“Дæт Is Wrætlic Deor”: Fantastic Creatures’ Alternate Natures as Metalwork, Architectural Works, and Other Highly-Wrought Objects in Old English Writings

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“ÐÆT IS WRÆTLIC DEOR”: FANTASTIC CREATURES’ ALTERNATE NATURES AS METALWORK, ARCHITECTURAL WORKS, AND OTHER HIGHLY-WROUGHT OBJECTS IN OLD ENGLISH WRITINGS

By

JAMES VICTOR CROWDER

Under the Direction of Edward John Christie, PhD

ABSTRACT

The conflation of fantastic beasts and monsters with highly-wrought objects constitutes a heretofore-critically-unacknowledged yet prevalent mode of representation in Old English literature. The Anglo-Saxon writers and poets utilizing this mode notably mobilize a number of strategies to blur the line between the bodies of such creatures and the associated manmade items, including figurative relationships, parallelism linking two accounts within the larger narrative, the conceptual pairing or collocation of seemingly-unrelated entities within a particular account, the description of a creature’s body with an adjective that normally applies to highly-wrought objects, and the destruction of a creature’s body in the precise manner befitting the destruction of a material artifact. Considering that each of the writers and poets utilizes two or more strategies to link a given fantastic beast or monster to the indicated object or objects, the depictions ultimately convey the sense that the amazing creatures literally possess alternate
natures as the exquisite items. In turn, the fundamental identification of living entity with material artifact in the different accounts enables the creatures to perform the important cultural work of responding to insular fantasies and anxieties tied to the perceived moral worth of certain kinds of splendid objects produced by or otherwise encountered within Anglo-Saxon England. The depictions specifically serve this end by effectively granting these objects beastly lives and a remarkable level of creaturely agency in the landscapes or seascapes of man’s moral universe. The objects enabled to enjoy such animal existences most frequently fall into two main, sometimes overlapping craftwork categories: insular and Roman items of smithwork and Roman/extra-insular architectural works, including entire buildings and individual architectural elements. Several documented aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture stand to shed light on the writers’ and poets’ inspiration to work with a theme of crafted objects’ moral worth in the first place, their tendency to engage the theme by conflating the material artifacts with the bodies of fantastic beasts and monsters, and their choice mainly to merge the fabulous creatures with architectural works and/or smithwork, with occasional recourse to other types of craftwork.

INDEX WORDS: Old English literature, Beowulf, Phoenix, Panther, Whale, Grendel
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DEDICATION

For my father. He has always encouraged me in pursuing higher education, lending me support in so many ways during my time at Georgia State University, including during my coursework, PhD qualifying exams, teaching, and writing this dissertation.

Thanks, Dad. I love you.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Conflating fantastic beasts and monsters with highly-wrought objects constitutes an oft-occurring mode of representation in Old English literature, the depictions ultimately conveying the sense that the amazing creatures actually possess alternate natures as the exquisite items. The blurred line between living entity and material artifact in the different accounts in turn enables the creatures to perform the important cultural work of responding to insular fantasies and anxieties tied to the perceived moral worth of certain kinds of splendid objects produced by or otherwise encountered within Anglo-Saxon England (I present the existing research supporting this insular ambivalence towards manmade items’ moral worth in the section of this Introduction discussing the influence of key aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture on the depictions of the dual-natured fantastic beasts and monsters). The objects conflated with the amazing creatures most frequently fall into two main, sometimes overlapping craftwork categories: insular and Roman smithwork items of various types (swords, shields, sumptuous jewelry, nonspecific ornaments and treasures, an article of gold-embroidered clothing, locks, clasps, a grate, an unidentified sharp implement, metallic architectural elements, etc.) and Roman architectural works, including entire buildings (prisons and a castle/fortress) and individual architectural pieces (walls, a roof, columns, and doors). No critic has heretofore commented upon the traditional mode of representation presently under consideration (although a few scholars do note figurative relationships between two of Beowulf’s monsters and particular manmade objects—see below). Nor has any critic established a link between literary depictions of fabulous animals and Anglo-Saxon society’s ambivalent attitudes regarding the moral worth of craftwork items and the skills of the artisans fashioning these items. This lack of preexisting scholarship opens
the door for this dissertation’s intensive investigations into the several Old English accounts of fantastic beasts and monsters in which insular writers and poets mobilize the marvelous animals as creature-objects, to the indicated ends.

