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## Tribal Loyalties in the *Finnsburh* Fragment and Episode

Richard North

The Lay of Finnsburh is sung to the Danes of Heorot on the same day that Grendel, their enemy and former invader of the hall, is pronounced dead. Three generations before the present scene in *Beowulf*, Hnæf of the Half-Danes was attacked in the night by King Finn, his host and brother-in-law, then killed after five days' battle. Finn made peace with the survivors, whom Hengest, Hnæf's lieutenant, now led. After a winter dark with the memory of slaughter, Hnæf's Danish kinsmen with Hengest's help killed Finn in revenge, looted his kingdom and took Hildeburh, his queen and Hnæf's sister, back to her people. To the Danes in Heorot this is thus a tale of glory, but it is with stress on the bitterness of Finnsburh that the poet of *Beowulf* reports their tribal epic to us. Pity for the victims rather than scorn for the vanquished is evoked. Particularly striking is the innocence of Hildeburh, who, as Finn's wife and Hnæf's sister, must mourn a Frisian son, a Danish brother and finally her Frisian husband. As Hildeburh moves elegiacally into the story in its beginning, middle and end, she is the harbinger of Wealhþeow, the 'foreign slave' queen of King Hroþgar's Danes, who comes forward when the Lay of Finnsburh is told. It is with hypermetric lines that the poet shows his foreboding of a like disaster in Heorot:<sup>1</sup>

þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere,  
æghwylc oðrum trywe.

(*Beowulf* [*Beo*] lines 1164-65)

[At that time their family was still together,  
each one true to the other.]

Tom Shippey has shown how Wealhþeow and Beowulf may see a prophecy in Finnsburh which in their celebrations the Danes and the aged King Hroþgar do not.<sup>2</sup>

To the audience of *Beowulf* the Finnsburh story is presented in an allusive rather than epic style, and though this episode is clear enough in outline, in many small details its narrative remains a muddle. Consequently, some scholars have emended words in the *Beowulf* text without restraint, in line 1130 even adding *ne*, 'not', to a positive sentence. No disrespect of this kind is intended in my emendations, which are 'he[o] ær mæste heold' (the joys of Hildeburh, not Finn), 'i[n]cge gold' and 'Finne [ea]l unhlitme' (*Beo*, ll. 1079, 1107, 1128-29). Other scholars have invoked the heroic code wherever they hope to explain the otherwise impenetrable motives of Hengest, Finn and other soldiers in this story. Part of my aim is to show that in Finnsburh, ultimately, the answers lie in the text and not in apocryphal truths of the 'heroic' kind.

### **Reconstruction**

Finn 'the savage of spirit' rules a kingdom of fabled wealth in fifth-century Frisia. His subjects include a tribe of immigrant Jutes. Hildeburh is Finn's queen; her brother Hnæf, a Dane on his mother's side, comes to Finnsburh to fight in Finn's service. Hnæf's own band, the Half-Danes, numbers Danes, his father's kin the Hocings, Jutes, Secgan, and perhaps men of other tribes. As Hnæf's mercenaries begin to idle at Frisian expense, Finn suspects his brother-in-law of designs on his kingdom. He sees a risk of conspiracy, in particular, between Hnæf's Jutes and the Jutes on the Frisian side. He attacks Hnæf's hall in the night and to be sure of his own Jutes' loyalty, receives pledges from them to join his attack. Finn makes peace with the survivors when Hnæf is killed after five days' fighting.

Finn now deals only with Hengest, the leader of Hnæf's survivors and a relative of Jutes on the Frisian side. He does so because Hengest, as a Jute, has no overriding duty to avenge his Danish leader Hnæf. In the name of his band, including Hnæf's relatives, Hengest now swears an oath by which he is made the vassal of Finn as long as he remains in Frisia. Hengest will not break this oath, Finn knows, because the god on whose gold it was sworn, Ing, is the patron of both Hengest and the Frisian royal house. Finn thus ensures that should the Danes and any others try to break the oath themselves, they must fight Hengest and his Jutish followers in addition to Finn's retinue. The Danes have no hope of succeeding in this enterprise, and therefore they are forced to acquiesce to a peace with Finn, whom they have a duty to kill. Finn, in this ruthless way, has managed to fill his depleted army with Hnæf's band of Half-Danes minus Hnæf.

### *The Finnsburh Fragment and Episode*

In the autumn, after the dead of both sides are cremated, Hengest is free to leave Frisia with his Jutes and any other mercenaries willing to sail with him. Yet he chooses to stay with Finn all winter until spring. During this time, the Danes ask Hengest more than once to break his oath and aid their vengeance of Hnæf. Hengest refuses, dearly though he would love to break the treaty: secretly he wishes to avenge himself on Finn's Jutes, who in leading the Frisian attack, betrayed the pledges of their own tribal loyalty. Still in fear of the oath, Hengest cannot break it, but quietly tries all winter to induce Finn's Jutes and Frisians to do so and give him the opportunity for violence. Finn, however, has silenced his own men with the threat of death, and Hengest's plan is frustrated.

For this reason he agrees to a Danish plan by which he makes over his command, and thereby his liability for the oath, to one of Hnæf's Scylding kinsmen. Inexorably the Danes have moved closer to their objective: first, by getting common quarters with their Jutish allies; second, by persuading Hengest there to let them break his oath; and third, by using Hengest to reach Finn and kill him in the midst of his retinue. To this end a ceremony takes place in which a son of the eldest Scylding brother Hunlaf gives Hengest a sword and makes him his vassal.

Two other Scyldings put the rest of their plan into action: singing of their earlier adventures on the sea to the whole company in Finn's hall, they surreptitiously rouse their own men, lead into the story of Finn's attack and taunt the Frisians; thereby breaking their oath without Hengest's opposition, and in fact with his help. For though Finn trusts no Dane near him, he has come to trust Hengest close enough for Hengest, on the Danish signal, to put him to the sword.

The Danes loot Finn's home and bring his widow Hildeburh back to her kin in Denmark. Hengest sails to Britain with his own followers, and having betrayed King Vortigern, founds the first English kingdom in Kent.

### *Editions*

My interpretation is made from two texts: the *Finnsburh Fragment (Finn)*, transcribed and printed by George Hickes from a loose leaf found in Lambeth Palace Library before 1705, and then lost (fight's beginning and five days' progress); and the *Finnsburh Episode, Beo*, ll. 1063-1160 (aftermath and revenge). The main editors are Frederick Klaeber, in his third edition of *Beowulf* and the Fragment; J. R. R. Tolkien, whose lectures A. J. Bliss sorted into reconstructions of Fragment and Episode with additional notes and appendices; and D. K. Fry, who

gives a survey of the critical heritage with some pragmatic comments of his own. For the sake of consistency with other quotations, I shall follow the text of E. V. K. Dobbie, as his 'Hakenstil' lines are faithful to the style of the rest of *Beowulf*.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Finnsburh Fragment*

A young leader, probably Hnæf, rouses his men from sleep with vigorous cries. Their hall is part of 'Finn[e]sburuh' [Finn's citadel] (*Finn*, l. 36), on which the simplified modern title is based. This hall will soon be attacked by a huge and probably Frisian army. Hnæf's men move to defend two doors from attack, and after a short exchange of words, Sigeferþ kills the first attacker, Garulf. At the other door are Guþlaf and Ordlaſ, with Hengest behind them. Hnæf's gifts of mead, says the poet, are repaid by the courage of all his sixty warriors. The fighting lasts five days without loss on Hnæf's side. Then a wounded soldier (on whichever side) goes back to his leader who asks him how the enemy are bearing up.

In the midst of his exhortations Hnæf seems to refer to some earlier trouble between his group and Finn's:

Nu arisað weadæda	Now arise deeds of misery
ðe ðisne folces nið	that will further this
fremman willað.	tribal hatred.
( <i>Finn</i> , ll. 8-9)	

In *Widsið*, l. 26 (*Wid*) Finn's patronymic is 'Folcwalding' [son of Folcwalda (ruler of the people)]. (Stanley B. Greenfield believes that the unnamed 'folces hyrde' [shepherd of the people], at the end of the Fragment, is Hnæf, but it is more in keeping with the other uses of *folc* in the Finnsburh material that this leader should be Finn himself.)<sup>4</sup> 'Folces nið', in this case, may show that Hnæf and his men before the attack were to be considered part of one *folc* ruled by Finn.

What had Hnæf or his men done to provoke this attack, after they came to Frisia? Here only conjecture is possible. But it might be relevant to cite the story of the Germanic mercenaries of Kent in c. 449, for which the earliest source is Gildas's sixth-century *De Excidio Britanniae*. When these newcomers began to idle at their employers' expense, the Britons at length grew suspicious and tried to drive them out. The complaint against them was simple:

veluti militibus et magna, ut mentiebantur, discrimina pro bonis  
hospitibus subituros, impetrant sibi annones dari.

