

Finnesburh

- <http://www.heorot.dk/finnsburh-en.html>

. ...gables burning?'
Then proclaimed Hnaef, the battle-young
king:
'This is not the eastern dawn nor is a dragon
flying here
nor here does this hall's gables burn.
5 But here they bear forth, birds screech,
the grey-coated wolf bays, the war-wood
clashes,
the shield answers the shaft. Now the moon
shines,
wandering under the clouds; now woe-deeds
come to pass
which this people's hatred desires to fulfil.
10 But awake now, my warriors,
grasp your linden-wood shields, resolve
upon courage,
strive to the vanguard, be high-spirited.'
Then arose many a gold-laden thane, girded
his sword
then moved to the door the noble champions
15 Sigferth and Eaha, drew their swords,
and at the other door, Ordlaaf and Guthlaaf
and Hengest himself came just behind them.
Then yet Garulf directed Guthere
that he so excellent a life at the first journey
20 to the doors of the hall, armoured, should
not venture
since now one hard in hatred wished to take
it away;
but he asked over all, openly,
the daring-hearted hero, who held the door.
'Sigferth is my name.' --said he-- 'I am a
man of the Sedgean

25 an adventurer widely known, I have
endured many misfortunes,
fierce battles. Even now appointed here for
you
which (thing) for yourself from me you will
attain.'
Then was in the hall the tumult of carnage,
the round shield-board must in the hands of
the bold,
30 the bone-helm burst -the planks of the
fortress resoundedoð
until in the battle Garulf fell
the first of all of the dwellers in the land,
Guthlaaf's son, around him many good
mortals' carcasses. The raven hovered
35 dusky and shimmering-dark. Sword-light
stood
as if all of Finnesburh were in flames.
I have never heard that more worthily in
battle of men
of sixty victory-warriors bearing themselves
better
nor ever for sweet mead making better
requital
40 than to Hnaef gave his retainers.
They fought for five days, as none of them
fell,
the troop-companions, but they held the
doors.
Then the hero went wounded, passing away,
he said that his byrnie was broken apart,
45 his war-garb weak and also his helmet
was pierced.
Then immediately asked him the protector
of the people
how well the warriors their wounds survived
or which of the young men....

Battle of Maldon

- <http://www.lightspill.com/poetry/oe/maldon.html>

... would be broken. [1]
 Then he commanded each young man
 To leave his horse, to drive it far off,
 and to go forth, with mind turned
 to strong hands and good thoughts.⁵
 Then Offa's kinsman first discovered
 that the great earl suffered no slackness;
 he let from his hand, then, loved one fly,
 hawk to the holt, and he stepped to battle.
 [2]
 So one could know that the lad wished not¹⁰
 to weaken in war, when he seized weapons.
 And as for him, Eadric would follow his
 prince,
 his lord to the fight; he bore forth, then,
 spear to the battle. He had good thought
 as long as he with hands could hold [3]¹⁵
 board [4] and bright sword: his boast he
 performed
 when to the fight he came with his lord. [5]

Then Byrhtnoth began to array men there,
 rode and gave counsel, taught warriors
 how they must stand and that stead [6]
 hold,²⁰
 bade them their round-shields rightly hold
 fast with hands, not at all frightened.
 When he had fairly arrayed that folk,
 he dismounted among them where it most
 pleased him,
 where he knew his hearth-band [7] most
 loyal.²⁵

Then on the bank stood a Viking messenger,
 called out stoutly, spoke with words,
 boastfully [8] brought the seafarers' errand
 to that land's earl where he stood on shore:
 "Seamen sent me quickly to you,³⁰
 ordered me tell you to send rings at once,
 wealth for defense: better for all of you

that you with tribute this spear-rush forgo
 [9]
 than that we share so bitter a war.
 Nor need we kill each other if you perform
 it;³⁵
 for gold we will fasten a truce with you.
 If you determine it, the mightiest here,
 that you for your people ransom will pay--
 give to the seamen at their own choosing
 wealth for a truce and take peace from us--
 40
 we with that payment shall to our ships,
 on ocean fare, hold peace with you."

