The Role of Æschere's Head

Abstract

This article draws on evidence from archaeological investigation and land charters to argue for the influence of Anglo-Saxon execution practice on the representation of Æschere's head in *Beowulf*. The poet's depiction of the discovery of the severed head of Hroðgar's retainer in a space defined as a borderland, where it has been left by his killer, Grendel's mother, can be seen to reflect the Anglo-Saxons' own judicial decapitation and display practices, which saw the heads of transgressors displayed on estate boundaries. Critics have identified similar echoes of decapitation on a border elsewhere in the corpus. The article argues that the severed head of Æschere is staged in this way to disturb the reader both through the violence done to the human body and through the sense of the *unheimlich* created by the hostile 'other' figure of Grendel's mother recognisably echoing the corporal punishment practices of Anglo-Saxon society. Grendel's mother is a transgressive figure who treats a key member of the Danes' society, an individual with whom the poem's Anglo-Saxon audience would identify, as a transgressor, highlighting the lack of human control over her landscape.

I. Introduction

Severed heads play a prominent role in the 'Beowulf Manuscript', London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, ff. 94-209; the heads of Grendel in *Beowulf* and Holofernes in *Judith* are conspicuously exhibited by their slayers, and the Donestre of *The Wonders of the East* weep over the heads of their victims.[1] In relation to *Beowulf*,

numerous scholars have discussed Grendel's decapitation, interpreting it through various prisms, including feud, head worship and Freudian analysis.[2] However, there is another severed head in the poem – that of Hroðgar's retainer Æschere, placed by his killer, Grendel's mother, on a sea-cliff near the edge of the mere. This article argues that the *Beowulf* poet characterizes the space in which Æschere's head is discovered as a borderland by echoing the style of charter bounds, in order to exploit the cultural resonances of a severed head on a border to increase the horror associated with Grendel's mother and heighten anxieties about man's jurisdiction over the space. Dorothy Whitelock, Victoria Whitworth and others have drawn attention to the influence of the Anglo-Saxons' own border-based judicial decapitation and display practices visible elsewhere in their literary corpus.[3] The *Beowulf* poet depicts Grendel's mother using Æschere's head to assert the boundary of her space and warn against transgression, effectively marking the mere as outside human control. The role of Æschere's head within the narrative of *Beowulf* is to contribute to the sense of the *unheimlich* around Grendel's mother by having her echo Anglo-Saxon practice, amplifying the episode's horror and highlighting man's vulnerability in the landscape.

Æschere's head belongs to a pattern of decapitation and dismemberment in *Beowulf*, but also stands apart from it. Comparison with the narrative function of the severed body parts of the Grendel-kin reveals that, within the narrative, Æschere's head occupies a distinct role. The *Beowulf* poet handles the death of Hroðgar's retainer differently from the other deaths inflicted by the poem's monsters. Whereas Hondscio's obliteration by Grendel is a horrifying perversion of feasting in the hall clearly witnessed by the reader (ll. 739-754a), Æschere's death at the hands of Grendel's mother takes place outside the narrative and only his head remains to appear as a sign: the display of the head is significant in a way that the moment of

death is not.[4] The discovery of Æschere's severed head is depicted as a moment of trauma; the men's emotional distress conveys the horror of their discovery:

Denum eallum wæs,
winum Scyldinga, weorce on mode
to geþolianne, ðegne monegum,
oncyð eorla gehwæm, syðþan Æscheres
on þam holmclife hafelan metton. (ll. 1417b-21)[5]

(To all the Danes, the men of the Scyldings, it was grievous in mind to many a thane to suffer, distress to each of the nobles, when on the sea-cliff they came upon Æschere's head.)

The poet first draws attention to the men's reaction; their grief and anguish is drawn out through variation before its cause is revealed. The structure of the verse mirrors the violent division inflicted on Æschere's body; his name appears in l. 1420b, separated from his head in l. 1421b. Identity and body are riven by the actions of Grendel's mother; the verse structure heightens the horror of the decapitation by delaying the appearance of *hafela* ('head') until the final half-line of the sentence. Æschere's head is an emotive object and a calculated token; its siting in the landscape is as deliberate as the poet's placement of *hafela* within these lines. Grendel's mother leaves the head where it will have a particular impact on its discoverers: on a sea-cliff by the mere, a space marked and asserted by its presence.

Although Æschere's head receives a nod in most discussions of severed body parts in *Beowulf*, critical focus has tended to remain on the bodies of the Grendel-kin, and no satisfactory reading has been presented for its placement in the landscape.

Æschere's head has been somewhat overlooked in the discussion of decapitation and dismemberment in *Beowulf*; it does not initially appear be as culturally resonant an image as the decapitation of Grendel and his mother, and no precise literary parallels have been identified. Yet, the poet is at pains to attach an emotional weight to Æschere, priming the reader to view the discovery of his head as a significant moment of trauma.[6] Although, as Tom Hill remarks, Æschere's 'sole function is to die and eventually lose his head', the length of Hroðgar's lament affirms his importance, while delaying the revelation of his fate.[7] Æschere is shown to be at the core of Danish society and tension is built in order to make the gruesome discovery all the more horrifying, suggesting that, from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, there is something particularly disturbing about the manner in which his body treated.[8]

The killing of Æschere functions within the framework of feud; for example, the poet refers to Grendel's mother as a 'wrecend' ('avenger', l. 1256b) who would 'sunu deoð wrecan' ('avenge her son's death', l. 1278b) by making an exchange (l. 1304b). Hroðgar says that in the killing of Æschere 'heo þa fæhðe wræc' ('she avenged that feud', l. 1333b) and her actions were motivated because 'wolde hyre mæg wrecan' ('she would avenge her kinsman', l. 1339b), a phrase echoed by the poet during her fight with Beowulf: 'wolde hire bearn wrecan' ('she wished to avenge her child', l. 1546b). Hroðgar and the *Beowulf* poet understand Grendel's mother's motivations and acknowledge their legitimacy; the occupants of Heorot have transgressed against her by killing her son, so she avenges that transgression by killing Æschere. However, Hroðgar's interpretation of Æschere's death in his lament (ll. 1322-44) precedes the discovery of the head (ll. 1417b-21), problematizing the predominant critical reading of the display of Æschere's head as being directly related to feud.[9] As the two incidents are treated separately by the *Beowulf* poet, it is

important to consider what Grendel's mother might intend by the display of the head, independent of the killing itself.

