hand instead of an original *a*, which is still pretty distinct
r6: *stærne* is owing to the later hand, *r* standing on an original *p*
r14: *wealdum* the later hand instead of *wealdum*, the *a* being still recognisable
r18: *fleah* first hand [that is, not *fleoh*, as the MS reads]
r18: *weall* . . . but *w* stands on an original *f*, which is still recognisable
r19: *muvatide*, no doubt, the second hand [but no suggestions for what is beneath]
v2: *fes* freshened up, but *s* seems to stand on an original *r*
v8: *si* the later hand, but *i* seems to stand on an original *e*
v10: *rihde* the later hand, but *wende* the first
v14: *innon* the later hand, but *o* stands on an original *a*
v16: *foc* later hand, but originally *feo*
v17: *moestan* later hand, but I think I see an original *o* under the *a*, *a* also seems to stand on another vowel (*u* or *o*?)
v19: *reorh bealc* later hand, but the first *r* stands on an original *f*, and *c* on an original *o*
v20: *pænæ* later hand, no doubt; nor do I see any sign of the third letter having originally been *r*

These notes and Zupitza’s failure to explain any details of his theory almost inevitably led to the widespread confusion among textual scholars that Westphalen meticulously traces.

Zupitza never hinted at why the original script had all but disappeared, yet surely this stage must be accounted for first, before an overall restoration can be entertained, much less accepted. Since most editors, notably Klaeber and von Schaubert, have mainly depended on Zupitza’s fs, rather than on the ms, Zupitza’s theory was accepted uncritically by them, giving it a factual status it had not earned. At the same time, no scholar who checked the ms itself was able to corroborate, in every instance, what Zupitza claimed was the original reading beneath the restorer’s mistakes. Essentially, the confusion that evolved centered around the sixteen putative errors, and scholars, as Westphalen
has shown in embarrassing detail, frequently forgot that Zupitza maintained that *all* of the distinct script, not just the mistakes, had been freshened up. But in fairness, Zupitza must be blamed for the confusion. One often has to guess just what readings Zupitza regarded as “distinct.” For example, in line 5 of the recto, Zupitza transcribes *hlæwe*. The reading is hardly distinct, in either the *fs* or the *ms*, and most other scholars have seen either *haeper* or *hope* (the *l* of Zupitza’s *hlæwe* is especially unlikely). All that is truly distinct here is part of the *h*, yet Zupitza notes, “very little of *hlæwe* freshened up; the *l* indistinct, *lawe* pretty certain.” The implication is that the *h* was not freshened up, but that at least part of *lawe* was. Yet anyone looking at the *ms* would have to conclude that (if anything) part of the *h* had been freshened up, but nothing after it. Indeed, it seems likely that “indistinct” is a printer’s error for “is distinct.” The notes highlighting the restorer’s errors contribute to the confusion, for Zupitza repeatedly asserts that the words in which they occur were written by the later hand, which can (and did) leave the impression that other distinct words had not been freshened up by the later hand.

The state of the uncertainty over Zupitza’s theory before Westphalen’s work appeared is reflected in Malone’s rather surprising decision not to take a definite stand of his own, either for or against the theory, in his own *fs*. He says:

This leaf is in bad condition not only at the top and side edges but also on many parts of the surface recto. Indeed, Z[upitza] states categorically that “all that is distinct” in his facsimile of the folio “has been freshened up by a later hand in the *ms*,” and he distinguishes between original readings and changed ones made by this later hand. Others, especially Sedgefield, have disputed Z’s accuracy here, finding no evidence in the *ms* that letters were touched up, though recognizing that this folio, like many others in the codex, shows altered readings. In the following, such alterations are duly signalized, as they are for the other folios, but the reader will be left to judge for himself how much touching up (if any) there has been, apart from changes in the text. (*Nowell Codex*, p. 83)

Obviously, a reader is in no position to make such a judgment on the basis of a *fs*. Malone’s misunderstanding of the theory can be seen, as Westphalen notices (p. 52), in the comment that Zupitza distinguished
between “original readings and changed ones.” In fact, Zupitza only
distinguished between partially or wholly freshened up readings (that
is, all that is distinct, whether or not they were restored accurately) and
the weak traces of original readings that were not freshened up at all.
As Westphalen also observes, it is clear that Malone, despite his seem-
ing impartiality, rejected Zupitza’s claim that all that was distinct was
in a later hand, for he uses examples from fol. 179 to illustrate some of
the scribe’s letterforms.

Westphalen’s revolution harmonized Zupitza’s theory that the folio
had been freshened up by a later hand with the opposing theory that
the handwriting was the second scribe’s. He showed that the second
scribe wrote the text on fol. 179, but much later than when he originally
copied the other folios. And unlike Zupitza, Westphalen did not neglect
to explain why the original script needed to be restored at a later time,
for he explained the bad condition of the vellum surface as a palimpsest.
In short, Westphalen was the first scholar to address the paleographical
issue and the bad condition of the vellum as a single problem. The origi-
nal text, Westphalen argued, had been deliberately eradicated by scrap-
ing, rubbing, and washing down the vellum. The damage to both sides
of fol. 179, Westphalen reasoned, clearly distinguishes it from the acci-
dental damage, by exposure, to the last page of Beowulf (fol. 198v).46
The surface of both sides of fol. 179 is napped, which seems to have
been caused by scouring the folio with a liquid solution to prepare a
palimpsest. Westphalen’s description is remarkably corroborated by the
sheet collation: fols. 179 and 188 form the outside sheet of the twelfth
gathering, yet it is clear that fol. 188 was not subjected to the same
treatment that spoiled the text on fol. 179. It follows that fol. 179 was

46. Wolfgang Keller had suggested that, if the part of the ms containing the dragon
episode once existed separately, there would be a reason for the bad condition of fols.
179r (the first page) and 198v (the last). His explanation ignored, however, the bad
accepted the thesis, still ignoring fol. 179v, and further suggested that the discoloration
on these pages “seems to have been caused by the application of some chemical in the
attempt to improve their legibility.” Wrenn, Beowulf, rev. Bolton, p. 12. There is no
justification for this claim. The Thorkelin transcripts show that the text was in as bad
shape in 1787 as it is today, and no one would have been treating the ms with chemi-
cals before Thorkelin’s time. Westphalen’s elucidative analysis of these theories is
excellent (Beowulf, pp. 28–42).
washed down after it had been stitched into the gathering. After a close look at the vellum of fol. 179, particularly in comparison with its conjugate leaf, fol. 188, one would have to agree with Westphalen that the folio is indeed a palimpsest.

Westphalen’s comparison of the script on fol. 179 with the script on the other folios copied by the second scribe is exhaustive, and his conclusions are compelling. There can be little doubt that the script on the palimpsest is still the second scribe’s, but with a few notable developments that can be quite reasonably attributed to the scribe’s maturity. If Westphalen’s calculations are right, the second scribe was still involving himself with Beowulf and the Beowulf MS up to twenty years after he had originally copied it. The question is, What was he doing on fol. 179 of Beowulf so many years later?

Westphalen’s brilliant investigation of fol. 179 is, by itself, as Malone has said of the book as a whole, “a landmark in the textual criticism of the poem.” The one shortcoming in the investigation, and one that Westphalen was ready to admit, was his hypothesis to explain the reason for the palimpsest, and hence the reason why the second scribe was obliged to “freshen up” the original text in the first place. Naturally enough, Westphalen could not conceive of a situation in which a palimpsest of a folio from Beowulf could have been authorized. He believed that the MS is a late copy of an early poem: as he says, “Die Urform ist uns für immer verloren” (p. 17). And if the palimpsest of fol. 179 were made for the usual reason, the present text on fol. 179 might very well be an Urform. In the face of this apparent impossibility, Westphalen suggested that the palimpsest was begun by a parsimonious scribe from

47. The alternative is that the original fol. 179 was cut from the gathering and replaced with the present defective leaf. But this is highly unlikely, first, because the scribe would not want to dismember the outside sheet of a gathering, and second, because there would be no reason for the defective text.

48. The development of the a form is the most convincing of all: it has gone from a sharp quadrangular form to a rounded triangular form, resembling a modern cursive a. Its variants are either rounded or pointed at the top. The incipient development of this new letterform can occasionally be observed on other folios (when the left side of the quadrangular a is shorter than usual, for example), but the rate of occurrence on other folios is minimal. See Westphalen’s important paleographical study of all the letterforms on fol. 179 (Beowulf, pp. 58–69).

49. Review of Tilman Westphalen, p. 186.
the monastic establishment that owned the Beowulf ms. He needed
parchment, and Beowulf seemed expendable. Fortunately, Westphalen
goes on, the mistake was discovered before all of the writing on
fol. 179 had been obliterated (and before other folios were similarly
spoiled), and the second scribe undertook the task of restoring his earlier
work. He did the best he could, but was hampered by the extent of the
damage, and by the extent of his own ignorance, inattention, and lazi-
ness (pp. 96 ff.).

The explanation for the palimpsest, and so for the need to “freshen
up” the text on fol. 179, is almost too chilling to contemplate. Westphalen
himself was not committed to it, and admits rather apologetically,
“All dies klingt reichlich hypothetisch und mehr nach einem
Roman denn nach der nüchternen Untersuchung eines Kodex” (p. 96).
Westphalen was only committed to what he had so impressively shown
to be true: that fol. 179 is a palimpsest, and that the new script was the
second scribe’s at a later stage of development. It can now be shown,
however, that Westphalen did not in fact prove Zupitza’s theory that
fol. 179 had been freshened up by a later hand, and that he should have
abandoned Zupitza’s theory as soon as he realized that the folio was a
palimpsest. For something far more important than Zupitza’s theory
was now before him. Without recognizing it, Westphalen had proved
that Beowulf was revised on fol. 179 ten to twenty years after the extant
ms was copied.

Before considering the new text it is necessary to show why Zupitza’s
theory, and Westphalen’s refinement of it, can and must be rejected. In
the first place, if the scribe were merely freshening up traces of his origi-

50. But parchment was not so hard to come by in England. N. Denholm-Young
points out that “the lack of ... palimpsests in England is perhaps in part due to the
prevalence of sheep-breeding, so that there was never any real shortage of writing-

Plates 14a and 14b. Fol. 179, recto and verso, of the Beowulf ms is a palimp-
sest. The frontispiece reproduces the recto in color.
form of the a would not appear, at least not with such convincing regularity, for there would only be traces of the pointed quadrangular a to trace over. The careless stagger of the later duct would disappear under the influence of the earlier, more uniform and precise writing. It is precisely the freedom and fluidity of the later script that make it possible to recognize what is different about it in comparison to the scribe's earlier work. The freshening-up theory is obliged to maintain that the scribe worked without an exemplar, or the scribe would have been able to restore the entire text. But if the scribe had to move laboriously from letter to letter, trying to decipher indistinct traces, he can hardly have written with the freedom and fluidity Westphalen rightly ascribes to his mature script.

The freshening-up theory also depends very heavily on the scribe's carelessness, laziness, and inattention. Surely these cannot be factors here. The scribe's only task was to try to restore a damaged folio, not copy an entire codex. Yet according to Zupitza's readings (which Westphalen accepts) the scribe inaccurately restored no fewer than sixteen letters, which are supposed to be still clearly visible beneath the mistakes. The percentage of error—nearly one blunder every two and one half lines—is staggering, particularly if the correct readings are still distinct today, one thousand years after the scribe made his meaningless blunders. The scribe's ignorance of his own language is no less remarkable. On the recto, lines 12–13, he is supposed to have freshened up pet he gebolge wes, rather than pet he gebolgen wes, equivalent to writing today "that he was enraged" instead of "that he was enraged." On the verso, line 16, he is supposed to have mistakenly freshened up fea worda cuæð, a common expression meaning "he spoke few words," to fæc (-)orda cuæð. The w in worda, Zupitza tells us, was not freshened up. Today in the MS (or even in the FSS), the traces of the n in gebolgen, the a in fea, and the w in worda, are all quite distinct, and they must have been at least as clear a thousand years ago. The best explanation for these traces, and others like them, is that the ink of the new text sometimes failed to adhere properly to the palimpsest. A likely reason for this is that the palimpsest was used too soon after its preparation, so that in its damp state it was unable to retain the ink uniformly.51

51. Denholm-Young notes that parchment could be cleaned "without pumice stone with a preparation of cheese, milk, or flour." Handwriting, p. 58, n. 5.
Excluding for the moment the first line and a half of the verso, and the large gaps on the recto in lines 5, 8–12, and 18–21, which together present a markedly different appearance, this explanation would account for the general appearance of the text, both recto and verso. On the recto the ink is diluted, and often blurry. In line 2, for instance, the first half of the line is in a strong, deep brown, but from -tig on, the ink becomes a faded rusty brown. The fault lies in the condition of the vellum when it was written on, not in the ink. A damp palimpsest fits the circumstances. On the verso the ink is generally much darker, and is seldom diluted or blurry. The difference in appearance is no doubt attributable to the difference in texture and absorbency between a hair and a flesh side. On the verso the ink seems to have flaked off frequently, leaving faded traces of the original ink behind. Sometimes an entire word was affected, as in fæt v2; sometimes part of a word, as in ær in sedær v9; sometimes an entire letter, as the w in worda v16; and sometimes only part of a letter, as the a (that consequently looks like a c) in fea v16. Once this kind of damage to the text on the verso is recognized, most of the scribe’s myopic blunders are cleared up. The so-called c in fea can be used as an illustration. It is not a c at all, but a partly damaged a. There is no other c like it on the folio. An especially appropriate comparison can be made with fec v11, which provides an authentic ec ligature. Then, to see what happened to the a in fea, it is helpful to compare the ea ligature in gearo v12, for the right side of the a furnishes a striking parallel. If the ink of the off-stroke had failed to hold to the vellum, it would appear that the scribe had falsely freshened up gea- to gec-. Many of the scribe’s supposed blunders on the verso are nothing more than trompe l’oeil of this kind, which have established themselves as ms readings.