Byrhtnoth spoke, lifted shield,
 shook slender ash-spear, with words spoke,
 angry and one-minded gave him answer:⁴⁵
 "Hear you, seafarer, what this folk says?
 Spears will they give you, ash-spears as
 tribute,
 poisonous point, old sword--
 an armor-tax useless to you in war.
 Seamen's messenger, bear word back
 again;⁵⁰
 tell your people much loathlier tale:
 that here stands a good [10] earl with his
 war-band,
 who will defend this homeland,
 Aethelred's land, land of my prince,
 folk and fold. [11] At battle, now,⁵⁵
 heathen must fall. Too shameful it seems
 that you, unfought, should go to ship
 bearing our wealth, now that thus far
 you have come into our land.
 Not so softly shall you carry off riches:⁶⁰
 point must, and edge, reconcile us first,
 grim battle-play, before we give tribute."

He bade them take shield then, go
 so that warriors all stood on the bank.
 One band could not to the other for water:⁶⁵

there came flowing the flood after ebb-tide;
streams locked. Too long it seemed
till they might bear spears together.
With tumult [12] they stood along Pante's
stream,
the van of the East-Saxons and the ash-army
[13];70
nor might any bring harm to the other,
but those who through flane-flight [14]
took death.

The flood went out. The seamen stood ready,
many a Viking, eager for war.
Then bade men's protector to hold the
bridge75
a war-hardened hero--he was called
Wulfstan--
who with his spear slew the first man
who most boldly there on the bridge stepped.
There with Wulfstan stood warriors
unfrightened,
Aelfere and Maccus, brave twain,80
who would not at the ford flight work,
but fast against fiends defended themselves,
the while they could wield weapons.
When they perceived and saw clearly
that they found the bridge-wards there
bitter,85
those loathly strangers [15] began to use
guile,
asked for free landing, passage to shore,
to fare over the ford leading foot-troops.

Then the earl for his arrogance [16]
left too much land [17] to a hostile
people.90
Then over cold water Byrthelm's son
began to call (men listened):
"Now you have room: come quickly to us,
warriors to war. God alone knows
who may master this battlefield." [18]95

Slaughter-wolves waded then, heeded not
water;
the Viking band, west over Pante,
over bright water, bore their shields;

seamen to land linden [19] bore.
There against anger [20] Byrhtnoth stood
ready,100
surrounded by warriors. He bade them with
shields
build the battle-hedge, hold that troop
fast against foes. Then was the fight near,
glory in battle. The time had come
when fey men must fall there.105
Clamor was raised there. Ravens circled,
eagles, eager for carrion. [21] There was
uproar on earth.
From hands then they released file-hard
spears;
ground spears [,grim ones,] flew. [22]
Bows were busy; shield took spear-
point.110
Bitter that battle-rush! Warriors fell;
on either hand young men lay.
Wounded was Wulfmaer, chose slaughter-
bed,
Byrhtnoth's kinsman; he was with swords,
his sister-son, badly hewn.115
There to the Vikings requital was given:
I heard that Eadweard slew one
fiercely with sword, withheld not its
swinging,
that at his feet a fey warrior fell;
for that his lord thanked him,120
his bower-thegn, when he could.
So the stout-thinkers stood firm,
young men at battle, eagerly vied
who with spear-point soonest might
in fey man life conquer there,125
warrior with weapons. Slain fell on earth.
Steadfast they stood. Byrhtnoth directed
them,
bade each young man think on the battle,
who against Danes would win glory in fight.

Then one strode, battle-hard, lifted his
weapon,130
his shield as defense, and against that man
stepped.
So the earl moved toward the churl:
either to other evil intended.

