The Battle of Maldon

A Verse Translation by
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The Historical Battle of Maldon
August 10, 991

The Battle of Maldon celebrates an event of the year 991, when a large party of Scandinavian raiders met English defense forces on the estuary of the Blackwater River near Maldon in Essex. The Vikings had made a number of successful raids on seaports in the vicinity, after which they had encamped on an island near the mouth of the river. The island, because it was accessible from the mainland by a causeway that could only be used at low tide, provided a natural base from which the Vikings could continue their hit-and-run depredations on the countryside.

Byrhtnoð, the earl of Essex, who was leader of the English militia, took up his position at the end of the causeway and from there was able to prevent the enemy from crossing to the mainland. As the poem relates, however, in his “overconfidence” he allowed them free passage so that a battle might take place. As a result, he was himself killed, but the members of the earl’s retinue continued to fight bravely until they were overwhelmed.

Maldon was a significant battle, with important political results, but it was just one of many fought by regional forces against the Viking armies which marauded across the country in the decades of Æðelred II Unræd’s reign. (Athelred the Unready – though the OE “unræd” literally means “ill-advised.”)

The battle at Maldon in 991 would have received little attention had it not been the inspiration for the celebrated poem on the subject. The poem, as a work of fiction, has received a great deal of attention from scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature.

Although an indispensable source for historians, it has to be approached with caution for it is first and foremost a work of literature and not of history. Its main purpose was not to provide accurate historical information, but to use an important historical event as a basis for a statement about the nature of loyalty and the relationship between a lord and his retainers. The problem is to decide how far the historical basis determined the content of the poem and how far the content of the poem determined the details of the battle.

The historical existence of some of the participants named in the poem has been supported by evidence elsewhere and the poet’s acquaintance with them suggests an early date for the composition. Furthermore, it has been shown that the spelling of Byrhtnoð’s name underwent a permanent change quite early in the 11th century.
and that the poem uses the original form. The likelihood, therefore, that the poem was composed shortly after the battle enhances its value as an historical source.

It is certainly true that the many stylized speeches are clearly fictional and the author makes the action point the moral. Most scholars would, however, reject the extreme skepticism of suggesting that the poet might have visited the area and decided on the location of river and causeway upon which to base his epic poem. It seems reasonable to accept the general accuracy of the poet’s account of the defense of the ford or causeway and Byrhtnoð’s decision to allow the Vikings across. It is also entirely plausible that the Vikings would choose an island as a base for an attack on Maldon.

*The Battle of Maldon* was written down in a manuscript that was reduced to charred fragments in the same fire that damaged the *Beowulf* manuscript. Fortunately, a transcript had been made of it before the fire, and on this modern editions depend. Even before the manuscript was burned, the poem must have lacked a number of lines at its beginning and end, although most scholars believe that nothing very substantial has been lost. Precious as the poet’s words were to Byrhtnoð’s descendants, those chance survivals of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, early printed editions, and transcriptions, are perhaps even more valuable to us for preserving our language’s past.

**The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles**

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a historical record in English, which takes the form of annals—that is, an annual summary of important events. Copies of the original Chronicle, which was started in 891, were distributed to centers of learning where they were carried on independently. Seven manuscripts survive. Entries begin with variations of the formula “Ðis gear” (This year) and may be brief or, occasionally, extended narratives. The entire entry for the battle described in the poem is this:

*A.D. 991. This year was Ipswich plundered; and very soon afterwards was Alderman Byrhtnoth slain at Maldon. In this same year it was resolved that tribute should be given, for the first time, to the Danes, for the great terror they occasioned by the sea-coast. That was first 10,000 pounds. The first who advised this measure was Archbishop Siric.*
The Epic Tradition

If you look up “epic” in a standard glossary of literary terms, you will read something like this:

1) a long poem praising probably mythic deeds of a hero whose nearly superhuman strength and abilities determine the fate of an entire people and call even the gods into the action.

