Onomastic Concepts of "Bear" in Comparative Myth: Anglo-Saxon and Greek Literature

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It is the purpose of this study to consider the feasibility of applying onomastic methodology to the diffusion of myth, in this case of the well-known one of the Bearson. Friedrich Panzer in 1911 identified some twenty versions of this myth in Europe and Asia, of which the Old English Beowulf was the only one glorified into epic, about A.D. 700.

It may seem a relatively simple matter to identify versions as deriving from a single common source, as for example, when the action of all of them involves a hero rescuing a maiden or a treasure from a dragon and/or descending to an underworld to slay a monster, precisely the deeds in which Beowulf engages. However, since we are more aware today that most actions in myth arise from universal needs and experiences and involve common psychological determinants, which understandably therefore find independent expression though in quite analogous and parallel forms, we may well raise the question as to whether the resemblances are ever due at all to diffusion from a single common source.

Let me state at the onset, therefore, that I am a believer in cultural diffusion as well as in independent psychological determinants. Whereas, however, the initial urge to a particular kind of myth may stem from the needs of the latter, independent sort, on the other hand the formal shape which the myth takes in its characters, details, and
other features, would in some cases at least have a single narrative source from which that myth spread over continents and in many languages and dialects. It is as though at some point in the prehistoric period, probably, some poetic genius, literally, a "born creator or maker," took particular universal experiences that were already in some loose oral form and effectively shaped those needs into a narrative prototype, giving them viable, immortal form by which they could be transmitted by one group to another and for a very long time. Moreover, it was because of a basis in commonly shared psychological experiences that certain tales and myths became readily acceptable when first heard from culture to culture simply because their elements struck so deeply familiar an internal chord.

But how can we be more certain that what we call comparative myth involves more than that shared common human experience which has been cast in parallel actions, rather than arising, in some instances at least, from a single organizing source which is then diffused? It would seem that the latter can be the case, as will be demonstrated.

It appears that a given myth receives a definite basic organization and structure by virtue of being composed of elements of a linguistic nature which not only define and limit it but also enable it to be conveyed by literal translation from one people to another. By means of this verbal structure, specifically onomastic, it is possible to identify even seemingly remote versions as having a common source—even when, in fact, we may scarcely recognize offhand how comparatively close their actions and episodes actually are. Moreover, epithets and
other nouns that are not personal names but which are closely associated with given characters should also be, more effectively, capitalized. When left in lower-case type (and this, too, is merely an editorial convention) we tend automatically to downgrade the complex substantive nature of a given character. Grendel is not only "Grendel," but he is as much "The Monster," rather than simply "a monster".

Otherwise it would be difficult to believe, as in our example of comparative myth, that Beowulf, The Monster Grendel, his Dam (otherwise "nameless"), and The Dragon are blood-kin, as it were, to the mythic complex of Perseus, Gorgo-Medusa, her son Chrysaor, The Sea-Monster Ketos, and more. Yet by the application of comparative onomastics this can be shown to be the case. By this demonstration it is hoped that something else, of greater scholarly value, can perhaps also be established, and that is the introduction of onomastics as a new tool of methodology in the pursuit of comparative myth. There is one simple basic rule to this method, however, that must be an absolute in this kind of onomastic study: All names must be literally translated, never transliterated as editors and translators now do. Only by the most careful etymological analysis and scrupulously accurate translation of these can we tear off many a mask and reveal the true meaning beneath and thus compare.

