

Dating Old English Verse



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External Dating 1/2

- ▶ 657x680 (abbacy of Hilda of Whitby): *Cædmon's Hymn*
- ▶ 735 (death of Bede): *Bede's Death Song*
- ▶ *Metres of Boethius* postdate Boethius translation, ? in turn associated with the reign of Alfred, 871x899
- ▶ 937 (Battle of Brunanburh): terminus post quem for *Battle of Brunanburh*
- ▶ 973 (coronation of Edgar the Peaceful on Whitsun): *Coronation of Edgar*
- ▶ 975 (death of Edgar the Peaceful on 8 July): *Death of Edgar*

External Dating 2/2

- ▶ 991 (Battle of Maldon): terminus post quem for *Battle of Maldon*
- ▶ 1066 (death of Edward the Confessor on 5 Jan): terminus post quem for *Death of Edward*
- ▶ Late tenth century (Vercelli Book): terminus ante quem for *Dream of the Rood*, *Andreas*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Soul and Body*, *Elene*, *Homiletic Fragment*
- ▶ Late tenth century (Exeter Book): terminus ante quem for the poems of the Exeter Book
- ▶ c. 1000 (Nowell Codex): terminus ante quem for *Beowulf*, *Judith*
- ▶ c. 1000 (Junius Manuscript): terminus ante quem for *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Christ and Satan*

Non-Metrical, Non-Linguistic Approaches to the Dating of *Beowulf*

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

Etc.; see esp. the Chase volume.

Traditional Chronology

Table 1: Chronology offered as traditional in Cable 1981

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

Fulk's 1992 Relative Dating

Parasiting

Group 1

- ▶ *Beowulf*
- ▶ *Genesis A*
- ▶ *Daniel*
- ▶ *Exodus*

Group 2

- ▶ *Andreas*
- ▶ Cynewulf

Group 3

- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*
- ▶ *Judith*
- ▶ Late poems

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Parasiting

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- ▶ *Beowulf*
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Group 3

- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*
- ▶ *Judith*
- ▶ Late poems

Contraction After Loss of *h*

Group 1

- ▶ *Genesis A*
- ▶ *Daniel*
- ▶ *Beowulf*

Group 2

- ▶ *Exodus*
- ▶ *Cynewulf and Andreas*
- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*

Group 3

- ▶ *Judith*
- ▶ Late poems

Fulk's 1992 Relative Dating

Parasiting

Group 1

- ▶ *Beowulf*
- ▶ *Genesis A*
- ▶ *Daniel*
- ▶ *Exodus*

Group 2

- ▶ *Andreas*
- ▶ *Cynewulf*

Group 3

- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*
- ▶ *Judith*
- ▶ Late poems

Contraction After Loss of *h*

Group 1

- ▶ *Genesis A*
- ▶ *Daniel*
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Group 2

- ▶ *Exodus*
- ▶ *Cynewulf and Andreas*
- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*

Group 3

- ▶ *Judith*
- ▶ Late poems

Contraction of Negation/Pronouns

- ▶ *Genesis A*
- ▶ *Beowulf*
- ▶ *Daniel*
- ▶ *Cynewulf*
- ▶ *Metres of Boethius*
- ▶ *The Battle of Maldon*

Additional Findings of Fulk 1992

- ▶ Analogical shortening of vowels lengthened by the loss of consonantal *h* suggests *Beowulf* precedes *Andreas*
- ▶ Analogical lengthening of stem vowels in inflected forms of diphthongal stems suggests *Judith* and the *Metres* come last
- ▶ Kaluza's Law suggests *Beowulf* may have preceded *Genesis A*, with all the rest ignoring the law to various degrees
- ▶ The metrical treatment of syllables associated with tertiary stress suggests *Beowulf* and the Junius 11 poems are earliest, Cynewulf likely following
- ▶ Resolution conditioned by syllable weight in internal position suggests *Beowulf* and the Junius 11 poems are earliest, followed by Cynewulf, followed by *Andreas* and the rest

