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Of Hands, Halls, and Heroes: Grendel's Hand, Hroþgar's Power, and the Problem of *stapol* in *Beowulf*

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Abstract: What Beowulf did with Grendel's arm and hand in the eponymous poem has been an often discussed question over the course of *Beowulf* scholarship. Interpretation rests on three passages; each passage has been examined from multiple points of view including archaeological, linguistic, and grammatical, as well as from a literary point of view. This paper argues that what has become the standard interpretation, included as a suggestion in Klaeber's commentary, does not work on any level; it explains why that is the case by reexamining those passages, and offers a new interpretation of the disposition of the arm and hand.

1 Introduction

One of the most exciting moments in *Beowulf* is the battle scene between Grendel and Beowulf. Grendel suffers a mortal wound, leaving behind his arm and shoulder as he quits Heorot and heads in haste back to the fens.[1] There are some tantalizing references to the hand, but the reader is left uncertain as to whether the hand is displayed inside or outside the hall, and thus the poet leaves the reader wondering where Hrothgar stood when he sees the hand in lines 925–927 and makes his speech.[2] The problem involves how the construction of Heorot is to be understood, and perhaps more importantly to the interpretation of the poem, where and how a hero declares his victory over his enemies.

1 Lines 834 f., cited below, state that Grendel left his hand, arm, and shoulder in the hall. For the purposes of easy reference, 'the hand' will be used throughout to refer to the whole hand, arm, and shoulder.

2 Citations from *Beowulf* are taken from Mitchell and Robinson (1998). Translations are the author's.

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Early commentators of the problem understood lines 833b–836 as referring to Beowulf, and therefore, to Beowulf as doing something inside the hall with Grendel's hand, arm, and shoulder. The text reads:

> þæt wæs tacen sweotol
> syþðan hildedeor hond alegde
> earm ond eaxle – þær wæs eal geador
> Grendles grape – under geapne hrof
>
> 'that was a clear token
> after the one brave in battle laid down [his] hand,
> arm and shoulder – there all together was
> the grip of Grendel – under the broad roof'

After a study in 1889 by Thomas Miller that addressed the question of the meaning and intent of *stapol* in line 926, most commentators have now accepted that when Hrothgar looks up and sees the hand and the *steapne hrof* and is said to have stood *on stapole* (l. 926), he is outside Heorot, not inside. Thus, the final disposition of the hand is in some way outside the hall (Klaeber 1950: 157; Bremmer 1996: 128).[3]

This question has provoked a surprising amount of commentary. The purpose of this paper is to reexamine the issue from linguistic, archaeological, and literary perspectives, gathering all of the pertinent evidence, and then rereading all of the appropriate lines in *Beowulf* in order to readdress the question of where Hrothgar stands when he sees Grendel's hand.

Interpretation necessitates understanding several passages in the poem. First is the already mentioned section in lines 833b–836, the departure of Grendel from Heorot. Traditionally the subject of this sentence has been understood as Beowulf. The lines would then mean that Beowulf hung up the hand somewhere inside the hall. But if the subject is Grendel, then that means that there is no support for Beowulf hanging the trophy up. Next are lines 925–927, where Hrothgar comes to Heorot the morning after the great battle with Grendel, looks up, and sees the hand and the steep roof before beginning his speech. Following this, in lines 982–984a, the thanes are described as seeing the hand over the high roof. This section introduces the problem that if the hand is inside, how it can be described as "over" the roof. In addition to these passages one must examine

3 It should also be noted that views have varied between the *stapole* as a cross beam extending outside the building so that Grendel's hand is over the doorway to the hall, and that *stapol* is an upright; thus the hand is examined by looking up at the roof of the hall.

Grendel's dam's hurried departure from Heorot and where the hand could logically be situated for her to grab it in her hasty exit (l. 1302b–1303a).

2 Lines 833b–836

The first passage in question is lines 833b–836, cited above. Typically this passage has been thought to refer to actions taken by Beowulf. Klaeber (1950: 158) sums it up well: "The victor places Grendel's right arm above the door outside the hall (on some projection perhaps) as high as he can reach".[4]

There are some significant difficulties with this understanding of the phrase *hond alegde*. Johansen (1982), for example, has demonstrated that this section most likely refers to Grendel as laying down his arm, rather than Beowulf hanging Grendel's arm somewhere, as Klaeber and those who follow him have it. Johansen proposes reading these lines with lines 850b–852a:

> siððan dreama leas
> in fenfreoðo feorh alegde
> hæþene sawle
>
> 'afterwards the joyless one
> in his fen fort laid down his life,
> his heathen soul'

Johansen argues that *hildedeor* 'brave in battle' (l. 834) refers ironically to Grendel. The poet employs a pattern of references to Grendel that are also used of Beowulf and sometimes of the Danes throughout the poem such as *ellen-gæst* 'powerful creature' at line 86 for Grendel and of Beowulf at line 340. Another example is *mære* 'renowned' at line 103, used elsewhere in the poem of Beowulf.

Most importantly, it is in the fight scene itself that a pattern of three such terms used ironically are applied to Grendel that elsewhere are applied to the hero Beowulf. Each instance establishes high expectations of Grendel that are very quickly proven to be false expectations. The poet calls Grendel *rinc* 'warrior', a term usually used of human fighters and of Beowulf elsewhere; but other than the battle with Beowulf, which he loses, Grendel is nowhere described as ever having been in battle. At line 762 (Johansen 1982: 196), Grendel is *se mæra* 'the great,

4 Similarly Mitchell and Robinson note in their text (1998: 76, note to l. 833b–836) that Beowulf displays the arm on high, though they do not commit to it being outside or in. Bradley (1995) and Heaney (2001) both reflect this in their translations as well, taking the verb *alegde* as 'hung up'. Cf. Orchard (2003: 147).

famous, illustrious, etc.' – a quality he certainly does not have is greatness in the warrior economy.[5] *Hildedeor* is the third ironic description of Grendel in the battle scene; as soon as he encounters serious opposition, he turns to flee, even to leaving his hand, arm, and shoulder behind in order to flee rather than fight.

Given this reading of *hildedeor* and presenting Grendel ironically in the fight scene, lines 834–836 form an envelope with lines 850–852 cited above.[6] Repetition of words and ideas invite such a reading. Both sets of lines begin with *siþþan*, both follow this word with a descriptive epithet, both speak of a fortress (spacious roof of Heorot, the fen fort), both have the verb *alegde* followed by an accusative with an appositive. The envelope suggests that Grendel, and indeed perhaps even Beowulf, thinks that by leaving his arm, he will preserve his life. The poet assures us that he does not.