The majority of critics are inclined to read Æschere's head alongside the head and arm of Grendel as part of a tit-for-tat exchange of body parts symbolizing the feud with the Grendel-kin, with its display making it a trophy of triumph, rather like the head of Holofernes in *Judith*, the poem following *Beowulf* in Cotton Vitellius A.xv.[10] Grendel's severed body parts are clearly treated as victory tokens: the poet calls his severed head 'tires to tacen' ('a token of glory', l. 1654), and his arm a 'tacen sweotol' ('a manifest token', l. 833b). As Rob Getz and Andy Orchard observe, both *tacna* echo the display of Nicanor's arm and head as victory tokens by the Jewish hero Judas Maccabeus.[11] However, images of triumph are not associated with Æschere's head. In relation to feud, Leslie Lockett has highlighted the requirement in Frankish law to display the corpse in order for a killing to be viewed as legitimate, which she links to Grendel's mother's behaviour: 'Although the killings committed by her son are without just cause and are therefore kept concealed, her slaying of Æschere is, – at least from her perspective – a legitimate requital of her own son's death, for which reason she prominently displays the head at the entrance of her own home, on high ground at the edge of the mere'.[12] Lockett's explanation accounts for the necessity, but not the location, for exhibition; if the head were simply a feud token it would be displayed in Grendel's mother's hall at the base of the mere, just as Beowulf displays Grendel's arm and head as symbols of success in Heorot, but instead it is placed at the edge of her space.

By drawing attention to the influence of law and custom on the *Beowulf* poet, Lockett exposes a productive direction for inquiry that has also been explored by Gale Owen-Crocker, who sees the display of Grendel's body parts as emphasizing his

criminality, drawing on the nature of Anglo-Saxon execution practice and a related horror of bodily fragmentation.[13] As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe highlights, maimed bodies were *loci* for anxiety in Anglo-Saxon society; mutilation was used as both a pre- and post-mortem punishment, and, probably as a consequence of such negative associations, the law codes demand heavier compensation for visible wounds.[14] Fear of bodily fragmentation is present in *Beowulf*, focussed around the Grendel-kin. Before facing Grendel, Beowulf tells Hroðgar that, should he fail:

Na þu minne þearft
hafalan hydan, ac he me habban wile
dreore fahne, gif mec deað nimeð:
byreð blodig wæl, byrgean þenceð,
eteð angenga unmurnlice,
mearcað morhopu (ll. 445b-50a)

(You will not have any need to hide my head, rather he will have me stained with gore, if death takes me: he will bare my bloody corpse, think to taste, the one who goes alone will eat unmournfully, mark the moor retreats.)

Grendel's actions dishonour bodies by breaking them apart like those of criminals and denying proper burial. Beowulf's later mutilation of Grendel can be seen as a requital of this behaviour. Owen-Crocker relates Anglo-Saxon mutilation practices primarily to the treatment of Grendel, referring only briefly to the poet's creation of 'agony' over Æschere's unburied body; yet, Owen-Crocker's approach provides the most successful way of reading the cultural resonances of Æschere's head as its appearance echoes the treatment of executed criminals. [15]

II. Decapitation in Anglo-Saxon England

Severed heads in the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus have been connected to pagan religion, the Celtic 'cult of the head' and feud, amongst other readings.[16] But while the depiction of decapitation in the literary corpus may be an echo of the cultural practices of a pagan past, it is more likely to be influenced by beheading in the Christian present. Diplomatic texts and the archaeological record provide evidence that decapitation appears to have been strongly associated with the bodies of criminals. Although the textual evidence for the application of capital punishment in Anglo-Saxon England is limited, it has been argued by Andrew Reynolds, Jo Buckberry and others that the archaeological record reveals that the execution and display of criminals within the landscape was a key part of Anglo-Saxon legal practice.[17] Transgressive individuals were buried separately from the rest of the population in dedicated execution cemeteries, where their heads were displayed on stakes.[18] Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries are identifiable by a range of distinctive features, which Jo Buckberry defines as 'varied burial alignments; unusual burial positions; prone burials; evidence of decapitation or other trauma […] location close to boundaries, especially of hundreds; and proximity to routeways'.[19] Highly visible pagan burial sites on prehistoric monuments were transformed into execution cemeteries in the Christian period, reflecting anxieties about these liminal locations.[20] Reynolds uses this archaeological evidence to argue for 'an organized system of execution sites located on boundaries between individual hundreds'.[21]

Reynolds's interpretation of the evidence is not uncontroversial. Andrew Rabin views arguments for royal control over the organization of execution as dubious, due to their dependence on historical approaches that take a questionably

maximalist view of Anglo-Saxon judicial practices, but he does, however, acknowledge that 'archaeological evidence reveals capital punishment to have been more common than previously realized'.[22] Tom Lambert has also highlighted problems with Reynolds's approach, particularly a partial circularity of reasoning which heightens the impression of uniformity in the burial pattern and location of sites identified as execution cemeteries.[23] Yet, Lambert acknowledges that 'these sites share sufficient common features to form a coherent category'.[24] Rabin also finds the archaeological evidence for extensive execution persuasive, but concludes that 'similarities between execution sites may be more indicative of analogous regional practices than a homogeneous or homogenizing judicial system'. The arguments advanced below draw on Reynolds's work on the landscape situation of execution sites, but not on arguments for the existence of an organized, royally authorized and extremely uniform capital punishment system. This interpretation of the placement of Æschere's head depends on precisely the kind of widespread and broadly similar cultural practice Rabin identifies.[25] As other examples of decapitation on borderlands in the literary corpus reveal, liminal spaces and severed heads were connected in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, reflecting people's lived experience of the landscape.

The prevalence of features that may relate to execution practice in the bounds of Anglo-Saxon land charters suggests that execution cemeteries were highly visible examples of liminal space and functioned as boundary markers. There are a large number of references to *heafod stoccan* ('head stakes') in surviving Anglo-Saxon boundary clauses. For example, these bounds from a charter of 940 for Pewsey, belonging to New Minster, Winchester (S470):

Ærest of ðære anlipigan æc to mætelmes burg westeweardan þonon adune to ealhheardes leage westeweardre þonon on mær denum of mær denum on mær wylle þonon forð to heafod stoccum of heafod stoccum to hundes geate … [26]
(First from the solitary oak to Mathelhelm's fortification westward thence down to Ealhheard's leah, westward thence to the boundary valleys, from the boundary valley to the boundary spring, thence forth to the head stakes, from the head stakes to hound's gate …)

The precise meaning of the term *heafod stoccan* is debated; George Grundy believed that the term related to ploughing, while Peter Kitson has argued that *heafod stoccan* may instead refer to trees pollarded at head height.[27] The most persuasive explanation, given the coincidence of the term in bounds with archaeological evidence of execution, is that of Percy Reaney who argues *heafod stocc* refers to 'a stock or post on which the head of a criminal was fixed after beheading'.[28] Reaney's suggestion is also supported (as Reynolds highlights) by the use of *heafodstoccan* to refer to stakes holding decapitated heads in the *Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers* (discussed further below).[29] If *heafod stoccan* can be understood as referring to head stakes, then charter bounds support the archaeological evidence for the landscape prominence of execution cemeteries: their sites seem to have been deliberately selected for visibility.[30]

Archaeological evidence for the use of head stakes also reveals the centrality of display to the treatment of criminals' bodies, as Reynolds emphasizes: 'evidence for the public display of skulls comes in the form of weather-worn skulls buried without the lower jaw, which had presumably dropped off'.[31] The exhibition of the transgressor's head marks the boundary and threatens anyone who would breach it.