There is a legitimate doubt, then, that the scribe falsely freshened up some letters. A new transcript of the folio will show that there is no reason to believe that any letters were falsely freshened up, and this is the only evidence Zupitza explicitly gives that the folio was freshened up at all. A close examination of the gaps in the first line and a half of the verso, and in lines 5, 8–12, and 18–21 of the recto, will show that the palimpsest was not just partly freshened up. These gaps were definitely made by rubbing off parts of the text after the palimpsest was written on. The fss give a very inaccurate impression of the gaps on the recto. They suggest that the writing in the gaps has simply faded away,
and the overall appearance of the ink on the recto reinforces this false impression. Actually, the gaps were heavily rubbed while the vellum was damp, leaving them uniquely discolored and napped. Once again, a likely reason for the damage is that the palimpsest was written upon too soon after it was prepared, while it was still damp. As a result, the ink in these areas may have blotted or run together, and if the scribe then tried to erase the mess, the combination of fresh ink and damp vellum would account for the gray discoloration and the napping that characterize these gaps. Under ultraviolet light the gray discoloration of the gaps is sharply accentuated, which suggests that it derives from ink that has permeated the vellum. If the gaps were made when the general palimpsest was prepared, there would be no reason for them to stand out under ultraviolet light.

But there is clearer proof that the gaps were made after the new text had been written on the palimpsest. The gap in line 5 between hea and hord can be used as an example. The heaviest rubbing is confined to the upper and lower extremities of minims, so that part of an ascender has not been rubbed off in the middle of the gap, and clear traces of a descender are visible toward the end of the gap. Zupitza and Westphalen argue that the ascender was partially freshened up, but this is an untenable argument: no matter what the letter originally was, the scribe would know that he could safely freshen it up at least as far as the lower minim line. The question is settled by the fact that the gray discoloration of the gap has left a filmy residue over the dark brown a in hea-. Obviously, hea- must have been written before the rubbing that follows it. Hence the palimpsest at one time contained a full text, but some of the new text, for whatever reason, was subsequently erased a second time. Thus, the text on the palimpsest was not partially freshened up, but partially obliterated after the new copy was finished.

The great lacuna between sc(ea)pen r21 and sceapen v1, as well as the gap on v2, are of extraordinary interest. The gap after sc(ea)pen on the recto is not accurately represented in the fss. It is part of a large, interconnected erasure, typically discolored, which winds its way back through lines 20, between gyst- and br(o)g(a), 19, between syn- and -sig, and 18, between fleoh and pea-, and even includes in its snakelike progress the ea in sc(ea)pen. It does not include the gap at the beginning of r21, which is not discolored. On the other hand, the fss are quite accurate in representing the appearance of the gaps in the first
line and a half of the verso, even including the gray discoloration. Here the rubbing has not napped the vellum, as it has on the recto, though it has made the vellum extremely thin (what looks like a point before sceapen v1 in the Fs is in fact a tiny hole). Some of the erased letters in line 1 are still quite distinct, despite the rubbing and the discoloration, and some can be identified with confidence. This alone shows that the erasing must have been done after the new text was copied on the palimpsest, for there is no conceivable reason why some of these letters would not have been freshened up with the rest of the page. Moreover, the ink in some of the traces is still strong enough to identify as that used throughout the verso. The general appearance of the gaps on the verso thus substantiates the view that the palimpsest at one time contained a full text, part of which was later deliberately effaced.

The writing that can be recovered with relative certainty from line 1 of the verso is: roga s ... (fyren) sceapen. The second stroke of the r in roga is clear and distinct, even in the Fs; the first stroke, the descender, is faint and partly covered by the paper frame, but the letter as a whole seems clear enough. The o, like many of the o’s on the folio, is angular (cf., for example, ongan r4, folc r12, on v4), though not as angular as the Fs suggests. The bottom is faint, but all sides close. The shape of the g is slightly distorted by the discoloration, but clear traces of the large descending loop unequivocally identify the letter in the Fs as well as in the Ms. In the Ms the g loop is emphasized by the pattern of the discolored erasure. In the Ms the top-stroke of the g is also easy to see, though part of it coincides with a torn edge of vellum. The next letter, a, is exceptionally clear both in the Fs and in the Ms. It is the scribe’s later, rounded a, very much like the one in mwaatidr 19. After a space of 5 mm. there is a low insular s. For the next 30 mm. no letters can be identified with any certainty from the many traces of ink (the darkest of which, above se v2, is mainly a shadow in the Fs, from a deep wrinkle in the vellum). Then, directly above the high e head in feor v2, there is an f: the top of the vertical descender and the top-stroke are clear, and there is a trace of the cross-stroke at the minim line. All that remains of the next letter is a single minim, yet it leans leftward, which suggests that it is the first stroke of y. There is no trace, however, of the hairline (the second stroke of y) nor of the dot. The next letter is surely an r, with both descender and minim stroke intact. The remaining discolored ink mass is the en ligature, which is clearer in the Ms than in
the fs: the high e head is faint, but recognizable, and the bottom of the e hooks in to meet the first minim of the n, all of which is quite distinct. As mentioned before, the point preceding sceapen is actually a hole in the parchment.

The reason this text was deliberately erased from the palimpsest is that it is a ditto graph from lines 20–21 of the recto: br(o)g(a) stod hwaedre / . . . sc(ea)pen. A ditto graph, in this case, is not by any means useless, for the lost word before sc(ea)pen on the recto can be restored as fyren, and the conjectural o and a in br(o)g(a), and the ea in sc(ea)pen are confirmed. The measurements between broga and sceapen corroborate these conclusions. The gap between -roga and sceapen on the verso is 57 mm. The gap between broga and sceapen on the recto cannot be so precisely measured, because it splits between lines 20 and 21, but a conservative estimate can be made. From the end of the traces of the a in broga to the end of the vellum in line 20 measures 39 mm.; and from the start of line 21 to sceapen measures exactly 20 mm. Thus the measurement of the gap between broga and sceapen on the recto is 59 mm., compared to the 57 mm. between -roga and sceapen on the verso. Moreover, there are 20 mm. from the beginning of fyren to sceapen on the verso, which corresponds exactly to the 20-mm. gap before sceapen on the recto, line 21. The ink traces are extremely faint, and the vellum badly napped, in this area on the recto, and there is a danger of seeing here what one is looking for. But the one piece of dark ink at the beginning of the gap looks like the top of an f, which is followed by a faint diagonal (the first stroke of y), and then by a short descender (the first stroke of r), the extremity of which survives as a point. Certainly the meager vestiges of the original writing in this gap do not disprove fyren, while they suggest it to anyone admittedly looking for fyren.

Possibly sceapen was left on the verso as a catchword, to indicate that, despite the appearances, nothing had been lost from the text between the two sceapen’s. The apparent problem with this explanation is that it would mean that nothing had been lost from the text after sceapen on the recto. It would mean that everything after sceapen on the recto had been deliberately deleted, and that despite the physical gaps in the ms from line r21 to line v2, there is no contextual loss to the text. The text itself supports the theory, for hwaedre fyren-sceapen is an on-verse, and se faer begeat is an off-verse, and the line as a whole is
metrically and alliteratively sound. Nor is the syntax (adverb, object, subject, verb) unusual: in fact, it is exactly paralleled in da hie se fœr begeat, “when disaster befell them” (line 1068). Thus, hweæðre fyren-sceapan se fœr begeat may be translated, “yet disaster befell that crime,” or “sought out that wicked deed,” or the like. If there is no textual lacuna between sceapan on the recto and se fœr on the verso, the material that was erased before se fœr in line 2v must have been identical with whatever followed sceapan on the recto. In other words, the erased text in line 2 continued the dittograph begun in line 1 of the verso. Whatever this may have been has permanently been deleted from the text, and the scribe, to show that nothing had really been lost, left sceapan as the catchword.

The huge dittograph may not have been a mistake, however. As the investigation of his corrections and erasures shows, the scribe was not prone to making dittographic errors, and none of his other repetitions exceeds a single word in length. It is hard to believe that the scribe made such a gross blunder here, when all he had to copy was a single folio. And there is no need to assume that a mistake has been made, for the problem can be explained in terms of the damage that occurred to the new text on the recto, after it was written on the damp palimpsest. The revised text of fol. 179 was shorter, by about two lines, than the original text it replaced. The scribe began copying the new text on the recto, but by the time he had finished it was evident that parts of the text (on lines 5, 8–12, and 18–21) would have to be erased and rewritten, because of the unsatisfactory way in which the ink had adhered to the damp vellum. This explains why parts of the text were erased in these areas after the new text was written on the palimpsest. And since the scribe had about two extra lines on the verso, he recopied in the first line and a half some of the damaged text from the recto. A restoration of the damages on the recto was never carried out, of course, but apparently was in progress when the scribe later erased the dittographic material on the verso. The hypothesis is complicated, and not susceptible to proof, but the evidence itself is dreadfully complicated, and it needs to be accounted for in some believable way.

Because the bulk of this evidence has not been available before, and because it materially affects one’s view of the text on fol. 179, a new transcript of the folio is necessary. The transcriptions, which sometimes differ from Zupitza’s, are based on a painstaking analysis of the folio
under high-intensity light, an invention Zupitza could not have used. The value of a strong and stable light source should not be underestimated: it produces stable ink traces, while natural light, even direct sunlight, produces disturbingly variable traces, as even Zupitza acknowledged. High-intensity light undoubtedly gives us the best view of the text available to the naked eye. Ultraviolet light, with the exception of one reading, did not enhance this view, but it is quite possible that other technological means now available will. For instance, qualified scholars must be urged to try, using up-to-date techniques and equipment, infrared photography as well as electronic photography and digital image processing. These methods are very likely to enhance the ink traces and firmly establish some currently disputable readings. Until these methods have been tried it is undesirable to pretend we have an established text for this folio. High-intensity light alone undermines the "received text" established by Zupitza a century ago. With variable lighting, what Zupitza saw, or thought he saw, in the MS was certainly affected by his belief that the original text had been freshened up, often inaccurately, by a later hand. While his transcript of the folio is basically accurate, his theory, particularly with regard to the supposed errors of the later hand, caused him to misrepresent the MS in some places. Along with the following transcriptions, Zupitza's readings will be discussed where they are felt to be wrong. To avoid confusion, purely conjectural restorations are not made in the transcript, and doubtful readings are placed within parentheses. The Thorkelin readings—at the end of the lines on the recto, and at the beginning of the lines on the verso—are separated by open parentheses to facilitate reference to the FS or the MS.

r1: beowulf bræde rice on hand gehweard. Except for bræde, which Zupitza transcribes as brade, the FS is good. The high e head is very faded, and covered by the transparent paper strip that holds the folio to the paper frame, but it is still visible in the MS under strong light. Both Thorkelin transcripts read bræde, from a time when the reading was not obscured by the transparent paper strip. The e tongue

52. For recent discussions of the value of these methods in the study of palimpsests, see Applied Infrared Photography; and John F. Benton, Alan R. Gillespie, and James M. Soha, "Digital Image-Processing Applied to the Photography of Manuscripts: With Examples Drawn from the Pincus MS of Arnald of Villanova."
of the æ has not faded, and Malone mistook the distorted remnants of this original æ as a unique example of an “oe” type of a (Nowell Codex, p. 84); but the same argument could be made for the æ distorted by fading in was r13. No special explanation is needed for the fading of the e head, in view of the similar fading in rice on, and throughout the folio in general. The spelling brede (for bradē) is the first of many linguistic or orthographic anomalies on this folio. Together they reflect the incipient breakdown of the Late West Saxon literary dialect, in the intrusion of late (seemingly Northern) dialectisms. In other words, the language (or the spellings), as well as the handwriting, is later on fol. 179 than it is elsewhere in the ms.

r2: hege heold tela fiftig wintru wa(es ða. Zupitza says that the u in wintru is “standing in the place of an original a,” and he may be right. All that is certain is that the scribe finally intended the letter to be a u, which is another late linguistic anomaly on the folio. As Malone says, “The u of wintru 2 is an alteration of a and reflects the speech of someone in whose dialect fiftig did not take the partitive construction” (Nowell Codex, p. 84). The form wintru is an analogical (neuter) plural, and there is no need for a specific genitive inflection. Uninflected winter is common. The ink is a strong, dark brown for the first half of the line, but from -tig it becomes a diluted, rusty brown.

r3: frod cyning eald ðel weard odða(et. As Zupitza says, the “w in weard looks very much like p,” but it is not a p (pace Malone, Nowell Codex, p. 84), as a comparison with the scribe’s other p’s will show. From eald on the ink becomes diluted.

r4: òn ongan deorcù nihtù draca (ric[s]i)an. There is no trace of an original a beneath the o in òn. The word is apparently a very early example of the linguistic and orthographic transition from an to on. The ink begins to fade in deorcù, and is decidedly diluted in nihtù draca.53

53. Malone is well worth quoting for the Thorkelin reading at the end of the line: “A ends the line with rics an (his s is on an erasure); B first wrote ric an and the s that Thorkelin, years later, inserted after c was probably got from A; it seems likely that the ms had ricsian, with a second i so faded that A and B saw only a blank space there; the word is now gone.” Nowell Codex, p. 84. In view of the evidence from the Thorkelin transcripts it would be wrong to charge the Beowulf scribe with a blunder here.
The Beowulf Codex and the Poem

5: see on hea(um haep) hord be west (ode. This is the first line in which part of the new text was rubbed off afterward, leaving the vellum napped and discolored between hea- and hord. As mentioned earlier, the rubbing left a light gray film over the dark brown ink of the a in hea-, and has also seemed to affect the strength of the ink of the h in hord at the other side of the gap. The fs is misleading in that it does not show the roughness and the discoloration of the vellum in the gap, nor the grayish film on the a of hea-, which proves that the rubbing was done after the new text had been copied. Under high-intensity light, the erased letters, -um haep, seem certain. As in the first four lines, the ink on the right side of the page is considerably more faded, or diluted, than on the left side.