Johansen continues to demonstrate that taking *hildedeor* 'brave in battle' in line 833b as an ironic reference to Grendel is not problematic. The poet uses other positive appellatives to describe Grendel as well, and even Beowulf refers to Grendel as *dior dædfruma* 'beloved doer of deeds' in line 2090a.[7] Thus, *hildedeor* here is likely another in a consistent use of ironic epithets to describe Grendel throughout the poem (Ringler 1966: 50–59). Between lines 830b and 852a, Hrothgar's retainers react to the death of Grendel, and so the suggestion of an envelope pattern for these lines makes all the more sense: the envelope begins with Grendel laying down his arm and ends with Grendel laying down his life, while between is a description of the reaction to his demise; it makes a nice poetic package. What it all means though, if we understand *hildedeor* as an ironic reference to Grendel and the envelope pattern of the two passages, is that lines 833b–835 are not about Beowulf hanging up Grendel's arm anywhere, outside or inside the hall.

Further support for this position comes from an examination of the legal aspects of the battle with Grendel (Day 1999: 315–324). Hrothgar gives Beowulf the guardianship of Heorot in a legal sense in lines 654–658. Hrothgar begins:

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5 *Se mæra* is often translated as 'notorious' or 'infamous' to get at a negative connotation; but such translations miss the ironic pattern.

6 An 'envelope pattern' is a set of formulaic expressions that serve to bracket a passage; a type of enveloping is the 'ring composition', in which these formulaic expressions are in a chiastic structure. See Bartlett (1935), Niles (1979), and Dane (1993) as three important treatments of envelope patterns in Old English.

7 It is worthy of note that Klaeber in his glossary to Beowulf cites *dædfruma* as 'doer of *evil* deeds'. The word *dæd* itself has no moral connotations to it, and such connotations must be determined by context. The context of line 2090 suggests that Beowulf is being ironic rather than describing Grendel as a beloved doer of evil deeds.

[abead] winærnes geweald ond þæt word acwæð:
"Næfre ic ænegum men ær alyfde,
siððan ic hond ond rond hebban mihte,
ðryþærn Dena buton þe nu ða.
Hafa nu ond geheald husa selest [...]"

'[gave] power of the wine hall [to him] and spoke that word:
"I have never to any man given before,
since I could heft hand and shield,
the great hall of the Danes except now to you.
Now have and hold the best of houses [...]"'

Day (1999: 315) argues that these lines emphasize two concepts: one is the legal guardianship of the hall given over to Beowulf, and the second is the "symbolic association of this right with the physical extremity that both holds it and can transfer it to another – the hand". In this speech, the association of power over something and the hand that holds that power is clearly affirmed. Day focuses on the Germanic concept of *mund*, which in legal terms means 'guardianship' but whose primary meaning is 'hand'.[8] Day points to a series of laws, charters, and other examples in which this concept is described and in which committing a crime with the hand is prevalent.

What intrigues about Day's analysis of the concepts of 'hand' and 'guardianship' in Hrothgar's speech is his conclusion. Day posits that Grendel is guilty not only of murder but specifically of invading the precincts of the hall. Day does not draw out the imagery in which the *Beowulf* poet dwells on Grendel's approach to the hall, restated several times in a few lines: 710–713, 714–715, 716b–717, and 720–722. In the space of twelve lines, Grendel's approach and entrance to the hall is mentioned four times. While one might argue that this repetition serves to heighten the tension, given the nature of the hall in Anglo-Saxon society and literature, this is probably not the only function of these lines (Hume 1974: 64). The poet's stress on Grendel's coming and entrance also serves to alert the reader to this invasion of Hrothgar's *mund*, his overlordship.[9]

Upon Grendel's entrance into the hall, a new set of images takes over. The poet mentions the hall frequently still, but images of hands become prominent:

8 In addition to Day (1999), see also Hübner (1918/1968: 585–586) and Hough (1999). While the word *mund* is seldom used in this regard in Old English poetry, one should note compound words such as *mundbora* for 'patron' or 'guardian' and *mundiend* 'protector' and *mundbyrdan* 'to protect' and, of interest here, *mundcræft* 'protection' that do occur in poetry, notably in *Beowulf*.

9 Cf. Ringler (1966), who sees these lines as also in part ironic, a presentation of Grendel as the 'hero approaches battle' type-theme.

grip, hand, fingers, etc. At line 740, Grendel is described as *gefeng hraðe* 'grasped quickly' the nearest sleeping man. In line 745, he stops at Beowulf's bed and *mid handa* grips the hero, repeated again at line 748 *mid folme* 'with hands'. Thereafter, several references to grip, grasping, hands, and the like follow (l. 753, 760, 764, and 765, for example). And again, these terms and their associations are both the physical contest of hands and also the legal control of Heorot. The comparison of images and their order is probably not accidental either. The poet, who, as mentioned, builds on Grendel's approach to the hall, describes in detail Grendel's breaking of the hall and the door, which clearly illustrates his physical as well as legal invasion of Hrothgar's domain. "The wrestling match becomes, quite simply, an elaborate legal metaphor, almost a pun: implied in their physical struggle, with its having and holding and grasping and gripping, is a legal battle over the rights of who should 'have and hold' the great hall" (Day 1999: 324).[10]

Day, however, does not examine lines 833b–836 any further, failing to note the implications of his argument regarding the disposition of Grendel's hand. If his analysis is correct that at least on one level the struggle between Beowulf and Grendel is a legal battle over rightful control of Heorot, then lines 833b–836 have important implications for that battle. Not only has Grendel laid down his arm to save his life, but he has also laid down his contest to hold Heorot as his own. The poet's parenthetical comment in lines 835b–836a, *þær wæs eal geador Grendles grape* 'there all together was Grendel's grip', is then not just an aside by the poet but a comment that Grendel's power and claim over Heorot lay on the floor as well. Further, the poet tells us in his description of Grendel that Grendel *rixode ond wið rihte wan* 'ruled and strove against right' (l. 144). The idea of Grendel's ruling Heorot and not having the right to do so seems a line missed by most commentators but ties into Day's thesis well. Thus, line 144 and line 836a form bookends, the one introducing the idea of Grendel's rule and the other expressing its end.

This also helps explain Grendel's inability to salute the *gifstol* in lines 167–170. The poet says that Grendel occupied Heorot during his nightly visits and could not salute the *gifstol* and 'did not feel love for it'.[11] To salute the throne and love it would be to acknowledge Hrothgar's lordship, to respect his *mund*. So Grendel cannot accept Hrothgar's rule and so Grendel is said to rule (l. 144).

10 If Day's analysis is correct, this has implications for Grendel's inability to salute the throne that Day does not mention.

11 This is a much discussed and debated passage. Here I follow the suggestion of Mitchell and Robinson (1998: 54, note to l. 168–169), themselves following one of the suggestions by Klaeber in his edition. See also Robinson (1992).

