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THE IDEA OF THE GOOD
IN LATE IRON AGE SOCIETY

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Uppsala 1998
ABSTRACT
Herschend, F., 1998. The Idea of the Good in Late Iron Age Society. *Occasional Papers in Archaeology* 15. Uppsala. ## pp. ##. Figs Monograph. The study is a discussion of the Pagan concept of the good with reference to the upper-classes of the Late Iron Age societies in Scandinavia, Northwest Europe and Anglo-Saxon England. It is based on a sample of halls belonging to the first millennium AD and on the analysis of a number of texts. Among these the following are poems: The poem about the Battle of Maldon, the *Beowulf*, two poems by Venantius Fortunatus to Sigibert and Brunhild and four by the same author to Duke Lupus. The following prose texts are used: The Martyrdom of Saint Sabas, Danish and Swedish rune-stone texts mentioning the word ‘good’, and the account in *Landnámabók* mentioning Queen Aud. The discussion is summed up in a chapter concerning the characteristics of the good and in a chapter discussing the forms of talk which takes place in the Late Iron Age hall in its most elaborate, i.e., royal form.

*Keywords*: ‘The good’; halls; Early medieval texts; Pagan ideology.

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This book is the result of the research project *Den goda människan mellan 500 och 1100 efter Kristus*—‘The Good Human between 500 and 1100 AD’. The project was financed by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It was headed by the author, and Dr. Johan Flemberg worked in the project as a translator of the poems by Venantius Fortunatus which form a central part of the analysis (cf. Flemberg 1996). He has also been kind enough to check my translations of the quotations from Venantius Fortunatus. Part of the book, the sections concerning Saint Sabas and Queen Aud, have been published earlier in the journal *Tor* and undergone only minor changes to fit this new context. Likewise the section about the poems to King Sigibert and Queen Brunhild appeared in the journal *Tor* during 1996. The English manuscript was revised by John Kendal who also did his best to improve my English. Alicja Grenberger made most of the illustrations. Elisabet Green took care of corrections and proof reading and Christina Bendegard did all the thousand things and checks it takes to turn a file into a book. Without grants from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the book would not have been published.

Uppsala May 1998

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I. Introduction

This study seeks an answer to the question what goodness meant and what it meant to be good in Germanic Northwest Europe and among Anglo-Saxons in England during the last 500 years of the first millennium AD. The answer does not lie in a radical Platonic discussion where good is the end product of a series of Socratic measurements in which this is demonstrated to be better than that (Nussbaum 1986, pp. 106 ff.), since to begin with it is fairly obvious that the good, or being good, is only vaguely connected with a scientific philosophical analysis of the general concept. On the contrary, and as pointed out to us by dictionaries, being good is a matter of acting in accordance with one or more of a lot of different qualities such as being fitting, pleasing or orderly (Buck 1965, pp. 1175 f.), or doing the brave, virtuous, excellent or right as we find it in Anglo-Saxon vocabularies (Toller 1921, pp. 478 ff.; Klaeber 1950, p. 345). In the dialogue bearing his name Protagoras’s point of view: goodness as a social art which makes up humanness while being performed, in his case taught (Nussbaum 1986, pp. 100 ff.), is conservative and perhaps not to our liking, but it seems much easier to link to the Germanic Iron Age usage than that of Socrates, e.g., when Protagoras tells us that the origin of braveness lies in the goodness and the well-fedness of the soul (Plato, Protagoras 6.2, p. 191).

To be good stands out not least as a very pragmatic social quality and Protagoras’s instrumental metaphor about the well-fed soul is very appropriate in our case, since the good Pagan is doubtless most often well-fed. Only little by little is the concept influenced by Christian ideals, and for that reason there are artless runestone texts from 11th century Sweden which combine the genuinely Pagan ‘goodness with food’, with ‘God’s goodness’ (cf. Backe et al. 1994, p. 339).

Generally speaking, there are a private and a public setting of the good and in a given period the character of one or the other is often obvious. Contrary to the Late Iron Age, in which the quality of being good was often made public, today’s goodness is very clearly linked to the individual in a private sphere and, for that reason, with the private sphere being a rather small and sheltered part of our societies, it is
unusual to point out someone as being good, not to say as being a good man or a
good woman. We may even find goodness an ambiguous and ironic concept
(Kyrklund 1988, pp. 424 ff.). The professional counterparts of goodness, e.g., abil-
ity, capability or efficiency are, on the other hand, commonly used to describe what
are primarily the private qualities of a person who works within organisations, which
are, if not public, then at least semi-public.

Now and then in obituaries this kind of professional quality reaches the public and
it becomes nearly synonymous with good, but generally speaking we are reluctant
actually to bring good into the official setting. During the winter of 1994–95 I made
it my habit to read the obituaries in the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, looking
for people who were publicly proclaimed as good in this way. I found only two
among several hundreds. One was an unobtrusive carpenter and a good Christian,
who had been a devoted member of a Stockholm congregation for more than a
generation, the other a judge who was considered in all meanings of the word to
have been the good judge. This included his good leadership. The examples are
interesting since the first is linked to a typically Christian world-rejecting and prob-
ably pacifistic notion of honour, while the latter partly reflects Germanic and worldly
related ideals of morality and honour (cf. Russell 1994, pp. 120 ff.).

In the Late Iron Age the balance between the public and the private, especially
among non-Christians, was probably quite different and, judging from contemporary
texts, good seems widely used to describe a man’s public qualities. The reason for
this has to do with one of the theses of this book, which is that the last 500 hundred
years or so of the first millennium AD were a period in which the ability to be publicly
good emerged from the private sphere, where some of the basic forms of goodness,
such as the care for and the welfare and survival of the family, are easy to imagine.
This, in its turn, reflects the general fact that goodness is related to the consensus of
a group as well as to the individual. Such a consensus is probably easier to reach
within small groups than larger ones. Good took the form of an individual, who was
socially good in a utilitarian, and practical, action-dependent way. Obsolete expres-
sions, such as ‘a good man’, ‘a good king’ or ‘a good soldier’, are echoes of this
kind of goodness.

It is doubtful whether textual analysis alone can cast sufficient light on the meaning
of ‘good’. The few and disparate texts in which ‘good’ and ‘goodness’ occur do not
in themselves form a corpus that reflects their common usage during the later part of
the first millennium AD. Although the texts provide a rewarding starting-point for an
analysis the need for knowledge about their setting soon makes itself felt. In recent
years, however, archaeology has contributed towards solving this problem by estab-
lishing that the house or room in which goodness is constituted, and many good
actions take place, i.e., the room which in the end becomes the feudal hall or the
king’s hall, was to begin with a special house or room on the economically dominant
farms all over the Northwest European farming and stock-breeding community
(Herschend 1993). It has also become obvious that one of the roots of the Late Iron Age leadership originates from a development of the household on these major farms brought about by adding the hall, which was originally a dwelling room for the farm owner’s family (Herschend 1993, pp. 195 ff.), to the traditional kitchen dwelling (Onsten 1993), thus separating those who lived on a farm from each other.

The most central halls are often badly preserved due to their being central and thus situated in what is still today some of the best arable land, but judging from the well preserved, albeit slightly peripheral examples, we may venture to say that the hall as an institution became the interface between the private and the public sphere.

In some cases the expression interface can be understood quite literally inasmuch as the hall, which was from the beginning singled out, i.e., more or less separated by a fence (Haarnagel 1979, pp. 319 Beilage 26–28, house 12), or placed within the fenced courtyard (cf. Stenberger and Klindt-Jensen 1955, pp. 199 ff.; Herschend 1993, Fig. 5), becomes incorporated within the fence surrounding the farm houses (van Es 1967, plan VII, house XV; Tibblin 1994, pp. 45 ff.). This straightforward or naïve symbolism was short-lived, but despite its oddity it is a solution to the problem of how to link the private with the public. Once the hall as an interface, in itself part of a change in society, had been created, then it was only natural that concepts and metaphors connected with this room should influence, or try to influence, the ideology of the whole society. With its background in wealth the hall was bound to become a social success.

The *res publica* of the Late Iron Age society with its democratic roots could not be satisfied solely by the hall (Notelid 1995, p. 420), not least while the affairs of society were traditionally strongly influenced by the assembly of free men. The free men as a political body, originally the assembly of warriors (Thompson 1965, pp. 29 ff.), was threatened by the leadership of the hall since in this house the rich entertained an elite with whom they shared the conviction that they and the elite should govern the people (Herschend 1992, pp. 150 ff.). In the form of the open air thing-assembly the collective continued to be the counterpart for a very long time, though with ever-diminishing strength, of the individual chieftain or king and his retinue in the hall. In some cases, like Yeavering (Hope-Taylor 1977, Phase III A–C), when the need for a symbolic balance was manifest, we are shown how, along a line between two graves, the room of the traditional *res publica*, the amphitheatre, is matched by the room of the selected, the king’s hall, and *vice versa*. To the modern eye such a manifest way of symbolising and pointing out reciprocity is obviously not very convincing.

The connection between the hall and the roots of society as a hierarchy headed by an individual, the hall owner, was essential. The power of this man may have varied considerably, but the idea of the individual hall owner reflected a wish to create a hierarchical social model which could be applied at any level between the international and the local. The hall owner, whether a local peasant, chieftain or king, was a
primus inter pares who had been invested with his position by a minority, in some cases probably just himself or his parents. He possessed a curiously indisputable leadership in economic and ideological matters, something that must for centuries have offended several kinds of assemblies of free men as well as fellow chieftains. We may infer this not least from the fact that within the Early Germanic tradition the slightest sign of incipient inherited omnipotence among the Germanic war-kings mentioned by Caesar and Tacitus alerted the free men of the danger of the born rather than chosen leader (Thompson 1965).

It is probably correct to say that the development of the hall owner owed much to the contacts between Romans and Germans in the first decades of the first century of our era. During this period the Roman concept of individual leadership seems to have influenced leading Germans in the Northwest and to have supplied them with an ideology which vindicated private ownership or domination of landed property and large surplus-producing farms. In theory the position of such leaders was justified by their generosity to and care for their fellow tribesmen. (Andersson and Herschend 1997).

The Material

Christianity in South Scandinavia marks the end of this study both conceptually and chronologically. When Christianity has rooted itself firmly in the Iron Age cultures it becomes obvious that it is charity, mercy and clemency, rather than the splendour of gifts, which promote good actions. Instead of being the ultimate result of heroic deeds the good is often the simple outcome of a pious or meek disposition. This latter kind of goodness makes the Iron Age goodness deteriorate. Only the most elevated, male, members of society continue to be connected with the old ideal in which actions, rather than general disposition, demonstrated a man to be good. This form of change should be expected to show itself in many texts and we are confident that it will if the sample is reasonable, not least since goodness within Christianity is a formal and cardinal concept which no conscious author will leave out and several unconsciously incorporate in their writings.

When we turn to the setting, things are not equally obvious. However, if Christianity is part and parcel of the development of the concept in the texts, then the involvement of Christianity in the development of the big and influential farms with a hall can also be anticipated. The big farms are important social rooms and it is thus reasonable to imagine that a close connection between the hall and the ‘good’ will result in moral breeding conditions which may in principle nourish Christian as well as Pagan ethics. We have no reason to believe that the moral primacy of those who influenced hall life was threatened by Christianity (Russel 1994, pp 107 ff. and 209 ff.). Eventually their primacy was challenged, but this happened only when confession within a
democratic congregation had been established and when ideas about a systematic separation between general categories, defined, e.g., as men or women, were becoming essential (cf. Nilsson 1994, pp. 29 ff.). These ideas were partly an echo of an earlier Christianity and they created an absolute difference between worldly powers, with a minutely graduated ranking of people, and a secular power which defined people in a few broad groups, such as men, women, children, heathens or Christians. This, in turn, was a challenge to the supremacy of the hall ideology since in the developed Christian state the good and goodness could not be exclusively upper-class. However, during a period before the congregation grew democratic, the concepts may well have had an upper-class bias.

It falls outside the framework of the investigation of the setting to study closely the architectural link to Christianity, but in principle large farms also seem to have a topological relationship with early churches, which may indicate that large farms played a considerable role in the moral development of Christianity. There may be many reasons for the congruency, but it is important to stress the probability that the morality of early Christian society among the Germans could have evolved on the large farms among their upper-class inhabitants.

From Anglo-Saxon England the connection seems to be archaeologically established, e.g., at Northampton, Norwich, Yeavering or Cowage Farm (Williams et al. 1985; Aldous 1995; Hope-Taylor 1977; Hinchcliffe 1986), and in his discussion of Yeavering, David Wilson (1992, pp. 44 ff.) has pointed out the correspondence between Pope Gregory’s letter about the usefulness of transforming Pagan buildings into churches as a means of facilitating ideological infiltration. Wilson has pointed to the building D2b and the graves in connection with it as an example of this kind of early church and churchyard (cf. Hope-Taylor 1977, pp. 97 ff.). He also refers to Bede’s story about how Paulinus made use of the hall at Yeavering in his work of conversion (Bede II; 14, p. 127). On the basis of these written sources it is natural to infer that the large (Royal) farm and the hall created a suitable environment for the Germanisation of Christianity and the Christianisation of Pagan morality.

A couple of hundred years later we find some Scandinavian examples of a similar connection between a church and a big farm, e.g., Tamdrup, Lisbjerg, (Jutland) Lilla Köpinge (Scania) or Borg in Lofoten (Schiørring 1991, pp. 11 ff.; Jeppesen and Madsen 1990, pp. 289 ff.; 1997; Tesch 1993, pp. 106 ff. and 131, Fig. 52.; Munch et al. 1989). The quality of the contexts vary and the contemporanity between church and hall cannot always be proved, but by and large the connection must be recognised.

As a parallel to the Yeavering case and Paulinus we can also refer to Wilhelm Holmquist’s suggestion (Holmqvist 1969, pp. 23 f.; Lundström 1969, p. 75) that the religious objects found at Helgö might have belonged to a missionary living in the Helgö settlement. Holmqvist’s suggestion has gained support from a revision of the interpretation of the so-called Foundation Ia at Helgö, since we now know that the
silver plate and the Coptic larder were found inside the wall-line of the 8th–9th century hall (Herschend 1995) and the crosier just outside that building.

It is true that the early connection between the large farm and the church might merely reflect missionaries seeking protection, financing or influential converts, but it is not satisfying to conclude no more than that. If the hall owners were generally speaking influential, then it is highly probable that they also set ideological standards and were perfectly convinced of their own moral qualities. Kings and chieftains are unlikely to have given up their moral codex when they became Christians. Their conversion was not a personal crisis and they probably felt that they contributed to Christianity when they brought it in line with themselves. As civilised beings they developed foundations for a generally speaking better morality when they became Christians.

All in all the basic theoretical assumption behind this study can be summarised as follows: Good and goodness are positive notions in any society and thus they reflect society rather than Platonic ideas. On the whole good is a privately based concept, but in different societies it may have had obvious public qualities. If so, the concept must also have been linked to a public context. Given the fact that the Germanic kingship developed into a hall-based leadership during the Late Iron Age, it is assumed that the originally private social functions in connection with the hall were brought along into the hall of the Late Iron Age and adjusted to its more public status.

The strongly hall-orientated texts about the upper classes can therefore be expected to exhibit the good, and if they do we may hope to find traits in the hall buildings that reflect the meaning and the importance attached to this concept. Since the usage in the texts is relatively straightforward and several of the texts are well known, it will be advantageous to start with an overview and a discussion of the less familiar phenomenon, the hall in the archaeological record.

The Hall

The Scandinavian and Northwest European Iron Age farm is characterised by a three-aisled main building which contains both dwelling and byre. Ecological conditions can explain some of the regional types of houses, especially with respect to their construction. For this reason the use of dung, rather than clay, and radially, rather than tangentially, split oak timbers mark out the buildings in the marsh area from those in Jutland (cf. Bantelmann 1955, pp. 39 ff.). Likewise in the mountain areas of southwest Norway the abundance of pine wood, but scarcity of suitable wood for wattle, made it natural to construct houses with wooden plank walls, stout four-sided posts and an outer insulation made of boulders and earth (Myhre 1980).

Also the planning of the houses was affected by climate and ecology, and we can point to the capacious houses along the coastal strip of northern Sweden as an ex-

Along with environmental factors social norms may also cause substantial differences explaining why the South Scandinavian house is strongly connected with the central entrance room, while the Middle Scandinavian house has two entrance rooms closer to the short ends (Fig. 1). The differences may reflect somewhat different family structures with a primary and a secondary dwelling (Løken 1992, pp. 53 ff.; Norr 1996). Be this as it may, not until the last part of the first millennium, earlier in the Southwest and later in the Northeast, do we see a general tendency to split the functions of the different rooms in the main house of the farm among separate houses of a one-aisled construction (cf. Ramqvist 1989). The general tendency for more and more spacious buildings with fewer posts and higher walls is, however, obvious from the beginning of our era, especially on the bigger farms (Herschend 1989).

Figure 1. The standard South and Middle Scandinavian house types. (a) is from Hansen et al. 1991. (b) is from Løken 1985.
On these farms there is also a tendency to split the housing among two houses. This split is brought about by the addition of a new dwelling house, which is a complement to the old kitchen-dwelling. The new house, mentioned above, has been defined as a hall and if the examples (collected in Appendix I) are taken together, they form a pattern characterised by one or more of the following features:

1) They belong to big farms.
2) Originally they consisted of one room with a minimum of posts.
3) They are singled out by their position on the farm.
4) Their hearths were not used for cooking or for handicraft.
5) The artefacts found in the houses are different from those found in the dwelling part of the main house on the farm.

In the course of time the hall ceases always to be a separate house. Over the centuries it seems to become a room in a building and its status to be attached to nobility and royalty, but already in the 5th century the hall is the room of leadership in an economic as well as a military sense (Herschend 1992, p. 195). This signifies that a part of the social power proceeded from the home, i.e., from one of the social psychological platforms later to be found in developed feudalism, namely: the unity of home, nuclear family, responsibility, power, and the individual acting for the collective. The interesting thing is that centuries before we can speak of feudalism, and well before the hall became a markedly royal phenomenon, later to move down the social scale (Thompson, M. 1995), the hall constituted a room, a social space, for the individual who in this room was the head of a nuclear family—a positive notion, mutual to rich and poor—and not just a member of a team which ran an estate. It is in the fusion between the military power, which could be temporarily bestowed upon any strategically gifted murderer, and the economic power, inherited by the sons of the best farms, that individuality became a public social concept invested with a room, the embryonic hall. Thus created, the hall could not be rooted out and it became a natural counterpoint or complementary contrast of different collectives such as the thing-assembly, the village-assembly or later the tenants. It appears that some time during the Late Roman Iron Age it became possible to breed individuality within the nuclear family.

The Origin

Since the discussion of the hall as a Scandinavian phenomenon (Herschend 1993) a number of illustrative examples have been found which make it worthwhile to consider the hall as a setting for the good. It has, however, also become interesting to go outside Scandinavia to look for its slightly more remote societal roots. For this purpose it seems right to turn to Feddersen Wierde, House 12, a partly enclosed dwelling house singled out for special purposes eventually becoming a hall in approxi-
mately the sense applied to the other examples used here. When the house first occurs in the second settlement phase it marks out the economic and probably ritual centre of the village (Haarnagel 1979, pp. 189 ff.). In the following two phases the estate to which it belongs grows and comes to consist of two main farm houses and two halls, i.e., houses 27 and 12 together with houses 13 and 35. This way of pairing the houses cannot be shown to be more than probable, but we can note the fact that in the northeast part of the villages there emerges a large estate displaying its halls towards those who approach the village from the only direction from which it can conveniently be approached, namely the east northeast.

The exact character of the farms to which the halls belong is not known, but there is evidence of their economic strength, expressed not least in the amount of storage buildings attached to the farms. Haarnagel (1979) sees a difference between the *Herrenhof* in house no 12 and the *Volkshalle* in house no 35, but there is little substantial proof of such a division, although it mirrors the general division of power in Early Iron Age society. Suffice it to say that in Feddersen Wierde we see part of the development of the hall farm, and in the fifth settlement phase (2nd century AD) the whole northeast sector of the village seems to be dominated by a wealthy estate displaying two halls, houses 12 and 35 (Fig. 2).

Part of the structure can also be observed in phase 6 (3rd to 4th centuries AD), but in the two last phases, ending in the 5th century, the structure is not discernible. Although there is much to support the hall interpretation of these two houses in Feddersen Wierde, it must nonetheless be said that in theory these houses, 12 and 35, may be equivalent to the so-called second house (Herschend 1993) found on several larger farms, which, despite their size, lack halls. Hall farms are often characterised by a combination of three houses, the main house, the second house and the hall.

If we had been able to follow the development of the Hodde settlement at the time, it is possible that we would have seen a development of the dominant farm similar to that in Feddersen Wierde. The farm and the house that may fit this kind of development in Hodde, the main farm and house II, were, however, interpreted by Hvass (1985, pp. 131 f.) as a large farm with a normal outhouse, albeit signified in ways that denoted its attachment to the large farm.

The origin of the hall is veiled in obscurity even though we may consider its general European roots to be connected with the Homeric megaron (Thompson, M. 1995, pp. 8 ff.). In our North European focus, however, it seems fair to say that halls grew out of the egalitarian Early Iron Age village.

A leap forward for the hall, not least geographically, seems to have taken place in the fourth century (cf. Appendix I), when halls are found in Denmark, Dejbjerg or Gudme and in the Baltic, at Övetorp on Öland and at Vallhagar on Gotland. On the Swedish mainland the house under Högum Mound 3 is so far the best and earliest dated published house, probably built in the fifth century. In Norway, a hall
Figure 2. The dominant farm at Feddersen Wierde during the fifth settlement phase (2nd century AD). (1) is the main village entrance, (2) the entrance to the main farm, (3) a separate entrance to the hall, House 12, and (4) a secondary entrance to the village and the main farm (based on Haarnagel 1979).
is found at Borg in Lofoten and dated to the Viking Age, but we may expect to find much earlier examples in southern Norway with the introduction of new excavation methods (cf. Løken et al. 1996).

In South Scandinavia a more developed type of hall seems to have been established in the 7th century at Lejre and in Old Uppsala. These halls, which may have had forerunners like that at Gudme, are kings’ halls containing several rooms with different function and great dimensions. Smaller halls, such as those at Svintuna (Nordén 1938, pp. 151 ff.), on Helgö or in Slöinge and perhaps in Sanda (Åqvist 1995), continued nonetheless to be built alongside the larger ones.

The development of the hall can be sketched in the following way:

First, a period in which an economically dominant person strives to define the phenomenon as a part of his personal farm, although we may suppose that also matters of public interest could be discussed in this kind of hall. The hall and farm are village-bound, as in Feddersen Wierde, and the ambitions of the leading farmer fit in with the common development of a marked privatisation which characterises the Iron Age farm. This is reflected in, e.g., the changes in the fencing tradition indicated by sequences such as those formed by the villages Hodde and Nørre Snede (Hvass 1985; Hansen 1988 ) or Hodde and Wijster (van Es 1967; Tibblin 1994, pp. 56 ff.).

Secondly, when the privacy of the halls has been established, their social significance continues to grow as a result of the growing influence of the individual chieftain or king on his people. This means that, as in Lejre, the hall becomes the interface between the private and the res publica, eventually dominating the latter in the feudal state. In its general development the hall is a parallel—probably closer than we are able to prove—to the development of the Germanic kingship as we see it from the time of Segestes and onwards (Thompson 1965), born out of the res publica, eventually to dominate it. In this development the hall seems to denote a number of concepts that are also of interest in connection with the concept of being good, since in the end goodness becomes a royal virtue.

Neither Caesar nor Tacitus could be expected to point out Germanic goodness, but the glimpses we get of the Germanic king acting in public and the even fewer glimpses of his private or family life suggest that, on one hand, an essential part of his leadership in the region closest to the Roman Empire is linked to the existence of a balanced political and ideological setting and to a capacity to care for his people (cf. Andersson and Herschend 1997, pp. 77 ff.). On the other hand and figuratively speaking, there are many leaders in a stand-by position waiting for the right crisis situation to appear, so that they may be chosen as executive leaders with undisputed and not least martial power. It is their ability to deal with a particular problem that makes them suitable, and the problem solved they are not needed anymore (Thompson 1965; Hedeager 1991; Andersson and Herschend 1997). Goodness is linked to the former aspect of leadership and it is thought of as a guiding principle for leadership in all kinds of situations, not just political ones. This in its turn implies that
the good leader can solve any problem. He is universal in his leadership and need only be chosen once. Since goodness is reproduced in the hall, it follows that also his sons are brought up to become good and stay good as long as fate does not pull a trick on them.

* 

Halls are most important in developed Anglo-Saxon society (Thompson 1995) and since the written sources used here are often closely related to Anglo-Saxon hall-life, it is essential to decide whether the Anglo-Saxon hall is a development of a Late Roman and local architecture or part of a Germanic tradition.

In the 1980s Dixon (1982) and James, Marshall and Millet (James et al. 1984) found no Continental parallels to the halls at Cowdery’s Down and concluded that there were elements in the Romano-British farmhouse tradition which could be seen as the architectonic forerunners of the Anglo-Saxon hall observed at Cowdery’s Down. Today with the analysis of the hall in Wijster (van Es 1967; Herschend 1994a; Tibblin 1994) we have a strong indication of a Continental origin for the Anglo-Saxon hall (Fig. 3). In Wijster the hall was built in the fourth century AD, and its plan is a close parallel to the earliest halls at Cowdery’s Down and thus to other early English examples (Rigby-Smith 1994; Thompson, M. 1995).

These buildings are designed with two small rooms at each short end and a larger room, the hall room, in the middle. Regarding their position on the farms, we note that in both cases the hall constitutes an interface between the private, fenced farm, and the outside (Fig. 4). In Wijster where the eastern short end with its entrance facing the street formed a part of the fence around the farm, this interface is something new to a society where farms were normally designed as a group of houses within a fenced area (van Es 1967). Here the hall breaks the barrier and becomes a concrete symbol of the meeting between the farm owner and his guests. The halls at Cowdery’s Down fulfil the same function and they are even more obvious in their role as fence-breakers (Millet and James 1983; Rigby-Smith 1994). All in all, the planographic similarities indicate that the hall-concept was brought to England by the Anglo-Saxons and developed there parallel to a similar development on the Northwest European coast and in Scandinavia.

The Anglo-Saxon hall preserves an older building tradition with ancient traits such as the juxtaposed entrances in the centre of the façade and thereby it links the aristocracy with its continental roots. In South Scandinavia the central entrance room in Gudme may be viewed in a similar perspective, but here the hall develops in such a way as to show influences from the Roman basilica (Thompson, M. 1995). The hall in Lejre may thus be compared with the basilica that Theoderic built on the island of Mljet in the Adriatic (cf. Dygve 1959), but also, from a technical point of view – the outer raking posts – with the Anglo-Saxon hall (Herschend 1994a) (Fig. 5).
Figures 3a and b. (a) The hall at Wijster, house XV (van Es 1967, pp. 57ff.) compared to (b) a hall at Cowdery’s Down, House C 12 (Millet and James 1983, p. 51).
Figures 4a and b. (a) The dominant farm at fourth century Wijster. The hall is incorporated into the fence in the northern part of the farmyard (based on van Es 1967).
(b) An early phase of a farm at Cowdery’s Down. The hall is outside the fenced yard but incorporated into the fence (based on Millet and James 1983).
Figures 5a and b. (a) The hall at Lejre (based on Christensen 1993) compared to (b) Theoderic’s Aula sacra on the island of Miljt in the Adriatic (based on Dygve 1959).
The Farm Owner’s Seat

The position of the farm owner’s seat has probably always been important and the archaeological record indicates that some time during the Late Iron Age it became possible for the hall owner to choose between different positions for this seat and perhaps also different kinds of seats, perhaps in accordance with the two terms connected with the it, undvegi and hásæti (cf. Birkeli 1932). The new short-end or corner positions are probably a development of the original situation which, in the narrow houses of the Early Iron Age, was a side-aisle position, perhaps a balanced
situation with two seats, the hásæti and the undvegi on each side of the fireplace, as indicated by the find distribution in Vallhagar and the picture stone from Butle Änge No I (Lindqvist 1941, p. 87 and Taf. 50) (Figs 6a and b). On the Gotlandic picture stone, dated c. 700 AD (Lindqvist 1941, p. 118), we see the high settle/hásæti, which is higher due to its having or standing on a dais, to the right and to the left the slightly lower dais-less opposite seat, the undvegi. It is worth mentioning that the undvegi did not necessarily have a permanent position: it may well have been moved in when needed and so may the high settle although it was probably in more permanent use. It must also be pointed out that in the royal milieu on the Bayeux tapestry we detect no undvegi, only high-seats in short end and probably also corner positions. In most scenes, however, the position cannot be determined (Figs 7a and b).

Going back to the Pre-Roman Iron Age, we find that the design and equipment of the house do not allow for a short end or corner position for any seat (Fig. 8). On the contrary, the short end of the dwelling part of the house is a sleeping, kitchen and storage area. Prominence is found somewhere between the long walls and the fire-

Figures 6a and b. (a) Plan of the hall at Vallhagar, i.e. Vallhagar House 16, with a tentative position of the hásæti and the undvegi (based on Biörnstad 1955, Fig. 68). (b) Illustration of the concept of the hásæti and the undvegi from a Viking Age Gotlandic picture stone (based on Lindqvist 1941, Taf. 50).
place. Living quarters are limited in early Iron Age house and in those without a byre, i.e., small dwelling houses, the kitchen area expands from the short end to the area on each side of the hearth. In houses where byre and dwelling are combined the design is not as compact and in the example (Fig. 8) the free space south of the hearth and the shelf that once hung here on the wall (Fig. 8; No 678) probably show us a protected and therefore also prominent space in the house. Since a prominent rather than withdrawn position fits what is later known as an undvegi or a hásæti, we may infer that some kind of seat, sæti, occupied the space permanently or occasionally. Be this as it may, the main point is that the house of the Early Iron Age contained a sheltered prominent space next to the fire.

Keeping in mind the mixture of function, position and quality implied by the terms it is reasonable to sketch the development as in Figs 9a–d and to point out that the additional possibility, the short end position introduced in later halls, is a change from the prominent but balanced and symmetrical position of hásæti and undvegi to an asymmetric and clearly dominant position. This accords well with the word high-

Figures 7a and b. Examples of high settles from the Bayeux tapistery, (a) in a corner and (b) in a short end position.
settle, which seems to signify a specific seat whereas undvegi, meaning the opposite seat, is a markedly reciprocal term.

The terms make sense if we start by saying that in the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age there was a permanent and prominent place for a seat. When needed this seat could be juxtaposed by another one, but with the introduction of this opposite seat it may also have become necessary in some situations to denote a difference between the seats. Later on short end position and a system of different floor levels in the hall made it possible to stage the growing complexity of the social ranking system.

In the archaeological record we find a high settle dominance in Helgö, where the find distribution indicates a corner position behind the fireplace in the southern aisle, which in the topography peculiar to Helgö is the highest part of the house, but also just inside the door (Fig. 10). In Borg in Lofoten we see a similar dominance, but the find distribution, the fireplaces and the doors, indicate a possible short end position like that said to be favoured and indeed introduced by Olaf Kyrre in the middle of the 11th century (Heimskringla, vol. III, p. 204; translation, Hollander 1964). We may imagine several positions for both the hasæti and the undvegi, but already in the Late Iron Age the archaeological material suggests a situation above the hearth seen from the point of view of the less prominent guests. The notion of the upper and the lower hall has already been established, and so has the hall owner’s separate entrance, where he appears en face, on entering the hall, e.g., in Lejre or at Borg.
Elevation and thus also centrality can be maintained also with the high settle in an elevated corner position, but obviously the effect of the elevated short end position, which, moreover, goes together with the shift in the position of the fireplace and the addition of doors to secure the seclusion in the upper part of the hall, is much more effective. The hall in Vallhagar could be used both ways, and that may have been practical in some situations, but the hall in Lejre is an example of a hall designed to point out the exclusiveness of the hall or high settle owner.

Discussions on the position of the high settle (cf. Birkeli 1932, pp. 10 ff.; Hauglid 1941; Schramm 1956; Holmqvist 1962; Steinsland 1991, pp. 66 ff.) in terms of alternatives like either side-aisle or nave, either corner or long side, are not so rewarding. First of all, the hall is not a substitute for the traditional dwelling, it is an addition to the living quarters. Secondly, the hall is a search for a new type of dwelling, a search for a tradition rather than the application of a sharply defined new way of life. We cannot expect the development of the farmer’s seat to proceed stepwise from undvegi to hásæti nor expect the high settle to be totally unrelated to an earlier concept of the seat. The introduction of the high settle in the upper part of the hall is a matter of splitting the connotation of the concept ‘the hall owner’s seat’ without introducing a clear differentiation among the denotations. It seems that the hall and even more so its prominent seat emerge from an egalitarian Iron Age society and like a vade-mecum the seats and their positions follow the development of the hall owner’s personal power and preferences matched by his possibilities of displaying them.

Figure 9. A proposed schematic development of the position of the prominent seats in the house, hásæti or undvegi. The stages (a–d) probably covered some thousand years.
Figure 10. The hall at Helgö. Find distribution in the hall on Foundation Ia at Helgö. (a) Fragments of filigree glass claw and cone beakers, open triangle. (b) Guldgubbar, open square, and weapons, filled square. (c) Knives, filled triangle, loom-weights and wetstones, a dot. (d) Density map of the find distribution. The first isarithmic curve marks areas with at least 1 find per m². The most dense square metre contains 8 finds, and the whole house (125 m²) 90 finds. The ‘H’ marks the presumed position of the high seat (based on Herschend 1995).
When eventually hall and power, king and throne stand out as synonyms, the hall itself starts to move down the social scale again. It leaves the throne behind and becomes a couple of square metres inside everyone’s front door, perhaps furnished with something to sit on when changing footwear.

The Family in the Hall

Even though some halls like Lejre and Yeavering were hardly just private, the privacy of the hall can be found during the whole of the Late Iron Age inasmuch as hall-life was a socially differentiated vogue related to families of sufficient wealth to split their households into two. Splitting the household was probably a slow process in the first centuries AD when the farms grew, but by the fourth century the original kitchen dwelling was obviously less private than the hall in its everyday use without guests. Good archaeological examples of this privacy may be found in Migration Period Vallhagar or at Viking Age Borg. In Vallhagar there are hardly any finds of high-status artefacts. The artefacts consist of a few larger pots and a fair share of small ceramic drinking cups, together with loom-weights, spinning wheels, some modest jewellery, a glass shard and a box on the floor with seeds and nuts. The distribution of the artefacts may indicate a gender division in the house (Fig. 11) and the artefact material stands out only in comparison with the material in the main house of a farm, where there is an abundance of coarse household ware which makes other artefacts relatively speaking fewer (Fig. 12).

Find categories and distributions are also interesting at Borg in Lofoten (Fig. 13). The artefacts found clearly indicate the different functions of kitchen, dwelling and hall, but at the same time this hall is much more intricate and more ceremonial than the farm hall on Gotland. Nonetheless, the mixture of handicraft utensils and drinking vessels is present, and there seems to be a division of the room into a male and a female part since utensils for weaving belong to the southwest side of the room while small knives and pieces of tufa for smoothing are more common in the northwest one.

All in all ‘Guldgubbar’, artefacts used for wood carving, weaving or spinning, together with lavish drinking glasses and a hearth not used for everyday cooking, indicate the ceremonies as well as the daily family life of the farm owner on the large farm. This is a room for a gender-divided family engaged in handicraft and consequently in talking to each other. Even in the royal milieu of *Beowulf* the nuclear family is present in the hall. The Queen, who administers a significant toast by serving beer to her husband and the three most prominent men in the hall, acts as the king’s complement and the royal princes are duly pointed out to us (*Beowulf*, vv. 1162–92). The ceremonies, as well as the terms, employed to designate the seats used by the hall owner and the guests refer back to an earlier situation in which husband and wife entertained and served their guest or guests, with their children as an audience. Significant parts of the hall life seem thus to be a continuation of the life in the small Early Iron Age farm house.
The Interface Between the Farm Owner and his Guests

The frequent finds in halls of broken glasses are a sign of the significance of the hall as a social room and an interface between the hall owner, the *selerærend* in the terms of *Beowulf*, and a number of invited guests. In Dejbjerg, Dankirke, Helgō and Borg there seem to have been glasses enough for half a dozen guests or more, in any case more glasses than the nuclear family could use privately. Glasses were undoubtedly a sign of wealth, and references to the meadbench in *Beowulf* or the poem about the Battle of Maldon and especially Wealhtheow’s speech in the former when she offer beer to Hröðgar, her husband, as well as to Rolf Kraki and Beowulf, are in my opinion indicative of the wish to display wealth, civilisation and refinement. Drinking in the hall went hand in hand with talking in the hall, if we are to believe the texts, and although the talking can no longer be heard, the existence of drinking vessels is probably a proof of both and a link to show how archaeology and text tell the same story.