The custom of merely transliterating a name may arise from the fact that sometimes the literal meaning may be elusive, such as that of Achilles for example. But more likely the name may be all too literally descriptive, and in fact unpoetic, awkward, and seemingly even embarrassingly
primitive or simply naive. "Beowulf" has a grand ring to it, whereas "Bee-Wolfer" is graceless indeed. Yet it is as "Bee-Wolfer" that the hero has a long epic and mythic history. It has been recognized for some time that Beo-wulf, Bee-wolf, is not lupine as the "-wulf" suggests, but means "One-Who-Wolfs-Down-Bees," that is, "Honey." The question now arises as to why Bear rather than Wolf was granted the distinction of being the prototype for this hero of the North. The answer is that in prehistoric and later times the great Brown Bear was the largest predator of the northern European forests and the central Asian highlands. Very likely he was the peer of the nine-foot giant Kodiak, a species that still makes awesome tracks in the narrow confines of Alaska. So great was the fear of Brown Bear and his powers that in most places he came under that taboo associated with nominal sanctity which is normally extended to such powers as are too dominant and imminent and which, for one reason or another, are deemed too supernatural to be subject to ordinary controls. The taboo is reserved for those major divinities and forces whose names one must not speak aloud lest unknown consequences result from the invoking of them. Thus, periphrastic epithets which identify but do not invoke are used instead, and sometimes these even supersede and thrust the actual name into oblivion. That this was a common practice in referring to Bear has been demonstrated by Meillet. Conversely, in Greece and Italy where Bear had limited range because the lion was dominant instead until the 8th c. B.C. in Greece at least, a taboo name for it rarely arose, so that Latin
freely used the generic term ursus and Greek arktos which has the same root as the Sanskrit. Where Bear reigned, however, among the languages of the North the Indo-European nomenclature was suspended and the beast identified periphrastically, as bruin, bear or braun, all meaning "The Brown One." The Baltic people preferred alluding to him also as "The Big Foot," and, most tellingly, "The Glory of the Forest." Slavic used a term closest to the Old English "Bee-Wolfer," namely, "The Eater of Honey." Even in Greece, in one limited Bear cult attached to Artemis, Goddess of Wild Animals, she was worshipped as Brauronia and her priestesses were very young girls who donned bearskins during the performance of her rituals.  

Significantly, the hero Beowulf has characteristics that suggest his ursine origins: his slothful boyhood, for one, might well stand comparison with the lumbering ways or even the hibernating habits of Bear. It might account for something of the aspect of "Loner" in his nature, for the grown male Bear, too, has quite solitary habits. Most of all, though, Beowulf resembles Bear in his method of fighting with bare hands and breast and in his notorious bear-hug. It is thus, not by a sword but by the crushing strength of thirty men, that the hero grapples with Grendel to the death and, later, fights with the Frisian hero, Daeghren. Similarly, in Northern legend there is frequent mention of a kind of unarmed warrior who battles "like a mad dog or wolf who bites and kills and against whom neither iron nor fire seems to have any effect." Such a fighter was called in Icelandic a berserker, "One Who Wears a Bear's Coat." In the Epic it is the monster Grendel who
also bites his prey to death, while Beowulf only crushes.

Regardless of his ursine origins, however, the creators of Beowulf did not keep him as Bear, but at some point saw him as completely human; from a menacing villain of the forest he was converted in the North into an apotropaic hero, and his powers, now made benign, were directed against forces of evil intent such as Grendel, his Dam, and the Dragon. How might this have happened?

Plainly, Beowulf had the supernatural powers of the zoomorphic kind associated with those of the Shaman who prevailed in prehistoric Eurasia for millennia and still does among the Siberian Eskimo. In the Shaman, concepts of zoomorphism and anthropomorphism are inseparably and interchangeably aligned. In the case of the Epic, Beowulf, the Bear ancestor had long since been tamed and, indeed, in this respect he seems almost like a gelded bull that has been corralled and trained to function usefully. Such an interpretation also makes it possible to account for the fact that in a culture which valued sons and heirs most highly, nevertheless Beowulf has no offspring. In a society in which it was unthinkable for a king to be in the condition of Beowulf, deliberately wifeless and childless, one can only conclude that the legend thereby tacitly acknowledged that somewhere along its development he was deemed sterile. All of his energies and intentions instead were thought of as curbed and dedicated to the welfare of his people.

In contrast, Grendel, in being introduced in the Epic, is described as *Aeglaeca*, "Monster," who ambushed King Hrothgar's Danes, and, not only as an Evil, a "Killer," *Banam*, but more significantly, as *Deorc*
Deathscua, "Dark Shadow of Death." The struggle between Grendel and Beowulf is, in these terms, profounder than that between Evil and Good as moral powers, but is that between Death and Life, between the host as opposed to the monster Death itself, lurking and ever waiting to spring in the dark of night. 

Etymologically, the name Grendel reveals the same fatal qualities, quite divorced from ethical ones. In Old English, as Klaeber defines the name, it is related to grindan and means "Destroyer." In Old Norse it is related to grindell, one of the poetical terms for "Storm," and to grenja, meaning "to bellow." Hence, Grendel is "The Destroyer," by grinding, and he is "The Roarer." Raging, storming, and roaring, he destroys men by crushing, tearing them apart and grinding their flesh in devouring them. He seems to have been endowed with certain attributes of the berserker and the "Honey-Devourer." Like a scapegoat he assumes the castoff bearskin of the power who has been converted to a man and becomes a force of Death. Moreover, Grendel is immune to attack by swords for obviously that symbol of man's phallic powers can do naught against Death. Grendel's powers are subdued only when the great hero with bear-hug wrestles with this agent of Death, like two alter egos of Good and Evil, of Life and Death.