2) an episodic, unrhymed, alliterative poem sung by bards who may have been illiterate, and who preserved their art by memory, by apprenticeship in the rules of oral-formulaic composition, and by singing improvised public performances before the ruling warrior elite at court.

However, Maldon represents a comparative oddity in the epic literature of the Anglo-Saxon period. The poem describes an actual historical event, and its characters are described using all the epic poet’s linguistic strategies but with no reference to the supernatural. The hero, the “eorl” or county-ruler named Byrhtnoð, is a very big man, but not superhuman. No god physically stands beside or before him in battle, and the “feonds” (fiends) he confronts are just what the word means in Old English: implacable enemies with whom no truce was possible, as opposed to the foes from one’s own people who might be bargained with in good faith.

So here we have the poet acting in a way which nicely defines this early period’s view of the artful uses of language: he praises the brave and he condemns the cowards, that the fame of either shall live on. The poem thus carries a socially constructive burden from past to future—“this is what we have been, and of those things we have done, these are excellent and those are hateful.” Preserving the deeds in song challenges the audience to match their courage with their ancestors’ and to carry the memory forward into the dangerous future.

The unknown poet of late Anglo-Saxon times was apparently well versed in heroic English poetry of the type of Beowulf adapts traditional epic mannerisms to his description of a local battle of no particular historical importance, which involved people with whom he was acquainted. The defense forces were actually no more than a home guard: inexperienced farmers and laborers conscripted for the local defense, together with a small group of aristocrats who were acquainted with heroic martial tradition. Godric and his brothers, who, according to the poem, fled from the battle, are representative of those Englishmen who preferred to pay tribute
rather than to fight. But Byrhtnoð and his retinue are of the traditional tough fiber, and it is especially in their speeches and single combats that the poet uses the epic style. After Byrhtnoð is killed, his loyal companions make speeches that express the heroic ethic, each in his own way.

Byrhtnoð’s questionable strategic decision is treated in the epic manner as an instance of heroic overconfidence that leads to tragic doom. Only the Vikings’ destruction would ensure general peace, but from the local point of view, Byrhtnoð’s permitting the enemy to come where he could fight with them might well appear as the rashly noble act of a traditional hero.

**The Comitatus**

A great deal of *The Battle of Maldon* is concerned with how the faithful retainers of Byrhtnoð honor their obligations under the *comitatus*. The *comitatus* is the Germanic bond of loyalty. It is the reciprocal obligation of the lord and his retainer: the generous giving of gifts (food, housing, rewards for deeds, etc.) in exchange for devoted loyalty, in which the honor and glory of both are defined. The thane promises to fight for his lord, if necessary to the death, and to avenge the lord if necessary. It is considered a great dishonor to flee from the battle.

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**Historical Context Questions:**

1. Why can’t scholars trust *The Battle of Maldon* as a historically accurate source? What about *The Battle of Maldon* makes it at least partially believable?

2. Using only the description from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, explain what happened in 991.

3. In what ways is *The Battle of Maldon* a traditional epic? In what ways is it not?

4. Briefly explain the concept of the *comitatus*. 
The Battle of Maldon

Introduction

…it was shattered.¹
Then Byrhtnoth² ordered every warrior to dismount,
let loose his horse and go forward into battle
with faith in his own skills and bravery.
Thus Offa’s young son could see for himself
that the earl was no man to suffer cowardice.
He sent his best falcon flying from his wrist
to the safety of the forest and strode into the fight;
the boy’s behavior was a testament
that he would not be weak in the turmoil of battle.
Eadric too was firmly resolved to follow his leader
into the fight. At once he hurried forward
with his spear. He feared no foe
for as long as he could hold board
and bright sword:³ he kept his word
that he would fight before his prince.

Introduction Questions:
1. Why does Byrhtnoth order all the horses to be driven away?
2. Why does Offa’s son release his beloved falcon into the woods before the battle? (i.e. what does this suggest about this boy’s attitude toward the coming battle?) How do his actions reflect the comitatus?