Then hurled the sea-warrior a southern spear
 [23]
 so that wounded was warrior's lord.¹³⁵
 He shoved then with shield so the shaft
 burst--
 the spear broke and sprang back.
 Enraged was that warrior: he with spear
 stung
 the proud Viking who gave him the wound.
 Wise was that fyrd-warrior [24]: he let his
 spear wade¹⁴⁰
 through the youth's neck, hand guided it,
 so that it reached life in the ravager.
 Then he another speedily shot
 so that the byrnie burst; he was wounded in
 breast
 through the ring-locked mail; in him at heart
 stood¹⁴⁵
 poisoned point. The earl was the blither:
 the brave man laughed then, said thanks to
 Metod [25]
 for the day-work God gave him.
 Then a certain warrior let a hand-dart
 fly from his hand, so that it went forth¹⁵⁰
 through that noble, Aethelred's thegn.
 By his side stood an ungrown youth,
 a lad in the battle, who full valiantly
 drew from the man the bloody spear,
 Wulfstan's son, Wulfmaer the Young.¹⁵⁵
 He let tempered shaft fare back again:
 the point sank in so he on earth lay
 who had his lord so grievously reached.
 An armed man then went to the earl:
 he wished to fetch wealth of that warrior--
¹⁶⁰
 spoil and rings and adorned sword.

 Then Byrhtnoth drew his bill [26] from its
 sheath,
 broad and bright-edged, and struck against
 byrnie.
 Too quickly one of the seamen stopped him
 when he marred the earl's arm.¹⁶⁵
 Then to the ground fell the fallow-hilt sword,
 nor could he hold hard blade,
 wield weapon. Then yet this word spoke

that hoar battler, encouraged the young men,
 bade them go forth with good company.¹⁷⁰
 He could not stand fast on foot any longer;
 he looked to the heavens [27]:
 "I thank thee, Wielder of peoples,
 for all those joys I had in the world.
 Now have I, mild Measurer, most need¹⁷⁵
 that you grant to my spirit goodness,
 that my soul may journey now to thee,
 into thy wielding, Lord of the angels,
 depart in peace. I am entreating thee
 that no hell-scathers harm it."¹⁸⁰
 Then heathen men hewed him,
 and the men who had stood by him,
 Aelfnoth and Wulfmaer, both lay there,
 when close to their lord they their lives gave.

Then they turned from battle who wished
 not to be there:¹⁸⁵
 there were Odda's sons first in flight:
 Godric turned from battle and left that good
 one
 who many a horse often gave him.
 He leapt on a horse which his lord owned,
 on those trappings where he had no
 right,¹⁹⁰
 and his brothers both ran with him,
 Godwin and Godwig, heeded not battle
 but turned from that war and the woods
 sought,
 fled to that fastness, their lives saved,
 and more men than was fitting¹⁹⁵
 if they all remembered those favors
 that he for their profit had done.
 So Offa earlier that day had said to him
 in the methel-stead, [28] when he held
 moot, [29]
 that many spoke boldly there²⁰⁰
 who after, at need, would not endure.
 Then was the folk's prince fallen,
 Aethelred's earl. All saw there,
 his hearth-companions, that their lord lay.
 [30]
 Then valiant thegns went forth there,²⁰⁵
 men undaunted eagerly hastened:
 they all wished, then, one of two things--

to leave life or loved one avenge.
 So the son of Aelfric boldened them forth,
 winter-young warrior words spoke,210
 Aelfwine spoke then, valiantly said:
 "Remember the speeches we spoke at mead,
 when we our boast on the bench raised,
 heroes in hall about hard fight:
 now I may test who is keen. [31]215
 I will make my nobility known to all,
 that I was of great kin among Mercians;
 my old-father [32] Ealhhelm was called,
 wise aldorman, [33] world-happy.
 Nor among the people shall thegns blame
 me220
 that I from this fyrd wish to flee,
 seek home, now that my prince lies
 hewn at the fight. That harm is most to me:
 he was both my kin and my lord."
 Then he went forth, mindful of battle,225
 with spear-point pierced one,
 a seaman among the folk, that he on fold lay,
 destroyed with his weapon. His friends he
 exhorted,
 friends and companions, that they go forth.
 Offa answered, shook ash-wood:230
 "Indeed, you, Aelfwine, have all thegns
 exhorted at need. [34] Now that our lord
 lies,
 earl on earth, to all of us need is
 that each of us embolden the other,
 warrior to war, the while he weapon may235
 have yet and hold, hard blade,
 spear and good sword. Us Godric has,
 Odda's craven son, betrayed altogether.
 When he on horse rode, on proud steed,
 too many men thought that it was our
 lord.240
 Therefore here on field the folk was divided,
 shield-defense broken. Fail his beginning!
 [35]
 since he so many men put to flight."
 Leofsunu spoke and his linden raised,
 shield for safety; to Offa he said:245
 "I vow it, that hence I will not
 flee a foot's length, but will advance,
 avenge in strife my lord-friend.