Archaeological evidence of post-mortem decapitation suggests that those killed by other methods would be beheaded to show their deviant status, and to serve as a boundary marker, which may be what happens to Æschere.[32] For the Anglo-Saxons, severed heads effectively assert a border without the need for an impenetrable physical barrier. Heads on stakes, placed at prominent locations, served as a powerful warning against transgression of both law and territory in the landscape.

Anglo-Saxon law influences the literature. Scott Smith has drawn attention to the relationship between the language of land tenure recorded in legal documents and literary language; what Smith terms 'tenurial discourse' seeps into literary texts and is exploited to articulate anxieties about man's relationship to the land.[33] A similar influence from material displays of land tenure is evinced in the appearance in *Beowulf* of a severed head in a location echoing that of an execution cemetery. Although charter bounds recording *heafod stoccan* ('head stakes') post-date the likely composition of the poem, as archaeological evidence shows, they provide evidence of a long-established custom.[34] The treatment of Æschere can therefore be read as a direct reflection of Anglo-Saxon execution practice, designed to heighten the horror of Grendel's mother's behaviour.

III. Literary Parallels to Anglo-Saxon Execution Practice

Beowulf is not alone in echoing contemporary attitudes to severed heads. Critics have identified two other Old English texts that associate severed heads with borders; both are based on Latin sources that do not make the same connection, suggesting that the staging of decapitation has been adjusted to reflect Anglo-Saxon custom. In her 1952 work, *The Beginnings of English Society*, Dorothy Whitelock highlighted the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus and execution practice:

Hanging was the commonest form of execution, and a poem known as *The Fates of Men* gives a gruesome picture of a thief's body left hanging on the gallows. These were often placed on the boundary between settlements, and hence phrases like 'to the gallows tree' or 'to the old place of execution' are not infrequent in lists of boundaries of estates. It is in agreement with native custom that the poet should cause St Juliana to be led out to execution 'near the land-boundary'.[35]

The poet in question is Cynewulf, whose *Juliana*, preserved in an incomplete state in the Exeter Book (ff. 65b-76a), narrates the imprisonment and martyrdom of St Juliana of Nicomedia, a virtuous Christian maiden condemned during the Diocletian persecution for refusing to marry the pagan Eleusius. [36] In highlighting the execution scene in *Juliana* as reflecting Anglo-Saxon culture, Whitelock echoes the observations of Francis Gummere and John Kemble, who saw the poem as providing evidence for boundary-based executions in Anglo-Saxon England.[37]

Cynewulf's *Juliana* appears to be based on a Latin text very like that of the *Passio S. Iulianae* from the *Acta Sanctorum*.[38] Although Cynewulf's precise source has not been identified, *Juliana* is closely related to the text of the *Passio* in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 10861 (probably written at Christ Church, Canterbury in the early-ninth century), facilitating analysis of Cynewulf's treatment of the execution scene in his source material.[39] Within the poem Juliana's martyrdom is by decapitation, and it takes place on a border:

> Ða wæs gelæded londmearce neah
> ond to þære stowe þær hi stearcferþe
> þurh cumbolhete cwellan þohtun. (ll. 635-37)[40]

(Then she was led to a nearby borderland and to the place where they, through hateful violence, intended to kill the strong-hearted one.)

The precise location of Juliana's death is not given in the version of the legend recorded in MS Lat. 10861, which simply describes Juliana as dragged: 'in locum illius ubi decollari meruerat' ('to the place where she had deserved to be decapitated', §19), but the Old English poem is explicit that Juliana is taken to a *londmearc* ('borderland') to be executed, placing the public display of her severed head on a border.[41] *Londmearc* belongs to the lexis of land tenure: *Juliana* contains the only occurrence of the word in verse.[42] Cynewulf's use of *londmearc*, most commonly attested in land charters, employs 'tenurial discourse' to present the boundaries of the Nicomedian state in Anglo-Saxon terms.[43] This reconfiguration of the principal source narrative is, as Jill Frederick notes, characteristic of Cynewulf's tendency 'to omit details that an Anglo-Saxon audience would not have found pertinent and to elaborate sections that would have enhanced the poem's relevance and appeal'.[44] The establishment of a borderland as the execution site must therefore have held significance for Cynewulf's audience. Juliana's martyrdom takes place after she is judged to have violated societal expectations by rejecting Eleusius. Her decapitation echoes the Anglo-Saxons' own treatment of transgressors, and her death takes place at a location typical of Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries.

A similar adjustment to the depiction of decapitation in a translated narrative in order increase its relevance to an Anglo-Saxon audience is seen in the *Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, which, as discussed above, refers to *heafod stoccan*. Hugh Magennis has identified the Latin text of London, British Library, MS Egerton 2792, as closest to the Old English version. The Latin describes the exhibition of the

heads of Christian martyrs as follows: 'Et supra muros et pinnacula ciuitatis suspendebant eos, et capita eorum iuxta ciuitatem ante portas infigebant in ligno' ('They hung them on the walls and gables of the city and stuck their heads on wooden poles close by the city in front of the gates', ll. 25-26).[45] As well as referring to 'head stakes', the Old English also subtly adjusts the geography of the displayed heads to reflect Anglo-Saxon practice, placing them more firmly outside the city: 'and ða heafodleasan man hengc on ða portweallas, and man sette heora heafda swilce oþra ðeofa buton portweallon on ðam heafodstoccum' ('and they hung the headless men on the walls of the city, and set their heads like those of other thieves outside the walls of the city on the head stakes', ll. 65-67).[46] This image of heads outside the city space, like those of thieves, is, as Victoria Whitworth observes, akin to the location of head stakes in Anglo-Saxon landscapes, suggesting that this Anglo-Saxon author, like Cynewulf, sought to create greater emotional resonance through familiarity.[47] In both *Juliana* and *Seven Sleepers* anxiety is created for the Anglo-Saxon audience as fellow Christians are treated as criminals by pagan societies, who execute them in order to proclaim their separation from and rejection of the Christian world.

Seven Sleepers ends with the reassuring renewal of Christianity in Ephesus, and in *Juliana* tensions created by the martyrdom are resolved with the transformation of Nicomedia into a Christian society that welcomes Juliana back into the centre of the space, transforming her body from a symbol of transgression into a relic representing social cohesion: [48]

Ungelice wæs
læded lofsongum lic haligre
micle mægne to moldgræfe,
þæt hy hit gebrohton burgum in innan,

sidfolc micel. Þær siððan wæs
geara gongum godes lof hafen
þrymme micle oþ þisne dæg
mid þeodscipe. (ll. 688b-695a)

(It was different when the body of the holy one was led with songs of praise, by a great throng, to the earth grave, when they, a great multitude of people, brought it within the fortification. There afterwards, through the duration of years, the praise of God was lifted up in great glory until this day among the people.)