(Chap. 23).

[deceitfully saying they were ready to undergo great dangers for  
their employers, as if they were soldiers, they demanded to be  
paid in provisions.]<sup>5</sup>

From later versions of this tale it is accepted that Hnæf's thegn Hengest was the leader of these mercenaries. Thus it is possible that in Frisia, not long before, many of the same hirelings had entered Finn's service and aroused his suspicions too. In *Finn*, ll. 8-9, Hnæf admits that a 'folces nið' [tribal hatred] has escalated with the surprise attack on his hall. Therefore it is possible that Hnæf's band formed part of Finn's greater *folc*, that Finn had come to suspect Hnæf of plotting against him, and that Hnæf already knew this was why the Frisians were coming to kill him, before they did so. The Fight at Finnsburh would then be the culmination of long bad feeling between two tribal factions.

### *Factions in Frisia*

The treaty between Finn and Hnæf's survivors is made 'on twa healfa' [on two sides] (*Beo*, l. 1095). Tolkien notes that with *twa* rather than *ba*, 'the two', 'there were more than two possible divisions among the peoples concerned' (p. 114). With the following deductions I shall show that among Hnæf's Half-Danes there were Jutes, Danes or Scyldings, perhaps Hocings, and Secgan (if not other tribes); and in Finn's army, Frisians and Jutes.

Hnæf is said to rule the 'Hocingas' at *Wid*, l. 29, and his sister Hildeburh is 'Hoces dohtor' [daughter of Hoc], in *Beo*, l. 1076. Therefore we cannot rule out Hocings in Hnæf's band. In the Fragment Sigeferþ proclaims himself a 'Secgena leod' [prince of the Secgan] in *Finn*, l. 24. As Hnæf is a 'hæleð Healfdena' [hero of the Half-Danes] in *Beo*, l. 1069, and the 'Herescyldinga betst beadorinca' [best warrior of plunder-Scyldings] in *Beo*, ll. 1108-9, it seems that he and perhaps Hildeburh are related to the Danish Scyldings through Hoc's wife.

In Arngrímr Jónsson's Latin abstract of the lost *Skjöldunga saga*, Gunnleifus, Oddleifus and Hunleifus are counted Skjöldung brothers.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore likely that the counterpart Ordlafr and Guþlafr in *Finn*, l. 16, and Guþlafr and Oslaf in *Beo*, l. 1148, are similarly Scylding brothers, and that 'Hunlafing' [son of Hunlaf] in *Beo*,

l. 1143, is probably their brother's son (rather than the name of a sword).

Hnæf's men are a pirate rabble: Sigferþ at *Finn*, l. 25, calls himself a 'wreccæ wide cuð' [widely famed exile], and the poet probably alludes to Hengest as a 'wrecca' in *Beo*, l. 1137; furthermore Old Icelandic cognates of Hoc and Hnæf, *Haki* and *Hnefi*, are listed under *sækonunga heiti*, 'sea-kings' names', in the Old Icelandic *Þulur*, which, though of the thirteenth century, record poetic synonyms from the pagan period.<sup>7</sup>

Jan de Vries and others have identified Hengest with his namesake Hengistus who played a central part in the legend of the Jutish settlement of Kent in the eighth-century accounts of Nennius, Bede and the authors of the Chronicle (Hengistus is not named in Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*).<sup>8</sup> A. G. van Hamel distinguishes two Hengests, a Jute (Kent) and a Dane (Frisia); but as this is a rare name, it is more likely that the Hengest in the Episode is also a Jute or related to their race.<sup>9</sup> Bliss points out, however, that this is an assumption founded on the Jutish settlement of Kent, and Hengistus and his brother Horsa are nowhere said to be Jutes themselves (pp. 168-80).

The problem of 'Jutes' in *Beo*, ll. 1063-1160, is partly phonological: a WS *Yte* or weak *Ytan* would be expected in *Beowulf* rather than the Anglian *Eotan*, which is unusual; and dative of *Eotan* would be *Eotum* rather than the 'Eotenum', strictly 'giants', governed by 'mid' at *Beo*, l. 1145. It is possible that the -n infix in the dative 'Eotenum' was analogized from 'Eotena', genitive of both 'Jutes' and 'giants' at *Beo*, ll. 1072, 1088 and 1141, but this is not convincing. R. E. Kaske reads 'giants', hence 'enemies', in all three instances of *Eote*, arguing that the Danes started the feud by insulting the Frisians with this nickname. Thus Kaske confronts the problem by eliminating 'Jutes' from the story altogether. He notes that in the thirteenth-century *Skáldskaparmál* it is permitted for poets to indicate 'men' with synonyms for *æsir* (gods) and giants, the last as a term of insult.<sup>10</sup> He is right to doubt R. W. Chambers that this confusion of 'Jutes' and 'giants' was a scribe's, for it could be in the poet's tradition.<sup>11</sup> But scaldic syntax was a peculiarly Scandinavian development, and very different from the diction of *Beowulf*; and the coincidence with Hengistus is too great to exclude 'Jutes' in the meanings of these four forms in the Episode.

Tolkien first proposed that the Jutes in the story of Finnsburh were fighting on both sides, with two reasons. First, in *Beo*, l. 1124, fire swallowed all those taken in battle 'bega folces' [of both sections of the people]. As this fire burns on 'Hnæfes ad' [Hnæf's pyre], Tolkien refers the whole *folc* in question to the Half-Danes, whose sections would therefore be Danish and Jutish (pp. 113-15). But the

possibility cannot be ruled out that the dead of both sides are cremated together. 'Bega folces', in this case, would confirm the Danish submission in *Beo*, ll. 1089-94 by implying that on the pact both sides became one *folc*. If this and my interpretation of 'folces nið' are true, then the Half-Danes did not join, but rather rejoined Finn's army after the attack on their hall and the death of Hnæf.

Tolkien's second piece of evidence for Jutes on both sides is Garulf, the first of Finn's men to die in the attack on Hnæf's hall (*Finn*, l. 31). As a certain Gefwulf rules the Jutes in *Wid*, l. 26, 'ond Ytum Gefwulf', Tolkien may be right to take Garulf as a member of the same tribe in the *Fragment* (pp. 33-34). There is no other *-[w]ulf* name in *Widsið* with a first element alliterating with *g-*, and a relation of Gefwulf to Garulf is made more plausible by the resemblance of 'Sæferð Sycgan' at *Wid*, l. 31 to 'Sigeferþ' the 'Secgena leod' in *Finn*, l. 24.

However, a better indication of Jutes on the Frisian side can be interpreted from 'inne' in *Beo*, l. 1141. Here it is Hengest who for reasons of a bitter grievance thinks more of vengeance than of a spring sailing,

gif he torngemot	if he could bring about
þurhteon mihte	a furious encounter
þæt [MS þ] he Eotena bearn	in such a way that he might
inne gemunde.	remember the sons of Jutes
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1140-41)	in this country.

I have followed the syntax but not all the meaning suggested by Bruce Mitchell, who reads the second line as a final clause with 'inne' 'as an adverb referring back to *torngemot*'.<sup>12</sup> What might 'inne' otherwise be? Suggestions are various: adverb of place 'within', the Jutes within the hall – though the topography is not immediately clear; thought deep 'within' Hengest's mind – though this is not exactly paralleled and does not hint at external violence, as it should, following 'torngemot'; even emended to *irne* to mean 'with iron', hence 'with a sword'. These are discussed by Fry, who follows all Mitchell's solution to 'inne' (p. 44). Two syntactic parallels for my interpretation are written by Wulfstan in the beginning of the eleventh century:<sup>13</sup>

- (1) And cingces þegnes heregeata inne mid denum  
(*Cnut's Laws* II, sect. 71.3)  
[And the heriot of a king's thegn among the Danes in this country]



- (2) & þus hit stod on ðam dagum inne mid Englum

(*Grið*, sect. 4)

[And thus it stood in those days among the English in the land]

In my examples it is the adjacent tribe-word that influences meaning: hence 'the sons of Jutes in this country'. 'Eotena bearn' and 'inne' are split by a caesura, but it works better to take 'inne' with these words than with 'torngemot' a line before, or other words even further away. As Tolkien suggested, therefore, but for partly different reasons, there seem to be Jutes on both sides.