¹ There are up to three pages missing at the beginning of the poem and something like one page at the end.
² Byrhtnoth: Byrhtnoð; for ease of reading, the Modern English spellings of names will be used.
³ as long as...sword: This formula functions throughout the poem, indicating the warriors’ complete devotion to lord and land.
Part One

Then Byrhtnoth began to martial his men. He rode about, issuing instructions as to how they should stand firm, not yielding an inch, and how they should tightly grip their round-shields, forgetting their qualms and pangs of fear. And when he had arrayed the warriors’ ranks, he dismounted with his escort at a carefully chosen place where his finest hearth-band\(^4\) stood prepared for the fight. Then a spokesman for the Vikings stood on the river and aggressively shouted a message from the seafarers to Byrhtnoth, the earl, on the opposite bank. “The brave seafarers have sent me to say to you that they will be so good as to let you give gold rings in return for peace. It is better for you to buy off our raid with gold than that we should cut you down in this spear-rush. Why destroy one another? If you are good for a certain sum, we will settle for peace in exchange for gold, if you, most powerful over there, agree to this and wisely decide to disband your men, giving gold to the seafarers on their own terms. In return for a truce we will take to the sea with the tribute you pay and keep our promise of peace.” Then Byrhtnoth spoke. He grasped his shield and brandished his slender ash-spear, resentful and resolute he shouted his reply: “Can you hear, you pirate, what these people say? They will pay you a tribute of ash-spears, of poisonous points and old swords, an armor-tax useless to you in war. Listen, messenger! Take back this reply; tell your people the unpleasant tale that over here there stands a good\(^5\) earl with his war-band

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4 hearth-band: OE heordwerod ‘the body of household retainers,’ i.e., his personal followers
5 good: OE unforcuð ‘reputable, honorable, noble, brave, undisgraced.’
who will defend this land,
The land of Æthelred, land of my prince
folk and fold.\(^6\) We will sever the heathens’ heads
from their shoulders. It would be much to our shame
if you took our tribute and embarked without battle
since you have intruded so far and so rudely into this country.
No! You will not get your treasure so easily.
The spear’s point and the sword’s edge, savage battle-play,
must teach us first that we have to give tribute.”
Then Byrhtnoth gave word that all his warriors should walk
with their shields to the river bank.
The troops on either side could not get at one another,
for there the flood flowed after the turn of the tide;
the water streams ran together.\(^7\) Too long it seemed
as they waited to cross and clash their spears.
The East-Saxons and the ship-army
stood beside the River Panta in proud array.
But no warrior could work harm on another
except those who through arrow-flight took death.
The tide ebbed; the seamen stood ready,
many bold Vikings eager for war.
Then Byrhtnoth, brave protector of his men, ordered
a war-hardened hero—Wulfstan by name—to hold the bridge.
He was of bold lineage—he was Ceola’s son—and struck the first seafarer who fearlessly
stepped onto the bridge with his spear.
Two experienced warriors stood with Wulfstan,
Ælfere and Maccus, both brave men.
Nothing could have made them take flight at the bridge.
They would have defended it
for as long as they could wield their weapons.
But as it was, the Vikings found the bitter
bridge-wardens too fierce for their liking.
The hateful strangers hatched a plot—
they asked if they could have access
to lead their foot-troops across the bridge.

\(^6\) **fold**: OE *folde* ‘earth, land’ Fold is used here to maintain alliteration

\(^7\) **The River Panta** (now called Blackwater located in Essex) is a tidal river; when the tide comes in, the island where the Vikings landed is cut off from the shore. Later, at low tide, a stone causeway allows the access.
Then, with arrogance, the earl permitted those hateful strangers to have access to the bridge. The son of Byrhthelm began to call out across the cold water (the warriors listened): “Now the way is clear for you. Come over to us quickly, come to the slaughter. God alone can say who of us that fight today will win this corpse-place.” Then the slaughter-wolves, not minding the water, waded to the west across the River Panta; the Viking band hoisted their shields on high and carried them over the gleaming water.