As an agent of Death Grendel cannot stand the life, the merriment and song ringing from Hrothgar's Heorot, "Hart-Hall." That the royal seat itself is named after an animal is another indication of the zo-omorphic, totemic world in which this Anglo-Saxon Epic still moved in spite of the fact that the poet is regarded by some scholars as a Christian.
The name of Heorot itself suggests how dominant still is its pagan cult origin. The cult aspect of the hart, which appears frequently in proto-Celtic context, may also be suggested by the fact that recent excavations at Yeavering, the royal seat of Edwin of Northumbria, have revealed a hall which resembled Heorot in plan, was identical in layout with early Northumbrian churches. A royal seat such as "Hart-Hall" served for congregational meetings, sacred and secular, and, if the archaeological implications are correct, acted as the natural prototype for the Christian church as well. In plain language, the very names alone within the Epic, Beowulf, clear us in to the fact of how much the pagan and primitive world is the vital background of its action.

In contrast to these highly literal names for Beowulf and Grendel, it is curious that Grendel's mother at first seems to have no name—only a series of epithets, which, however, are most illuminating: "... Grendles modor, ides aglaecwif... ." While it is the convention in English translations to capitalize the descriptive epithet, Grendel, "Grinder," "Roarer," "Destroyer," and thus turn it into a proper name, such a change is not made in any of his Dam's descriptive nomenclature. But if we honor her in the same manner, and (as noted earlier) only editorial convention or mere habit bars the way, she emerges as Modor, meaning "Mother," as in, say, "Mother of God," and as ides Aglaecwif, meaning "Lady, Monster-Woman." It was at this point, as I was capitalizing her epithets, that suddenly bells of memory
pealed for me, for in this juxtaposition of "Destroyer," "Lady," and "Monster-Woman," there was evoked a singularly literal parallel with the Perseus and Gorgo-Medusa myth.

First,14 Perseus' name is derived from the Indo-European root *perthein* and means "Destroyer," by cutting, and cutting is precisely what he does in destroying Gorgo by amputating her head. For this he is normally represented as using a short sword rather like a long dagger, for it has no guard hilt. Vase painting and myth similarly associate a sakos with him, a sack or bag in which he puts the head of Medusa.

Medusa herself, whose capitalized epithet in her case tradition arbitrarily accepts as her proper name, unlike the convention regarding Grendel's Mother, means literally, "Lady," and is the feminine form of the title accorded her lover Medon Poseidon, meaning "Lord Poseidon." For both these monstrous ladies the title "Lady" is surely not so much honorific as cautious euphemism. Now, Medusa's other name, or rather her capitalized epithet (and we appreciate more and more that epithets are what all names in myth really are), is Gorgo, meaning "Roarer," the same as the old Norse epithet for Grendel. As its root *gorg* itself indicates, as well as English derivatives such as "gargle," "gargoyle," "gorge," etc., and even "Gargantua," Shakespeare's "voracious monster," it is a *gurgling*, guttural sound, closest to the threatening *grrgrr* of a "growing" beast. Thus, the same onomatopoetic sound occurs in the name of Grr-endel and Gorr-go. Furthermore, Gorgo is characterized not
only by her great, wide-open mouth necessary for roaring, but also by her fierce teeth fitted for crushing and grinding the bodies of men. In addition, Homer also speaks of her as *blosuropis*, meaning "bristly-haired," presumably like a shaggy beast. In Greek myth, however, it is not her teeth which destroy men, though Freud has shown how these and her mouth symbolize the *vulva dentata*, the castrating female organ. Rather, it is her devastating Evil Eyes: one look from these and a man is turned to stone, which is to say he is unmanned. As such, therefore, Gorgo is the classical and universal "Mom" of all times and all peoples; she is the dominating female whom all grown men fear to have enter their bed. But Perseus, forewarned of Gorgo's potential for castration, averts his gaze while he cuts off her head and conceals it in the sack. He uses the head later, and consistently, only against males of wanton sexual intent.

