

BEOWULF: CREATIONIST IMPLICATIONS IN OUR EARLIEST ENGLISH EPIC

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It is shown that the Old English epic Beowulf may embody traditions going back to times not long after the Flood, and thus may provide additional evidence for a universal Flood and subsequent dispersion.

Beowulf, our earliest English epic, has long been recognized as a paradox and puzzle. The Old English tale is recognized by many as "the earliest and the greatest epic in our literature," yet one of its translators admits candidly, "no one knows when *Beowulf* was composed, or by whom, or why." Only one manuscript exists, and it is a copy, in two distinct handwritings,³ now housed in the British Museum library. The sole survivor of Henry VIII's war on monasteries and their libraries, the manuscript is in poor and ever deteriorating condition due to careless binding and a fire in 1731 in the London building in which was housed the collection of Medieval English manuscripts made by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton.⁴ Some words are known only through ultraviolet photography, some through transcripts made in 1786-87 by the Danish scholar Thorkelin.⁵

Beowulf is of great interest from a Creationist perspective, for it contains a myriad of references to Genesis 1-6, with an abrupt cut-off at that point. Most critics have called it an odd mixture of Christianity and paganism. Bloomfield, for instance, calls it "an old Scandinavian tale . . . changed into a Christian poem,"⁶ Garnett and Gosse say that "traces of Christianity—perhaps interpolated—are not absent from it,"⁷ pointing out that modern criticism has dated it over a hundred years after the mission of Augustine. Thus, they claim it "is and is not pre-Christian."

After studying the *Beowulf* epic and comparing it with Genesis references, I feel certain that the oral tradition *Beowulf* reflects is not only pre-Christian, but pre-Judaic as well. Long says, "there existed, at the time the poem was composed, various northern legends of Beowa, a half divine hero, and the monster Grendel."⁸ Most critics recognize that it represents an oral tradition earlier than its writing.

God is frequently referred to in the epic, but never in distinctly Christian or Judaic terms. Deity is called God, the Lord of Life, the Ruler of Heaven, the Lord, the Judge of Deeds, the Lord God, the Protector of Heaven, the glorious King, the Father, Holy Lord, the King of Glory, the Guardian of Heaven, the wise Lord, Eternal Prince.

Cain is referred to frequently; a race of monsters is said to have been kin to him, and condemned by God, a seeming allusion to Genesis 6:1-4. Cain's slaying of Abel is spoken of in several places. From Cain is said to have descended "all bad breeds, trolls and elves and monsters—likewise the giants". Cain's exile is mentioned twice.

The monster Grendel seems to be equated with the devil. He is called "the fierce spirit," "he who dwelt in the darkness," "a hellish enemy," "the creature of evil," "the enemy of mankind," "dark doer of hateful deeds in the black nights," "the demon," "the wild ravager." "fosterer of crimes," It is said that "he was at war with God" and surrounded by a host of invisible hell demons.

Giants are described—they are reported to have been destroyed by the Flood. The golden hilt (sword) is said to be the ancient work of giants; on it was supposed to have been written "the origin of ancient strife, when the flood, rushing water, slew the race of giants—they suffered terribly: that was a people alien to the everlasting Lord."

Reference is also made to creation itself. The scop, the Anglo-Saxon minstrel who recited poetic stories to the accompaniment of a harp, related "the beginning of men far back in time, said the Almighty made earth, a bright field fair in the water that surrounds it (Genesis 1:6⁹), set up in triumphs the lights of sun and moon to lighten land-dwellers (Genesis 1:16⁹), and adorned the surfaces of the earth with branches and leaves, created also life for each of the kinds that move and breathe ("after its kind"?)". Thus, most of the major events in Genesis 1-6 are alluded to, many in striking detail.

Rexroth says *Beowulf* is "the Gilgamesh motif come to the far north across 4,000 years."⁹ The Gilgamesh epic is "the Babylonian Genesis", another record of the early earth as the Babylonians perceived it. In many ways, *Beowulf* may be considered an Old English remembrance of the early events recorded in the Gilgamesh and in Genesis, interwoven, probably, with later Germanic history.

Another striking reference in *Beowulf* is the description of the dragon. Many creationists have expressed the viewpoint that the almost universal tales of dragons in early literature represent remembrances or traditions of actual encounters of humans with dinosaurs. The dragon in *Beowulf* dwells on a high heath keeping watch over a hoard of gold over a stone barrow, a pile of stones on an ancient grave. He is described as "the smooth hateful dragon who flies at night wrapped in flame. Earth dwellers much dread him." When angered, the dragon begins to vomit flames. He has sharp fangs, and strikes at *Beowulf*'s neck. He is measured to be fifty feet long after he is killed.