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8 arrogance: OE ofermod; also translated as “overconfidence,” “spirit,” “pride,” and even “pulsing blood-mood” is the most discussed word in the poem. A great deal of critical discussion in the past fifty years has been devoted to arguing whether the poem views Byrhtnoth as blameworthy for his action.

9 slaughter-wolves: Vikings
**Part One Questions:**

1. Do the Vikings actually want to fight? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

2. What is Byrhtnoth’s general answer to the Vikings’ demand for tribute? What does this show about Anglo-Saxon culture and ideals?

3. Identify the following as kennings or stock epithets. Then explain what they mean.
   - 48 armor-tax
   - 67 ship-army
   - 74 war-hardened
   - 84 bridge-wardens
   - 94 corpse-place
Part Two

Byrhtnoth and his warriors awaited them, ready for battle: he ordered his men to form a battle-hedge with their shields, and to stand firm against the onslaught of the enemy. Then the battle, with its chance of glory, about to begin. The time had come for all the doomed men to fall in the fight.

The clamor began; the ravens wheeled and the eagle circled overhead, craving for carrion; there was shouting on earth. From hands then they threw their file-hard spears and sent sharp darts flying from their hands. Bow strings were busy, shields took spear-point, bitter was the battle-rush! Brave men fell on both sides, young men lay dead. Byrhtnoth’s sister-son, Wulfmær, was wounded; slashed by the sword, he decided to sleep on the bed of death.

This was violently requited, the Vikings were repaid in kind. I heard that Eadweard swung his sword so savagely, a full-blooded blow, that a fated warrior fell lifeless at his feet. Byrhtnoth shouted out his thanks to him, His hearth-companion, as soon as he had a chance to do so. The brave men stood resolute, rock-firm young men at war, eagerly worked to see who might be the first to win the life of a doomed man with his spear, soldiers with weapons; slaughter fell on earth.

But the rest stood battle-hard and Byrhtnoth spurred them on, inciting each man to fight ferociously who wished to gain glory against the Danes. Then a brave sea-warrior raised up his spear, gripped his shield and advanced towards Byrhtnoth. The resolute earl advanced towards the churl; each had evil intentions for the other.

The sea-warrior was the quicker he hurled his foreign spear, wounding the lord of the warriors. Byrhtnoth broke the shaft with the edge of his shield;

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10 **churl**: OE ceorl; a rude ill-bred person; the lowest class of freeman
the imbedded spear-head sprang out of his wound. Then he flung his spear in fury at the sea-warrior who dared inflict such pain. His aim was skillful. The spear slit open the proud Viking’s neck. Thus Byrhtnoth took the life of his attacker. Then, for safety’s sake, he swiftly hurled another which burst the Viking’s ring-locked mail, cruelly wounding him in the chest; the deadly spear pierced his heart. The brave earl, Byrhtnoth, delighted at this; he laughed out loud and thanked his Maker for the day-work God had given him. But one of the Vikings sent a sharp hand-dart speeding from his hand that pierced the body of the noble thane of Æthelred.  

By his side stood a young warrior, Wulfmær by name, Wulfstan’s son, who without a moment’s hesitation drew out the blood-red spear from Byrhtnoth’s side and hurled it back as hard as he could at the man who had grievously injured his prince. The sharp point struck home; the Viking sank into the earth. Another seafarer advanced on the earl, meaning to make short work of him and snatch away his treasures his armor and his rings and his ornamented sword. Byrhtnoth drew out his sword from its sheath, Broad and bright-edged, and struck against byrnie, but his enemy stopped him all too soon, savagely striking Byrhtnoth’s arm. The golden-hilted sword dropped from his hand. He could hold it no longer nor wield a weapon of any kind. Then the old warrior raised his men’s morale with bold words, called on his brave companions to do battle again. He no longer stood firmly on his feet but swayed, and raised his eyes to heaven: “O Guardian of the people, let me praise and thank you for all the real joys I received in this world.