This highly complex and universally significant concept of the menacing figure, as roaring, growling, shaggy, animaloid and glaring, and suggestive of the angry, threatening female, is basic to the Gorgo-Medusa of the Perseus myth. It is also more and more central to the Beowulf story as we investigate it and its various Analogues as well, as I do elsewhere at length, all of which serve as illuminating transitional steps from myth to the Epic.

Beyond this constellation of names we find that Lady Gorgo and the equally monstrous Lady Mother of Grendel, have each settled into her own culture, in analogous ways. Both are forced to dwell in remote and watery regions: Grendel's Dam in desolate "cold streams", *cealde streamas*...
and an underground cave; Gorgo Medusa, in the frontier lands beyond Okeanos (which in Hesiod's Theogony consistently means "streams" and "rivers"). Also, the gorgon head of the decapitated Medusa finds refuge in the underworld where Odysseus sees it, while Beowulf encounters Grendel's Dam in her underwater cave and then cuts off Grendel's head. Both epic poets show their awareness of the essentials of those universal epics which require the hero to descend to underground, subhuman regions and engage in struggle with the spirits below. So also, we recall, do Aeneas and Gilgamesh, only with one markedly significant difference: they do not share in the same complex constellation of names as do our other mythic figures.

In the Old English version, and presumably prior to the composition of the Epic, Lady seems furthermore to have split into two figures, of Mother and her son Grendel who is her Roaring aspect. He, too, is characterized by preternatural, wildly glaring eyes which confound men as do Medusa's. It seems correct, therefore, to suggest that the hero's two duels with the mother and son are really to be regarded as two encounters with one personality. Moreover, just so, on being decapitated, Medusa, Poseidon's Lady, splits open and gives birth from her severed neck to Poseidon's son Pegasus, the winged horse. His unusual form was the Greeks' acknowledgement that his father was God of Horses as well as of Water, for Pegasus' own name derives from the word πεγή, meaning "Well-Spring." At the same time Medusa also gives birth to Chrysaor, a full-grown youth, but one who seems to have little visible connection with either his divine father or his
monstrous mother. Grendel, too, is curiously fatherless, unless we regard him as literally a split personality, split off from his mother, as just stated. But, in comparison with Grendel, or even with Pegasos who figures so prominently in the Bellerophon myth, Chrysaor takes no further action of any kind in any myth. Yet it is his name Chrysaor which reveals that he is not a person, but actually the personification of an object, and one which is very important to both the Anglo-Saxon and the Greek versions of this myth, for Chrysaor means "Golden Sword." Now, also, in the Lady Monster-Woman's lair where Beowulf contends with her, hangs just such a supernatural sword, Fetelhilt. Davidson, the foremost authority on Anglo-Saxon swords, finds the term Fetelhilt "unique," as she says, "arising out of a traditional element in the story though its significance is no longer apparent in the poem as we have it [my emphasis, T.P.F.]." But, if we shift the spelling of fetel to faetel as some do, the meaning of the term emerges as "plate beaten out of metal, especially gold," and as such, the term readily translates into "golden hilt." If capitalized, Fetelhilt emerges as literally the Chrysaor of the Greek.

Fetelhilt, moreover, was made by giants of old who are described not only by the Anglo-Saxon term eotenisch, but by the Greek term gigantas as well. Curiously, that happens to be the only word of distinctively Greek origin in the entire Epic. It is used here and elsewhere to describe further the hilt of this same sword. At which point, and in view of the foregoing argument as to possible contamination from the Greek, might it not be valid to ask whether those
gigantas do not perhaps explain the origin of that obscure "traditional element" which Davidson suspects in reference to it? The poet himself also considers it a sword of obscure origin when he declares it the work of "wundorsmitha," which Earle perceptively notes does not mean "of wonderful smiths" but "of smiths of wonderland."\textsuperscript{23} In the poet's thinking it is the place of origin that is remarkable, not the craftsman. To continue in this light: The contest of the reference to the gigantas arouses further suspicions of contamination from Greek sources, for as Hrothgar surveys the hilt, "the old relic" given to him by Beowulf, he finds inscribed upon it "the origin of primeval quarrel, what time the flood, the rushing ocean destroyed the 'giants' brood (gigantas cyn)."

This makes the third time the same gigantas are mentioned, albeit in reference to Cain, though, very significantly, in a context quite un-biblical: "He banished him [Cain] far away, the Maker, for that crime banished him from mankind. From that origin all strange broods awoke, giants (eotens) and elves and ogres, as well as giants (gigantas--a foreign breed perhaps, as distinguished from the local Anglo-Saxon eotens?) who warred against God a long time."

