

Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*

(Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003) paperback; 352 pages; RRP \$C35; ISBN 080208583

The Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* manuscript dates from the early eleventh century. The manuscript consists of five texts: *The Passion of Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf* and *Judith*. In Orchard's study he examines all of the monsters of these texts through systematically reflecting upon the thematic connections within the *Beowulf* manuscript. However, it is *Beowulf* that is the central inspiration of the study. Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon, and their relative parallels to *Beowulf* are examined from the perspective of the compiler's selection of the four companion texts. The five texts share not only an obsession with monsters; they are additionally preoccupied with pride.

Orchard gives a concise overview of the manuscript and outlines the thematic connections. The 32 marvels of the *Wonders of the East* are carefully delineated and although the illustrations are mentioned, unfortunately none have been reproduced within the text. Although the book-cover has a wonderful image from *Wonders of the East*, it is from *Cotton MS Tiberius BV* and not the *Beowulf* manuscript.

Past and present scholarship on the monsters of *Beowulf* is summarised, clearly demonstrating the breath of the subject matter. The parallels of *Beowulf* and his three monstrous adversaries are outlined. The heroic exploits of *Beowulf* were analogous to the classical heroes, such as Alexander the Great, and from a Christian perspective 'seem damned with feigned praise' (57). Orchard considers that the Biblical influences on the story of Grendel and Grendel's mother would have been flavoured by different texts, in Irish, Latin and English, and by writers such as Augustine, Isidore, Cassian and anonymous writers such as the author of the *Irish Reference Bible*. The *Beowulf* poet built on a fusion of Christian and pagan traditions and attitudes. The *Liber monstrorum* has had a long association with *Beowulf* because of the reference to 'Hygelac, king of the Geats' in both texts. In *Liber monstrorum* Hygelac is of gigantic size, which is not mentioned in *Beowulf*. However, pride is the common theme between the giants of both texts, which intersect with Hygelac who 'attacked the Franks because of pride [for *wlenco*] (114).' Hercules appears in each of the three sections of *Liber monstrorum* in the role of both monster and monster slayer, and this ambiguity leads back to the character of Alexander the Great.

In the manuscript, *Beowulf* follows *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. Alexander the Great, like Hercules, can be depicted as monster and monster slayer, and he is also full of pride. Finally, the parallels between *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* are examined. In these texts the

distinction between the worlds of monsters and humans becomes increasingly indistinct. As Grendel and Grendel's mother had human qualities, so did men have monstrous qualities. Beowulf, the monster slayer, becomes a monster himself and is ultimately damned by his arrogant pride. 'The heathen warriors and monster-slayers, such as Hercules, Alexander, Beowulf, and Grettir, have themselves become monsters in Christian eyes' (169).

Orchard spins a web of interconnected parallels between the monsters and humans of the *Beowulf* manuscript, *Liber monstrorum* and *Grettis saga*. These connections demonstrate wide reading and excellent research by the author. The book is clearly written and parallel texts are provided to support his argument throughout the book, and this material adds another dimension to the study. More than half the book is taken up with appendices of text, translations and sources. The texts are in both Latin and Old English, the translations are of the *Wonders of the East*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and *Liber monstrorum*. This is the second edition, and in this edition Orchard has corrected some literal errors that he detected in the first edition.

Although not everyone will agree with Orchard's arguments, the scope of scholarship, the parallel texts plus the resource material in the appendices make *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* a valuable book for any *Beowulf* scholar.

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Thacker, Alan and Sharpe, Richard (eds), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*

(Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) hardback; 581 pages; 39 black and white illustrations; RRP GB£85.00; ISBN 0 19 820394 2

Local Saints and Local Churches (henceforth *LSLC*) concerns the development of saints' cults in western Europe between 400 and 1000 CE, particularly the post-Roman 'Atlantic' zone of Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Cornwall. *LSLC* thus builds on a long tradition of scholarship in this field of study, dating back in 'recent' times to Bowen and others ideas of the 'western seaways', and as far back as William of Worcester and Gerald of Wales if one cares to argue the point. With contributions from many of the most important modern scholars in this field, including John Blair, Thomas Clancy, Richard Sharpe and Alan Thacker, there can be little doubt that *LSLC* will become an indispensable source for all those interested in the religious life of early medieval Europe.