Cynewulf highlights the contrast between the treatment of Juliana's body at death and her post-mortem veneration; the change in the Nicomedians' perception is indicated by the alteration of her display location. Juliana is brought 'burgum in innan' ('within the fortification'), placing her as the defining centre of the community, rather than on a boundary, delimiting the area whose rules she violated. Relics are displayed body parts, but rather than being a sign of transgression, as heads on stakes in boundary spaces are, they are the locus of veneration, revered not reviled. Juliana is described as a *lic* ('body'), suggesting corporeal unity despite her decapitation, indicating her saintly status.[49] As Hugh Magennis notes: 'This receiving of the body back into the city epitomizes the city's repentance and rejection of wicked paganism'.[50] Juliana is no longer a warning against transgression given by a pagan society, but like the martyrs in *Seven Sleepers*, she is now an exemplar for a Christian one.

The discovery of Æschere's head has significant commonalities with the death of Juliana and the treatment of the Christian martyrs in *Seven Sleepers*, despite the obvious genre difference between the two hagiographies and *Beowulf*: Æschere, Juliana and the martyrs are all are virtuous characters executed by hostile 'others',

and their severed heads are all associated with boundaries controlled by their killers. Although the landscape in which Æschere's head is discovered is less explicitly a borderland than the site of Juliana's execution and the martyrs' display, it is the same type of space and conforms to the features of Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries as defined by Buckberry and Reynolds. Like Cynewulf and the translator of *Seven Sleepers*, the *Beowulf* poet exploits the cultural resonances attached to severed heads in boundary spaces, creating a memorably disturbing moment by mirroring established Anglo-Saxon practice, but attaching this behaviour to a monstrous 'other' figure, in this case Grendel's mother.

IV. Borderlands in *Beowulf*

Æschere's head is discovered on an elevated location, a *holmcliff* ('sea-cliff', l. 1421a), and the reader is encouraged to recognize the head as a boundary marker through the description that leads to this point. Æschere's head is discovered when Beowulf and his men follow the trail leading to the mere left by Grendel's mother, through a space defined as a *londmearc* by a sequence of landscape features typically associated with boundaries, and a style that, as Nicholas Howe highlights, echoes the rhetoric of boundary clauses.[51]

Before Beowulf and his men set out for the mere, Hroðgar gives a detailed description of its landscape, and its relation to the settled, controlled space of Heorot. Hroðgar's account of the path to the mere is filled with landscape elements strongly associated with unsettled waste spaces in Old English verse:

Hie dygel lond

warigeað, wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,

frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
milgemearces þæt se mere standeð;
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite.
Ðeah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,
heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece,
feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
aldor on ofre, ær he in wille
hafelan (beorgan); nis þæt heoru stow. (ll. 1357b-72)

(They hold the hidden land, wolf-slopes, windy headlands, hostile fen-water crossings, where the mountain stream tumbles downward under the headlands' mist, flood under the earth. It is not far from hence in mile-marks that the mere stands, over it hang frosted groves, a fast-rooted wood overshadows the water. There, nightly, one may see a fearful wonder – fire in the flood. There is not one who lives among the children of men so wise that he that can understand that abyss; though the heath-stepper, pressed by hounds, a hart with strong horns, may seek the forest, pursued from far, he prefers to give up his life on the shore, before he will go in to preserve his head; that is not a pleasant place.)

The mere is a ‘dygel lond’ (‘hidden land’) full of wild and windswept spaces, but it is perceived as being held and controlled by the Grendel-kin, as Hroðgar’s use of the verb *warian* (‘hold’) in 1358a shows. The sense that the edge of the mere forms a kind of absolute boundary is conveyed by the hart which will not enter the water, even to save itself. The obvious play on the *heorot* hunted in this passage and the name of Hroðgar’s own hall suggests to the reader that the world of human control symbolized by that magnificent structure reaches its limits at the mere.

Immediately after Hroðgar’s description, Beowulf and his men traverse the path to the mere. The route begins in a landscape that can be measured and recorded, but gradually moves into a wilder, more threatening space. The poet combines images of measurement, paths, and boundaries to convey the contrast between the ordered, defined, and measurable landscape surrounding Heorot and the space of the Grendel-kin, creating a boundary zone between the two in which Æschere’s head is found. Anglo-Saxon texts often distinguish between the methods of measurement employed for spaces that are controlled by men and waste spaces outside human control, as exemplified in the travel accounts of *Ohthere and Wulfstan*, preserved in *The Old English Orosius*.[52] The Norwegian Ohthere speaks of the size of the agricultural land in Hålgoland in precise physical measurements, but switches to time in order to convey the scale of the moors:

Eal þæt his man aþer oððe ettan oððe erian mæg, þæt lið wið ða sæ; & þæt is þeah on sumum stowum swyðe cludig, & licgað wilde moras wið eastan & wið uppon, emnlange þæm bynum lande. On þæm morum eardiað Finnas. & þæt byne land is easteweard bradost & symle swa norðor swa smælre. Eastewerd hit mæg bion syxtig mila brad oþþe hwene brædre; & middeweard þritig oððe bradre; & norðeweard, he

cwæð, þær hit smalost wære, þæt hit mihte beon þreora mila brad to þæm more, & se mor syðþan, on sumum stowum swa brad swa man mæg on twam wucum oferferan, & on sumum stowum swa brad swa man mæg on syx dagum oferferan. (ll. 25-31)[53]
(All that his man could graze or plough lies by the sea; and that is yet in some places very rocky, and wild moors lie to the east, and run up along the cultivated land. In those moors dwell Finns. And that cultivated land is eastwards broadest, and always northerly narrower. Eastwards it can be sixty miles broad, or a little broader, and towards the middle thirty or broader, and he said that northwards, where it is smallest, it might be three miles broad to the moors; and the moors are, in some places, so broad as a man may travel over them in two weeks, and in some places so broad as men may travel over in six days.)

The cultivated land is precisely reckoned in miles, but the moors take days to cross, and the repeated use of *mæg* ('may') suggests that the timings are uncertain: spaces controlled and delimited by men can be quantified in detailed measurements as man has an effect on the space, whereas unoccupied spaces such as moorland and the sea are defined by the effect that they have on men. A similar switch between physical and temporal measurement occurs in *Beowulf* to signal a boundary zone between the world of Heorot and the mere. Hroðgar has measured the distance to the mere in miles, saying: 'Nis þæt feor heonon | milgemearces þæt se mere standeð' ('It is not far from here in mile-marks that the mere stands', ll. 1361b-2a). At this point the capacity for human measurement and control of the landscape is exhausted – the mere is beyond human reckoning: 'No þæs frod leofað | gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite' ('There is not one who lives among the children of men so wise that he can understand that abyss', ll. 1366b-7). The image is sustained when, as Beowulf

descends through the water, the mere can only be measured in time: 'Ða wæs hwil dæges | ær he þone grundwong ongytan mehte' ('It was the space of a day before he might perceive the ground-plain', ll. 1495b-6). The mere, like the moors in *Ohthere and Wulfstan*, is measured in temporal displacement rather than quantifiable distance. At the edge of the mere, where Æschere's head is found, exists a boundary space between the human-controlled world of Heorot and the monstrous space of the mere.