The Biblical Cain never has such a monstrous brood, nor are giants ever wiped out in any flood by the Lord for warring against Him. Again, Davidson quite validly regards this Biblical interpretation of the runic inscription on Fetelhilt as "obscure and purposeless," but then adds, "... but if we regard it as a slight twist of an earlier non-Christian tradition connected with the sword, given by a poet well acquainted with Genesis, it becomes very understandable."\textsuperscript{24} This seems precisely what has happened. Besides the Old Testament Satan and his followers, the
only other host to war against the chief divinity are the Giants, the Titans, against Zeus and the Olympians as celebrated by Hesiod in the Theogony. Moreover, surrounding that portion of the ancient Greek version of the genesis of the cosmos, there is embedded in it the legend of the first of the great Greek heroes mentioned by name, and that is Perseus. Those Giants of the Theogony are wiped out not by flood but in a colossal battle against the god, Zeus. Therefore, if we take all this vexing admixture of names, terminology, and situations in Beowulf, which appear to have strange and irrational parallels to those in the Greek Theogony of the early 7th c. B.C., and contaminate them with a respectably late touch of Genesis, including The Flood, then certain "obscurities" in Beowulf become much more explicable.

The poet compounds all this by another term which the scholars also label as "obscure," though it need not be so regarded if analyzed according to comparative etymology: That runic inscription referred to is engraved on the so-called scennum of Petelhilt and is a term the exact significance of which is not clearly understood. Davidson again suggests that there may have been a special tradition regarding scennum in some earlier and lost version of the story, misunderstood by the poet. It has been interpreted by some to mean "skin" and therefore it is suggested at this time that there is present in the story a certain contamination from the skin-bag which Perseus carries with him to bear off the head of Gorgo. However, in reinterpreting the myth in the North, the skin has somehow become combined with the great sword of gold associated
naturally with the Lady Monster. Moreover, a parallel involving a special sword and a bag seems also to have been part of the Icelandic Grettir Sage, the most important of the Analogues of Beowulf. In addition, the particular weapon used by Grettir is again, as Davidson states, as seemingly "obscure" as Fettelhilt, for it is called a Heptisax (a term noted as strange even by the saga-teller). It is, however, a term normally applicable only to a knife or dagger without a guard-hilt, and, as such, is precisely the kind of weapon depicted in Greek vase paintings of Perseus beheading Gorgo. Thus, in the Grettir Saga, the beheading of the monster, the short dagger-like sword and the bag, contain persistent elements that are very essential also to the core of the Greek myth.

Actually there is much more to be explored by way of comparative myth regarding the Eurasian roaring Brown Bear, Lady Monster and the decapitating Hero of Greek and Northern legend. The Analogues are full of parallels both to that Epic and the substance of the Gorgo-Perseus myth. Moreover, what, for example, do we make of the hero of the Kojiki legend of Japan, who like Beowulf slays a dragon, just as Perseus slays the great sea-monster Ketos, and finds in the dragon's body what is simply translated as a "golden sword"? Or, when we apply the appropriate capital letters, does the original Japanese version mean "Golden Sword," as does the Chrys-aor of the Greek?

All this may seem like skating on thin Nordic ice, indeed, until we come to grips with the fact so hard for a book-reading culture such
as ours to appreciate, that no human baggage traveled more widely, continuously, or swiftly even across the expanse of Eurasia than did story-telling. It found acceptance first and foremost in being based on universal psychological experience. Further, as Panzer found, it was structured within a framework of set situations and actions in conjunction with certain ideas that comprise the core elements of it. But then we find that it is the names, both the obvious capitalized terminology, and, very importantly, those very literal epithets and descriptive terms, which we normally relegate to the ancillary role of minor adjectives, but which should be promoted to capitalized forms themselves—it is all these which actually carry the burden of any myth. It is the names in their literal meanings which comprise the core structure of any myth and convey in capsule form its meaning, the meaning which is only then acted out in the episodes. The names are the skeleton of the myth, and the narrative its flesh.

Finally, if such a constellation of names, epithets, and significant terminology is translated—and not just transliterated, for that is the fatal mistake—and is then successfully matched with a comparable constellation of names as well as of actions, then we have evidence, I believe, for the presence of comparative myth. Normally it is the obvious parallels of action which first clue us into making such a possible comparison. But it is by the application of etymology and onomastics that we can be assured of the most definitive evidence. It is hoped,
at least, that this onomastic study in comparative myth has demonstrated a methodology that can be applied in further contexts.