### *Hengest speaks for the Danes*

The poet first enlarges on Hildeburh's suffering, and then on Finn's losses, which were so great

þæt he ne mehte	that he could not
on þam meðelstede	in that place of parley
wig Hengeste	win a fight with Hengest
wiht gefeohtan,	in any way,
ne þa wealafe	nor in fighting with
wige forþringan	the prince's thegn push out
þeodnes ðegne;	the wretched remnant.
ac hig him gepingo budon,	But they offered him terms,
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1082-85)	

With Fry (pp. 39-40) I take 'hig' to refer to Hnæf's men in the nearest preceding noun 'wealafe'; and 'wige . . . ðegne' to be parenthetical with 'wig Hengeste'. Finn, therefore, found in Hengest's tactical mind the only obstacle to destroying Hnæf's survivors. Brodeur, despite this and Finn's epithet in *Beo*, l. 1146 'ferhðfreca' [the savage of spirit], suggests that Finn's 'motives, from first to last, were honourable and magnanimous', for he did not burn the Danes inside.<sup>14</sup> But it is just as likely that, to the extent that Finn does not fire the hall and kill all the defenders inside, he probably wishes to keep (some of) them alive and use them to rebuild his own army. This is more plausible if the Danish faction in Hnæf's war-band was never numerous enough to worry Finn. Thus the Danes offer him terms,

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þæt hie him oðer flet	in such a way that they cleared
eal gerymdon,	for themselves another whole floor,
healle ond heahsetl,	a hall and high-seat(s),
þæt hie healfre gewæld	in such a way that they were
wið Eotena bearn	allowed to have power of
agan moston,	half [the hall] facing the sons of
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1086-88)	the Jutes.

The topography is unclear. If 'oðer flet' denotes the other half of one hall containing all parties, Finn would be assumed to occupy one half facing Danes and (Hengest's) Jutes in the other. But if Finn did not share a hall with Hnæf's men before the fight, why should he do so now? It is then more likely that the Danes should share a hall of their own with their (and Hengest's) Jutes. Literally read, 'wið' would mean 'against', hence 'facing'. 'Moston' on the last line would mean 'were allowed to' rather than 'had to', according to H. J. Solo's recent work on *motan*.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore as it is the Danes who suggested these terms above, so it is more likely that they are fighting for their own conditions ('were allowed to') than submitting to Finn's ('had to share power'). According to these interpretations, the Danes here insist on sharing quarters, now as before, with their Jutish allies.

In this way the Danes seem to trust Hengest and his Jutes to guarantee their safety from Finn. The Danes ask to join Finn's service on equal terms of pay with Frisians. In their request in *Beo*, ll. 1090-91, 'Dene' is apposed to 'Hengestes heap' [Hengest's band], and it is therefore likely that the Danes made Hengest their spokesman, and that Hengest forced Finn to talk with him 'on þæm meðelstede' [in that place of parley] (*Beo*, l. 1082).

#### *Terms of the treaty*

Only Hengest is named in the deal with Finn: he is a good intermediary. This is plausible if Hengest is a Jute, and if Finn, as Tolkien proposed, has dealt with Jutes before in his own army:

Fin Hengeste	Finn to Hengest
elne, unflitme	with zeal declared
aðum benemde	in oaths renouncing feud,
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1096-97)	

'Unflitme' is unique, but this word may be a genitive feminine noun related to *flitan*, 'compete, contend', and therefore I shall not emend it, though I can find no other adverbial use of *elne*. J. L. Rosier emends this word to 'unhlitme' to identify it with a similarly unique 'unhlitme' at *Beo*, l. 1129, 'unflitme' and 'unhlitme' being 'two rare words of very similar shape'; two of Rosier's parallels, however, will confirm MS 'unflitme':<sup>16</sup>

- (1) Relatives of a thief caught stealing, though he will be executed, must 'swear oaths renouncing feud' to the apprehender: 'þa mægas him swerian *aðas unfæhðað*' (*Ine's Laws*, sect. 28, c. 688-95).
- (2) If an apprehender kills the thief in the act, relatives must swear the same 'oath renouncing their feud': 'þæs deaðan mægas him swerian *unceaſes að*' (*Ine's Laws*, sect. 35).

Finn would thus forswear vengeance for his son by cancelling him out with Hnæf. This son, an unnamed half-Frisian, is laid alongside Hnæf in *Beo*, ll. 1114-15. Tolkien believes he fought as a foster-son of Hnæf against his own father, and recently Rolf Bremmer has supported this view with excellent documentation of this 'sister son'/mother brother' *topos* in Germanic literature.<sup>17</sup> But where in this literature does the special relationship in this *topos* outweigh that of father and son? Since Finn's queen Hildeburh orders the laying out of their son, but not apparently of her brother (*Beo*, ll. 1114-15), it is likely that her son died on the Frisian side. There is nothing in the text to show Finn's fight against his own son. No *bot* [compensation] for Hnæf or his nephew is mentioned in the Episode, and therefore an equivalent exchange of combatants could be implied by their proximity on the pyre.

Finn's conditions in *Beo*, ll. 1096-1106, can be divided into four. Firstly his own pledge of provision and *unflitm* or 'renouncing feud', as above. Secondly for all parties:

þæt ðær ænig mon	that no man in that place
wordum ne worcum	in word or deed
wære ne bræce,	should break the pact;

Thirdly for Hnæf's survivors:

ne þurh inwitsearo	nor should they at any time
æfre gemænden	complain through malicious skill.

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*Gemænan*, 'to complain', contains sympathy for the shame described in the next lines, that the Danes serve their lord's killer; therefore not the Frisians, but the Danes are probably subject of 'gemænden'.

Fourthly for Finn's men : if any Frisian mentioned the past murders 'frecnen spræce' [with savage speech],

þonne hit sweordes ecg	then afterwards it would be
syððan scolde.	the sword's edge [for him].

By the logic of Finn's circumstances, any Frisian claiming compensation for a private loss would in effect be setting it at higher rate than his king's son (now matched with Hnæf). This would help to explain Finn's willingness to execute his own men. (But this is also a safeguard against one or more *agents provocateurs*.)

#### *Finn's use of Hengest*

Hengest protects the Danes from Finn; and I shall try to show that as far as Finn sees any danger from Hnæf's kinsmen as opposed to other tribes among the Half-Danes, he uses Hengest to protect him from the Danes. With Hengest to keep the bargain for both sides, this treaty is inevitably the source of Finn's safety from the Danes under Hengest's command.

The Danish submission to Finn, says Tolkien, would be 'made easier by the assumption that Finn was not the original attacker' (p. 104). Tolkien assumes that Finn's Jutes were the first to attack Hnæf, as above; and furthermore, that Finn was dragged into the attack against his will. But Finn is still said to be responsible for Hnæf's death, whose men were not to complain,

ðeah hie hira beaggyfan	though they followed
banan folgedon	their ring-giver's killer,
ðeodenlease,	without a prince,
þa him swa ȝeþearfod wæs;	since the necessity had been laid
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1102-04)	upon them in this way.

It is probably true that they hope to wait and strike at Finn after the treaty. But given this, why can and do the Danes wait until spring to surprise him?

Why, too, should Finn want to incorporate the Danes into his army after having fought them for five days and killed their leader Hnæf? No obligation on

Finn's part can be made out in the Fragment or Episode that is sufficient to override these basic objections. It is odder still that Finn lets his Frisian barons go home for the winter. After the oath ceremony and cremation of the dead, and at the start of a new division in the written text,

Gewiton him ða wigend	The fighters then left
wica neosian,	to inspect their estates,
freondum befeallen,	bereft of kinsmen,
Fryslanð geseon,	to see Friesland,
hamas ond heaburh.	homes and high-dwelling.
(Beo, ll. 1125-27)	

Literally 'hamas ond heaburh' seems to denote the *terpen* that are known to have covered the Frisian areas in the fifth century through to the thirteenth century when coastal dykes allowed the safe draining of low ground.<sup>18</sup>

Having made a treaty that admits the Danes into his army, Finn now leaves himself almost alone with them for the length of one winter. So far no scholar has tried to explain Finn's security in his enemies' hands, or even drawn attention to it. And yet it is obvious, and even indicated by Finn himself in *Beo*, ll. 1102-04, that the Danes have a duty to avenge their leader Hnæf. Is Finn an innocent, then, to overlook the risk of Danish vengeance? Tolkien seems to think so (pp. 104, 117, 137), though Finn's unequivocal epithet 'ferhðfreca' [the savage of spirit] in *Beo*, l. 1146, and his willingness to execute his own men in *Beo*, ll. 1104-06, make him out to be anything but a fool.

Finn's treaty holds one winter long, and so initially Finn must be right to be secure in it. Hengest is a Jutish intermediary between him and the Danish 'wealaf', Hnæf's 'wretched remnant' (*Beo*, l. 1084). Therefore Finn trusts the Half-Danes' spokesman, Hengest, with his life.