God, Creation, Cain, Abel, Giants, Dragons, Demons, the Flood—the epic is full of Genesis 1-6 imagery. Why the abrupt break? If the *Beowulf* epic represents Christian teaching of even the most elementary type, why is there not one reference to Christ, Christianity, or the New Testament? Why not one clear Old Testament reference after the Flood? Why such an obsession with

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antediluvian themes? Why no references to Jewish history? Most conservative Bible scholars consider the Germanic peoples to be descendents of Japheth. Could it be that remnants of the story of the creation, the flood and the early earth with its giants and dinosaurs were preserved among these northward migrating peoples even before the coming of Christianity? Cut off from the influence of Judaism to the south, such stories undoubtedly were embellished through continual retelling. Yet, as they were set down in the at least partly historical poem, they are amazingly accurate, as judged by the Scriptural account.

If we adopt the earliest dated name that can reasonably be identified with one in the poem, the epic must have been written about 520 A.D., or a little earlier, when Chochilaicus, identified with Hygelac in the poem, raided the Frisian coast,¹⁰ leading a huge plundering expedition up the Rhine. The battles of the hero Beowulf are historically identified with these raids.¹¹ But the legends that form its background and framework are much, much earlier.

Whether *Beowulf* was brought from Jutland by Saxon invaders and then Anglicized, or whether it was com-

posed in England itself, *Beowulf* is intriguing as an early linguistic document, as a rare archaeological relic, and as a testimony to the preservation of the creation and flood accounts among our Germanic ancestors.

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¹¹Raffel, Burton, 1963. *Beowulf*. New York: Mentor Books. p. ix.
¹²*Ibid.*
¹³Donaldson, E. Talbot, 1966. *Beowulf*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., p. vii.
¹⁴Raffel, *op. cit.*, p. ix.
¹⁵Fry, Donald K., Ed., 1968. *The Beowulf poet. A collection of critical essays*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p. 75, Essay by Bloomfield, Morton W., "Beowulf and Christian allegory"
¹⁶Garnett, Richard, C. B., LL.D., and Gosse, Edmund, M.A., LL.D., 1903, *English literature, an illustrated record*. Vol. I, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, p. 6.
¹⁷Long, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
¹⁸Fry, *op. cit.* p. 69.
¹⁹Saintsbury, George, 1912. *A short history of English literature*, New York: Macmillan Company, p. 3.
²⁰Long, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

EVIDENCE OF GLACIATION IN WISCONSIN

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Some Creationists have doubted whether there ever was a glacial age, since they find it hard to see how it could fit in with an Earth as young as Scripture would indicate. On the other hand, there is certainly evidence which would seem to point to a former glaciation. Here some of that evidence, as it is found in Wisconsin, is described.

In this article, I shall for the most part present the usual glacial interpretations of various features, without stopping to try to justify them. The matter is one in which I feel an interest, having been born and brought up near the southern terminal moraine of the Green Bay lobe, which crosses between Milton and Janesville.

Figure 1 shows a general picture of the motion of the glaciers over North America. Figures 2 and 3 show, to larger scales, the features peculiar to Wisconsin. The directions of flow of the ice, as shown by arrows, have been deduced from striations on the rock, and from the orientation of drumlins. The latter are oval hills, of which there are several thousand in Wisconsin. They are ascribed to the glaciers, their long axes indicating the direction in which the ice was moving.

The ice, which was an extension of the Labrador ice sheet, completely covered the Eastern Ridges and Lowlands. Near its borders, the sheet broke up into lobes, as determined by broad valleys and lowlands. See Figures 2 and 3. The Lake Michigan lobe advanced southward down the shallow river valley which was then where the lake is now, and westward across the Niagra upland. The Green Bay lobe, a branch of the Lake Michigan glacier, advanced down the Green Bay—Lake Winnebago—Rock River lowland.

Effects on Topography

Not only did the glaciers carve out the basins of the Great Lakes, as has been held for a long time; but they also sculptured eastern Wisconsin, greatly modifying the topography. The contrast between the glaciated and driftless, i.e. unglaciated, parts of Wisconsin is indeed striking. But even greater glacial sculpture is known to have occurred in Alaska, Greenland, Norway, the Alps, and elsewhere.

Lake Michigan, with its broad, flat bottom and abrupt walls, descending to a depth of 500 to 800 feet, appears to be a basin excavated by ice, not a river valley formed by erosion. The lowland, no doubt, was occupied by a master stream, which probably flowed southward.

Green Bay, which looks like a thumb on Lake Michigan, is comparable with a hanging valley in any glaciated mountains. It is shallow compared with the lake, and where it joins the lake the bottom falls off rapidly.

Differences in Surface Materials

In the driftless portion of Iowa and southwestern Wisconsin the Richmond shale is about 200 feet thick. In eastern Wisconsin it is missing, except only on the slope at the base of the Niagra escarpment, evidently having been eroded away by the glaciers.

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