The impression that the space between the mere and Heorot is a borderland is sustained throughout the account of Beowulf's journey in pursuit of Grendel's mother. Her trail is initially seen on paths in the legally defined, measured and demarked area near Heorot, but as the men move further from the hall the route becomes obscure, crossing an inhospitable waste outside human control:

> Ofereode þa æþelinga bearn
> steap stanhliðo, stige nearwe,
> enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad,
> neowle næssas, nicorhusa fela.
> He feara sum beforan gengde
> wisra monna wong sceawian,
> oþ þæt he færinga fyrgenbeamas
> ofer harne stan hleonian funde,
> wynleasne wudu; wæter under stod
> dreorig ond gedrefed. (ll. 1408-17a)

(The son of nobles then went over the steep stone-slopes, narrow paths, confining single tracks, unknown water crossing, steep headlands, the home of many water monsters. He went before, with some few wise men to examine the land, until

suddenly he found mountain trees leaning over grey stone, a joyless wood; water stood under, dreary and disturbed.)

Beowulf crosses the borders of Hroðgar's land into a boundary zone. The route that Beowulf must follow seems ill designed for a man: it is narrow and steep, an 'uncuð gelad' ('unknown water crossing'), unmapped onto the landscape. Wise men are required to perceive the way, indicating that there is no longer a path as they have moved away from the area of human control. At this point Æschere's head is discovered.

Many of the features encountered by Beowulf along this path are commonly found in Old English charter bounds, suggesting they are characteristic of the marginal land belonging to the edges of estates: *hlið* ('slope'), *gelad* ('water crossing'), *stan* ('stone'), *beam* ('tree'), *wudu* ('wood') and *clif* ('cliff') are all common in charter bounds.[54] But it is not only the features of this landscape that mark it as a borderland, the style of the description bears marked similarities to the rhetoric of charter bounds. The features are presented in sequence along a route, visualized individually, but only connected as a whole by Beowulf's movement. This way of mapping the space by presenting features in sequence without clear interrelation draws on the style of charter bounds, as exemplified by this mid tenth-century bound for a parcel of land in Herefordshire (S677):

Ærest of myle forda ondlong erge þæt in wæsce ford · of wæsce forda ondlong erge ymb holan eige ufeweardre · of holan eige ufeweardre · on þa ac ecge ufeweardre þæt lang þære ac ecge ufeweardre þæt on snæd weg foreweardre · of snæd wege ymb hean lege on æcna brycge up ondlong broces þæt in ða dic · ondlong dices in tanes

bæce · of tanes bæce ondlong mær geardes · þæt on lion hina gemære · ondlong leon hiena gemæres þæt on aðelwoldes hege · of aðelwoldes hege in hean oldan · of hean oldan in mær ðorn · of mær þorne ondlong geardes in ðæt hlid get · of ðam hlid gete ondlong stræte on dices geat · of dices geate in ðæt ðridde geat · ðæt ondlong stræte þæt eft in myle ford.[55]

(First from the mill-ford along the Arrow until wash-ford, from wash-ford along the Arrow around the upper part of hollow island, from the upper part of hollow island to the upper part of oak edge, thence along the upper part of oak edge until the near part of the cleared land-way, from the cleared land-way around the high lea to oaken bridge, up along the brook until it goes into the ditch, along the ditch to Tan's stream, from Tan's stream along boundary enclosure until the Leen community's boundary, along the Leen community's boundary until Æthelwald's hedge, from Æthelwald's hedge to High Oldan, from High Oldan to the boundary thorn, from the boundary thorn along the enclosure to the swing gate, from the swing gate along the street to the ditch's gap, from ditch's gap to the third gate, thence along the street until back to the mill-ford.)

As in the section of *Beowulf* describing the route to the mere, a charter bound's landscape view is of points in sequence; there is a restricted perspective rather than a complete vista, the immediate rather than an overview.

Just as the *Beowulf* poet's rhetoric echoes charter bounds, so Beowulf's actions recall the way in which Anglo-Saxons marked a boundary. Charters are not a legal record of the land in themselves: Charter bounds were performed; they are the lived experience of the space because they record physical and verbal events that

proclaim and assert boundaries, as revealed by a late ninth-century Gloucester charter (S1441):

Đa cydde Werferð biscop þam weotum, þæt him wære forneh eall þæt wudulond ongereafad þe to Wuduceastre belomp, þæt Æþelbald cyning gesalde to Weogernaceastre, him to ecre ælmessan, Wilferðe biscope to mæstlonde & to wudulonde. & þæt sæde þæt hit wære sum genumen to Bislege, sum to æfeningum, sum to Scorranstane, sum to þornbyrg, þes þe he wende. Þa cwædan alle þa weotan þæt mon uðe þære circan ryhtes swa wel swa oþerre. & ða sona was Eðelwald þæs wordes þæt he no þes rihtes wiðsacan wolde, & sæde þæt Aldberht & Alhhun biscop wæron ær ymb þæt ilce & cweð þæt he ælcre circan aa his dæla ryhtes uðe, & hit þa swiþe mildelice ageaf þam biscope. & heht his geneat, Ecglaf hatte, ridan mid Ceastersetna preoste Wulfhun hatte. & he hine þa gelædde all ða gemæru swa he him of þam aldan bocum rædde, hu hit ær æþelbald cyning gemærude & gesalde.
(Then Bishop Werferth informed the council that he had been robbed of nearly all the woodland belonging to Woodchester, which King Aethelbald had given to Worcester, [handing it over] to Bishop Wilferth for mastland and woodland, and as a perpetual gift for the good of his own soul. And Werferth said that part of it had been abstracted at Bisley, part at Avening, part at Scorranstan and part at Thornbury, as far as he knew. Then all the council declared that justice should be done to that church as well as to [any] other. Thereupon, Aethelwald said that he would not dispute the claim, and stated that Aldberht and Bishop Alhhun had formerly been occupied with this very matter; and he added that he was always ready to accede to the claims of every church to the best of his ability (?), and so very generously restored it to the bishop. And he ordered his geneat, whose name was Ecglaf, to ride with a priest from Worcester,

Wulfhun by name; and Ecglaf led Wulfhun along all the boundaries, as Wulfhun read out from the old charters, how they had been determined of old by the grant of King Aethelbald.)[56]