6: stan beorh stearne stig under la(eg. The fs is accurate. The first stroke of the r in stearne is particularly dark, with a slight gloss to it; the second stroke is dark only at the top, making it look as though an insular s was written over an original r. This r is remarkably like the r of faer v2, which Zupitza says is “faes freshened up, but s seems to stand on an original r.” In both cases the off-stroke of the r has faded, probably because the scribe was applying less pressure to his pen as he finished the letter. Both r’s have unusually long descenders.54

7: eldū uncud þer on innan giéng · nið (a. The fs is fairly accurate, except that it does not show the bleeding of the ink beneath -cud, which may be a mild indication of the kind of bleeding that necessitated the deliberate removal of readings in the gaps. The faintness of the i in nið- at the end of the line, moreover, is caused by the transparent strip that holds the folio to the paper frame, rather than by fading. The ink is somewhat diluted in -dū and -iáng, but on the whole the strength of the ink throughout the line is unusually uniform (dark brown, with a slight gloss). There is a ligature between the two n’s of innan, and beneath the last stroke of the first n there is an erased descender; together, they suggest that the scribe wrote an insular s or f, but immediately corrected his mistake. In the fs, the erased descender appears to

54. Malone is right that, contrary to what Zupitza says, there is no sign of an original p beneath the r, and that “we must emend to get a reading that makes sense.” Nowell Codex, p. 84. A possible reading is stanbeorh stear[c]ne, “stark” or “severe rocky cliff,” rather than staepe, “steep.” The first minim of the n has almost a c-like bow, and the scribe may have inadvertently made an n from the first stroke of his c.
float between r7 and r8, but in the MS it seems clearly to come from beneath the first n of innan, r7.

r8: nathwylc (se þe ne) h gefeng hæðnū ho(rde). The Rs is good for showing the extant traces. Everything between nat- and hæðnū was rubbed off, but not as much heavy rubbing was done over -hwylc and gefeng, and both can be read in the MS with relative certainty. Sedgefield in his edition, and more recently Westphalen (p. 45), construed the erased descender from r7 as an ascender in r8, and read geprang instead of gefeng. A glance at the Rs will show that there is not enough room for geprang. The rubbing in this line, as in r5, stays for the most part within the confines of minim strokes, so that the ascenders of the h and l of hwylce, the point over the y, the ascender of the h preceding gefeng, and the three descendes in gefeng are all clearly visible.

r9: hond (ger:::m:::) since f更高的 ne (he ♀). The ink is very dark, almost black, in hond and sin-, after which it becomes diluted, and is especially weak in ne. The discoloration caused by rubbing off the text in the gap has left a gray film, which can be clearly seen in the MS in any light, on the s of since. Again, this proves that the rubbing was done after the new text was written onto the palimpsest. A letter (perhaps h) seems to have been erased after f更高的. In this line and throughout my transcription a colon represents an illegible letter.

r10: syððan (:::) þ(eah) δ (: le:::) s.loopende (be). The Rs is fairly reliable. The ink is very dark, again almost black, at the beginning of the line, and also for the letters þ and δ and the ascender after δ, in the gap. The rubbing was done around the δ and beneath the ascender of the l in le:: (Zupitza suggests that this word is he, but there are more ink traces after the ascender than a minim and an e). The þ, however, was written over the rubbed and discolored vellum; presumably the scribe tested the vellum's ability to receive new writing after the rubbed area had thoroughly dried. The vertical stroke (not mentioned by Zupitza) immediately before the s of sloopende appears to be a high caroline s.

r11: syre(d hraede) þeofes crafte þ si(e). The Rs is generally clear; the ink is diluted except in a few places where the vellum is napped, and has absorbed the ink (the r in syre-, es in þeofes). The restored reading, hraede ("quickly"), can be read with confidence, though the
usual restoration is *wurde*. The spellings *hraede* (instead of *hraede*, *hraēde*) and *sie* (instead of *sio*) are unique to fol. 179, and thus are part of the evidence that the text on this folio constitutes a more advanced stage of the Late West Saxon literary dialect.⁵⁵

r12: *diad (onfand) bufolc beorn(a) ð hege.* The fs is quite reliable, aside from failing to show the abrasions on the vellum between -δ- and -folc. The readings *-iod* and *bu-* are faint but distinct in the ms. Between them, the usual restoration, *onfand*, is highly probable. *Bufolc* (cf. *bifylc*), “neighboring people, region,” is another linguistic anomaly on the folio. The *a* in *beorn(a)* may be *ū* (that is, *um*) instead.

r13: *bolgen wes. XXXII.* The fs is accurate. The *n* in *bolgen* is faded, but still quite distinct in the ms and the fs. The faint marks between *wes* and the fitt number are shine-through from the verso, but the condition of the vellum here suggests that the original text (before the palimpsest was made) may have extended beyond *wes*, and perhaps up to a few millimeters of the fitt number.

r14: *Nealles (nas)ge weoldū wyrhmorda(n).* A critical new reading in my transcript is *nas* for Zupitza’s *mid*. The *n* is distinct. What Zupitza mistook for the third minim of an *m* is the *a*-bow of an ash, which also is distinct, and may be fruitfully compared with the ash in *wes* immediately above it in r13. What Zupitza took for an *i* is the main bar of the digraph: the *a*-loop to the left is triangular, and the *e*-loop to the right is large and unruly, like many of the *e*-heads on the folio. A millimeter to the right of this *e*-head (which Zupitza mistook for the tail of a *d*) there is a high caroline *s*, faintly visible even in the fs. In the ms, some rusty brown ink traces are still intact on the *s*, especially at the top and at the slight jag at the base of the curve (upper minim line).⁵⁶ As Malone says, there is no indication that the *o* in *ge-weoldum* is written over an original *a*; the spelling may be viewed as

⁵⁵. Sisam makes the relevant point that dialect begins to intrude more often into the standard Late West Saxon literary dialect as the 11th century advances (*Studies*, p. 153).

⁵⁶. Zupitza’s very doubtful reading, *mid*, which all editors accept, left the principal clause without a verb; this in turn obliged the editors to emend ms *wyrhmorda craft*, which was almost certainly *wyrhmordan craft* before the edge of the ms crumbled, to *wyrhmord ab rac*. Surely a sounder procedure would have been to emend or reject the reading *mid*. 
the common Northern confusion between $ea$ and $eo$. The large capital $N$ at the beginning of r14–15 is very dark, though, as the $fs$ shows, some of the ink has flaked off. The $fs$ also shows that the vellum beneath the capital is very rough, and the shape of the roughened area suggests that the $N$ may have replaced a different capital (perhaps $H$ or $W$) from the original text. A minim overlooked by Zupitza at the end of the line is presumably part of an original $n$.

r15: $crafted$ $sylfes$ $willu$ $sede$ $hi$ $sare$ ($ge$). The $fs$ is good; the ink in $sa$- is very faded, while in -re it is very dark.

r16: $sceod$ $acfor$ $prea$ $nedlan$ $p(e:)$ $nat$. The $fs$ is fairly trustworthy. The lack of rulings on the palimpsest is most evident in the $fs$ by the way $sceod$ is out of alignment with the words that follow it. Whatever came after the thorn ($egn$, $eow$, $eow$?) was not rubbed off deliberately, for the vellum is neither discolored nor abraded. Apparently the ink failed to adhere to an improperly prepared surface (after the $a$ in $prea$, the ink becomes increasingly diluted and blurred).

r17: $hwylces$ $haleda$ $bearna$ $hete$ $sweng(eas)$. The $fs$ is good. Zupitza says, "$hwylces$ not freshened up," but it seems rather that it has been rubbed off, napping but not discoloring the vellum. On the other hand, -$arna$ $hete$ is faint and blurred, but the parchment is not napped.

r18: $fleoh$ (::::::) $pea(rfa)$ $7\delta er$ $inne$ $weall(l$. Zupitza says that the $o$ in $fleoh$ stands on an original $a$, but there is no trace of this $a$. The spelling of the $ms$, as Malone suggests (Nowell Codex, p. 85), should be seen with $geweoldum$ r14 as an example of the Northern orthographical confusion between $ea$ and $eo$. The same explanation may account for $weall$ (instead of first preterit $weoll$), at the end of the line (from $weallan$, "to boil"?). The reading $weall$ is confirmed by both Thorkelin transcripts, though it is usually emended to $fealh$, on Zupitza's claim that $f$ was falsely freshened up to $wynn$. Indeed, the $wynn$ may have been written over an original $f$, for the $wynn$ is a bit distorted (though less so in the $ms$ than it appears in the $fs$); but since there is no change in ink there is no justification for Zupitza's claim. If anything, it should be viewed as a correction. The gap begins the serpentine erasure that ends at the end of r21. The reading $pearfa$ is relatively sure in its entirety.

r19: $seog$ $syn(by)sig$ $sona$ $mutade$ $\tilde{f}$ (::::::). The long, discolored erasure that begins in r18 between $fleoh$ and $pearfa$ cuts through the
line between syn and -sig, though by- still seems faintly legible. The ms mwatide is clearly a case of a false ligature (for one thing, mw- is an impossible combination). 57

r20: δā gyst (e ::re) broga stod hwæ(ðre). The interconnected rubbing that began in r18 continues on this line between gyst- and broga. The -e and the -re in this gap are faintly readable in the ms, though not in the fs. The o and a in broga are faintly visible, and they are confirmed by the dittograph on v1. At the end of the line, -ðre, with part of the e head chipped off from the fire damage, is very light, but distinct.

The readings by collation from r21–v1, as explained above in detail, are: (fyren) sceapen. Since the corresponding gaps after sceapen on r21 and v2 were both made deliberately, it was suggested above that the former readings here were also dittographic, but were permanently deleted from the text, presumably as part of the revision of the folio. Otherwise, the text on the verso is in much better shape than it is on the recto. Aside from the first line and a half, the scribe has not had to eradicate large areas of the text, as he did for the damaged readings on the recto. There are still many problematic readings on the verso, however, which are mainly caused by the failure of the ink to adhere to the vellum in some places. The distortions this occasionally produced in the letterforms seemed to support Zupitza’s freshening-up theory, but not on closer analysis.

v2: [deleted readings] se fēr begeat sinc fæt(:). The fs is not reliable here, and the perils of depending on it can be illustrated. Just above the damaged r in fær there are in the fs what appear to be some letters written in a modern hand. Indeed, Malone says in his fs edition, “Over the s [sic] in a much later hand I read fēr (?)” (Newell Codex, p. 85). As Westphalen has pointed out (p. 109), what Malone read as an early modern restoration in his fs is a smudge in the ms. Malone and Zupitza both read fēs for ms fær, and in fact, as Zupitza says, “s seems to stand on an original r.” What makes the r look like an s is that the off-stroke

57. Read (with Thorkelin B) in wa-tide, but translate, “in time of misery” (cf. Bosworth-Toller, getwin-tid, “time of distress”). There are several wea- compounds in Beowulf, and the spelling wa- can be seen as part of the incipient abandonment of Late West Saxon spellings, and the intrusion of dialectisms, on this folio. Bosworth-Toller records wa-med for wea-met, “anger,” in Laȝamon.
Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript

Kevin S. Kiernan With a new foreword by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe

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has failed to adhere to the vellum (cf. stearne r6), though traces of it are visible. The descender is unusually long because it is ligatured to the unusually high e tongue preceding it. But it is shorter than the descender of the insular f at the beginning of the word, which shows that it should not be mistaken for an insular s. The damage to the offstroke of this r is paralleled by the damage to -inc feæt at the end of the line. Again, the ink has not held uniformly to the vellum. The letters -inc are far more distinct in the MS than they are in the FS. There are traces of a letter lost after feæt at the end of the line.

v3: (:::::) þær wæswylcra fēla inðā eord. The FS is more reliable here. The illegible word at the beginning of the line failed to hold to the vellum.

v4: sc::) ae·r ge streona swa hy on gearda. The reading at the beginning of the line, before the parenthesis, is based on Thorkelin B. The rest of the line is accurately represented by the FS, though it should be noted that the damage to the æ in ær is comparable to the damage to the r in feær v2, but without leaving behind an ambiguous letterform.

v5: gū) gumena nathwylc eormen lafe. The FS is reliable.

v6: æ)b)elan cynnes pænc hygengde pærga. Good FS (note the loss of ink where the top of the e connects with the first stroke in -ge; many of the e heads and tongues are similarly damaged on this page).

v7: hy)dde · deore maðmas ealle hie deað. Good FS (again, note the head of the first e in deore, and the heads of both e's in ealle).

v8: for) nam æran mælū · 7sian dagen. The r in fornam is partly covered by the paper frame, and is less distinct in the FS than in the MS. Zupitza says that the i in si "seems to stand on an original e," but there is no evidence of this whatever.58

v9: leo)dæ dugūde sediment hwearf. The surface of the vellum between sedœ and lengest is napped, but -ær is certain.

v10: we)ard wine geomor renede þæs yldan. The ink on the line is

58. Malone concurs: "Of this e I see nothing." Nowell Codex, p. 86. Elsewhere he has implicitly defended si on limited evidence of a tendency for a closed long e to raise to i. "If ē actually became y (i, iœ) in the mouths of some OE speakers, one would expect corresponding spellings to turn up... in other words as well." "Old English [Ge]Ỹdan 'Heed,'" p. 47. The reading might also be defended as a subjunctive of the verb "to be" (cf. sy, ste). Then, ond si an ða gen leoda dugūde could be translated, "and there may be one" or "if there be one of the troop of people still." In either case si is one of the many unique (non—Late West Saxon) spellings on the folio.
generally dark brown (almost black), except for wine, which is faded light brown. Here the ink has failed to hold to the vellum. It has also failed to hold on the loop (top and bottom) of the first e inrende, making the word look like rihde (cf. the en of fyrena v20). Thus Zupitza says, “rihde the later hand, but wende the first.” There is no trace of an original wynn under the r, and a true h would have a longer ascender, which would not curve, as this remnant of an e-head does. The r in rende is presumably a scribal dittograph from the preceding word, geomor, and an emendation to wende seems necessary. There is, however, no need, and no justification, for the editorial emendation of yldan to ylcan. If emendations were made for all awkwardly made letters, we would have another poem entirely.

v11: ðh)e bytel fæc long gestreona brucan. The fs is good, and there are no controversies over the transcript. The awkward o in long or the u in brucan might be noted in passing, as an additional caveat against changing the d in yldan for the sake of an easier reading.

v12: m)oste beorh eall gearo wunode on wonge. The fs is accurate. The second l in eall has not adhered well, and the totally faded parts may be fruitfully compared with the faded parts of the first e in rende v10. Here, the lost ink does not make the l look like a different letter. In wunode, it seems that the scribe started to write wunode, but caught himself in time to change the o to n, and to finish the word correctly.