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2. Klaeber, p.xxv and n. 6a. Carpenter, p. 43. The "wolf" is descriptively important because the male of the species bolts his food down in large, undigested chunks while on the hunt but regurgitates these, even 24 hours later, to feed the lactating females and puppies left behind in the den. In like manner Grendel devoured his victims but not for the same reasons.


7. Hector Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: 1967), pp. 121, and n. 3. It was also recounted by Saxo Grammaticus, Historia Danica II, sect. 56, that a drink of bear's blood was thought to make a man stronger.

8. Maurice Bowra, Heroic Poetry (London: 1952), pp. 16ff. This zoomorphic-anthropomorphic relationship is at the basis of Hiberno-Saxon art and has its antecedents, apparently, in the protohistoric art of Europe and Asia and which was taken north by the Goths from Southern


10. Klaeber, pp. xxiii, xxvili-xix; Lawrence, p. 163 traces Grendel to O.E. grund, i.e. "ground," "bottom," or "watery depth," and views the name as a term for a "water-monster," such as the water-fall trolls of Scandinavian myth. Also, Ch. W. Kennedy, Beowulf The Oldest English Epic (Oxford: 1940), p. xx.

11. The sculpture of the anthropophagos monster of Noves (Bouches du Rhone) answers remarkably the image of Grendel. From its gaping, great-toothed jaws protrudes a human arm, while its forepaws rest upon two bearded, severed heads seemingly as noble in appearance as must have been Aeschere, King Hrothgar's beloved councillor whom Grendel similarly devoured. Porinsias MacCana, Celtic Mythology (London: 1970), pp. 46-7.


15. in my book, under preparation, Several Aspects of Beowulf.
16. G. N. Garmonsway, Jacqueline Simpson, Hilda Ellis Davidson, 
Beowulf and Its Analogues (London: 1968); Jones pp. 15-21; Kennedy 
pp. xxii-xxxii.


19. For Medusa, see ref. above (note 14). For Beowulf, v. 729, "... 
out of his Grendel's eyes there stood likest to flame an eerie light." 
Glaumr, the fiend in the Grettir Saga, has similar eyes. See Analogues 
above n. 16) pp. 302, 311. For a reference to the Evil Eye in Beowulf, 
see v. 1776.

20. As Ritchie Girvan also suggests, Beowulf and the Seventh Century, 

21. On Fetelhilt: Beowulf vv. 1557ff. The argument is also given 
that a fetel-hilt is intended to mean a "belted-hilt", and as such would 
refer to a "ring-sword". Klaeber p. 470. But, since the poet 
further alludes to the hilt as literally "gilded," gylden hilt (v. 
1677), it is evident that he is not referring to rings but to a 
golden-hilted sword. Moreover, as Earle notes, a gold-plated sword, 
golde fæted sword, was one of the insignia of knighthood. John 

22. Beowulf vv. 1557-65; 1677-81. Hilda R. Davidson, The Sword in 

23. Beowulf v. 1681. Earle p. 164. Yet Klaeber would excise this 
passage for no apparent reason, pp. 189 and cvii.


25. Theogony vv. 664-735.

27. Beowulf v. 1694. Donald Fry, The Beowulf Poet (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1968) 127-8. Davidson (above n. 22) 135ff., scennum has been related to Genn. skanjo, M. H. G. schene ("membrane"), and to O. N. skan ("crust"). On these grounds it is interpreted as "skin" and as such, perhaps, was a leather cover for the hilt. I think not, for reasons stated in the text; and because if it were a term reserved for a hilt-cover, it would very likely have been more extensively used in literature, instead of this hapax legomenon.

28. Analogues on the Grettir Saga, vv. 139ff, 302-16, which is dated ca. A.D. 1300-20.

29. On the heptisax: Analogues ch. xvi; on p. 312 it is translated as "short-sword." Davidson, pp. 135ff, discusses the term at length. It is worth noting perhaps that two such short-swords of the heptisax type were engraved on a dolmen at Stonehenge, and are regarded as of Cretan type, indicative, as some scholars believe, of the presence of those early Greeks in Britain, perhaps even as the architects of that megalithic structure. If so, who knows what sagas and tales they brought with them besides those swords? Gerald Hawkins and John White, Stonehenge Decoded (New York: 1965), p. 51.