Steadfast heroes need not reproach me
 with words around Sturmere, now my friend
 fell, [36]250
 that I journeyed home lordless,
 turned from the battle; but weapon must take
 me,
 spear-point and iron." He went full angry,
 fought stoutly, flight he rejected.
 Dunnere spoke then, brandished a dart,255
 the humble churl [37] over all called,
 bade that each man avenge Byrhtnoth:
 "He may not flinch, who thinks to avenge
 his lord among folk, nor for fear mourn."
 Then they went forth, recked nothing of
 fear.260
 Household retainers began to fight stoutly,
 fierce spear-bearers, and prayed God
 they might avenge their lord-friend,
 and a fall [38] work on their foes.
 The hostage began eagerly helping them;265
 he was of brave kin among the
 Northumbrians,
 Ecglaf's son; Aescferth was name to him.
 He flinched not at battle-play,
 but again and again shot forth arrow:
 sometimes he shot against shield, sometimes
 a man tore;270
 ever and anon he inflicted some wound
 while he could weapons wield.

Then yet in the van stood Eadweard the
 Long,
 ready and eager, vaunting words spoke,
 that he would not flee a foot-space of
 land,275
 bend at all back when his better lay slain.
 He broke the shield-wall and fought with
 those warriors,
 until on those seamen his wealth-giver
 he worthily wreaked, before he with the
 slain lay.
 So did Aetheric, noble companion,280
 eager and forth-yearning, fought earnestly,
 [39]
 Sigebyrht's brother, and many others,

clove celled [40] shield, keenly defended them.

Shield's rim burst, and the byrnie sang a terrible song. [41] Then Offa at battle²⁸⁵ struck the seaman, that he on earth fell, and there Gadda's kinsman sought ground. Quickly at fight Offa was hewn; he had, though, furthered what he promised his lord, as he boasted before with his ring-giver,²⁹⁰ that they should both into burg [42] ride hale [43] home or in battle fall, on the corpse-field with wounds perish. He lay thegnly, his lord near.

Then there was shield's clash. [44] Seamen advanced,²⁹⁵ burning with battle-rage. Spear often pierced through

"Thought must be the harder, heart be the keener, mind must be the greater, while our strength lessens. [45] Here lies our prince all hewn, good one on grit. He may always mourn³¹⁵ who from this war-play thinks now to turn. My life is old [46]: I will not away; but I myself beside my lord, by so loved a man, think to lie." So Aethelgar's son emboldened them all,³²⁰ Godric to battle. Often he let spear, slaughter-spear, speed into those Vikings; so among folk he went first, hewed and humbled, [47] until he in fight fell. (That was not the Godric who fled from battle.)³²⁵

a fey one's soul-house. Forth then went Wistan,

Thurstan's son, fought against warriors. He was in throng the bane of three of them, before Wig(h)elm's son lay slain with him.³⁰⁰

There was a harsh meeting. They stood fast, warriors in conflict. Warriors fell, weary with wounds. The slain fell on earth. Oswold and Eadwold all the while, both those brothers, strengthened the men,³⁰⁵

with words bade their kin-friends that they should endure at need, unweakly use weapons.

