

**BEOWULF: WITH
THE FINNSBURG
FRAGMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649072880

Beowulf: With the Finnsburg Fragment by A. J. Wyatt & R. W. Chambers

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A. J. WYATT & R. W. CHAMBERS

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PÆT FELDARD

Ða mæcra dazum þeod cyning
 þrym geþrunon huda æþelingsas ealla
 feore medon. oþt se yld scepung scæpe
 þreacum monegū mæghum meodo seald
 of tæh esode eorl syddan ærest þe
 fea scæp fundon he þæs eþrope toba
 þeox undeg polenum þeopd myndum þah
 oð þ him æghyle þara ymb sit tendinga
 oþer þron þade hyran seolde zomban
 sylðan þæs god cyning. ðam æfter þæs
 æfter cenned seow mæcra dazum þone god
 sende folce to þraffe þyn dæsse on
 zæc þine ædrigon aldræse. lange
 hyle him þæs luf þra puldres þealdan
 þeold ære þon zæc þeapung þæs þe
 blæd þide spung se yld æfter seald
 landum in. Spæ seald æfter seald
 se þe ceam þromum seald æfter seald

HWÆT WE GARDE

- na ingear dagum. þeod cyninga
þrym ge frumon huda æþelingas elle[n]
fre meolon. Of seýðl seofing sceaþe[na]
5 þreatum monesum mæzþum meode setle
of teah egsode eorl syððan ærest weard[ð]
fea seact funden he þæs frofre geþa[d]
weox under wolenum weorð myrdum þaþ.
oð þæt him æghwyle þara ymb sittendra
10 ofer hron rade hyran seolde zomban
zyððan þæt was god cyning. ðæm eafra was
æfter ceaned zeon[ð] in zeardum þone god
sende folce tofrofre fyren ðearfe on
zeat þæt he or druzon aldor [le]ase. lunge
15 hwile him þæs lif frea wulfres wealdend
worold are for zeat. beowulf was brome
bled wide spranz seýðles eafra seode
landum in. Swa secal [zeon[ð] z]uma zode
ze wyrcan fromum feoh ziftum. on fader

BEOWULF
with
THE FINNSBURG FRAGMENT

Edited by
A. J. WYATT

NEW EDITION REVISED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

by
R. W. CHAMBERS

*Also
Beowulf on Internet + of J.G.P. 1880-1914 and 1914-1914*

Cambridge:
at the University Press

1914

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ON THE TEXT OF *BEOWULF*

THE editors of *Beowulf* have, with rare exceptions, concentrated their attention upon the problem of fixing and interpreting the text, and have avoided discussing the literary history of the poem. Theories as to the origin and structure of *Beowulf* have been developed, not in editions, but in monographs such as those of ten Brink, Müllenhoff, and Boer.

This practice is probably sound: and in accordance with it I have made no pretence here to deal with questions of the "higher criticism." I hope to attempt this in an *Introduction to the Study of Beowulf*, which is to be issued separately. But an editor ought to give an account of the principles upon which he has worked, and the relation of his text to the MS. This duty is particularly incumbent upon him, when he is revising a standard text.

THE MANUSCRIPT

The *Beowulf* has been preserved in one manuscript only, written about the year 1000: a feature which it shares with most extant Old English poetry. As to the history of this manuscript we have no information, till we find it in the collection formed by Sir Robert Cotton, which is now in the British Museum. From its position in the book-cases of this collection the MS. containing *Beowulf* received the name and number (*Cotton Vitellius A. 15*) by which it is still known. Our first record of it dates from 1705, when Wanley in his Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts described our poem as telling of the wars which a Dane, Beowulf, waged against the Kings of Sweden.

Twenty-six years later occurred the disastrous fire in which so many of the Cottonian MSS. were either destroyed or, like the *Beowulf* MS., damaged.

It was not till the eighteenth century was drawing to a close that any serious attempt was made to master the poem. Thorkelin, an Icelander by birth, inspired by that revival of historical studies which marked the close of the eighteenth century in Denmark, and doubtless led by Wanley's misdescription of the MS., came to England, made a transcript of the MS., and caused a second transcript to be made. After twenty years of labour his edition was nearing completion, when in 1807 "the Englishman came, the damned thief¹," bombarded Copenhagen, and incidentally destroyed Thorkelin's translation and notes. The much more valuable transcripts of the MS. fortunately escaped. But the work had all to be done again, and it was not till 1815 that the first edition of the *Beowulf* appeared, under the title of *De Danorum rebus gestis...poema Danicum, dialecto Anglo-saxonica*.

Thorkelin's ignorance has been harshly censured by later students, who have often forgotten that, by his two transcripts, made more than forty years before any Englishman cared to study the poem, the Scandinavian scholar had done a service, the value of which cannot be exaggerated. For after Thorkelin's time the MS. continued to deteriorate steadily, by the dropping away of its charred edges². Thorkelin's mis-translations simply do not matter to us. What does matter is that he recorded what was to be read in the MS. at the time he saw it. He, and, to a greater extent, the transcriber whom he employed, made many mistakes: but the two transcripts correct each other: and the mistakes are of a type easily detected and explained. Indeed Thorkelin's ignorance of Anglo-Saxon, and the ignorance of his scribe, add immensely to the value of their transcripts. Had they

¹ *Aa det var Aaret atten hundrede aa syv
Da Engelsmanden kom, den forbandede Tyv—*

² More than thirty years ago, further destruction was prevented by the MS. being rebound, and the parchment inset: but the paper which now surrounds each parchment leaf necessarily covers letters or portions of letters, especially on the back.

1731

Thorkelin

date 1757

1807

1815

Janet J. R.

8 Collations 1882
Sedgfield.

The Manuscript

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known more, they would have been tempted to fill in from conjecture such gaps as they did find, and this would have deprived their testimony of its value.

Thorkelin's transcripts are generally referred to as A (the copy made by Thorkelin's order) and B (the copy which he made personally). Both belong to the year 1787: they are preserved in the Royal Library at Copenhagen.

In 1830 the MS. was again copied by Thorpe, who however did not publish till a quarter of a century later. In 1833 (and more correctly in a second edition, in 1835) Kemble published the results of his inspection. In 1861 N. F. S. Grundtvig published a text based upon an examination both of the MS. and of Thorkelin's transcripts. In 1876 Kölbing published collations in *Herrigs Archiv* (LVI.), and both Wülker (1881) and Holder (1881; from his notes made in 1876) prefixed to their texts a transcription of the MS., letter by letter.

Finally, in 1882, a facsimile of the MS. was published by the Early English Text Society, with a transcription by Prof. Zupitza (quoted in the notes below as "Zupitza"). This transcription embodies more than Zupitza's personal reading of the MS.; for he endeavoured "to give the text as far as possible in that condition in which it stood in the MS. a century ago." He weighed the evidence of all the scholars, enumerated above, who had examined the MS. before him, and he had the advantage of comparing the MS. itself with Thorkelin's two transcripts, which were sent to the British Museum for the purpose.

The MS. having thus been collated and recollated by eight scholars, each in his day peculiarly competent, it might well seem that nothing further remained to be done. And in fact most recent students have been content to take the facsimile, and Zupitza's transliteration, as final. But in the study of a MS. which has suffered as the *Beowulf* MS. has, finality is indeed hardly to be reached; and Dr Sedgfield has shown in his recent edition what good results may yet be produced by an editor who will look at the MS. for himself. *Cotton Vitellius A. 15* is still a field in which a student,

Th. A.
- B. 787

1830-74

1833-35

1861

1876

1881

1882

1892

(9)

late of 1883