Given the foregoing, in all probability lines 833b–836 refer to Grendel, not to Beowulf, as previously argued by Klaeber and others. Moreover, the semantics of the key vocabulary in the passage supports this conclusion. As the above-mentioned quote by Klaeber (1950: 158) illustrates, it has been assumed that Beowulf *alegde* Grendel's hand somewhere within the hall. One suggestion even has Grendel's arm be as long as to "stand on its wound on the floor, and if Hrothgar, also inside, followed it with his eyes, he would have seen the hand, and beyond it, the intact, overspreading roof" (DuBois 1955: 298). However, no matter how one attempts to stretch the meaning, the semantic field of *alecgan* does not include 'to hang up' or 'to display'. Its primary meaning is 'to lay down' or 'to put down' (Bosworth-Toller s.v. *alecgan*).[12] While it is possible to imagine Beowulf laying down Grendel's hand, it then becomes difficult to understand why Beowulf's laying down of the hand was a clear sign. The poet makes a particular point that the laying down of the hand was a *tacen sweotol* (l. 833). But if Grendel lays down his hand, then it is 'a clear sign' that Grendel has given up his rule of Heorot. Thus, editors and translators have emended the meaning of the word *alecgan* in order to make sense of the supposed subject, Beowulf. Semantically and grammatically speaking, the sentence makes more sense if Grendel is the unstated subject, not Beowulf.

Commentators have been reluctant to accept this reading on the grounds that if Grendel is the subject of the sentence, then logically the reader does not know who or how the hand was hung up for Hrothgar and others to see later in the poem. This is true, but the question is whether it is a valid criticism. As will be seen below, the question is whether Beowulf or anyone else hung anything up, but this will be discussed in the next passage. Further, there are many places in the poem where the action is not always clarified. One very clear place is the backtracking the poet must take in explaining the presence of Grendel's mother – there is no mention of her until line 1256. Even then, Hrothgar must explain to Beowulf who she is. Nor does the poet discuss why her existence was never mentioned either within the story or by the narrator previously, especially at the point where the poet speaks of Grendel's origins. Given such gaps in the plot of the story, the rather insignificant gap of explaining how Grendel's hand became displayed in Heorot is not surprising.

12 One might also note the ubiquitous nature of this definition in other *Beowulf* glossaries and Old English dictionaries and glossaries. See also and especially the corresponding entry in the *Dictionary of Old English* (*DOE*).

3 Lines 925–927

After Grendel flees the scene leaving his hand, arm, and shoulder behind, the reader does not encounter any mention of the hand until line 920. Here the poet says that everyone is eager to see the wonder of the hand. He relates Hrothgar's approach to see the wonder, and fitt XIIII begins with Hrothgar's speech (l. 925–927):

> Hroðgar maþelode – he to healle geong,
> stod on stapole, geseah steapne hrof
> golde fahne ond Grendles hond
>
> 'Hrothgar spoke – he went to the hall
> stood on the *stapol*, saw the steep roof
> decorated with gold and Grendel's hand'

Here several problems present themselves on the question of just where Grendel's hand is. It may indeed be most expedient to take the difficulties in order of appearance. The first difficulty is in line 925b: whether Hrothgar simply goes to the hall and so is outside of it when he makes his speech or whether he enters the hall and so speaks inside the hall. That question's answer certainly affects whether one reads the poet as placing Grendel's hand outside or inside the hall. Related to this is the second major question in these lines: when Hrothgar stands and sees the hand, what is a *stapol*, and how may Hrothgar stand on it, and how is all of that related to the sight of the hand and roof?

The first problem is where Hrothgar goes. In line 925b, he is described as going to the hall with his queen and attendants. The usual understanding of this line is that Hrothgar went *to* the hall, but did not enter into it.[13] This reading, however, is not driven by the grammar of the clause, which is open to multiple interpretations, but is rather driven by a given understanding of the context. That is, if one understands that the *stapol* is outside and the hand is outside, then the *to healle* must mean that he went simply to the hall. The other reading is just as possible and likely, that the phrase should be read as 'he went *into* the hall'. Such a consideration rests on the role of completion that the preposition *to* sometimes fulfills, i.e. the direction or object of verbs of motion in Old English absorbing

13 Three recent examples are: Bradley (1995: 436) translates: 'he had reached the hall and was standing on the steps [...]'; Liuzza (2000) translates: 'he went to the hall, stood on the steps [...]'; and Heaney (2001) likewise translates as 'to the hall' and 'stood on the steps'.

both the locative sense of the Old English dative and the Latin sense of *ad* plus the accusative that sometimes late Old English imitates.[14]

There are several instances in *Beowulf* where the meaning of the preposition seems to be 'into' rather than simply 'to'. In line 1009, a similar phrase is used in which Hrothgar is again described as going to the hall: *to healle gang sunu Healfdanes*. The context describes the time of the feast in honor of Beowulf's victory, and Hrothgar is described as going to the hall to eat the feast. In this instance, the phrase undoubtedly means that Hrothgar went *into* the hall. This has implications for line 925b: if the poet means that Hrothgar went into the hall to see Grendel's hand, the place where it was left, then there can be no question of the arm and hand being outside the hall. One cannot be dogmatic, but the clarity of Hrothgar's position in line 1008 and the prepositional phrase less than one hundred lines earlier seems to be indicative.

A similar use of *to* occurs just a few lines later in line 1013: *bugon to bence* 'lowered [themselves] onto the benches'. The warriors sit or return to their benches, which again, since this is a feast scene, are inside the hall, not somewhere outside. The use of *to* here after a verb of motion indicates 'motion into or onto', not merely 'to' or a static 'at'.

In lines 323–325, Beowulf and his men are said to have come to the hall in their war-gear, then set their shields and swords against the wall of the hall, then sit on a bench. Since the only words in these lines indicating entrance to the hall are those describing their arrival, and the immediate action after laying the war-gear against the wall is to sit on the benches *inside* the hall, the reader is left to conclude that *hie to sele furðum [...] cwomom* 'they into the hall first [...] came' (l. 323–324), i.e. that they entered into the hall.[15] Likewise, Grendel's mother in lines 1279–1282a is said by the poet to enter *to Heorote*, where she is clearly entering into the hall. Similarly then, in line 925b, it seems most natural to read that Hrothgar and his entourage go and view the trophy where the battle took place inside the hall.

Further clues may be that one would presume that the decoration of gold would again be inside the hall, where it could be kept shining, rather than outside on the exterior roofs, where it would quickly become dull and tarnished. Thus, the multiple descriptions of the shining hall and shining roof probably indicate the interior, rather than the exterior of the building.[16] In any case, *to healle*

14 See discussion on *to* in Bosworth-Toller s.v. *to* and Mitchell (1985: I, §§1209–1216).

15 Note also lines 1288–1289, where the swords hang on the wall *within* Heorot, close to hand, but not in hand. This indicates not only the warrior's readiness for battle but the fact that the war-gear, even of a visitor to the hall, would never be left out of doors, out of reach, and in the weather.