v13: wa)ter þu neah niæ ðæs ðæs nearo. The fs is reliable.

v14: c)raeftu feast þer on innan þer eorl. Zupitza is mistaken when he says, “innan the later hand, but o stands on an original a.” The ms reads innan: the ink, as has so frequently happened on the page, has simply failed to hold to the vellum on the off-stroke of the a. It is impossible to believe that a restorer could have mistaken this letter for an o; the off-stroke of the a is even clearer in the ms than it is in the fs.

v15: g)estreona hringa hyrde hard fyrdne. As Zupitza says, the first letter of the last word in this line could be wynn or f; in the fs it looks a bit more like wynn, but in the ms the f-tongue seems certain. The advantage of f is that hardfyrdne, as Bosworth-Toller first glossed it, means “hard to carry, weighty,” and is excellent in the immediate context. The unbroken a (instead of heard) is another Northern dialectal feature on the folio. The disadvantage of wynn is that it requires editors to change hard to hord, and wyrde to wyrðe.
Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript

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v16: d)eal fettan goldes fea worda cwæð . heald. The readings have already been discussed. Failure of the ink to hold in a few places has metamorphosed fea worda to fec- -orda, but the traces of the original ink can still be seen, even in the rs. The damage to the ash in cwæð may be compared to the damage to a in fea.

v17: þ)u nu hruse nu hæled ne mæstan eorla. The rs is somewhat misleading, in that nu hruse is noticeably faded in the ms, and -ruse seems to have been rubbed lightly with pumice, perhaps because the ink ran or bled. From the looks of it, the scribe first wrote mastun, as Malone suggests (Nowell Codex, p. 86), but then changed the spelling to mæstan by adding an e loop to the a, and by closing the top of the u with a tilde-like stroke.59

v18: æhtæ hwæt hyt ær onðæ gode begeatæn. Part of æ is covered, but all of æ is distinct at the beginning of the line. The hair stroke of the y has not held to the vellum. The scribe started to write another letter (perhaps the eth) after o in onðæ, but then wrote the n over the mistake (the bottom of the n closes in the ms more distinctly than it does in the rs).

v19: guð deað for nam . feorh beал(e) frecne. Zupitza reads reorh bealc for feorh beale, and says that “the first r stands on an original f, and c on an original o.” The f looks like an r because the scribe began a dittograph of nam, immediately preceding. He got as far as na- before realizing his error, and then, without erasing, he wrote f over n, and eo over a, using the right side of the a as the ligature. A comparison of the descendents of the f and r in feorh will show that the scribe was not confused.60 The second e in beale is unusually small, but part of the middle stroke (not the tongue) is still faintly visible, even in the rs. The form in the nominative singular is a late analogue spelling.

v20: fyrena gehwylce . leoda minra þanae. The last letter in the line is not an a, but an æ, with the small loop all but gone, but with the faint tongue distinct in the rs, and more distinct in the ms (cf. the second

59. Editors assume that mæstan is a blunder for moston, but mæstan, “greatest,” may be an adjective modifying æhtæ. The form mastun is a late Northern spelling of the adjective, which the scribe evidently decided to give in the standard Late West Saxon form.

60. The scribe probably refrained from erasing this, and other false starts on the page, because he knew from his erasure in the first line and a half that the damp vellum could not be erased without making a mess.
e in sele v21). The loss of ink on the ash is similar to the losses on the h and wynn of gehwylcne, earlier in the same line.

v21: dépis ofgeafgesawon : sele dream(as). The rs is good, even in showing the traces of letters after dream-, which Zupitza does not mention. Malone says, “At the end of line 21 are traces of letters but they cannot be read; the usual restoration ic is plausible enough” (Nowell Codex, p. 87). Under ultraviolet light, the first letter seems to be an a (perhaps an e), and the second an uncial s.

There can be little doubt that the folio is a palimpsest, and that the handwriting on it is later than the script that appears on the rest of the Beowulf folios. The spelling is also later, for forms like bæde, wintr, on, bæde, sie, bifuolc, gewoldum, fleoh, weall, watide, si, hardyrdne, mastun (changed to mæstan) and beale, all testify to the breakdown of the standard Late West Saxon literary dialect, in non-West Saxon areas, as the 11th century advanced. Perhaps the unique mixture of forms on this one folio will lead to some valid conclusions about the provenance of the poem. At any rate, a new edition of the text on the palimpsest is desperately needed, but must await further attempts, by modern technological methods, to decipher all of the extant ink traces.

A conservative edition will strive to retain all of the readings that are clear in the mS, and will try to make sense of the text by emending conjectural restorations (for which there is little or no mS support), Thorkelin readings, and then doubtful mS readings. Scholars need to begin to study the revised text on folio 179.

**Beowulf in the Making**

When viewed in isolation, the palimpsest and the new text on fol. 179 perhaps remain incredible phenomena. An 11th-century revision of the

61. Unfortunately, panae (like pana) makes no sense, and an emendation is still unavoidable. The missing alliteration in line 2251, however, can be supplied simply by emending n to m, and reading panae/ðe (v20–21) as pa mæde, “portion, measure”; the half-line, pa mæde pis ofgeaf, can be translated, “then this [that is, guðdeaf, ‘death by war’] left behind this portion.” The lacking minim (n for m) is not a serious error, and could have been induced by the scribe mistaking the right side of the a in pa for the first minim of m. What Zupitza took for an a rather than an æ in panae is the quadrangular form still used by the scribe on fol. 179 in the digraph æ, but never elsewhere on the folio for a single, unligatured a.
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poem has been unthinkable until now, and the MS itself has been con-
sidered relatively unimportant, because the original poem and the
extant MS are supposed to be centuries apart. Yet the mere existence of
a palimpsest in the middle of Beowulf is, at the very least, circumstantial
proof that the poem was revised, and consequently that at least one folio
of the poem, containing lines 2207–2252, is contemporary with the MS.
The new text, from all aspects, leads to the same conclusion: the hand-
writing is the scribe’s, but much later in development; the language is
essentially the same, but shows, proportionately, many more ortho-
graphical idiosyncrasies, attesting to the later breakdown of the standard
literary dialect; and the text is apparently shorter than the one it
replaced. Thus, all of the evidence on the folio would seem to lead inexor-
ably to the conclusion that it is a revision. Assuredly, this evidence
cannot be used to support the traditional view that the MS as a whole
is a late copy, many stages removed from the 8th-century archetype. It
must hold a critical place in all theories describing the transmission of
the poem.

The signs of revision on fol. 179 receive repeated support elsewhere
in the MS. To begin with, it is not the only folio in the Beowulf MS from
which the original text has been deliberately deleted. The first three
lines of text on fol. 180v have been carefully rubbed off with the aid of
some liquid solution, which has left the vellum napped and discolored.
Moreover, the rubbing was done only over the script, not over the vel-
rum generally, which shows that the text was purposely removed, not
damaged accidentally. The FS gives a very inadequate and inaccurate
impression of all of this, and yet neither Zupitza nor Malone describes
the appearance of the MS here. It is not surprising, then, that no modern
editor draws attention to the extraordinary condition of the text. It is
surprising, though, that both Thorkelin and his scribe treated the first

62. In the FS the condition of the facing page, fol. 181r, looks quite similar to the
first three lines of fol. 180v, but not in the MS. Fols. 181 and 186 constitute the third
sheet of the twelfth gathering, a sheet that was badly prepared before it was written
on: there is still a whitish caking on both sides of this entire sheet, and in places the
ink has not held well to the vellum surface. The contrasting appearances in the FS and
the MS are a pertinent warning of the dangers of relying totally on FSs.

Plate 15. The first three lines of fol. 180v were deliberately deleted.
three lines of fol. 180v as a deliberate deletion. Thorkelin A leaves three corresponding lines blank in his copy, without making any effort to record what was still legible, even when he proofread. Thorkelin A knew no Old English at all, and his testimony in this respect is totally objective, unimpaired by any prejudices about the authority of the ms.

Thorkelin himself records what he can make out of these three lines in his transcript (B), but he leaves no doubt whatever that he regarded them as intentionally deleted. In the first place, he highlights the lines in his transcript by setting them off between long rows of dots, in the following manner:

... hege ... sceall bearn
... rusan þær he hædæn gold waræd
wintrum frod ne byð him wihtæ ...

Then, he explicitly says in the margin: "hic lacu/na trium/ linearum si/ve 15 versu/um incidunt/ qui in au/tographo/ defuisse/ videntur/ et enim mem/brana, ex/ qua hoc apo/graphum/ desuntum/ hic vacua/ est." It is possible, even likely, that the palimpsest on fol. 179 and the deleted lines on fol. 180v1–3 are part of the same incipient revision. In any case, there can be no doubt that the first three lines of fol. 180v were deliberately expurgated by someone, and editors need to consider this before automatically restoring them to the text. There are indications that the received text of this deletion may be spurious in other ways, as well.

In fact, Zupitza's transcript of these erased lines is strangely less reliable than Thorkelin's. Zupitza's desire to provide a semiedited text (including conjectural restorations) along with his transcript has here affected the accuracy of his transcript. His readings need to be reviewed:

63. "Here a lacuna occurs of three lines, or 15 verses, which seem to be missing in the autograph, for indeed the vellum, from which the partial transcription is derived, is void here." Malone, The Thorkelin Transcripts, p. 104a. Malone should have drawn attention to this note in his fs of the Thorkelin transcripts, and both he and Zupitza should have described the physical state of the text on fol. 180v1–3 in their respective fss of Beowulf.
Zupitza improved on Thorkelin’s transcript by providing secean, which, as he says is “pretty certain,” and ðy sel, which are “tolerably distinct.” But thereafter Thorkelin has the advantage. In line 2 of Zupitza, there is a trivial oversight; on is a reasonable conjectural restoration, but the h in hrusan is equally conjectural (and equally reasonable). In the first line, however, subjective editing has taken precedence over the job of objective transcription. The conjectural restoration [swiðe ondræ] da[ð] is not securely based: of the unbracketed letters da, only a is visible; the so-called d, which Zupitza says is “not perfect,” is a shadowy remain that could be almost any letter. Wishful thinking also accounts for the bracketed letter [ð] following the a. Zupitza says that this “may have been ð as well as n”; but the letter is almost unquestionably an n, which is distorted in the fs by a tear in the vellum. In short, Zupitza’s conjectural restoration, [swiðe ondræ] da [ð], ought to be abandoned, in favor of a restoration ending with MS –an.

Similarly, Zupitza’s reading, [ho]r[ð], at the end of the line should be viewed as an emendation, not a conjectural restoration. The rejection of Thorkelin’s reading bearн, though textually justified, is totally unjustified from a paleographical standpoint. To begin with, one must assume that the edge of the vellum was still intact, and that the reading seemed obvious to Thorkelin when he made his transcript. Surely he had more of the word to study than had Zupitza. If the reading were as doubtful in the 18th century as it is now, Thorkelin would have skipped over it, just as he skips secean and ðy sel in the same passage. And while it may be admitted that Thorkelin is not always entirely trustworthy as a copyist, there is no evidence elsewhere in his transcript that would account for his mistaking hord for bearн here. Indeed, such evidence (if it existed) would utterly destroy the value of his transcript.

64. We know, for example, that some vellum was lost along the top of the word after the transcripts were made. Thorkelin A and B both copy nah with confidence from the other side (the first word on the recto), but now the top of nah is chipped away.
Thorkelin’s unreliability is of a different nature. He often miswrites one vowel for another, and here he may have mistaken the common word *bearn*, “son” (which he had already transcribed over thirty times, and which was readily understandable to an Icelander), for the rarer poetic word *beorn*, “man.” The mutilation of the text would explain and excuse the mistake in this case. All of the letters in the disputed word have been distorted by the rubbing and discoloration, and by the crumbled edge of the vellum, but *beorn* (or Thorkelin’s *bearn*, for that matter) can still be defended, while *hord* cannot. The ascender of the first letter is now gone, but the bottom closes, eliminating *h*. The closed bottom is clearer in the MS than in the FS, and clearer still under ultraviolet light. The space between this letter and the relatively certain *r* is more than is needed for an *o*, and the rather involved ink traces (resembling a modern *w*) support a digraph like *eo* (or *ea*), but not a simple *o*. A single minim stroke after the *r* is all that remains of Thorkelin’s *n*, but there is no inward curve to it that would support Zuftpitz’s *d*.

One can only surmise that Zuftpitz favored *hord* over *beorn* on textual, rather than paleographical grounds. The word *beorn*, on the other hand, does not disregard the evidence Thorkelin must have had when he copied down *bearn*; and *beorn* is both textually and paleographically acceptable.

The effect on the text is that *beorn* must be the subject (in variation with *he*), rather than the object, as *hord* was construed.

\[
\text{... } \text{an. He gesecan sceall}
\]
\[
\text{beorn [on h]rusan, ðæ he hæðen gold}
\]
\[
\text{wæræ wintrum fæod; ne byð him wihte ðy sel. (cf. Klaeber, 2275–2277)}
\]

“A man will search in the earth where he [the dragon], old in winters, guards the heathen gold; he [the man] will be nothing the better for it.”

The change in referent for the personal pronoun in line 2276 will present no difficulty for anyone familiar with this practice in *Beowulf* (a notorious example occurs in lines 168–169). The apparent meaning of the passage may explain why it was deleted: it was replaced, and expanded, by the revised text on the palimpsest.

65. See Malone’s lists of such errors in *The Thorkelin Transcripts*, pp. 27 ff.
Because the vellum itself is lost between *hyne foldbuend* (2274b) and *-an* (2275a), it is impossible to be certain about the contextual and syntactical relationships originally made clear in the lacuna. The *-an* following the lacuna leaves a great deal of room for speculation: it might be the vestiges of a preterit (such as *hran, ongan, wan, can*), it might be an adverb (*ongean, ponan*), a conjunction (*siddan*), a noun (in phrases such as *for sincgifan, for sinfrean, on sefan*, and the like), or any infinitive. The possibilities for conjecture are innumerable. Speculation on the lost text from a lost piece of vellum is frustrating, and perhaps ultimately futile. Yet the current conjectural restoration, [*swide ondræ*-*da[ð]*], has been part of the received text for nearly a century, even though the unbracketed *d* is a guess and the last two letters are almost certainly *-an*, not *-að*. And it is not speculation that everything on fol. 180v1–3 from *-an* to *ðy sel* was deliberately deleted by someone. The reason for the deletion may be as permanently lost as the piece of vellum from the upper left corner of the page; but the apparent substance of the deleted text suggests that it was associated with the palimpsest and the revised text of fol. 179.