In peripheral Lofoten the hall at Borg contains a feature that has been interpreted as a closed pit for seething meat, a construction that indicates the need to host and feed a larger number of people (Johansen O-S 1989, pp. 23 ff.). Cooking is otherwise most uncommon in hall rooms, but in the Lofoten case it is obviously the great distances in that part of Scandinavia that made it necessary to provide for people with food and drink for a longer time than could always be managed in the farm.

Figure 11. Indications of a gender-bound artefact distribution in the hall at Vallhagar (after Biörnstad 1955, Fig. 68).
Figures 12a and b. A comparison between the ceramics from the kitchen-dwelling in Vallhagar House 18 (Gejvall 1955; Stenberger and Klindt-Jensen 1955) (a) and from the hall, Vallhagar House 16 (Björnstad 1955) (b). Water jugs and small mugs characterise kitchen-dwelling and hall respectively.
Figures 13a–c. The distribution in space of artefacts indicating either weaving and spinning (C) or a number of artefacts (B) which could be connected with wood cutting (a). The percentage distribution of artefacts with different functional implications in the dwelling rooms of the main house at the farm Borg in Lofoten: the hall (b) and the kitchen-dwelling (c).
kitchen. The tempo in Northern Norway was no doubt relatively slow and relaxed, despite the possibilities of sailing wherever one pleased, and well suited to the equally slow and ceremonial process of seething (Snorre’s Edda, 9. 95), where the opening of the pit when the meat was ready could easily be fitted into the inauguration of a feast and a communal meal similar to that we hear of in the saga about Håkon the Good (cf. Hultgård 1993, pp. 225 ff.). In more densely populated areas most of the guests could have been expected to time their arrivals and departures in accordance with a more rigorous time-table. The special character of the feast seems to be proved by archaeological and literary sources alike and we may say that the hall owner displays himself and his family in front of a selected number of people in order to realise himself socially.

The Retinue and the Smashed Hall

The existence of a retinue or house-earls in the hall shows itself in the artefact distribution as an element of weapons and fragments of armory. We find this at Dejbjerg, at Helgö and in Eketorp. In the two former sites the finds do not indicate the foremost activity in the hall, but in Eketorp, (Fig. 14), with its emphasis on defence, the weapon finds are characteristic of the hall room.

In the ideal and very densely populated Eketorp society we find an early example of the hall being a room in a house. The division between kitchen and hall room is very obvious and so is the gender division: in the kitchen women cooking and in the hall room men-at-arms. A similar division may also have existed in the hall at Helgö although the two rooms, one with artefacts pertaining to the family, the other with the weapon finds pointing to the retinue, is more remarkable (Figs 10 & 14). In particular, the fact that the two rooms both contain fragments of drinking vessels can be said to unite the master, his family and the retainers in a formal rather than natural way.

The great number of glass vessels has already been mentioned, but one is struck not only by the abundance of glass, but also by the size of the fragments. At Helgö and Borg this can partly or perhaps theoretically be explained by the well preserved state of these sites. This is, however, not a strong argument since in the equally well preserved, albeit continuously cleaned Eketorp settlement, the shards are very often very small, but their number so large that originally there must have been many glasses in the settlement (Herschend 1974, Näsman 1984; 1986). It must also be observed that contrary to Borg, Helgö and Eketorp, Dejbjerg and Dankirke have been so heavily ploughed that big shards have had little chance of surviving, a fact which makes their occurrence even more striking.

On all sites, except Eketorp, the size of the shards can thus be associated with the fact that they were most often found in sheltered positions, in postholes and foundation trenches (Hansen 1990; Hansen 1996; Holmqvist 1961; Lundström 1970, pp. 132 ff.). But this fact alone cannot account for their preservation, since if the shards
were not immediately deposited in the holes and ditches, then they would soon, as in Eketorp, have been broken. Generally speaking, but also in precisely documented cases, when found deep down in sectioned postholes, the glasses indicate that smashing them went hand in hand with smashing or pulling down the buildings.

This characteristic trait is paralleled by the fact that hall fights and hall destruction are major themes in poems about the hall such as *Beowulf* and the poem about the fight at Finnsburg. It is, moreover, in keeping with the hall, as a manifestation of the individual hall owner, that it should attract one's antagonists and their retinue in the competition for individual power. In *Beowulf*, King Hroðgar flatters himself on having built a most splendid hall in the settlement where he lives and the act of building the hall plays an important role, being the inauguration of his kingship. Likewise the initial armistice at Finnsburg (*Beowulf*, vv. 1086–7) contained an agreement saying that a hall should be put in order for the thane of the slain Danish king Hnaef and his retainers. Clearly one cannot be a leader without a hall, however, temporary. The archaeological reflection of the fight in the hall is prominent in the examples known to us. It is so common that we may venture to say that sagas like the fight at Finnsburg

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**Figures 14a, b and c.** The distribution of weapons in three halls. Dejbjerg (a), Helgö (b) and Eketorp (c) (after Hansen 1996; Herschend 1995; 1992).
have their obvious counterparts in the archaeological remains of the Late Iron Age. It seems fair to propose the hypothesis that the struggle for power among the leading families was to a certain degree a matter of fighting each other with the purpose of destroying each other's halls. Smashing rather than plundering was the keynote of this kind of political rather than economic warfare.

The Architecture

For many practical and social reasons farm houses tend to represent a traditional building style – a way of expressing oneself as a member of a collective. With halls it is more or less the other way round. They are designed to reflect the individual hall owner and he constructs his house to be favourably compared with other halls, so that similarities and differences may be pointed out in a meaningful way. Halls are competitive architecture and only a reluctance in the collective, and thus also indirectly among the master builders and kings, to accept the truly unique in buildings or behaviour, make it possible to recognise the halls as a loosely linked set of houses. Representing both the traditional building style and the aspiration towards uniqueness, they may be said to contain a number of conflicting or complementary ideals.

The traditional ideal says that an Iron Age house in South Scandinavia should have an entrance room and in Middle Scandinavia an entrance for humans at one end of the house and another for animals at the opposite end. When the farms grow new entrances may appear, but they are there for practical reasons as the houses are required to contain a larger number of functions. In some halls, however, despite their being small, we find side entrances and entrances of different status which cannot be explained with reference to different indoor functions in the subsistence economy. Since all doors in a hall are designed to fit humans, it therefore makes a difference how we enter and leave the hall. This difference mirrors our role in the hall and we may therefore conclude that some halls break the traditional entrance pattern in which there is only one way of entering or leaving the kitchen dwelling (Fig. 15).

Contrary to the entrance pattern, the arrangement of the hearth and the posts around it is obviously a loan from the dwelling quarters of the traditional main house and a pattern that cannot be changed despite the fact that the hearth in the hall is not meant for cooking, but solely to provide light and heat. The hall is in other words meant to display tradition as well as change.

A few halls, Helgö, Dankirke, Vallhagar and Rönnerum lack an entrance room and here immediate entrance is the only possibility. For this reason these halls fit the entrance procedure that we hear of in Beowulf, in which the formalities before the party is allowed into the hall are settled outside the house. When Beowulf is allowed in, he is immediately at the centre of the story and is listened to and respected.

In The Sagas of the Icelanders, in which the social setting is often a peasant’s hall with only undvegi and no high-seat, we find similar examples of guests who become
the centre of the action as soon as they appear in the doorway of the hall. When the berserk Bjorn visits the high-ranking peasant Vigfus in Viga-Glum’s saga he scans everyone in the hall, checking them out in order to define his own rank as equal to that of the host Vigfus. (Viga-Glum’s saga, 6; Hollander 1972). Probably he does so with the intention of eventually occupying the most prominent seat on the bench opposite to Vigfus, who sits in his undvegi. We may imagine that in Vigfus’ hall there were two juxtaposed seats of close to the same prominence. Each seat was at the top of a bench and the bench headed by Vigfus’ seat was the more prominent. If Bjorn had succeeded he would have created an unstable balance between Vigfus and himself and a troublesome social situation typical of the milieu of The Sagas of the Icelanders. Fate catches up with him, however, when he reaches the lower end and the most inferior seat of the bench opposite to Vigfus’, the bench on which he intends to preside, and tries to bully the sleeping Viga-Glum by kicking manners into him.

Bjorn is a hall-nuisance and in the archaeological record there seems to be examples of Late rather than Early Iron Age halls planned in such a way as to prevent this kind of behaviour. The technique consists in introducing an ante-room in which a more dignified and elaborate role-play can take place before the hall itself is actually entered. The hall in Lejre is an examples of this. Here there is also the additional possibility of entering through a backdoor, which will allow the owner of the hall and probably some of the prominent and honoured guests to enter in such a way that

Figures 15a and b. The lay-out of two hall farms. (a), the possible hall farm at Mörup, Jutland and (b), the hall farm at Vallhagar, Gotland (based on Kaldal Mikkelsen 1988; Stenberger and Klindt-Jensen 1955).
they, contrary to most of the guests and retainers, appear immediately in the upper central part of the hall.

At Wijster and in Anglo-Saxon halls the central doors echo the design of the traditional continental main house, but here the polarisation between, on the one hand, introduction from the street and the entrance room up through the hall room and, on the other, appearance from the chamber in the upper short end of the hall is already fully developed. In brief, entering and leaving the hall was a complicated matter during the Late Iron Age and the complexity probably stemmed from a wish to distinguish entrance as either introduction or appearance, and to mark the status of the entrant by the mode of entry. At first, and also later, on Vigfus’ peripheral farm, the hall seems to have been understood as a function under a roof, which amounts to saying that people had direct entrance to the hall or hall-room from the outside. Technically speaking, the hall was a building but socially speaking it was a room, and thus not a house. It did, however, develop into a house, and in the archaeological record we see this as the physical division of the hall building into several rooms. In Holland this division can be observed already at Wijster, but in Scandinavia only much later. This means that the change from room to house spread from the southwest to the north and northeast over a span of several hundred years. The central functions of the hall must always be performed in a room, but the point in fitting this function into the larger structure and concept of ‘the house’ is to make the hall-room and what takes place there more exclusive.

The large open space is typical of all halls, but also its position in the landscape and outer appearance tend, during the Late Iron Age, to mark out halls as dominating buildings. Wijster is perhaps the most modest example with the entrance incorporated in the fence, but otherwise the elevated position, often juxtaposing burial monuments, is typical of the halls. In Yeavering this context is connected with the res publica of the amphitheatre, and if we are to believe Adam of Bremen (Book IV, 27) and the new excavations in Old Uppsala (Hedlund 1993) the same mixture of mound, hall and public audience also existed here. In Wijster there is a link, albeit modest, between the Stone Age mounds, reused to contain a chieftain’s grave contemporary with the large farm and the hall. In Lejre, Valsgärde and Högom this balance is most obvious (van Es 1967; Christensen 1993; Andersen 1995; Norr and Sundkvist 1995; Ramqvist 1994) (Fig. 16).

The two Svealand examples are linked to what may be seen as a local tradition of building the halls on artificial plateaux (Hedman 1991; Hedlund 1993; Norr and Sundkvist 1995) and in Northern Norway at Borg the elevated position, although created by a natural hilltop, as the name of the farm implies, has a marked symbolic character (Roesdahl 1989;). With these Late Iron Age halls in mind it seems an anachronistic point of view, sometimes expressed in hall literature, e.g., Thompson (1995, pp. 48 and 75), to explain the elevated and sometimes fortified position of the hall as an expression of a general wish to defend oneself and one’s hall. The
Figures 16a and b. The connection between settlement and cemeteries with mounds. (a), the Wijster settlement and its cemetery. (b), the Old Uppsala settlement. The exact sizes of the two settlements are not known and therefore only sections of settlements and graves are shown in order to point out the relation between settlement, hall and graves.
accessible, elevated and at the same time also vulnerable character of the building is a better reflection of the original rationale of the hall. This implies that fortification is part of a development which is not in harmony with the original hall, despite the fact that from the very beginning the peaceful hall life seems to have been difficult to maintain. The centre of society must be approachable and the hall owner strong enough to defend the ideal of the open centre and strong enough not allow us to enter. From an idealistic, Late Iron Age point of view defended halls are a crisis phenomenon although in reality smashed halls are common. We may therefore infer that it was thought better that some halls should be smashed than all halls defended.

The idea that a hall should have a façade can be seen in Wijster and Cowdery’s Down. In Lejre, however, the notion of the façade has been carried further and the main entrance and the position of the hall seem to be designed to create a consciousness about the hall in the mind of the beholder inasmuch as the façade reveals the design of the hall (Herschend 1994a, Fig. 3). This is a marked step forward towards the creation of the official building, as is the isolated situation of the hall in Yeavering. On the whole, however, it must be underlined that the emergence of official architecture is a late phenomenon. But then again this type of architecture is an indirect way of promoting the individual, and Germanic society would have been reluctant to allow that. A splendid interior was probably much easier to justify.

Modesty, lavishness, tradition and change constitute a complex system in which the links between texts and the archaeological records is now and then relatively subtle. For a long time we have noted the curious fact in the description in Beowulf of the hall Heorot, that the hall was held together with an iron band serving as a hoop:

772  þæt he on hrusan ne feol
faenger foldbold  ac he þæs faeste wæs
innan ond utan  irenbendum
searoponcum besmipod

that it did not fall to the ground
the fair building while it was so fast (firmly surrounded)
inside and outside with iron bands
of the smith’s skilful iron work

Although we are given to understand that this fact is some kind of praise it is still an odd fact. However, with growing knowledge about halls the fact has become understandable and also significant. To begin with, we must note Michael Thompson’s (1995, pp. 11 f.) observation that Heorot must have been a house with walls constructed mainly of vertical elements, i.e., elements which had to be prevented from falling out. We may consider it strange that the Scandinavians, having built houses for thousands of years,
had not yet learned how to master the problems connected with the upright position of the house wall, but nonetheless, and as we can also infer from Thompson’s text, walls falling out was a major problem for the halls of the Late Iron Age.

Generally speaking, the development of the South Scandinavian house during the Iron Age meant a change from a house in which the roof tended to fall down at right angles to the ground to a house in which the roof tended to fall at an acute angle, indicating that it was a saddle-roof (Hvass 1988; Herschend 1987; 1989; Tesch 1993; Björhem and Säfvestad 1993; Ulväng 1992; Hansen et al. 1991). It was the wish to build more spacious houses, i.e., houses with higher walls and fewer posts, and probably also a need to economise on timber, which create the problems. In the traditional houses there were naturally no great problems but in halls problems of construction are reflected in the curved long-walls and the outer sloping supports of the hall in Lejre. Later the building technique was improved by the introduction of cross-beams bracing the walls and supporting the queen posts, which carried the side beams as in the houses of the Danish Viking Age ring forts (Fig. 17).

The interesting thing about the Beowulf quotation is that it reflects a technical problem in the building tradition around 500 AD, i.e., in the alleged age of the Beowulf story. There were two different ways of coping with the problem: the cross beams connecting the walls or the curved walls and the outer support preventing the walls from falling apart. The Beowulf solution is inspired by the approach that manifested itself in curved walls and sloping outer supports rather than cross-beams.

It may be that the iron hoop around Heorot never existed, the kind of solution that a cooper’s apprentice could come up with, intended as a humorous fantasy, but it is still a solution which fitted in with traditional technological thinking as well as the need to give the hall building a unique but not too lavish construction, and of course high walls. As a solution it is markedly non-Roman.

Hall and Settlement Structure

It seems likely that the reluctance of the public to accept the monumental hall may also have prevented hall owners from exercising their power as best they wished. As in the architecture of the hall this is also reflected in the structure of the village if it contains a hall. The hall farm is there, but its dominance is not pronounced. We may expect most hall villages to remind us of villages like Feddersen Wierde, Vallhagar or Nørre Snede (Hansen 1988) (Fig. 18), i.e., that the hall belongs to the largest farm around which the other farms are situated, but the hall cannot be immediately pointed out. The village with a large farm constitutes a major pattern in South Scandinavia, with the farms grouped around the big farm, as they were in Hodde (Hvass 1985). Such villages may be more or less strictly structured (Fallgren 1993a) and they may also lack an obviously dominant farm. This is the case with Wijster before the construction of the large farm and its hall. In relatively close connection with the building of
Figures 17a–c. Three sections of roof-supporting constructions in which stability is based on a tie connecting the house walls. Additional support for the walls has been created by outer raking posts (c), by posts which take part of the load on the walls (a) and beams pressing against the walls (b). Together with the tie these beams create a tension between the supportive elements, thus stabilising the construction (after Schmidt 1981; Clemmensen 1937; Henriksson 1989).
this farm, however, the village was divided into three sections separated by streets. It is difficult not to see the introduction in the village of a strict structure and a large farm with a hall (van Es 1967, pp. 56 f. and Fig. 14) as mutually dependent.

Also in Vorbasse we have an example of the same situation. When the Late Iron Age village was moved to its early Viking Age site, this was accompanied by the introduction of precise regulation and a very big farm (Hvass 1979; 1984; 1991). Vorbasse had had several earlier stages with regular sections and no obviously dominant farm or perhaps with a dominant farm located outside the village, but whichever was the case, the change in the settlement pattern seems to show the power of the big farm to organise the structure of the community. The somewhat special case of the ideal and planned Migration Period Eketorp ring-fort shows a complex balance achieved in a seemingly egalitarian, but at the same time hall-dominated settlement. Here planning has been used to stabilise this balance (Herschend 1988; 1991b, pp. 157 ff.)

Examples of this kind of precise settlement regulation introducing a dominant farm are rare, but they must be paralleled with the situations in Beowulf and the tale of Saint Sabas where typical members of the hall-owning nobility are seen to act for the benefit of the collective by establishing an organisation in order to deal with a social crisis, be it due to the symbolic Grendel in Hroðgar’s hall or to the inability of the Visigoth assembly to solve the problem of the communal meal (cf. below pp. 121 ff.). The introduction of a strict settlement pattern in connection with the establishment of a large farm can be seen as a consequence of the kind of corrective executive power described in the texts.

The situation of a Scandinavian settlement is very often but not always one in which the unity of grave and settlement is apparent (cf. Tollin 1989, pp. 77 f.). There seem to be two types.

One is a general connection such as that in Hodde, Klasro, Skavsta or Lindholm Høje (Hvass 1985, p. 96; Norr 1992; Herschend et al. 1993; Olausson 1994; Ramskov 1976, p. 12 Fig. 1), the other a ranking situation where there is an obviously big farm and an obviously dominating grave (Fig. 19). Where it is possible to single out the hall as a prominent building, it also becomes possible to compare the most prominent graves with the most prominent house and to form an axis between the most prominent living and dead. This axis may be seen, e.g., in Wijster, Lejre, Gl. Uppsala, Yeavering or Valsgärde.

The general association between grave and settlement goes back to a shift in the Late Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age, when the Bronze Age barrows with their marginal but monumental position ceased to be a source of inspiration (Carlsson 1979; Tesch 1993, pp. 18 ff.; Björhem and Säfvestad 1993, pp. 353 ff.). This basic connection can also be illustrated by an example from the Mälar Valley from Tibble (Notelid 1993), where houses, fields, hearth area, a burnt mound with offerings as well as graves and cupmark rocks are situated next to each other in a
microcosmic representation of civilisation. While this is the basic connection, which can be found in several varieties over hundreds of years, e.g., Hedegård (Madsen 1995, pp. 184 ff. and Fig. 1) or Sejlflod (Nielsen 1991; Ringtved 1991), there are also combinations in which the rational situation of the settlement, from the point of view of subsistence, seems to come second to the monumental situation of the ritual part of the site (Olausson 1995, p.190 ff.).

To begin with, the association is in other words either general or in a few cases specific and, if specific, the ritual side dominates, but the repeated connection between dwelling and religious ritual is nonetheless firmly established. The connection seems to develop and in somewhat later examples the material wealth of a settlement seems clearly to be indicated by the grave finds (Madsen 1995, pp. 185 ff.) and in the greater part of the Roman Iron Age there is a simple proportionality between material wealth and burial display (Hedeager 1990, pp. 39 ff.; Ringtved 1988a and b).

With due reference to local variations, e.g., the difference between Stevns, where the will to display wealth in burial equipment continues well into the Late Roman Iron Age (Hansen, U., 1988), and the more fashion-sensitive Southern Jutland (Ringtved 1988b and c), the proportionality between social status and grave artefact quality becomes more and more complex with time (Hedeager 1990). This has also been shown by Ringtved (1988a, b and c), who among other aspects followed the change in fashion from male to female graves during the Roman Iron Age and the diminishing significance of display among the rich or fairly rich, when indications of material wealth are moved from the graves of the dominant male gender to those of the subordinate female gender.

On a broader scale, investigating gold objects, Andersson (1995, pp. 9 ff.) has shown the change in wealth display to be a more widespread phenomenon than we may have thought. In connection with gold finds in graves it is therefore worth comparing the differences in the display of grave gold between an area with remote and an area with less remote contacts with the Roman economy (cf. Herschend 1991a). Southern Zealand and Southern Jutland are two such areas. The less remote Jutish area displays only a little gold in absolute quantities and the relative differences in the willingness to display are small (Fig. 20).

In the remote area, on the other hand, burial consumption of gold as well as the relative differences in burial display are large. In the long run, however, there is little doubt that the Zealand practice was a disappearing practice, while at the same time metal economy was spreading in the south Scandinavian area.

Eventually the general association between settlement and grave is replaced by a specific one between the dominant farm and a dominant grave. However, it is not easy to prove this specific relation beyond all doubt, since the connection between farm and grave is indeed one formed by association rather than by logic, as in the Wijster case, where the rich fourth century weapons grave is more or less contemporary with the hall. Likewise in Old Uppsala there seems to be a connection between mounds and hall although the partly excavated hall is later than the mounds. In
a general perspective the significance of the dominant grave, i.e., mound, has recently been discussed by Müller-Wille (1992), and its affinity with Germanic royalty in specific cases by Brulet (1991) and Arrhenius (1995).

When the pattern becomes specific, as in Rosendal on Öland, with the central farm situated close to the largest grave we may expect the pattern most often to be the result of a development of the whole settlement (Fallgren 1993a and 1993b). It probably started with one farm and its grave in a general association which in due course became a specific association when the settlement grew and smaller farms were added as if they originated from the primary farm. In a similar way, new graves were put next to the primary stone setting, but they were small compared to the original monument, and no larger graves were constructed. Only in a few cases, such as Valsgärde and perhaps Lejre, is there reason to believe that the juxtaposition of the graves and the farm was the result of a preconceived and purposeful plan.

With the growing influence of the Church the association between grave and hall became obsolete, and the early medieval farm Halkær, with its quite atypical position in a swampy valley, more like that of a water mill than a main farm, is an example of this separation (Fig. 21).
The connection between a dominant farm and the graves belonging to a settlement reflects the cosmology of the settlement. The proximity of the forefather in the mound and his progeny in the hall could be seen as a general way of forming a link with Heaven. This link can also be inferred from the saga about Aud (see below pp. xxx ff.), who erected a cross next to her farm Hvammr so that she may have a place to pray to God, or from the saga about Skalagrim who built his farm, which he called Borg, next to the place where his father’s coffin landed (Herschend 1994b with ref.). In the halls themselves the cosmological link is implied by the so-called *guldgubbar*, which are surprisingly often found in the filled-in postholes in halls. This is the case for Borg in Lofoten, Helgö, Slöinge, Møre and perhaps Svintuna (Munch *et al.* 1989; Herschend 1995; Rosengren 1994; Lundqvist 1995; Lidén 1969; Nordén 1938).

The most common motif on the gold foils in the halls is the couple embracing each other in a kiss. The link between this motif and the literary Frøy/Gerd motif was pointed out by Ólsen (1909) and developed by Steinsland (1990; 1991). On the basis of several contributions between 1909 and 1989, the motif has revealed an
Figures 21a and b. (a), Early Medieval hall farm Hallkær and (b), its atypical position in the landscape (based on Roussell 1947).
unmistakable connection between the hall of the archaeological record and Norse mythology. The gold foils would have reminded Iron Age men and women of holy wedlock, and of the reproduction of the upper classes. They are the first indisputable examples in Scandinavian prehistory of a symbolic representation of gender-bound affection and love. As such they are typical hall phenomena.

The fact that there seems to have been a high settle in a hall and that such a seat in Asgard gave a cosmic view upon things for gods like Oden and Frøy (cf. Steinsland 1991) is yet another indication that owing to the status of at least some hall owners, the hall should be seen as a cosmological reflection. The hall constitutes a point in Midgard, where, due to the holiness of kings and the way they marry (see below pp. ### ff.), Utgard and Asgard are connected in the focus of Midgard society.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of the eight sections sketching the characteristics of the hall as an archaeological phenomenon it is reasonable to conclude that the hall is closely linked to the main activities and material display of the Iron Age upper classes and royalty when exercising their power, goodness and love in their homes. It is consequently a room for the good and their generosity, at least in the shape and the actions of the hall owner, his family and their guests. The archaeological examples suffice to show that although there are differences and a development among the halls we can also detect similarities and inertia over vast areas and long periods of time.

The hall came to play an important role in the development of the Iron Age aristocracy inasmuch as it constituted a social space in which the aristocracy could thrive as a social group with shared values and shared rituals, whether ethical, religious, political or economic. At the same time the centrality of the hall, and thus also of the hall owner, marks out the individual as the guide and guardian of the collective, as the aristocrat. The hall was one of the phenomena which brought about as well as reflected social change.

**The Choice of Texts**

The texts are intended to facilitate the analysis of the usage of the word good and its relevance to the hall-governed society. They are examples and do not contain all the references to the word. There is hardly any point in trying to collect all texts containing the word good since the chance that they would be numerous enough or evenly distributed in time, or representative in a social perspective, is minimal. The reason for analysing the texts must therefore be sought in their referring to a widespread concept in such a way as to suggest that the concept had some sort of commonly accepted meaning, and common development of meaning, in the area and period in
question. This is certainly a matter of significance by association rather than a matter of proving a certain conceptual value, and we must satisfy ourselves with the impression that the examples are sufficiently complex to give substance to our discussion. The modern usage of good is, on the other hand, fairly clear and we are therefore running the risk, pointed out by Jones in connection with the word honour (1959, pp. 3 f.), of being trapped in our anachronistic views upon the meaning of the word. Likewise, and as pointed out by John Casey in his analysis of Pagan virtue (1990, pp. 199 ff.), our mixture of Kantian and Christian ideas about the character of the good, goodness and what good actions are, tends to prevent us from seeing the qualities of Pagan virtues (cf. Casey 1990, pp. vi ff.).

If we depend on earlier historical research then the meaning of the word good can, with the exception of the rune-stones, only be inferred from dictionaries or from by-products of the analysis of the appellatives þegn and drengr. There is in other words no research tradition to build on when it comes to selecting texts and so, also for this reason, a specific choice is no better than one based on common sense and texts are useful only in a general discussion.

The two Anglo-Saxon texts, Beowulf—mainly the first part—and the poem about the Battle of Maldon, have been chosen because they cover the whole period, c. 500 to 1000 AD, in a conscious literary form. Beowulf is in many ways a didactic poem (cf. Outzen 1816; Lindqvist 1958, pp. 117 ff.; Haarder 1975, pp. 106 ff.) and it draws upon the whole of the traditional and complex usage of good. Its usage is so consistent that it is hard to imagine that it should be part of the redaction made by the scribes who produced the manuscript around 1000 AD. This is attested not least by the fact that the second part of the poem is a complement to the first part reflecting a Christian attitude to the concept of goodness much more contemporary with the manuscript as such than the first part. In Beowulf, good is an essential concept used in two different ways that taken together reflect a development. It is hardly reasonable to suggest that scops or scribes manipulated the whole text to make it appear as that which indeed it seems to be, namely, two juxtaposed, chronologically separated oral poems written down on parchment.

The poem about the Battle of Maldon also suggests a change in the approach to the concept of Goodness. Here there are some structural similarities in the usage of the word good, but the concept is deprived of much of the complexity that characterises its usage in the first part of Beowulf. In this contemporary, within a generation or two, description of a crisis for the good in connection with a lost battle c. 1000 AD, we find an up-to-date view upon the concept that differs considerably from the ideal in the first part of Beowulf even though its affinities with Pagan and martial rather than Christian ideals are obvious.

Turning to the Italian poet Venantius Fortunatus, we find a substantial part of the early Beowulfian ideal in his four poems about the Merovingian Duke Lupus, poems which can be dated to the decades around 570 AD. Although they are a Late Classical
reflection of Germanic ideals, their connection with the ideals in *Beowulf*, and the fact that they were appreciated by the Merovingian nobility suffice to strengthen the meaning of the good as a widespread Germanic ideal in the sixth century. Moreover, the Lupus poems provide contemporary support for the authenticity of the retrospection in the first part of *Beowulf*.

The section from the Martyrdom of Saint Sabas is brought into the discussion in order to cast light on the possibility that the ideal of the poems was highly class biased. Should this be the case then the importance of the ideal is not negated by that, but it becomes necessary to point out the analytical difficulties that must be kept in mind when we turn to the development of the ideal in its Scandinavian context. This context is made up by rune-stone texts which belong to a broad social spectre.

Rune-stone research provides us with a possibility to benefit from a discussion about the meaning of the word good, but the stones also link in with the overall analysis and pave the way for understanding the ‘changements’ in Pagan ideals, the influence of Christianity and the meaning of the concept outside the uppermost stratum of society.

The analysis of the texts can be expected to generate genuinely gender-bound results, revealing very few good women. In order to illustrate this bias and its affinities with both Pagan and Christian ideals the *landnám* saga fragments concerning Queen Aud (*Landnámaðbók*, pp. 136–47; Pálsson and Edwards 1972) are brought into the discussion. Here, as it happens, Christian and female actions are still in keeping with the Iron Age ideal, but at the same time a symbol of their decay.

The decay of the prehistoric concept is also touched upon in the chapter concerning the characteristics of the good which sums up the usage in a discussion of the meaning of two Icelandic concepts, honour and friendship. Not only did these concepts survive prehistory, they grew to become of paramount, although very specific, importance in Icelandic society (Jones 1959, p. 7.; Meulengracht Sørensen 1993; Sigurðsson 1993, pp. 141 ff.). In this discussion the question of development versus differences caused by the usage within different social groups is in focus and it seems that the Sabas example and the rune-stones make it possible to argue that although there is a difference in the usage according to social status, there is also a general change in the meaning and usage of the concept.

The texts describe the complexity of the ideal in general terms. Local varieties, limited chronological differences or the attitude of the individual to the concept, are not reflected in the texts. The texts are likely to form an interlocking pattern and the basic justification for the analysis lies in the fact that the hall, to which the usage is linked, is a widespread phenomenon with a number of common and changing qualities which fit the general outline indicated by the texts.

If the practise of the research into cultural history can be seen as polarised in order to bring about development, then it is right to say that the case-study belongs to the one extreme and the systematic study to the other. This investigation consists mainly of a small series of case-studies since we have no way of deciding whether
the sources used, houses as well as texts, are sufficiently representative to support a systematic analysis. Nevertheless, given the theme of our study it is hardly likely that the results will primarily be a reflection of specific cases.

Earlier Research

Not much has been written about the meaning of the word good in the sources employed here. In his study of honour in German literature, Jones (1959) touches frequently upon the word, but mostly in connection with medieval texts, and nothing has been written at all on this theme when it comes to Sabas, Lupus or Magnulfus, while to the best of my knowledge its use in *Beowulf* has only occasionally been touched on. I think that this lack can be explained by our failing to understand the prehistoric setting in which the word developed meaning, and because of this the discussion has hitherto been rather tentative and characterised both by basic disagreements and by several promising ideas. The best discussion is probably Scandinavian and concerned with the appearance of the word good on Viking Age rune-stones. I shall make this discussion my point of departure, although the usage in these texts is linked to a many-sided transitory phenomenon and a fashion. Presenting this research and the problems that it has raised, will, however, introduce some of the foundations for my discussion of the concept.

By and large the epithet seems less interesting than the appellatives, *þegn*, *drengr*, *comitatus*, *maðr* etc., connected with it. In dealing with these appellatives two opposite opinions have governed remarks and discussions. One opinion was put forward by Jónsson (1926), and later by many others, who argue that good describes the character of a person whom today we would call brave and righteous. The other opinion, advocated by Aakjær (1927) or Jacobsen and Moltke (1941–42; 1976), holds that the epithet good was used on rune-stones to designate a person ‘esteemed’ by birth, and ‘good birth’ is no doubt a medieval metaphor similar to ‘well-born’ (cf. Jones 1959, p. 60).

Finnur Jónsson makes a very clear statement in his essay in the newspaper *Politiken* on May 11th 1926. Following Wimmer (1914) he argues that *drengr* and *þegn* meant a young and an older capable man respectively and therefore good in front of these words should be considered to qualify the character of such men. Good qualified their mentality or their characters, indicating that it was noble or honest, though not by birth. Jónsson stresses the peacefulness of the rune-stone texts and states that the words *drengr* and *þegn* do not designate warriors alone, although it is quite possible that a brave warrior could also have been a good *drengr* or *þegn*.

Svend Aakjær (1927) turns against the views expressed by Wimmer and Jónsson. He accepts that in the rune-stone texts as well as in The Sagas of the Icelanders and medieval codes of laws the contexts are not always helpful, if we want to find out the meaning of the words *drengr* and *þegn*, and therefore the quali-
fier good is even more difficult to judge. Nevertheless, when Aakjær turns to the
Old English usage of the words he finds that the position of the thane, *þegn*, is
more official and regulated as if thanes made up a formal group or category of
people. *Drengr*, a peculiarly Nordic word, is less common in Anglo-Saxon texts,
but the use of the qualifier good in combination with *þegn* eventually convinces
Aakjær that during the Viking Age the expressions *góðr þegn* and *góðr drengr*
signified members of the nobility if they were not simply titles. The fact that later on
the expressions lost their specific meaning is of course no argument against their
having had a Viking Age meaning inspired by Anglo-Saxon usage.

Aakjær favours a thesis that defends the existence of a formal institution, i.e., a
class of nobility in Denmark during the Viking Ages. In a recent study, based partly
on literary, partly on archaeological evidence, Duczko (1995, pp. 634 ff. & 658)
argues that in Sweden the place-name *Tegneby*, but also rune-stone texts, in
which the appellative or name *þegn*/*Þegn* is used, signify the introduction of a
*þegn*-based and Danish administrative system in Sweden. Duczko may thus be
said to support Aakjær’s strongest formulation which states that *drengr* and *þegn*
were in Viking days titles of a sort for members of the king’s attendant nobility
(Aakjær 1927, p. 29).

If we disregard the strongest interpretation and confine ourselves to *drengir*
and *þegnar* being noblemen with a more than personal relationship with the king,
then the core of Aakjær’s thesis has been widely accepted (cf. Christensen 1969,
28 ff.; Christophersen 1982, pp. 129 ff.). It is, however, doubtful whether the
rune-stone texts can prove an institution formally recognised as a nobility. None-
theless, even cautious historians like Aksel E. Christensen come close to describ-
ing *drengr* and *þegn* as a formal stratum in society (Christensen 1969, p. 222).

Jacobsen and Moltke (1942) concur with Aakjær, but they do not deny of
course that the usage favoured by Jónsson (1926) can be found. On the grounds
of the formulaic prose and the verses on the Danish rune-stone, and bearing in
mind those high social status of the commemorated, e.g., on the Karlevi-stone
with its verse glorifying the warrier, we must agree with Moltke and Jacobsen that
to understand the epithet good as meaning merely brave, honest or righteous
seems not quite to the point. Sibba’s virtues are undoubtedly linked to his social
status as a chieftain whether inherited or not. In 1976 Moltke (1976, pp. 237 ff.)
repeats his earlier views but he also makes a distinction between an ethical usage,
e.g., *faðir sin góðr*, and a social usage in which good means well-born. His point
of departure is still the usage of the words *þegn*, *drengr* and perhaps *svein* as
military titles connected with the age of the person; *þegn* being the older warrior.
The word good was thus meant to differentiate between warriors of different de-
scent. This means that we may be born good, i.e. noble, but not born *drengr* or
*þegn*, on the contrary the titles are part of a career.
Although we may accept the argument, it is still odd that in Denmark a góðr þegn is as common as a góðr drengr. If the quality of being good was acquired by birth it would indeed tend to be a more or less constant factor, but since warriors often die young and often are members of the upper stratum of society to be commemorated, we would have expected góðr drengr to be much more common on rune-stones than the good (old) thanes.