To inspire such extraordinary trust, Hengest must have satisfied Finn of his good intentions. Finn's security can therefore be due to nothing else than Hengest's fear of the oath which he swears on behalf of the Danes and other tribes of Hnæf's old band.

*Hengest's private intrigue*

The treaty is sealed with one oath in *Beo*, l. 1107 (or more if 'að' is generally meant). Both sides now burn their dead, with Hildeburh suffering for all.

The Danes, for their part, have taken Hengest's leadership, to survive. They have time now in which to recover, but they cannot avenge Hnæf without first killing Hengest and all his Jutish followers. Dealing only with Hengest, in this way, is Finn's guarantee of safety from Danes.

If the 'heroic code' had any place in this Episode, why did Hengest and the Danes strike a deal with the man responsible for Hnæf's death? Should they not have died around his body, instead? And yet no commentator, so far, has failed to use this unwritten code as a constant in determining the motives of these warriors in the Episode. In fact there is no evidence in this text that Hengest has any duty to avenge a leader who was not a blood-relative (*pace* Fry, pp. 11-12).

Hengest's enemies seem rather to be Jutes immigrant in Frisia, as I have shown above (*Beo*, ll. 1140-41). Hengest seeks 'gýrnwraece' [revenge for an injury] (*Beo*, l. 1138), and I suggest that this is to repay the Frisian Jutes for having taken part in Finn's attack. I have shown above that Garulf, the first to fall on the Frisian side in the Fragment, may be a Jute. My reason now for suggesting that Finn ordered his Jutes to show their loyalty to him by joining the attack, comes from lines opening the narrative:

Ne huru Hildeburh  
herian þorfte  
Eotena treowe;  
(*Beo*, ll. 1071-72)

Nor did Hildeburh, at any rate,  
have any need to praise  
the pledges of the Jutes.

The effect of 'huru' is to stress the name of Hildeburh with which it alliterates; not just to intensify an awareness of her blameless suffering described in the lines to come; but in conjunction with the litotes of 'ne herian þorfte', to imply that if not Hildeburh, another had cause to praise the loyalty of the Jutes. The two men in the preceding lines are Hnæf and Finn. If Hnæf is contrasted with Hildeburh in this way, it is because Hengest and other Jutes were loyal to him in the fight. If Finn, the husband of Hildeburh, it is because he had reason to praise his own Jutes. It is the juxtaposition of Finn's needs with those of his wife Hildeburh that shows the contrast of interests in the best *chiaroscuro* style. And therefore Finn required 'pledges' from his Jutes: that is, he believed it was necessary to test their loyalty.

If Finn exacted pledges from his Jutes whereby they joined his attack against a band partly made up of their own people, then the Jutes 'in this country' betrayed the family from which they came. It would be to settle this score that Hengest stays in Frisia.

Hengest ða gyt	Hengest still lived with Finn
wælfagne winter	through a winter stained
wunode mid Finne	with slaughter,
[ea]l unhlitme	without casting lots
– eard gemunde –	– he had a homeland in mind –
þeah þe he meahte	al(?)–though he could
on mere drifan	sail his ring-prowed ship(s)
hringedstefnan;	on the ocean.
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1127-31)	

As the manuscript readings stand, this text shows Hengest choosing to stay over the winter. (I have followed Fry in reading 'eard gemunde' in parenthesis.)

So far most scholars have looked ahead to the following winter-ice imagery in *Beo*, ll. 1132b-33a, assuming that Hengest was trapped by the winter against his will, and then adding 'ne' to 'meahte on mere drifan' to make 'he could not sail on the ocean'.<sup>19</sup> But the poet shows a variety of weathers: just as he distinguishes the spring from winter, so he probably depicts the autumn in 'holm storme weol, won wið winde' [the deep heaved in the storm, fought against the wind] (*Beo*, ll. 1131b-32a). Sailing in autumn, though dangerous, was possible, but Hengest chose to stay in Frisia.

The poet marks Hengest's refusal to sail with 'unhlitme', which is not paralleled but must literally mean 'without casting lots'. There has been much disagreement over this word, which is probably related to *hleotan*, 'to cast lots'. Dobbie has 'having no choice' (without opportunity to cast lots) and Fry and J. F. Vickrey 'voluntarily' (without deciding by lots).<sup>20</sup> Each side of this discussion is concerned with squaring Hengest's Frisian stay with his 'heroic' duty to Hnæf and an ensuing spiritual dilemma. As a result, no interpretation of this passage has emerged in which the action in Finnsburh over the winter is not either muddled or implausible.

Noone seems to have noted Gildas's account of what (though named 'Saxons') are clearly the same warriors looking for omens when, presumably after the death of Finn, they sail from the continent to Kent:<sup>21</sup>

*The Finnsburh Fragment and Episode*

Tum erumpens grex catulorum de cubili [sic] leaenae barbarae,  
tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus,  
secundis velis omine auguriisque, quibus vaticinabatur, certo  
apud eum praesagio, quod ter centum annis patriam, cui proras  
librabat, insideret.

(Chap. 23)

[Then from the lair of the savage lioness broke out a pack of  
cubs, in three 'keels', as their tongue says it, our 'long ships';  
their sails following the omens and auguries which foretold,  
according to a sure portent among them, that they would live for  
three hundred years in the homeland to which their prows  
headed.]

Putting out to sea, in both contexts, is implied in the image of 'lots' or 'omens': *omen*, *auguria* or *hlitm*. Hengest does not sail, therefore he does not look for omens. As for his 'eard' [homeland], I suggest that he has a new one in mind – Britain. A similar use of *gemunan* with present or future reference occurs in *Beo*, l. 179, where the pagan Danish worshippers had not yet been to Hell, but in 'helle gemundon' had it 'in mind'. Hengest plans to settle a new land, but his private feud takes precedence. To finish it, he does not wrestle with any loyalty to Finn – as if he were Ayres's surrogate Hamlet – but with the terms of his oath.<sup>22</sup>

Finn's terms protect him against unknowns, for they ensure him against Hengest, whom he can only grow to trust, besides the Danes, whom he cannot trust at all. And Hengest, in a frustrated way, is still locked in his oath (as the sea in winter ice) when we see him in the spring, trying to see

gif he torngemot

þurhteon mihte

(*Beo*, l. 1140)

if he could bring about

a furious encounter.

He hopes that while keeping to the word of the oath, he might, without exposing himself, induce the Frisians to break it themselves. This is the only way in which he is prepared to break Finn's treaty and 'remember the sons of Jutes in this country'; to kill them, probably. But Finn has frightened his men into silence with the sword; hence the impasse. Finn's terms are neatly devised, and Hengest is caught by them.



*The Danes make Hengest an offer*

One thing is wrong in Finn's calculations: he assesses the internal structure of the Half-Danes by comparing them with his own kingdom. The Half-Danes, however, are not a dynasty rooted in land and settlement. On the contrary, they seem to be a motley crew of pirates with men from many different tribes. With Hnæf dead, succession to the leadership and stability of the leader is less rigid than Finn has estimated. Lack of hierarchy in pirate bands is attested in French accounts of the vikings Sigfred in 885 and Rollo in 911:

- (1) In Abbo's late ninth-century poem, *Bella Parisiacae Urbis*:<sup>23</sup>

Egregii Sigefredus adit pastoris ad aulam.

Solo rex verbo, sociis tamen imperitabat.

(I. 37-38)

[Sigfred approached the threshold of that singular shepherd of people, being a king in name alone, though he gave orders to his comrades.]

- (2) In Dudo's *De Moribus et Actis Primorum Normanniae Ducum*:<sup>24</sup>

"Quo nomine vester senior fungitur?" Responderunt "Nullo, quia æqualis potestatis sumus."

(II. 13)

["What name does your leader go by?" They answered, "By none, we are of equal power here."]

The Danes in Finnsburh can exploit a similar lack of hierarchy within their own group, the Half-Danes, in order to circumvent Finn's terms. As I have shown above, they asked Finn early on to give them the same quarters as their Jutish allies. Taking advantage of Hengest's presence among these Jutes, the Danes approach him with the idea of taking his command and his oath.

Finn is aware of the Danes' duty to avenge Hnæf (*Beo*, ll. 1101-03), but – perhaps because he scorns their influence – he fails to anticipate them in this manoeuvre. Their plan, in any case, proves unworkable so long as Hengest refuses to listen to them. But by the coming of spring Hengest's private vengeance is still frustrated, and as a natural 'wrecca' [exile] he wants to leave Frisia.