(l. 925b) could indicate the inside as easily as the outside of the building, and the decorations within the hall may help direct the readers' or hearers' attention to the interior.

The next questions are perhaps the most difficult to address. Understanding the phrase in line 926a, *stod on stapole*, is the heart of the entire problem. Each term in this half-line calls for some discussion. First, the word *stapol* in these lines has been understood and misunderstood to mean many things. It appears in most Germanic languages in some form and descends from the Proto-Indo-European root **stapulaz*, which means 'pillar'. Early commentators took it to indicate a chief pole or vertical support in the interior of the hall (Klaeber 1950: 166; DuBois 1955: 291; Bremmer 1996: 128). Against this view, Thomas Miller in 1889 argued that *stapol* was better read as a set of steps by examining derivatives from the word in Old English and Middle English such as *step*, *staple*, and similar developments in continental Germanic languages. Miller concludes that *stapol* in this passage means the landing at the top of the stairs that enter the door of Heorot. This interpretation has been accepted by most commentators, largely popularized by its inclusion in Klaeber.

Miller's argument rests on three principle supports. First, he assumes that the hand is outdoors, not even beginning to make an argument for this conclusion (1889: 398). If such is the case, he notes that these lines present a difficulty for that reading; so he moves on to his second argument. Ironically, then, the very lines that, as Miller notes, are a difficulty for understanding the hand as being outdoors, are the lines that most commentators now cite to demonstrate that the hand is outdoors. Miller examines one of the examples where Old English *stapol* glosses an apparent *hapax legomenon* in Latin, i.e. *patronus* in the sense of 'pillar' (Wright-Wülcker 1884).[17] According to Miller, it is likely that this is a misspelling of Latin *petronus*, which has derivatives in French and German and resulted in modern French *perron* 'flight of steps'. Thus, if *petron* < *petronus* was equivalent to *stapol*, then *stapol* is a flight of steps. Third, Miller notes that citing *on* in Old English in the phrase *on stapole* as 'at, beside' would be extremely unusual and thus unlikely.

Although Miller has convinced Klaeber, who has determined the course of *Beowulf* studies in Germany, England, and the United States for the better part of the last seventy years, nonetheless two significant problems with Miller's argu-

16 But see Webster (1998) for the possibility that the gold refers to the thatch.

17 Bosworth listed both glosses prior to 1889, the date of Miller's article, indicating that the information was available.

ment stand out. First, Miller failed to consider any of the other evidence in which *stapol* clearly indicates pillars, posts, and the like.

Among this evidence are other examples of Old English glosses on Latin texts. In the Lindisfarne Gospels at Matthew 21:12, the majority Latin Vulgate reading has *columbas*. The manuscript reading for the Lindisfarne Gospels is *columnas*, a scribal error for *columbas*, which Aldred glosses as *culfas et staplas* in Old English. Uncertain of the correct word in the Latin text, obviously knowing the majority text, Aldred has included in his gloss the Old English that translates the majority term, Old English *culfas* 'doves or pigeons', and the literal translation of the word that is on the page, *staplas* 'columns, pillars'. In his gloss, Aldred has covered both contingencies rendering the word by both possible terms, and for the current purpose, rendered *columnas* as *staplas*.

In Book II.16 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in the Latin text, Bede mentions posts or pillars along public roads using the Latin word *stipes* in the dative case. The Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* has rendered Bede's *stipitibus* as *stapulas* (Miller 1890–1891: 145; Child 1893; Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 193). Two years after the above-mentioned article on *stapol*, Miller published for the Early English Text Society his edition of the Old English translation of Bede. He apparently did not reexamine the question of *stapol* in *Beowulf* line 925 after that point.

A second significant issue is Miller's reinterpretation of *patronus*, which he derives from his puzzling over an entry in Wright-Wülcker's vocabulary (1884: col. 126). This is a glossary from London, British Library, Harley 3376. It lists a Latin term, *patronus*, which is glossed by Old English *stapul*. It is this entry on which Miller bases his argument that *stapol* in *Beowulf* line 926a means 'staircase'.

Wright-Wülcker records three uses of *stapol*/*-ul* in all of the glossaries there reprinted, all glossing Latin entries. It is worthwhile to examine each briefly. In London, British Library, Harley 3376, Wright-Wülcker lists *cione*, a borrowing from Greek into Latin, which is glossed by *stapul*. The term *cion* means 'pillar', and the Old English glossator reflects his understanding of the term correctly. Though not printed by Wright-Wülcker, the same glossary in the line above this word has a variant spelling of *cione* as *cion*, which is glossed as *masticen* for 'mast' (Oliphant 1966: 79).[18]

In another glossary recorded by Wright-Wülcker, the Latin word *batis*, a probable misspelling for *basis*, is also glossed as *stapul*. This glossary is preserved

18 The Greek term means 'pillar' and is used interestingly enough in the *Odyssey* to refer to the pillars of the hall. It is unlikely that this is the source for the glossary, however.

in London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra A. iii, and it has only recently drawn significant attention (Rusche 1996).[19]

It is most likely that *batis* is simply a misspelling of the Latin word *basis*. The following entry in the glossary is *bassis* and is glossed as *stepe*. The latter word elsewhere glosses either Latin *passus* or *gradus*. This suggests that the scribe here has confused *batis* for *basis*, which would fit a gloss of *stapul*, and confused *bassis* for *passus* 'step' (Wright-Wülcker 1884: col. 361).[20] The Latin word *basis* in architectural contexts refers to the base of a column and can refer to the base and column together (*TLL* s.v. *basis*).

Beyond these bilingual glosses and translations, there are places within the Old English corpus where the word *stapul* and its forms clearly mean 'pillar' rather than 'step'. *Andreas* 1062 and 1494 have the term in the sense of 'pillar'.[21] The second of these references has some direct application to the phrase in *Beowulf*:

> He be wealle geseah wundrum fæste
> under sælwage sweras unlytle
> stapulas standan storme bedrifen
> eald enta geweorc[22]
>
> 'He saw by the wall wondrously fast
> upon the plains unlittle pillars,
> columns standing, beaten by storms
> ancient work of giants'

In this section, the author relates the exterior construction of the wall inside the city, its key feature being ancient pillars apparently holding up the wall.