In some cases it may also be troublesome that the word could mean both ethically good and well-born, while doubt concerning either meaning is hardly flattering. On the stone from Sønder Vissing (Moltke 1976, pp. 162 f.) King Harold Bluetooth is called the good (by his wife) and that is reasonable if we can be sure that the word refers to his qualities as a king. It is only natural that his wife wants to distinguish him as a better king than others, but is hardly flattering if the word is meant to point out that he was of noble birth—something Harold and his wife would have expected everybody to know.

Lastly, it must also, generally speaking, be considered doubtful whether the goodness of one born good, would spill over to appellatives describing his development as a warrior or his social status. It seems more likely that men acquired the status of being good as a part of their social career in much the same way as they qualified as þegn and drengr.

Strid (1987) points to the difficulties of settling the matter as one of either good by character or good by birth when he discusses the use of þegn and drengr in runestone texts from Svealand. Here the use of these appellatives is vaguer than in Denmark or Västergötland, and it seems difficult to believe that good is an inherited quality. On the other hand, he is reluctant to say that an expression like góðr drengr signifies just any good young man. He recognises the definite link between good and þegn or drengr.

Strid’s doubts as to whether Moltke’s and Jacobsen’s usage of good holds true in Uppland and Södermanland are much in line with Nielsen (1945) and supported by Stocklund (1991, p. 295.). These doubts are strengthened by the stones on which two close relatives are commemorated, but only one of them called good. In the text on SÖ 287 one brother is good, but the other is not. In U 324 the deceased is a neutral brother to his brother, but a good son to his mother. In U 512 the father is good, but the brother is not. Lastly, in U 808 the commemorators, two sons, are góðir drengr, something people are reluctant to praise themselves for, but the father is neutral. If we take them one by one, we can find explanations why good is not linked to inheritance in each of these cases, but the fact that we have seven stones commemorating two closely related deceased men, on three of which both are called good while four are split, must lead us to conclude that good is an epithet with a broad rather than narrow usage (cf. Gräslund 1995, p. 469 f.).

During the Viking Age steps were probably taken towards making nobility a formal institution. It is nonetheless doubtful whether the goal was reached and unlikely
that a common word such as good, used in widely different Scandinavian societies, could be adopted by an institution that was barely formalised and perhaps not yet recognised.

Jansson (1984, pp. 131 ff.) and Herschend (1994b, pp. 187 ff.) discuss the texts in which the person commemorated is praised for his generosity with food. To Jansson these texts stand as a symbol of the good peasant or master, i.e., a bóndi. In addition to this kind of flattery good is also used as an epithet describing a manifested quality of a man such as his seamanship, honour and bravery. Good seems thus to have been a way of both pointing out the character of a person as well as the quality of his formal or informal functions in society, and Jansson’s opinion has affinities with Moltke’s (1976, pp. 162 ff.). Jansson links generosity with food and the mildness that goes together with it to the very last lines of Beowulf, in which the dead king is praised for the same qualities as the peasants in the Mälar Valley.

Herschend (1994b) compares these texts, where good is qualified in several ways, such as being a matter of generosity with food, quality of speech, mildness, ability to listen and to negotiate, with a set of stones where good is part of a general description. He connects the former stones with one of two complementary sides of the Late Iron Age idea of chieftainship and rulership, i.e., the peaceful negotiative side as opposed to the generous and brave side, but he thinks of the usage of good in very broad terms as just generally speaking ‘good’.

In a discussion of the meaning of the words drengr and þegn, primarily in scaldic verse, Jesch (1993) demonstrates two different usages of the former, namely the eventual change from a specific meaning (close follower of a warlord) to a more general one (man; warrior). Furthermore, she sees differences between an East Norse and a West Norse usage of both words (Jesch 1993, pp. 166 and 196 f.). In my opinion the East Norse meaning of drengr would agree with the late West Norse usage.

Jesch mentions the connection with good, but does not elaborate upon expressions like góðr drengr or góðr þegn. That is quite natural since the expressions are commonplace stock-phrase prose. In the compressed format of the dróttkvætt (Gade 1995, pp. 29 ff.) one gains very little from the word ‘good’ and generally speaking it is a waste of a syllable.

In his discussion of the positive male ideal drengr, Meulengracht Sørensen (1993, pp. 203 ff.) touches upon the use of the word good in the expression drengr góðr, an expression that designates a man’s personality. Since drengr góðr may also be used about women it is fairly obvious that in The Sagas of the Icelanders the expression has developed into a normative ideal without designating a nobility that did not exist on Iceland (cf. Jesch 1993, p. 166). The usage is meant to describe a person who defends his or her own integrity without wronging others—a forceful, but disciplined person (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, pp. 203 & 205.). Meulengracht Sørensen agrees, in other words, with Jónsson 1926. His interpretation is difficult to reject, but it concerns only The Sagas of the Icelanders.
The change in the meaning of the words þegn and drengr in medieval times reflected in the analysis of Jesch and Meulengracht Sørensen was observed already by Aakjær (1927) and has been further discussed, e.g., by Christophersen (1982, p. 132). In relation to the word good the problem of understanding þegn and drengr relates to the fact that the Iron Age usage of drengr as a social quality was closely related to the quality of being good, while in the Christian era the word was not primarily linked to being a warrior or member of a retinue. Comparing two quotations from a medieval code of laws shows this:

*Sextandi war Swarkir konungær, sniællær man oc goðþær þraengær.* Västgötalagen (Schlyter I, p. 302).

The sixteenth was Sverker, a capable (nice) man and a good drengr.

*Döpis ængin tysna. elles han see swa gother dængær at han sik sjælwer j Jorþdan döpir.* Smålandslagen (Schlyter VI, p. 104).

No one is to be christened twice if he is not so good a drengr that he christens himself in the Jordan.

About the king we hear an echo of the prehistoric good, the social external quality, paired with the quality of being capable, sniællær, which is a variety of being good, but when it comes to baptism, in the second quotation the expression suggests the Christian disposition and an individual internal quality. The character of proved loyalty, which is essential to the prehistoric concept and also the rationale for flattering the king, namely his loyalty to his people, is absent from the quotation about baptism, which implies one of the possible benefits of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In this question good describes someone with an inclination for pilgrimage.

There is little doubt that drengr or góðr drengr designate a man who stands out in society as loyal and if we are not kings and loyal to our people loyalty is directed towards some sort of leader of a hierarchy. The words reflect the sorting of men within the hierarchies in such a way that it is better to be a góðr drengr than drengr. The same is true of þegn in relation to a king or a chieftain, but in addition it is possible for the þegn himself to be a leader to whom we, e.g., as drengr, ought to be loyal. Þegn may in other words designate a man with a stable and more or less elevated social position, but the basic divide is probably that between a serf and a man of family. This is expressed in the Västgöta code of laws in the following way:

*Prel draper man ættapa han ana eig hetæ þengsbane. bóndi skal sak bótæ. baþe arna bot ok ættærbót.* (Västgötalagen, Schlyter I, p. 125).

If a serf kills a man of family he shall not be called a thane’s bane (i.e. a free man’s bane). (His) master shall pay the fine. Both the fine to heirs and to the family (cf. Holmbäck and Wessén 1946, p. 25 and 45, notes 51 and 52).
The point of the law is to link a rule to the stratification of society and to tell us that the serf, although a man, is not a human being, but more like a soul-less animal or a thing. The divide between thane and serf, þegn and þrel, is in other words that between the socially accepted and the socially unacceptable man.

Gräslund has, in a recent article (1995), discussed the meaning of good on runestones, from a gender perspective, pointing out that if good means ‘generally speaking good’, as Herschend proposed (1994b, pp. 187 ff.), it is strange that so very few women are described as good. In agreement with Strid, Gräslund rejects Moltke’s views (Moltke 1985, pp. 288 f.) and explains the lack of epithets expressing quality, as well as of descriptions of women’s achievements and women’s ways of dying, as a result of the narrow world—the farms and the local community (cf. Holtsmark 1964, col. 565 ff.)—of the rune-stone woman. Women, at least in the Mälar Valley, were privately, but not publicly good.

So, in relation to Moltke’s view upon the word also Gräslund favours a general meaning. Good does mean generally speaking good, but rune-stone texts are not designed to give a fair picture of the usage. This gender bias is odd, but perhaps significant for the Late Iron Age, since there are other words, which are in our opinion rather neutral, such as the Anglo-Saxon (wel)-þungen, i.e., accomplished or excellent, a word used about women only. We can, however, be sure that several men considered themselves accomplished or excellent.

Hovstad (1958) discusses the connection between good and drengr and he gives several examples from The Sagas of the Icelanders showing that good is a reinforcing of the word drengr parallel to constructions such as drenglikr and dreng-skapr. Good drengr thus means a good man, trustworthy and helpful of the weak. His examples suffice to show how (Christian) ethics influenced the meaning of good, and Hovstad dates this influence to the end of the Viking Age.

In his discussion of the personal qualities of the Icelandic goði, Sigurðsson (1993, pp. 94 ff. and p. 95 note 5) points to two examples of the expression góðr drengr signifying two of the peaceful, nice and good-natured representatives of that group of men. Hovstad, Meulengracht Sørensen and Sigurðsson demonstrate the Christian and Pagan links necessary to understand the Christian and, moreover, Icelandic usage of drengr as a disposition, an internal quality, and thus also the stock expression drengr góðr. Their analyses supply us with a hint as to the general development of the usage, not least for the interpretation of the rune-stones.

Even in the rune-stone material there are texts strongly pointing to a Christian meaning of good:

*Assurr gerði kumbl þessi æfti Öind, faður sinn. Hann var manna mæstr oniðingr, var yndr matar ok omunr hatrs. Goðr þegn Guðs tro goða hafði* (SM 37).

Assurr made this memorial after his father Öind. He was the most honest man, was generous with food and unwilling to revenge. A good þegn; he had God’s good faith.
Ulf and Ragnar they erected this stone after Fari their father . . . a Christian man. He had the good faith in God.

There is little doubt that Öind was good in a Christian sense and that the goodness of Fara’s Christian belief was confidence in God and not the pursuit of worldly success. The peaceful if not meek disposition of Öind in spite of his being a þegn is also worth noting. Here þegn is hardly an appellative for a man who is nothing more than a member of the chieftain’s or king’s warrior retinue. Pegn is an appellative for a relatively peaceful male ideal and there is a causal tie between his goodness as a þegn and the goodness of his belief in God.

Birgit Sawyer discusses good in an article and suggests that it was used as a marker of social status in connection with men who were important landowners (Sawyer 1991, p.110). The correlation between good and the words drengr and þegn is interpreted as a link between the social status and the title quality of these words. Sawyer does not believe that the words refer to goodness of heart, competence or skill, since texts using good are so uncommon that they cannot reasonably be supposed to describe this phenomenon.

This argument is not entirely convincing since there is on the whole no indication that rune-stone texts were ever meant to describe anything in a neutral way. The odd usage of the word in connection with rune-stones seems, moreover, to be proved by its restricted use in relation to women (Sawyer 1991, p. 110) and its strong correlation with the appellatives and possible titles, drengr and þegn.

Sawyer, we may infer, takes Moltke’s point of view more or less for granted, but with reference to Sawyer this way of favouring the social status of the word has been commented upon by Práinson (1994). He points out the purely spiritual meaning of the word in Þorvalds þátur tasalda (Práinson 1994, p. 36). In the short narrative the Pagan Bárðr has been brought in front of King Olaf in Nidaros by the dugandi drengr (the king’s capable young man) Þorvald tasalda and Þorvald’s friend the dugandi and góðr (capable and good) Sigurðr. In this situation Bárðr tells the King that he wants to become a Christian and the following happens:


Bard and all his men were then christened. Then Bard spoke: You tell me King whether I am now good. The King said that so it was.

Bard’s and our doubts thus set to an ironic rest, we may rejoice and notice that the goodness of Sigurð and Barðr is combined in Öind, the father mentioned on the rune-stone SM 37 quoted above. This means that goodness by christening, a mockery of the Pagan ideal, spread as far as Småland. The quotation from Smålandslagen is an example of the same phenomenon.
The discussion of good in Scandinavian research emanates from its connection with the terms *þegn* and *drengr*. Good in its own right has attracted interest only in recent years and the dependency on earlier discussions is very obvious. However, the will to see the concept in view of the tension between the private and the public character of goodness seems to provide an appropriate basis for summing up a discussion in which few contributors have been totally wrong and nobody totally right.

There is a link to the public and the professional in the use of good in a text like this:

*Ríkr/Rinkr/Ringr ok Hulti ok Fastgæirr þæir letu . . . stæin at Vigmar, faður sinn, styrimann goðan. Likbiorn rísti. (U FV1976, p. 104).*

Ríkr and Hulti and Fastgæir they had . . . stone after their father Vigmar; a good ship’s captain. Likbiorn carved.

In this text the professional/social qualities match Vigmar’s family position and character as a father. With the Glavendrup-stone in mind (DR 209) and the link to the obvious usage of at least *þegn* as a title in Anglo-Saxon contexts (Aakjær 1927; Lindow 1976, pp. 106 ff.) we may well see the above usage as connected with the tendency to view some skills and professions as more or less synonymous with the state of being good—a gender goodness. It is, moreover, a usage in connection with a profession and a *styriman* is close to being an exponent of a formal institution in the Viking Age world.

The contrast to this public/professional usage in connection with institutions about to become formal, i.e., the obviously family-good text, can be exemplified by another stone from Uppland:

*Gy ok Svæinn þæir ræistu stæin at Birsu, faður sinn goðan. Ærnfastr hiogg stæin at Birsu, bonda Vigærðar, sun Þorgærðar goðan. (U 79).*

Gy and Svæin they erected stone after Birsu their good father. Ærnfastr hewed the stone after Birsu, Vigærða’s husband (master), Þorgærða’s good son.

In this case good is a family matter. Birsí is good as a father and good as a son, but not in his position as his wife’s master. His goodness is of a most informal kind. This is noteworthy, since *bóndi goðan*, where *bóndi* is drifting towards the public role of a master, is a common expression and it is much more common to describe a *bóndi* as good than it is to say the same of a father or a son. The meaning of good seems to have been distributed between two different qualities: one in which it becomes a synonym for some of the public roles of the male gender, another in which good seems to mirror the private character of a person. This later ideal is not well developed among the rune-stone texts: first of all, because this way of using good is a late phenomenon probably inspired by the transition from Pagan to Christian ethics, secondly, owing to the cultural blockage which made it virtually impossible to call a rune-stone woman good.
Earlier discussions of the Old English, Greek or Latin texts analysed in the following chapter do not elaborate on the use of the term good. This is probably because the use of the word is very restricted in these texts compared with the rune-stone texts where good is a relatively frequent word. The discussion of good in The Sagas of the Icelanders is negligible in comparison with the discussion of honour (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993) and friendship (Sigurðsson 1993). The meaning of the word should be commented upon on the basis of the analysis of honour and friendship since, in the saga fragments discussed below, honour and friendship are echoes of Late Iron Age usage of good and other qualitative concepts.

Conclusion

It looks as if the hall that we recognise archaeologically was indeed the central room of the upper stratum of the Late Iron Age society. It was the room in which they created their ideals of power and personal qualities, their ideological think-tank, from which they emerged to try to rule the rest of the people or to take part in their own struggle for power against their rivals.

Although the idea of good may have brought forth characteristic behaviour in many different Iron Age settings it seems natural that it should have existed in the hall and prospered in a room so well suited for staging generosity and eloquence. The point in combining the hall and the textual analysis of good behaviour is thus first to draw attention to a concept that today we are perhaps unconsciously somewhat reluctant to recognise and translate as good. Lund’s splendid translation into Danish of Maldon (1991) is a subtle example of this. In two out of six straightforward cases, Lund does not use god, i.e., good, to translate góð, despite the fact that it would have been quite reasonable to do so in Danish. Secondly, we ought to discuss whether the relation between the word and the hall can provide a sense that is otherwise split among several related concepts later to become prominent in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages.

Contrary to concepts like honour or covrage, which have undergone continuous evolution up to our day, the meaning of the word good undergoes a major transformation when Christianity was established, which makes it interesting from the point of view of cultural history. We may not succeed in fully appreciating the most deviant Christian and Pagan forms of goodness, but goodness is still worthwhile.
II. Usage and Non-Usage

The Good Composition

In the two Anglo-Saxon poems, *Beowulf* (Part i) and *Maldon*, there is a tendency at times for the word good to occur two or three times within a couple of dozen lines, as if the word had a particular claim to be used. It is also characteristic of the texts that they begin and end by frequently using the word, namely two times in the first 25 lines and two times in the last 22 lines of *Beowulf* (Part i) together with two concluding *selra*, i.e. ‘better’, in the last 7 lines. In *Maldon* good is used twice the first 16 lines and once in the last 11 ones. That frequency, c. one good each eleventh line, is about ten times higher than the average for both poems. Between the end points good is used now and then in groups which are often related to episodes. In these episodes the usage parallels the usage in the poems as a whole, since here too the word signals the beginning and the end of the scenes. The speech made by the Queen Wealhtheow (vv. 1162–1192) in *Beowulf* is an example of this usage (Fig. 22).

The episode consists of Wealhtheow’s speech as she carries round a drinking bowl in order to administer a toast. It is set in frames to guide the listener from the beginning to the end and her words, formally directed to her husband, constitute a narrative about the importance of being good, leading up to a specific conclusion. The intention and the structure of the episode is, as we shall see later on, a parallel to the whole first part of the poem (Fig. 23).

This structuring principle is most obvious in the first part of *Beowulf*, and it structures the part as well as several episodes within it. In *Maldon*, however, the missing beginning and end makes it more reasonable only to point out that the central part of this poem, lines 166–189, is an episode structured by this usage of the word (Fig. 24).
Since good is a commonly used word with a meaning that is difficult to restrict one would expect there to be exceptions to its usage as a structuring word in this specific kind of narrative, but they are surprisingly few. In *Beowulf* the word is used twice (once v. 1952 and once in v. 1969), without belonging to the same episode. The tendency to use the word twice rather than once is at hand, but the thematic link is not acknowledged. In v. 236 of *Maldon* we find the word used once in the centre of the brave, encouraging, but short speech delivered by Offa, Byrhtnoth’s second-in-command. This means that only in three out of 29 cases is the word used with a non-structural function.

Although the structuring qualities of the word are perhaps more substantial than we would have expected, its prominence does not come as a surprise since both poems concern the problem of being good. *Maldon* is a tragic poem about Byrhtnoth’s lost battle and *Beowulf* (Part 1) is the tale about the success of the victorious hero. Both men are, however, characterised as good. Their virtues are many, but such things as generosity, honour, friendship, righteousness, loyalty, eloquence and even physical strength are clearly linked to the two men’s quality of being good.

The word plays an important role also in the Sabas letter. Sabas is obviously not characterised by the same sort of goodness as Beowulf and Byrhtnoth, since his goodness is internal and a matter of his peaceful, loving, pious and strong-hearted Christian disposition, but the tendency for the probably Germanic author to repeat the word at short intervals in the beginning, i.e., the second section, of his narrative when Sabas’ daily actions, rather than his general Christian opinions are in focus, is obvious enough. It is essential for the author to point out Sabas as being good and also partly good in his actions, before we hear of his persecution (Herschend 199, pp. 155 ff.).

Although Venantius Fortunatus writes about a successful Germanic hero, in effect a good man rather than a tragic figure, and although there are many opportunities to
use the word good, he does so only once in the poems about Lupus. His usage is general, but when Venantius, on behalf of Lupus, appeals to Lupus’ brother Magnulf, there is more mentioning of goodness and of other qualities that go together with the Germanic ideal of being good. The poem (Venantius vii, Poem 10) consists of 22 lines and good is used in lines 6 and 18, i.e., in the end of the introduction and just before the petition for Lupus (cf. below p. 113). This means the each of the two sections building up to the request for the reinstallation of Lupus, ends by stressing the good. This is obviously Venantius’ way of reminding the minor Germanic petty chieftain Magnulf of why, when and how, he, with his Germanic background rather
than pious disposition, ought to do the good. The poem does not exhibit any deep insights into Germanic ways, but it is a practical example of the merging of the two cultural ideals that characterised the Merovingian society.

As a petition Venantius’ short letter is not part of the Germanic ideal of goodness. On the contrary, the petition as a genre belongs to the Christian ideal. It is from his Christian point of view that Venantius makes use of his understanding of the Germanic ideal.

The structured use of the word good in the texts offers two ideals: one is concerned with the use of a most significant word in the Germanic culture, the other linked to the classical and in effect Christian use. In texts where Pagan ideals are criticised or moderated by a Christian faith, good does not structure the texts as obviously as in the Anglo-Saxon poems concerning Beowulf and the Battle of Maldon. In texts written from a Christian point of view only that addressed toMagnulf uses the word to structure the text.

The rune-stones constitute a special group characterised by the repeated use of formulaic prose and a few original poetic expressions. These texts seldom lend themselves to more elaborate analyses of composition and structure, but good is nonetheless a word which is often mentioned rather emphatically at the end of the texts. Here good is simply linked to words such as þegn, drengr, maðr, bóni, faðir, sunr or broðir (thane, youth, man, master/husband, father, son or brother), to logocentric qualities, such as the ability to listen and negotiate, and to generosity with food. The very fact that the word good appears in the laconic setting of the rune-stone text may, however, well be a strong indication that its usage was conventional, corresponding to what was commonly understood by the word good over a period of some hundred years, during which the concept was changing.

The Viking Age rune-stones were mainly a vogue phenomenon beginning in the 10th century in Denmark and ending in Northeast Uppland in the beginning of the 12th century (Moltke 1976; Jansson 1984; Sawyer 1991a and b; Gräslund 1991; 1992). During this period and parallel to the geographical shift in its centre of gravity, the fashion spread down from the uppermost stratum of society into broader layers (Sawyer 1991a). In time the Christian character of the monuments became deeply embedded in the tradition although demonstrative Christian symbols, such as crosses and prayers, were only a passing fashion within a greater tradition (Hallgren 1992; Herschend 1994). It is probable that the stones themselves, their ornament and text, are a reflection of the large-scale change in the Late Viking Age society of South Scandinavia (Herschend 1994, pp. 101 ff.), and although there is uniformity in the development there is also an abundance of regional and local traditions which should not be confused with the general development.

Regional differences, such as the preference for stones mentioning bridges in Southeast Uppland (Herschend 1994, Figs 12 and 22, p. 33), can be explained by the lowland topography of that landscape. Other geographically defined preferences
may be the working areas of carvers like Balli (cf. Brate 1925, p. 51; Philippa 1977; Weskamp 1987) or the use of Christ in prayers, which could partly be the result of the preferences of a specific missionary (Segelberg 1983; Herschend 1994, pp. 54 ff.) or preferences within a family (DR, stones nos. 391 and 392). Some preferred formulae, e.g., the prayer ‘God help his spirit and soul’ must on the other hand be explained as geographically defined with respect to more general religious terms (Herschend 1994, pp. 57 f.).

The most interesting regional groups are those which have a limited geographical distribution despite the fact that they are defined only in very general terms, such as great uniformity in design and style. They designate that something which we would consider commonplace was nonetheless something special. Such groups have been defined in seminar papers (cf. Lindblad and Wirtén 1994; Hansson 1994; Sundquist 1996) and found to exhibit a markedly regional distribution (Fig. 25). This kind of distribution can be explained only by reference to a fairly sharply defined regional fashion, linked to a multitude of social preferences. These preferences may overlap each other like the distribution of the spirit-and-soul prayers on the one hand and the distribution of Hansson’s Family 2 on the other (Herschend 1994, Fig. 29; Hansson 1994, Fig. 47).

The phenomenon should make us cautious when it comes to interpreting rune-stone distributions, e.g., the occurrences of þegn-stones, since we cannot be sure that they define an area where þegnar were common. Nor does the absence of these stones define an area where þegnar were lacking.

Such problems of representativity become acute in minute interpretations of distributions like those found in Randsborg (1980, pp. 35 ff.). Straightforward interpretations of these maps run the risk of becoming examples of the ‘naive’, but false, interpretation that Randsborg himself (1987, p. 212) has warned against. The point also applies to Duczko’s straightforward interpretation of þegn-stones and Tegnebyar in Sweden, since their distribution is conspicuously complementary rather than coincident (Duczko 1995, Fig. 1; 2 and pp. 634 ff.).

The difficulties of understanding distributions and their relations to words, which may or may not signify an institution, emanates from underestimating the role of socio-psychological factors and a failure to understand how such factors may have worked in the period and area in question. Rune-stone texts are not tacitly inspired by newly invented formal institutions, they are simply inspired by common opinions about what may reasonably be said.

This may be illustrated if we introduce a new socio-psychological space in a culture and try to observe what happens, e.g., to rune-stone distributions. It is thus typical of the rune-stones in and around both Sigtuna and Århus (Figs 26 and 27), that the towns which make up this new kind of space in their area attract rune-stones at their centre and immediate surrounding linked to the roads to the towns. Moreover, they create an empty space around this centre and inspire peripheral rural cen-
tres. This pattern reflects a rune-stone ideology which says that their *raison d’être* is based upon their being read at a proper place and by as many as possible of those who ought to read them. So, a rune-stone, mentioning a *þegn* and standing north of the Gudenå, does not necessarily indicate that the *þegn* was based there nor that such persons were especially frequent in the area. The actual *þegn* may have lived and had his estate south of the river, but for ideological reasons he or his family, the sponsors, preferred to side with the rural centre north of the river for promotional reasons. The Mammen complex may thus have been inspired not only by the royal status of the person buried in the famous grave (Iversen 1991), but also by a more general need in the area to display unification and centrality.

Figure 25. Two partly overlapping examples of regional bound preferences among rune-stone erectors in the Mälar Valley. Hansson’s (1994) second family of identically designed rune stones and prayers using the expression ‘spirit and soul’ (Herschend 1994).
These problems of interpretation apply to the ‘good-stones’ too, e.g., to those rune-stones which call someone good or generous with food (Backe et al. 1994, Tab. 1A). If we believe the distribution to be representative, we must also conclude that three out of seven generous-with-food Swedes lived in Sunnbo Härad in Småland, where farming conditions are not particularly easy. This makes the attributed generosity all the more flattering, but tells us nothing about Viking Age distribution of generosity.

Likewise in Östergötland we shall have to explain why the formula, with respect to goodness in connection with brothers, is ‘after NN his brother, a good þegn/ dregr/maðr/bóndi’, and never ‘after NN his good brother’, as if no brother from Östergötland was in himself a good brother.

On the other hand, the general development of the usage is easy enough to see, e.g., in the contrast between Västergötland and Uppland. In the former good is never primarily linked to a man’s position within the nuclear family. A man is always a good þegn, good dregr, good maðr, good bóndi or just good, and in addition he is also a father, son or brother. In Uppland, however, the expression is nearly always
good father, good son or good brother as if people were never good in their capacity as thanes, youngsters, men or masters.

Östergötland fits into the shift of usage from Västergötland to Uppland (Fig. 28), linked as it is to a specific use of appellative nouns (Figs 29a and b), and stylistically the stones in Östergötland represent early as well as later parts of the rune-stone period, but when it comes to brothers, people in Östergötland seem to have found it difficult to connect brotherhood in itself with goodness. This leads to the conclusion that the texts fulfil part of a South Scandinavian tradition while at the same time recognising a different one belonging to Middle Scandinavia. Among several possible explanations for this fact it seems fair to suggest that the equality between brothers was so great that the prevailing meaning of the word good did not apply to brotherhood in itself in a transitory period when good was remembered originally to have been connected with some sort of social behaviour by means of which people of at least somewhat different social status, and not otherwise attached to each other, were mutually connected. This in its turn signifies a prevailing non-Christian ideology and ideal of goodness, since if we have once fully understood the Christian ideal of goodness as a disposition in man, a concept often linked to love, then brothers as well as anybody else may be good in the sense ‘my good (i.e., peaceful, meek, loving) brother’.

A quotation from Finnur Jónsson’s article in Politiken (1926) casts light on the peculiar problem that fathers, but not brothers, may be good in Östergötland. Observing that stones erected by a brother after a brother were common in the Danish material Jónsson wrote:

Figure 27. The rune stone distribution in and around Århus (based on Jacobsen and Moltke 1941–42; Randsborg 1980; Stoklund 1991). In a way similar to the Sigtuna situation the town attracts rune stones and creates an empty space around itself and a rural satellite centre in the Mammen area.
Figure 28. The relative frequency of good used as an epithet in different areas and with different nouns and noun groups.

Figures 29a and b. The linkage between the word good and common nouns describing men. (a), commemorated only as good father, good bondi etc. (b), commemorated as a good bondi, etc., and as something more, e.g., a father.
In reality it gives a significant and graceful verification of brotherhood and love between brothers (brothers-german), of which we find so many a handsome expression in the old Norwegian-Icelandic literature. (Jónsson 1926, my translation).

The interpretation is clearly inspired by a modern Christian ideal linking brotherhood with love, but the parenthesis, which explains to us that Jónsson is thinking of brothers-german, shows that while writing down his opinion the author came to think of another side of brotherhood—social, external, brotherhood. He preferred to reject the existence of this kind of brotherhood on the rune-stones despite the fact that both he and we immediately come to think of it when we reflect over the concept.

For this reason the explanatory parenthesis opens our eyes and makes us remember, e.g., the Hellestad stones, which actually tell us about a social brotherhood, namely that of brothers-in-arms:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(A-side)} & \quad \text{Askil sati stin } \hat{\text{hansi iftir Tuka Kurms sun sar hulan trutin. Sar flu aigi at Up-Salum}} \\
\text{(B-side)} & \quad \text{Satu trikar iftir sin bru\text{"}fur sin a biarki stu\text{"}ban runum } \hat{\text{pir.}} \\
\text{(C-side)} & \quad \text{(DR nos. 295–297).}
\end{align*}
\]

Eskil put up this stone after Toke, Gorm’s son, who was his kindly lord. He (i.e., Toke) did not flee at Uppsala. 

\textit{Drengr} put up stone on the mound, steadfast with runes, after their brother (i.e. brother-in-arms). They went next to Gorm’s Toke.

There is a clue to understanding the situation in Östergötland in this brotherhood discrepancy, since if we look at brotherhood we shall find that it is a symmetric relation governed by reciprocity and solidarity irrespective of our finding it among brothers-in-arms or brothers-german, and it seems that in this fact we may have found the reason why good can more easily be applied to a father or a son since their relationship is asymmetric. So, if brothers are to show themselves to be good, it will have to take place outside their relationship with each other, namely when they compete for a social position by proving themselves to be better than others, e.g., by fighting well enough to become a 

\textit{drengr goðr} rather than just a \textit{drengr}.

If this is so, it explains the fact that in areas where the rune-stone tradition is early there are no good brothers, but in areas where it is late we may find some. This in its turn amounts to saying that asymmetric relations are one of the preconditions for being good in a Pagan way.

Finally in the saga about Aud seemingly obvious opportunities to use the word good are not taken. Honour fills the place of good where men are concerned, and Aud herself, who could well have qualified as good, is called ‘the deep-minded’. This means that among the texts analysed here, Venantius’ first two poems about Lupus and what \textit{Landnámbók} relates about Aud are narratives about two people who rank among the good, although neither Venantius nor the compiler of \textit{Landnámbók} are prepared to use the word. This is an intriguing similarity, which defines two areas in which the Germanic ideal of the good ceases to apply: Christian ideology and the female gender. They make up the boundaries of the present study.
The Use of Good in *Maldon*

The poem about the Battle of Maldon (Scrugg 1981) is a fragment; lines are missing at the beginning and at the end of the text (cf. Laborde 1936; Lund 1991). As the structure of the Anglo-Saxon epic was characterised by a composition consisting of several more or less independent episodes, it is impossible to know what the lost verses may have contained. But if we view the poem as one-episode poem, it can be said that we have access to a large part of such an independent unit. We have no reason to doubt that at its centre it was meant to have Byrhtnoth’s death, flanked by the events leading up to it and the consequences which followed upon it. Nonetheless, an Anglo-Saxon epic may, for instance, for didactic reasons have included some lesser episodes around the central one in order to drive home the message.

To support the view that the poem is in essence a one-episode epic we can point out the following: Byrhtnoth is cut down in what is today line 181, and the battle is obviously about to come to an end in the last line, 325. There is reason to believe that the manuscript originally consisted of 8 sheets and that the first and the last have been missing since the manuscript was first described. This opinion is supported by Laborde’s observation (1936, pp. 67 ff.) of the scribe’s crowding the letters of the last page, which speaks in favour of a recalculation of the number of letters necessary on each line in order to finish the poem at the bottom of the next or next plus one page. Even the idea of symmetry around Byrhtnoth’s death suggests a recalculation, since half the poem will not have room on the remaining pages when the point of Byrhtnoth’s death is reached, if the letters are not crowded on the last pages. To sum up: some twenty-five per cent of the poem has probably been lost, but in this loss we should include some introductory and concluding lines around the battle. The loss is great if we want to judge the intention of the poem as a whole, but from the point of view of the narrative it is not a major problem since the lack of beginning and end makes the character of the poem clearer. It is a one-episode epic like the fragment about the fight at Finnsburg (Klaeber 1950, pp. 231 ff.). Broad epic traditions need this kind of poem or tales, which, like the Icelandic þáttr (cf. Guðnason 1976; Danielsson 1986), facilitates the composition of standard scenes with a clear meaning such as *Maldon*, as well as scenes from everyday life in which even myth seems to be lived, e.g., Brunhild crossing the Pyrenees (cf. below p. 97).

Also the use of the word good seems to indicate that the greater part of the description of the battle, or the battle episode, is known to us, since, as mentioned above with reference to Figs 22–24, there is a tendency within the poem itself and likewise within *Beowulf* (Part i) to begin and end an episode, in which the meaning of being good is in focus, with a more frequent use of this word.

This is clearly the case in the dramatic climax when Byrhtnoth dies: in line 170 he can no longer stand, but he can still speak and tell his ‘good’ men to go forth and fight. Then he prays to God that his soul may be granted God’s ‘goodness’, (l. 176),
and immediately afterwards he is cut down by the Danes. As a pendant to his last words to his good men before his prayer and death, and as a proof of the truth of these words, Ælfnoð and Wulfmær are killed while Godwin, who ought to have been one of them, flies, forgetful, in line 187, of the ‘goodness’ bestowed upon him by Byrhtnoth.

The essence of the episode is concentrated to between line 166 when it becomes apparent that Byrthnoth is unable to fight, when all of a sudden his age is pointed out to us, and the moment when Godwin leaps into his master’s saddle in line 189. The poem is centered on the heroic death of a man, who although he made a mistake, died as he ought to, not forgetting what it means to be good, in his case to his king. He is surrounded by two kinds of men: the good ones who die with their Earl and some surviving men whose lack of goodness is proved by their survival. We are also presented with a hint as to Byrhtnoth’s shortcomings—the discrepancy between his powerful eloquence and lack of physical abilities—showing that he is too old to live up to his own ideals. It is a disadvantage to be old, and perhaps that is the reason for the use of the word ofer-móde to describe the fact that Byrhtnoth invites the Danes to fight on his side of the river. It must, moreover, be noted that it is the young, rather than the thanes, who attack him again and again. Byrhtnoth is not killed in a heroic combat with a single man, he is worn out by a pack of dedicated drengr and lið-men, brothers in terms of the Hellestad stone or fellows, of whom several are of course killed.

The feebleness of old age, if not as in Byrhtnoth’s case feebleness of mind, seems also to be the reason for King Hroðgar’s troubles in Beowulf. In Maldon lines 166–189 are therefore not only an example of a military crisis but also an example of a leadership crisis. Maldon is a clash between ideals, righteousness versus strategy, and a poem about the conditions of those whose behaviour is guided by the ideal of the good. It is so in its nucleus, but also in the larger perspective in which we follow the build-up to the breakpoint and the development of the catastroph.