As Peter Sawyer states: 'there is no suggestion that the bounds of this woodland were uncertain; the dispute was caused by the claims of other estates to have rights in it': the perambulation recorded above is not to change or discover the bounds, but to assert and proclaim them.[57] As he travels to the mere, Beowulf behaves rather like the *geneat* in the above charter, aiming to define and secure the boundary for Hroðgar, preventing the Grendel-kin's claim on his space, but as Howe has noted, the bounds are incomplete:

Boundary clauses conclude by returning to their starting point, giving a reassuring sense of closure: the parcel of land is bound, limited, and conveyable as a legal grant. In them, place can be known; in *Beowulf*, place remains mysterious. The passage in *Beowulf* moves in a straightforward direction without any sense of closure; it leads characters and audience alike into a no-man's-land where landscape features demonstrate not the presence of the human but rather of the monstrous.[58]

By using the reassuring, legalistic style of the boundary clause, but then leaving the journey open-ended, the poet creates an unsettling image of a failure to control the space, amplified by the discovery of Æschere's head, which defines the area as belonging to another. Once the Grendel-kin have been dispatched the poet allows the bound to conclude and the space becomes quantifiable as the Geats return to Heorot, bringing the land back under Hroðgar's governance: 'Ferdon forð þonon feþelastum |

ferhþum fægne, foldweg mæton, | cuþe stræte' ('They travelled forth from thence on the walking track, rejoicing in spirits, measured the way, the known street', ll. 1632-4a). The path from the mere has been marked, measured and controlled; tensions around governance of the space are resolved, asserting human control over the landscape.[59]

The legalistic representation in this section of *Beowulf* draws on the way in which the poem's Anglo-Saxon readership would have been accustomed to thinking about space. By appropriating the style of charter bounds the poet is able signal that the men are traversing a border, the edge of which is passed at the moment where the wise men are required to 'wong sceawian' to find the track. The sudden loss of the path signals the breakdown of human control before the discovery of the horror marking the border of Grendel's mother's land and asserting her control: 'Æscheres | on þam holmclife hafelan metton ('on the sea-cliff they came upon Æschere's head', ll. 1420 b-21). Immediately after this borderland has been passed the mere appears, marked with a distinctive and unsettling rhyming half line: Flod blode weol — folc to sægon | — hatan heolfre. ('The flood welled with blood – so men say – hot gore', ll. 1422-1423a). This section of the poem presents what Peter Clemoes called a '"flat" piece of narrative', which 'heightens the moment of sharp recognition' as the mere appears and the men's movement abruptly ceases.[60] Æschere's decapitated head marks the boundary, echoing the location and presentation of an Anglo-Saxon execution cemetery. The display of Æschere's head by Grendel's mother would have been clearly recognizable to the Anglo-Saxon audience as a warning against transgression of a boundary and those who control it, beyond the *londmearc* lies a disturbing space in which human society is the 'other': it is the social space of Æschere's killer, coloured by his gore.

V. Conclusion

Examining the influence on the literary corpus of customs revealed by diplomatic and archaeological records exposes Æschere's head as a culturally significant sign within *Beowulf*. The display of Æschere's head is a socially sanctioned, albeit threatening, practice carried out by an alien figure against someone at the core of human society. As Michael Lapidge has noted, the *Beowulf* poet has a 'fascination with the workings of the human mind and the mechanism of fear', and his use of Æschere's head fits with his habit of employing psychological terror as a narrative strategy.[61] The decapitation of Æschere disturbs the reader both through the violence done to the human body and through the sense of the *unheimlich* created by a hostile 'other' recognisably meting out the punishment practices of Anglo-Saxon society on a figure with whom the audience are encouraged to identify – Æschere is exhibited as a transgressor by one who is transgressive. Æschere's violent death and the placement of his head in the landscape highlight the fragility of human power, a key preoccupation for this poet.

In the two hagiographic texts that make similar use of echoes of Anglo-Saxon decapitation and display practice, the disturbing sense of the *unheimlich* created by the use of familiar judicial processes by 'other' figures is relieved by the transformation of these 'othered' societies into fellow members of the Christian church, bringing a comforting sense of order: *Seven Sleepers* offers consolation for the deaths of the martyrs in revitalized faith, while *Juliana* mitigates similarly disturbing imagery through the Nicomedians' repentance and the miserable fate of Juliana's persecutor. In *Beowulf* retribution is also swift – Grendel's mother is killed by Beowulf – yet a pervasive disquiet remains. In the hagiographies mutilated bodies

are moved to the centre of communal space to become holy relics: Juliana's corpse is honoured by the converted Nicomedians, who, we are told, praise God 'oþ þisne dæg' ('to this day', l. 694b); she and the Christian martyrs of *Seven Sleepers* are assured of a place in heaven and their communities protected by their continued spiritual presence; this is not the case in *Beowulf*. In an image that foreshadows the funerals and societal disintegration of poem's end, the pagan society of *Beowulf* can offer no such reinterpretation of the fragmented body, nor can the corpse protect those who honour it: Æschere's degradation endures; his head plays no further role in the narrative and the rest of his remains are never recovered. Within the world of *Beowulf* Christian consolation is absent: Æschere's head remains as a horrifying object whose role is to signal the limits of worldly human power.

[1] The structure of the manuscript is discussed in: Neil Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), 281-3; Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto, 2014), 322-3. Decapitation in *Beowulf* will be examined below. For the text of *Judith* see *Judith*, ed. Mark Griffith (Exeter, 1997); for *Wonders of the East* see *Three Old English Prose Texts in Ms. Cotton Vitellius A.xv*, ed. Stanley Rypins (London, 1924). These severed heads occupy considerable narrative focus, and have consequently attracted critical attention. For example, on the Donestre see: Asa Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York, 2006), 101-4; Asa Mittman and Susan M. Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (Tempe, 2013). On *Judith*: Mary Flavia Godfrey, '*Beowulf* and *Judith*: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 35 (1993), 1-43; Susan M. Kim, 'Bloody Signs: Circumcision and Pregnancy in the Old English *Judith*', *Exemplaria*, 11 (1999), 285-307.

[2] For example, Leslie Lockett, 'The Role of Grendel's Arm in Feud, Law, and the Narrative Strategy of *Beowulf*', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (eds), *Latin Learning and English Lore, I* (Toronto, 2005), 368-88; G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*: Mutilation, Decapitation and Unburied Dead', in Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (eds), *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2003), 81-100; John M. Hill, 'The Sacrificial Synecdoche of Hands, Heads, and Arms in Anglo-Saxon Heroic Story', in Benjamin C Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (eds), *Naked before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England* (Morgantown, 2003), 116-37; Bill Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, 1996); John Edward Damon, '*Desecto Capite Perfido*: Bodily Fragmentation and Reciprocal Violence in Anglo-Saxon England', *Exemplaria*, 13 (2001), 399-432.