In addition to the literary references for the word, there are multiple uses of the word in charters. British Library, Additional 15350, fols. 55^{v}–56^{r} is a charter of a gift from King Edgar to Æthelwulf in 961 from Winchester, Old Minster. There, as in many charters, our word appears as a 'post' marking part of the land being given: *[...] swa bæ þære dic ofer þone brocuyt. be norðan eallan forda to þam stapole. þonon east to mearc hlince* (Sawyer 1968) '[...] so there by the dike over the

19 I am indebted to Dr. David Porter for his kind assistance in providing information from this work. See also Quinn (1956) and Kittlick (1998).

20 It is also possible that *bassis* here is the Greek cognate *basis*, which means 'a step' in the sense of putting one foot before the other. In either case though, the orthography of each entry is not the customary orthography even by medieval standards.

21 *Andreas* lines 1058–1062 read: *Gewat him þa Andreas inn on ceastre [...] he gemette be mearcwaðe standan stræte neah stapul ærenne* (Krapp 1932a: 32).

22 *Andreas* lines 1492–1495a (Krapp 1932a: 44).

brook, then north along the ford to the post, then east to the border bank'. Parallels in multiple other charters ranging in date from 757 to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period exist; in each case, the term indicates a pole or post or pillar of some kind, not a set of steps.

Last, but certainly not least in this regard is the only other use of *stapol* within *Beowulf* at lines 2715b–2719:

> Ða se æðeling giong
> þæt he bi wealle wishycgende
> gesæt on sesse seah on enta geweorc
> hu ða stanbogan stapulum fæste
> ece eorðreced innan healde
>
> 'Then the noble one went,
> he sat by the wall wise-thinking,
> sat on the bench, saw within the work of giants
> how the stone arches, with pillars fast
> held the earth-cave within ever'

The parallel with the above-noted reference in *Andreas* is plain. Here though clearly the *stapul* is holding up the roof, and in this case as well the posts are seen inside the dragon's hall.

All this evidence should give considerable pause to the argument that *stapol* in *Beowulf* line 926 is a step, not a pillar. It is interesting that Miller would give attention to one gloss in Wright-Wülcker's work, while completely ignoring others in the same work.[23] Thus, Miller's methodology may be successfully challenged, and further, there is no lexical or semantic basis for arguing that the *stapul* in question should be read as anything else other than a post, pole, or column. Miller's puzzle regarding the *patronus* glossed as *stapul* still remains.

Wright-Wülcker (1884: 126) preserve a text that seems in part related to Ælfric's glossary.[24] In the midst of this glossary, in the section on vases, is a small list of the parts of a house. Among these household features is an entry in Latin *patronus* that is glossed by the Old English word *stapol*. It is this entry that Miller puzzled over and developed an ingenious solution for, as mentioned above.

The glossary in question is preserved in what are now two manuscripts: Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, M.16.2 (formerly 47), and London, British

23 The third example, i.e. *patronus* = *stapul*, will be examined in some detail below.

24 See also the introduction to the glossary at the bottom of column 104. The relationship is indirect. One of the sources for Ælfric's glossary were words taken from *Excerptiones de Prisciano*, the source for this glossary as well.

Library, Additional 32246 were once a single manuscript. The main texts are *Excerptiones de Prisciano*, Remigius' commentary on Donatus, an incomplete copy of Ælfric's *Colloquy*, and some poems. In the margins of these texts are several glosses, one of them a Latin-English glossary arranged by subject headings. The manuscripts date from the eleventh century (Ker 1957: 1–3; Dekker 2001: 328; Gneuss and Lapidge 2014: 557).

Miller, as mentioned, posited that the *patronus* of the glossary was likely not the Latin word known but rather a misspelling for *petronus*. This Latin word appears in Migne's lexicon as a 'pile of stones'. This is clearly the ancestor of French *perron* 'stair case' and derived from *pierre*, itself from Latin *petra*.

Here is where Miller went astray, in addition to consulting only this one glossary entry in Wright-Wülcker. While in modern French the meaning of *perron* is fairly limited to a staircase, in Old French, *perron* had a wider semantic range. The main definition of the term in Old French is 'block of stone'; but it can also mean 'pillar, a column, a boundary post, a feudal courtyard, a defensive barrier, even a stone statue' (Godefroy s.v.).[25] Indeed, the Old French term overlaps with the semantic field of Old English *stapol*, including the senses 'pillar', 'column', and 'boundary post'. The Old English word survives into Middle English with the same meanings, and the Old French word is borrowed as well with the same senses (see *MED* s.vv. *peroun*, n. and *stapel*, n.). Miller's late 19th-century analysis rested entirely on a comparison to modern French; he did not take into account the usage of the term in Anglo-Norman or Old French. The presence of a gloss equating *stapol* with the Latin form that stands behind *perron* < *pedron* should not be taken as some odd definition of either term. There is enough semantic overlap to justify the gloss in the mid-eleventh century.

Archaeological evidence may be brought to bear on this question of *stapol* in *Beowulf* as well (Hope-Taylor 1977: 119–122; Bremmer 1996: 128).[26] It must be confessed that archaeology has been adduced to support more than one position on the question. Bremmer, for example, cites archaeology to support his view that *stapol* probably indicates a step and uses Old Frisian to illustrate that it might be a step used in official or legal functions. Thus, Hrothgar stands not just on a step but rather on a box or slightly raised step in order to deliver an official speech. Such a step, Bremmer (1996: 128) notes, was found at Yeavering. Hills (1997: 305), writing in the *Beowulf Handbook*, cites Rosemary Cramp (1993); Cramp is dependent on Klaeber and understands lines 926–927 as he does. After citing Klaeber on

25 See also *AND* s.v. *perrun*.

26 For more general comments on halls in Anglo-Saxon England, see Taylor (1972) and in the same journal issue Addyman (1972).

these lines, Cramp explains *stapol* as possibly a set of steps from archaeology, and has been able to report the discovery of steps at Cowderys Down. The issue neither Hills nor Cramp consider is that *stapul* in Old English never indicates 'steps'. The 'step' and theater construction that Bremmer refers to is not part of the hall but stands apart. It is a construction apparently used for formal ceremonies and is shaped on the one side like a section from a Roman theater. In front is an oval shaped area in which is a raised area, possibly a platform or stage, on which apparently sat a chair. Behind this chair also there seemed to be a large pillar. This area seems to be for some sort of official function and would fit Bremmer's (1996: 128) argument nicely.