In the later part of the poem there is a tendency to repetition with the aim of assuring us that none of those who took part in the battle with honour will be forgotten. Obviously the author is strongly interested in creating an East Saxon myth about what happened. For this reason the last part of the poem stands out as a kind of restoration of goodness in order to limit the effects, i.e., the moral effects, of Byrhtnoth’s death and the guile of Godwin and his brothers.

In the larger perspective we initially meet good in lines 4 and 13; this is in the section where Byrhtnoth has decided to fight the Danes. He has made up his mind and he knows that it is good to fight, and so have, and so do, his retainers, after which we do not meet the word till lines 170, 176 and 187. After the climax a sword is called good in line 236. Then the word good returns in a more significant way in line 315 when the time has come for the old and humble retainer Byrhtwold to step forward and announce his determination to die next to his master and to call his master good. Byrhtwold starts with a couple of lines that must have made the poet
proud, if he had composed them himself, and pleased the audience even if the verses were common stock:

\begin{quote}
Hige sceal þé hearðra, heorte þé cénre, 
mód sceal þé máre, þé úre mægen lýtlað.

Her líð úre ealdor eall forhéawen, 
gód on greote; (Maldon vv. 312–315).
\end{quote}

Mind shall be the harder heart the more bold
pride shall be the greater as our strength grows less.
Here lies our earl all cut-down
good on the earth;

Byrhtwold is by no means the first to die; on the contrary, he comes after Ælfwine, Offa, Leofwine, Dunnere, Æscferth (who speaks) and Edward, Ætheric, Wistan and Wighelm’s son, who step forward to fight and die together with Oswold and Eadwold, who speaks just before Byrhtwold. After him Godwin (not the cowardly Godwin) steps forward to fight and die. This series of people is presented in no apparent order or rather deliberately without any order, high and low, talkative and silent, some defined by their own name, one by his father’s and some by both. Together with Eadric, Wulfstan, Ælfgar, Maccus, Wulfmaer, Ælfnóð and the three cowards Godric, Godwine, Godwig, there are roughly 20 men around Byrhtnoth, and those who go forth after Byrhtnoth’s death are there to represent his people in a wider sense, not just his best soldiers.

Who the retainers were, in terms of merit and descent, and why they were chosen by Byrhtnoth in the first place is of little consequence. The point is that when the Earl of the East-Saxon people picks out a bodyguard and when the poet needs to point out a people, then they are both looking for a group of men whose ability and will to act as good men is not linked to class, descent or age.

It seems possible that Byrhtwold’s use of the word good signals the rounding off of the poem’s battle scene, and the line of men going forth to die is close to being tedious. That may of course not have bothered the author, who obviously had a catalogue to present, but in that case it is a happy coincidence that Byrhtwold expresses himself so well. It is his role to be old and to sum up, without forgetting his loyalty to Byrhtnoth. He is splendid in his old age, even better than Beowulf, whom young Wiglaf had to remind of his youth when he expected that Beowulf would be reluctant to reopen his death-bringing fight with the dragon (Beowulf, vv. 2663–2668). Byrhtwold’s speech is, in other words, an approach to old age as well as to the end of the battle and of his life, which by the way is of little consequence. Growing old and maintaining the ability to judge a matter well, while sticking to ideals formed in our glorious youth, is, to say the least, not an easy matter.

If it can be accepted that the good represents a framework and an underlying
current, throughout the poem as well as in its climax, then it is also possible to see the reoccurrence of the word as a sign that the good has been restored. This, in its turn, means that the poem starts by pointing out what must in the given situation be good, namely to fight and not pay tribute. This decision eventually brings those who do the good into a severe crisis and we come close to the breakdown of the ideal, but as there are still men who are prepared to do the good, which is actually to honour a bargain with a master who has been good to you, and for whom one is expected to give one’s life in order to make the deal fair and even, the ideal can be saved. The East-Saxons as a people are represented by 20 or so men, similar to the Geats, who are represented by Beowulf and his 14 men, and they overcome the crisis and restore the ideal by sacrificing themselves. For a man to be caught up by age and to be lacking in judgement and physical strength it is a harsh fate to be called upon to be good, but that is certainly no reason to depart from the good. National football teams and their managers, modern equivalents of Byrhtnoth and his men, can count themselves fortunate in that they risk only defamation by media, the murder of Escobar being the exception.

Being called upon to be good often restricts one’s possibilities of action. The poem shows this splendidly by letting Byrhtnoth make the initial decision to fight the Danes. This is a good decision since to Byrhtnoth it is the right way in which to repay his king, but it leads to other decisions which make it easy to be wise after the event and at the same time quite pointless, since earlier that day, in the assembly before the decision was taken, Offa—in what was probably a most typical epic digression in the unknown beginning of the poem—had already told the Earl what would probably happen if his men were tried in battle against the Danes.

The good is in other words best in the long run and it may lead to immediate disaster for the individual or a hard-won victory for one side or the other, since it must not be forgotten that also the Danes acted in a good way, not least the young men who went forth and got themselves killed trying to get at Byrhtnoth.

It seems clear that in a crisis the only right thing to do is to return whatever benefits or gifts we have received by sacrificing our lives for the sake of our benefactor. Seen in a long perspective the crisis for the prehistoric ideal of the good in the battle situation is no doubt a sign of mental health and, to many, a proof of the development of society, but probably even in prehistoric times the normality of being good was hardly a matter of killing as many opponents as possible before getting killed oneself.

It is worth wondering if the author of *Maldon* was aware of his own use of the word good. I think that there can be little doubt that he knew that he was writing about a mainly military ideal of the good and that he felt obliged to connect it with a Christian goodness, at least formally. God, moreover, is a king whose thane it is worth being; he grants the good in the same way as a worldly king and whatever Heaven may look like Byrhtnoth prefers to belong to God. Using the word good probably occurred quite naturally to the author when he reached the most solemn parts of his poem—when
right and wrong with reference to kings and leaders are set against each other.

The general character of the events must, however, not be forgotten: the author’s ideal and that of the Danes is one and the same. This kind of a-man-has-to-do-what-a-man-has-to-do syndrome of the noble soldier is still part of the glorification of war and courage in defeat, e.g., in Georg v. Hase’s book about the Battle of Jutland and the defeat-victory of the German Navy in 1916. It shows not least in the sadly adequate bilingual title of Hase’s book Die zwei weissen Völker—Two White People (1920), originally a translation into German of an opinion expressed by a British admiral in the Adriatic c. 1910. Readers interested in the far-reaching symbolic meaning of the word ‘white’ in the mind of the Vilhelminischen officer are referred to the first chapter in Klaus Theweleit’s Male Fantasies (1987–89).

The First and Second Parts of Beowulf

The surviving version of Beowulf is contemporary with Maldon. It consists of two distinct parts, verses 1–2199 and 2200–3182. The first part is concerned with the good in much the same way as Maldon, but it tells us of historical events or at least of events which were in those days believed to have taken place in the past. The historical setting is correct in so far as the poem relates a tradition about the beginning of the hall-governed society and the problems linked to this form of regime. Maldon is based upon a battle that was fresh in living memory and it comments upon a political problem in the beginning of the 11th century, the tribute payments to the Danes. The author is against them. The poem draws upon these problems in order to put the moral dilemma about doing the good into a convincing setting: a reality difficult to deny. Imperfections, tragedies and dilemmas become apparent to the listener and the ideal behaviour, i.e. the good, becomes more troublesome than in Beowulf, where the principle or long-term values of being good have weighed down the reality of the setting into a literary style which helps to perfect the ideal. In fact only the complication of age can eventually, in the second part of the poem though not in the first part, break the heroes, i.e., those who carry the ideal. In Beowulf (Part i) also this cardinal complication is solved by Beowulf when he helps the Danish king in his impotent old age. Not until the second part do we hear of the unavoidable fate of Beowulf as an old man in his lonely fight with the dragon.

In this situation and in contrast to Maldon there are no heroes around to save either Beowulf or the Geats. This makes Beowulf (Part ii) different from both the first part and Maldon. Wiglaf, the only co-hero in sight, is not good in the right, Pagan, way and there is no doubt too little self-sacrifice among the young Geats when their society is threatened by the dragon. This sad situation does not come as a surprise to the listener since in the very beginning of the second part things are put into their proper place by the following verses:
So, no sooner have we learned that Beowulf has grown old than we are told about the ominous dragon which is eventually to kill him, thereby ruining the nation. What follows is in essence an account of a series of tragic events and the shortcomings of lesser men reflected in and contrasted to the heroic deeds of the young and middle-aged Beowulf.

*Beowulf* (Part II) is not a poem about the good. It is a poem about the inevitable or the hopeless and the agony of a nation that has lost its king. It does not help that these Beowulf’s last days contain some references to Christ’s Maundy Thursday. Beowulf, as it happens, sets out with twelve men, of whom one is the thief (a parallel to Judas) who stole from the dragon and enraged it (vv. 2400 ff.). This man leads the party to the dragon’s cave and here Beowulf, in a mood similar to that of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Klaeber note to v. 2418), takes leave of the twelve men. He does so in a manner just as dignified as that of Jesus, but more long-winded. In this situation there is perhaps also a possible Peter parallel in the strange character of the young Wiglaf. He is one of the twelve followers who, when they have fled into the woods, speaks as their leader and steps forward to declare two things: first that Beowulf must not forget what he swore in his youth and, secondly that he, Wiglaf, like Peter at the Mount of Olives, will not abandon, but help him (vv. 2663 ff.). Then Beowulf steps forward to kill the dragon and be killed and as a result of his death the Geatish nation will soon come to an end.

Even though *Beowulf* (Part II) refers to the dying Jesus, it fails to inspire the hope expressed in ‘Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1,29). On the contrary, we follow a Jesus who leaves us on our pilgrimage in a desolate and difficult place like the vale of Baca (Psalm 84, line 6), which Luther preferred to call the vale of tears. To the Geats this is the beginning of the end, but to Wiglaf it may be the beginning of a new era.

Wiglaf’s opinions as he expresses them in his little speech are most uncalled for and he is an odd hero inasmuch as he is what no other heroes are, namely helpful, nice and unobtrusive and something of a knowall. While Beowulf clashes with the dragon for the second time Wiglaf manages, as if by chance, to wound it, so that its fire dies down a little, thus giving the death-marked Beowulf a chance to finish it off. He does so, and there are rumours that one of Wiglaf’s hands was burned off by the dragon. This, however, does not prevent him, single handed, from offering Beowulf
water from his hand or from unstrapping Beowulf’s helmet, quite a feat for a one-handed man.

Wiglaf faces much the same problem as the author of Maldon: How can he be an honourable man and still alive, when it seems that only dishonourable men have survived? This ought to have been a dilemma, but it turns out not to be, when we realise that Wiglaf, rather than being a Pagan hero, is the equivalent of a death angle. He is there not to change Beowulf’s fate or to save the Geatish nation by sacrificing himself when he sees that his master needs help, but to interfere with fate a little in order to make it more suitable by preventing the dragon’s rapid killing of the hero, which would have deprived us of his last words. Wiglaf is good, but he is far from being a Pagan hero; he is the merciful, loving Samaritan, and to some editors (cf. Klaeber 1950 note to v. 2663) a highly misplaced exponent of a Christian ideal of goodness. Like a brother in the hospice he closes the eyes of the incurably ill and gives them a more or less dignified death.

Beowulf (Part ii) is about the inevitable loss of a nation, the Geats, and for this reason those who accompany Beowulf to his last fight cannot die with him, since that would have amounted to saving their nation in spite of his death, in the same way as the East Saxons were saved when Byrhtnoth’s men died together with him.

Part ii is therefore a narrative about the collapse of the ideals of the good, and we should expect the word to be used only in connection with a cultural critique of the Pagan society or in a conventional sense. Nonetheless the tendency to use good twice, if it is used at all, is obvious in the second part of the poem, but the word is hardly ever used to structure the narratives.

There are no real epic digressions or episodes in the second part. Instead we are offered a series of monologues and a few dialogues informing us about this or that. In between the monologues there are passages which keep the narrative about the fight with the dragon and its aftermath going. If good had structured the text this would have been apparent in the speeches, but it is not (Fig. 30).

Half of the times the word is employed to call Beowulf good when it seems appropriate. Only twice (vv. 2543 and 2563), when he is called good just before beginning the fight with the dragon, do we see a parallel to the structuring principles of the combat episodes in the first part of the poem. Otherwise the word occurs now and again with reference to Beowulf, Hygelac or Ongantheow.

There are two sections in which we can find a thematic use of the word, albeit not a structuring use: in verses 2249 and 2263 a lonely, anonymous, old and defeated hero speaks of good men and a good falcon; they are part of and they adorn the happy civilised life which created the treasures he is lamentingly about to bury, as he has no one to give them to. Later in one of his speeches Wiglaf uses good a couple of times (vv. 2641, 2648) to give his fellow retainers a bad conscience. He says that Beowulf once thought them good and that Beowulf was good. Both these two passages are meant to point out that the good no longer inspires the conduct of men.
Except for these two examples of a usage which is divergent from a Pagan point of view the word crops up in quite a commonplace way, and it never structures a speech with a framework and an underlying theme, on the contrary it is used for the sake of convenience. Despite the fact that we see a change in the use of the word, it must be pointed out that it is not employed outright ironically even though we may note a tendency towards this kind of usage in vv. 2641 and 2648 when Wiglaf mocks his fellow retainers. Not until we reach Hávamál (vv. 39–46) do we find a clear case of an ironically mocking attitude towards the word good (cf. below p. 157).

To sum up, we may say that Maldon describes the events leading up to a crisis of the good, the critical climax and an eventual restoration in a relatively realistic setting, allowing for one or two surprisingly well-phrased statements, considering the massive slaughter that takes place around the speakers. In contrast, Beowulf describes either the complete victory of the quintessentially good Pagan (Part I) or his total destruction (Part II). The setting is often supernatural especially in the second part, where the Pagan usage of good does not structure the narrative. This part is in many ways a tale of grotesque and arabesque.

In a larger perspective it is interesting that around 1000 AD readers and listeners found pleasure in poems about what it meant to be good, and about the victories as well as the defeats of good people in such different settings. The theme and its settings show the need for society to come to terms with the complicated ideal of being good, not least in its warrior sense, and with Beowulf (Part II) in mind we can conclude that Maldon is archaic, or an example of a revival of an ideal after a period in which it had been criticised.
Six Narratives About the Good

There are six narratives about the good in *Beowulf* (Part I). The first part itself and five episodes within it. The inner episodes constitute the underlying current of the good, and the use of good in the beginning and at the very end puts the inner episodes into a framework, whereby the whole poem reveals itself as a matter of writing about the good and what goes with it. This is a comprehensive theme since the good is the ideal of all the positive characters of the poem. In *Beowulf* good is not restricted to the battle or combat situations, although the use of force to secure the good is vital. It therefore expands upon the notion of the word in comparison with *Maldon*.

The framework surrounds the good and links it, not just to a responsible way of living, but to the development of the civilised, i.e., Pagan, human being. Within the framework the five episodes or narratives are supposed to make it evident why good is used as it is in the beginning and the end of the poem. The use of good in the end refers back to the beginning and supplies the poem with a logic related to the development of a man through his actions.

The first narrative within the framework shows us what happens when good people meet and how their interaction starts. In this case the meeting is caused by a crisis for one of the good characters, the Danish King Hroðgar. The four consecutive episodes depict the growth of the good in, two times two, typical situations.

The first of these is a contract situation in which Beowulf agrees and is allowed to do the good by fighting the monster Grendel in order to free Hroðgar of the problem. Beowulf succeeds. The second narrative, the speech of a woman who tries to obtain security for her young sons, concerns goodness and peace in the family. The third narrative is a parallel to the first with the exception that Beowulf, having engaged himself to Hroðgar and received all kinds of gifts and the King’s goodness after having defeated Grendel, is obliged to fulfil a new engagement to secure the results of the first. The fourth is a parallel to the second, but it concerns peace, friendship and reconciliation between two nations rather than within the family.

When Good People Meet

The first episode runs from verse 194 to 389 and good is used eight times. The words are concentrated in groups (vv. 195, 199, 205; vv. 269, 279; vv. 347, 355 and v. 384) and the general feature that one good rarely comes singly does in other words apply to this section. The narrative starts by mentioning that Beowulf has heard of the problems that Grendel is causing in Denmark. It goes on to describe how the hero sets out with his men and how they arrive at Denmark, where, through negotiation, Beowulf is eventually welcomed by Hroðgar. It is the episode in which the two leading good persons of the poem are brought together. The main purpose is
to introduce Beowulf and to describe him as good. This happens in the frame verses 195 and 384. So, although the episode could be broken up into smaller ones, it is still a unit in the narrative—Beowulf’s first step to bring himself into the presence of the King.

Verses 195 and 199 link the good with Beowulf’s ship and his men, i.e., his means of action. Verses 269 and 279 belong to a conversation with the beach watchman and the point is initially to describe Beowulf and Hroðgar as good. The latter is good in verse 269 and Beowulf in 279. The watchman leads the party to the King’s farm, where Beowulf is engaged in yet another conversation this time with the court official Wulfgar. First Beowulf calls King Hroðgar good and then Wulfgar answers by pointing out that Hroðgar is good. Having thus established Hroðgar’s position, it eventually becomes possible for Hroðgar to end the episode by calling Beowulf good in verse 384. This means that Beowulf is accepted, the preliminaries have been performed and the story can proceed. From c. v. 269 and onwards we can describe what happens as a ‘How-do-you-do?-may-I-come-in?’ scene, and it takes 150 odd lines for two civilised men to pose these questions and answer: ‘Yes!’.

Beowulf, who is already famous for his strength, presents himself in a splendid ritualistic way, showing the quality of his character, his descent, and equally agreeable manners, all embedded in a fittingly pompous eloquence, but for Hroðgar the essential thing is the fact that he knows who Beowulf is and that they knew each other when Beowulf was a child (vv. 372 ff.). This should not surprise us, since in the very beginning of the poem we have been told that princes, when young and still under the protection of their fathers, should ‘give good gifts’, i.e., be generous, so that when they come of age their companions will support them. There is in other words a point in being good or nice to children, and in the case of Hroðgar and Beowulf the interaction and the goodness seems to have started in Beowulf’s childhood when Hroðgar was still a forceful king or prince.

The Two Contract-Combat Episodes

Beowulf fights twice in order to solve Hroðgar’s problems and good is employed in same way in both episodes. The first starts when Hroðgar leaves his hall in Beowulf’s care (v. 662), and ends with the King returning to inspect the house in the morning. In verse 956 the King declares that he is satisfied with Beowulf’s night’s work, i.e., the way he punished Grendel. The episode has an epilogue, a speech by Beowulf up to verse 980 and good is used five times (vv. 675, 681, 758, 863, 956).

The second episode is Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother. It was necessary for Beowulf to engage himself in this fight when it became apparent that his first fight was not sufficient, although he was honoured for it as if it had been the end of all problems. Therefore the second episode starts in verse 1473 when Beowulf is leaving a search party which was set up with the purpose of leading him to the lake where
Grendel’s mother lives and where he is to fight with her in her underwater hall. The scene ends when he returns in verse 1623, but before he returns many in the party think that Beowulf has been killed by Grendel’s mother when they see blood spreading on the water. Good is used four times (vv. 1486, 1518, 1562, 1592).

The first episode starts with Beowulf being called good (v. 675), and ends with the hope that God will give him good gifts (v. 956). Beowulf is good and rewarded because has taken the initiative for the fight and because he won. When he has succeeded he will not only be entitled to receive presents from Hroðgar, but also from God, since the saviours of nations must be God’s men. In between these points we note that tactics can be good (v. 681). Beowulf is good when he finds himself face to face with Grendel in verse 758 and he gets strength and determination by recollecting statements made in the King’s hall. This does not mean that he needs to encourage himself or talk himself into bravery, it is a sign of his being good and also a sign of the power of the spoken word. When Beowulf has defeated Grendel and everybody meets in front of the hall in the morning, there are several who think that Beowulf ought to be king. The author, however, points out that this is not criticism of King Hroðgar, who is still good. The situation in which some cry for a new king does not seem far-fetched, but it has obviously been put there to give Beowulf the opportunity to support old King Hroðgar.

The second episode starts with Hroðgar being called good by Beowulf (v. 1486). In the end of the episode (v. 1595) also Beowulf is good. The beginning and the end of the two episodes follow rules of symmetry. The first episode, which is the result of Beowulf’s initiative, starts by calling Beowulf good (because of his initiative), but the requirements of symmetry demand that the episode ends by calling Hroðgar good. Therefore the second episode, being a reflection of the first, must start with Hroðgar being good and end with Beowulf being good. Especially the last mention of Beowulf as good seems to be put in for the sake of symmetry since his goodness is pointed out by the King and his men, when they think that Beowulf has been killed in the lake. Although the listener or reader knows that Beowulf has been victorious, it is not necessary to survive in order to be called good. For Hroðgar, Beowulf at this point in time represents the common rise-and-fall fate of a hero: he appeared, he fought, he was rewarded for proving himself to be a hero, he fought again and disappeared.

Unlike the King, the reader has followed Beowulf’s fight and knows that he is alive, but also that it is not always sufficient to be a good man. Between the beginning and the end Beowulf is described as good when he finds himself face to face with Grendel’s mother (v. 1518) in the same way as he was good when he met Grendel in verse 758. However, in his fight with Grendel’s mother his sword, Hrunting, which he got from the deceitful Unferð, fails him. This results in a troublesome situation for the hero, but he manages to get hold of another sword, which is called good in verse 1562. This instrumental goodness is a parallel to the good tactics in verse 681 of the first fight scene. Instrumental and personal goodness are prerequisites for the ulti-
mate success, but there is no sharp limit between the goodness of an instrument and that of a person. Instruments are animated and men, as we shall see, used if they were instruments in order to bring about success. In the last fight the verses about the sword Hrunting are illustrative:

1518 Ongeat þá se góda grundwyrgenne
merewif mihtig ðæt hire on hafelan hildebille, hond sweng ne oftéah,
þæt se beadaléoma bitan nolde, þæt hire on hafelan hringmæl ágól
grædig guðléoð, þæt se gist onfand, aldre sceþðan, ac séo ecg geswác
ðéodne æt þearfe; ðolode ær fela
hondgemóta, helm oft gescær,
fæges fyrdhrægl; óá was forma sið
déorum mádma, þæt his dóm álæg

1518 Then the good saw the monster of the abyss
the mighty water-woman, he granted a strong onslaught
to the battle-sword, the hand did not withhold the blow,
so that on her head the ring-sword sang
a greedy war-song. Then the guest found,
that the light of the battle would neither bite
nor hurt to life, but its edge failed
the prince in distress; it had before endured much
hand-meeting, often did it cut the helmet,
the corselet of the doomed-to-die; this was the first time
for the precious treasure, that its honour fell.

Hrunting was a gift to Beowulf from Unfreð, and there is little doubt that the man’s bad character has caused the sword not to support Beowulf. Not by sabotage as it happens, but by poisoning its good character. This is not just sad, it is also dangerous since if you cannot trust the good in all the shapes it can be expected to assume, then catastrophe is close at hand unless you find a substitute for the failing. Someone or something must take the place of a failing part, be it an animated sword or Thane Godwin at Maldon. This is also the case in the fight with Grendel’s mother, since eventually Beowulf finds a good sword in her underwater hall.

In Beowulf, boats, tactics and swords are animated thus making it possible for them to act well and perform their part of the good. In this way they come close to becoming humans. For symmetrical reasons there is also an example of a good hu-
man, who is instrumentalised. He belongs to the first fight scene, in which as one of Beowulf’s men, of whom we know from verse 205 that they are good, acts as a decoy. The man is intended to stimulate Grendel to proceed further into the hall, so that Beowulf may surprise and overcome the monster. It so happens that acting as a decoy for Grendel means death and we would say that Beowulf’s man sacrifices himself for the sake of the good and that it is his duty as a retainer to do so. ‘Sacrifice’ and ‘duty’, however, are our own ways of labeling what is in reality the graceful and natural behaviour of a good man. Although Beowulf himself will not use the good tactics of an art which Grendel is not acquainted with, tactics are, as we are shown by the example of the decoy’s contribution, nonetheless worthwhile for Beowulf. He would not have succeeded in gripping Grendel if he had himself been the first to meet the monster. On the contrary, Grendel, sensing Beowulf’s strength, would have fled at once, as he eventually does, having been mortally wounded through the loss of his arm, i.e., when the joint of his shoulder proved weaker than Beowulf’s grip. The loyal man and the failing sword are inversions of each other and so are the two episodes. The first, in which Beowulf is waiting indoors, starts well, but it develops into something that is not a complete success. The second, however, in which Beowulf is the intruder, begins with a severe crisis, but ends with a complete victory. The symmetrical inversion is in other words part of a larger scheme in which Beowulf’s perfection is demonstrated in his ability to master two complementary situations, defence and attack.

The Two Appeasement Scenes

The outcome is always good when Beowulf fights for us and so, after the fights with the monster, there is much rejoicing, which gives the author the opportunity to point out additional aspects of the good. The first scene (vv. 1162–1192) is a short speech given by Hroðgar’s Queen Wealhtheow. This speech is not uncalled for since it follows directly upon a much appreciated winter’s tale, told by Hroðgar’s scop, about the dynastic, hall-smashing, agony and slaughter at Finnsburg during which Queen Hildeburg, a Danish princess married to Finn, the Frisian king of the Jutes somewhere on the west coast of Southern Jutland, loses her husband, her brother and her son, before she is happily, in the opinion of the men in Hroðgar’s hall, returned to Denmark. Things are complicated at Finnsburg, to say the least, with a mixing of peoples, nations and dynastic families, and we get the impression that this tale is by no means far-fetched. In Beowulf the story is naturally presented as one of the favourite hall tales, a typical þáttr, at the Danish court, and it is obviously a suitable contribution at the celebration of the victory over Grendel. On the other hand, it is also easy to understand that Hroðgar’s Queen, Wealththeow, takes the opportunity to say something immediately after the scop, using as a pretext her right to bring around the drinking vessel to the prominent men. She speaks of reconciliation.
Wealhtheow, whose name means ‘celtic servant’, steps forward onto a stage dominated by four men: King Hroðgar, his brother’s son Hroðulf, Beowulf and Unfreð, the king’s most important official, his pyle or ‘speaker’, who is sitting at the king’s feet. The Queen’s two small sons and other young men are also in the hall.

To begin with both Hroðgar and Hroðulf are called good; later, towards the end of her speech, Wealhtheow expresses the hope that Hroðulf will honour the goodness once showed to him by Hroðgar and Wealhtheow and be good to her children, should her husband die first; finally, she turns to the bench where her sons are sitting and there we also find the good Geat, Beowulf. Unfreð is not called good since that is not what he is; on the contrary he is one of the symptoms of the crisis at the Danish court. The crisis thus reflected in Unferð’s somewhat rotten Danish character makes us suspect that killing Grendel is perhaps not enough to solve all problems.

So, if we remember the beginning of the poem, when princes are advised to be generous (vv. 20 ff.) and also the fact that Hroðgar knew Beowulf when Beowulf was a child, we can understand why Beowulf is sitting next to the princes and the point in the Queen’s speech besides her wish to secure her children. To remember the good once done to us is to be ready to do the good in return rather than fighting each other.

The speech concerns the behaviour of a king when there is peace in his country, but more so peace in the family, since before Wealhtheow speaks we have been informed that the events in Beowulf (Part i) happened when there was still peace and faith between Hroðgar and Hroðulf, and at the same time we have been told quite bluntly that Unfreð is a deceitful and false character. This is the author’s flashback to what he believes are the actual historical events into which he fits his more fictional tale about Beowulf.

There is obviously a need for reconciliation and Wealhtheow underlines her speech by urging the men to drink in a ceremonial or ritual way. Wealhtheow tries to secure her sons by creating a balance between the four power factors and binding them to continue to be good. Of course we cannot hope for Unferð to be good, but we can hope for an axis of trust between Beowulf and the King and that Beowulf, who is symbolically seated between the sons, will save them if needed.

It is worth noting that the power constellation in Hroðgar’s hall is the same as that which characterises two petty kingdoms in the early Landnám-phase in Iceland, namely: the King, one of the King’s close relatives, his foremost official and the outsider (Herschend 1994) (Fig. 31). In Iceland these cornerstones are represented by four different farms dominating the landscape, but obviously when the owners of these farms meet they are the prominent men in the hall. There is hope in this model of balanced power, and Wealhtheow’s speech shows its close affinity with goodness. The model may not always succeed in keeping the peace, but it is a constitutional model for preventing tragedies like the slaughter at Finnsburg. The Queen can hardly hope to convince the drunken retainers in the hall of the benefits of peace, but she may succeed with the four leaders of the kingdom. That is why she directs her
words to them knowing that in the future the retainers will do as told by their superiors, the good men.

As mentioned above, the setting of tragedies like that of Finnsburg is in fact known as a type in the archaeological record, where several examples of smashed halls occur from the Late Iron and Viking Ages. There are at least two splendid Iron Age examples on the west coast of Jutland, Debjerg (Hansen 1993; 1996) and Dankirke (Hansen 1990) characterised by broken glass vessels and weapon fragments. This destruction was most likely the work of Jutes, Friesians or Danes.

The second narrative that treats the theme of reconciliation is of course a parallel to the first and therefore occurs after the second combat scene, which was in itself a parallel to the first one. The first combat scene is rather simple, but the second is more complicated. The second reconciliation narrative is similarly more complex than the first. It runs from verse 1803 to 1880 or 1887 and contains the leave-taking of Beowulf and his men.

Figure 31. A map of Skalagrim’s settlement in Borgarfjord. ● = Borg Skalagrim’s farm. ♀ = The farms of Yngvar, Olaf and Grim. ♂ = The households or secondary farms under the manor Borg. ⚫ = The farms of the free and freed shipmates, i.e. An, Grani, Thorbjorn, Thord, Thorir and Thorgeir. ♦ = The production units.
In verse 1810 the sword Hrunting is called good when Beowulf gives it back to Unferð telling him that he is not blaming the edge of the sword that failed him. And he means it. Much to the surprise of a modern reader the author stresses that this is not a piece of grim humour—it is a sign of reconciliation and it shows Beowulf’s greatness. In verse 1860 Hroðgar tells us that the greetings and gifts between the Danes and the Geats shall be good in the future, and in verse 1870 Hroðgar, the good, kisses Beowulf, the best, good-bye. This scene presents the public success of the good between two nations. What started as a story about the terrorising of a country and its old king has been turned into tale about victory and friendship between nations.

Since peace is one of the aims and force but a part of goodness, it goes without saying that the transition from war to peace can be difficult to manage, something, however, that it is important to manage with skill. And since repeated heroism in the good individual paves the way to royal power, if the good individual should for a moment choose to forget his duty and loyalty to the king who needs his help, then the king can be expected to have ambivalent feelings for the helpful hero. If the hero is successful and killed while being a success all is well. That was probably now and then the case for the young men killed in combat and later to be commemorated as good on a rune-stone. This situation was reflected in the feelings of Hroðgar and his servants when they noticed what they might well have believed to be a mixture of Beowulf’s as well as the monster’s blood spreading upon the lake in which Beowulf fought Grendel’s mother. Their reaction to this sight was immediately to declare Beowulf dead and good and to return home, rather than to jump into the water or at least wait a while to make sure he was dead or to retrieve the corpse as more loyal companions would have done. So, when against all odds the hero returns, there is a great need for appeasement. Unferð, for one, must have felt the need, having supplied Beowulf with what was not a good sword.

The four paired scenes: combat, appeasement; combat, appeasement are there to show us the enormous social skill it takes to handle a crisis and at the same time succeed in making goodness grow.

The Frame Story

The frame story is about the individual—the impact on the individual of the good as an ideal. We realise this when we come to the end of the first part of the poem and for the last time meet with the word good. It is the summing-up scene just before Hygelac, Beowulf’s own king, makes Beowulf second only to himself by means of presents—we must not forget that even to Hygelac Beowulf’s success in Denmark may hold a threat. At this point the poem turns and the adventures in Denmark stand out as a tale about the strong youth who grows up to become the ideal human being—the very opposite of Grendel. The summing-up scene about Beowulf’s character runs as follows:
Swá bealdode bearn Ecgðéowes,
guma giðum cúð, gódum daedum,
dréah æfter dóme; nealles druncne slóg
heorðgenétas; nás him hréoh sefa,
ac hé mancynnes maesta cræfte
ginafæstan gife, þé him God sealde,
héold hiledèor Hean wæs lange,
swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon,
né hyne on medobence micles wyrône
drihten Wederas gedón wolde;
swýðe wéndon, þæt hé sléac waren,
aðeling unfrom.

So did he show himself brave, Ecgtheow’s son,
a man well-known in war for good deeds,
bore himself with glory never when drinking did he kill
the retainers, his mind was not savage,
and mankind’s greatest strength,
an ample gift that God had given him,
was guarded by him, the battle brave. For a long time
the children of the Geats did not find him good
and the lord of the Weather-Geats would not make him
much worthy on the meadbench
they thought very much, that he was slow,
a feeble prince.

Apart from the hint in verses 2179–80 that retainers are a nuisance to the hero when he drinks in the hall, this is obviously a tale about the development of a teenager who has found an opportunity to fulfil a contract of goodness. The basis for this contract was laid in his childhood when he met Hroðgar, and although he was not much thought of in his home hall by those who had observed him there, a change of hall made all the difference, and he showed himself fit to be a hero, not just physically, but also morally. The hall character of the summing-up is evident and so is the fact that Beowulf was known to Hroðgar. It is in the hall that the basis for the good is founded and in the hall or the community of the halls that a young man shows himself good.

The good emerges from the hall, and putting the child Beowulf, the man Beowulf and King Hroðgar together in one person we see how the good in happy cases structures the whole life of a prince. When you are a child, people become aware of
you and perhaps take a liking to you, as Hroðgar did to Beowulf and Beowulf to Hroðgar’s sons. As a young man you engage yourself in contracts about the good, you fight, give food, beer and presents and you keep the peace. As an old and wise, but vulnerable man, you benefit from the contracts about goodness that you have initiated or honoured.

Several researchers (cf. Klaeber 1950, note to v. 2178; Lindqvist 1958, p. 118) have found it strange that the hero of the story should not have been universally recognised as a splendid man all his life, and if we are expecting a poem about a hero, it is no doubt a little strange in the very end to be confronted with this feeble youngster on the meadbench. But, if we see the poem as chiefly concerned with the people of the hall—those who governed Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, Saxon and Friesian societies during the Late Iron Age, then it is quite natural that social perfection should have been something that was created in the hall in competition among those who were brought up and spent most of their lives there. The good is created in the hall, it forms the link between halls everywhere and eventually it develops into a model for keeping the peace between people, as well as a model for the use of force. Goodness is established as a current in the minds of men and when necessary it comes up to the surface to solve various social problems. It is to be hoped that modern readers will have difficulties accepting the Pagan ideal of the good, but that is besides the point, as long as the ideal can be recognised.

We may look upon the development of a man as a spiral tour on which he does good actions in order to refine himself (Fig. 32). He starts in a hall and proceeds upwards frequently visiting different halls and eventually he reaches a level or a circuit where man, good actions and hall balance each other. In fortunate cases, like Beowulf’s, this equilibrium may continue for years on a high level, but it is likely to break down when we become old and most people will be satisfied with an equilibrium on a rather low level.

Figure 32. The hall and the course of life for the good person.
The Two Anglo-Saxon Poems

There is reason to believe that Beowulf (Part i), Beowulf (Part ii) and Maldon make up a sequence. Beowulf (Part i) relates the complete success of the ‘good’, the second part its complete failure. In Maldon the ideal of the ‘good’ is revived, but the reality in which it is expected to be practised makes it difficult to live up to this ideal. There is, however, no doubt in the poem that the ‘good’ ought to be lived up to. In Beowulf (Part i) none of the good persons fail, at Maldon some do, but it would have been within their power not to fail. In Beowulf (Part ii) those who fail may from one point of view be blamed, but from another we detect fate as an explanatory force behind their failure. Fate has changed and the ideal of the ‘good’ is no longer inspiring. Beowulf reflects a change in morality somewhere between 500 and 800 AD, and it may well be that choosing between a number of early and late versions of Beowulf was the easiest and most natural way to create a poem about the fall of an earlier civilisation.