Swa he ne forwyrnde  
woroldrædenne,  
þonne him Hunlafing  
hildeleoman,

So he did not oppose  
the choice of the world,  
when the son of Hunlaf  
placed a battle-flash,

*The Finnsburh Fragment and Episode*

billa selest,	best of blades,
on bearm dyde,	into his lap.
þæs wæron mid Eotenum	Its edges were famous
ecge cuðe.	among the Jutes.

(*Beo*, ll. 1142-45)

'Woroldræden' is ably discussed by Tolkien (pp. 131-32) and thoroughly by Brodeur, but without answers in either case.<sup>25</sup> With 'choice of the world' I cannot claim to answer one of the most difficult semantic questions in the Episode. But it is possible that with 'woroldræden' the poet offers a poignant comment on the Danes' ensuing violence from the monastic point of view. Thereby he may also wish to contrast this bleak view of 'the world' with the 'worolde wynne' [joys of the world] (*Beo*, l. 1080) that were Hildeburh's before her brother and son lay dead before her.

In the passage above the litotes of 'ne forwyrnde', in combination with the initial 'swa', implies that until this occasion Hengest had rejected more than one Danish approach of this kind over the winter. If now he lets the Scyldings take his command from him, it can only be to let them also accept an accompanying liability for the oath. To break the oath, the Danes must first be made responsible for it. Then they can accomplish their vengeance of Hnæf, and Hengest can punish the Jutes on the Frisian side.

There are at least four instances of a lord taking a vassal into service by presenting a sword to him:

- (1) At the end of Beowulf's visit to Heorot King Hroþgar orders 'Hreðles laf' [Hreðel's heirloom] to be brought in – a gold-ornamented sword.

þæt he on Biowulfes	This he laid
bearm alegde	into Beowulf's lap.

(*Beo*, l. 2194)

With this and a wealth of gold and estates Beowulf is raised to the rank of Hroþgar's vassal ('sweordes had' [the order of the sword], *Beo*, l. 2193).

- (2) In Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga Helga*, Chapter 43, the Iclander Sighvatr Þórðarson tells in a verse how he took service with King Óláfr Haraldsson (c. 1016): 'Ek tók lýstr við sverði þínu' [I have eagerly received your sword].<sup>26</sup>
- (3) In Snorri's thirteenth-century *Haralds saga Hárfagra*, Chapter 38, King Æþelstan of England tricks King Haraldr of Norway into paying homage to Æþelstan by taking his proffered sword.<sup>27</sup>
- (4) On the death of his master Rolvo, in Book II of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*,

Wiggò pretends to take service with his master's killer Hiartwarus, by receiving Hiartwarus's sword.<sup>28</sup>

Unferþ gives his sword to the hero Beowulf, but without ritual (*Beo*, ll. 1455-56), and yet with more ceremony Beowulf hands a sword to the coast watchman in *Beo*, ll. 1900-03.

Is there an implied threat in the last lines of the extract above? For by telling Hengest, a Jute, that this sword's edges were known among the Jutes, the Danes seem to promise him, if not Finn, a violent death with the same sword if he opposes them again. Hengest would have this incentive, besides his own, to allow the Danes to break the treaty in this way.

### Quid pro quo: the death of Finn

The Fragment shows Guþlaf and Ordlaſ working with Hengest at the door in *Finn*, ll. 16-17. If Oslaf is identifiable with this Ordlaſ, then the same pair collaborate with Hengest a second time, in exchange; each party to do what the other cannot: the Scyldings to break the treaty, and Hengest to kill Finn with the Danish sword.

Swylce ferhðfrecan  
Fin eft beſeat  
sweordbealo sliðen  
æt his ſelfes ham,  
siþðan grimne gripe  
Guþlaf ond Oslaf  
æfter sæsiðe  
sorge mændon,  
æt witon weana dæl;  
(*Beo*, ll. 1146-50)

Likewise the cruel horror  
of the sword came back  
to Finn the savage of spirit  
in his own home,  
when Guþlaf and Oslaf  
sang and lamented  
a fierce attack,  
sorrow after sea-adventures,  
made taunts for their  
share of misery.

In 'sæsiðe', Tolkien interpreted a voyage home to Denmark for reinforcements which is otherwise not announced, and he assigned 'ferhðfrecan' (in the instrumental) to Hengest as the agent of Finn's death, not to Finn (pp. 136-38). But these propositions are awkward, if only because it is not certain who or where these secondary Danes should be, and the -an ending is not specifically instrumental.

In my interpretation Guþlaf and Oslaf perform a song or 'lament' to the whole

company assembled in Finn's own hall. Their word *mænan*, as 'lament', is also used of Beowulf's inheritors in *Beo*, ll. 3149 and 3171, and of the bard who sings the Lay of Finnsburh for the Danes at *Beo*, l. 1067. By starting with tales of their wanderings on the sea before their arrival in Frisia, these Danes slowly lead up to referring to the sudden attack that followed. Their whole move is summed up in 'æfter sæsiðe sorge' in *Beo*, l. 1149, a semantic construction which is paralleled in *Beo*, l. 885: 'æfter deaðdæge dom' [Judgement after Death-day].

That two poets could perform together is shown perhaps in *Wid*, ll. 103-04, in which 'wit Scilling' [Scilling and I] begin to sing; and in Priscus's eye-witness account of an evening feast in the camp of Attila the Hun in c. 449:<sup>29</sup>

Two barbarians came and stood before Attila and chanted songs which they had composed, telling of his victories and his deeds of courage in war. The guests fixed their eyes on the singers: some took pleasure in the verses, others recalling the wars became excited, while others, whose bodies were enfeebled by age and whose spirits were compelled to rest, were reduced to tears.

In *Beowulf* the next lines come without a clear subject:

ne meahte wæfre mod	Within the breast a turbulent
forhabban in hreþre.	fury could not be contained.
( <i>Beo</i> , ll. 1150-51)	

Rousing their men with the customary *duende* of performers, the two Scyldings lead slowly up to the present. Then they break the oath, in exactly the way Finn feared, 'þurh inwitsearo' [through malicious cunning] (*Beo*, l. 1101). Their method he anticipated, but not their opportunity. Without warning they chant of the 'fierce attack' the treaty forbids them to mention, making their taunts, and signal to Danes, Jutes and others to fall on the Frisians.

Hengest now fails to help Finn as his oath demands, but sides unexpectedly with the Danes. 'Swylce' at *Beo*, l. 1146 implies two processes, if it means 'likewise' here. Thus on the Danish signal it is probably Hengest who puts Finn to the sword in *Beo*, l. 1152. Finn dies as a 'cyning on corþre' [king among his retinue]. If no Dane could go near him, then it seems that Finn had come to trust Hengest close enough, over the winter, for Hengest to be able to stab him without

warning on behalf of the Danes, and with their sword.

### *Hengest's god*

As yet it is unclear why Hengest should fear to break the oath himself. In Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, it is 'Hengistus' who arranges a treacherous attack on Vortigern in his hall while their men celebrate their 'perpetua amicitia' [everlasting friendship].<sup>30</sup> How, if this is our Hengest, could he break this agreement but not the treaty in Finnsburh?

To answer this question I must compare the eighth to tenth-century *Beowulf* with Icelandic sources from manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There is a gap of between three to four hundred years, but it is assumed that much of the Icelandic material dates or derives from pre-Christian times and thus has Common Germanic ancestry with English paganism. Objections to this approach are well known. How, after the failed romantic philology of this and the last century, could the lays of the Icelandic Edda throw light on the darker reaches of a sophisticated Christian poem from England? What price the scraps of Germanic antiquity that might be found in *Beowulf* on the comparative evidence of certain sagas or of *Gylfaginning*, Snorri's fabulous mythography? And yet a surprising conclusion can be drawn here from Icelandic evidence of this kind. There is one figure so far unnoticed in this drama: Ing, a pagan god. Without 'Ing' no peace-treaty could have been made at all.

Vortigern was a Christian, Finn and Hengest certainly not. Christ is nowhere mentioned in *Beowulf*, whose poet presents his heroes as pagans of innocent ignorance (Scyld's voyage in *Beo*, ll. 50-52), but just as capable of self-abasement (devil-worship in *Beo*, ll. 175-88). In these respects the factions of the *Episode* are probably no different, and the oath that binds them to a *fæst frioðuwær*, at least in pretence, would be sworn with reference to whichever cult their two leaders had in common. Hence Hengest might break faith with Vortigern, but not with Finn.

