

The Wægmundings



P. S. Langeslag



Wiglaf is a Swede!

2602 Wīglāf wæs hāten, Wēoxstānes sunu,
lēoflic lindwiga, lēod Scylfinga,
māg Ælfheres.

Wiglaf's Father Weohstan Killed Eanmund in the service of Onela!

2610

gomel swyrd getēah;
þæt wæs mid eldum Ēanmundes lāf,
suna Īhtere; þām æt sācce wearð,
wræccan winelēasum Wēohstān bana

So How Does Beowulf Grant Wiglaf Weohstan's Hereditary Land?

2606 Gemunde ðā ðā āre þe hē him ǣr forgeaf, (hē=Beowulf, him=Wiglaf)
wicstede weligne Wāgmundinga,
folcrihta gehwylc, swā his fæder āhte.

And How Does Weohstan Bequeath Wiglaf His War-Gear *mid Gēatum?*

2623 geaf him ðā **mid Gēatum** gūðgewāda
āghwæs unrīm ðā hē of ealdre gewāt

Beowulf, Too, Is a Wægmunding

“Ðū eart endelāf **ūsses cynnes,**
Wægmundinga; ealle wyrd forswēop
2815 mīne māgas tō metodsceaftē,
eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal.”

Sister-Son Relationships in *Beowulf*

- ▶ Hygelac and Beowulf
- ▶ Sigemund and Fitela (881; his son as well as nephew? cf. *Volsunga saga*)
- ▶ Hnæf and Hildeburg's son share a pyre (III4; Tolkien proposes fosterage)

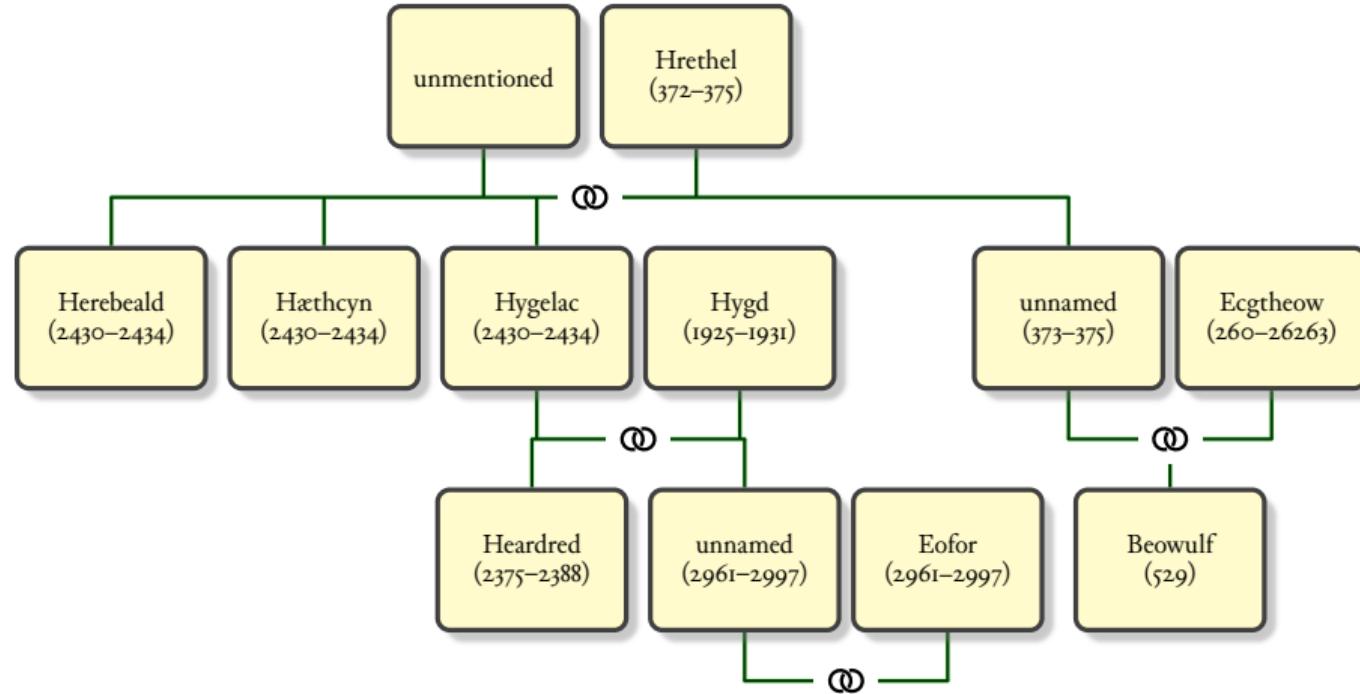
Foregrounded Brother-Son Relationships in *Beowulf*

Described by the term *subtergefæderan* “nephew and paternal uncle” (II64).