The poet who wrote Maldon happened to comment upon the same moral problem as that which mainly concerns the Beowulf tradition. It is likely that the poet and his audience knew about the Beowulf whom we know today. This gives us a possibility to infer how the Beowulf poem was actually understood in its day: The retainers in the second part of the poem are morally speaking wrong. They should have done better and died with their master or, better still, overcome the dragon. Judging from Maldon, their behaviour cannot be excused and for the Maldon poet there was no need to bring in fate in order to explain the shortcomings of chieftains and retainers. Overweening confidence and guile are sufficient human weaknesses to explain why men fall short of doing the good.

When we read Beowulf (Part ii), we detect a critical attitude to the moral standard of the first part that does not correspond with the attitude of the Maldon poet. This indicates that Beowulf (Part ii) is indeed in essence an older poem employed in a composition designed generally speaking to support the view of the Maldon poet, namely: if retainers fail, nations die!

Beowulf (Part ii) contains a good deal more, but that is a minor problem since obviously it is part of its tradition. To some extent this tradition may have been tampered with when the manuscript was produced and the views of anno dazumal were to be conveyed to an early 11th century audience.

Venantius Fortunatus

Honour, hall, battle, heroism, king and retainer are some of the corner-stones of Venantius Fortunatus’ poems about the Merovingian duke Lupus, which is why they are to be discussed here. The four poems form the main core of the analysis, but first
it must be discussed how a Late Classical poet came to write poems devoted to barbarians. This discussion leads up to an analysis of his first two poems to Germans, i.e., those to King Sigibert and his queen Brunhild.

When we try to uncover Venantius’ reasons for doing this or that, we can refer only to Fortunatus himself, e.g., to the information he supplies when he mentions himself in his poems or writes about himself in the introductions to the collections in which he published his works. His writing is occasional and his purpose in mentioning himself is always another than presenting the reader with a neutral comment or description.

The poems of which parts are to be discussed here belong to the earliest among his known production and they were written on his arrival at the Merovingian court at Metz 566 AD. He included them in the sixth of the seven books of poems published c. 576 AD (Meyer 1901; Tardi 1927; Reydellet 1994; with ref.).

In 566 AD Venantius was a well educated young man, a poet from northern Italy with good connections in episcopal circles (Brennan 1985, p. 57). Ten years later he depicted himself as a wandering bard (Venantius, Prefatio, p. 4) who happened to arrive just at the right time for the wedding between the Merovingian king Sigibert and his Visigoth queen Brunhild. Reydellet (1994, p. x) has, however, shown that Venantius had arrived in good time and waited at the court in order to add lustre to the occasion with a Latin epithalamium and a panegyric to Sigibert and Brunhild. These poems are among the first in Latin to praise a Germanic king and queen as representing the ideals of classical perfection. They were an ideological victory for Sigibert.

When Venantius arrived he was looked after by Count Sigoald and made friends with a number of influential Franks during his time at the court. It seems that the poet was a most amiable person and a sufficiently gifted occasional writer to be able to produce convincing flattery of the Merovingian royalty and nobility within a classical scheme. Before and after the wedding Venantius toured the country either with the courtier Sigoald or with the court.

Later in the winter 566 AD he was in Paris, where he wrote panegyrics to King Charibert and visited his bishop Germanus before he went to Poitiers to meet Queen Radegund, who had formed a community there and appointed Agnes, her adoptive daughter, to be her abbess.

In Poitiers Venantius’ life changed and he no longer devoted his efforts to the cultivation of various promising noble patrons. On the contrary, he started to work for the Queen and Agnes, becoming part of a troika that managed the community. Venantius, however, did not live in the convent (Brennan 1985, pp. 61 ff.). He led a relatively quiet life, but as his royal patroness was not much restricted by the walls of her convent, he was in continuous contact with the royal family, making himself useful with poems, visits and business management in connection with the Queen’s involvements in international and national politics. His employment by Radegund in Poitiers
was probably the real reason why he originally left for Gaul (Reydellet 1994, p. x & xiii). His first year in France resembles an educational tour and his poems to royalty, nobility and bishops were intended to establish him in Merovingian society. Some time after 573 AD Gregory of Tours became Venantius’ principal patron. Gregory commissioned poems from him, gave him a small villa, situated between Tours and Poitiers, and around 575 AD he encouraged Venantius to collect and publish his poems.

While the modern reader will find unmistakable signs of an empty conventionality in Venantius’ verse, it is likely that the Merovingian aristocracy found it both pleasing and convincing, whether it occurred in official performances or in private letters. It should, however, be remembered that Sigibert’s court, and for that matter any Merovingian court, seems to have been prepared to use any means available to promote itself.

Although Venantius’ early poetry contains attractive elements, most modern readers will eventually find him no more than an occasional poet of some technical skill—well versed in many arts. His original skill may nonetheless have been another, namely that of cunningly mixing classical epithalamium, panegyric and eulogy with a genuine understanding of Germanic ideology. Venantius’ talent in this respect may easily be overlooked even though we are aware of this general fact.

From the classical point of view Venantius should be criticised for his extrovert, animated passion and his use of the concept of love may also rouse one or two critics (e.g., Dill 1926, pp. 333 f.). His style poses a problem since we may mistake it for empty manners and inconsistency. His attitudes, e.g., to the concept of love, are characterised by indecision, and they could in the end reflect a way of coping with nakedness and shame in Duerr’s sense, or the reverse, a primitive relationship to sexuality that would fit Norbert Elias’ thesis. In the epithalamium to be discussed below, he is most reluctant to comment on the erotic reality of marriage and that may remind us of Germanic prudery (cf. Duerr 1994, pp. 161 ff.). However, in the panegyrics, e.g., to Duke Gogo, he expresses his love for the Duke in exaggerated words that offended Dill as ‘tasteless love’ (1926, pp. 237 f.) and remind us of Elias’ view upon ‘childish’, ‘immature’ or ‘uncivilised’ relationships (cf. Elias, 1989, pp. 75 f.). We meet the same kind of exaggeration in the poems to Duke Lupus:

31 *Sic ego, curarum valido defessus ab æstu,*
   *Noscens te salvum fonte refectus agor;*
   *O nomen mihi dulce Lupi replicabile semper;*
   *Quodque mei scriptum pagina cordis habet*
   *Quem semel inclusum tabulis dulcedinis intus*
   *Non abolenda virum pectoris arca tenet;*
As the morning star with its rays after the darkness of the night dominates the light of the stars, so do you shine in my mind, and as the light of the sun recreates the world when it rises, so do your words enlighten my heart.

Here they talk of your celebrity, there of your sagacity in law, but I shall always love you, Lupus.

Our difficulties in understanding the poems are accentuated by the fact that modern scholars who take an interest in Venantius Fortunatus tend to be very familiar with the literary eloquence of the quotations and the classical tradition, handed down to us in a vast number of sources, but to be less aware of the growing archaeological material constantly changing or adding to our view of the Germanic ideal. These difficulties are still intriguing and we may therefore benefit from the relief provided also by relatively extreme interpretations of the poems.

The Poem to Sigibert and Brunhild

The cultural complexity in Venantius is exemplified by the very first two of his poems to Merovingians, namely those with which he introduced himself officially at Sigibert’s court in connection with the royal wedding. In recent decades the poems have been discussed by Rogers (1969) and by George (1992). The first poem is an epithalamium to Sigibert and his Visigoth bride Brunhild, a bedside poem as it were, to be recited officially at the wedding. The rationale of such a poem is to point out the raptures of love, not least its erotic joys and of course the happy and highly valuable result that may come of these pleasures in the nuptial bed. Venantius makes use of the genre in a surprisingly heathen way, which must—in the context of a Christian royal wedding—be seen as a relatively light-hearted flirtation with Pagan cult and rites in connection with the reproduction of the aristocracy. Rogers comments upon this poem with a clear eye for its impersonal attitude and seeming lack of deeper insight into matters which for most people are too serious to be treated so superficially and schematically.
From a modern point of view her criticism has much to support it, and she ends up by showing that the structure of the poem is meant to lead us upwards to a culmination that celebrates the marriage between a man and a woman representing the State and Nature respectively, an approach that does not make for a particularly inspiring bedroom scene. Rogers’ analysis of the poem is, in my opinion, so correct that it should provoke additional discussion. It is obvious that the poem fits the tradition of the epithalamium in such a commonplace way that it probably fits more than its own tradition and the State-Nature match.

Turning to George, we find a much more satisfying historical or contextual analysis, which explicitly takes an additional aspect of Venantius’ poems into consideration, namely the cunning ways in which they are designed to match classical and Germanic ideals alike. One of the examples is the short panegyric following directly upon the epithalamium (George 1992, pp. 40 ff.). Much of what was said in the first would have befitted the second, but the latter is, as George shows, more strictly to the point in summing up the mixture of the classical and Germanic virtues of a monarch and his queen as the primary nuclear family of the kingdom, a constitutional phenomenon in alliance with God.

George’s analysis adds a lot to that of Rogers and perhaps we should try to combine the two aspects and consider the poems as wedding requisites as well as works of art. Their universe is the wedding days, and there is a point in their order, i.e., an epithalamium followed by a panegyric. We should imagine that they were recited, e.g., on the first and the last days of the wedding festivities respectively or, at least, the former at a light-hearted opening stage and the latter at a more solemn concluding stage of the ceremony. With reference to Gregory of Tours some scholars, e.g., George (1992, p. 40), believe the panegyric to have been written shortly after the wedding, but Gregory’s text (iv. 27) does not prove this.

The epithalamium is a straightforward construction, mixing ingredients from authors like Sappho, Statius, Sidonius or Ennodius in a poem that centres around the familiar Cupid—Venus dialogue (Morelli 1910, pp. 398 ff.). Cupid, however, plays the most active role.

The poems starts with a spring scene (ll. 1–14), an echo of a traditional opening, and continues (ll. 15–24) by showing us the procession of noble dukes and warriors, who have come to the wedding. In the poem Venantius tells us that they represent joy, but they do so in a more than usually heavy-footed way. We could have hoped for dancing, singing and playing young men and women to remind us of Catullus or some sportive Loves from the otherwise conventional Sidonius (Catullus Carmen 61, Sidonius Epithalamium Rurico et Hiberiae. Tufte 1970, pp. 23 and 69). All we get are phalanxes of noble dukes and warriors surrounding their king on his uphill way to the wedding. The following eleven and a half lines (25–36) tell us that Sigibert has reached a stage in life when love, marriage and the wish for heirs converge. Then, as we could have foreseen, Cupid happens by (ll. 36–47) and makes
Sigibert burn to marry the maid. The rest of the poem (ll. 47–143) is dominated by Cupid and Venus, who talk to each other and sing the praises of Sigibert (Cupid) and Brunhild (Venus) alternately. Eventually the couple is blessed by Venus, as Cupid had asked her to do at the beginning of the section. Contrary to her usual behaviour in epithalamia, Venus confines herself to talking rather than posing or acting, and we get the impression that Cupid and Venus are heralds pointing out what is appropriate at a royal wedding (Morelli 1910, pp. 400 f.), i.e., when a king, a perfect and civilised prince, takes to himself a queen from far away.

Undoubtedly the poem is a late-classical epithalamium, although rather dull, and probably Rogers is to some extent correct in saying that it is marked by a late-classical tendency for Pagan gods to reflect forces that work on man from within. This may account for Cupid’s attack (ll. 36–47) but not for the following scenes between Cupid and Venus, in which they praise the worth of their respective clients. This has nothing to do with the inner forces of anybody. On the contrary, the deities work as deities, enlightening their listeners, i.e., the wedding guests who we met in lines 15 to 24 as they approach the court and the hall where everyone is now gathered listening to the recitation. Venus and Cupid, mother and son, are gods intervening in the human affairs of royalty and lineage, while Venantius’ God, although formerly mentioned twice, has not been invited to the party.

There is a gently jesting tone in the Cupid/Venus scenes and the two are part and parcel of the late-classical epithalamium, but here they demonstrate the linkage between the Germanic king and queen and Pagan gods. In Venantius’ poems mythological figures and Pagan gods are rare and unimportant, and generally speaking Cupid and Venus, as introducers of prince and princess, are used by a Christian poet only to signal a good-humoured approach to the sweetness of the wedding theme. In Venantius’ epithalamium the last two-thirds of the text is dominated by the gods and their part in the affair is of paramount importance. Once they have spoken, the poem comes to an end and Venantius has succeeded in avoiding every possible nuptial joke. From the composition of the poem and the strong involvement of Germanic gods in the creation of Germanic royalty we must conclude that the way Sigibert and Brunhild are presented fits the mythology of the Germanic king and his wedding.

Steinsland’s (1991) analysis of the hieros gamos myth in Skírnismál and its relation with genealogical poems like Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal and Hyndluljóð as well as Ynglinga saga takes us still further into the interpretation of the epithalamium. The best parallels are the royal weddings in Ynglingatal and Ynglinga saga, since they show the marriage between a king and a woman from Utgard, as well as the death of the king—in Steinsland’s opinion a sign that these weddings are modelled on a Norse hieros gamos myth (Steinsland 1991, pp. 237 ff.). It is naturally impossible for Venantius to link death and wedding in an anti-epithalamium (cf. Tufte 1970, pp. 37 ff.), as is done in Norse poems and sagas. Probably it did not occur to him at all, but it is worth pointing out the similarities between the weddings. The similarity is
especially obvious in the notion of the Queen as an Utgard woman, i.e., a worldly variety of the giantess in the original myth. In the epithalamium, and in the panegyric that follows, Brunhild is described in passages which strongly remind us of the foreign origin of the giantess.

113 *Per hiemes validasque nives, Alpenque, Pyrenen,*  
*perque truces populos vecta est, duce rege sereno,*

115 *Terrenis regina toris. Super ardua montis*  
*Planum carpis iter: nil obstat amantibus umquam,*  
*Quos jungi divina volunt. Quis crederet autem*  
*Hispanam tibimet dominam, Germania, nasci,*  
*Quae duo regna jugo pretiosa conexuit uno?*  
*Non labor humanus potuit tam mira parare:*  
*Nam res difficilis divinis utitur armis.*  
*Longa retro series regi hoc vix contulit ulli:*  

(Venantius Book VI, poem 1, ll. 113–121)

Through winter and heavy snow, and the Alps, the Pyrenees, and raw people, she travelled with the Duke as the serene King (115), a Queen for an earthly (Blomgren 1971, pp. 119 f.) marriage bed. You crossed the steep mountains as if they were a plain, since never did anything stand in the way of lovers whom the gods wanted to bring together. But who would have believed that there was born in Spain, with you a mistress for Germania, (you) who shall connect, like a yoke, two rich kingdoms into one. No human skill did prepare such wonder. For difficult matters divine vigour is needed. Hardly any, way back in the series of kings, have conferred this on any king.

Interestingly enough, these words are spoken by Venus, who ought in fact not to be so surprised by the circumstances of the story, which she continues to relate through another fifteen lines before wishing the couple well in the last eight lines of the poem. It is no doubt Venantius who is speaking on behalf of the wedding guests in Venus’ concluding monologue.

Venantius’ point in letting Brunhild unite the two countries is to create a parallell to the kind of apotheosis foreseen by the *Beowulf* poet when in the scene described in vv. 1810–83 he speaks of the friendship between the Geats and the Danes. This unification is wonderful and it matches the surprise expressed by Venantius that a Queen for Germany could be born in Spain. Venantius is probably thinking of what it takes to bring her out of the place, but to the modern reader it is even stranger that Spain should be connected with such cold, snowy, distant and troublesome regions, partly populated by raging tribes from where it takes one of the king’s dukes to get a woman out. Why did Venantius not just tell us that a splendid flower from Toledo in sunny Spain (Collins 1983, pp. 39 ff.) had come to comfort everyone in Metz? And
why is the description of Brunhild as Venus’ child (Book vi, poem 1, l. 103) so literal that her marriage bed must be pointed out as earthly?

Only with Steinsland’s interpretation of *Skírnismál*, *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga* in mind does it become clear why this Utgard picture or Jotun background is needed. It is a reference to a myth like that in *Skírnismál*, where Frøy sends Skirnir to Jotumheim in order to fetch him the giantess Gerd. Incidentally the adjective used to describe the king (Sigibert) and in effect also his duke (Gogo), sereno, corresponds to the cognomen of Frøy and the etymology of Skirnir, i.e., skirr, an adjective meaning clear, pure or shining (cf. Steinsland 1991, pp. 48 ff.).

Gogo’s Skirnir-like character is also apparent from the way Venantius describes his mission in Spain in a panegyric to the Duke himself:

40  *Et domini mores, serve benigne, refers.*

*Nuper ab Hispanis per multa pericula terris*

*Egregio regi gaudia summa vehis.*

*Diligis hunc tantum quantum meliora parasti:*

*Nemo armis potuit quod tua lingus dedit:*

(Venantius Book vii, poem 1)

And you restore, friendly servant, your lord’s character. Just now from Spain through many dangers, you convey over lands the greatest joy to the excellent king. You value him so much more inasmuch as you have given (him) the best. Nobody could have done with arms what you obtained with your speech.

This *restoration* of Sigibert, a word pointing out the seriousness of the matter, namely that his character was temporarily lost, is a parallel to Frøy who is strongly affected by his love for Gerd, but eventually restored by Skirnir. Initially in the poem *Skírnismál*, i.e., in the introductory prose lines and the first two verses, Frøy is described as suffering from *hugsóttir*, i.e., illnesses of the mind, and seeming to be in *ofriðr afi*, i.e., in ‘feud hate’, with someone (Jónsson 1888, p. 38). Likewise, the friendly character of the servant Skirnir matches the fact that he is more than a servant (Steinsland 1991, p. 48). It is also worth noting that Venantius stresses Duke Gogo’s logocentric qualities, thereby implying that a lesser man than Gogo might have used force to obtain his goal. It becomes easier to understand Venantius’ observation if we bear in mind the trouble Skirnir had in persuading Gerd.

A check on the use of the adjective *serenus* in PHI, CD ROM #5.3 makes it clear that the word is not used to describe a duke nor used in connection with the word *dux*. With respect to human beings it describes their countenance or forehead. Cicero used it once to define the character of a person, and Statius spoke of *maiestate serena*. It is known as a cognomen, but night and day, sky and weather, are the most common nouns described by the adjective. *Serenus* is a relatively poetic word and to use it about a king or a duke is odd, although possible, not least in
a poem which starts out with a heavy-footed procession of armed dukes and nobles (Venantius Book vi, poem 1, ll. 15–25).

Having observed this, we can return to line 36, where just before Sigibert falls in love with Brunhild down in Spain he is in the hall (like Frøy, who is sitting in Oden’s hall Hlíðskíalf when he sees Gerd far away in Jotunheim). Venantius writes of Sigibert:

36 Instaurat de prole lares, ubi luserit heres

(Venantius Book vi, poem 1)

He erects for the dynasty a house, where heirs will have played.

In effect he builds himself his hall at Metz with a view to settling down and falling in love with someone who is remarkably far away—and does so.

The parallelity between Frøy and Sigibert is also implied by the relationship between, on the one hand, Frøy and Skírne, and on the other, Sigibert and Gogo. In Norse mythology Skírne is usually considered to be an emanation of Frøy (Holtsmark, 1970, p. 570) and the existence of a similar relationship between Sigibert and Gogo is indicated by the line in the poem quoted above, in which we are told that Brunhild travelled from Spain, ‘with the Duke as the serene King’ (Book vii. poem 1, l. 114). We know for a fact that she travelled with Duke Gogo, but we are given to understand that he was also the King in the King’s serene nature. We may, in other words, conclude that the somewhat obscure expression matches the obscurity of the concept of emanation.

In the second poem, the panegyric, Venantius dwells on the fact that Brunhild was won twice, first by Sigibert and a second time, when she gave up her Arian faith to become a Catholic, by Christ. This hint at her deviant background is in keeping with the summary character of this poem. Taking this together with the quotation above, we must conclude that she is indeed a foreign woman who must be changed considerably in order to become Sigibert’s wife. We can agree with Venantius that we have not for a long time seen this kind of match or love affair. It is also typical of the short and programmatic poem that it sets out by showing Sigibert’s power over people and countries, a result of the wars that have led to peace, and ends by calling Sigibert a holy king:

35 Rex pie, reginae tanto de lumine gaude:

(Venantius Book vi, poem 1a)

Holy King, rejoice in the Queen’s abundance of light.

Although the light, being different from serenity, may fit in better with Christian than with Pagan ideology, the devine roots of the Pagan king and his marriage to the giantess from Utgard are obvious in the three poems. The king’s holiness is matched by his divine vigour in lines 121–2 of the poem quoted above (Book vi, poem 1), since it was Sigibert himself who took the initiative to marry Brunhild. It is also characteristic that when Venantius flatters Duke Gogo he refers to the
Skírne-motif and hints at the parallel with Frøy, the troubled love-sick king.

There is even a far-fetched but amusing linguistic point to be made as to where Brunhild is brought. Incidentally, the etymology of the word Metz goes back to the name Mediomatica, i.e., the name of the Gallic people who lived in the Metz area. The etymology of Medio + matico (‘middle’ plus ‘mother’ or ‘maternal’) suggests that the name referred to those who lived in the middle of the motherland. Whether or not this is the case, the reference to ‘middle’ is still obvious in the word Mediomatica as well as in Mettis. These words are linked to the Gallic Mid -, which means middle (Nègre 1990, Nos. 2486 and 2487). Since Midgard, midjungards, is known even in Gothic (Lehmann 1986, the word midjungards) to mean ‘the habitable earth’, i.e., ‘the human world’, it is not totally out of the question that Franks, Saxons and Frisians at the wedding could have made the connection and seen the Spain – Metz link as a parallel to Utgard – Midgard. If so, we may have found a surprisingly poetical explanation as to why Sigibert established his court at Metz.

In the Norse myth and genealogies the bride is more or less forced to marry, and Gerd, who refuses to marry Frøy, reluctantly agrees to make love to him. There is an obvious threat and revenge theme to be found in the poems that we cannot expect to be present in Venantius. We may, however, be relatively sure that in some circles the marriage was looked upon as a misalliance or as unnatural. This is the point of a contemporary anecdote, related by Gregory of Tours, in which Brunhild throws herself between Duke Lupus and his antagonists. Lupus had sided with Brunhild after Sigibert’s death and in this particular situation Lupus and his enemies are about to start a fight, which will probably kill Lupus, but Brunhild rather courageously, and with no use of force, prevents it. In the altercation Lupus’ antagonist, Ursio, tells Brunhild:

Recede a nobis, o mulier. Suficiat tibi sub viro tenuisse regnum;

(Gregory vi. 4).

‘Go back from us, oh woman. It is enough that you held the reign under your husband’.

This seems an echo of the fact that the giantess is reluctant, to put it mildly, to conform and behave like a good earthly wife—she is irritatingly emancipated. Given the fact that Brunhild’s career turned out to be that of a strong-minded queen and model valkyrie, Ursio may well have been expressing male Germanic sentiments about the royal marriage by telling Brunhild that her role as giantess should come to an end. Ursio is changing the myth about the marriage of the king. Even the fact that Gogo’s ability not to use force is pointed out to us as something remarkable rather than normal may indicate that royal match-making and thus also royal wedlock are starting to become problematic.

As mentioned above, Venantius was born in the Aquilieia area probably in the 540s and educated in Byzantine Ravenna. His childhood and youth were in other
words a period characterised by the last three phases of the Gothic underdog-war conducted by Totila against the Byzantine Empire and its epilogue in the early 550s (Wolfram 1987, pp. 354 ff.). In view of his later career it is only fair to suspect that from his childhood and onwards he was acquainted with Gothic ways, and the way in which they formed a cultural background for a rather dedicated or at least cunning resistance. (Wolfram 1987, p. 353). For that reason it may well have been easy for him to communicate with Germans and to know how, generally speaking, he should write to please a member of the Austrasian nobility, but when it comes to the poems to Sigibert and Brunhild, he has obviously made use of more specific and current information, e.g., about Brunhild’s trip from Spain. This information was supplied to him or he may actively have sought it in order to write an appropriate poem. Venantius lives the myths of both cultures and that is what makes him worthwhile.

The Lupus Poems (Appendix II)

Lupus, Duke of Champagne, was one of Sigibert’s most trusted men and accordingly lost influence and power after Sigibert’s death in 575 AD (Gregory IV. 4). His interest in uniting Latin and Germanic culture is attested by Venantius’ description in his poems of his relation to the bilingual Lupus, and also by an account by Gregory from which we understand that Lupus introduced the slave Andarchius at Sigibert’s court. Andarchius’ merits, although he showed himself later to be a terrible bully, lay in the fact that he was learned in arithmetic, in the Theodosian code, as well as in Vergil (Gregory IV. 46).

Even the male names in Lupus’ family hint at the unification of Latin and German inasmuch as the names of the men known to us have the German or Latin word for wolf, i.e., ulf or lupus as a common denominator: the brothers Magnusulfus (magnus+ulf) and Lupus, and Romulf, who was Lupus’ son. This means that the Lupus family followed the Germanic tradition of common denomination while being open to Latin variations.

Venantius came to know Lupus at the height of the Duke’s career and the poems follow him up to c. 576 AD, i.e., up to his most troubled years. We hear nothing in Venantius’ later books of Lupus’ partial return to power at Brunhild’s court nor of later events in his life.

Venantius describes his relation to Lupus in such a way that to begin with we must label him one of Venantius’ patrons, but later Venantius gained a position of his own under the combined patronage of Queen Radegund and Gregory of Tours while Lupus was facing political trouble, which made the two more even.

The chronology of the four poems is relatively easy to establish when it comes to the first and the fourth. The first (Venantius 7.7, i.e. Book VII, poem no. 7) can be dated to 566 AD or the beginning of 567 AD when Venantius was still in Metz. The
fourth belongs to a period after Sigibert’s death in 575 AD, when Lupus had lost power, but before the publication of Venantius’ poems, Books i–viii in 576 AD. During this period there was a possibility of Lupus being restored to power. This eventually happened after the treaty of Andelots 587 AD (Wood 1994, pp. 98 ff.). The two poems in between were both written between 566 and 576 AD.

Meyer (1901, p. 14) dated the first Lupus poem, Venantius 7.7, to 566 AD when Venantius was connected with Sigibert’s court. Meyer dates the second poem, 7.8, to a later period when Venantius was in Poitiers, i.e., after 567, but before 576 AD. George (1992) also sees poem 7.8 as closer to 570 than 566 AD, i.e., as belonging to a period after Venantius had left Sigibert’s court. This date no more than a guess and it depends very much on how the relation between the two first poems, 7.7 and 7.8, is viewed. Meyer’s uncommented dating must be doubted. He confesses his confusion about the composition of the second poem (1901, p. 89) and has not noticed that the poems form a pair. Both poems give the impression that Venantius and Lupus are in personal contact with each other and both poems are inspired by the same events (cf. below p. 111).

The third poem to Lupus, 7.9, is after 566 AD and the reference to the nine years which have lapsed since Venantius left Italy (Venantius 7.9:7) indicates that the poem was written around 575 AD. The last poem is in all probability from the same period as there seems to be a causal tie between the two last poems inasmuch as the last poem is the poet’s way of helping Lupus after having received the gifts mentioned in the third poem.

Turning to the poems themselves, we see that they are linked in pairs. To begin with we read an official panegyric, and afterwards its natural counterpart, the private panegyric. These poems are equally long. The third is a note thanking Lupus for some presents and his thoughtfulness towards Venantius, while the fourth is a petition, in the form of yet another short note equal in length to the third poem, from Venantius on behalf of Lupus to Lupus’ brother Magnulfus, who has gained a politically powerful position as a result of his military skills.

Also these two poems match each other inasmuch as we are given the impression that in return for having received gifts from Lupus, in poem 7.9, Venantius supports Lupus in poem 7.10, thus fulfilling his part of the bargain between patron and protégé. The poems can be seen as thematically and perhaps also chronologically linked. We may suspect that Venantius wanted to show how it all started between him and Lupus and how he was able to show his affection and gratitude to Lupus. The two short notes lack poetic quality. They are both intended to be notes, delivered by messengers, who are actually depicted in poem 7.10 as waiting for the notes to be finished. Both poems give the impression that Venantius is a very busy man, but also an extremely righteous person who lives up to the code of civilised behaviour.

Although the Lupus poems are occasional they are intended in the collection to be read en suite. Book vii contains poems to Merovingian noblemen and the position
of the Lupus poems reflects Lupus’ ranking among the other noblemen, all of them connected with King Sigibert’s court at Metz, to whom Venantius dedicated poems.

This is the reason why we find four poems to Duke Gogo and two to Duke Bodigesilius before we come to the poems to Lupus. If we check the order of these dukes in the collection, with the way they are described by Gregory of Tours in his History of the Franks, we find that Gogo is by far the most important, being the nutricius, i.e., foster-father of Sigibert’s son Childebert (Gregory V. 46). Bodigesilius comes next. He is mentioned under the year 585 AD for the fact that he died in that year, but it is pointed out that he died full of years and that his complete inheritance was handed down to his children. Since such benevolence on a king’s part was not the rule, this indicates his high position in society (Gregory VIII. 22). Lupus, on the other hand, had problems maintaining his social status around 576 AD when the poems were published (Gregory VI. 4).

This parallel ranking should no come as a surprise to us, since after all it was Gregory who encouraged Venantius to collect his poems and to publish. Moreover, Gregory was Venantius’ principal patron around 576 AD and during the greater part of the 570s AD. Like a Maecenas supporting his Horace, Gregory presented Venantius with a small farm pleasantly situated by the river Vienne, possibly, with reference to Venantius’ description of the river (Book VIII, poem 19), between Tours and Poitiers (Brennan 1985, pp. 72 f.), where Queen Radegund, Venantius’ principal patroness from the late 560s and early 570s AD, lived in her convent.

Venantius’ poems, not least in Book VII, fit a scheme and although they look like a collection we must suspect that in reality they are selected rather than collected if not partly rewritten to fit the scheme. As already mentioned, the four poems form a quartet consisting of two pairs of poems. An analysis of the content and composition will make it evident that they were intended to form a whole and their purpose was conceived in the 570s AD although most of their material was probably written in the 560s AD.

The Two Panegyrics

Most authors have seen the first poem to Lupus as a summing-up of his outstanding qualities perhaps written in connection with his elevation to ducal rank (George 1992, p. 80). Some have even suggested that Lupus was Sigibert’s Major Domus, and that the poem was to be seen in connection with his appointment to that office (Nisard 1887).

The poem itself is the only source of information and on this basis it seems more reasonable to point to Lupus’ return from a campaign north of Mainz to the King’s hall at Metz as the occasion on which the poem was recited in the selfsame hall. It is an official panegyric by Sigibert’s court poet, who happens to be Venantius Fortunatus.
The second poem seems ultimately to have been inspired by the same event as the first one, though it contains elements of Venantius’ private feelings for Lupus. Everything is seen from Venantius’ personal point of view so that as a counterpart to the first poem, it appears as a private panegyric written by the devoted poet to his beloved patron.

The Official Panegyric

The poem starts with an introduction praising Lupus’ general qualities (ll. 1–18) stressing his loyalty to the people. In the next six lines (ll. 19–24), his loyalty to King and the State, two entities which are in many ways one and the same, is pointed out. Brunhild’s marriage to the State in Book vi, poem 1 is in other words echoed in the relationship between Lupus and Sigibert.

At line 25 there is a slightly bewildering break in the narrative of the poem when out of nowhere an embassy arrives. This kind of caesura is unusual in Venantius poetry, but common in Anglo-Saxon verse (cf. Beowulf, vv. 86, 194, 499, 782 etc.) or even frequent, e.g., in the fragment about the fight at Finnsburg (Klaeber 1950, pp. 245 ff, vv. 18 and 43), and we are given a description of negotiations between the visiting emissaries and Lupus (ll. 25–30). No diplomatic solution is reached, but nevertheless positions are made clear in the process. This lack of agreement leads in turn to a conflict that must be solved by force. In lines 31–44 the poet continues to emphasise Lupus’ righteous and law-abiding personality, but we are also informed that the high Merovingian commanders are seeking him, in all probability to discuss the conflict. In the fifth section (ll. 45–60), Lupus takes command of half of the army and he destroys some Saxon and Danish intruders in the northern part of Austrasia in an effective way suitable to a hero. In lines 61–72 he returns to the hall, restoring its peace and happiness. The poem ends by once again stressing his general qualities. His actions have added to his greatness and the conclusion depicts him as the eloquent, amiable host satisfying his guests with food—a vision of Lupus in his own ducal hall.

This is also the section in which Venantius wonders if he is sufficiently worthy to praise Lupus. However, in the last two lines he manages to demonstrate his skill expressing a most Solomonic wish, flattering to the King as well as Lupus:

81 sit tibi summus apex illo regnante per aevum,
   vitaque sit praesens atque futura colat.
   (Venantius Book vii, poem 7)

May your great honour, during his (i.e.Sigibert’s) reign, last for ever and may he enjoy his present life and think about the coming.

The core of the poem is Lupus’ usefulness to the people as well as the King, mostly, however, to the King since it is due to the services to the King and the State that Gallia, i.e. the nation and the people, deserves him.
What we have in the poem is an episode structured by actions in time and space and carried out by a few characters. In time we start somewhere way back in the past and through a series of events we are brought up to the very moment when the words we read are actually being recited. Here time stands still for a while and we are given a glimpse of the future in a scene showing Lupus in honourable hall-satisfaction and the King at peace.

In space, parallel with time, we start at distant Rome, or Italy and jump to Metz while at the same time the action moves from Republican Rome and the people, passing the King and the State, to the arrival of the embassy. At this stage, however, the hero starts to move and sets out on a campaign, tours the country and returns to the hall where the words in front of us are uttered. Parallel to the future, as a motionless tableau lacking change in time, the location where the future takes place is not precisely in the hall where we are, but at some neutral premises. The whole poem is a way of approaching the hall as the focal point in society and as we approach it the detail becomes more and more accentuated.

The here-and-now of the poem is Sigibert’s court and hall at Metz, and the detour made by Lupus takes him from Metz into an area northwest of Mainz and back again to Metz. We are, in other words, in Austrasia and it is worth looking more closely at the account of the military campaign led by Lupus, since the description is in many ways surprisingly precise:

45 antiquos animos Romanae stirpis adeptus
    bella moves armis, iura quiete regis.
    fultus utrisque bonis, hinc armis legibus illinc,
    quam bene fit primus cui favet omne decus!
    quae tibi sit virtus cum prosperitate superna,
    Saxonis et Dani gens cito victa probat.
Bordaa quo fluvius sinuoso gurgite currit,
    hic adversa acies te duce caesa ruit.
    dimidium vestris iussis tunc paruit agmen;
    quam merito vincit qui tua iussa facit!
55 ferratae tunicae sudasti pondere victor
    et sub pulverea nube coruscus eras,
    tamque diu pugnax acie fugiente secutus,
    Laugona dum vitreis terminus esset aquis.
    qui fugiebat iners, amnis dedit ille sepulchrum:
    pro duce felici flumina bella gerunt.
(Venantius Book vii, poem 7)
You have adopted the custom of the old Roman stock waging war with arms, dispensing justice peacefully. How fair (good) that he is the first whom every decoration favours supported by both advantages (goods), weapons as well as laws! The vigour you possess, with a prosperity granted by heaven, is proved by the promptly vanquished Saxon and Danish peoples. Where the river Bardaa runs with a meandering course, there the enemy’s army was defeated by your leadership. You held the command over half the army at that time; how well-deserved does he win who does what you bid! (55) As a victor you were sweating under the weight of the coat of mail and you were flashing in the cloud of dust, and fighting you pursued the fleeing army, until the transparent waves of the Lagona (the Lahn) set bounds. To him who powerless fled the river gave a sepulchre: For the prosperous leader the rivers wage war.

To begin with the intruders are called Saxons and Danes. That may of course be just a paraphrase for enemies, but Venantius is on the other hand well informed about the northern peoples since in Book ix, poem 1 he knows something that we also know, namely that the Jutes lived between the Danes and the Saxons.

Generally speaking, enemies whom the Merovingian army set out to destroy after negotiating with their emissaries would have been known by their proper names in Metz because the embassy itself would hardly conceal its identity from its antagonists. The most intriguing part of the description is the introduction of the two rivers Lagona and Bordaa. They testify to a surprisingly minute interest in rivers in a poem in which the only other river mentioned is the Nile ‘recreating Egypt when it rises’ (v. 35).