It should be easier to accept the concept that the palimpsest on fol. 179 represents a revision once it is realized that a related text was deliberately erased on the next folio. It cannot be denied, at any rate, that both folios provide striking evidence that can be legitimately interpreted as revisions. Aside from the bias that *Beowulf* is a 7th- or 8th-century poem preserved in a late 10th- or early 11th-century ms, the chief impediment to accepting this interpretation is no doubt the apparent lack of a believable motive for the revisions. Even if one grants the possibility that the poem is contemporary with the ms, the need for a total revision of one particular folio, deep in the ms and deep in the poem, is hard to imagine. The particular position of fol. 179, both in the ms and in the poem, can, however, account for this need. Textually and codicologically, the folio marks off significant boundaries: in the poem, it marks the beginning of the dragon episode, a totally new development in the poem; in the ms, it is the first leaf of two five-sheet gatherings, which do not adhere to the physical format used in the rest of the *Beowulf* ms. From these facts it can be argued that *Beowulf*, as we now have it, is an amalgamation of two originally distinct poems, which first came together in the ms that has come down to us. If the dragon episode was already copied when two stories about Beowulf were fused into one,
there would be an explanation for the change in format, and, more important, for the palimpsest. The original text of fol. 179 was eventually erased and replaced to mend the contextual leap that would naturally exist at this contextually artificial juncture.

Surprisingly, there is considerable paleographical and codicological support for this hypothesis. Before considering this evidence, it is well to keep in mind that the theory has been repeatedly urged by scholars on textual grounds. These arguments are systematically rejected by other scholars almost as soon as they are made, and it is safe to say that the theory is generally repudiated by Beowulfians as a group. Those who have argued for multiple authorship of the poem are characterized as “dissectors,” usually with some justification. The idea first surfaced as the so-called Liedertheorie, which held that the poem consists of many originally separate lays, loosely slapped together by carefree interpolators or enterprising scribes. Expressed in this way, the theory amounts to what most readers have rightly dismissed as an impotent assault on the artistic integrity of the poem. The essential unity of Beowulf is not in question here. Whether one poet, or two, or more, composed two or more poems, and then conceived of a collaboration, is perhaps not even important, for whatever the “inner history” of its constituent parts may have been, Beowulf as it has come down to us is now unquestionably unified. Accordingly, the present argument stresses artistic fusion rather than critical dissection. It maintains only that the paleographical and codicological evidence suggest that Beowulf was created in more than one stage in the course of the 11th century, and that our extant ms preserves the most exciting stages of its creation.

Karl Müllenhoff, who in 1869, in “Die innere Geschichte des Beowulfs,” presented the first extensive explanation of the poem’s inner history, broke the story into four main parts, each of which, he believed, derived from a different author:

1. Beowulf’s fight with Grendel (lines 194–836);
2. His fight with Grendel’s dam (837–1628);

66. See Klaeber, Beowulf, pp. cii ff.; and Chambers, Beowulf: An Introduction, pp. 112–120. The most elaborate attempt to delineate the “inner history” of the poem is by Walter A. Berendsohn, Zur Vorgeschichte des ‘Beowulf.’
67. Müllenhoff’s essay is reprinted as Chapter 3 of his Beowulf: Untersuchungen über das angelsächsische Epos und die älteste Geschichte der germanischen Seevölker.
3. Beowulf’s homecoming (1629–2199);
4. His fight with the dragon, and his death (2200–3183).

Müllenhoff believed that the fight with Grendel and the fight with the
dragon were originally two distinct lays that eventually came together
in Beowulf, after a third poet added the fight with Grendel’s dam, and
a fourth added Beowulf’s homecoming. But one does not have to believe
in the Liedertheorie, or even in multiple authorship, to see that a single
poet in the 11th century could have composed the epic from diverse
sources, in several stages, in much the same way as Müllerhoff imagines.
Certainly, Müllerhoff has not distorted the basic structure of the
poem. Indeed, Klaeber, who argues persuasively for single authorship
(pp. cii–cvii), describes the structure of the poem in essentially the same
way, as the following outline, using Klaeber’s headings (pp. ix–xii), will
illustrate.

I. Beowulf the young hero
   1. The fight with Grendel (lines 1–1250)
   2. The fight with Grendel’s mother (1251–1887)
   3. Beowulf’s homecoming and report to Hygelac (1888–2199)

II. Beowulf’s death
    The fight with the dragon (2200–3182)

Klaeber emphasizes the unity of the first three episodes, and disagrees
with Müllerhoff over where, precisely, one episode ends and another
begins, but the four-part episodic structure of the poem is not chal-
 lenged. It might be argued, from Müllerhoff’s view, that the first three
episodes form a unit because successive poets deliberately unified them;
the fourth episode stands apart, even in Klaeber’s scheme, because as an
older lay it was not written as a continuation, but was artificially
appended. In fact, Klaeber’s view of the structure helps illustrate Müller-
hoff’s theory of how the poem grew, by accretion, into an epic. But
one 11th-century poet could account for the creative process, as well.

Most readers of the poem, from Tolkien on, are probably impressed
most by the three-part thematic structure, based on Beowulf’s three
great fights. The structural role of Beowulf’s homecoming, because it is
not a heroic event in Beowulf’s life, tends to be forgotten. Yet the tran-
sition is structurally essential, and it ought to be seen as a transition,

rather than as material integral to Klaeber’s Part I, “Beowulf the young hero,” but not to Part II, “Beowulf’s death.” While the three great fights of Beowulf’s life must remain prominent, the structural link between the early fights in Denmark and the last fight in Geatland should be highlighted, to stress its crucial function. Without it, the dragon episode could be seen only as an awkward accretion, thematically but not structurally related to the rest of the poem. Beowulf’s homecoming furnishes an adequate transition, when Beowulf, back in Geatland, tells Hygelac what he had accomplished in Denmark. The transition then swiftly moves from Danish to Geatish affairs, and prepares for Beowulf’s kingship (lines 2166b–2206).

While the transitional text known as Beowulf’s homecoming firmly unites two disparate phases in Beowulf’s career, it also raises some legitimate questions about the original dimensions of the poem, and provides tenable reasons for believing in composite authorship. The problem is that Beowulf’s account of his exploits in Denmark is not in complete accord, at least not on the face of it, with earlier parts of the poem. The discrepancies are, of course, overplayed by those who believe in multiple authorship, and underplayed by those who believe in single authorship. But the fact that there are, indeed, discrepancies means that the case for multiple, or composite, authorship is not entirely a subjective judgment. Composite authorship might better be seen as a pleasant alternative to Klaeber’s view, for example, that, “in explanation of some discrepancies and blemishes of structure and execution it may also be urged that very possibly the author had no complete plan of the poem in his head when he embarked upon his work” (p. cvi). A late collaboration that attempted to weld together two slightly different versions of the same story would explain the minor variants in question without the need to depend on authorial ineptitude.

The textual case for composite authorship has been best marshaled by Levin Schücking. In Beowulf’s Rückkehr, Schücking made an objective, and exhaustive, stylistic investigation of the particular usage in Beowulf’s homecoming of formulas, nominal compounds, metrics, syntax, and moods and tenses. Most of the results, as Schücking was the first to admit, are not compelling for anyone believing in single author-

ship, yet they do provide some support for the belief in multiple, or composite, authorship. For instance, Schücking uncovers some syntactical usages in Beowulf’s homecoming that are unique in the poem: the conjunction *by-læs*, “lest” (1918b, *pæt ne* elsewhere); *ac* used as an interrogative particle (1990b, used perversively as the conjunction “but”); the placement of the adverb *ða*, “then” (2192b); the only certain case of *forþam*, rather than *forþan* or *forþon*, as the conjunction “because, since” (1957b). Unique syntactical transitions are made in the phrases *Ic sceal forð sprecan* (2069b) and *To lang ys to reccenne* (2093a). Chambers has objected that this “is natural when we realize that we have here the longest speech in the whole poem, which obviously calls for such apologies for prolixity” (p. 119); but Chambers’s objection merely puts the unique phrases in their broad context, which as he implies is equally unique in the poem.

While it may be admitted that Schücking does not prove separate authorship of Beowulf’s homecoming, one ought not to lose sight of the issues that led him to make the argument in the first place. Even Chambers was ready to admit Schücking’s premises. As he says, “Schücking starts from the fact, upon which we are all agreed, that the poem falls into two main divisions: the story of how Beowulf at Heorot slew Grendel and Grendel’s mother, and the story of the dragon, which fifty years later he slew at his home. These are connected by the section which tells how Beowulf returned from Heorot to his own home and was honorably received by his king, Hygelac.” Chambers goes on to say that, “as Schücking rightly urges, instances *are* forthcoming of two O. E. poems having been clumsily connected into one [Genesis, for example]. Therefore, whilst no one would now urge that *Beowulf* is put together out of two older lays, *merely* because it can so easily be divided into two sections, this fact does suggest that a case exists for examination” (pp. 117–

70. And Chambers disputes them from this bias in his *Beowulf: An Introduction* (pp. 117–120). He concludes, “To me, the fact that so careful and elaborate a study of the story of *Beowulf’s Return* fails to betray any satisfactory evidence of separate authorship, is a confirmation of the verdict of ‘not proven’ against the ‘dividers.’ But there can be no doubt that Schücking’s method, his attempt to prove differences in treatment, grammar, and style, is the right one.” Ibid., p. 120. As we shall see, paleographical and codicological evidence adds an entirely new dimension to the argument.
118). But these concessions insufficiently account for the purpose of Schücking’s investigations, and thus unfairly minimize the validity of his results. As Schücking makes clear in his second chapter, “Der Ausgangspunkt der folgenden Untersuchung” (Beowulfs Rückkehr, pp. 9–15), it is the textual contradictions in Beowulf’s homecoming, more than the gulf between the fights in Denmark and the fight in Geatland, that oblige one to scrutinize even minor syntactical idiosyncrasies of the type mentioned above. They corroborate the more obvious textual evidence of composite authorship. Schücking is usually characterized as a dissector or divider of Beowulf. Actually, his conclusions stress the ultimate unity of the poem, and the creative ingenuity of an Anglo-Saxon poet who (in an eminently medieval way) drew on the work of other poets to create a new poem of epic proportions (ibid., pp. 73–74).

The same body of evidence has been interpreted quite differently by Francis P. Magoun, Jr.71 His conclusions stress the ultimate disunity of the poem, for he views the three distinct parts of Beowulf (Beowulf’s youthful exploits in Denmark, Beowulf’s homecoming, and Beowulf’s death in Geatland) as three distinct folk poems, brought together through the industry of “an anthologizing scribe.” In short, Magoun’s theory resuscitates the old Liedertheorie, in the light of current conceptions of oral performance. Magoun refers to the three separate parts as Béowulf A, Béowulf A’, and Béowulf B. From his folkloric standpoint, the question of the ultimate unity of the poem is irrelevant, and this frees him to emphasize textual discrepancies in the three parts as natural variants. As he says in “Béowulf A’: A Folk-Variant” (p. 100):

Rather than assume the existence of an incredibly careless singer or irresponsible lettered poet it would seem more natural to assume the insertion by an anthologizing scribe of a variant (‘A’) which, though giving a far shorter version of the fabula in question, included what seemed to him a lot of curious and interesting features not in A and that he made his insertion for just that reason. Such a solution allows one to have a higher opinion of the work of both A and A’ and relieves a critic of feeling obliged to try to convert inconsistencies into artistic triumphs.

71. In “Béowulf A’: A Folk Variant”; and “Béowulf B: a Folk-Poem on Béowulf’s Death.”
If one is looking for inconsistencies, as Magoun is, it is easy to find them, though many of the ones he cites are more imagined than real. Most can be explained, if not as artistic triumphs, then as natural shifts in emphasis or pleasing variations in detail.72

Still, there are some inconsistencies between A and A' that are hard to ignore or gloss over: Hroðgar's sons, Hrēðric and Hroðmund, figure rather prominently in A (lines 1169–1231), yet in A' Beowulf does not mention them by name and tells Hygelac all about the impending marriage of Ingeld the Heaðobard and Freawaru, Hroðgar's daughter, who is not even mentioned in A (see 2020–2069); in A' Grendel seems less savage and primitive than in A, for Beowulf tells Hygelac that Grendel carried some kind of gaming bag (glof, 2085), in which to stow his victims. These variants, alone, provide a case for Magoun. The variants he urges between A and B are perhaps less persuasive than these, but since all scholars agree that there is a rift between Beowulf's youthful exploits in Denmark and his death in Geatland, there is no need to hunt out specific variants. Whether or not they were composed by one person, the stories are different, and are presented differently enough to sustain Magoun's belief in an A singer and a B singer. In "Béowulf B: a Folk-Poem on Béowulf's Death," Magoun summarizes the entire theory in the following way (pp. 129–130):

What we actually have are two stories about the Gautish hero Béowulf. The first is about a youthful adventure with a couple of trolls at the Scylding court . . . in Denmark and is told twice, once at some length by a narrator (Béowulf A . . .), once much more briefly (cp. 11. 1999–2176) by Béowulf himself to his uncle Hygelác, king of the Gauts (Béowulf A'). Béowulf A' ends up with a somewhat curious miscellany of remarks (11. 2177–99) that seem only casually to concern what precedes or follows. The second Béowulf story starting at line 2200 tells of Béowulf's death at the hands [sic] of a sort of flying dragon and begins in an almost

72. See, especially, A. G. Brodeur, "Beowulf: One Poem or Three?"; Sherman Kuhn, "Beowulf and the Life of Beowulf: A Study in Epic Structure"; and Walter Scheps, "The Sequential Nature of Beowulf's Three Fights." For a recent and finely detailed structural analysis, see John D. Niles, "Ring Composition and the Structure of Beowulf."
Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript

Kevin S. Kiernan With a new foreword by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe
http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=8599
The University of Michigan Press, 1997

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jolting fashion, considering that some odd sixty-five years separate this part of Béowulf's life history from what precedes.