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11 the noble thane of Æthelred: Byrhtnoth
12 byrnie: chainmail shirt
Now, gracious Lord, as never before, I need your grace,
that my soul may set out on its journey to You, O Prince of Angels, that my soul may depart
into Your power in peace. I pray
that the hell-scathers\textsuperscript{13} may never destroy it.”
Then the heathens hewed him down
and the two men who had stood by him;
Ælfnoth and Wulfmaer, fell to the ground,
both gave their lives in defense of their lord.
Then certain cowards beat a hasty retreat:
the sons of Odda were the first to take flight;
Godric fled from the battle, abandoning Byrhtnoth,
who had often given him many horses.
He leapt into the saddle
of his lord’s own horse, where he had no right,
and both his brothers, Godwine and Godwig,
galloped beside him. Forgetting their duty,
they fled from the fight
and saved their lives in the silent wood.
And more men followed than was at all fitting
had they remembered the former rewards
that the prince had given them, generous presents.
It was just as Offa once said to Byrhtnoth
at an open council in the meeting place,
that many spoke proudly of their prowess
who would prove unworthy of their words under battle-stress.
So Æthelred’s earl, the prince of those people,
fell; all his hearth-companions
could see for themselves that their lord lay low.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} scathe: to harm or injure

\textsuperscript{14} The troops closest to Byrhtnoth could see that he was dead; those further away mistake the fleeing Godric for their lord.
Part Two Questions:

1. In line 105, the speaker makes reference to ravens and eagles craving carrion. What do these birds symbolize (each bird is different)? What mood does the poet create when he uses these symbolic birds?

2. What do Godric, Godwine and Godwig do? What is the result of Godric’s choice of horse? What consequences might they face? (Think the comitatus…)

3. Find 5 kennings and 5 stock epithets. Explain what they mean (include line numbers).
Part Three

Then the proud thanes, with the utmost bravery, threw themselves once more into the thick of the battle. They all, without exception, strove to one of two ends: to avenge their lord or to leave this world. Ælfwine the son of Ælfric, a winter-young\(^{15}\) warrior, shouted encouragement, urging them on. He rallied them with valiant words:

“Think of all the times we boasted
At the mead-bench, heroes in the hall predicting our own bravery in battle. Now we shall see who meant what he said. Let me announce my ancestry to one and all:
I come from a mighty family of Mercian stock; my grandfather was Ealhelm, a wise ealdorman\(^{16}\) and prosperous in the world. No thane shall ever have reason to blame me for my desire to desert this troop and seek home, now that my prince has been cut down in battle. This is the most bitter sorrow of all. He was both my kinsman and my lord.”

Then he went forward into the fight and pierced a Viking’s body with his spear-point. The man keeled over, dead, killed by Ælfwine’s weapon.

Again he urged friends and companions to follow him into the fight. Then Offa spoke and shook his ash-spear:

“Ælfwine, you have encouraged all the thanes at exactly the right time. Now that our prince is slain, the earl on the earth, we must all encourage each other to fight, for as long as we can wield our weapons, pierce with our spears, and lunge and parry with our swords. Godric, the cowardly son of Odda, has betrayed us all. When he hurried off toward the woods on our lord’s fine horse,

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\(^{15}\) **winter-young**: experienced few winters (years)

\(^{16}\) **ealdorman**: Modern English *alderman*; a high ranking official
he misled many men into believing it was Byrhtnoth himself; and so they followed him, and here on the field the shield-defense was broken: may fortune frown on him whose cowardice has caused this catastrophe.”

Then Leofsunu spoke. He raised his shield for protection, and replied to Offa: “I give you my word that I will not retreat a foot’s length but will advance and avenge my lord-friend in battle. Now that he has fallen in the fight, no loyal warrior living at Sturmere¹⁷ Need reproach me for returning home lordless in unworthy retreat, instead weapons shall take me, spear-point and iron.” He strode forward angrily, fighting furiously; he rejected escape. Then Dunnere spoke and shook his spear; a lowly churl, he cried out loud and asked every man to avenge Byrhtnoth’s death: “Whoever intends to avenge our prince must not flinch, nor care for his own life.”