Perjury was not a crime to be gone into lightly, even to satisfy a code of honour. In the Anglo-Saxon laws (of Christian times) *mansworan* [oath-breakers] are reviled with the same terms as witches, murderers and whores: they must be exiled and the land purged of them.<sup>31</sup> Penalties are unknown for pagan defaulters, Frisians or others, though in an addendum to the *Lex Frisionum* of the late eighth century, robbers of pagan temples in East Frisia are said to be ear-cropped, gelded and then sacrificially drowned on the beach in the rising tide. Oaths are mandatory

in the larger Frisian text, and five of them are sworn on 'saints' relics'.<sup>32</sup>

Finn's pagan oath-ritual is prominent in the Episode: 'Að wæs geæfned' [the oath was performed] (*Beo*, l. 1107). Fry keeps 'að' (p. 41), but most other editors have emended 'að' to 'ad' [pyre], hence 'the pyre was made ready', because the funeral coincides with the peace ceremony. Furthermore in *Beo*, ll. 3105-56, a 'bær' [pyre] is 'prepared' with *geæfnan* (the only instance). But as the text makes good sense without emendation, the manuscript 'að' will have to stay. Then on which pagan symbols is this oath sworn?

Að wæs geæfned  
ond i[n]cge gold  
ahæfen of horde.  
(*Beo*, ll. 1107-08)

The oath was performed  
and Ing's gold  
lifted out of the hoard.

Christopher Ball reads 'icge' with a lost titula here, at the end of a detailed study confirming the common history of *incge* and cognates Old Icelandic *Ing-*, *Ingunar-* and *Yngvi*, which are all appellatives of the god Freyr. Ball translates 'incge', 'immense/mysterious/sublime' (also in the first element of Finn's 'treasure' in *Beo*, l. 1155, 'ingesteald').<sup>33</sup>

There is enough evidence, however, to interpret 'incge' as an explicit reference, in adjectival form, to a North-Sea Germanic counterpart of Yngvi.<sup>34</sup> This god's English counterpart is Ing, known from the *Rune Poem*, ll. 67-70 as the god whom the Heardings named and the East-Danes first saw as he travels east with a waggon running after him. Thus Finn would keep 'Ing's gold' in his own hoard (witness 'hæðen gold' [heathen gold] to describe the Dragon's hoard in *Beo*, l. 2276). Later than Ball, but without referring to him, Rosier reads *in-ge-*, 'native', for this example in *Beowulf* and more in other poems (MS *c* for *n*).<sup>35</sup> Fry has accepted this (p. 41), also without noting Ball, though it is from 'habits of composition' and 'bound contexts' that Rosier argues and not from morphology.

If 'i[n]cge gold' is 'Ing's gold', therefore, it appears that the symbols or ideas by which Hengest and Finn swear an oath refer to a tradition of Ingvaeonic paganism best known from Tacitus's first-century *Germania* and some tenth to thirteenth-century Old Icelandic works. The goddess Nerthus in *Germania*, Chapter 40, is an ancient etymon of the god Njörðr in the Scandinavian tradition; Njörðr was known to be the father of Yngvi-Freyr and his sister Freyja. Tacitus shows that Nerthus was worshipped in the lowlands where the Frisians, among others, had settled, though the Frisians are not listed among the tribes worshipping

her. However, two Frisians in the early tenth-century *Vita Vulframni*, a victim of sacrifice and a king's messenger, are named Ingo-marus.<sup>37</sup> And P. C. Boeles has interpreted the runes on a bone amulet found in the terp at Wijnaldum in modern West Friesland as the god's name Inguz.<sup>38</sup>

In the Episode there are five examples in which the Old English vocabulary corresponds with the Old Icelandic tradition of Freyr. These I shall list below in order to confirm the identity of Ing in 'i[n]cge gold'. Either they manifest the poet's allusion to Ing in this story, or together they are five coincidences.

(1) Freyr's epithet

Finn seems to be of divine descent, from a Frisian dynasty similar to the Ynglingar in Sweden. 'Folcwalda' [ruler of the people] is the name of Finn's father (*Beo*, l. 1089, *Wid*, l. 27), but also resembles two epithets reserved for Freyr himself: 'fólcvaldi goða' [ruler of the host of gods] (*Skírnismál* verse 3, probably Norwegian, of the tenth century);<sup>39</sup> and 'fólkum stýrir' [he leads peoples] (*Húsdrápa* verse 7, c. 985).<sup>40</sup>

(2) The sacral treaty

The common word 'friðu' in 'frioðuwære' [peace-treaty], is cognate with the '(ár ok) friðr' [peace and plenty], which is characteristic in *Ynglinga saga*, Chapters 9-10, of the peaceful reigns of Njǫrðr and Freyr.<sup>41</sup> Of Freyr it is also said in *Gylfaginning* Chapter 24 that 'á hann er gótt at heita til árs ok friðar' [it is good to invoke him for peace and plenty].<sup>42</sup> Was Finn that most mysterious of beings, a 'sacral king'?<sup>43</sup>

(3) Freyr's wealth

When the Danes sack Finnsburh they make off with 'eal ingesteald eorðcyninges' [all the Ing-treasure of the earth-king] (*Beo*, l. 1155). Finn's 'ingesteald' is unparalleled and as 'Ing's treasure' would be an inheritance of the wealth of Njǫrðr and Freyr, proverbial in Chapters 23-24 of *Gylfaginning*, especially in the line immediately following the Old Icelandic extract above: 'hann ræðr ok fésælu manna' [he also controls the wealth of men].<sup>44</sup> The otherwise hackneyed reference to Finn as 'eorðcynig' [earth-king, mortal monarch] would be a parallel to the tribute which, according to *Ynglinga saga* Chapter 10, is loaded into Freyr's mound for three years after his death.<sup>45</sup>

(4) The golden pig of Freyr

Part of the armour placed on the pyre in *Beo*, ll. 1111-12 is a 'swyn ealgylden, eofer irenheard' [a pig completely golden, a boar ?hard as iron]. This is probably the image of a boar on a helmet. But if this is nonetheless the form of a golden boar, the Episode is paralleled in three Old Icelandic sources. First in the thirteenth-century prose of the probably Norwegian eleventh-century *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*.<sup>46</sup>

Um qveldit óro heitstrengingar. Var fram leiddr sonargöltr,  
lögðo menn þar á hendr sínar, oc strengðo menn þá heit at  
bragarfulli.

[In the evening solemn vows were made. A sounder was led  
forward, men laid their hands on him, and then, with a toast  
with the poet's cup, men made a solemn vow.]

Second, two variant passages in the thirteenth-century *Heiðreks saga* show the interwoven traditions of sacral pig, gold, winter festival and the councils of wise men. In one version (Chapter 10):<sup>47</sup>

Heiðrekr konungr blótaði Frey; þann gölt er mestan fekk, skyldi  
hann gefa Frey; kǫlluðu þeir hann svá helgan, at yfir hans burst  
skyldi sverja um ǫll stórmál ok skyldi þeim galti blóta at  
sonarbłóti; jólaaptan skyldi leiða sonargöltinn í hǫll fyrir konung  
ok lögðu menn þá hendr yfir burst hans ok strengja heit.

[King Heiðrekr worshipped Freyr; he was obliged to give Freyr  
the biggest boar he had; they considered the boar so holy that in  
all cases of great importance oaths should be sworn over its  
bristles, and it was that boar that was sacrificed at the pig-  
sacrifice; at Yule eve this sounder was to be led into the hall and  
before the king; men laid hands on its bristles and took vows.]

In the other version (Chapter 9), it is said that King Heiðrekr<sup>48</sup>

lét ala gölt mikinn. Hann var svá mikill sem öldungar þeir, er  
stærstir váru, ok svá fagr, at hvert hár þótti ór gulli vera.  
Konungrinn leggr hönd sína á höfuð geltinum, en aðra á burst  
ok sverr þess, at aldri hefir maðr svá mikit af gert við hann, at  
eigi skuli hann hafa réttan dóm spekinga hans, en þeir tólf skulu



gæta galtarins.

[had a great pig bred, one as huge as the largest bulls, and so beautiful that each hair seemed to be made of gold. The king puts one hand on the pig's head and the other on his bristles, and swears this, that no matter what a man has done against him, he should receive true justice from his wise men, and these twelve are to watch over the pig.]

King *Heiðrek*'s 'réttir dómr spekinga' echoes Finn's 'weotena dom' [judgement of wise men] in *Beo*, l. 1098, and also the 'sapientes' to whom part of the *Lex Frisionum* is ascribed.<sup>49</sup>

Third, Freyr's 'sounder' is known from Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, Chapter 49, as *Gullinbursti* [golden bristles], the pig that draws Freyr in a cart to Baldr's pyre in a wild procession of Norse gods.<sup>50</sup> Snorri quotes *Úlfr Uggason's Húsdrápa* as his source:<sup>51</sup>

Ríðr á þorg til borgar  
þøðfrøðr sonar Óðins  
Freyr ok fólku stýrir  
fyrst ok gulli byrstum.