While the evidence is malleable, there can be no doubt that there are textual and structural grounds for these arguments in favor of multiple authorship of the poem. The problem with Magoun's folkloric explanation of the evidence is that it does not sufficiently confront the unquestionably literary activity of the "anthologizing scribe[s]" who supposedly fused three oral performances into one literary (recorded) epic.

It is here that Magoun's and Schücking's theories merge. From his own point of view Magoun may have been a dissector or divider of the poem, since he was primarily interested in the oral performances, the prehistory of the transmitted text. But what must ultimately be of primary interest is the transmitted text itself. Even if one accepts Magoun's outline of the prehistory of the epic, with its three independent oral sources, the person whom Magoun labels an "anthologizing scribe" must have been a lettered poet, who unified his diverse sources. Magoun himself unconsciously says as much: "The question of just where A' begins and ends, similarly to what extent the original ending of A may be involved, is presumably unanswerable short of the discovery of more manuscript material, for my postulated anthologist had presumably to some extent mastered the technique of oral singing and hence was able to compose authentically in his own words neatly soldered joints. Presumably part of the original ending of A was sacrificed, . . . likewise no doubt the original beginning of A'."73 In short, to round off his theory, Magoun is forced to create a lettered poet who had mastered the techniques of oral performers, who saw a great design in three narratives, and who had the talent to reshape them, using what he needed and discarding what he did not, into a unified epic. Regardless of his antecedents, this person is the Beowulf poet.

The textual arguments for composite or multiple authorship of Beowulf are decisively reinforced by paleographical and codicological evidence that has been totally ignored. It can hardly be fortuitous that all of this evidence falls within the broadest limits, as first defined by Müllenhoff, of Beowulf's homecoming (that is, lines 1629–2199). Moreover, the clearest and most significant evidence falls within the narrower lim-

beowulf’s homecoming as defined, for instance, by klaeber (lines 1888–2199). Nor, in retrospect, is it likely to be a coincidence that the second scribe copied the part of beowulf’s homecoming that holds all of the textual discrepancies (from line 1939 on). Indeed, the two scribes’ work precisely parallels the textual case for composite or multiple authorship. As shown in “The Beowulf Codex” in Part 2, the Beowulf Ms comprises the sixth through the thirteenth gatherings of the Nowell Codex. The first scribe alone copied all of beowulf’s youthful exploits in Denmark on the sixth through the tenth gatherings, and on the first fourteen lines of the eleventh gathering (fol. 171r, to line 1887); the second scribe alone copied all of the section on Beowulf’s death, which conventionally begins with the last six lines of the eleventh gathering (fol. 178v, from line 2200), and of course includes the twelfth and thirteenth gatherings; the two scribes collaborated on Beowulf’s homecoming, the eleventh gathering, lines 1888–2199. It is therefore possible that Beowulf’s homecoming was first composed to join together two different Beowulf Ms, and that the extant Ms preserves the actual collaboration.

The exceptional nature of the eleventh gathering as the essential link between two otherwise disparate paleographical and codicological units is well illustrated by considering the Ms minus the eleventh gathering. Without this gathering, paleographers would have every reason to conclude that the two gatherings preserving Beowulf’s fight with the dragon had been copied many years before the five preserving Beowulf’s youthful exploits in Denmark. The archaic script of the second scribe, in which insular letterforms like the low s still effectively compete with the high caroline s, would suggest that the second scribe’s work was somewhat older than the first scribe’s, in which the caroline influence is more advanced. It would seem most probable as well that the two

74. A case can be made for starting the dragon episode at line 2207, with the palimpest, the first page of the twelfth gathering. The last few lines of the eleventh gathering (lines 2200–2207a) do not lead inexorably to the kingship of Beowulf, the first line of the twelfth gathering. On the contrary, they seem to be leading elsewhere: “Again it came about in later days, in the crash of battle, after Hygelac lay dead, and battle swords became the slayer of Heardred under his shield covering, when fierce warriors, the Battle-Swiftings, sought him out among his victorious people, with force assailed the nephew of Hérec, after.” The transition to Beowulf’s rule is decidedly abrupt, even with a full stop after nefan Hercies. The former independent existence of the dragon episode might account for this.
Beowulf mss derived from different scriptoria, for while the first scribe regularly uses gatherings of four sheets, ruled for twenty lines to the page,\(^{75}\) and generally arranged so that hair faces hair and flesh faces flesh, the second scribe uses gatherings of five sheets, ruled for twenty-one lines to the page, and invariably arranged with the hair side facing out. In short, without the eleventh gathering, scholars would have reasonably concluded that two unrelated Beowulf stories had been preserved in two unrelated mss, attesting to a lively Beowulf tradition throughout the country in late Anglo-Saxon times. Linguistic peculiarities of the two poems (for example, unbroken *a* in the first, or the *io* forms in the second) would tend to confirm this deduction, by suggesting that the two distinct Beowulf stories must have derived from different dialect areas. Surely, it would have been a reckless guess, attacked from all sides, to say that the first scribe’s MS and the second scribe’s MS were parts of the same MS, or that the two stories were part of the same poem.

So the eleventh gathering, containing Beowulf’s homecoming, is paleographically and codicologically as well as textually transitional. The second scribe takes over the copying on the second leaf (fol. 172v4). Naturally, the gathering was made up in the first scribe’s manner: it is a four-sheet quire, ruled for twenty lines of text to the page; the first two sheets are arranged with flesh facing flesh, the second two with hair facing hair. Between these paired sheets, hair faces flesh. One assumes that the first scribe fully intended to finish copying the gathering, if not the entire poem. Because the handwriting of the two scribes is so ill matched, it is clear that they did not plan beforehand a place for the second scribe to take over the copying. If they had, the change of hands could have been obscured by the first scribe stopping at the end of fol. 172r. There is compelling codicological evidence that the first scribe suddenly halted where he did, and the second took over, because at that point a collaboration had been devised to join two originally distinct MSS, and two originally distinct poems.

It is virtually certain, at any rate, that the second scribe copied the eleventh gathering—Beowulf’s homecoming—after he had already cop-

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75. The first gathering of the poem is comprised of four full sheets, and two half-sheets (or leaves) folded on between the third and fourth sheets. The only anomalously ruled gathering by the first scribe is the tenth, which is fully discussed below.
ied the twelfth and thirteenth gatherings. Obviously, one cannot afford to ignore such an amazing parallel to the independent structural and textual arguments that the homecoming episode was written after the dragon episode, as a transitional link between two formerly unrelated Beowulf narratives. The evidence that the second scribe copied the eleventh gathering last is that he had to squeeze in four extra lines of text, in disregard of the original rulings, on fols. 174v–176r. This compression would not have been necessary if the scribe knew he had at least two extra gatherings of unused vellum ahead of him. The squeezing in of twenty-one lines of text, at this early stage, on four successive folios ruled for twenty lines of text can only mean that the scribe did not have vellum available after the eleventh gathering. Certainly, if he had more vellum beyond the eleventh gathering, he could have easily fit in the text of four extra lines by adding a few extra letters per line, in the course of copying the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth gatherings. Unless he was compelled to fit the extra material into the eleventh gathering, it is far too early in the copying for the scribe to be worrying about running out of vellum. If he really had over twenty empty folios left on which to copy, the scribe’s desperate recourse of ignoring the rulings of the eleventh gathering is inexplicable. The twelfth and thirteenth gatherings must have been copied already.

In view of the importance of this conclusion, it will be helpful to demonstrate that the four extra lines could not have been added inadvertently. It might seem, for instance, that one sheet of the eleventh gathering could have been unintentionally ruled for twenty-one lines, rather than twenty. This simple solution, however, cannot apply here. Sheets are only ruled on one side, since the indentations made by the awl simultaneously provide identical rulings on the reverse side. Hence it is patently impossible for a sheet to be ruled for twenty lines on the hair side, but for twenty-one lines on the flesh side. Since fol. 174v–176r do not (and cannot) constitute a single sheet, the extra lines of text cannot be accounted for through any kind of oversight. The third sheet of the gathering consists of fols. 173 and 176, while the innermost sheet consists of fols. 174 and 175. By virtue of the method of ruling both sides of a sheet simultaneously, the third sheet cannot have been ruled by mistake for twenty lines on fol. 173, recto and verso, and fol. 176v, but for twenty-one lines on fol. 176r; similarly, the fourth sheet cannot
have been ruled for twenty lines on fol. 174r, but for twenty-one lines on fol. 174v, and fol. 175 recto and verso. The extra lines of text on these four folios are not there by accident.

A closer look at these pages reveals how they came to have twenty-one lines of text, despite the fact that they were originally ruled, with the rest of the eleventh gathering, for twenty lines. First, it must be said that the extra line on fols. 174v–176r was not simply ruled in at the bottom of each page.76 A measurement of 174r (twenty lines) and 174v (twenty-one lines) from the first ruled line to the last shows that both pages have the same writing space (175 mm.). Since the eleventh gathering was already ruled for twenty lines throughout, it is surprising that the scribe was able to achieve a uniform written space while still using the first and last lines of the original rulings. The Ms shows that the scribe achieved this result by deliberately ignoring the original rulings, and by spacing the lines of text so that he would progressively pick up enough room for an extra line of text. The fs of fol. 174v is clear enough to illustrate the method, for it faintly shows the original rulings.77 Starting at line 3, the scribe begins lifting the line of text away from the ruling, until, at line 17, an entire line of text has been added, and the rulings can once more coincide with the lines of text. For this reason if one counts the rulings on fol. 174v there are twenty, but if one counts the lines of text there are twenty-one. This extremely difficult way of

76. This was done once in the Nowell Codex, on fol. 122v, in Alexander's Letter. The scribe probably skipped a line, either at the end of fol. 122v or at the beginning of fol. 123r. It is certain that this extra ruling was added by the scribe after he had copied the text on fol. 122r, because the indentation shows through clearly on the recto, and yet the scribe failed to use the line on the recto. It should be noted in passing that the second scribe did not create twenty-one lines from twenty rulings on fols. 174v–176r to make his text in the eleventh gathering consistent with the text in the twelfth and thirteenth gatherings: he follows the twenty-line rulings on fols. 172v–174r and on fols. 176v–178v.

77. Oddly enough, Malone's fs, using the same photograph as Zupitza's, does not show the rulings very clearly at all. In the Ms, the original rulings are most easily seen on fols. 174v and 176r.

Plate 16. Fol. 174v. In order to fit more text on the page than the first scribe's writing grid allowed, the second scribe omitted the fit number, ignored the right margin, and wrote 21 lines of text within the space of the 20 rulings.
including the extra material emphasizes that the scribe was compelled to fit it all in within the eleventh gathering.

There are other sure signs of his need to fit more text in than the gathering was designed to hold. On fol. 174v, the same page on which the scribe began squeezing in an extra line of text in disregard of the rulings, he omitted fitt number XXX for lack of space. It is not surprising that he did not squander the line he had so laboriously gained on a fitt number, and that he drew the large capital O outside the area of the text. He garnered a good deal more space throughout the gathering by ignoring the first scribe’s margins, or bounding lines, which permitted him only about 10 cm. of text per line. The second scribe added between 1 and 2 cm. of additional space per line by ignoring one or both of the first scribe’s margins. Again, fol. 174v provides a good example, because of the clarity of the rulings: the right bounding line can be easily seen in the fs in line 10, between hryre and lytle. By ignoring the margin on this one page, the scribe added outside the margin over sixty characters, the equivalent of at least two whole lines, to his text. The scribe normally ignored the right margin, as in this example, though a few times he disregarded the left bounding line too. We can even see in the fs the point at which the scribe knew that the rest of his text would fit into the gathering without further violating the bounds of the first scribe’s grid. By fol. 176v he stopped squeezing in an extra line of text in disregard of the first scribe’s rulings; on the next page, fol. 177r, after ignoring the first scribe’s left margin for the first eighteen lines, he used the first scribe’s margin for the last two, and thereafter generally adhered to the 10-cm. boundaries until the last page of the gathering (fol. 178v). The scribe undeniably went to great lengths to fit a certain amount of text within the transitional eleventh gathering. And the only conceivable reason he would be compelled to do so would be that the following gatherings had already been copied.

Thus a clear pattern emerges from all of the extraordinary paleographical and codicological data associated with the second scribe. He has not only corrected errors, and restored damage caused by age and use. His part of the ms provides compelling codicological evidence that he copied a new episode, designed to fuse Beowulf’s Danish and Geatish exploits into a unified epic. Apparently, many years later, he was still working toward a better fusion of the parts, on the revised text of fol. 179. But there is also some evidence that the first scribe took part in the
last revisions of the poem. The indications are that the text of what is now the tenth gathering was subjected to major revisions after the scribe stopped copying the eleventh gathering. Since the tenth gathering (fol. 163–170) contains that part of the text that Müllenhoff would include in Beowulf’s homecoming (lines 1629 ff.), there is at least a case to examine. And if the second scribe was copying an entirely new text in the eleventh gathering, it should not be surprising that the text immediately preceding it might need some revision, too, to accommodate the new direction of the narrative. Together, the rulings of the tenth gathering, and the ftt numbers after line 1629, make a solid case in favor of such a revision.