Lagona is Latin for the river Lahn, a tributary to the Rhine, but Bordaa is the purely Germanic name for a river which we do not know precisely where to locate. When the enemy panic they are driven into the transparent waves of the Lahn and that indicates somewhere at the lower part of the river. Saxons and Danes must originate from the north and their following the Lahn Valley is most reasonable if they want to cross the Rhine either at Koblenz or at Mainz in order to pillage more central parts of Austrasia. Lupus, on the other hand, comes from the south with the army. We may wonder why Venantius should find it essential to inform us that Lupus was in command of half the army, rather than an army. The information stands out as so peculiar that it is probably a fact and an indication that during the campaign the Merovingian army was actually divided into two halves.

There is a point in this division since if the King was at Metz and the enemy standing in the Lahn Valley, then there were two ways in which to meet it, depending on where the enemy was planning to cross the Rhine, at Koblenz or Mainz. Lupus commands one half and he proceeds either via Trier or Mainz. We find a similar piece of precise information in line 56 when Lupus wins the battle and Venantius says that ‘fighting you pursued the fleeing army’, thus indicating that the intruders panicked in defeat.

This brings us to the identification of Bordaa. The meaning of the word is simple enough. Bord means swamp or moor water and the suffix -aa means running water
(Krahe 1964, pp. 21 ff.). So where such a river runs with a meandering pace, according to Venantius, we may imagine the battlefield. Among the tributaries of the lower Lahn between Giessen and Lahnstein, the river Ahr (Aar) is the most suitable candidate from a geographical, topographical and even linguistic point of view. Ahr is the same word as the suffix -aa in Bordaa, and the fact that we know of an Aar-Moor, ‘the moor of the Aar’, (Faust 1965, p. 1) makes it possible that the river could have been called Bordaa at least in its lower parts.

A conventional panegyric to a courtier would not have needed all this detail, and, as it is, it does in fact clash with the more commonplace flattery. We can see that Venantius has baked factual information about the campaign, i.e., what he has heard in Metz, into the text mostly to point out Lupus’ strategic skill in such a way that it matched what the Merovingians thought had actually happened.

The kind of people we meet fits the time and space structure nicely. When we are far off, people are republican Roman heroes of obvious symbolic quality—the genuinely republican Cato, the splendid servant Scipio and the brilliant, as well as faithful leader of the republican army, Pompey. When we reach Austrasia and the present day, people are immediately divided into two groups, outsiders and insiders. The first group consists of Saxons and Danes and, probably, their emissaries. The insiders are first and foremost the King, his advisors and servants (among them Lupus), but they are also the dukes and it so happens that Lupus belongs to this group too. The men in the army are also among the insiders and they are led by Lupus.

Lupus is at the centre of the action, but although he acts independently his actions are always in complete agreement with King Sigibert’s will, and in spite of the fact that Sigibert does virtually nothing, Venantius hints that the King is in effect behind all that happens. The hints are carefully veiled, but they give the impression that the King is passive in a strange way:

\[\text{pectore sub cuius firmantur pondera regis,}\]

(Venantius Book vii, poem 7, l. 19)

The King’s power is founded in your bosom

\[\text{pro requie regis dulce putatur onus.}\]

(Venantius Book vii, poem 7, l. 22)

for the King’s peace the burden seems sweet to you.

\[\text{quis tibi digna loqui valeat, quem voce potente}\]
\[\text{rex pius ornatum praedicat esse suum?}\]

(Venantius Book vii, poem 7, ll. 79–80)

may your great honour, during his reign, last for ever and may he enjoy his present life and think about the coming.
Distant or stand-offish Germanic kings are nothing new. Hroðgar’s behaviour towards Beowulf between the fights with Grendel and Grendel’s mother (vv. 1345 ff.), or Hygelac’s attitude to the young Beowulf (vv. 2177 ff.; above p. 89) are significant examples.

If our interpretation of the poems to Sigibert and Brunhild is correct we can say that the way the King is depicted in relation to his most loyal men is a projection of his divine origin. His roots give him the ability to sit in his high settle, survey the world and know what must be done. They also invest him with the power to make others, i.e., Gogo and Lupus, feel obliged to carry out his wishes, i.e., do what must be done. Thus, the King not only towers high above everybody else, he is also alien—a perfect man but marked by otherness.

Lupus is the hero of the poem and his tour a Beowulfian one inasmuch as it starts with his being made aware of a threat to the kingdom, and thus the hall; accordingly he sets out to solve the problem, solves it and returns a hero to the hall. This means that he has completed a turn in the spiral (cf. Fig. 32), and his actions are like those of Beowulf inspired by loyalty to a king and to the hall-governed society. It is true that he benefits from his campaign, but for all we know he did not undertake it for his own benefit. Even the way Lupus handles the emissaries on behalf of the King has its parallel in Beowulf, namely in the negotiations conducted by Beowulf and his men with the courtier Wulfgar, the equivalent of Lupus, who had been sent out to negotiate on Hroðgar’s behalf.

The hall-governed society is represented by the dukes, whose task it is to approve of Lupus’ actions, but also by the personification of the hall when we close in on it:

65 occurrens dominis veneranda palatia complexes
   et tecnm ingrediens multiplicatur honor.
   te veniente novo domus emicat alma sereno
   et reparant genium regia tecta suum.
   nempe oculos recipit cum te videt aula redire,
(Venantius Book vii, poem 7, ll. 65–69)

When you meet with your lords you fill the venerable palace, and honour, which enters with you, is multiplied. When you arrive the house shines from a new serenity and the royal dwelling regains its genius. The hall gets its eyes back seeing that you return,

These lines hint at the existence of a hall society strongly dependent on information and therefore also potentially interested in Lupus’ returning with the victory and knowledge about what happened. The loyal and approving dukes are not a new acquaintance; on the contrary, we saw them at the wedding when they trotted up the hill with Sigibert, a happy rejoicing aristocracy otherwise difficult to detect among the Merovingians.
The last of the insiders are the men in the army. They represent the people and those among them who are lucky enough to follow Lupus rather than other military leaders. As always when a good aristocrat is leading the people, the latter are instrumental, used to fulfil a task, and a loyal collective. This, as it happens, is true of the dukes too, but their approval is at least sought. The insiders thus form a hierarchy consisting of the King, his man Lupus, the dukes and the people, in this case disguised as an army. This social hierarchy is a parallel to that in Hroðgar’s Denmark and in the landnám sagas about Aud or Skalagrim (Herschend 1992; 1994).

It is easy to see that if Byrhtnoth’s expedition had been successful then Venantius’ tale about Lupus would have matched the character and behaviour of the East Saxon thane returning to his king. Cato, Scipio and Pompey would have had their Germanic counterparts in elected Gothic kings or perhaps in early warleaders such as Arminius. Danes are always Danes and they are the ideal of a foreign enemy in both poems. Lupus and Sigibert are the equivalents of Byrhtnoth and King Æthelred.

Thus the three poems Maldon, Lupus (Poem I), the official panegyric, and Beowulf (Part I) together with their leading figures Byrhtnoth, Lupus and Beowulf form a series of parallel scenes from ducal life: battles lost or won are at the centre of all three narratives; attack is always the best course, and leaving the hall in order to fight and return in triumph with reconciliation in mind constitutes the hero. If repeated, such heroism perfects a man. However, Byrhtnoth loses his battle and Lupus cannot repeat his success. Probably they both fail because they are so close to the selective mechanisms and randomness of real life while Beowulf, who is not much bothered by complex realities, succeeds.

The Private Panegyric

The panegyric, Book vii, poem 8, starts by telling us that it is a hot summer day in July and everything is suffering under the burning sun (ll. 1–10). In this time and space we meet a wanderer (ll. 11–30), who, tormented by the heat, happens to his relief to find a murmuring spring and comforting shade under the leafy crown of a tree moved by the wind. He starts to sing, that being what he can do and therefore what he naturally wants to do. So, in the first 30 lines we experience a tense and difficult situation and relief.

Since Venantius’ day there have been many movies starting with such a hot, tense and threatening scene, but few have turned out after a minute or two to be introductions to some light-hearted songs in a pastoral setting. This, however, is the result of Venantius’ sentiments at the moment when he, not knowing whether Lupus is safe, finds out that indeed he is:

\[ \text{sie ego, curarum valido defessus ab aestu,} \]
\[ \text{noscens te salvum fonte refectus agor.} \]

(Venantius Book vii, poem 8, ll. 31–33)
So am I, exhausted by the mighty troubles of the heat, restored by the spring when I know that you are safe.

Being thus informed, by something similar to the murmur of a clear and lively spring (vitrei fontis sibilet unda recens, l. 19), and relieved of his anxiety, Venantius in his turn pours 16 lines (ll. 33–48) of the most intimate praise over Lupus. The prudent and manly German hero, not least the one known from the 1930s, would have blushed and sunk through the floor had he been the recipient:

{o nomen mihi dulce Lupi, replicabile semper
quodque mei scriptum pagina cordis habet,
35 quern semel inclusum tabulis dulcedinis intus
non abolenda virum pectoris arca tenet:
thesauros pietatis habens, pretiosa voluntas
producentes animo pura talenta suo!
divitias quas mundus habet mens aurea vincit
gemmarumque decus corde micante reft.
sensus aromaticus suaves diffundit odores.
hoc tribuens animae quod bene tura solent.
melle saporatum refluens a pectore verbum
et sale conditum reddis ab ore sophum.
45 post tenebras noctis stellarum lumina subdens
Lucifer ut radiis sic mihi mente nites.
ut recreat mundum veniens solis ab orto
inlustrant animum sic tua verba meum.
(Venantius Book VII, poem 8)

Oh, Lupus’ sweet name, to me, always worth repeating, which is written on the page of my heart, (35) a man who, once included there on the tablets of sweetness, the indestructible coffer of my chest shall keep. You have a treasure of devotion, a costly benevolence, which produces pure talents in its soul. Your golden mind exceeds all worldly wealth and reflects the beauty of pearls with your brilliant heart. Your aromatic mind spreads soft fragrance and gives the soul the good which incense usually gives; the words flowing from your breast taste of honey and the wisdom you speak is spiced with salt. (45) As the morning star with its rays after the darkness of the night dominates the light of the stars, so do you shine in my mind, and as the light of the sun recreates the world when it rises, so do your words illuminate my heart.

This turmoil of feelings awakes in Venantius (ll. 49–56), the memory of his coming to Germania and his first meeting with Lupus, who found time to act like a father to young Venantius although he was at the same time deeply engaged in political life, giving advice to the fatherland. Venantius was, to say the least, impressed. Bringing
himself back to the present and the praising that must be performed between lines 56 and 77, he first wonders about his worthiness (ll. 57–62), and then tells Lupus how others, i.e., the Roman, the Greek, the German and the Briton, shall flatter him with their instruments and songs (ll. 63–71).

In the last line, however, Venantius bestows upon Lupus the most private, but in its cringing simplicity also the highest esteem when he says:

\[ \text{ast ego te dulcem semper habebo, Lupe.} \]

\[(\text{Venantius Book vii, poem 8, l. 79}) \]

but I shall always love you, Lupus.

The poem refers mainly to two events. The first is Venantius’ arrival at Metz, the other Lupus’ safe return to the same place. The latter event has just happened and it is the reason for composing the poem. We know that Venantius arrived in spring 566 AD and we are told in the poem that that was the time when Lupus was giving advice to the fatherland. Judging from the feverish feelings towards Lupus which possess Venantius, when he reminds himself of the situation, and the anxiety he feels when Lupus is away, and nobody has any information about him, we must suppose that his love for Lupus is still fresh. The much calmer tone of the third and fourth poems, nine years later, supports this interpretation.

What Lupus is returning from, or in the language of the love-sick Venantius, what he has been ‘saved from’, is almost certainly the campaign against the Dano-Saxon army. To a Germanic hero war is of course nothing you are saved from unless everything he has uttered in the hall before he went out to the campaign was but empty words and he himself is not a hero. However, to the peaceful and sentimental Venantius the horrors of war must, if we survive, obviously be something from which we have been saved. Even the widespread praise and songs that Venantius foresees indicate that it is indeed Lupus’ martial skill and victories that are going to be praised by everybody and Venantius’ first poem to Lupus is precisely that kind of verse and the only ones that he could refer to when in line 69 he says that ‘I give you verses, may the barbaric song give you lays, so shall in different ways the same praise be bestowed on the man’. This reference cannot be to the poem we are reading at the moment, since it is not what we would expect, e.g., of a German scop singing about Lupus. Venantius’ first poem to Lupus is, however, the equivalent of the scop’s lay. The two first poems to Lupus are in other words two ways of viewing the same matter.

Venantius’ first poem to Lupus, the official one, is indeed an example in Latin of what, according to the second poem, is happening just now, also in the Celtic and Germanic languages. In his second poem Venantius shows himself to be even more flattering than others when he points out that to him Lupus is still the father (or beloved) rather than the official hero. Of course, this fact does not prevent Venantius, as Sigibert’s scop, from praising Lupus officially. That is his craft and it enables him in
the first poem to express the united opinions of King, court and people, but not necessarily his own mind since his opinion is not officially called for.

The reasons for praising Lupus need not logically be specific—his position at Sigibert’s court is sufficient, but in the case of Lupus this kind of double elucidation of specific events, the German and the Latin appreciation of his return, fits Lupus’ character, his ambition at the Austrasian court and perhaps his vanity.

In the second poem Venantius takes care to point out that Lupus embraces both classical and Germanic ideals and it is therefore no more than right that Venantius, who understands both, should find it fitting to praise Lupus in a rather pompous and Germanic way as well as with his somewhat sugary late-classical *dulcedo* (cf. Koebner 1915, pp. 34 f.). In the Austrasian setting this is a matter of praising the Germanic ideal officially in the king’s hall and then praising the classical ideal in the private poem, which is to be read rather than recited. There are two sides of Lupus, and Venantius, seeking a patron, knows both of them.

Although the two panegyrics cannot logically be linked to the same historical situation, it seems quite in keeping with Venantius’ role as an intermediate between Classical and Germanic culture to depict the same historical situation in two different and complementary ways. It is, moreover, consistent with Lupus role to be flattered by both types of panegyric, and the two poems are obviously structured to link the two ideals.

The first starts with a reference to the Roman Republic and tells us that with Lupus those happy days are brought back to us, but the rest of the poem is concerned solely with the Germanic ideal and the references to Cato, Scipio and Pompey are there only to prove the similarity between Roman and Germanic respect for the welfare of the people. In the other poem the allusion to the Germanic ideal – the *lieder* of the barbarians – occupies very little space, but it is a reference that presupposes knowledge of the first poem. On the other hand, the Late Classical ideal of letting nature reflect the sentiments of a human being and transferring these general sentiments to a specific person and his situation, namely the stranger Venantius in the Germanic world, is most elaborate. Venantius is welcomed in this world by Lupus who, instead of acting the way Venantius expected a Germanic chieftain or patron to do, he acts like a father or a mentor, with confidence in the young Venantius. So, despite his being the perfect Germanic official hero of the poetry which is sung to a *crotta*, harp or lyre, he is also a most devoted individual.

We can see that Lupus is in fact engaging Venantius in a relationship of goodness in the same way Hroðgar started a relationship with the child Beowulf simply by recognising him, but we cannot be sure that Venantius understands the meaning of Lupus’ kindness.
The Two Notes

If the second poem is concerned with Lupus as a father, then the third poems depicts Lupus as a man who fulfils the duties of everybody in Venantius’ family, since what they ought to have done, Lupus does with his presents. Such melodramatic exaggeration is merely a polite way for Venantius to express his gratitude, but nevertheless he has not got time to express his feelings in more than 10-odd lines, which in Venantius’ terms is no more than a starter. The poem seems most of all to be an introduction or a background to the fourth, which is a petition by Venantius to Magnulfus, Lupus’ brother, on behalf of Lupus. This petition is explained by the third poem. Venantius is obliged to address Magnulfus because of the patronage he has benefited from and the hard times experienced by Lupus. It is in this connection that he turns to the concept of the good. The poem is a reference to the good rather than a narrative about it. It points out Magnulfus as a person, who, due to his qualities, is obliged to do good and especially so towards his brother, who is one of the best. Like Wealhtheow’s speech it is a I-hope-you-do-not-forget note:

1 Quam cito fama volat perniciibus excita pinnis
et loca cuncta suis actibus aucta replet!
nam tibi cum Rhenus, mihi sit Liger ecce propinquus,
hic, Magnulfse, decens, magnus honore places.
sic tuba praconis Sigimundi missa cucurrit,
ut tua diffuso sint bona nota loco.
quod tamen in brevibus vix signat epistula verbis:
non quia cuncta canit, nec reticere cupit.
iuredico in primis pollens torrente relatu
10 sic regis, ut revoces facta vetusta novis,
cuius in officiis aequi cultoris aratro
semine iustitiae plebs sua vota metit.
nemo caret propriis; alienis nemo recumbit:
sic facit ut pupulum non vacet esse reum.
sollicitudo tua reliquis fert dona salutis,
et labor unius fit populosa quies.
aequalis concors ut ab omnibus, alme, voceris,
legibus hinc iudex hinc bonitate pares.
da paucis veniam, quoniam mihi portitor instat:
20 nam de fratre Lupi res monet ampla loqui.
sic tribuat dominus, meritis reparetis ut illum,
quem pariter tecum cordis amore colo.
How fast does Fame fly, rising on fast wings, filling all places, having grown by her own actions! For you are at the Rhine and I am close to the Loire and here you are most popular, courteous Magnulfus, and much honoured. So (far) has the herald’s trumpet sent out by Sigimund travelled that your deeds are well-known (i.e., bona nota) in a wide area. But a letter with short words can hardly express it, since neither can it sing of everything, nor does it want to keep anything in silence. Your principal strength is the flow of words in executing the law; (10) and you rule so that with the new you recall the old. During your office, with the plough of the just cultivator, the people reap the benefit of their desires from the seeds of justice. No one is without his property, no one steals that of others. You see to it that the people has no opportunity to be criminal. Your care gives others their salvation and one man’s work becomes the peace of the multitude. You are just and mild so that by everyone you are called on one hand judge for your cleverness in the law, on the other father for your goodness (i.e., bonitate).

Forgive me for expressing myself briefly, the letter carrier waits; (20) but about Lupus’ brother the cause urges one to speak lengthily. May the Lord grant that you by your merits rehabilitate him whom I, together with you, love with all my heart!

Venantius’ point is that since Magnulfus is the defender of the good, it follows that he should act on behalf of his brother. Reading the two last poems as one we first get an example of the contractual aspect of goodness that was found also in Maldon and Beowulf—Venantius has received a present and acts accordingly. When writing to Magnulfus Venantius does not formally appeal to the love between brothers. Instead Venantius’ appeal is motivated by the fact that Magnulfus, who has just experienced some military success, is one of the good, in the same way as Lupus.

So, although the good Christian Venantius must think it sufficient to point out that a brother should be helpful and good to his brother, he does not explicitly say so, and the reason for that must be that he knows the weakness of his argument among the Merovingians and Germans to whom a brother is not good per se. Helping each other within the family may have been a great Merovingian and Frankish notion, but it was not common practice, to say the least. However, even in Venantius’ own case he felt it appropriate to point out to Lupus that his own parents, brothers and sisters, had been found wanting in this respect and it is one of the points in the third poem that Lupus is the kind of person who steps in to fulfil the duties of an absent family. This in loco familiae situation is also a Beowulfian quality inasmuch as it shows the unconditional initial goodness between the powerful man and the weak child or newcomer. As usual Venantius, the mediator, shows himself capable of mixing Christian and Pagan ideals.

We may expect Venantius to have written hundreds of small notes of this kind without including them in his collected works since he was a technically gifted poet, who was probably carried away by almost any occasion in a very similar fashion. Considering his seemingly close relations with Lupus it is strange that he should only once have received presents or written only once after the first years, and this cir-
III. The Characteristics of the Good

The Model Behaviour

The good is an itinerary on which the traveller, the individual, is bound to meet with all kinds of difficulties, intentional ones, with the purpose of being on purpose, and rational as well as surprising and emotional difficulties. All difficulties must be overcome in order to reach the goal, i.e., a life governed by friendship in familial and communal affiliation. Seen in this light, the good is linked to what Nussbaum considers a classical and Aristotelian tradition of ethics (cf. 1992, p. 10, col. 4 f.). But the mechanistic way in which a man like Beowulf travels and brings us along through the necessary stages of goodness seems also to echo a kind of unreflected normative code of honour and loyalty which Cesar and Tacitus noted in the noble, but savage, early German (Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* VI. 22. 2; Tacitus, *Germania* VIII–IX; Thompson 1965, pp. 8 ff.).

In my opinion this kind of virtue made it worthwhile for the Romans in the century around the birth of Christ to pick out some Germanic leaders and support them in order to make them more Romanly civilised. The support made it possible for these leaders to be generous and responsible, and in this way, the Romans inspired a new Germanic virtue: that of being economically powerful and generous in a socially responsible way. Eventually this kind of generosity created the form of loyalty and goodness, which is evident in *Beowulf*.

The initial contact between Hroðgar and the child Beowulf is thus, on the one hand, an example of an unconditional goodness related to Aristotelian ideas of ethical reflection telling us that in principle, goodness needs an unconditional start in...
order to survive and develop, but at the same time it is also an example of a suitable context: Beowulf visiting the Danish court in his father’s company. There is a similar example in the meeting between the Latin-loving Lupus and the amiable young Venantius on the occasion of the wedding between Sigibert and Brunhild. In that example too the hall and its community constitute a suitable context which makes it possible to form a relationship based upon unconditional goodness.

Beowulf’s goodness, on the other hand, although based on the unconditional, is inspired by the idea of honouring a contract set up between the hero, in his capacity as a retainer or drengr, and the king. This social practice is neither a loan from the classical tradition of virtue nor a continuation from the Early Germanic tradition of loyalty as a duty to an elected chieftain or king. There are obviously possible connections, but the contract represents something new, namely a practical way of selecting the individual: a way of pointing him out as an aristocrat and eventually a responsible leader and, moreover, a way of securing for him the wealth which is necessary to live a good life, but not sufficient to create it.

This means that when looking for the roots of the Late Iron Age concept of being good we may expect remote connections with an unspecified Aristotelian and Greek as well as with an Early Germanic tradition, but also a strong affinity with a new Germanic tradition. We can therefore conclude that concepts like goodness, virtue or honour have very deep roots, but also that goodness in its Late Iron Age version exploits and transforms older traditions for obvious power-political reasons and as part of the ongoing process of social stratification.

The good designates the individual and those of his actions that, in the long run, maintain the civilised or, indeed, the good society. The concept is complex, it can create conflicts and it is partly reserved for the individuals of the upper strata of society. Due to its character of a contract which must be honoured, even good people in the upper classes may find themselves in troublesome conflicts when trying to be good. Since the concept involves areas of general conflict in a society, the negation of being good is not always to be bad or evil—we may just be more or less lacking in goodness.

The glimpses we have received of the lower classes, i.e., Sabas, have showed us that here people may be considered evil or monstrous by the upper classes, while they are themselves prepared to defend their goodness, and to define the good members of the upper classes as utterly evil and monstrous. Sabas’ goodness is a matter of a world-rejecting disposition as well as of actions. It is, moreover, very Christian. Sabas’ attitude, or rather hate, towards the representatives of the nobility, whose behaviour is modelled on that of Beowulf, convinces us of the possible social conflict behind the notion of the good. But even from an aristocratic point of view not everybody in the upper classes is good. This implies that doing the good is a universally accepted means of social selection.
As an upper-class ideal good exists as a relation between people and to begin with that relation is always asymmetric. The benefactor is the superior individual and even if the beneficiary may in his turn, i.e., in another setting, fulfil the role of the benefactor, there is no doubt that as long as people call each other good there is a difference between them. If, however, both are good in such a way that there is no need of pointing it out within a given social setting, then the preconditions for what may eventually become a complementary pair have been established, and this kind of pair is the emblem of the civilised society.

It is naturally difficult to stabilise the asymmetry and the complementarity as they form the basis of the dynamics of society, and it is especially difficult to avoid their transformation into polarisation and antagonism. The anecdote about Aud and Vifil shows this as do the problems which Lupus ran into after Sigibert’s death, when his loyalty to King Sigibert and Queen Brunhild stood out as a form of antagonism to people like Ursio. This means that being good is the cause of class conflict as well as of conflict between competing equals.

That goodness, according to the sources used here, stands out as an upper-class phenomenon is no doubt the expression of a strong bias, but it is even more noteworthy that women cannot be good while men and even artefacts can qualify as intentionally good. This bias seems the more unreasonable as examples show that women act like good men and that through their actions they promote goodness and are capable of giving guidance, even to men, in the proper understanding of the concept.

Queen Aud is mainstream Late Iron Age good when she acts as a leader for her party and later as a queen in her fjord. Wealhtheow reminds the men of their duties as good, and Hygd, who is not too mean to give presents, performs one of the main tasks of the good ruler: that of being generous. Women are, however, peaceful rather than good in their ideal role and as queens like Brunhild or her equivalent, the wife of an important peasant like Olaf Feilan, who married Alfdís of Barra, they enter the society of their husband at a fairly late stage in life when their role, far from being childish, is already rather formal. This means that they lack the social origin of the good from which Beowulf benefited when he went to Denmark to re-introduce himself to Hroðgar, who knew Beowulf as a boy:

\[ \text{Ic hine cuðe cnichtwesende} \]
\[ (\text{Beowulf v. 372}). \]
\[ \text{‘I knew him well being a boy’, i.e., when Beowulf was a boy} \]

That upper-class women have been uprooted also means that they have lost the opportunity to repay whatever reward they may have received in their childhood, and that it is difficult for them to start a relation with a man, or to engage a man, other than their husband, in a goodness contract or relation by being unconditionally nice to him.
Their peaceful role in general and the fact that they have been deprived of their social origin is a handicap in the goodness game. Ultimately it is their complementary relation with their husband and the fact that they are withdrawn from the public that make it difficult and perhaps impossible for upper-class women to be or to become good.

From a formal point of view it can be argued that since the wife or the queen has already reached the state of being complementary to her husband, there is no need either for her or for him to be good to each other. They are past that stage in life. The social sphere of women becomes unreasonably narrow in this perspective and for a modern mind it is obviously difficult to accept that a sword or tactics are more likely to be good than women. Nonetheless, Beowulf applies tactics which make it possible for matter to behave in accordance with the ideal of the good and men and swords meet each other, so that they may engage themselves in the goodness game. It is, moreover, easy to imagine that now and then a sword gives us its unconditional support when we strike our blow, and also to feel that this support is the result of the care and goodness we have bestowed upon it.

Goodness is a matter of civilised action, and the good verify themselves through their actions. It is characteristic of the society that there is a latent need for someone to take action in order to solve some problem or other. The good should take some of the initiative to solve the problem in a way that corresponds to the end product of the good, namely the peaceful society. It is thus not for one person to decide what is the good action in a given case. If goodness cannot be discussed as in Beowulf, follow an administrative line as in the Lupus case or be taken for granted as in Byrhtnoth’s situation, then the good cannot take action. This shows itself in a most subtle way when Vifil asks for Aud’s generosity, since the very asking a favour or demanding it, as Vifil does, results in conflict. Instead of bringing friendship into the picture or a new contract of goodness between Aud and Vifil it brings up a quarrel between Vifil and his superior Hord, who is Aud’s shipmate. Whether on purpose or not, the story tells us that women are not good, since they cannot form contracts of social goodness.

The point is that we are allowed to be good only when the good actions are the result of a social contract based on the free will of members of the same sex. Even in cases where it ought to be fairly obvious what is good and what is not good, decisions may be difficult to reach. Wealhtheow hopes that Hroðulf will remember the good done to him in his youth and pay it back to the Queen’s children, her sons, if Hroðgar should die, but these very hopes suffice to tell us that there may be competing relations of goodness which could lead to the death of her sons.

It is characteristic of the good action that it is a contract imposed upon a man by his superiors, but also that he may himself engage his inferiors in another similar of contract. A contract must be honoured, but within the upper classes a lack of goodness does not lead to a man being defined as evil; instead the man loses honour. In
the contract the socially dominant person fulfils his part of the goodness contract by being generous and helpful in negotiations, thus developing his goodness and honour, while in return the inferior party must perform dangerous and difficult tasks for his benefactor. The risk is that the beneficiary will be killed, the chance that new gifts, in effect honour, and later new obligations may be bestowed upon him, until he eventually reaches the level at which people can be mutually generous, i.e., engaged in a friendship fruitful for both. Such a state may be personal, but it can also spread out to a friendship between peoples. Therefore the progression of the friendship between Beowulf and Hroðgar, is the friendship between Danes and Geats. In his epithalamium Venantius is also aware that this kind of friendship between leaders is a friendship between nations, since when Athanagild gives his daughter Brunhild to Sigibert, Venantius sees it as the unification of two kingdoms, but within the aristocracy male friendship was probably much more important for the development of friendship between peoples than marriage.

The capability of the individual to act in the name of the people is close to unlimited. The modern reader may doubt that the individual is defending the cause of the people rather than his own interests, but it is nonetheless characteristic of the first poem to Lupus that it starts by comparing Lupus to three of the heroes of the Roman republic, Cato, Scipio and Pompey, rather than heroic emperors. The good aristocrat, the foremost being the king himself, bestows care upon everybody, hereby in all probability honouring an ancient Germanic tradition when the king was elected by the assembly of free men and represented the people (Thompson 1965).

To balance this obviously advantageous account of the good individual it must be pointed out that for some heroes the contract seems harsh, e.g., when Byrhtnoth’s men go forth to die or when the innocent Geat acts as a decoy for Grendel. The notion of general development and social career is nonetheless very apparent in Beowulf, but also in the rune-stone texts from Jutland and Västergötland. In these texts it is as easy to be a good þegn as a good drengr, although the old skilled warriors ought to be fewer than the young ones.

Career and development structure the whole of Beowulf (Part 1) and it seems essential to start the career with the unconditional contact between the old man and the young man or child—Hroðgar and Beowulf or Lupus and Venantius, although Venantius may not have observed how he was about to engage himself. The early social meeting between two men inaugurates a social, gender-bound fatherhood, which is a main ingredient in the idea of goodness. This openness and goodness as the beginning of a fatherhood may also explain why women are not good in the marked social sense of the Late Iron Age, and why rune-stone sons and especially fathers are regularly considered good.

As an upper-class role-play goodness involves a combination of logocentric and martial qualities paired with, or inspired by, generosity. In the initial generosity we see a reflection of good as a male disposition and a willingness eventually to create a
reciprocal connection between a pair of people, one of whom is more powerful than the other. The frequency of good rune-stone fathers points to the family as a forum for this kind of goodness.

The link between generosity and the hall strengthens this interpretation. It means that the concept existed within the family and that it was developed in the hall as a social room. From here it was taken out into society as a model for the right social conduct.

This led to the birth of a good human being who acts as an individual on the basis of the ideology of the hall in the public interest. When Pagan society meets Christian society, hall goodness can of course survive, but hardly dominate, society as such, since it is difficult to deny anybody a good disposition, in spite of the fact that they are not employing their disposition in a contract of goodness. Sabas’ pacifistic and steadfast goodness is obviously inspired by the antagonism between a Pagan and a Christian goodness. Even the ritual aspect of the quality of being good with food may cause ideological problems in a Christian society where it is difficult to give the communal meal sponsored by the rich, i.e., those good with food, the status of an official ritual, once the communion of the Church has been established.

It must have been easy for the Pagan aristocrat to follow God as the supreme leader, but also difficult to grasp that God nonetheless considered everybody to be equal, an attitude which enabled him to bestow his ultimate reward, ‘light and Paradise’, upon anybody. It would therefore seem reasonable for the upper classes first to connect the word good with appellatives and later to drop it, while keeping the conduct in connection with worldly affairs. This means that it disappears except in very special cases, e.g., a good soldier, i.e., a man who in his career continues to be good due to his willingness to die for what his king or generals believe to be the right cause, i.e., the actions of the inferior partner in the contract. Eventually he may of course become a general himself.

In the transition from Pagan to Christian ideology we may in other words expect new concepts to raise and play a prominent moral role in society. Recent analysis of the Sagas of the Icelanders and the history of Iceland in the Middle Ages point to honour and friendship as two such concepts, and in the case of friendship we meet an institution that harbours many of the ingredients of the goodness-contract.

Goodness and Honour

In his analysis of the concept of honour in the Sagas of the Icelanders Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1993) has argued that our understanding of the concept benefits from our seeing it as one concept differently emphasised in different social situations and among different social groups, rather than two, chronologically, separated concepts. His analysis is opposed to that of Lindow (1976) or Andersson (1970), who accept two ideals of honour, one connected with the glory of the war-
rior and the other with the honour and honourable behaviour of the free man. Meulengracht Sørensen’s analysis is supported by our analysis of the good, since good cannot be understood unless both aspects of honour, i.e., martial as well as peaceful utility, are brought into the analysis.

Among the upper-class members known to us, honour is the product of the actions of the good, and thus the Old English or Old Saxon ára or éra, in which honour, glory, rank, protection, mercy and property are all contained, is a late meaning in terms of cultural history inasmuch as it mixes the double-sidedness of goodness and blurs the contract perspective. This is reasonable in a society which develops Christianity, royalty and nobility early. In less hierarchically developed societies, where Christian indoctrination and influence on the language are a late phenomenon, the link between doing the good and pursuing honour is still action- and contract-based and tied to the development of the individual. In such a society it is natural to divide the concept of honour between different words.

In a society where honour and friendship are the outcome of good actions, which are still seen as the result of an interaction between two persons each playing his social role, it is natural that the language reflects the roles rather than the result—the aspects rather than the product.

Late Iron Age goodness must be able to show the unconditional initial acceptance of the child or young man in order to start this interaction. This is the eira part of the interaction, where eira is confined to meaning mercy and/or clemency. This initial honorable disposition demands a response, namely an unconditional willingness to perform inspired and glorious deeds to support and honour the initial and genuinely merciful actions on which the contract is founded.

In the milieu of the upper classes the complement to clemency constitutes a set of deeds signified by a variety of words originally linked to the martial success of the individual: heiðr, tírr, tign or vegr—glorious, glowing, worthiness or esteem (Lindow 1976, pp. 128 ff.). Whatever the reason for these word to have etymological roots in expressions meaning shining, there is, as Lindow has shown, no doubt that they describe a mental state achieved by means of fighting. In the quotation from *Beowulf* vv. 1518–1528 (above p. 84) the kenning used to describe the sword Hrunting, ‘the light of the battle’, shows us the connection between light, battle and honour. The practical inference of the Late Iron Age aristocracy was that the goodness of swords is logically tied to being good, inasmuch as battle honour is linked to light and light to goodness.

Eira and heiðr are the complements of each other and if we are good they are both the outcome of our actions.

This complementary understanding of action-based goodness is also reflected in the oldest Norse words for honour, sómi and sæmdø. According to Lindow, they mean to benefit and to honour and they must have been partly synonymous. If they are viewed in connection with the behaviour of the good, their meaning seems the
result of a philosophical development in which the complementary aspects of honour have eventually fused. Nevertheless, the words echo the interactive model in which the good individual receives a benefit and returns an honour or receives an honour and returns what is fitting.

Meulengracht Sørensen translates the verbs sóma and sæma as ‘to befit’ someone and ‘to assign honour’ to someone. These meanings show a reciprocal and double-sided relationship with words typical of the behaviour of the good. The words mirror a gesture-response situation in which the befitting act leads to the assignation of honour and the assignation of honour to the befitting act. Sómi and sæmð are complementary words.

When we turn to later constructions (Sørensen 1993, pp. 188 ff.), with their obvious etymological links with measurement and evaluation, it becomes clear that the words have been coined to fit the society analysed by Meulengracht Sørensen, in which honour is a moral quality possessed by a free man, but constantly reflected in, i.e., measured and evaluated by, the public opinion.

The extraordinary Icelandic situation is created by the paramount social obligation to be honourable and to defend one’s honour. In the traumatic situation characterising Maldon we see a good deal of the same attitude, while in Beowulf the stress is upon the development of a stable friendship in which honour is secured and undisputed. There are several examples of this in the poem, e.g., in the end, when even Unferð is tolerated (vv. 1805 ff.) or when public opinion hints that Beowulf ought to be king after his first solution of the Grendel problem (vv. 856 ff.). The stable friendship between Hroðgar and Beowulf, a friendship which is formed on the acceptance of a naturally biased order rather than a strictly balanced reciprocity, prevents these situations from developing into crises.