Freyr the battle-wise rides first  
to the pyre of Óðinn's son  
on his boar, and he leads peoples,  
on his boar with bristles of gold.

This matches the *Episode* in two details besides the *folc*-epithet already noted in (1): the pyre and the golden pig.

#### (5) Freyr's sword

Kaske compares Hengest's blade in *Beo*, l. 1145, whose 'edges were famous among the Jutes/giants', with the sword which Freyr loses to the giants in *Gylfaginning*, Chapter 36.<sup>52</sup> According to this story, Freyr was so eager to win Gerðr, a giant's daughter, that he gave his magical sword to Skírnir, his messenger: partly so that Skírnir could get to Gerðr unharmed; partly as a gift for Gerðr when he arrived. In *Skírnismál*, on which the prose is based, Skírnir describes the sword:

oc þat sverð,  
er síálft vegiz  
við iotna ætt.

(*Skírnismál*, verse 8)<sup>53</sup>

and that sword  
which fights by itself  
against the race of giants.

The edges of Hengest's sword are 'mid eotenum cuðe' in *Beo*, l. 1145. Strictly 'giants' seem to be the victims of each sword, Freyr's and Hengest's.

If Hengest is an *eoten*, rather than a Jute, would it be a sword inherited from giants that Hunlafing presented to him in ceremony and with practical purpose? This question leads us back to the 'Jute' problem in *Beo* 1072, 1088, 1141 and 1145: are Hengest and his kin 'Jutes' or 'giants', *Eotan* or *eotenas*?

I suggest that the poet of *Beowulf* has made them both at the same time. This may be his contribution or the result of a longer development before him. But in the Episode the poet may envisage 'Jutes' as a crowd of uncanny people grown out of an archaic race of 'giants'. As such these Jutes would resemble the Old Icelandic 'jǫtnar' [giants] in their qualities of remote antiquity, wisdom and malice. The case-obliquity of 'Eotenum' once and 'Eotena' three times would be enough, perhaps, to help the conflation of *eotenas* and Anglian *Eotan* at a semantic level.

This would be a foreshortening of a tradition of which a parallel can be seen in the thirteenth-century *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*: in the way the hero Egill's family evolves from archaic monstrosity in Norway in the beginning, to become fully human in Iceland at the end; in Egill's ancestors and the strange followers of his father Grímr: Þórbjörn krumr [crooked], Beigaldi kolbíttr [Fear-?wielder coal-biter], Þórir Þurs [ogre], Þorgeirr jarðlangr [earth-long]. One observer calls them men,

"ef menn skal kalla; en líkari eru þeir þursum at vexti ok at sýn  
en mennskum mǫnnum."<sup>54</sup>

["if men you can call them; they are more like ogres in their  
growth and appearance than human men."]

And yet having settled in the west of Iceland, this tribe intermarries with the surrounding humans in a few generations.

This motif can throw light on the Jutes in the Finnsburh Episode and their 'Eotena treowe' in *Beo*, l. 1072. If the Jutes in Hnæf's band had preserved the weird characteristics of their forebears, Finn's Jutes lost them over generations as they became integrated into the Frisian people. Hence when the time came to take sides, they forgot their kinship with Hengest and his followers, and chose to make 'pledges' of loyalty to Finn instead. Perhaps, in this case, the phrase 'Eotena bearn inne' in *Beo*, l. 1141 should be read with emphasis on every word: it was 'the sons of the Jutes in this country' who had forgotten their ancestors, betrayed their cousins who had not, and deserved death from Hengest as a result.

Hengest's injury, in this way, would lie at a deeper level than the tribal loyalties of the others in this story. Thus the privacy of his vengeance, until the Scyldings approach him with their 'choice of the world'.

Why Hengest should fear his oath, in the first place, can be explained if we accept the possibility of a submerged tradition of Ing in the treaty's 'i[n]cge gold'. For it is shown in *Flateyjarbók* and *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* (albeit fourteenth and thirteenth-century texts) that the 'stallion' signified in OE *hengest*, Olce *hestr*, was another sacred animal of Yngvi-Freyr.<sup>55</sup> Hengest would have cause to fear an oath made, as I suggest, on a golden pig of Ing, if the cult of Ing was invested in his name.

### Conclusion

My interpretation depends on literal translations throughout. The three emendations I have followed are given at the start. If, with this, I have shown a story more complex than previously thought, it is one that gives Finn and the Frisians their due as calculating opponents. As emperor to a guard of hirelings, Finn can use Hengest to control the Danes to the extent that all warring factions spend a winter together in enforced harmony. What is Hengest's dilemma, therefore, but the paralysis of an outmanoeuvred player? The Finnsburh Episode proceeds in this way more as a game of chess than a case study on heroic honour. Tactical analysis is all, and the main ethical judgement is invited by the poet afterwards with Hildeburh and Wealhþeow in mind.

Within the rest of *Beowulf* the Episode has severe implications. The clearest of these for the Danes of Beowulf's time is tragic, that by faction and intrigue, Hroþgar's sons will be betrayed and killed by his nephew and their cousin Hroþulf. In a while the Danes will turn Heorot into a Finnsburh of their own – and bursting in later the same evening, Grendel's mother will shatter their complacency even sooner. Only Queen Wealhþeow, a foreign wife and mother, and Beowulf himself can see that tribal loyalty, like charity, begins in the home.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf and Judith*, edited by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 4 (New York, 1953). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. For a Frisian summary of my argument, see 'Kening Finn en it Ferdrach fan Finnsboarch', *Us Wurk*, 38 (1989), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972), pp. 19-43 (pp. 31-32); *Beowulf* (London, 1978), pp. 32-33. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 34-38.

<sup>3</sup> *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, edited by Fr. Klaeber, third edition (Boston, 1950), pp. 170-76, 231-53 (p. 231); J. R. R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: the Fragment and the Episode*, edited by Alan Bliss (London, 1982); *Finnsburh: Fragment and Episode*, edited by D. K. Fry (London, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Stanley B. Greenfield, ' "Folces Hyrde", *Finnsburh* 46b', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73 (1972), 97-102 (p. 99).

<sup>5</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, edited and translated by Michael Winterbottom (London, 1978), pp. 96-98.

<sup>6</sup> *Arngrimi Jonae Opera Latine Conscripta*, edited by Jakob Benediktsson, Bibliotheca Arnarnagaeana IX-XII (Copenhagen, 1950-57), IX (1950), 333-86 (p. 336).

<sup>7</sup> *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, edited by Finnur Jónsson, 4 vols (Copenhagen and Christiania, 1912-14), B I (1912), p. 658, verses 2, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Jan de Vries, 'Die beiden Hengeste', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 72 (1953), 125-43 (pp. 137-38). *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, edited and translated by John Morris (London and Chichester, 1980), p. 4 (date), pp. 67-73 (chapters 31, 36-38, 43-46). *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, edited and translated by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 46-52 (l. 14-15). J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: a Historical Commentary*, edited by C. N. L. Brooke, D. E. Greenway and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford, 1988), pp. 19-25. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, prepared by John Earle and edited by Charles Plummer, third edition, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892-99), I, 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> A. G. van Hamel, 'Hengest and his Namesake', in *Studies in English Philology: a Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber*, edited by Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis, 1929), pp. 159-71.

<sup>10</sup> R. E. Kaske, 'The Eotenas in *Beowulf*', in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, edited by R. P. Creed (Providence, R. I., 1967), pp. 285-310 (p. 289).

<sup>11</sup> R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, third edition, with supplement by C. L. Wrenn (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 245-89 (p. 261), 543-46. Can the words of Hengistus in Nennius's *Historia* (Chapter 46, ed.

Morris, p. 173) be emended so: 'Eu[te] nimet saxas' [Jutes take your knives]? This vernacular cry would make a half-line in the style of Hnæf's exhortations in the *Finnsburh Fragment*. Could Nennius have taken it from the lost remainder of the same poem? Furthermore, if Garulf there were a Jute, might not his enquiry of his opponent's name in *Finn* l. 23 be a way of identifying and then sparing Jutes on Hnæf's side?

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Mitchell, 'Two Syntactical Notes on *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus*, 52 (1968), 292-99 (pp. 296-97).

<sup>13</sup> *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, edited by Friedrich Liebermann, 3 vols (Halle, 1903-16), I, 358, 470. Possibly also Wulfstan in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, edited by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), p. 262, lines 31-33 (Homily XX(C), composed c. 1014):

And ne dear man gewanian on hæðenum þeodum inne ne ute ænig þara  
þinga þe gedwolgodan gebroht bið . . .

[And among heathen peoples here and abroad no man dares lapse in any of  
the things that are brought to heretical gods]

However, 'inne' here may only mean 'inside (the house)'.