The Old English writings featuring these creature-objects notably represent a number of medieval genres. This wide range in terms of genre attests to the influence of this mode of representation on the insular literary imagination. Anglo-Saxon literary culture inherited several of these genres from the Latin tradition, with creature-objects occurring in the Exeter Book’s *The Panther, The Whale/Asp-Turtle*, and *The Phoenix* (all three in the physiologus or bestiary tradition); the Old English *Orosius* (a history); the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle* (an example of the mirabilia genre); and the Old English version of *The Life of Saint Margaret* in Cotton Tiberius A.iii (a work of hagiography). Regarding strictly insular literary genres, *Beowulf*, the prime example of the Anglo-Saxon heroic poem, proves to be a rich source of such depictions. Considering that, according to Tony Millns, *The Wanderer*’s poet offers us a vision of a conflated serpent-wall (434-36), the genre of the Old English elegy conceivably joins that of the Anglo-Saxon heroic poem to constitute a short but magnificent list. In summation, a shared vision of fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects informed the whole literature of a culture that held tightly to its native traditions even as it embraced the continental literary genres with which it came into contact.

The individual writers and poets typically mobilize multiple strategies to fundamentally indentify their fabulous creatures with highly-wrought objects. This inspiration to utilize a number of means to conflate a given fantastic beast or monster with an exquisite item further attests to the influence on the insular literary imagination of the mode of representation presently under consideration. Metaphor and parallelism constitute two of the strategies; accordingly, a
few critics have noted the use of the two strategies by the *Beowulf*-poet to link Grendel and/or the fire-drake to specific types of fashioned items in the world of the poem. Regarding Grendel, Jacob Grimm posits a metaphorical connection between him and certain types of metal implements, based upon this troll’s name (Elliott et al. 69). In a similar vein, Seth Lerer and Andrew M. Pfrenger build separate cases for Grendel’s dragon-skin glove functioning as a metaphor for this monster’s mouth/stomach/organs of digestion (Lerer 735; Pfrenger 210). Hugh Magennis and John Leyerle each comment upon the significance of the parallelism tying the launching of Scyld’s funeral ship to the putting to sea of the fire-drake’s dead body, Howard Shilton joining them in acknowledging the likelihood of the poet’s vision of this dragon as a northern longship. With recourse to the respective interpretations of the three critics vis-à-vis the parallelism, Gale Owen-Crocker in turn argues that Scyld’s funeral ship is “personified” as “a lively and impatient beast, an incipient dragon” (Magennis 125; Leyerle 91; Shilton 76; Owen-Crocker *The Four Funerals* 24-27, 39). Additional insular writers and poets readily turn to metaphor and parallelism as ways to merge their fabulous animals with material artifacts.

Whenever appropriate, the above items of criticism will inform my investigations.

Critics have not remarked upon the additional demonstrable strategies by which the insular writers and poets, including the *Beowulf*-poet, conflate their fantastic beasts and monsters with material artifacts. The writer of the Old English *Orosius* effectively merges the massive, nigh-invulnerable body of the serpent attacking the Roman general Regulus and his soldiers with a nearby architectural structure, the monster and architectural structure in question remaining discrete entities in the Latin source text. In Cotton Tiberius A. iii’s version of *The Life of Saint Margaret*, a subtle yet complex metonymic relationship serves as one of the means by which the writer fundamentally links the body of the dragon assailing Saint Margaret to the prison building
confining her, this veritable fusion of dragon and architectural work an innovation on the part of
the writer. This same dragon and the Sigmund Episode’s worm in Beowulf both enigmatically
meet their ends as destroyed objects rather than slain animals. The Beowulf-poet apposes and/or
colloca the anatomical pieces with material artifacts, offers craftwork-related epithets
for the anatomical pieces, and utilizes lexical, syntactic, and referential ambiguity to present the
troll’s various body parts as an array of highly-wrought objects. He and the poet(s) of the Old
English Physiologus and The Phoenix moreover strikingly turn to Old English wreætic—an
adjective typically applied to exquisite craftwork items throughout the Old English corpus of
writings—to describe amazing creatures’ bodies. Finally, subtle wordplay reinforces the
conflations between Grendel and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon and their respective
objects. This dissertation will take a close look at each of the strategies evident in the individual
accounts of fantastic beasts and monsters, in the process bringing to light the ways in which a
given strategy will further the work of one or more previous strategies to depict a particular
fabulous animal as a conflated creature-object.