In the very long perspective there seems to be a change in the concept of honour inasmuch as it starts out as something that must to begin with be gained, but when it is gained it results in a relatively stable social and mental state. Eventually it becomes a state into which a man may be born, and in that situation it may also more easily be wholly or partially lost. In Iceland, when it expresses a man’s overall moral qualities, it seems inevitable that honour must be more or less continuously defended or regained. Any action or measure taken by a man will relate to the honour of other men who in their turn will have to act with a measure of response.

This does not mean that from a theoretical point of view the aspects of honour have changed significantly. It seems instead to be a reflection of a more clearly stratified society, in which social ranking is becoming more definite and the possibilities of upward social mobility smaller. As pointed out by Meulengracht Sørensen, what we may see as a social change could also reflect the fact that early and late sources are concerned with different social strata. This is to say that even if the likes of Beowulf competed for power in a ranking system, where doing the good meant advancement, then the members of the peasant stratum of those days, of which we know
virtually nothing, may have been as strict about the maintenance of their honour as ever the Icelanders of the Free State. If, moreover, we are to judge the Germanic lower classes by the examples of Sabas and Grendel, there may well have been ideals of honour that we know nothing of at all, since not even in the Sagas of Icelanders are the drop-outs human.

Obviously the socially acceptable combination in one man of the complementary extremes, clemency and battle glory, designates a very capable individual, so capable in fact that we can hardly imagine him today. Nonetheless present-day Scandinavians can still see that honour is a concept which contains complementary parts. It is a typical deconstruction which helps us to see this, namely when we want to describe what happens when we defame someone. In Scandinavian languages such an act is still a matter of depriving people of heder och ära, i.e., heiðr and eir, an echo of the once complementary character of the honour which characterised the good. The honour concept in the Sagas of the Icelanders is in other words a reflection of, but also a development away from an older ideal of the good.

Friendship and Goodness

When the good, i.e., those who are both merciful and shining, meet, then moral stability evolves and the relation between the good may become the reciprocal state of friendship although there is still a difference in rank between the friends. In some cases when the likes of Beowulf and Hroðgar are involved, a friendship between nations is created, although we are given to understand that the friendship is not going to last. Between Lupus and Venantius we can also talk of friendship. The alleged time span between the first and the last pair of poems is in that case an indication of the stability of the friendship.

In principle the scenes describing upper-class relationships in Beowulf, Maldon or the Lupus poems are concerned with vertical relations in which the superior is generous with material gifts and the inferior risks his life. In other words the goodness contract need not develop into any reciprocal friendship, and goodness may well be a stable vertical relation. These ideas about one’s position on the social scale are the same ideas that guided Aud in her relationship to Vifil, and which her gender prevented him from understanding.

The friendship that developed on Iceland during the Middle Ages is obviously based on the contract idea of the good (Sigurðsson 1993), but it is a much more of an institution with a reciprocal structure for special purposes than in the earlier poems, where friendship was the far-reaching and balanced result of a series of activities in a vertical or asymmetrical relationship.

Already in Hávamál (vv. 39–46) friendship is depicted more or less as a balanced or reciprocal economic relation in which the two partners give and take goods of exactly the same value. The stress on the material side of things and formal friendship
connections is marked and disproportional to the single line (v. 44, l. 2) in which we are advised to meet friends with an open mind. Actually the very opening of this section about friendship mocks some of the basic concepts of goodness, mildness and generosity with food, by inferring that they are always tied to an ulterior motive. However, in the original ideal they are genuine at the very beginning of the goodness contract and at its successful conclusion:

\[
\text{Fannka ek mildan mann \quad eða svá matar góðan,}
\]
\[
\text{at ei væri þiggia þegit \quad eða sins fðar}
\]
\[
\text{svági ... ... ... ... .... \quad at leið sé laun, ef þægi.}
\]

(I found no man so mild nor so good with food that that which was offered him was not taken, nor a man so ... [wasteful?] of his property that he became fed up with compensation when (it was) given.—Hávamál v. 39)

Friendship as a convenient contract rather than reciprocal relationship is further developed during the Middle Ages and it leads to several situations in which the formal character of the concept brings people into insoluble predicaments equal to those which are created by the demands upon a man’s honour (cf. Sigurðsson. 1993, pp. 153 ff.).

When honour was discussed above it became clear that it was from the beginning a complementary concept among the upper-classes, and that on Iceland the complementarity was subject to a pressure that sought to unify the concept. Likewise friendship seems to have involved a reciprocal relationship between two good men, with friendship as the end product. In Icelandic society, however, there is a tendency to define a nucleus of the concept by constantly bringing it into correspondence with a publicly accepted pattern of behaviour.

Hávamál should, therefore, be seen as the result of a philosophical position halfway between the aristocratic and the egalitarian points of view. Its coverage can be seen in Fig. 37.

Whether the different aspects of honour or friendship are chronological or social is hardly the issue here since even today we understand the complementarity of the concepts, and we know that the social periods in which their singularity or complementarity differ are not consecutive or simply linked to a linear development over a time span as short as a thousand years or so. We are also aware that the solutions of Icelandic society which stress the communal and iterative definition of honour and friendship are far from ideal today even though we can accept a good deal of their egalitarian basis.
Several of the most important concepts in the texts analysed so far display their complementarity. The concept of good is the example par excellence and so are the characters of Lupus and Beowulf, inasmuch as they denote the concept of the outstanding individual who is the complement of the collective. However, in their role as the complement of the king they represent the collective. In this role the complementarity becomes extra intricate inasmuch as both Beowulf and Lupus can also act as the complementary partner in a social set-up, in which they represent the top of the hierarchy. This goes for the landnámakóna Aud too, but she is also part of an incredibly stable and much wider gender complementarity with Skalagrim, the landnámsmann at the fjord south of Hvammsfjord (Herschend 1994).

In the Sagas of the Icelanders the scene changes, but still the complementarity of concepts like honour and friendship is visible. We must ask ourselves about the origins of this conceptual structure and when it became decisive in the Northwest Germanic culture?

In my opinion the first complementary division where inequality and difference are incorporated into a whole is the division of the dwelling into the kitchen dwelling and the hall. The double-sidedness to be found in the construction of Early Iron Age houses (especially Jutland and Northwest Germany) with a central entrance room
and humans and animals on each side of that room is a balanced dyad and a way of conserving and stabilising a strict social structure in a more dualistic perspective. The complementarity, on the other hand, is a way of coping with and benefiting from the inequalities of the society. It is in essence the expression of a conflict-solving social philosophy with a dynamic character in an originally egalitarian society.

The complementary concepts of the Late Iron Age, whether illustrated by the marriage between Sigibert and his complement Brunhild or by the relationship between Beowulf and Hroðgar, are significant of a society in which social mobility is possible and essential while at the same time there is a strong will to control it and an equally strong will to mark its hierarchical structure. In practice the complementarity is the basis for personal development of individuals—a career for perfect men and women at a suitable social level. Society is not stratified in sharply defined groups, but each member is ranked in accordance with his or her ability to honour the complexity of utilitarian concepts such as the good, or marriage.

Clearly, we can only arrive at a very tenuous understanding of prehistoric or Early Medieval society on the basis of written or material sources, but at least the prehistoric setting of the hall fits in with the concept of the good and associated concepts of honour and friendship. And one aspect of the good, namely goodness with food or gifts, i.e., the initial stage of the contract of goodness is performed in the hall. The introduction of the hall is in other words linked to the concept of complementarity, inasmuch as it is the room in which an essential part, and the confirmation of the good act, is performed, and perhaps we may go as far as to say that the hall is the result of the acceptance of complementarity as a social norm.

The Making of an Aristocracy

In two related essays, *On Aristocracy* and *On Fashion*, the German sociologist Georg Simmel (Simmel 1911, pp. 29 ff.) has pointed out some general concepts basic to these two social phenomena, which in their turn are closely linked to the characteristics of the good. This follows from the fact that although the concept of the good is linked to the formation of an aristocracy characterised by individuals, it is also characteristic of a period during the Viking Age when the word ‘good’ invades the rune-stone texts, which are, at least in the Mälar Valley, an obvious vogue phenomenon (Herschend 1994).

It is a major point in Georg Simmel’s sociology that on the basis of a reasonable, although not very clear, basic perspective upon the tension between individual and collective, he takes his readers on a tour around a large number of relevant and intriguing examples. However, in order to benefit from the examples the reader must often hesitate in front of them and develop them further for his own purposes (cf. Lipman 1959, pp. 135 ff.).
The difficulty for the reader and also for Simmel arises from the fact that his approach is so fundamentally social-psychological that he is looking for the most basic mechanisms, ‘phenomenological formulae’ and specifically not for sociological ‘laws of Nature’, (Simmel 1923, p. 532). Simmel works with very complex societies, in which also the genealogy of the formulae forks innumerable times thus making it hard to follow the mechanisms of the ‘phenomenological formulae’ (Simmel 1923, p. 532).

If, however, our field of research is studying the good during the Late Iron Age then Simmel is not quite so difficult to use as we may have supposed, since what we are seeking is the origin and first development of an aristocratic group which set or forced its mark upon society and developed with it for more than a thousand years, i.e., the first development of the Northwest European class of the aristocracy.

The good, as we have seen, is a concept used to differentiate among the members of the aristocracy and thus the origin of the basic conflict within it. This follows from the fact that good is either the individual’s course of development into personal perfection or the responsibility of the individual towards an egalitarian collective with membership rules rather than individual rights. Lupus’ role at Sigibert’s court is an example of this since he is in one and the same person the perfect individual and a member of the duke-collective. When Sigibert dies Lupus falls out with a number of the dukes. Envy may be the reason for this, but it seems more reasonable to explain the events as the result of the potential conflict in the aristocracy between the individual and the group. As pointed out by Simmel, this is the fundamental conflict of the aristocracy (1923, pp. 545 ff.). In connection with the present study this probably means that goodness in the Late Iron Age was the vehicle for the foundation of what Simmel calls a ‘major sociological form’ (Simmel 1923, p. 545) in our societies, since aristocracy in his opinion is an archetype for several of the group formations in the lower strata of society.

The good is no doubt a general concept, but during the Late Iron Age the emphasis on goodness with food and generosity together with the archaeological characteristics of the hall suggests that one of the roots of the good is to be found within the family, in paternal goodness or the farm owners’ goodness which is made possible by a surplus production. The good reflects a hierarchic order on the farm and so also within the farm-owning family. Although a farm may be more or less successful the hierarchic structure is the same on all farms as long as it is equipped with a hall.

As Simmel shows (Simmel 1923, pp. 535 f.) the family is the first social form in which an individual may stand out as more or less capable than others, and in the Late Iron Age, when farm and family were to a large degree one, there was probably a point in proving yourself within the hierarchy of the farm, and also a family position to gain, even if one was not from the beginning kin to the head of the farm-owning family. Although we cannot know for sure, it is reasonable to imagine that
competition on the farm was smooth and unregulated with a large measure of solidarity and a ‘good’ leader who provided for his people without constantly grading them.

The hierarchic structure of the hall-farm is extended to the hierarchy of farm groups, and that leads to a need for differentiating a larger number of people each belonging to one of the smaller farm/family hierarchies, but also in this larger social context the aim is still a life guided by the good.

In the settlement structure we can see these hierarchies as one large farm surrounded by several smaller ones, but eventually when we may expect the hierarchies to have grown to cover regions, so that they comprise several farms groups or villages, it becomes difficult to actually see the leader’s farm or the leading farm and its hall, while the magnates of a society may own several widely separated farms. Be this as it may, the point is that the leader of any hierarchy, independent of its size, is a man characterised by the same form of goodness and no matter what other qualities he may possess, goodness is always there. Farm and society are organised the same way, headed by and aiming at the good. We can say that individuals and society are good-orientated.

It is thus only natural that due to their varying economic power, leaders may be more or less good. The concept can in other words be used for differentiating people independently of the farm or family hierarchy to which they belong, and that differentiation need not be a simple reflection of economic power. In the Late Iron Age it is the ability to honour the good as a contract that is the instrument of differentiation, and it works across the hierarchies, which are only loosely segmented.

If Fig. 38a shows the general character of the farm-bound hierarchies, then Fig. 38b shows how a leader, e.g., a king, and his men, are chosen both from the farm-bound hierarchy closest to the leader himself and from other hierarchies, without this being a simple reflection of the men’s previous ranking. The group around the leader form the aristocracy of the Late Iron Age and with changing leaders the aristocracy eventually becomes a group with internal ties as well as ties to the farm-bound hierarchies on the one hand and to leaders and kings on the other. The membership rules and the individual rights in the aristocratic group are defined primarily in relation to the good with a lot of surrounding concepts such as mildness, eloquence, righteousness, bravery, warrior skills, loyalty, honour etc., etc., facilitating differentiation.

When Simmel points out that differentiation within a group (Simmel 1923, pp. 530 ff.) leads to alliances between similar segments in different groups, then this is the mechanism acting in the formation of the Late Iron Age aristocracy, and the good must be the general differentiating concept since it is the segment-producing concept of the basic groups, i.e., families as well as farm hierarchies. Good people like the ones we have met in the texts stand out as segments of the aristocratic family and a segment, perhaps only one or two persons, on a farm. Hroðgar is thus the only good man on his own farm before Beowulf arrives.
From an economic point of view there is little doubt that the means for keeping a retinue and an aristocracy are eventually produced by a pillage economy supported by a surplus-producing self-sustaining economy. Therefore the ruthlessness of the pillage and its horrors together with the multiple ways in which they backfire in all kinds of violence are intimately linked to being good. Being ourselves the result of this kind of goodness, as well as in parts the reaction to it, we should in other words be puzzled by the fact that we can form such different opinions about Beowulf and Atharidos in their relationships with Grendel and Sabas respectively.

There is equally little doubt that it is the contractual aspect of the good which eventually leads to consequences that we find hard to connect with our own ideas of what the good is, but it so happens that our views on such matters are in themselves a result of the formation of the Late Iron Age aristocracy. When the upper classes encountered Christianity they must have seen an advantage in replacing the contractual aspect with concepts like loyalty and duty.

Figures 38a and b. Hierarchies of the Late Iron Age: (a) five topologically and socially defined farm hierarchies—a model of the basic structure of the Late Iron Age society, (b) the kingship hierarchy: the elevation of one of the hierarchies in Fig. 38a, in this case no. 3, to which is added an extract of men belonging to the farms of the basic hierarchies. In this case farm hierarchy no 4 in Fig. 38a is not represented in the kingship hierarchy.
The established aristocracy is always a model for other groups in society and as Simmel has pointed out there is a mutual dependency between the aristocratic and the non-aristocratic group. One such dependency is the mutually maintained balance which characterises a society’s concept of fashion.

Fashion is more than clothes, inasmuch as such things as life-style, ideology and moral conviction, in short everything that signifies one social group in relation to another group, in such a way that it may be imitated by the other group, is related to this concept. It is thus typical of a fashion or a vogue phenomenon that it involves the selling out of virtues which had hitherto been an exclusively aristocratic privilege or a significant symbol of the aristocracy.

It seems that at the end of Scandinavian prehistory, perhaps as a result of the meeting between the aristocracy and the Church, the good, especially the aspect that had to do with honouring, as a cardinal and exclusive upper-class virtue, was deliberately sold out and exploited as a fashion during a short period. The phenomenon is exemplified by the Scandinavian rune-stone texts which signify the selling out of a virtue. The selling out is indicated by the relatively large number of good thanes, drengir, fathers and sons. The latter two are obviously a ridiculous category in connection with the original concept, since its very essence was to make possible the formation of groups rather than singling out fathers and sons, despite the fact that fathers may naturally be good to their sons. But if they were, this was not primarily a function of their family relation, but a function of their social understanding.

Even Hávamál reflects the use of the concept of the good as a fashion. In the poem the concept is no longer the backbone of outstanding human development through action. On the contrary, the poems criticises the concept for being hardly more than a formal basis for what was in the days of the composition of the poem in the process of becoming the object of a normative measure-for-measure contract with very little relation to the characters or moral standards of the people involved. The poems shows the concept to have been deprived of something of its quality and we may conclude that the concept has become commonplace.

This means that to begin with goodness was used to form the aristocracy and in this way a relatively large number of individuals were able to gain entrance to the aristocracy and to define their social rank. Once the group had been formed, however, the concept of the good underwent a process of devaluation. During this short period it was used for flattering people of a lower social rank and thereby soon lost its character as a symbol for the Beowulfian career. It was no longer an enlightening guideline for formalised behaviour.

In this way the aristocracy as a state-bearing group managed to show the lower strata in society that Beowulf was a hero, but also that from now on brutality and violence must not be used as a means of becoming the good individual, except within formal organisations like the army. By being used as a vogue phenomenon the con-
cept is dissolved while flattering a socially inferior group. This made it possible for the aristocracy to engage itself in other social activities, which could later be taken over by the lower strata, or formalised in some way or another.

It may well be that the production of the *Beowulf* manuscript and the composition of *Maldon* belong to a period in which the Late Iron Age concept of the good is sold out as a fashion and made commonplace, by means of traditional poetry, as well as a standard situation for honouring the goodness-contract, i.e., the battle. Venantius’ poems, on the other hand, seem to root the good in a more genuine context and thereby conform to most of our interpretations although we may of course be the victims of several minor misinterpretations. It is, however, essential that we see the good being sold out of the aristocratic circle since it is an indication that the aristocracy was actually formed during the Late Iron Age and that it brought forth its own first *raison d’être* as its first social fruit, when it exported the ideal of the good as a social quality downwards in the societal system, thereby strengthening its own dominant position and the hierarchical structure of society. In my opinion the ability to do so is the inauguration of the aristocracy.
IV. The Room of the Good

Hall Life

During the Late Iron Age the hall constitutes the room of the good. It is the centre of the orderly and lawful aristocratic society, but also the room in which the quality of a man is discussed, analysed and partly created. There are affinities between the texts and the archaeological material, but to begin with the general differences that characterise the two kinds of sources must be pointed out—the social differences.

In the texts we are privileged, i.e., invited into or allowed to look into the halls of kings, dukes and earls, and we easily get the impression that halls are for the upper classes only. The archaeological material shows us that the qualities of the hall are relative and that the halls as well as the privilege to visit them may differ as Vallhagar differs from Lejre. In spite of this, halls are in several ways modelled on the same pattern. The time, space and social status of the king at Lejre can in other words be exchanged for their corresponding denotations in the hall of the hall owner at Vallhagar. In principle the differences are quantitative and the quality of the Vallhagar peasant in his social space may be equal to that of the Lejre king in his.

We can infer this from the fact that texts and the archaeological records correspond when it comes to a number of significant factors such as husband and wife, luxury display, retinue, centrality and selection.

Husband and wife as a pair suggest themselves immediately in the texts. Wealththeow’s role in Beowulf and the pair Hygelac and Hygd presented in connection with the mentioning of Hygelac’s hall are two examples. The fact that Sigibert builds his hall with a view to settling down and marrying Brunhild is another example, and with the references during their wedding to Frøy falling in love in the high settle, the link between hall, husband and wife becomes of paramount importance. The texts contains only hints of a parallel between the royal marriage and the marriage of
peasants, namely the marriage between Olaf Feilan and Alfdis of Barra in the saga about Aud, but archaeological finds like Helgö and Borg in Lofoten with their *guldgubbar* confirm the evidence of texts on lower social level, i.e., the levels where petty cheiftains and peasants belong.

Displays of luxury play an important role in the texts. Luxury may be the house itself, as the description of Heorot shows, but it is mainly expressed in the splendid gifts bestowed upon worthy heroes. In the archaeological record the houses may also be impressive, but otherwise the display of luxury was through the smashed glasses, which must have represented a considerable value. Glasses are not explicitly mentioned in the texts, but toasting and drinking are inherent in the display of luxury and the reward theme.

The centrality of the building is naturally very important in the texts. *Beowulf* is absorbed with the hall as the centre of the kingdom, and one is struck by Venantius’ expression that the hall ‘gets its eyes back’ and the peculiar light, its serenity, when Lupus returns after his victory over the Saxons and Danes. This indicates that the hall is the head of the kingdom. In the archaeological record the centrality is visible at Vallhagar, but also at Borg in Lofoten, at Gudme and at Wijster, not to mention Old Uppsala. At the same time it goes without saying that those who visit the hall must be a very small number of people in comparison with the whole population of a given area.

**Hall Talk**

Goodness is a metaphor for kingly behaviour, and the hall its focal point as well as the centre of royalty as an institution. This means that all the aspects of aristocratic life which take place outside the hall are treated in the hall, and several of the primary functions of kingship and aristocracy are also carried out there. In the long perspective life in the hall develops from a distinctly private and informal institution into a public and also more clearly formal one. This development goes hand in hand with the formation of the aristocratic group and its retainers. Hall society is a selection of people representing all the worthwhile inhabitants of the kingdom, and with this constellation of people it is natural that the whole life of society should be processed in this room. Most of the actions in the hall are about what has happened or will happen in the outside world, but eventually hall actions become relevant in a public sense and thus also part of the outside world, which was originally only informally commented upon in the private circle of the rich farmer and his closest family. That is to say that some of the truly aristocratic virtues are exported to the rest of society if not always as a pure fashion then as at least as a social norm or as rules.

Parallel to this large-scale development there is a shift in the character of hall society. To begin with it is mainly a forum for the formation of the individual, for
whom the hall is his classroom as he develops towards ideal manhood. Later on hall society becomes a collective in which the members, regardless of rank, have obvious duties. The king himself is an example: first of the splendid individual career towards unquestioned leadership, but later even the king becomes a member of the collective, who like everybody else has duties to perform in accordance with the formal character of his role in the hall institution.

If we look at our early examples, Sigibert and Hroðgar, we see that these kings are always right whatever they decide to do. In reality they may of course have been criticised, but there is a natural ring to their being described as perfect. Later on, however, we see a tendency to criticise the wisdom of a truly kingly decision, namely the comment about Byrhtnoth’s ôfer-mode. Compared with Hroðgar’s forgetfulness when he did not tell Beowulf about the existence of Grendel’s mother, Byrhtnoth’s ôfer-mode, the decision to fight rather than to withdraw, is a small point in the criticism of leadership, since he did not deliberately withhold any crucial information. He misjudged the situation. We may argue that it is the divine character of the Migration Period king which explains Hroðgar’s forgetfulness of earthly matters and that Byrhtnoth should be criticised since he is not kin to any of the gods. This line of argument leads, however, to the same conclusion, namely that leaders are becoming more equal to their retainers.

From later periods there are even more striking examples. In Saga Hákonar goða (Heimskringla, vol. III, Ch. 14 ff.; translation, Hollander 1964, pp. 106 ff.) Snorre Sturlason depicts a conflict situation in a hall. Here the hall is the gathering place for the invited assembly of the aristocracy, i.e., the farmers of the Trondheim District, who are engaged in the performance of the mid-winter or Yule offerings—the communal meal sponsored by the top of the local aristocracy, the earl at Hlaþír, Sigurð. The ceremony is chaired by the King, Hakon the Good, but being a Christian the King has difficulties performing his duties and he is criticised by the assembly. This criticism is based on the opinion that as a member of the assembly, as well as its head, he must drink from the horn dedicated to the gods and eat of the consecrated meat. What the King, rather vainly, tries to do is first to refuse and later to change the ritual so that it may suit him as well as the farmers gathered in the hall, but he succeeds only thanks to the intervention of Sigurd Jarl, and neither party is satisfied with the sacrificial feast. The King and the Earl fall back upon the more basic and also more informal and indisputable privilege pertaining to the King as the foremost among the aristocrats, namely the right to lay down rules for formalised and ritual behaviour in the hall. In this saga we witness a kind of discussion, although it does not go as far as a real argument, like the one that took place earlier in the saga at the Frostathing Assembly.

Whatever happened in the hall at Hlaþír, (cf. Hultgård 1993, pp. 224 ff.) it was, at least for Snorre Sturlason, reasonable to imagine a revolt in the hall, and to argue that the revolt could have emanated from the invited guests. The reason for this must
have been their obvious right to expect a certain formal kingly behaviour. The aristocracy in the hall acts as a norm-governed group with rights, not as individuals, i.e., invited guests competing for rank. In early examples of hall behaviour any kind of royal decision was hailed and a king was never heard arguing with anyone.

This lack of argument on the king’s part is a sign of the Iron Age ideal, and in minor conflicts we can expect it to have lived on far into the Middle Ages. In the Saga about Aud, Vífil’s complaint that he has not yet been given a farm, does not start an argument as to whether or not he should have one. On the contrary, Aud explains the idea of individuality as an Iron Age phenomenon to him and then she gives him a farm, which to her mind is not really the important thing to get. Likewise when Aud’s male counterpart Skalagrim is criticised for driving his men too hard, he responds with a song about how nice it is to work (Egils Saga, pp. 404 f.; Herschend 1994a). The Iron Age leader does not respond to a critical argument with an argument that speaks in favour of his/her behaviour, but with moral guidance and decision.

Our examples have indicated that what happens in the hall is a complex phenomenon, but also that there seems to be a unity between the hall and the talk in the hall, which in its turn seems to support the notion of an aristocracy being born. Let us begin by focusing on the room itself in the developed Scandinavian Iron Age state. Due to excellent preservation conditions this is best known from the peripheral Borg case, but given that it can also be seen in the way the hall at Lejre may have been organised, I venture to take the Lejre hall as an early royal or aristocratic hall designed to fulfil the needs of an aristocracy which is about to become a group (Fig. 39).

In view of the way in which content, setting and talk are structured in Beowulf (Part i), the hall-room may be said to contain primary performance qualities comparable to what is later found in the courtroom, in the church, or on the stage as a general phenomenon. With respect to the stage part of the hall the performance may be divided into, on the one hand, the public entertainment by the scop on the estrade and, on the other hand, the realistic drama in the sitting-room of the royal family with one wall lacking. The secondary quality of the hall is that of the chaotic battle field. Although we do not know very much about the talk during the recurrent fights, it is likely that the clashes were preceeded and accompanied by a certain amount of talk or oral activity (cf. Herschend 1997).

The design for the formal usage of the room suggests a division into different parts, the first of which is an entrance room where the humbler visitor is expected to wait for leave to enter the hall proper. Earlier that would of course have been outside the house if it lacked an entrance room as such, but some sort of borderline must be crossed, and that can happen only after seeking the king’s permission. Having crossed the first border the visitor finds himself in the lower part of the hall where people sit in the side-aisles engaged in a conversation with their neighbours at the table, but, in larger halls, hardly a conversation across the mid-aisle and the fire.
Some of those invited into the hall are also admitted to its upper part, which in the Lejre case is the area next to and above the fire. This is the stage part of the hall, at Lejre probably centred by the king in his high-seat at the back. This stage is used by those who wish to address everybody in the hall. The upper part is delimited by the wall behind the king, and there is a passage here too, namely a door that allows the king and queen (or perhaps only the king), to enter and leave the hall instantly and without any contact with the guests, a *Deus ex machina* entrance. So, looking at the Lejre hall in connection with the social stratification in the hall-governed kingdom, we seem to find the following conventions: the common people are not allowed to pass the entrance room, other hall owners and other socially significant guests are

![Figure 39. A tentative division of the hall at Lejre into entrance room, lower hall and upper hall.](image-url)
not free to pass through the lower hall, and lastly the king’s men are not automatically allowed to pass the king’s throne or high-seat and leave by the backdoor. In the farmer’s hall (Birkeli 1932, pp. 29 ff.) the design is not equally clear, but in principle we find the same demarcations although the guests are all of them closer in rank to the hall owner than is usual in a king’s hall. The abominable, but partly tolerated behaviour of the berserk Bjorn testifies to this.

When it comes to the way people talk in the hall, and thus to the literary possibilities of the texts used here, this organisation is, in my opinion, reflected in specific production formats (Goffman 1981, pp. 146 ff.). One such format is made up by the poem about hall life itself, a production format meant to be recited in the hall. Even Venantius’ poems to Lupus indicated that the official poem was essential to barbarians, but also that a man like Venantius with his Latin extraction felt the need to balance the official poem with a private one.

In the entrance room the participant framework (Goffman 1981, pp. 146 ff.) is rigid. The formality of the talk is exemplified by the greetings scene in Beowulf when the hero arrives in Denmark. Although he speaks for his group of people, he has no special status at the moment, but the group needs someone to represent them vis-à-vis a higher stratum in society. The same is the case in the tale about St. Sabas, where the villagers are represented by the village leaders. The other participant in the village assembly scene, which is a parallel to the entrance room framework, is the king’s representative who has been sent there by the king in the same way as Wulfgar was sent out to meet Beowulf. In the first Lupus poem a group of what seems to be Saxons and Danes is represented by an emissary and met by Lupus who acts on behalf of the king. These royal emissaries, Wulfgar or Lupus, the king’s representatives pose questions in the king’s name, and in Goffman’s terms that is their principal standing, but they also allow themselves to embed (Goffman 1981, pp. 128 and 149 f.) some of their own opinions in their questions. This is certainly true of Lupus, while Wulfgar uses ‘I’ now and then and the nobleman in Sabas’ village also acts as a judge and not just as a persecutor or interrogator when in the assembly he creates new representatives of the people by letting someone step forward and give his opinion of Sabas. This nobleman obviously cannot think of himself as talking to the assembly itself, he is only able to question someone who represents the people in the village. He is a courtier, a civil servant acting partly on behalf of the king, partly on his own behalf. His actions, however, seem not to have been satisfactory since later on and, no doubt, after having heard what happened in Sabas’ village a new and more effective nobleman with a sharper question is sent to Sabas. Like Lupus and Beowulf this man represents not only the king but also the people: he is the acting king. He demands that Sabas eat the sacred meat, and by refusing to do so Sabas loses his life. The new nobleman, Athanarid, appears to be following precise instructions. He is the equivalent of the returning Wulfgar who, when he refrains from expressing his own opinion, is the king’s mouthpiece. The enquiry carried out by the king’s man in
the entrance room, i.e., in a room where the king would not himself meet the people, is a matter of posing the right questions, bringing back the answers to the king and returning to carry out his wishes. In principle Lupus also acts this way when negotiating with the emissaries from the Saxons and the Danes (behind which we may suspect kings) and, according to Venantius, Lupus succeeded in balancing his foothold in himself as an individual and his foothold as a royal official in the royalty. The aristocrat may thus function as the king’s servant in contacts with the people, but also like Beowulf as the representative of the people. This entrance talk outside the king’s hall is, then, the basic platform from which the aristocratic civil servant can exert influence over the collective, and out there he may agree to talk to a representative or chose someone to represent the collective if he does not fill the part himself, a true sign that he considers the people a collective. The first nobleman in the Sabas letter exemplifies this when as the king’s representative he takes over the assembly, thereby representing the people as well as his king:

When the leader of the lawlessness heard this he ordered Sabas to step forward. When he stood there, he (the Leader) asked those who fetched him, whether he possessed anything of value. When they answered: Nothing except what he is dressed in, the lawless despised him and said: One of those can neither be of any use nor hurt. And thereby he had him thrown out. (Flemberg 1992, p. 172).

In the literary sources used here we cannot expect to meet other situations than those dominated by the king’s unquestioned authority. Such situations may have occurred, e.g., in the public assembly, but the sources seem to reflect the wish of the king to seek seclusion as an ideal and the poets seem to respect this wish.

In principle we find two forms of talk in the lower part of the hall. The relatively limited, but free talk between tablemates and the participation as hearers in the talk which is meant to incorporate everybody in the hall. The first kind of conversation must be adjusted to those we talk to and those who may happen to overhear what we say. Goffman (1981, p. 128) describes this kind of conversation as involving a large number of ‘footings’ to shift between for those engaged in the conversation. These shifts are the problem of the free talk and the idea of formalised talk is, among other things, to control the ‘footings’ and minimize their number.

From Maldon we know that anonymous hall-guests may promise each other to act in accordance with the high ideals of kings and heroes, since when this battle begins to get dangerous they remind each other of their former promises.

Ælfwine þá cwæð      (hē on ellen spræc):
‘Gemunað þára mæla      þe wé oft æt meodo spræcon,
þonne wé on bence     béot áhófon,
hæleð on healle,        ymbe heard gewinn:
nú mæg cunnian      hwá céne sý.
Then Ælfwine said, he talked boldly:
Do you remember the speeches which we often spoke at the mead,
when on the bench we made up boast,
Heroes in the hall, about bold fighting:
Now may it be tested who is brave (Maldon vv. 211–215).

When Beowulf is about to fight Grendel in the hall, i.e., the episode framed by vv. 675–956, he effectively pulls himself together by recollecting his speech in the hall. As an aristocrat he uses the hall to clarify his aristocratic mind, self and society. In this interaction with his own past he does not reconsider his speech or have second thoughts about fighting Grendel’s mother. The reflection of Beowulfian homily in the conversation among tablemates was no doubt often the pompously declared promises hinted at in Maldon. Such promises express loyalty to the high ideals of the hall, but as their natural complement we may also expect collusion and innuendo (Goffman 1981, p. 134) by means of which hall-guests comment upon the talk from the upper part of the hall in which the guests in the lower part of the hall participated as hearers. Examples of this can be found in Beowulf when the tale about the fight at Finnsburg, a great, but cruel victory for the Danes, is told in Hroðgar’s hall. The men in the hall cheer in delight when the scop tells the saga (vv. 1066–1162). This is a sign of appropriate behaviour, but it also shows us that the possibilities for the men to engage themselves in penetrating discussions are limited and nobody can take the floor in the lower part of the hall.

Owing to the construction of the hall and the way the guests are seated, their comments, if critical, can hardly engage more than a few persons and they are under observation. In the very end of Beowulf (Part i) we are given to understand that people are observed and judged by their behaviour in the hall (vv. 2178 ff.; cf. above p. 89) when the Lord of the Weather-Geats does not accord the young Beowulf a place of honour on the meadbench because the young man is slow and feeble. Viga-Glum in Vigfus’ hall is given an inferior seat as a result of his being judged and obviously considered a bore in a hall (Viga-Glums saga, 6; translation Hollander 1972). This should convince us that enthusiastic consent and solemn man-to-man vows were the expected behaviour in the lower part of the hall. Furthermore, the would-be-wise character of the poems, Latin as well as Anglo-Saxon, Aud’s homily and Skalagrim’s verse tell us that the need to educate the hall-guests and inspire loyalty was deeply felt.

The tension between the loyal, cheering collective and the possibilities of practising collusion and innuendo on a man-to-man level worked like a filter for those seeking a better position in the hall. Obviously one should neither be too critical nor too enthusiastic, since the message from the upper part of the hall is not always one and the same. In the situation when the story about the fight at Finnsburg is being told, this obvious opportunity for the men to applaud the raw slaughter of Jutes and
Frisians is changed immediately by the Queen, who tells us about our duty to remember the good things done to us and to keep the peace.

Most of the talk in the hall takes place in its upper part and if the talk belongs to the lower hall it is nonetheless guided from the stage-like setting of the upper hall. Contrary to what we may have expected, the king does not lead the conversation. The King remains relatively silent, while his men and prominent guests like Beowulf, who is about to become the King’s man, do most of the talking. If the leading guests and the King’s men are silent for a while we can expect the scop to fill out the time with a story about what is going on in the hall. If we look at the production formats in this the upper part of the hall, i.e., court-room, church, and stage, then we get a good impression of what happens in the talk.

The courtroom production is concerned with the need to make a decision, and in order to do so the king needs information about almost everything. Odin, we know, solved the problem by putting his eye in Mimer’s well and employing Hugin and Munin as sources of intelligence. In the first poem about Lupus we are told that the hall has recovered its eyes when Lupus returns from his campaign with the good news and the eyes seeking information for the head seems to be a plausible metaphor for the centrality of the hall.

Information is the backbone of decision-making but the courtroom conversation does not in itself bring much new information. It is rather a matter of displaying the information in such a way as to make the foundation for the decision clear to the king. In Beowulf the courtroom talk is opened when the King orders Wulfgar to go out and find out who is standing at the door. The talk continues in order to settle the question whether or not Beowulf can be trusted with the King’s hall. The process of figuring this out is led by Unferð, who is the King’s speaker, his þyle as he is called in verse 1181. He does not speak anything that the King does not know, but it is his duty on behalf of the King to bring forth a narrative with a partial perspective. He acts like a prosecutor and starts by saying ‘we have heard that …’, and then he tells Beowulf something about Beowulf that could be interpreted in a negative way. Beowulf, the accused, answers with the same narrative correctly stating what happened. The prosecutor and the accused continue for a while and then they wait for the King to make the decision. In other words, the King cannot act for one side or the other while he is a judge in the courtroom production.