Then they hurried forward, heedless of their lives; The brave thanes, fierce spear-bearers, fought with great courage, and prayed to God that they might avenge their lord-friend by killing all his enemies. The hostage helped them with all his might

His name was Æshferth, the son of Ecglaf; He came from a family renowned in Northumbria. In the battle-play he did not flinch, notching arrow after arrow as quickly as he could. Sometimes he hit a shield, sometimes he pierced a man, Again and again he inflicted wounds for as long as he could hold a bow in his hands. Eadweard the Long, eager and brave, did not stray from the line of battle. He boasted that he would not flee a foot-space of land, or seek safety by flight, now that his lord lay dead. He smashed the shield-wall, and attacked the seafarers worthily avenging his ring-giver’s death.

¹⁷ Sturmere: a village and a parish in Essex
He sold his life dearly in the storm of battle.
And so too did Ætheric, a noble companion.
Eager and death-ready, he fought aggressively.
The brother of Sibyrht and many others
split the hollow shields and warded off the sea-warriors.
The rim of the shield broke and the byrnie sang
a terrible song. Then in the turmoil
Offa struck a seafarer; he fell dead to the earth.
But the kinsman of Gadd was killed there too;
Offa was quickly brought down in the battle.
Yet he had kept his promise to his lord;
he fulfilled his former boast to Byrhtnoth, the ring-giver,
that they should both return unhurt, riding to the burg
in victory together, or together surrender their lives,
bleeding from wounds on the corpse-field.
He lay near his lord as befits a thane.
Then shields were shattered; the seafarers surged forward,
burning with battle-rage. Often a spear pierced
the soul-house of a fated warrior. Then Wistan advanced,
the son of Thurstan; he fought with the Vikings
slew three in the struggling throng
before Wigelm’s brave son ¹⁸ lay slain with him.
That was a savage fight; the warriors stood firm
in the struggle. Strong men fell,
utterly worn out by wounds; the dead dropped to
the earth. The brothers Oswold and Eadweard
continuously encouraged the companions;
they urged their kin-friends to use
their weapons without slackening
and endure the stress to the best of their strength.
Byrhtwold grasped his shield and spoke.
He was an old companion. He brandished his ash-spear
and with wonderful courage taught the warriors,
“Our thoughts will be the firmer, our hearts will be the keener,
our spirits will be stronger as our strength diminishes.
Here lies our leader, dead,

¹⁸ It is not clear how Wistan is both the son of Thurstan and of Wigelin, unless Wigelin is his mother. ‘Matronymic’
epithets are virtually unknown in Old English, but this may be a rare instance of one.
a heroic man in the dirt. He will mourn
who thinks to escape this war-play now.
I am old. I will not go from here,
but by the side of my lord—
by such a beloved man— I intend to lie.”
Godric, too, the son of Æthelgar, gave them courage
to continue the fight. Often he let fly from his hand
and sent a slaughter-spear, at the Vikings
as he advanced at the head of the host.
He humbled and hewed down until at last he fell himself.
That was not the Godric who fled from battle…

Part Three Questions:
1. It is clear that the heroes of the poem are going to lose their battle. Yet somehow, it does not matter a great deal—how so? Explain.
2. Other than English vs. Vikings, what is the essential conflict in The Battle of Maldon? How does Offa’s speech (lines 230-42) relate to this second conflict?
3. The Battle of Maldon is full of examples of loyalty in action. Consider the behavior of Wulfmær and Byrhtwold and describe how their behavior demonstrates the comitatus.

\[19\] The poem ends as it begins, fragmented. Perhaps not much of the poem is lost – the rest of the battle (a complete rout by the Vikings) is easy to imagine, though one wonders what sort of moral, ideological, political, or spiritual point the poet would have made of it.
Powergraph Prompts:

1. Compare and contrast the version of events given in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* with that given by the poet. How do the chronicler’s motives and art differ from those of the poet? What does the poet attend to while neglecting to name the date, the exact place, or the eventual outcome? (The new Archbishop, Siric, talked the king into paying 10,000 pounds in tribute, which only stopped the raiders for one year.)