Importantly, I will build a case that several aspects relating to the strategies utilized to
fundamentally identify amazing creatures with highly-wrought objects contribute to the sense
that the fantastic beasts and monsters in Old English writings actually possess alternate natures
as the indicated splendid objects rather than them simply sharing one or more specific likenesses
with the items. The creatures’ dual natures enabled by the diverse strategies is precisely what in
turn positions them to perform their larger roles in terms of embodying either the inescapable
moral darkness or moral perfection associated with different types of fine objects in Anglo-
Saxon England (again, see my next section for the existing criticism on the relevant aspects of
Anglo-Saxon material culture informing the creatures’ depictions, including aspects from before,
dual, and after Anglo-Saxon England’s Christianization, which gradually took place between 597 and 686 A.D. at the hands of Roman missionaries [Fulk and Cain 10]). The ubiquitous use of multiple strategies instead of a single strategy by the individual writers and poets to merge living entity with material artifact constitutes one way in which the writers and poets work to present us with creature-objects as opposed to creatures that only resemble the indicated objects in some way. In other words, the writers and poets, by repeatedly invoking craftwork imagery through two or more of the various stated means when describing the body of a fantastic beast or monster, leave the indelible impression of a fundamental identification of the entity with the object. The fact that hundreds of lines of text separate the strategies at play in the accounts of some of the monsters (for example, the account of Grendel, as well as that of the serpents of the Old English Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle also supports the interpretation that insular writers and poets seek to offer consistent, coherent visions of their amazing creatures as creature-objects. Moreover, certain of the discrete strategies themselves (for example, the Sigmund Episode’s worm in Beowulf and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon each meeting their respective ends as destroyed manmade items rather than slain animals) appear ideally suited to conveying the sense that a fabulous creature enjoys or has enjoyed an actual existence as the designated object.

The interpretation that the various strategies used to blur the line between the amazing creatures and highly-wrought objects result in dual-natured creatures gains indirect yet significant support from the respective research of Johann Köberl and Gillian R. Overing on particular features of Old English literature. While the two critics do not specifically focus upon the conflation of living entities with material artifacts in insular narratives, each critic essentially does argue for ambiguous natures on the parts of depicted items and animals, this fundamental ambiguity both enabled and indicated by a number of the very strategies explored by the current
study. The first of the two scholars, Köberl, devotes an entire book-length study to this characteristic uncertainty in Old English writings, referring to it as “the duck-rabbit of indeterminacy.” He builds a compelling case that insular writers and poets purposefully cultivate the uncertainty in their narratives so that two interpretations of a given item or entity will bear equal merit, without one interpretation invalidating or otherwise outweighing the other. If viewed from one conceptual angle, the item or entity in question is a “duck”; from another angle, it is a “rabbit.” The item or entity importantly never exists as a hybrid of the two, rather concurrently existing as a “duck” and a “rabbit.” Neither does symbolism come into play, both identities instead proving literal in the world of the narrative. To effect this rich indeterminacy, the writers and poets utilize a range of strategies, including lexical, syntactic, and referential ambiguity (1-9). As mentioned above, the current study will demonstrate that these same three strategies constitute part of the means by which the Beowulf-poet both creates and calls attention to Grendel’s alternate nature as an assemblage of objects. In terms of Köberl’s proposed schema for the items and animals of Old English literature, Grendel (and, by extension, the other fantastic beasts and monsters investigated by the current study) would be a living creature when seen from one angle but clearly consist of the craftwork items when gazed upon from another angle.

Gillian R. Overing’s research on the so-called metonymic mode in Old English poetry likewise opens the door to the type of dual nature posited by this dissertation. First explaining that Anglo-Saxon poets relied most heavily on metonymy, not metaphor, she then argues that, even in the case of a metaphor or simile or kenning or epithet that functions metaphorically, the item or entity serving as the figure of speech’s vehicle in actuality constitutes another aspect or face of the item or entity representing the figure of speech’s tenor, an aspect or face which the poet now is revealing to the reader. Consequently, the substituted image does not refer to
something beyond itself; it simply is the original object or entity viewed from a different perspective. The metaphor, simile, kenning, or epithet thus enables “a moment of ‘seeing,’ a momentary fusion of a variety of aspects in combination, whether visual, spatial, emotional, or literal,” which results in the “immediate impact” characteristic of Old English poetry (Overing Introduction and Chapter One). Overing’s larger argument bears obvious significance for the several fantastic beasts and monsters whose poets figure them as highly-wrought objects through metaphors, similes, kennings, and/or epithets. According to her basic schema, the highly-wrought object named as the vehicle in a given figurative expression in one of the narratives presently under consideration would be the amazing creature constituting the tenor, viewed from another vantage point. The designated crafted item therefore would not refer to anything beyond itself—for example, the abstract qualities of “exquisiteness” or “excellence”—as it would if in line with modern expectations regarding figurative language, but rather would possess a literal existence in the world of the poem in its own right as a real and tangible aspect of the fantastic beast or monster.