But this area first is not at the hall, and *Beowulf* line 925b certainly has Hrothgar go to the hall, not stop on the way to sit in another area. Second, the area at Yeavering faces away from the hall; so if the hand is anywhere on the outside of the hall as Bremmer, Miller, Klaeber, and others argue, then Hrothgar in his official seat in this area could not see it.[27]

Another recent attempt to explain the term *stapol* here in *Beowulf* by reference to archaeology is an article included in Mitchell and Robinson's edition of the poem. Leslie Webster notes that a feature common to all the hall-type buildings at Yeavering, Cowderys Down, Continental sites, and other Anglo-Saxon sites is that these larger buildings have a system of supporting struts bracing the external walls (1998: 186). Webster ponders whether this construction is what is meant by *stapol*, but then rejects the notion by noting that Hrothgar would then have to stand at, rather than on, the *stapol* and remarks that this might stretch the grammar. While this suggestion does seem to take seriously the semantic field that *stapol* governs, it should be noted that the above analysis of the usage of the word demonstrates that *stapol* is used of upright pillars or posts, not supporting structures. Further, as will be examined below, the other reference in the *Beowulf* poem to the *stapol* of a hall refers specifically to interior pillars holding up the roof. Thus, grammar aside, it is unlikely that it is the system of structural supports that is referenced by *stapol*.

This then raises the problem of how Hrothgar would be able to have *stod on* a pillar or column in line 926a. This is not a significant problem, even though Miller's (1889) article suggests briefly without examination that *on* meaning 'at, beside' would be unusual. The lexica, already cited above, all offer 'at' or 'beside' as possible modern translations for the Old English preposition *on*.

27 This assumes that Yeavering is constructed in some way like Heorot, an unprovable assumption either way.

There is evidence to support a reading of *stod on stapole* (l. 926a) as 'at or near the pillar'. Restricting discussion to examples just within the poem, one of the places where *on* means 'at, beside' in the locative sense with the dative is line 404, Beowulf stands 'on the hearth'.[28] Given that the hearth would not be large and was located at a place where there was heavy traffic before the seat of Hrothgar, if the Yeavering halls are indicative, it is unlikely that Beowulf stood on the edge of the fire ring. Rather he stood at the hearth or next to it, not on it, where he undoubtedly would have been singed.

Line 1117a reads: *eame on eaxle*.[29] Here, Hildeburh's son is laid on the pyre next to his uncle. Mitchell and Robinson suggest a translation of 'by his uncle's side' for this phrase. The image, however, is very clear. Hildeburh's son is being laid shoulder to shoulder on the pyre next to his uncle (Mitchell and Robinson 1998: 85, note to l. 1117). It is apparent that what is in view is not one body on top of the other but rather two bodies laid next to one another.[30]

Further, in Old English there are examples where the combination of *standan* and its compounds and the preposition *on* occur together where modern English places *at* (Bammesberger 2002).[31] In the Vulgate, Luke 6:17 reads *et descendens cum illis stetit in loco campestri* 'and descending with them, he stood in an open place', which is rendered in Aldred's gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels as *ofdune astag mid him astod on stou* and in the West Saxon Gospels as *and mid him farendum he stod on feldlice stow*.[32] Both the Old English renderings could be rendered just as effectively, and arguably better, translated as 'at a place' or 'beside a place'.[33] Paris Psalter 108:30 reads *He sylfa gestod on ða swyðran hand*

28 The manuscript has a *hapax legomenon, heoðe*, which Klaeber takes as *heorðe* 'hearth'. Mitchell and Robinson (1998: 61) retain the manuscript reading, and their glossary (p. 269) suggests 'hall, interior'. This, however, little changes the meaning of the sentence. In line 403, Beowulf has already entered so that this clause in 404b introduced with *þæt* cannot be taken as merely restating the action of the previous line.

29 The manuscript has *earme*; most editors emend to *eame*. For this thesis, it matters little. Whether the son is laid, his arm at the shoulder, next to Hnaf, or whether the uncle is "at his shoulder" on the pyre, makes little difference.

30 There are other examples, such as place names, that could be added here. Stratford on Avon does not mean, for example, that the town sits on top of the river but rather that Stratford is at or beside the Avon. Or in Matthew 27:38 in the *West Saxon Gospels*, the author states: *Ða wæron ahangen mid him twegen sceaþan an on þa swiþran healfe*, where the thief is not sitting or hanging on Jesus' right side or hand but is at his right.

31 In particular, Bammesberger's footnote 12 offers a full bibliography of studies on the preposition. See also *OED*, s.v. *on*, prep. In addition to Bammesberger's list, *MED*, s.v. *on*, prep., 7. also demonstrates the continued use of *on* with the meaning 'at' or 'beside'.

32 Transcribed from London, British Library, Cotton Nero D.iv and Royal 1.A.xiv.

33 In addition, see Bammesberger (2002: 4).

'he himself stood at the right hand' (Krapp 1932b: 94). Ælfric writes for a sermon on Palm Sunday *þa stod on ðære stowe sum stænen ðruh [...]* 'in that place stood a coffin of stone [...]'. Here again, modern idiom would translate these as 'in/on', but in actuality the text describes a position 'at' rather than a position 'on'.[34]

At this juncture, it might be useful to summarize findings in regard to lines 925–927. First, in line 925b, the most probable reading of that half line should indicate that Hrothgar entered into the hall rather than merely went to the hall. *Stapol* cannot mean 'steps' or 'platform'; it means quite simply 'post' or 'pole', or 'support'. Finally, there is no difficulty in taking *stod on* as 'stood at' rather than 'on'. The lines then could be translated as:

'he went into the hall
stood at [the] pillar saw the high roof,
decorated with gold and the hand of Grendel'

4 Lines 980–983

After Hrothgar comes into the hall, sees the hand, and gives a speech, Beowulf delivers a speech. Then the poet remarks (l. 980–983):

Ða wæs swigra secg sunu Ecglafes
On gylpspræce guðgeweorca
Siþðan æþelingas eorles cræfte
Ofer heanne hrof hand sceawedon

'Then was the warrior more silent, the son of Ecglaf
in boasting word of battle deeds
after the noblemen saw the hand
by the power of the earl over the high roof'[35]

This passage has created a good deal of discussion in reference to Grendel's hand. Klaeber, for example, did not agree that this means that the hand was over the roof, but that *ofer* here indicates 'up toward'. He posits that the noblemen looked in the direction of the roof, not at the roof, confirming his earlier reading of *stapol* as a pillar extending outside the building horizontally (Klaeber 1950: 167).[36]

34 Bammesberger (2002) suggests *standan on* be translated as 'stop at'.
35 Bremmer (1996: 128). – If, as stated above, standing outside the building and looking upward produces discomfort, how can they now see it over the roof?
36 See Bremmer (1996), who also cites others.

DuBois took another route demonstrating that features of the hall may stand for the whole in an intriguing argument for keeping the hand well-placed inside. Thus, when Beowulf stands *on flet*, this is no more remarkable than if the poet had said that he stood in the hall, similarly the references to under the roof, under the gables, which mean no more than in the hall as well (DuBois 1955).