[3] Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth, 1952), 144; Victoria Whitworth (as Victoria Thompson), *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004).

[4] On feasting in *Beowulf* see: James L Rosier, 'The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in *Beowulf*', *PMLA*, 78 (1963), 8-14.

[5] All quotations from *Beowulf* taken from: *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 4th edn (Toronto, 2008). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[6] Æschere's name apparently lacks symbolic significance; it is elsewhere attested as a personal name for an East Anglian landholder. 'Æschere 1', *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (pubd online 2010) <http://www.pase.ac.uk> accessed 11 Jan 2016. On personal names in *Beowulf* see: Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in R. T. Farrell (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, Given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974* (Oxford, 1978), 32-95, reprinted in Wormald and Stephen Baxter (eds), *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian* (Oxford, 2006), 30-105; Tom Shippey, 'Names in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', in Leonard Neidorf (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2014), 58-78.

[7] Thomas D. Hill, '*Consilium et Auxilium* and the Lament for Æschere: A Lordship Formula in *Beowulf*', *Haskins Society Journal*, 12 (2002), 71-82, 71.

[8] Hill, '*Consilium et Auxilium*', 75. For a further discussion of Æschere's importance see: Frederick M. Biggs, 'Hondscioh and Æschere in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus*, 87 (2003), 635-52.

[9] Although Leslie Whitbread suggests that Hrothgar responds to Æschere's hand, left by Grendel's mother in exchange for her son's: L. Whitbread , 'The Hand of Æschere: A Note on *Beowulf* 1343', *Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), 339-42.

[10] The display of Æschere's head has also been read as related to his role as *runwita* and *rædbora* (l. 1325). Mary Godfrey considers decapitation as a symbol of silenced eloquence: Godfrey, '*Beowulf* and *Judith*'. James Paz analyses Æschere's head as an unreadable 'thing'. James Paz, 'Æschere's Head, Grendel's Mother and the Sword That Isn't a Sword: Unreadable Things in *Beowulf*', *Exemplaria*, 25 (2013), 231-51. Neither approach accounts for the head's location. Helen Damico reads Æschere as a type of Alfred Ætheling, which is problematic given the poem's date. Helen Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendel-kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England* (Morgantown, 2015), 41-101.

[11] Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Woodbridge, 2003), 145-7. John Edward Damon has linked the bodily fragmentation meted out to the defeated kings Oswald and Edwin in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* with *Beowulf*. Damon, '*Desecto Capite Perfido*', 426. John M. Hill also views Æschere's head as part of an exchange enacted when Grendel's mother retrieves Grendel's arm from Heorot: Hill, 'Sacrificial Synecdoche', 131. Megan Cavell reads Æschere's head as demonstrating Grendel's mother's 'understanding of the use and function of trophies': Megan Cavell, 'Constructing the Monstrous Body in *Beowulf*', *ASE*, 43 (2014), 155-81.

[12] Lockett, 'The Role of Grendel's Arm', 372.

[13] Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*', 93-5.

[14] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE*, 27 (1998), 209-32.

[15] Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*', 93.

[16] Griffiths, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*; William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley, 1979), 117-9; Damon, '*Desecto Capite Perfido*'; Godfrey, '*Beowulf* and *Judith*'; Lockett, 'The Role of Grendel's Arm'; Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr, 'Grendel's Arm and the Law', in M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (eds), *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely': Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley* (London, 1996), 121-32.

[17] On the relation between legislation and practice see Andrew Rabin, 'Capital Punishment and the Anglo-Saxon Judicial Apparatus: A Maximum View?' in Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti (eds), *Corporal and Capital Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2014), 181-99. On 'execution cemetries' see Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009); Reynolds, 'The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', in Guy De Boe and FransVerhaeghe (eds), *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe*, vol. 2 (Zellik, 1997), 33-41; J. L. Buckberry and D. M. Hadley, 'An Anglo-Saxon Execution Cemetery at Walkington Wold, Yorkshire', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 26 (2007), 309-29.

[18] Execution on boundaries seems to have been established throughout the Christian Anglo-Saxon period. Andrew Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and the Landscape* (Stroud, 2002), 104.

[19] J. L. Buckberry, 'Cemetery Diversity in the Mid to Late Anglo-Saxon Period in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire', in J. L. Buckberry and Anita Cherryson (eds), *Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England c. 650-1100 AD* (Oxford, 2010), 1-25, 13. See also Jo Buckberry, 'Osteological Evidence of Corporal and Capital Punishment in Later Anglo-Saxon England', in Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti (eds), *Corporal and Capital Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2014), 131-48, 131.

[20] Richard Hoggett, 'The Early Christian Landscape of East Anglia', in N. J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan (eds), *The Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2010), 193-210, 206-7; Sarah Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 109-26.

[21] Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, 105.

[22] Rabin, 'Capital Punishment', 183.

[23] Tom Lambert, review of Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009), in *English Historical Review*, 526 (2012), 678-80.

[24] Lambert, 'Review', 679.

[25] Rabin, 'Capital Punishment', 199.

[26] *Langscape: The Language of Landscape: Reading the Anglo-Saxon Countryside* (pubd online 2008) <http://langscape.org.uk> accessed 14 May 2015; P. H. Sawyer, *The Electronic Sawyer: Online Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Charters* (pubd online 2010) <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/index.html> accessed 12 Nov 2015.

[27] G. B. Grundy, 'The Saxon Land Charters of Wiltshire (First Series)', *Archaeological Journal*, 76 (1919), 143–301; P. Kitson, 'The Nature of Old English Dialect Distributions, Mainly as Exhibited in Charter Boundaries', in J. Fisiak (ed.), *Medieval Dialectology* (Berlin, 1995), 43-135. Kitson's reading is adopted by Susan E. Kelly and Sean Miller: *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, ed. Susan E. Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 5 (Oxford, 1996), 89; *Charters of the New Minster, Winchester*, ed. Sean Miller, Anglo-Saxon Charters 9 (Oxford, 2000), 235. For a counterargument to these suggestions see Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, 31, 224.

[28] P. H. Reaney, *The Origin of English Place-Names* (London, 1960), 158. On the coincidence of the excavation the execution cemetery at Old Dairy Cottage in Hampshire with the term *heafod stocc* in three sets of bounds see Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Custom*s, 119, 169, 224.

[29] *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, ed. Hugh Magennis (Durham, 1994), 35; Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, 119. Daniel O'Gorman also notes a parallel in the use of *steng* ('stake') in the *Old English Bede* to describe the support for Oswald's severed head: Daniel O'Gorman, 'Mutilation and Spectacle in Anglo-Saxon Legislation' in Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti (eds), *Corporal and Capital Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2014), 149-64, 156.

[30] Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, 109.

[31] Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, 105.

[32] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, 76-7; Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, 169.

[33] Scott T. Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012).

[34] Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, 104.