Byrhtwold spoke, raised his shield-- he was an old retainer--shook his ash-spear;³¹⁰ full boldly he taught warriors:

The Battle of Brunanburh

The physical details of the battle at Brunanburh are scanty. History reveals the date (937 A.D.) and the names of the important leaders: Aethelstan and Eadmund leading the English; Constantine and Anlaf leading the Picts and Vikings. But the impetus for the battle is conjecture, as is its location.

That the battle was an event of great cultural significance is clear from the tone of the poem. A close reading of The Battle of Brunanburh, combined with historical knowledge of the reigns of Alfred, Eadweard and Aethelstan, suggests that Britain, which had previously been a loose confederation of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (known as the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy), had finally become a unified kingdom capable of celebrating its national and artistic maturity.

The poem is recorded in four manuscript copies of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It is not clear whether the poem was written specifically for the Chronicle or whether it was an independent piece that was incorporated into later manuscript copies of the Chronicle (a distinct possibility). Regardless, it survives as the sole entry for the year 937.

The poem is both self-consciously artistic, with strict meter and high poetic diction, and politically aware. It is self-conscious poetry that seeks to legitimize the focus of its praise, the reigning aristocracy, and to instill national pride in its audience. The poem commemorates the martial prowess of a well-governed people and demonstrates its artistic skill as well.

The Battle of Brunanburh

- <http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/litresources/brun/brun2.html#modtext>

In this year King Aethelstan, Lord of warriors,
ring-giver to men, and his brother also,
Prince Eadmund, won eternal glory
in battle with sword edges
around Brunanburh. They split the shield-wall,
they hewed battle shields with the remnants
of hammers.
The sons of Eadweard, it was only befitting
their noble descent
from their ancestors that they should often
defend their land in battle against each
hostile people,
horde and home. The enemy perished,
Scots men and seamen,
fated they fell. The field flowed

with blood of warriors, from sun up
in the morning, when the glorious star
glided over the earth, God's bright candle,
eternal lord, till that noble creation
sank to its seat. There lay many a warrior
by spears destroyed; Northern men
shot over shield, likewise Scottish as well,
weary, war sated.

The West-Saxons pushed onward
all day; in troops they pursued the hostile
people.
They hewed the fugitive grievously from
behind
with swords sharp from the grinding.
The Mercians did not refuse hard hand-play
to any warrior

who came with Anlaf over the sea-surge
in the bosom of a ship, those who sought
land,
fated to fight. Five lay dead
on the battle-field, young kings,
put to sleep by swords, likewise also seven
of Anlaf's earls, countless of the army,
sailors and Scots. There the North-men's
chief was put
to flight, by need constrained
to the prow of a ship with little company:
he pressed the ship afloat, the king went out
on the dusky flood-tide, he saved his life.
Likewise, there also the old campaigner
through flight came
to his own region in the north--Constantine--
hoary warrior. He had no reason to exult
the great meeting; he was of his kinsmen
bereft,
friends fell on the battle-field,
killed at strife: even his son, young in battle,
he left
in the place of slaughter, ground to pieces
with wounds.
That grizzle-haired warrior had no
reason to boast of sword-slaughter,
old deceitful one, no more did Anlaf;
with their remnant of an army they had no
reason to
laugh that they were better in deed of war
in battle-field--collision of banners,
encounter of spears, encounter of men,
trading of blows--when they played against
the sons of Eadweard on the battle field.

Departed then the Northmen in nailed ships.
The dejected survivors of the battle,
sought Dublin over the deep water,
leaving Dinges mere
to return to Ireland, ashamed in spirit.
Likewise the brothers, both together,
King and Prince, sought their home,
West-Saxon land, exultant from battle.
They left behind them, to enjoy the corpses,
the dark coated one, the dark horny-beaked
raven

and the dusky-coated one,
the eagle white from behind, to partake of
carrion,
greedy war-hawk, and that gray animal
the wolf in the forest.

Never was there more slaughter
on this island, never yet as many
people killed before this
with sword's edge: never according to those
who tell us
from books, old wisemen,
since from the east Angles and Saxons came
up
over the broad sea. Britain they sought,
Proud war-smiths who overcame the Welsh,
glorious warriors they took hold of the land.