2. What heroic values come to the fore in this poem? Consider what is implied or said about courage, kinship, and revenge—how does the poet show the importance of all three?
Hwæt!\textsuperscript{20}

We have heard of the glory in bygone days
of the folk-kings of the spear-Danes,
how those noble lords did lofty deeds.

Often Scyld Scefing seized the mead-benches
from many tribes, troops of enemies,
struck fear into earls. Though he was
first found a waif, he awaited solace for that –
he grew under heaven and prospered in honor
until every one of the encircling nations
over the whole whale’s-riding had to obey him,
grant him tribute. That was a good king!

[Scyld Scefing is Hrothgar’s (the Danish king in the story) great-grandfather. The scop continues to detail the accomplishments of Hrothgar’s ancestors for another 50 lines.]

Then success in war was given to Hrothgar,
honor in battle, so that his beloved kinsmen
eagerly served him, until the young soldiers grew
into a mighty troop of men.

[Then, Hrothgar builds his grand mead-hall, Grendel shows up and eats a whole bunch of Danish thanes, and Beowulf shows up to save the day.]

\textbf{Activity – Maldon’s Missing Lines}

Based on the historical information found on pages 2-5, and using the above passage from \textit{Beowulf} as a stylistic guide, write a paragraph (5-7 sentences) that provides a traditional Anglo-Saxon introduction for \textit{The Battle of Maldon}.

\textsuperscript{20} OE exclamatory phrase often used at the beginning of a poem to indicate that all prior speech is to end as the new narrative begins. Usually translated as “Listen!” “Hear me!” “Attend!” (or as Ms. Slade likes to say, “Shut up and listen ‘cause I got a really cool story to tell…”)}
The people of the Geats then prepared for him
a splendid pyre upon the earth
hung with battle-shields and helmets
and bright byrnies as [Beowulf] had bidden;
there in the middle they laid the mighty prince,
the heroes lamenting their dead lord.
Then the warriors kindled there on the cliff
the greatest of funeral pyres; dark over the flames
the woodsmoke rose, roaring fire
mingled with weeping – the wind lay still –
until it had broken that bone-house
hot at the heart. With heavy spirits
they mourned their despair, the death of their lord;
and a sorrowful song sang the Geatish woman,
with hair bound up, for Beowulf the king,
with sad cares, earnestly said
that she dreaded the hard days ahead,
the times of slaughter, the host’s terror,
harm and captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then [his people] wrought for him
a barrow on the headland; it was high and broad,
visible from afar to all sea-voyagers,
and in ten days they built a beacon
of that battle-brave one; the ashes of the flames
they enclosed with a wall, as worthily
as the most cleaver of men could devise it.
In the barrow they placed rings and bright jewels,
all the trapping that those reckless men
had seized from the hoard before,
let the earth hold the treasures of earls,
gold in the ground, where it yet remains,
just as useless to men as it was before.
Then round the mound rode the battle-brave men, offspring of noblemen, twelve in all, they wished to voice their cares and mourn their king, utter sad songs and speak of that man; they praised his lordship and proud deeds judged well his prowess. As it was proper that one should praise his lord with words, should love him in his heart when the fatal hour comes, when he must from his body be led forth, so the men of the Geats lamented the fall of their prince, those hearth-companions; they said that he was of all the kings of the world the mildest of men and the most gentle, the kindest to his folk and the most eager for fame.

**Activity**
Based on the historical information found on pages 2-5 (especially that found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*), and using the above passage from Beowulf as a stylistic guide, write a paragraph (5-7 sentences) that provides a traditional Anglo-Saxon conclusion for *The Battle of Maldon.*
References