The first scribe, as we have seen, ruled all of his gatherings, except the tenth, for twenty lines of text to the page. 78 His absolute uniformity in this respect, not only in Beowulf, but in the prose texts as well, makes the twenty-two-line rulings of the tenth gathering somewhat suspicious. The only obvious explanations are that the scribe had more material to copy in the gathering than he originally had planned for it, which is consonant with revision, or that the gathering was ruled anomalously by mistake. The latter can be safely eliminated. The gathering was intentionally ruled for twenty-two lines, as a measurement of the written space, from the first ruling to the last, makes clear. If two extra pricks had been inadvertently made through the sheets when the rulings were prepared, the written space would be approximately 20 mm. longer than the written space of pages having only twenty lines per page. In fact, the written space for the twenty-two-line folios is the same as it is for the twenty-line folios (c. 175 mm.). Thus it is certain that the rulings were not expanded from twenty to twenty-two lines. On the

78. All apparent exceptions have nothing to do with the original rulings. The extra ruling on fol. 122 is explained in note 76, Part 3. The other exceptions are not in the number of rulings themselves, but in the number of rulings used. The recto of fol. 95(97) has only seventeen lines of text on a page ruled for twenty lines because that was all that was needed to finish the St. Christopher legend; similarly, fol. 103v has only nineteen lines of text, the number needed to finish The Wonders of the East, and fol. 128v has only seven, to finish Alexander’s Letter. Fol. 108v in Alexander’s Letter has nineteen lines, because the entire first line (and part of the second) was erased. Finally, the first page of Beowulf (fol. 129r) has only nineteen lines of text, for the first line of capitals occupies the space between the first two rulings. In short, the first scribe was absolutely consistent in his ruling, until the tenth gathering.
contrary, it shows that the scribe took care from the beginning that an anomalously ruled gathering would not look remarkably different from the rest of his gatherings, by keeping the writing space identical, despite the extra rulings.

It is not extraordinary in itself, of course, that the scribe ruled his gathering commensurate with the amount of text he had to copy. What is extraordinary is that, for some reason, he had to restrict the extra rulings to the tenth gathering. In short, it is hard to explain why he made the tenth gathering with twenty-two lines per page, and the eleventh with twenty lines, instead of ruling both for twenty-one lines. The only apparent reason is that the scribe had to copy more material onto the tenth gathering than had been originally planned for it, and curiously could not spread the extra material over two gatherings. Once again, this kind of restriction implies revision in the circumscribed area. It is precisely the same kind of restriction that impelled the second scribe to fit in four extra lines of text on the eleventh gathering. The first scribe, after ceasing work on the eleventh gathering, must have gone back and copied a revised text on the tenth.

The revised text, it seems, was either considerably shorter or somewhat longer than the original text. At first glance, it would appear that the revised text was longer, since it required a gathering ruled for 22 lines per page, while the original text only needed 20 lines per page. In other words, the revised text was about 32 lines longer than the original text. But these appearances are probably deceiving. Evidence from the fitt numbers indicates that the poem was shortened, which could mean that a gathering ruled for 22 lines replaced two original quires ruled for the customary 20 lines. In this case the revision is quite radical, for it means that about 288 lines (the difference between two quires ruled for 20 lines and one quire ruled for 22) were deleted from the poem. However, it is unrealistic to conceive of a major revision as simple addition or subtraction of lines. In all probability, parts of the text were deleted, while other parts were expanded. There is evidence from the fitt numbers that an entire fitt was deleted from the poem, but aside from this, the precise nature and scope of the apparent revision of the text of the tenth gathering remain a mystery.

The fitt numbers indicate that the twenty-fourth fitt of the original text was deleted in its entirety. Accordingly, they independently corrob-
The conclusions reached on the basis of the anomalous rulings. All of the fitt numbers in Beowulf preceding line 1629 in the tenth gathering, from I to XXIII, are in perfect order, and have not been tampered with in any way. But beginning with the second number of the anomalously ruled tenth gathering, and continuing through the eleventh gathering to number XXXI, all of the fitt numbers either have been altered or were never written in the first place. Since the reasons for these curious difficulties in the simple act of consecutive numbering have never been sought, no special significance has ever been attached to them. It has not even been recognized that the alterations of the fitt numbers were not made by either of the scribes.  

The alterer was, it seems, an early modern reader of the codex, for the changes had already been made in time for the Thorkelkin transcripts. On fol. 164r the scribe correctly wrote XXIII for the first fitt of the tenth gathering. However, on fol. 166r he mistakenly wrote XXV for the next fitt, instead of XXIII, and thereafter he and the second scribe held to the new, erroneous sequence. The alterer made an abortive effort to correct the sequence, but in the process obscured the first scribe’s real error, and left the false impression that the second scribe had made a series of errors. In all, five numbers were altered: of the first scribe’s numbers, XXV was changed to XXIII by writing two of the four I’s over the V, XXVI, XXVII, and XXVIII on fols. 168r, 169v, and 171r were changed to XXV, XXVI and XXVII, simply by erasing the last I of each number; similarly, the second scribe’s number...

79. Malone says, “The fit number [XXIII] is obviously corrected in another hand, presumably the second scribe’s” (Nowell Codex, p. 71), and Westphalen concurs (Beowulf, p. 108, n. 140).

80. The first two I’s are joined at the bottom, because of the original V they attempt to obscure.

81. There is an inkblot covering everything after XX- (fol. 168r9), but it seems to be the same ink used to draw the four I’s of the preceding fitt number. As Malone says, “Only the xx of the fit number is easy to read, because of the great blot (modern) over the rest of it. But [Thorkelin] AB have xxv, in A followed by a point, and I think I can make out both v and point. In all likelihood the scribe wrote vi (rather than v), later corrected by rubbing out the i, but the blot keeps us from finding signs of erasure.” Nowell Codex, p. 73. Under high-intensity light the V is certain, and what Malone takes for a point could just as well be faint signs of the original I, erased. Perhaps the alterer, after erasing the I, started to touch up the V when his pen ran.
XXVIII was changed to XXVIII by erasing the last I. Only the first alteration, XXIII, can be judged from a palaeographical viewpoint, but it is easy to see in the stiff, childlike counterfeiting of the I’s that neither of the two scribes made them. Yet even if the I’s had been drawn more skillfully, it would still be hard to assign these changes to either of the scribes. The first scribe had no conceivable opportunity to correct one of the second scribe’s numbers, while it is highly unlikely that the second scribe would correct four of the first scribe’s numbers, and leave all but one of his own uncorrected. One may safely conclude that the five altered fitt numbers are later changes.

The untenable belief that these alterations were made by the second scribe has led to some unwarranted conclusions about the number of fitts in the poem. The second scribe wrote only two fitt numbers in the eleventh gathering: XXVIII on fol. 173r, and XXXI on fol. 177v. He did not write XXX on fol. 174v for lack of space. After all, this is the first folio on which the scribe squeezed in an extra line of text in disregard of the rulings. He did, however, clearly mark the fitt by the large capital O. When the alterer changed XXVIII to XXVIII by erasing the last I, he left the impression that the second scribe had failed to write in two fitt numbers, XXVIII and XXX, and worse, that he had failed even to mark the beginning of one of the fitts with a capital letter. Thus the alterer ingenuously shifted the first scribe’s mistake over to the second scribe, for the illusion that two fitt numbers are missing here can be directly traced back to the first scribe’s error of skipping number XXIII, and writing XXV instead. The second scribe, who relied on the accuracy of the first scribe’s number sequence, continued numbering the fitts where the first scribe left off. Hence the disarray in the fitt

82. Most editors authorize this false impression. Klaeber and von Schaubert, for instance, print in brackets the numbers XXVIII and XXX at the beginning of line 2039. This procedure implies a major scribal corruption of the text where no corruption at all exists. The only justification there is for the notion that the unnumbered fitt [XXX] is in fact two fitts is its length—105 verses (lines 2039–2143); yet fitt VIII consists of 103 verses, XLI of 112, and XXXV of 142 verses.

Plate 17. Fol. 166r11. The first scribe’s fitt number XXV was sloppily altered by a later hand to XXIII.
Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript
Kevin S. Kiernan With a new foreword by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe
http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=8599
The University of Michigan Press, 1997
numbers of the tenth and eleventh gatherings, and the confusion over the actual number of fitts in the poem, can all be reduced to the first scribe’s omission of XXIII. If one ignores the later alterations, the fitts were numbered from I to XXIII, and then from XXV to XLIII, indicating that there are forty-three fitts in the poem, whereas in fact there are only forty-two.

Despite the hiatus between XXIII and XXV, the scribes’ erroneous number sequence ought to be maintained, for it preserves an interesting, and possibly very significant, feature from the making of the text. The following table provides at a glance a full account of this sequence, noting the five spurious alterations in the margin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fitt</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Fitt</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Altered Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>130r</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>XXII</td>
<td>162v</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>132v</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>164r</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>134r</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>[     ]</td>
<td>[     ]</td>
<td>[     ]</td>
<td>[XXIII]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIII</td>
<td>135v</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>166r</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>[XXV]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>137r</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>XXVI</td>
<td>168v</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>[XXVI]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>138r</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>XXVII</td>
<td>169v</td>
<td>71</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>140r</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>XXVIII</td>
<td>171r</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
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<td>60</td>
<td>XXVIII</td>
<td>173r</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
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<td>VIII</td>
<td>142v</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>[XXX]</td>
<td>174v</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>145r</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>XXXI</td>
<td>177r</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>146r</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>XXXII</td>
<td>179r</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>147r</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>XXXIII</td>
<td>181r</td>
<td>79</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>148r</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>XXXIII</td>
<td>183r</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIVII</td>
<td>150r</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>XXXV</td>
<td>184v</td>
<td>142</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV</td>
<td>151v</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>XXXVI</td>
<td>187v</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td>152v</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>XXXVII</td>
<td>189A(197)v</td>
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<td>154v</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>XXXVII</td>
<td>189v</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>156r</td>
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<td>191r</td>
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<tr>
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<td>192v</td>
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<td>159r</td>
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<td>193v</td>
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<tr>
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<td>90</td>
<td>XLII</td>
<td>195v</td>
<td>79</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>XLIII 198r 46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table highlights the source of all apparent errors in the number sequence as the first scribe’s omission of number XXIII. All of the
numbers following this omission are in proper sequence, if one ignores the alterer’s abortive effort to correct the first scribe’s oversight. 83

The scribes’ number sequence is, in any event, quite significant. No matter how one interprets the evidence, it effectively proves that the fitts of the poem had not been numbered before the extant MS, and this in turn is consonant with a contemporary MS. At the very least, the omission of XXIII suggests that the first scribe was numbering the fitts of Beowulf for the first time, without the aid of numbers in his exemplar, and that he omitted a number by mistake. The second scribe did not have numbers in his exemplar, for his numbers follow the first scribe’s erroneous sequence. The alternative—that their exemplars contained the same errors—should not be too tempting. We are sure that some of the fitt numbers in the Nowell Codex were drawn in after the texts had been copied. In Beowulf, the numbers up to fol. 168r were drawn by the first scribe with a much sharper quill than the one he used to copy the text. For the Judith fragment, we have seen that the numbers were put in later, by someone other than the scribe, presumably after the Judith codex was complete and all texts could be properly numbered seriatim. The evidence in the last two gatherings of the Beowulf MS likewise suggests that these numbers too were added later, after the entire text had been copied. It is obvious, though, that the second scribe intended to leave space for planned fitt numbers, for on fol. 183r he left an entire line free for a number. But it is equally clear that he did not have numbers in his exemplar, for in other cases he forgot to leave space for them. On fol. 189v he inadvertently began a new fitt without leaving space; part way through the first line of the new fitt he realized his oversight and improvised space by cutting off the name Wihstanes after writing only wih-. And on fol. 191r, he assumed he had left space for a number at the end of the fitt, but he must not have known at the time that the number would be XXXVIII, the longest of all, too long he apparently decided for the space he had reserved for it: he left the space blank. Thus, all of the signs point to the conclusion that the fitts of the poem were first numbered in the extant MS.

83. The alterer no doubt stopped where he did because he did not want to write in number XXVIII on fol. 174v (for lack of skill as well as lack of space), and then continue altering all the rest of the numbers throughout the poem. The second scribe’s omission of number XXX on fol. 174v provided a well-camouflaged place to stop.
On the other hand, the first scribe's omission of XXIII may really point to a far more significant conclusion. The numbering could have been initially thrown off if a revised text of the tenth gathering in part entailed the deletion of the original twenty-fourth fitt. The first scribe’s numerical oversight is easily understood if one assumes that the revisions were made on the quires replaced by the tenth gathering. When the scribe copied the revised text, he mechanically copied as well the fitt numbers he had formerly written on his first copy. In this light, the fitt numbers remarkably corroborate the conclusion, arrived at on the basis of the anomalous rulings, that the tenth gathering comprises a late revision of the poem.

Conclusion

Quite obviously, this study of the *Beowulf* MS is not totally objective, for it is founded on the premise of a contemporary MS, and therefore actively seeks significance in paleographical and codicological evidence. It deliberately searches for any indications in the MS that *Beowulf* was not mechanically copied, after the prose texts that now precede it in the Nowell Codex, as the fourth item in a humdrum anthology. It concludes, through paleographical and codicological evidence, not only that the premise is warranted, but that the extant MS actually was the poet’s (or poets’) working copy. All previous investigations of the MS are equally subjective, and far less descriptive, because they are founded on the premise that the MS is a late, corrupt copy of an early poem. Accordingly, though there has never been any attempt to justify this premise, the possible significance of paleographical and codicological evidence is assiduously ignored. If the conclusions of the present study are not inevitable, however, the mass of MS data on which they are based provides for the first time relevant evidence to evaluate. Taken all together, the evidence sustains the view of a contemporary MS: it assuredly cannot support the traditional view that study of the MS, in the case of *Beowulf*, is not pertinent.

The traditional view of the MS is faced, for the first time, with paleographical and codicological data in direct conflict with it. The most probable construction of the original gatherings shows that the poem was probably copied as a separate codex. The capital lettering, partic-
ularly in the first line of Beowulf, sharply contrasts with the capital lettering in the prose texts; also on the first page of Beowulf, the rulings, the deterioration of the script in the lower right corner, and the partly obliterated inscription, V[i[elli]us] A. 15, all indicate that Beowulf existed (and thus was copied) as a separate codex. Wanley, who expertly studied and described the composite codex before the fire destroyed the gatherings, refers to the Beowulf MS as a separate book. If it was a separate book, it was not mechanically copied with the prose texts. More specifically, the traditional view must now be reconciled with the thorough and repeated scribal proofreading of Beowulf alone, which suggests that the MS was copied separately, and then corrected with care and comprehension. The MS was also repaired by the second scribe as time and use damaged it. Finally, the traditional view must ponder the palimpsest and the revised text on fol. 179; the three deliberately deleted lines on fol. 180v; the four inserted lines in the eleventh gathering which flagrantly disregard the rulings; the anomalously ruled tenth gathering; and the ramifications of the skipped fitt number, XXIII. Without ignoring all of this paleographical and codicological evidence, there is now an obligation, for those who would adhere to the traditional view, to prove that the Beowulf MS is not a contemporary MS of the poem.