[35] Whitelock, *Beginnings of English Society*, 144.

[36] Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501, fols. 8-130. Ker, *Catalogue*, 153; Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 201-3. Rosemary Woolf has suggested *Juliana* was intended for women in a religious community: 'Saint's Lives', in E. G. Stanley (ed.), *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London, 1966), 37-66, 46. The poem has historically not found favour with critics. For example, see: Cynewulf, *Juliana*, ed. Rosemary Woolf (London, 1955), 19; C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London, 1967), 125. More positive assessments are offered by: Joseph Wittig, 'Figural Narrative in Cynewulf's *Juliana*', *ASE*, 4 (1975), 37-55; Antonina Harbus, *The Life of*

the Mind in Old English Poetry (Amsterdam, 2002), 97-8; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: the Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon* (New York, 1984), 103-4.

[37] F. B. Gummere, *Germanic Origins: A Study in Primitive Culture* (London, 1892), 55; John Mitchell Kemble, *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth Till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, vol. 1 (London, 1849), 47, n. 3.

[38] For Februarius II. James M. Garnett, 'The Latin and the Anglo-Saxon *Juliana*', *PMLA*, 14 (1899), 279-98; Claes Schaar, *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group* (Lund, 1949), 27-8.

[39] Michael Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', in Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (eds), *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.* (Toronto: 1998), 147-71. Lapidge provides the text of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 10861 in his chapter. The text of the eleventh-century Cotton-Corpus Legendary (London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero E.i, pt.1) is also very close to *Juliana*: Antonina Harbus, 'Articulate Contact in *Juliana*', in Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (eds), *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank* (Toronto, 2005), 183-200, 186. Four extant manuscripts of English provenance contain the *Passio*: E. Gordon Whatley, 'Juliana passio [ANON.Pas.Julianae]: *BHL* 4522/4523; *CPL* 2201', in Frederick M. Biggs, Thomas D. Hill, and Paul E. Szarmach (eds), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: A Trial Version* (Binghampton, 1990), 13-15. Rosemary Woolf discusses Cynewulf's adaptation of his source in her edition: *Juliana*, ed. Woolf, 11-17.

[40] All quotations from *Juliana* taken from *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter Ms 3501*, ed. Bernard J. Muir, 2nd edn, vol. 2 (Exeter, 2000), 191-217.

[41] Michael Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', 164.

[42] *Dictionary of the Old English Web Corpus*, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto, 2007). *Londmearc* is elsewhere attested in Byrthferth's enchiridion, in glosses to Psalm 59 and 107 in the Lambeth Psalter (describing the mountainous region of Galaad), and, most commonly, in land charters. *Langscape*, accessed 30 Jul 2015; Byrhtferth, *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS s.s. 15 (Oxford, 1995), 140; *Der Lambeth-Psalter: eine altenglische Interlinearversion des Psalters in der Hs. 427 der erzbischöflichen Lambeth Palace Library*, ed. U. Lindelöf (Helsinki, 1909), 94, 171.

[43] *Langscape*, accessed 30 Jul 2015; Smith, *Land and Book*.

[44] Jill Anne Frederick, 'Warring with Words: Cynewulf's *Juliana*', in David F. Johnson and Elaine M. Treharne (eds), *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature* (Oxford, 2005), 60-74, 63. Similarly, Lenore MacGaffey Abraham has drawn attention to the relationship between Anglo-Saxon law and the treatment of Juliana's ordeals: 'Cynewulf's *Juliana*: A Case at Law', *Allegorica*, 3 (1978), 172-89; repr. in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (London, 2001), 171-92.

[45] *Seven Sleepers*, ed. Magennis, 74-5. Translation Magennis's.

[46] *Seven Sleepers*, 35.

[47] Whitworth, *Dying and Death*, 189.

[48] The drama of this moment is enhanced if, as Joseph Wittig suggests, we read Juliana as *ecclesia*; her acceptance into the centre of the community marks the growth of the Christian church: Wittig, 'Figural Narrative', 50-4.

[49] Cynewulf does not make the status of Juliana's corpse explicit, yet his language suggests bodily unity, reflecting Juliana's spiritual state. The image of a physically undamaged martyr is unusual, but also occurs in Abbo of Fleury and Ælfric of Eynsham's accounts of Edmund of East Anglia. See Mark Faulkner, '"Like a Virgin": The Reheading of St. Edmund and Monastic Reform in Late-Tenth-Century England', in Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (eds), *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination* (Leiden, 2012), 39-52.

[50] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1996), 173. As Margaret Bridges observes, there is no parallel to the assembled multitude and the enduring faith of the Nicomedians in the Latin, suggesting that Cynewulf has amplified the immediate effect of Juliana's martyrdom on the community: Margaret Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry* (Copenhagen 1984), 33.

[51] Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, 2008), 69.

[52] The *Old English Orosius* is a relatively free vernacular translation of Paulus Orosius's fifth-century Latin work *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem*, produced in the period 870-930. M. R. Godden, 'The *Old English Orosius* and Its Context: Who Wrote It, for Whom, and Why?', *Quaestio Insularis*, 12 (2011), 1-30. *Ohthere and Wulfstan* is preserved in the opening geographical section of the *Old English Orosius*, but differs from the main text in language and style, suggesting separate

authorship. *Ohthere and Wulfstan* may have begun as independent records made by court scribes during the seafarers' visits to Wessex, later interpolated into the *Old English Orosius* to contribute to the account of the north in the geographical section. Janet Bately, 'Old English Prose before and During the Reign of Alfred', *ASE*, 17 (1988), 93-138; Janet Bately, 'Ohthere and Wulfstan in the *Old English Orosius*', in Janet Bately and Anton Englert (eds), *Ohthere's Voyages: A Late 9th-Century Account of Voyages Along the Coasts of Norway and Denmark and Its Cultural Context* (Roskilde, 2007), 18-39.

[53] *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS s.s. 6 (London, 1980), 15.

[54] *Dictionary of the Old English Web Corpus*, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto, 2007). Similarliy, Margaret Gelling has discussed the *Beowulf* poet's use of the highly-specific vocabulary of placenames rather than literary language. Margaret Gelling, 'The Landscape of *Beowulf*', *ASE*, 31 (2002), 7-11.

[55] *Langscape*, accessed 17 Aug 2016; *Electronic Sawyer*, accessed 17 Aug 2016.

[56] Text and translation from *Electronic Sawyer*, accessed 22 July 2016.

[57] P. H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England* (London, 1978), 146.

[58] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 69.

[59] Streets and paths were common boundary features. See Della Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), 81, 99.

[60] Peter Clemoes, 'Action in *Beowulf* and Our Perception of It', in Daniel G. Calder (ed.), *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style* (Berkeley, 1979), 147-68, 163.

[61] Michael Lapidge, '*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror', in Helen Damico and John Leyerle (eds), *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), 373-402, 394.