A Chronology of *Beowulf* Dating

Table 2: A rough chronology of *Beowulf* dating

Period	Dating
Pre-1980	Overwhelmingly early
1980	The Toronto conference
1980 to 1989	Age of agnosticism
1989 to present	Return to early dating
2007	Roberta Frank's rebuttal
2011	The Neidorf conference

Some Practical Dating Criteria

Table 3: Selected dating criteria

Feature	Tendency
Alliteration of palatal with velar <i>g</i>	Earlier
Proportion of Sievers types DE	Decreases
Parasiting	Later
Contraction of <i>h</i>	Later
Contraction of negation/pronouns	Increases
Poetic diction	Decreases
Use of rhyme	Late
Alliteration on final lift of b-verse	Late

Earlier or Later?

Ne seleð þē wæstmas eorðe
wlitige tō woruldnytte, ac hēo wældrēore swealh
hālge of handum þinum; forþon hēo þē hrōðra oftihð,
glāmes grēne folde. Ðū scealt ġeomor hweorfan,
ārleas of earde þinum, swā þū Ābele wurde
tō feorhbanan; forþon þū flēma scealt
wīdlāst wrecan, winemagum lāð.

Earlier!

Ne seleð þē wæstmas eorðe
wlitige tō woruldnytte, ac hēo wældrēore swealh
hālge of handum þīnum; forþon hēo þē hrōðra oftihð,
glāmes grēne folde. Ðū scealt ġeomor hweorfan,
ārleas of earde þīnum, swā þū Ābele wurde
tō feorhbanan; forþon þū flēma scealt
wīdlāst wrecan, winemagum lāð.

(*Genesis A* 1015b–1021)

- ▶ Alliteration of velar with palatal *g*
- ▶ Sievers type E (but we need a larger sample)

Earlier or Later?

Mē þæt wyrd gewæf, ond gewyrht forġeaf,
þæt ic grōfe græf, ond þæt grimme græf
flēan flæsce ne mæg, þonne flānhred dæg
nȳdgrāpum nimeþ, þonne sēo neaht becymeð
sēo mē ēðles ofonn ond mec hēr eardes onconn.

Later!

Mē þæt wyrd ge^wæf, ond gewyrht for^gēaf,
þæt ic grōfe græf, ond þæt grimme græf
flēan flæsce ne mæg, þonne flānhred dæg
nȳdgrāpum nimeþ, þonne sēo neaht becymeð
sēo mē ēðles ofonn ond mec hēr eardes onconn.

(*Riming Poem* 70–74)

- ▶ Rhyme
- ▶ Alliteration on the final lift (71b; but is *græf* authorial?)
- ▶ *Seems* to avoid alliterating between velar and palatal *g* (best to have the other in final position)
- ▶ Misleading sample for metrical types: the poem is mostly A and B, but here we have D₂ (72a) and E (73a)

Earlier or Later?

Mē sendon tō þē sǣmen snelle,
hēton ðē secgan þæt þū mōst sendan raðe
bēagas wið ġebeorge; and ēow betere is
þæt ġē þisne gārrǣs mid gafole forġyldon,
þon wē swā hearde hilde dǣlon.
Ne þurfe wē ūs spillan, ġif ġē spēdaþ tō þām;
wē willað wið þām golde ġrið fæstnian.

Later!

Mē sendon tō þē sǣmen snelle,
hēton ðē secgan þæt þū mōst sendan raðe
bēagas wið ġebeorge; and ēow betere is
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Ne þurfe wē ūs spillan, ġif ġē spēdaþ tō þām;
wē willað wið þām golde ġrið fæstnian.

(Battle of Maldon 29–35)

- ▶ Palatal *g* in the final lift of a line alliterating on velar *g* (32)
- ▶ 1x D1 (33b), otherwise AB

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