There are several difficulties with this passage that need some examination. First is the verb in the passage, *sceawian*. Generally taken as a 'verb of seeing', in certain texts it seems to have a more specific meaning. In *Beowulf* especially the word is used nineteen times, and in every case the reader or the audience is not just looking at or seeing some object, but specifically is *examining* or looking closely at something: Grendel's trail (l. 132b, 840b, 843b), omens consulted by the Geats (l. 204b), and the monster mere (l. 1413b) are a few examples (Orchard 2003: 27). In every instance of the word in *Beowulf*, some specific thing is examined close at hand, often accompanied by the word *wundor* or a similar compound or cognate. In short, the poet's use of the word is not a mere 'seeing a sight' but is instead a detailed examination, like following a trail.

This meaning of the term in line 983b is illustrated in that immediately following the verb is a detailed description of Grendel's hand and nails. It is difficult to imagine such a detailed description of the hand unless we assume that Grendel's hand is so astronomical in size that its features can be clearly seen if it indeed is over the roof. If the hand is outside on some overhanging pole or protruding beam, that would fit the scenario suggested by the poet's use of *sceawian* as would an internal location. But there is little to no evidence to suggest that the poet is here indicating some kind of protruding beam; this latter interpretation rests on how the prepositional phrase *ofer heanne hrof* in line 983a is understood.

Most scholars and translators have taken the phrase as modifying either the verb or the hand. As already stated above, it is unlikely that the verb *sceawian* here allows the nobles to 'look over' the high roof, nor would a vantage point on the stairs allow such a view of the high roof either. However, most current commentators take the phrase as a locative modifier indicating the location of the hand that the nobles see. That is, they see the hand over the high roof. If so, it is difficult to imagine Hrothgar and the noblemen standing on the steps or even outside the hall close to the pillars, looking upward and seeing the hand above the roof, much less be able to examine it in detail. Such a position would be uncomfortable in the extreme (DuBois 1955: 291). Klaeber and Wrenn (1953: 272) in particular have recognized this problem and have taken the *ofer* as meaning 'up toward' rather than 'over'.

On the other hand, if *ofer* means something other than the normative sense in this line, 'up toward' is not one that is attested in other uses of the preposition.

Interestingly, several translators have also noted the difficulty. Bradley translates as 'up against the lofty roof'. Liuzza translates as 'over the high roof', but Heaney takes cues from Klaeber and takes it as 'up against'.

In addition, everywhere else in *Beowulf* where the word *hrof* appears, it seems to indicate the interior of the hall. In line 999, it is stated that the roof alone was intact after the struggle with Grendel: but all the features preceding the mention of the roof are inside the hall as is the activity of decoration. In lines 403, 836, and 2755, *hrof* is the object of the preposition *under*, again very clearly indicating the interior of the hall. That leaves three references. Line 1030 refers to the helmet and not to the hall at all. Lines 983 and 926 are affected by the interpretations under discussion in this paper, but certainly are not harmed in meaning if they refer to the interior.

In addition, there is some question whether the prepositional phrase is indeed a locative indicator. Typically even in Old English poetry, the locative sense is expressed by a preposition and the dative case, motion toward or into is expressed by a preposition and the accusative case.[37] In these lines, we have a preposition followed by an accusative, not a dative. At the same time, *ofer* plus the accusative often expects a verb or clause expressing motion. This too is lacking in these lines. Thus, *ofer heanne hrof* is probably not an expression delimiting the position of Grendel's hand.

In Old English, there are two ways of expressing rule or control over someone or something. A noun or verb of rule or power is usually followed by the genitive of the thing or people ruled. However, there is another way to express this idea: the preposition *ofer* plus the dative of the thing or people being ruled.[38] And in these lines, the poet does in fact have a word of power or ruling: *cræfte*.[39] Further, often *ofer* takes the accusative when used in this way.

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37 As seen with *on* above, Old English does not always draw this distinction sharply; there are frequent uses of a locative with a following accusative, or a verb of motion followed by *ofer* and dative. Thus, these comments are general only.

38 Mitchell (1985) does not mention this use or this rule, but Bosworth-Toller s.v. has a special definition for *ofer* describing just this usage. However, they only mention this use under the dative, not the accusative (1882–1898: 729–730).

39 *Cræft*'s primary meaning is 'power, might', and so it is a noun conveying the idea of power and ruling where one would indeed expect it to be followed by a phrase or genitive of the thing ruled. *Ofer* as a preposition plus the accusative also is used to express power or ruling over something. Placing both together in the same context is indicative that in this case the prepositional phrase should be read as modifying *cræft*, not the verb or *hand*. *Hrof* as a word indicating the hall should also not surprise: when Grendel leaves his hand and arm *under geapne hrof*, the poet is not indicating a location inside Heorot, but rather that Grendel simply left his arm in the hall. This is stated by Beowulf in his report to Hygelac: *hand on Hiorte* (l. 2099).

Thus, while on the one hand the locative use of *ofer* plus accusative is unusual, if not uncommon, it is common for *ofer* plus accusative where power or dominion is in question. The prepositional phrase then modifies line 982b, *eorles cræfte*, 'the power of the earl over the high roof'.

These lines should be read by following the word order of the text: 'The Scylding noblemen by the power/skill of the earl over the high roof saw the hand'. This reading expresses an idea important in *Beowulf*. It is through Beowulf's skill that Heorot is delivered from Grendel. Line 699 uses both words: *ðurh anes cræft ealle ofercomon [...]* 'through the craft (or: power) of one, all overcame [...]'. This ends the section immediately after Hrothgar's giving the hall into Beowulf's control. The poet relates that everyone has gone to bed, including Beowulf, and that Beowulf has decided to forgo the use of sword and weapons against Grendel. Then the poet states that the Lord gave them victory, that they, the Danes, completely overcame their enemy through the strength of one man, Beowulf. This is matched by an inverse order in the case of lines 980 ff. Hrothgar is the first speaker, whereas in the earlier scene he had been the last, and he reasserts his control over the hall and over Beowulf. Beowulf then describes briefly his battle with Grendel, mentions again that Grendel left behind his hand. Then the poet describes Unferth's silence as the Danish nobles examine the hand in all its gory detail. So lines 982–983 echo line 699: in both, the people of the Danes are in view; in both, the 'craft' of Beowulf is mentioned; in both, *ofer* is used, though in the first instance in a verbal form rather than a prepositional form. If lines 980–981 are included, these lines serve as an envelope not just with line 699 but also serve as a conclusion to the Grendel episode, looking back to the earlier debate with Unferth and to the beginning of the battle with Grendel.

