Dating Old English Verse

P. S. Langeslag
657x680 (abbacy of Hilda of Whitby): *Caedmon’s Hymn*

735 (death of Bede): *Bede’s Death Song*

*Metres of Boethius* postdate Boethius translation, ? in turn associated with the reign of Alfred, 871x899

937 (Battle of Brunanburh): terminus post quem for *Battle of Brunanburh*

973 (coronation of Edgar the Peaceful on Whitsun): *Coronation of Edgar*

975 (death of Edgar the Peaceful on 8 July): *Death of Edgar*
991 (Battle of Maldon): terminus post quem for *Battle of Maldon*

1066 (death of Edward the Confessor on 5 Jan): terminus post quem for *Death of Edward*

Late tenth century (Vercelli Book): terminus ante quem for *Dream of the Rood*, *Andreas*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Soul and Body*, *Elene*, *Homiletic Fragment*

Late tenth century (Exeter Book): terminus ante quem for the poems of the Exeter Book

c. 1000 (Nowell Codex): terminus ante quem for *Beowulf*, *Judith*

c. 1000 (Junius Manuscript): terminus ante quem for *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Christ and Satan*
Non-Metrical, Non-Linguistic Approaches to the Dating of *Beowulf*

- Its Danish focus makes composition between 835x886 and 980x1013 unlikely.
- Its “succession” of *Beowulf* by Wiglaf suggests a composition about 827, when a Wiglaf succeeded a Beornwulf in Mercia (see North).

Etc.; see esp. the Chase volume.
Table 1: Chronology offered as traditional in Cable 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>657–680</td>
<td><em>Caedmon’s Hymn</em></td>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td><em>Andreas</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>735</td>
<td><em>Bede’s Death Song</em></td>
<td>890–899</td>
<td><em>Pastoral Care</em> preface, epilogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>8th c.</td>
<td><em>Leiden Riddle</em></td>
<td>897</td>
<td><em>Metres of Boethius</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th c.</td>
<td><em>Genesis A</em></td>
<td>937</td>
<td><em>The Battle of Brunanburh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th c.</td>
<td><em>Daniel</em></td>
<td>942</td>
<td><em>The Capture of the Five Boroughs</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th–9th c.</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em></td>
<td>10th c.</td>
<td><em>Judith</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th–9th c.</td>
<td><em>Exodus</em></td>
<td>973</td>
<td><em>The Coronation of Edgar</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td><em>Elene</em></td>
<td>991</td>
<td><em>The Battle of Maldon</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td><em>Fates of the Apostles</em></td>
<td>1066</td>
<td><em>The Death of Edward</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td><em>Juliana</em></td>
<td>1110</td>
<td><em>Durham</em></td>
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Fulk’s 1992 Relative Dating

Parasiting

Group 1
- *Beowulf*
- *Genesis A*
- *Daniel*
- *Exodus*

Group 2
- *Andreas*
- *Cynewulf*

Group 3
- *Metres of Boethius*
- *Judith*
- *Late poems*
Fulk’s 1992 Relative Dating

Parasiting

Group 1
- Beowulf
- Genesis A
- Daniel
- Exodus

Group 2
- Andreas
- Cynewulf

Group 3
- Metres of Boethius
- Judith
- Late poems

Contraction After Loss of $h$

Group 1
- Genesis A
- Daniel
- Beowulf

Group 2
- Exodus
- Cynewulf and Andreas
- Metres of Boethius

Group 3
- Judith
- Late poems
Fulk’s 1992 Relative Dating

Parasiting

Group 1
- Beowulf
- Genesis A
- Daniel
- Exodus

Group 2
- Andreas
- Cynewulf

Group 3
- Metres of Boethius
- Judith
- Late poems

Contraction After Loss of $h$

Group 1
- Genesis A
- Daniel
- Beowulf

Group 2
- Exodus
- Cynewulf and Andreas
- Metres of Boethius

Group 3
- Judith
- Late poems

Contraction of Negation/Pronouns

- Genesis A
- Beowulf
- Daniel
- Cynewulf
- Metres of Boethius
- The Battle of Maldon
Additional Findings of Fulk 1992

- Analogical shortening of vowels lengthened by the loss of consonantal $h$ suggests *Beowulf* precedes *Andreas*.

- Analogical lengthening of stem vowels in inflected forms of diphthongal stems suggests *Judith* and the *Metres* come last.

- Kaluza’s Law suggests *Beowulf* may have preceded *Genesis A*, with all the rest ignoring the law to various degrees.

- The metrical treatment of syllables associated with tertiary stress suggests *Beowulf* and the Junius 11 poems are earliest, Cynewulf likely following.

- Resolution conditioned by syllable weight in internal position suggests *Beowulf* and the Junius 11 poems are earliest, followed by Cynewulf, followed by *Andreas* and the rest.
# A Chronology of *Beowulf* Dating

## Table 2: A rough chronology of *Beowulf* dating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-1980</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly early</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td><strong>The Toronto conference</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1980 to 1989</td>
<td>Age of agnosticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989 to present</td>
<td>Return to early dating</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Roberta Frank’s rebuttal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td><strong>The Neidorf conference</strong></td>
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Bibliography