In the courtroom production format the King poses his question through a narrative related by his speaker, which means that Beowulf cannot be asked whether he is honourable or not, although that is the question we want to sort out. Like a judge the King may explain his decision and if he chooses to do so he also makes use of a narrative rather than the argument favoured by today’s judges. Moreover, the King’s narrative relates facts and opinions which are not indisputably linked to the problem in question. For this reason, when Beowulf is allowed to enter the hall the King gives his consent, which he explains by mentioning that he knew Beowulf when Beowulf
was a child. Today we would not count that as a reason. Similarly, when the King consents to Beowulf using the hall, he says:

\[ Hafa \ nu \ ond \ geheald \quad húsa \ sélest, \]
\[ gemyne \ mærþo, \quad mægenellen \ cýð, \]
\[ waca \ wið \ wráþum! \]

Have now and hold the best of houses
remember your fame, show mighty valour,
keep fiercely watch! (Beowulf vv. 658–660)

From our point of view the King mentions the least important point first and the most important one last, however without emphasising it, and he does not mention the real problem, i.e., how to get rid of Grendel. His reference to Beowulf’s fame shows that the real reason for letting Beowulf use the hall is that he is a good man.

When the King has reached a decision, this decision cannot be questioned even if there were reason to do so. In the Beowulf case nobody says that killing Grendel is not enough although many must have known that Grendel’s mother would try to avenge the attack on or the killing of her son. We can therefore conclude that in the courtroom format those who speak, those who are spoken to and those who listen are clearly defined and expected to act within the rather strict limits of given roles.

The parallel between the hall and the church is obvious if we substitute the fire for the altar and the central part played by the Pagan meal for the equally central Christian communion. It is, moreover, significant that what is said from the upper part of the hall is most often a narrative that we can easily transform into a sermon or a homily, and that goes for Venantius as well as the Beowulf and the Maldon poet. The usage of good is clearly linked to the church production format and several of the narratives belonging to this format are structured by the word. The church format is first and foremost didactic, but it can naturally also be applied in the other formats. The same is true of the other formats, and that means that a change in a format may involve a fragment from another format. Hall competence is partly a matter of coping with different formats and people in the hall are in all probability expected to reflect on the homily even if it occurs in a courtroom format.

The church format may also contain the talk that is involved with food activities. This is indicated by the fact that these activities are matched with the notion of eloquence as well as with ability to listen and negotiate. The talk in connection with handing out food invites comments from the guests in the hall and from Maldon we can infer that serving beer to the guests results in mutual promises to follow the code of the hall and to die for one’s master. This kind of response from the congregation no doubt belongs to the church format. Even the rib from a cow, found in Sigtuna with the inscription: The King gave most ..., may well be an example of the talk in the lower part of the hall during and just after events connected with the church.
format. On the other hand the example from the Saga of Hákon the Good shows that the church format may eventually lead to a strongly formalised form of behaviour that cannot be commented upon freely.

The stage format, which can be split into entertainment and drama, is the one which most directly involves the guests in the hall and it does so in an informal way that invites some sort of active participation in the production. This is no doubt a matter of positive comment. Venantius’ jesting good humoured epithalamium as well as the happiness when Hroðgar’s scop takes up the saga about the fight at Finnsburg show that the stage format most often belongs to the leisure talk in the hall-estrade entertainment with a didactic touch.

Although the scop may fulfill a number of functions, his function in the entertainment format is not least to form an alliance with the guests in the lower part of the hall. By entertaining them and engaging them, and that may well be a matter of flattering the king in precisely the way the hall-guests want him to be flattered, the scop satisfies the lower hall, the upper hall and the king. The concept of goodness or the good is hardly present in this format, and there is a risk that the stage format may turn out to be too frivolous. This is so at least in the case of the narrative about the fight at Finnsburg since it immediately makes King Hroðgar’s Queen, Wealhtheow, deliver her speech about the good. This speech could qualify as a homily, but even more so it is a scene from the private life of the King and Queen, a glimpse of the realistic drama going on in the royal families. It is no doubt the allusions to this kind of drama, embedded in the tale about the splendid Danish fighting preceding the successful recapturing of the Danish Finnsburg princess in the entertainment part of the stage production, which provoke the Queen to her monologue.

The scene reminds us that in the upper hall the family is on display, and that we, like the audience, are looking into their sitting-room. Good is obviously a central concept in family drama production, and the format is highly informal since we are brought so close to those who are in the most distant parts of the hall, and whose kinship to the gods make them even more remote.

It is interesting to note that the kinds of talk produced in the hall are formalised by the normative design of the physical space itself as well as by their own formats. This eventually leads to talk production formats that are repeated so often that they could be written down as texts in which there is no room for alterations. The three formats of the upper hall are thus both formal, courtroom or church, and informal, entertainment and the realistic drama derived from the stage format, but in addition they are also meant to facilitate public and private talk.

The point in this is, on the one hand, to create an aristocracy as a group and, on the other, to permit the individual to pass through a hierarchy according to his abilities. The formats that have been labelled courtroom, church and realistic stage drama are adapted to develop the individual, and obviously the most difficult challenge is to master the talk of the realistic drama. Listening to the talk delivered by
Beowulf in the first part of the poem we can hear how he progresses from the courtroom format to that of the realistic family drama. If we are leading participants in that production, then we are also at the top of the hierarchy. It is typical that the most informal formats – chatting and cheering in the lower part of the hall and drama in the upper – may clash. They are obviously the most potent and dynamic formats. Courtroom and Church are interesting inasmuch as they tend to be so formalised that already by the end of the period we can see that they may be taken out of the hall and used as formal institutions in the society, as texts. This development is of course hinted at in their present labels, and the event takes place relatively early with the change to Christianity and the creation of the congregation as well as somewhat later when the State manages to formalise the thing assembly into a courtroom with judge, prosecution and defence, now and then assisted by a jury. When this exodus from the hall takes place the scope of the format is narrowed so as to permit fewer variations. The lavish food, for example, does not leave the hall for the Church (Holy Communion cannot be considered a lavish feast) and a court session is not opened unless there is a matter to be adjudicated.

Eventually the stage performance in the form of the estrade entertainment is also brought out of the hall or its successor, the king’s residence, into public institutions and changed into historical drama and light entertainment. In the 19th century the evolution from Wealhtheow’s speech commenting upon the scop, over Hamlet’s instruction of the visiting actors, and the monologue he puts in the mouth of the leading actor, resulted in realistic drama such as Ibsen’s. Today in soap-opera television this drama has become a highly formalised and thus a totally foreseeable institution. Similar to the narrowing of the other formats the crucial tension within the family drama did not survive exportation from the hall. The most sophisticated production format introduced in the hall is thus about to become commonplace. This is in a sense true of all four hall formats, but they still exercise an almost universal fascination.

This is due to the fact that justice, belief, arts and love are phenomena not totally but more or less dependent on their format. However, from a social point of view the formats in which these concepts are expressed are nonetheless essential ways of keeping track of them and of employing them in social life. If a social group manages to develop its informal norms concerning concepts like justice, belief, arts and love into formalised institutions based on the forms of talk that characterised the informal treatment of the norms, then the influence of this social group will become paramount. During the Late Iron Age the hall room inspired a moral view of man as a social being signified not least by the word good. Together with the hall room these moral standards were capable of producing the self-confident class of the aristocracy and, moreover, a number of social norms that were later to guide social life.

It is most significant that good and goodness are strongly attached to the realistic family drama, which was the last of the original formats to leave the hall, and it is even more characteristic that the examples of good people from the obituaries over six
months in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* happened to concern a Christian carpenter and a capable judge, roles that fit the first two formats to be exported. Eventually the formal character of the production formats in connection with courtroom and church will squeeze out the good, and obituaries will no longer be the setting for the talk about courtroom and church. Family drama, on the other hand, will eventually reach a point where not only the priest and family members who talk over the dead, but also those who direct their words to the public through the obituaries, may talk about the good and goodness in public. When that happens, perhaps some time in the next millennium, we shall be down to our last connection with the moral essence of the hall society and its life.
Abbreviations

Beowulf = Klaeber 1950
Finnsburg = Klaeber 1950
Lupus poems = Appendix II
SM = Småland in SR
SR = Sveriges runinskrifter. Edited by Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien 1–. 1900 ff. Stockholm.
VG = Västergötland in SR
U = Uppland in SR
SÖ = Södermanland in SR
U FV = Upplandic rune stones published in Fornvänner.

References

The Battle of Maldon = Scragg 1981.


Dagens Nyheter = The newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Stockholm.


Fortunatus = Venantius Fortunatus


Hávamál = Jónsson, F., 1888.


PHI CD ROM #5.3 = The Packard Humanities Institute, Lain Texts CD ROM #5.3 Los Altos California. USA.


Politiken = Jónsson 1926.


Appendix I

This appendix is a short catalogue of twenty halls in Scandinavia, England, Holland and northwest Germany. The halls are those on which the discussion in the first chapter is based and they have been collected here to guide any reader with a particular interest in halls.

Halls are a phenomenon in vogue among researchers who take an interest in the last five hundred years of the first millennium AD and the number of halls is steadily growing due to new field work and reinterpretations of old excavations. This means that the selection presented in this appendix will soon be inadequate and some of the examples may also become the objects of future reinterpretations (cf. Fabech 1998).

The geographical and chronological distribution of the sample are summarised in Figs. 40 and 41.

*  

1 Wijster. Around 400 AD the village of Wijster (van Es 1967) was structured in three fenced quarters. The southern part of the westernmost quarter is occupied by a large farm with a hall. The position of the farm is prominent inasmuch as it marks the entrance to the village when you approach it from the burial ground. It is likely that there was felt to be a connection between the farm and the four mounds.

It is partly the design of the farm which makes it likely that the isolated house is a hall, but the architecture of the house itself also speaks in favour of this interpretation. In the present sample the house should be compared to those from Yeavering and Cowdery’s Down, and the position of the farm bears a clear resemblance to that of the hall farms in Feddersen Wierde.

2 Feddersen Wierde. In Feddersen Wierde Haarnagel (1979) singled out houses 12 and 35 as halls. In the my discussion I expand upon this and arrive at slightly different interpretations. The prominent character of the farms to which the houses belong is obvious and so is the prominent position of the farms in the village. The halls in Feddersen Wierde seem to belong to a period starting c. 100 AD and ending in the 4th century.
3 Dejbjerg. The hall from Dejbjerg that we know of was burned down in the 4th century AD (Hansen 1993; 1996). Rather than being a hall in a village, it belonged to a single farm in a prominent position in the cultural landscape. It has been inferred that between the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and the Middle Ages, Dejbjerg was a centre of some importance (Hansen 1996). It is the oldest example of a smashed hall. (Herschend 1995; Hansen 1996).

4 Dankirke. The hall at Dankirke is similar to that in Dejbjerg although somewhat younger, 5th and 6th century AD. The farm has been considered a merchants’ farm.
and centre of wealth (Hansen 1990), but lately it has been reinterpreted as a farm
with a hall (Herschend 1993; 1995). Its connection with Gudme has also been em-

5 Nørre Snede and 6 Vorbasse. (Hansen, 1988; Hvass 1978; 1986) The kind of
hall found in these villages does not always belong to one dominant farm. It seems
more reasonable to connect it with large farms. This interpretation is, however,
rather tentative and it has not been put forward by the excavators. From a
planographical point of view the characteristics of the buildings are easy to detect,
but the lack of artefacts and detailed knowledge of the construction of the houses
make the interpretation difficult. The house may be described as a relatively small
detached house in the yard of a relatively big farm (cf. Herschend 1993). It seems to
belong to a type of farm rather than a specific place, and may be found in other
places in Southern Jutland (cf. Knudsen and Hertz 1994, pp. 197 f.)

7 Gudme. The large hall in Gudme is probably part of a complex of royal buildings
belonging to the central farm among a group of large estates, probably containing
several halls, east of the Lake Gudme (cf. Nielsen et al. 1994; Sørensen 1993;
Henriksen and Michaelsen 1995). Its dimensions are huge, but its subdivision into
rooms of a specific function is not easy to establish although several function must
have had rooms in the house. Its multi-functional character and the traditional en-
trance room mark out the house as a hall different from others. In all probability the
house existed around 400 AD (Rasmussen et al. 1995, pp. 55 ff.).

8 Lejre. (Christensen 1993, Herschend 1994a). This house would seem to be a
continuation of the kind of hall found in Gudme: A dominant multi-functional building

| 1 Feddersen Wierde | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2 Gudme | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 3 Dejbjerg | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 4 Wijster | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5 Högem | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 6 Vorbasse/Nr Snede | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 7 Eketorp | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 8 Vallhag/Rönnerum | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 9 Dankirke | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 10 Yeavering | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 11 Cowdery’s Down | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 12 Leje | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 13 Söinge | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 14 Gi Uppsala | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 15 Helgö | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 16 Svintuna | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 17 Valsgärde | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 18 Borg | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

years AD 0 200 400 600 800 1000

Figure 41. Cronological table of the halls in Appendix I.
on a central farm among other large estates, which may well have had their own halls. In Lejre, however, the architecture has developed and very few traits of the classical Early Iron Age house can be found. Nonetheless the hall in Lejre is in reality a sequence of halls erected and used between the end of the 7th and the end of the 10th centuries AD.

9 Slöinge. The hall in Slöinge is still being excavated (Lundqvist 1995; 1996; 1998; Lundqvist et al. 1994; Rosengren 1994). It is a single farm hall in several phases belonging to a period between the 6th and the 8th century. It is characteristic of the halls containing guldgubbar (cf. Steinsland 1990), which in view of the Lejre hall seem to characterise a noble, but not royal milieu. Dendrological investigation has revealed that the posts of one of the prominent trestles were made from the same trunk and thereby provided us with a small but significant piece of information concerning the aesthetic idea behind timber selection.

10 Eketorp. The hall in the ideal settlement at Eketorp dates to a period between the 5th and the 7th centuries AD (Näsman 1976; Herschend 1988; 1994d). Eketorp is the only known planned model society from the Scandinavian Iron Age. Nonetheless it seems very significant that those who planned the society incorporated the central building into the overall egalitarian layout. The weapon finds in the hall-room and the kitchen behind the hall-room indicate that this was a building with several functions, one of which was to house the retinue defending the fortification (Herschend 1993).

11 Rönnärum and 12 Vallhagar. Both these buildings are examples of the third house on a major farm within a village like agglomeration of farms typical of Ölandic or Gotlandic society around the middle of the first millennium AD (Herschend 1993: Fallgren 1993; Stenberger 1933; 1955). Seen in this way they link in with the halls in Norre Snede and Vorbasse (Nos 5 and 6) as the peaceful halls of wealthy peasants.

13 Svintuna. We know little of this hall, which was excavated in some haste (Nordén 1938). It is, however, an example of a hall with guldgubbar (Steinsland 1991) from the 8th or 9th century AD. As with Dejbjerg or Borg in Lofoten (Nos 3 and 18) the importance of Svintuna continues into the Middle Ages.

14 Helgö. New interpretations of this building on Helgö (Herschend 1995 with ref.) have made it probable that this hall from around 800 AD consisted of mainly two rooms, one centering around the family, the other around the retinue. Guldgubbar and also Christian objects are linked to the family part of the house. The hall at Helgö adds to the picture of the hall with guldgubbar indicating a hall of the late Iron Age upper classes, rather than a king’s hall.

15 Old Uppsala. This building is not yet completely excavated (Hedlund 1993; Duczko 1998), but it shows an interesting parallel with the hall in Lejre, (No. 8) namely the distance between the trestles in the main hall room, which in both cases is c. 9.1 metres (Hedlund 1993, fig. 33; Christensen 1993, fig. 14). The construction with outer raking posts also unites the two houses. The hall in Uppsala would seem
to be contemporary with the hall in Lejre, perhaps from the 8th century. It is reasonable to consider the hall in Uppsala one of the royal halls of this site.

16 **Valsgärde.** The hall in Valsgärde is a recent discovery (Norr and Sundkvist 1995). It is the main house of a large farm adjacent to the boat grave cemetery. Its position in the landscape parallels that of the hall in Uppsala, placed on an artificially made terrace stretching from the southwest to the northeast overlooking flat arable land.

17 **Högom house III.** This house, dated to the 4th century AD, stands out in several ways (Ramqvist 1994). It is different from the normal farmhouse of northern Sweden (cf. Liedgren 1992) and situated under one of the big mounds at Högom. Högom is in all probability a royal site and the hall a building with several functions.

18 **Borg in Lofoten.** The main farmhouse on Borg has several functions. One of the rooms is the hall room. *Guldgubbar* in the postholes, broken glass and finds connected with handicraft characterise the room (Munch *et al.* 1989; Munch 1990) as a chieftain’s hall. There are three main houses in a series in the same spot and they constitutes a small stratigraphical sequence dated between the 6th and the 10th century AD.

19 **Yeavering.** (Hope-Taylor 1977). Known historically, like Lejre and Old Uppsala, as a royal farm, the site contains a number of halls. Dating to the 7th and 8th century. The halls at Yeavering are roughly contemporary with those in Lejre and Old Uppsala. Contrary to these sites, however, Yeavering is a solitary farm on which a King could be expected to stay only temporarily.

20 **Cowdery’s Down.** (Millet and James 1983). The tentatively identified halls at Cowdery’s Down from the 5th century are prototypes of the Anglo-Saxon hall of which there are such splendid examples in Yeavering. The halls are, however, also of the same kind as that at Wijster (No. 1).
Appendix II

An English version of four poems by Venantius Fortunatus concerning Duke Lupus. The text is based on Leo (1881) and on Blomgren (1933 and 1971). The translation is reprinted from Flemberg (1996).

* Carmina Book VII, Poem 7

May the great men of the past and the lofty names all give way, 
defeated (due to) by Duke Lupus!
Everything, which the wise Scipio, the capable Cato 
and the fortunate Pompey did, can be found in you alone.
During their consulate Roman power shone, 
but during your dukeship Rome has returned to us.
When you grant an audience, everyone gains confidence, 
your free speech is helpful to freedom.
If someone is sorrowful and troubled, 
he is in a better mood when he has seen you.
Your mind is serious and your thoughts (heart) are deep 
and the salinity of a calm sea flows from your mouth.
But it is mainly for the people, that your gift of fluent speech is useful: 
you flavour the thoughts as the salt of the wave seasons the food.
You are the root of advice and the vein of a plentiful taste, 
your mind is lively, your mouth fluent and fast, 
you who shine in each, prepared to either, 
whatever you have at heart your tongue can produce.
The King’s power is founded in your bosom 
and the State is strong due to your help.
With singular devotion you put a great strain on your limbs:
for the King’s peace the burden seems sweet to you.
O happy soul who advises the fatherland
and generous mind who lives for all men!
Ambassadors arrive: they are tied by your answer
and fall at once, hit by the javelin of the words.
Your speech was a lance and your voice armed;
in you Sigibert has a presage of the victory.
From this opinion does the answer of the people proceed
and a single voice can express the decision of the community.
That cause which has triumphed through your genius,
becomes even more just by being confirmed by him.
No one could have spoken for his own cause the way
your renowned tongue sounds for everybody.
As the Nile recreates Egypt when it is raises,
so do you favour everything with the flood of your speech.
Justice is flourishing and the laws are favourable when you are judge,
you are the well-balanced scales of the lawsuits.
To you the high commands flee, you they require;
you need not seek it, all honour seeks you.
In your bosom power grows up,
under your rule the honour you have got has learned to grow.
How well-deserved does he keep the honours always bestowed upon him,
he through whom the most dignified have the highest power!
You have adopted the custom of the old Roman stock
waging war with arms, dispensing justice peacefully.
How fair (good) that he is the first whom every decoration favours
supported by both advantages (goods), weapons as well as laws!
The vigour you possess, with a prosperity granted by heaven,
is proved by the promptly vanquished Saxon and Danish peoples.
Where the river Bardaa runs with a meandering cause,
there the enemy’s army was defeated by your leadership.
You held the command over half the army at that time;
how well-deserved does he win who does what you bid!
As a victor you were sweating under the weight of the coat of mail
and you were flashing in the cloud of dust,
and fighting did you pursue the fleeing army,
until the transparent waves of the Lagona (The Lahn) set bounds.
To him who strengthless fled the river gave a sepulchre:
For the prosperous leader the rivers wage war.
Gallia has deserved you as a light among its inhabitants,
you who shines everywhere with the torch of your heart.
Some the power of beauty denotes, others wisdom,
there is something singular to each and everyone, but you have many merits (goods).

When you meet with your lords you fill the venerable palace
and honour, which enters with you, is multiplied.
When you arrive the house shines from a new serenity
and the royal dwelling regains its genius.
The hall gets its eyes back seeing that you return,
you whom the shining dukes hold to be their common light:
The monarch’s support, the honour of the fatherland, the arms of the fathers,
the advice of all others, the common love of everyone.

What shall I say about your admirable charm (lit. sweetness, *dulcedo*),
by which you, full of nectar, make honey with your speech?
An amiable grace accompanies your serene countenance
and an eternal day sparkles in your interior.
You who satisfy with food, restores with kind words,
when the dishes are put away your words are a feast.

Who could be able worthily to praise you, you whom the pious King
in a loud-sounding voice declares to be his ornament?
May your great honour, during his reign, last for ever
and may he enjoy his present life and think about the coming.

Carmina Book VII, Poem 8

When July, which brings heat, burns the hot sand
and the dry earth thirsts in a cloud¹ of dust,
when the tired tendril of the vine gives hardly any pleasant shadow
and the lean grass contracts its pale hair;
the leaves of the grove slouch under Phœbus’ heat
and it can hardly defend its cool rooms.

The heifer disdains the pasture and flees from the mountain slopes due to the heat
and the horses, beset by the heat, do not even eat the bitter vetch.

The dog whips its mouth with a long, hanging tongue
and the sad sheep faintly pants.
The wanderer who travels during the hot hours
is burnt when the hair catches fire under the pressure of the sun.
Often he eagerly wishes, when the earth is dry,
for a runnel to refresh himself with a sip,
or that a wide verdant head of a tree which moves in the wind
with its shading leafage shall mitigate the thirst.
If by lucky chance a grove near by gives shade
and the fresh wave of a clear spring is purling
then he hastens there and lies down on the pleasant ground
and stretches out his limbs on the bed of grass.
his wishes have come true and he is refreshed by a double delight:
the shadow eases the heat of the day, the water drives the thirst away.
If he knows any songs he recites them with a melodious chant
and the cooler air provokes the pleasant sounds.
If well he knows Homer, famous in Athens,
or Maro\(^2\) who is read in Rome on Trajan’s Forum,
or if he has learnt the holy psalms sung to David’s plectrum,
then he sings the honourable song with a lively throat.
Or he plays the lyre, bone pipe, flute, Pan’s pipe:
every instrument pleases the birds with their art.
So am I, worn out by the strong heat of anxiety,
invigorated when I know that you are safe.
Oh, sweet name of Lupus, to me always worth repeating,
which is written on the page of my heart,
a man who once included there on the tablets of sweetness,
the undestroyable coffer of my chest shall keep.
You have a treasure of devotion, a costly benevolence,
which produces pure talents in its soul.
Your golden mind exceeds all worldly wealth
and reflects the beauty of pearls with your brilliant heart.

Your aromatic mind is spreading soft fragrance
and gives the soul the good which incense usually gives;
the words flowing from your breast taste of honey
and the wise you say is spiced with salt.
As after the darkness of the night the morning star with its rays
dominate the light of the stars, so do you shine in my mind,
and as the light of the sun recreates the world when it rises,
so do your words illuminate my heart.
When I, as a stranger, saw Germania, (lit. When, as a stranger, G. held my sight)
you were a father and took care of the fatherland.
When I, rejoicing, was allowed to see your calm face,
there shone at once for me a double light in the sky.
As often as I talked with you,
I felt I rested among Ambrosian roses.
Your grace is the same for everyone, but me more than others
did it vanquish with its love, while I hastened there.
Who shall now give you homage worthy of your honour?
I am vanquished by the subject and my tongue is insufficient.
Like the mountain rising above the man who ascends it,
so my love urges me on, but your honour hinders me.
But instead of me may others compete in praising you
and may each to his ability entreat or celebrate you in song,
the Roman sing to the lyre, the barbarian to the harp,
the Greek to Achillean lyre, the Briton to the crowd.
May they call you strong, law-learned,
skilled in the use of weapons, versed in booklore.
Since you rightly manage the tasks of war as well as those of peace
some may sing of your judicial, others of your military honour.
I give you verses, may the barbarian song give you poems (leudos = Lieder);
so may in different ways the same praise sound for the man.
Here they talk of your fame, there of your sagacity in law,
but I shall always hold you dear, Lupus.

Carmina Book VII, Poem 9

You who pay attention to your pious duties and remember he who loves you,
you who promptly give him advice in your benignity,
you who have far too much pity upon the friend who is thus more willingly absent,
when your love asks for a sign of life from my hiding-place,
how have I deserved that Fortunatus’ hope
has at once become the kind concern of Lupus?
Nine years, I think, have I been away from Italy
here next to the shore of the Ocean.
Such a long time has passed and yet from my parents
not a sign of encouragement in my solitude.
But that which father and mother, brother and sister and their children, that which my fatherland could have done, you fulfil with pious devotion.

The amiable letter, so benignly dispatched in your name, has refreshed me with the waters of its nectarean source.

And not only your letter has pleased me, a carter, send out for the purpose, has also arrived here.

Who, I wonder, could remember and enumerate so many gifts? the tongue refuses to express its sweet feelings.

May the Lord in Heaven repay you for all, he who teaches that whatever we give to the lowly is his (given also to him).

Carmina Book VII, Poem 10

How fast does Fame fly, rising on fast wings, filling all places, having grown by her own actions!

For you are at the Rhine and I am close to the Loire and here you are most popular, courteous Magnulfus, and much honoured.

So (far) has the herald’s trumpet sent out by Sigimund travelled that your deeds are well-known in a wide area.

But a letter with short words can hardly express it, since neither can it sing of everything, nor does it want to keep anything in silence.

Your principal strength is the is the flow of words in executing the law and you rule so that with the new you recall the old.

During your office, with the plough of the just cultivator, the people reap the benefit of their desires from the seeds of justice.

No one is without his property, no one pinches that of others. You see to it that the people has no opportunity to be criminal.

Your care gives others their salvation and one man’s work becomes the peace of the multitude.

You are just and mild so that by everyone you are called on one hand judge for your veracity in the law, on the other father for your goodness.

Forgive me for expressing myself briefly, the letter carrier waits; but about Lupus’ brother the cause urges one to speak lengthily.

May the Lord grant that you by your merits rehabilitate him whom I, together with you, love of all my heart!
Notes

1 The translation follows the reading *spargine* instead of *margine*.
2 Publius Vergilius Maro, Rome’s national poet.
3 Here the adjective *pius* is not used in its Christian sense. It denotes human piety.
4 The adjective *concors* means ‘unanimous’, ‘harmonious’, perhaps even ‘peace making’. Here it is possible that it is to be taken with *voceris*, meaning that Lupus is by all unanimously called judge etc.
Appendix III

An English version of the letter describing the Martyrdom of the Holy Sabas, the Goth. The text, based on Delehaye (1912), has been reprinted from Flemberg’s translation (1992).

* 

1. The Church of God in the land of the Goths wishes the Church in Cappadochia and all local communities of the holy Catholic Church the mercy, peace and love of God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ in fullest measure.

That which was said by the holy Peter is now being verified with all plainness, namely that he who is godfearing and does what is right is acceptable to him, whatever nation he belongs to; this was confirmed even in what happened the holy Sabas, who is the witness of God and Our Saviour Jesus Christ. He was Goth by birth and lived in the land of the Goths, and even in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation he shone as a heavenly light in the world as he imitated the Holies and like them he distinguished himself through great spiritual works in Christ. Because from his early childhood he strived to attain nothing but piety towards Our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, as he considered that virtue the complete, to become mature in the knowledge of the Son of God. And since all things work together for them that love God, he won the prize above, of the high calling of God, as he from his youth had strived to attain. Later when he openly had fought against the Adversary and overcome the evil of life and behaved peacefully towards everybody, he urged us not to be silent after his departure in the Lord, but for the sake of his commemoration and the edification of those who fear God, to write down his heroic deeds.

2. He was faithful, pious, willing to obey in everything that was righteous, good, rude in speech yet not in knowledge, he spoke peacefully to all for the sake of the truth, he silenced the idolaters, but was not haughty and kept to that which is humble, meek and not pushing in his talk, eager for every good work, he sang in the church with the greatest zeal, he did not think of money nor property except for the necessary, he was sober modest in everything, had never known any woman, was temperate,
always fasting, incessantly praying without being conceited, brought everybody to obedience by his good disposition, he did what was proper and was (no busybody) not busy with futile things and in everything his faith which worked by love, was irreproachable, so that he never hesitated to speak fearlessly in reliance on the Lord.

3. Not just once but often before he passed away in faith, did he give proof of pious actions. The first time was when the lords in the land of the Goths started to act against the Christians by forcing them to eat meat from idol-offerings. Then some of the heathens in the village where Sabas lived decided to let the Christians, who belonged to them, have (eat) meat that was not from the idol-offerings, instead of that which came from idol-offerings, openly in front of the persecutors; this in order to keep their own immaculate and to take the persecutors in. When the holy Sabas became aware of this not only did he refrain from eating the forbidden food, he also stepped forward into the middle and witnessed in front of everybody and said: “If anybody eats from that meat he cannot be a Christian.” And he prevented them all from falling into the Devil’s trap. For this those who had hit upon this fraud expelled him from the village, but after a while they let him return. But when this visitation was off once again, as it often happened, some of the heathens in the afore-mentioned village wanted to offer to the idols and swear in front of the persecutor, that there was no Christian in their village. But once again Sabas talked openly (freely) and went forward into the middle of the assembly and said: “May no man swear for me; for I am a Christian.” When the persecutor arrived the chieftains swore, in order to protect their own, that in their village there was no more than one Christian. When the leader of the lawlessness heard this he ordered Sabas to step forward. When he (Sabas) stood there, he (the Leader) asked those who fetched him, whether he (Sabas) possessed anything of value. When they answered: “Nothing except what he is dressed in”, the lawless despised him and said: “One of those can neither be of any use nor hurt.” And thereby he had him thrown out.

4. Later when a large persecution was started by the sinful in the land of the Goths against the Church of God and the holy Easter Sunday was approaching, he decided to set out for another town, to the presbyter Gouthias, to celebrate the festival together with him. But when he walked along the road, a man big beyond measure appeared before him, splendid to look at, and said to him: “Turn around and go to Sansalas, the presbyter”. Sabas answered and said: “Sansalas has gone away”. Sansalas had as it were fled due to the persecution and resided in the Roman Empire. But now, due to the holy Easter, he had just returned to his home (country) [or just home?] town. But since Sabas did not know of his returning, he answered he who appeared in front of him in this way and insisted on going on to the presbyter Gouthias. But when he was not willing to obey the order, an immense amount of snow was all of a certain visible on the ground, although the weather was clear at that hour, and the road was blocked and he could not proceed. Then he understood that it was God’s will that prevented him from going on and ordered him to go to the
presbyter Sansalas; and he praised God and turned around. And when he saw Sansalas he rejoiced and told him and many others about the vision he had seen on the road. But the third night after the holy-day, lo, there came from the crowd of the ungodly Atharidos, son of the lord Rhothesteas, together with a party of lawless robbers to that village and found the presbyter sleeping in his house and had him tied up. Likewise he had Sabas wrenched naked from his bed and put in irons. And they kept the presbyter prisoner on a cart, but Sabas they took away, naked as he was born, through glades they had just burned and they chased him and beat him with wooden clubs and scourges and they acted brutally and merciless towards the servant of God.

5. But the severity of the foes strengthened the endurance and faith of the righteous; when it had become day, he said to his pursuers with pride in the Lord: “Have you not dragged me naked and without shoes, through burned land and knocked me against sharp rocks? Look and see if my feet have been hurt or whether I have got bruises on my body from all the blows you have given me!” When they saw that there were no signs on his body from their unmerciful treatment, they took an axle-tree put it on his shoulders and stretched out his hands to the ends of it; so too did they stretched out his feet on another axle-tree and tied them up. And finally threw him down tied to the axle-trees and let him lie on his back on the ground and they did not stop tormenting him till more than half the night was over. But when the tormentors had gone to sleep, a woman, who had risen in the night to cook for those who stayed in the house, came up to him and unchained (released) him. After he was set free he remained in the place without fear and helped the woman in her work. In the morning when the ungodly Atharidos got to know this, he ordered that he should be tied up and suspended from the roof-beam

6. A short time thereafter those who were sent out by Atharidos returned with meat from idol-offerings; and they said to the presbyter and Sabas: “This Atharidos ordered us to give you, that you should eat it and save your souls from death”. But the presbyter answered and said: “This we shall not eat, as it is not allowed for us. But ask Atharidos to have us crucified, or put to death in some other way, as he likes. Sabas said: “Who has sent this?” They answered: “Our lord Atharidos”. But Sabas said: “One is the Lord God in heaven. Atharidos is an impious and cursed creature and these the foodstuffs of depravity are unchaste and defiled, as is Atharidos, who sent them.” When Sabas said this one of Atharidos’ retainers was enraged and he took a pestle and banged it into the chest of the holy so hard, that the bystanders thought that he should die at once, crushed by the fierceness of the blow. But thanks to his love for piety he overcame the pain from the blow and said to the tormentor: “Now you think that you have hit me with the pestle, yet you shall know that I felt so little pain that I believe you threw a flock of wool against me”. And in his action he gave a distinct proof of what was said: He neither cried out or moaned as if in pain, nor was there on his body any sign whatsoever of the blow.
7. When Atharidos got to know this he ordered that Sabas should be killed. Then the servants of the lawlessness had Sansalas tied up and (they) took Sabas and carried him off to the river that is called Musaios (Muresul) to drown him. But the blessed man who remembered the commandment of the Lord and loved his neighbour as he loved himself said: “What wrong has the presbyter done that he is not allowed to die with me?” They answered him: “It is not for you to decide about him.” When they had said this he rejoiced in the holy spirit and (exclaimed) cried out: “Blessed are you Lord, and highy exalted your name, Jesus, for ever, amen, for Atharidos has brought down everlasting death and ruin upon himself, while sending me to eternal life, for thus have you found pleasure in your servant, Lord Our God.” And all the time when he was carried away he thanked God and reckoned that the sufferings of this time were not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in the Holies. When he was brought forth to the shore of the river, those who kept hold of him said to each other: “Let us set free this innocent man! For how should Atharidos find out about that?” But the blessed Sabas said to them: “Why do you talk so foolishly instead of doing what has been enjoined on you? I see what you cannot see; lo, in front of me they stand in glory who have come to receive me”. Then they led him down to the water, all the while he thanked and praised God—for to the very end [his spirit served him] (he was in full possession of his spirit)—; and they threw him down and pressed him down into the depths by placing a beam over his neck. And so he ended his life by wood and water and kept the seal of salvation immaculate, at the age of thirty-eight. He died Thursday after Easter, which is April the 12th, during the consulate of Flavius, when Valentinian and Valens were emperors. They are to be found under the consulates of Modestus and Arintheos.

8. Later the murderers dragged him out of the water and let him lie unburied and went away: but no dog nor any other animal touched him. But by the brethren the body was shrouded and taken custody of; and Junius Soranus the glorious ruler [dux] of Scythia, who honoured God, sent out reliable men, and had it brought from the land of the barbarians to the Roman Empire. And while bestowing upon his country of birth a valuable gift and a glorious fruit of the faith, he sent the body to Cappadocia, for your devotion. It was done to the wish of the presbyters, for the Lord have mercy upon brethren, who await His arrival and fear Him. And when you celebrate his sacred feast on the day, he won his wreath of victory through struggle, let it be known even to brethren living further away, that you may rejoice in every Catholic and Apostolic community, while praising the Lord, who choose out among those who serve him. Greetings to all the holies, those who like yourself are persecuted salute you. Glory, honour, might and majesty to Him who by his merciful gift is able to bring us all into the heavenly kingdom, so too to His Only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.