5 The Placement of Grendel's Hand

There are two places within the hall that seem the most likely locations for displaying Grendel's hand. Many of the halls that have been uncovered from the Anglo-Saxon period have a floor plan that includes a kind of entry-way. One enters the door and is in the hall but not in the interior of the hall. Thus, for example, in the earlier discussed case of lines 320–323, Beowulf and his *comitatus* enter into Heorot, disarm, and sit on benches. This has often been taken as indicating that the disarming takes place outside Heorot, but it is shown later in the poem that the arms are kept inside the hall. Further, one would not leave weaponry at the mercy of the elements. A further consideration has been later in the poem at line 390 where Beowulf is called from *inne* the hall. If the poet has in

mind a construction such as that outlined above, Beowulf and his men are in the "foyer", disarm, and then are called to the interior to speak to Hrothgar.

Similarly then, while the poet is not as clear as desired, this construction is a likely position for the hand of Grendel to be displayed, since anyone approaching Hrothgar or Heorot would enter the door and there see inside the hall, but before seeing the chieftain note the trophy that proclaims that the hand that tried to take control of Heorot was defeated. Presumably, any embassy to Hrothgar not of the immediate tribe would be treated similarly to Beowulf and his men in the poem and wait outside the interior of the hall until Hrothgar agrees to see them. They too then would see the trophy over the door and get the message very clearly. It is a clear token to all who enter Heorot and would be a place in the building where looking up would enable one to both examine the hand and its features and see the steep roof. Outside the hall, as already noted, such reflection on the power of Hrothgar over Grendel would not be possible.

Another discovery, reported by Hope-Taylor (1977) for the Yeavering site, is the presence of pillars around what is believed to have been the position of the throne within hall A3. Hope-Taylor's reconstruction of the halls at Yeavering illustrates what may very well be taken as indicative of Heorot. The hall is shaped in an essentially cruciform pattern with doors at all four points. There is evidence of a small fire place where the cross ways intersect. The top of the hall is dominated by a step and seat construction similar to that found in the exterior theater already mentioned. And again behind this seat there seems to have been a pole. The larger hall, called A4 by Hope-Taylor, is assumed to have had the same feature as A3, the smaller hall, although later farming in the area has affected the evidence somewhat. Within this structure are rows of pillars, on the outside walls, as well as forming the interior, cruciform aisles (Hope-Taylor 1977: 126).

The pillars or post behind the seat would be a natural place to display a battle trophy; all in the hall could see it as well as any seeking audience with Hrothgar. Further, since the seat and the pole behind it are elevated on a raised platform, and those standing by the fire before the seat are not on a raised platform apparently, then looking upward toward the seat, the pole and the hand would lead them to also see the decorated roof. As such then, should Heorot have had a similar construction to this early hall in Yeavering, a place that would fit lexical, literary, and archaeological evidence would be a pillar behind the seat of the lord of the hall.[40]

40 See the articles by Cramp (1993) and Hills (1997). Cramp has suggested twice that what is in view here is steps, but she does so largely on the strength of Klaeber and understanding *stapol* as steps rather than pillar. In addition to archaeological evidence, one could and should examine manuscript and artistic evidence. Regrettably, there are few halls depicted in Anglo-Saxon art,

Such a position may illustrate part of the development of the semantic range of *stapul* and its cognate in Frisian and *perron* in Old French. As Bremmer (1996) notes, in Frisian *stapul* becomes a base from which a legal or royal person would make public announcements. In Old French, one of the uses of the term *perron* is to designate the seat and pillar of the lord who receives his vassals.[41] One could posit that the *stapol* as a totemic element in the hall associated with the lord's high seat could give rise to the later Old French, Frisian (and it must be said, Middle English) usage. And such a step, seat, and pillar construction is apparently what is described for Hrothgar, who has Unferth seated on a step before him, and a throne, and high-seat pillars.

This last suggestion provides the reader with another example of irony. When Grendel is described and comes from the moors to Heorot, it is stated that he could not greet the *gifstol* (line 168).[42] If the suggestion given above that a *stapol* behind Hrothgar's *setl* is the most likely place for the display of Grendel's hand, then this offers an envelope that surrounds the Grendel episode: Grendel does not greet the *gifstol* and so receive with his hands gifts as Beowulf does; therefore, by Beowulf's skill, Grendel's hand will be received by the *gifstol*, or at least the pillar directly behind it.

Other indications underscore this. It is known that at least in continental and Scandinavian halls the seat of the king was bounded on both sides by pillars. These high seat pillars were certainly totemic. Perhaps the most famous story is that of Ingolfur Arnarson, who circa 870 threw his high seat pillars overboard off the coast of Iceland. The pillars are mentioned as being carved with the image of Thor, the familial god, and Ingolfur declares that wherever the pillars make landfall that is where he will build his new hall. As it turned out, Thor was gracious, and Ingolf founded Reykjavik. A similar story is told of Thorolf.[43]

Manuscript art often depicts royal figures with columns around them, holding up a canopy or roof. Sometimes, these pillars seem to serve as a kind of frame for the image, but as often as not, the pillars and the roof they hold up are meant to be representations of the hall. Although few if any of these images display war

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and the halls depicted on the Bayeaux tapestry are as likely to be Anglo-Norman examples rather than Anglo-Saxon ones and certainly appear to be of stone and thus of a later style rather than of wood and of an earlier style. The reading given here should not be read as revivification of the old 'prince pole' position of the 19th century. The pillars at Yeavering have some structural importance but are not significant, and they seem to be more important as totem possibilities than as structural elements.

41 Godefroy, previously cited. Bremmer, ibid.

42 See Robinson (1992: 262).

43 "Story of the Ere-Dwellers", *Landnámabók Eyrbyggja Saga* (Pálsson and Edwards 1989: 28).

trophies, they do illustrate the ubiquity even in the later period of pillars associated with the high seat of the king or ruler.

Added to this is the importance of the seat within the hall. It is there that the warrior would swear allegiance; it is there that the gifts are doled by the king to his *thegns*. As noted above, it is Grendel's inability to salute the *gifstol* that is the heart of the problem in the Grendel episode.

From several perspectives, it seems that the best reading of the final disposition of Grendel's hand is within the hall, probably even above Hrothgar's own seat. Archaeological finds and reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic halls make this a possibility. Linguistically, the words involved in some cases, such as *stapol*, support such an interpretation at least in a general way; and other words and phrases may be read as supporting this view without emending their semantic ranges or stretching the grammar to support something it cannot bear. In literary terms, this reading increases and continues to play on already established word plays with hands, structural elements and envelope patterns, as well as irony, which is present throughout the poem but has been especially noted in the Grendel episode. Finally, since the *gifstol* and the question of OE *mund* 'legal control' of Heorot is an essential question in the Grendel episode, this reading emphasizes the resolution of that question by placing Grendel's hand up on a pillar over Hrothgar's seat. Thus, it would seem that Grendel's hand is inside Heorot, near or above Hrothgar's seat rather than outside, and the place of Hrothgar's speech in line 925 ff. is within the hall, not on exterior steps, possibly even from in front of his high seat.

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