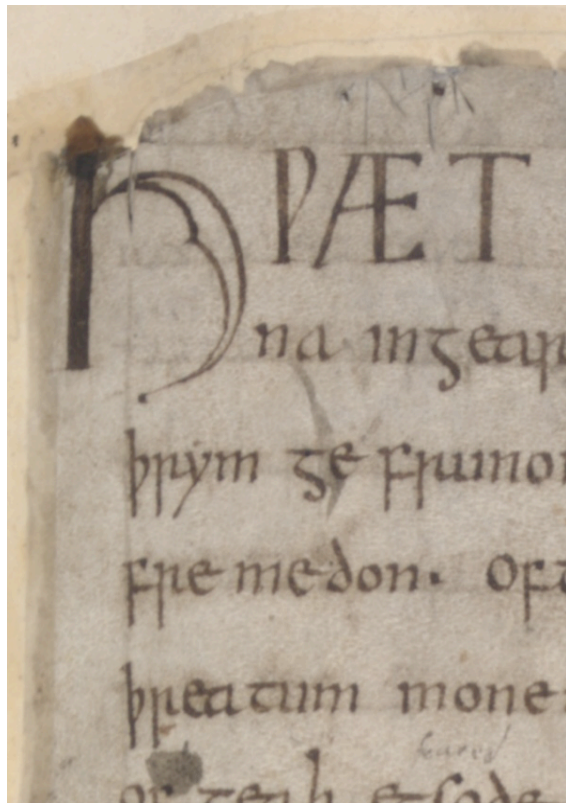




Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic

Part II Paper 5



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

A Subject in Old English Literature: *Beowulf*

ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC TRIPOS, PART II, PAPER 5

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to allow students to acquire an intimate familiarity with *Beowulf*, a masterpiece of world literature whose study lies at the heart of Old English scholarship. By the end of the year, students should have gained a detailed, first-hand knowledge of the text in its original language, and of attendant problems of textual and philological interpretation; they should also have attained an understanding of a variety of broader issues relevant to the poem, its context and themes, including a range of critical opinions. Candidates for this paper will ordinarily already have taken ASNC Part I Paper 5, Old English Language and Literature.

For the 'Moodle' site for this paper, go to <<https://www.vle.cam.ac.uk/login/index.php>>, login with your Raven password and choose 'Part II Paper 5 *Beowulf*'.

Organisation of teaching

Teaching for the course is provided through sixteen departmental classes, eight in each of the Michaelmas and Lent Terms. The Michaelmas series aims to provide familiarity with the details of the whole text, which will be discussed in-depth at the rate of about four hundred lines per week. Students will be asked to read each week's portion carefully in advance (in Old English), and reading lists of important secondary literature for each section will also be provided. In the second term, the

poem is approached as a whole, and issues of more general interpretational interest will be raised and discussed. Each week in Lent, it is envisaged that two students will prepare and deliver brief presentations (five to ten minutes), with each session focussing on a specific topic. Subjects ordinarily expected to be covered will range from literary approaches to understanding the poem (including its structure, themes, characters, imagery and style), to its historical and literary contexts (dating and authorship, sources and analogues) and its transmission (the manuscript). Discussion of these topics is intended to be wide-ranging, and may draw on relevant materials from related disciplines, such as history, palaeography, philology and archaeology.

In keeping with the format of Part II generally, teaching for this paper will not be accompanied by any college supervisions. Students intending to offer the paper will be expected to spend time in private study each week, and during the vacations. They will need to work through the text of *Beowulf* in the Michaelmas term, translating and making careful notes, and should be prepared to follow up on suggested reading and topics discussed in order to broaden their knowledge of the poem and its context; presentations given as part of the Lent term classes will also involve students in planning, researching and delivering their own work to the group. In Easter term, there will be a short run of revision sessions, in which candidates will have the opportunity to consolidate and review their work for the paper as a whole in preparation for the examination.

Examinations

The course is examined by a three-hour Part II paper, in which candidates will be required to answer three questions, each of which has equal weight. The first question, which is compulsory, will consist of a passage of around twenty-five lines from *Beowulf*; candidates will be invited to situate this passage within the context of the poem, and to comment on such matters of interpretation as seem relevant. Candidates must then choose two essays to write from a range of further questions, normally at least ten.

BEOWULF I

Tips for Translating Enormous Epics

Preparing a text the length of *Beowulf* in Old English will be a new experience, and people have sometimes asked me for the benefit of mine when they begin; so here are a few pointers.

It's really entirely up to you how you prepare each week's block of text, so try experimenting and see which way works best for you. The most important piece of advice is that **YOU DON'T HAVE TO WRITE OUT A FULL TRANSLATION**. In fact in lots of ways it's much better if you don't; and even if this is how you've tended to prepare texts in Part I, it would be a good idea to try and wean yourself off this method. Apart from anything else, the act of typing or writing out your translation long-hand isn't a particularly productive use of your time, and if you find you want a translation to help with revising then there are many published ones available. It's better in many ways if one can work through the text as far as possible 'reading' it — and it would be useful to make this your aim as you progress further through the poem (it does all get easier with practice, as always) — using the glosses in Jack (for instance) to help, and making detailed notes as you go along (you can always write out sections of translation in those places where the text is especially or famously difficult, and where it's taken you a while to work out the sense). So long as you can follow the text when we go through it in class, and have sorted out any major stumbling blocks for when you come to revise, then it's essentially fine. And tackling the text in this way has numerous advantages: one of the most important is that it allows you to follow the content/style/themes, etc., of the original more easily than stopping to write down a translation every few seconds. And of course it takes much less scribal effort! (though I do appreciate that the approach I'm outlining here is by no means effortless, and should clearly still be taking you several hours per week of detailed, close work).

Another tip: try working through the week's portion of text once in detail, and then re-read it as straightforwardly as you can soon before the class (e.g. the night before). This will help both sense and features sink in, and will help build up your confidence in tackling the original.