<sup>14</sup> A. G. Brodeur, 'Design and Motive in the *Finn* Episode', *Essays and Studies: University of California Publications in English*, 14 (1943), pp. 1-42 (pp. 37-42); 'The Climax of the *Finn* Episode', *University of California Publications in English*, 3 (1943), pp. 285-361 (pp. 330-35).

<sup>15</sup> Harry Jay Solo, 'The Meaning of '\*Motan': a Secondary Denotation of Necessity in Old English', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 78 (1977), 215-32 (pp. 230-31).

<sup>16</sup> J. L. Rosier, 'The *unhlit* of *Finn* and *Hengest*', *Review of English Studies*, 17 (1966), 171-74 (p. 172). The parallels from the Laws are quoted from Friedrich Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I, 101, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr, 'The Importance of Kinship: Uncle and Nephew in *Beowulf*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 15 (1980), 21-38 (pp. 33-34).

<sup>18</sup> Herrius Halbertsma, *Terpen tussen Vlie en Eems*, 2 vols, I *Atlas*, II *Text* (Groningen, 1963), II, 159-207 (p. 207), 223-54 (maps), cf. Plate XV fig. 2 (photograph of Marsum in Fivelgo).

<sup>19</sup> See R. A. Williams, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf* (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 88-89. This problem is discussed by Paul B. Taylor, 'Beowulf 1130, 1875 and 2006: in Defence of the Manuscript', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 82 (1981), 357-61 (pp. 357-58).

<sup>20</sup> J. F. Vickrey, 'The narrative structure of Hengest's revenge in *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 6 (1977), 91-103 (p. 94).

<sup>21</sup> *De Excidio*, ed. Winterbottom, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> H. M. Ayres, 'The Tragedy of Hengest in *Beowulf*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 16 (1917), 282-95 (p. 291).

<sup>23</sup> *Abbon: Le Siècle de Paris par les Normands: Poème de IXe Siècle*, edited and translated [into

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French] by Henri Waquet (Paris, 1942), pp. 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> Dudo of St Quentin, *De Moribus et Actis Primorum Normanniae Ducum*, edited by Jules Lair (Caen, 1865), p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> A. G. Brodeur, 'The Climax of the *Finn* Episode', pp. 313-30.

<sup>26</sup> *Heimskringla* I, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit, 26 (Reykjavík, 1941), p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> *Heimskringla* II, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit, 27 (Reykjavík, 1945), p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, edited by J. Olrik and H. Ræder, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1931-57), I, 61.

<sup>29</sup> *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, edited and translated by R. C. Blockley, 2 vols (Liverpool, 1981-83), I, 48, 70 (on Priscus); II, 286-87 (text).

<sup>30</sup> *Historia Britanniae*, ed. Morris, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, II, 580-81 (Meineid).

<sup>32</sup> *Lex Frisionum*, edited and translated [into German] by K. A. Eckhardt and Albrecht Eckhardt, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, XII (Hannover, 1982), 44, 52, 54, 56, 58, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Ball, 'Incge Beow. 2577', *Anglia*, 78 (1960), 403-10 (pp. 409-10).

<sup>34</sup> Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols, second edition (Berlin, 1956-57), I, 367, sect. 259; II, 177, sect. 457.

<sup>35</sup> J. L. Rosier, 'Incge Gold and Incge Læfe in Beowulf', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 81 (1966), 342-46 (p. 345).

<sup>36</sup> *The Germania of Tacitus*, edited by R. P. Robinson (Middletown, Conn., 1935), p. 317.

<sup>37</sup> 'Vita Vulframni episcopi Senonici auctore Pseudo-Iona', edited by Wilhelm Levison, in *Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, edited by B. Krusch and W. Levison (Hannover and Leipzig, 1905), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum* V, 657-73 (p. 666, Chapter 7, and p. 670, Chapter 10).

<sup>38</sup> P. C. Boeles, 'Zu den friesischen Runendenkmälern', in *Berichte zur Runenforschung*, edited by Helmut Arntz, 3 vols (Giessen, 1939-42), III, 116-122 (p. 119 note, photograph p. 120). A fuller description of the amulet can be found in Helmut Arntz and Hans Zeiss, *Die einheimischen Runendenkmäler des Festlandes* (Leipzig, 1939), pp. 413-18 (p. 417). For the cognate of *Freyr* in Frisian place-names, see Jan de Vries, 'Studien over Germaansche mythologie III, Franeker en Vroonloo', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taalkunde en Literatuur*, 51 (1932), 97-121.

<sup>39</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, edited by Gustav Neckel, fifth edition, edited by Hans Kuhn, I *Text* (Heidelberg, 1983), p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> *Skjaldedigting*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, B I, 129, verse 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Heimskringla* I, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, pp. 22-25.

<sup>42</sup> *Snorri Sturluson: Edda, Prologue and Gylfaginning*, edited by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford, 1982), p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> At present there is a reaction in progress against the widely held view that 'sacral kings' once ruled in Scandinavia or elsewhere. But while this view needs great qualification it is still unsound to dismiss it altogether. The best definition of sacral kingship is held to be that of Rory McTurk, 'Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 19 (1974-77), 139-69.

<sup>44</sup> *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> *Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, pp. 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Edda*, ed. Neckel and Kuhn, p. 147. This is the ceremony, between verses 30 and 31, at which Heðinn swears an oath to Sváva, his brother Helgi's wife.

<sup>47</sup> *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, edited by Jón Helgason (Copenhagen, 1924), pp. 54-55 (first version).

<sup>48</sup> *Heiðreks saga ok Hervarar*, edited by Gabriel Turville-Petre and Christopher Tolkien (London, 1956), p. 36 (second version).

<sup>49</sup> *Lex Frisionum*, ed. Eckhardt and Eckhardt, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, pp. 46-47.

<sup>51</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, B I, 129, verse 7.

<sup>52</sup> Kaske, 'The Eotenas in *Beowulf*', p. 295.

<sup>53</sup> *Edda*, ed. Neckel and Kuhn, p. 71. Two more correspondences between the Episode and the Old Icelandic tradition of Yngvi-Freyr are too tentative to go with the other five anywhere but in a note:

(6) *Woroldræden* [choice of the world] *hap. leg.* (*Beo*, l. 1142). In *Ynglinga saga*, chapter 10, Snorri says that the Swedes refused to burn Freyr when they knew he was dead, but sacrificed to him instead 'ok kǫlluðu hann Veraldargoð' [and called him God of the World of Men]. The meaning with which *woroldræden* in *Beowulf* is loaded may be linked to this tradition.

(7) The name Fin is unusual and may be derived from a Celtic substratum in Friesland. Finne is still in use there as a woman's name today. However, it is also true that in *Ynglinga saga*, Chapter 13, Vanlandi, the great-grandson of Freyr, marries a woman from 'Finnland' to beget the next king of the Yngling dynasty.

For theories that the Finnsburh story is itself a Scandinavian myth in euhemerized form, see Wolfgang Laur, 'Die Heldensage vom Finnsburgkampf', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 85 (1954), 107-36 (pp. 124-29, 134-36); Hans Kuhn, 'Finn Folcwalding', in *Studia Frisica in Memoriam K. Fokkema*, edited by H. D. Meijering and others (Groningen, 1969), pp. 23-29 (pp. 26-8); Ommo Wilts, 'Die Friesen im Beowulf – Rezeption und epische Grundlage', *Nordfriesisches Jahrbuch*, 15 (1979), 131-44 (pp. 134, 139-41); A. Russchen, 'Finnsburg – a Critical Approach', in *Miscellanea Frisica*, edited by N. R. Århammar and others (Assen, 1984), pp. 349-56.

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<sup>54</sup> *Egils saga Skallá-Grímssonar*, edited by Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk Fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), Chapter 25, pp. 62-63.

<sup>55</sup> *Flateyjarbók*, edited by C. R. Unger, 3 vols (Christiania, 1860-68), I (1860), 400-01. Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II (1957), pp. 188-91, sect. 463-64. *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, edited by Jón Jóhannesson, Íslenzk Fornrit, 11 (Reykjavík, 1950). In *Hrafnkels saga*, Hrafnkell swears an oath by his god (Yngvi-)Freyr and keeps this even to the price it demands (Chap. 3, p. 100): 'við þann átrúnað, at ekki verði at þeim monnum, er heitstrengingar fella á sik' [in the belief that nothing comes of men who let their own sworn oaths rebound on them]. When the horse Freyfaxi is thrown from a cliff, Þórkell makes clear on whose account the horse is destroyed (Chap. 6, p. 123): "'Mun þat nú makligt, at sá [Freyr] taki við honum, er hann á'" [Fitting it now shall be that he [Freyr] who owns him, takes him back].