For now, it seems more fruitful to pursue the possibility, which much of this paleographical and codicological evidence supports, that the Beowulf MS is an unfinished draft of the poem, and that it preserves for us the artistic fusion of two originally distinct Beowulf narratives. It is unlikely that a final draft would have provided such consistent evidence that Beowulf is a composite poem: structurally and orthographically (so perhaps linguistically) there are two distinct parts to the poem, excluding Beowulf's homecoming; paleographically and codicologically there are two distinct parts to the MS, excluding the transitional gathering containing Beowulf's homecoming; in the transitional gathering the orthographic (or linguistic), paleographic, and codicological differences all converge, and as they are fused, so too are the heroic events of Beowulf's life. Here the division in the poem and the division of labor between the two scribes are quite remarkably reconciled. A final draft would at least obscure the transition paleographically (aside from the change of hands) and codicologically, rather than highlight it, as the Beowulf MS does, in the tenth and eleventh gatherings, and in the pal-
impsest. The Beowulf ms appears to be an unfinished draft of a late collaboration because there is evidence of collaboration in precisely the part of the ms where all of the different transitions—structural, orthographic or linguistic, paleographical, and codicological—had to be made. Coincidence can be stretched to cover many contingencies, perhaps, but even it will snap when stretched too far. In the tenth gathering, the first scribe begins fitt XXVI (altered to XXV) with the word Oððæt, in the middle of a sentence (line 1740); in the eleventh gathering, the second scribe begins fitt [XXX] with the same word, Oððæt, again in the middle of a sentence (line 2039). Elsewhere, neither scribe ever begins a sentence with Oððæt,\(^{84}\) or a fitt in the middle of a sentence. This coincidence at least implies that the division between fitts in these two crucial gatherings was not carefully planned out in advance. If a collaboration was in progress, there were more exciting things to think about.

One final paleographical clue that Beowulf is a late fusion of two originally separate poems first accomplished, and therefore preserved, in the extant ms, may be deduced from the second scribe’s proofreading of the first scribe’s copy. This material has not been discussed with the rest of the scribal proofreading, because it seems fundamentally different from the rest of the proofreading. This additional evidence also reveals truly exceptional interest in the poem by a scribe who is usually supposed to have been largely ignorant of its meaning, and so inattentive, careless, and lazy in copying it. As we have seen from the scribe’s proofreading of his own work, these suppositions are untenable. But, in his proofreading of the first scribe’s work, already carefully proofread by the first scribe, he picks up some decidedly minute oversights. His superscript corrections are easy to identify, not only by the difference in hand, but by his characteristic use of a comma to mark the place of insertion: thus, on fol. 133r20 he corrects beortre to beor\(h\)tre; on fol.

\(^{84}\) Von Schaubert interprets oððæt, in these cases in an adverbial sense—“afterward”—rather than in the customary conjunctive sense, “until.” Thus, in her text, Oððæt, begins new sentences as the new fitts begin. The fact that the word is used to begin new fitts suggests that von Schaubert is right.

Plate 18. The comma beneath the correction on fol. 142r13, in the first scribe’s part of the ms, indicates that the correction was made by the second scribe.
142r13 o is corrected to $o^n$; gan to $gan^g$, on fol. 160v14, and feh to $feh^\delta$, on fol. 168v3. These corrections reflect close attention to detail; the last two emphasize as well the scribe’s comprehension of the text, for real linguistic forms that are wrong in the context are corrected. But most of the second scribe’s corrections in the first scribe’s section of the MS are not corrections at all: they are emendations. In many cases, the second scribe changes perfectly acceptable linguistic (or orthographic) forms to forms generally found in his own part of the MS. Together, these changes support the view that Beowulf and the Beowulf MS are one and the same, for the second scribe’s emendations can be seen as the first steps toward normalizing the orthography of the composite text.

On fol. 140v14, the second scribe emends dol-scaðan to dol-scéadan. The first scribe’s spelling is certainly not an error: the word appears with the a spelling frequently in his part of the text (554, 707, 712, 737, 766, 801, 1339, 1803, 1895), and the other spelling occurs, too, but only in the genitive plural (4, 274). The second scribe’s e represents a glide that developed in some dialects after palatalization of sc-. The spelling without the e is evidently a Mercian feature, for as Campbell points out, “there is no trace of the development of a glide between sc and a back vowel” in Mercian texts (Old English Grammar, p. 68). The spelling with the e, on the other hand, cannot be localized, because it is standard Late West Saxon, which at this late date was used as the literary dialect by Mercians as well as West Saxons. In a contemporary MS it is very strange indeed that the two scribes followed such discrepant orthographical traditions to copy the same poem. After all, it is impossible to believe that the scribes’ exemplar followed two different orthographical traditions, too, which corresponded exactly with the parts of the poem later copied by the two scribes of the extant MS. In short, if one believes in a single exemplar, one or the other (or both) of the two scribes radically altered its spellings in the course of copying his part of the poem.

The implications here are worth exploring. A single exemplar must have been uniformly written, either in a nonstandard, presumably Mercian orthography, or in the standard Late West Saxon orthography. In the case of the former, the first scribe copied -scaða accurately, while the second scribe transiterated -scaða into the Late West Saxon spelling -scead, and even went so far as to start transliterating the first scribe’s work. The alternative is less believable: the exemplar was basically
written in the standard Late West Saxon orthography, but for some reason the first scribe transliterated his portion of the MS into a non-standard, local orthography. These deductions apply, of course, to other major discrepancies in spelling, as well, the most famous of which is the preponderance of io (over eo) spellings in the second scribe’s part of the MS. And, assuming a single exemplar (no matter who is supposed to have done the transliterating), it is astonishing that the two scribes worked on the same poem with such different aims and methods. The argument that either transliterated, however, cannot be easily upheld. As many of the scribes’ written corrections and erasures illustrate, both scribes attempted to copy what was before them: a dittograph is not made by someone who is transliterating rather than copying. Furthermore, though the spellings in the prose codex and in the Judith fragment are not appreciably different from the spellings in Beowulf, there are enough minor differences to suggest that both scribes faithfully copied the spellings of their exemplars. Hence a possible explanation for the orthographical differences between the first and second scribe in Beowulf is that their respective parts of the MS are based on two different exemplars.

The second scribe’s emendations in the first scribe’s text (like scaða to sceada) make a good deal more sense once it is realized that they are not corrections, and that they are not based on the first scribe’s exemplar. The second scribe did not need an exemplar to read the first scribe’s copy, detect and correct a few minor mistakes, and normalize a few spellings in accordance with predominant spellings in his own copy. On fol. 132r14 he emends the occasional spelling scyppen to the standard form, scyppend.\(^{85}\) On fol. 144r5 he changes wealhþeo to wealhþeow; as in the case of -scaðan, he only makes the change the first time the word occurs, letting it stand without the w thereafter (629, 664, 1162, 1215).\(^{86}\) Zupitza believed that the change of ængum to the unsyncopated form, ænigum, on fol. 147r11 was made “in the same hand,”

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85. The first scribe’s form, scyppen, has been defended by Malone in “Notes on Beowulf: I.” Von Schaubert prints scyppen in her edition.

86. Moreover, he spells the name without final w in his own part of the MS (2173); his emendation of the first scribe’s form should perhaps still be seen as an attempt to regularize spellings throughout the MS, for at line 2961 (in his own section) he alters ongenðio to ongenðio. It appears, then, that the second scribe ultimately wanted to return to the conservative spelling of the name element, -beow (or -biow).
but it was clearly made by the second scribe. A single minim is virtually impossible to identify with any real certitude on paleographical grounds; but since the first scribe only uses the spellings *ængum* (474, 1461) or *ænegum* (655, 842) for the dative, while the second scribe uses the form *ænigum* (2416) elsewhere, the emendation must have been made by him. A similar case occurs on fol. 158v15, where *on* has been altered to *in*. Here the *i* does look like the first scribe’s, but once again the usage is more in keeping with the second scribe: the alteration occurs in the phrase *in Heorote*, which the first scribe invariably writes *on Heorote* (475, 497, 593, 1330, 1671). The second scribe’s usage varies. He writes *on Hiorte* (2099) once, but elsewhere he writes *in Swiorice* (2383, 2495) and *in Hrefnesholt* (2935). The significance of the change is hard to imagine, but in any event it is an emendation, not a correction.

The second scribe makes another emendation on fol. 167v10, where he changes *ferpe* to *ferhpe*. He himself uses the first scribe’s form as a variant spelling in *collenferð* (2787; versus *collenferð* 1806) and *sar-igferð* (2447). The change was perhaps motivated by an erratic desire for a conservative spelling. Curiously, he emends a conservative form on fol. 169r19, by altering *dogor* to the analogical form *dogore*. The first scribe’s original reading, *by dogor*, is the correct dative-instrumental for nouns of the *-es* *-os* declension, and the first scribe uses the form elsewhere (1395). The second scribe apparently made the emendation to refine the meter, though *dogore* is the form he uses anyway (2573). Since the emendation transcends orthography, it supports the view that the two scribes worked with two different exemplars. On the other hand, orthographical variety is perhaps unusually significant in the second scribe’s final emendation, of *hrepe* to *hrape*, on fol. 171v20. The word appears frequently, with a variety of spellings, in the first scribe’s part of the MS: *hrape* (748), *hrađe* (224), *hrape* (1437), *rape* (724, where it alliterates with *recedes*), and *hrepe* again (991). The word appears three times in the second scribe’s section, twice in the eleventh gathering, and always spelled with *a* (1975, 2117, 2968). The revised text on the palimpsest contains the late, nonstandard spelling, *hrađe* (fol. 179r11). The word seems more familiar to poet and scribe in the first part of the MS than in the second. And if the eleventh gathering was in fact written after the twelfth and thirteenth, word frequency alone would suggest that *hrađe* became an active word in the second scribe’s part of the MS in the transitional text of Beowulf’s homecoming.
As we have seen, most of the second scribe's alterations in the first scribe's copy are emendations rather than corrections. As a whole, they show the scribe normalizing the spelling between the first and second parts of the poem. There is no reason to assume that the scribe made any of these emendations on the basis of the first scribe's exemplar. There is, however, one bit of evidence that strongly implies that the second scribe did not have an exemplar to refer to when he read and altered the first scribe's work. After the word *hafelan*, on fol. 160r17, there is a mark that ZuPitza transcribed as a colon, but that in all likelihood is a mark for insertion, made by the second scribe. The spacing makes it clear that the mark was made after the text was copied, and the mark itself is what the second scribe ordinarily uses to signal the place where an insertion belongs.\(^{87}\) As Malone says, "After *hafelan* 17 comes what I take for a mark of insertion, printed by Z[upitza] as a colon. It looks like the handiwork of the second scribe... The first scribe here seems to have skipped a verb, which modern editors have to supply, since the correction was never made" (Nowell Codex, p. 68). The apparent significance of this has gone unnoticed. It is difficult to believe that the scribe would note the omission of a verb, mark the place, and then fail to write in the missing word,\(^{88}\) if indeed he had the exemplar. We know he had an exemplar for his own part of the Ms, but it now seems quite evident that it was not the same as the exemplar used by the first scribe.

Paleographically and codicologically, at least, all of the facts converge to support the theory that *Beowulf* is an 11th-century composite poem,

87. See, for example, his marks for insertion on fols. 186r3, 188v13, 189A(197)r4, 193r11, and 196v19.

88. The passage, as it stands in the Ms, is not in need of an infinitive, as far as the sense is concerned, for *wile* alone is syntactically and contextually sufficient; thus, *ær he in wille hafelan* (1371–1372) means "before he would want his head within." Moreover, *willan* is frequently used with an infinitive understood from the context, and so it would be possible to translate the same phrase "before he will (put) his head within." Perhaps the second scribe refrained from making an interpolation here, because he came to realize that no interpolation was required. Lines 1371–1372 should be read as three half-lines:

\begin{quote}
*alde on ofre,* \hspace{1em} *ær he in wille hafelan:* \hspace{1em} *nis þet heoru stow!*
\end{quote}

The enjambment of alliteration provided by the second half-line is effective.
and that the *Beowulf* MS is the archetype of the epic as we now have it. Students of the poem first need a new, truly conservative, edition before the poem can be easily, or even adequately, revaluated in the light of this theory. But it is not hard to imagine how Anglo-Saxon poems like *Beowulf* might have emerged during the reign of Cnut the Great, as an aesthetic aftermath of the Danish Conquest. On its most basic level, the subject matter is thoroughly Scandinavian, and the poem begins with a dedicatory salute to the founding of the king’s royal Scylding dynasty. Surely Hroðgar, the dominant power in Scandinavia, who received exiles like Hunferð and Ecgþeow; who married a foreign queen—worried about the succession of her sons—and who was honored by heroes like Beowulf, could have been modeled on the latest Scylding king, Cnut the Great. The Anglo-Saxon poet who created the exploits of Beowulf in Denmark was content to suggest that even the mighty Scyldings, led by a wise and noble king, were not immune to irrational disaster. Cnut would not have been embarrassed by the implication that everything in this life is transitory, or that God rules the universe.

But the Anglo-Saxon poet who created the dragon episode was more poignant. He traces the actual disintegration of a dynasty, which culminates in the death of a glorious hero and implies the subsequent extinction of an entire race. This poet had for his model the fall of the house of Alfred, and the subsumption of his homeland and his race in the Danish empire. If he knew Anglo-Saxon history from the Chronicle, he might have remembered that fiery dragons first portended the Viking invasions of England (A.D. 793); at any rate, he would have known that many Anglo-Saxon thanes deserted their lords when the dragon ships came in the 11th-century Danish conquest. His mood is elegiac and, in the light of 11th-century events, unbearably sad. The poet himself is a “last survivor of a noble race,” who was left an enormous legacy after the death of his lord. If the last poet of *Beowulf* was the second scribe, as the paleographical and codicological evidence encourages one to believe, he increased, and continued to polish, an Anglo-Saxon treasure during the reign of a Danish Scylding lord.