A few additional scholars join Köberl and Overing in maintaining that literary devices of various types signal ambiguous natures on the parts of objects and entities in Old English narratives; for example, when appropriate, I will refer to Peter Clemoes’ findings that figurative language in Old English literature typically indicates a richer, more essential connection between vehicle and tenor than generally allowed for by modern sensibilities, this connection specifically involving an underlying “kinship” resulting from a shared “active being” between the items and/or entities in question (68-116).vi As to the likely larger purpose of the ambiguity informing the physical natures of the fantastic beasts and monsters included in my study, Köberl offers an explanation with a particularly high degree of relevance to my larger findings in terms of these
dual-natured creatures, namely that “a duck-rabbit reading [of a particular account or description] would not so much cancel the duck readings or the rabbit readings as preserve them and find another level of meaning in their relationships” (9). In other words, the reader’s job is to determine how the two identities, natures, or interpretations may be working together to afford a view of the item or entity in question that proves greater than the sum of the disparate elements. Vis-à-vis Köberl’s insightful interpretations and well-conceived terminology, this dissertation essentially replaces the concept of the “duck-rabbit” with the closely-related concept of the “creature-object,” subsequently demonstrating that a more complete understanding both of the role the creature-object played in the Anglo-Saxon literary imagination and the cultural work that it performed in written accounts does arise when this strange entity is perceived from one conceptual angle as a living creature and from another as an exquisite object.

I specifically argue that the ambiguity informing the depictions of Old English literature’s fantastic beasts and monsters, an ambiguity effected in a number of ways throughout the various narratives, ultimately enables these creatures to perform the important cultural work of responding to insular fantasies and anxieties tied to the perceived moral worth of certain kinds of splendid objects produced by or otherwise encountered within Anglo-Saxon England. Accordingly, commentary by Catherine E. Karkov and George Hardin Brown on ambiguity’s larger role in Old English narratives fundamentally supports my basic interpretation that insular writers and poets mobilize their fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects to address crucial cultural concerns of some type on the part of Anglo-Saxon society. In their Introduction to the critical anthology entitled Anglo-Saxon Styles, Karkov and Brown explain that “ambiguity could carry a number of meanings and serve a variety of functions within Anglo-Saxon culture but, in the papers that follow, it is clear that it was never purely decorative, but always a vehicle
for political or social messages” (3). As will become apparent in the next section of my Introduction, the critically-attested insular ambivalence in terms of the moral worth of different types of craftworkers, their skills, and their representative products was of sufficient social importance to be ripe for literary expression by means of the vehicle constituted by the figure of the creature-object.

Notably, the alternate nature of a particular fantastic beast or monster sometimes involves an object other than an item of smithwork or an architectural work; for example the Old English Physiologus’ poet conflates the Panther’s coat with the biblical Joseph’s coat-of-many-colors, this esteemed vestment essentially rendered a high-status Anglo-Saxon garment in the Old English account. Within his description of the sumptuous article of clothing, however, the poet subtly indicates the presence of insular decoration in the form of metal treasures and gold embroidery, thereby tying the garment and Panther’s body to the products of smiths, one of the two prime craftwork categories. Similarly, while the research of Lerer and Pfrenger points to a fundamental identification of certain of Grendel’s body parts with the troll’s dragon-leather glove, the Beowulf-poet’s detailed description of the glove suggests that intricate insular ironwork constitutes its ingenious set of clasps. In other words, the idea of fantastic beasts and monsters as items of smithwork and/or architectural works does inform, to a greater or lesser degree, all of the various depictions investigated in this dissertation, indicating that the insular fantasies and anxieties informing these depictions most often were attached to items from these particular two craftwork categories.