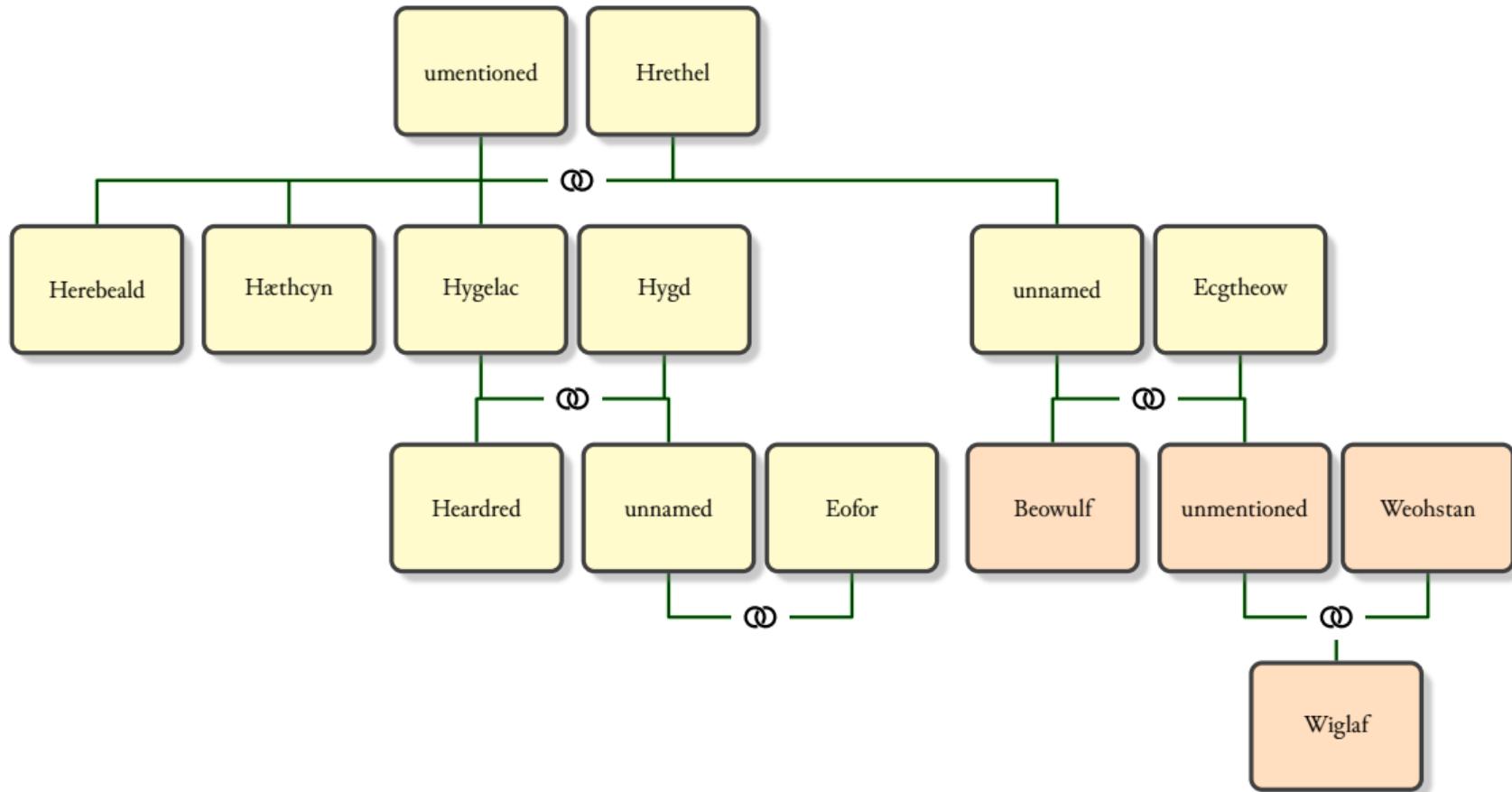
- ▶ Hrothgar and Hrothulf (Halga's son)
- ▶ Onela and the sons of Ohthere (Eanmund and Eadgils)

Coincidence or otherwise, these relationships all lead to conflict (Ohthere's sons) or at least threaten usurpation (Hrothulf).

The Hrethlings According to *Beowulf*



The Wægmundings According to Eliason



Can't Ecgtheow Be the Wægmunding Connection?

Yes; Eliason's evidence against this position is only that

- ▶ Ecgtheow does not alliterate on /w/
(But then neither does Beowulf alliterate with Ecgtheow, or *Ælfhere* with *Wiglaf*.)
- ▶ Beowulf being half-Swedish would be “unthinkable or even ridiculous” (98)
(In fact, the Wægmundings demonstrate one could move between these categories.)

Eliason does not explain

- ▶ how his sister's marriage would make Beowulf a Wægmunding but not a Swede
- ▶ why Ecgtheow's lack of alliteration on /w/ is more problematic than that on /b/
(Unless, as per p. 101 fn 1, Beowulf's real name is *Ælfhere*, which Eliason rejects)

Can't Hrethel Be the Wægmunding Connection?

Not if alliteration matters.

But every Hrethling we know of is dead, with the possible exception of Eofor, so that could fit.

Can't Beowulf's Mother be the Wægmunding Connection?

Yes; Eliason's evidence against this position is only that she has a father already; he does not consider that Beowulf's mother could have had a mother.

Bibliography

- Eliason, Norman E. “Beowulf, Wiglaf and the Wægmundings.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): 95–105.
- Farrell, R. T. “Beowulf, Swedes and Geats.” *Saga-Book* 18, no. 3 (1972): 223–96.