Another significant factor to consider before discussing the importance of these two craftwork categories to Anglo-Saxon poets and writers when mobilizing their fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects in response to insular fantasies and anxieties linked to the perceived
moral worth of craftwork items is the actual distribution of the individual fantastic beasts and monsters within the two categories. Only the monsters (with the notable exception of *Beowulf’s* Sigmund Episode’s worm) exist as architectural works, the Exeter Book’s two heavenly fantastic beasts, the Panther and Phoenix, evidencing absolutely no ties to this general type of craftwork. vii The architectural works moreover all appear to possess a Roman or at least extra-insular provenance. For only the murderous and, in a number of instances, literally-hellish creatures to bear an affinity to Roman or Roman-influenced buildings and the specific constituents of such structures signals that the Anglo-Saxons perceived such architectural works in some way to pose grave danger to a given society. The ties of several of the monsters to the Devil and Hell (the Exeter Book’s Whale, Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon, and *Beowulf*’s Grendel) in turn collectively provide a clear hint that the danger fundamentally is of a moral and spiritual variety. Over the course of its investigation into the architectural monsters, this dissertation takes into full account yet another prime aspect of all of the representatives of this class, the creatures’ draconic/serpentine natures. The Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s serpents, the Old English *Orosius*’ serpent, and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon explicitly are such creatures, and the existing criticism reveals both the Whale’s original identity in the Greco-Roman bestiary as the serpentine beast known as the Asp-Turtle and Grendel’s status as a dragon by virtue of *Beowulf*’s exploits paralleling those of Siegfried.

Notably, a number of the architectural monsters also fit into the remaining of the two general craftwork categories that typically come into play in the depictions of fantastic beasts and monsters as highly-wrought creature-objects in Old English narratives, smithwork. In the case of the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s gargantuan serpents, goldwork constitutes the monsters’ entire bodies, which possess alternate natures as exquisite gold
columns. The other architectural monsters with links to metalwork feature specific body parts fundamentally identified with the indicated metal items. Thus, the Old English Physiologus’ poet conflates the Whale’s jaws with Hell’s grated iron prison doors as part of the overall vision he offers of this monster as Hell’s prison. The Life of Saint Margaret’s writer in Cotton Tiberius A.iii punningly hints that the prison building representing the alternate nature of the dragon’s massive body contains gold locks, bars, and/or bolts as part of its architecture, while simultaneously conjuring an arresting image of this same monster as a sumptuous pagan idol with teeth of wrought iron, eyes of expertly-cut gems, and hair and beard of spun gold. The Beowulf-poet utilizes a range of strategies to present Grendel’s anatomical parts as an array of metal objects, including various items of ironwork and goldwork. One such set of iron objects is the iron bolts, bars, and/or gratings of prisons, an interpretation enabled both by Jacob Grimm’s analysis of Grendel’s name (Elliott et al. 69) and Edwin Guest’s discussion of Old English grindel from A History of English Rhythms (qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “grindel”). Based upon the marked similarities between the Whale, The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon, and Grendel (all three effectively exist as literally-hellish reptilian monsters sharing a blurred line with prison architecture and its associated metalwork), this dissertation will consider them a triad in Old English literature, exploring their larger significance as a specific type of dark creature-object within the Anglo-Saxon literary imagination.

The existence of the architectural monsters’ metalwork body parts raises the possibility that these beasts, as creature-objects, respond not only to Anglo-Saxon moral concerns regarding Roman/extra-insular architectural works, but also to similar concerns in terms of smiths’ products (see my next section for the existing scholarship on ironwork’s and goldwork’s perceived problematic aspects for the Anglo-Saxons). I will offer evidence that the associated
metalwork of the Whale/Asp-Turtle and the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s dragons possesses a strictly Roman/extra-insular provenance, a state of affairs in keeping with the Roman/extra-insular provenance of the architectural works merged with these monsters. However, the respective bodies of Grendel and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii feature examples of both Roman/extra-insular and insular/Germanic metalwork, thereby hinting that the Anglo-Saxons also perceived moral darkness to infect items of the latter tradition. The depiction of the one non-architectural monster, *Beowulf*’s Sigmund Episode’s worm, further supports the interpretation that the Anglo-Saxon imagination readily conceived of creature-objects embodying the moral darkness of insular/Germanic pieces of metalwork. Despite the worm’s short account in the poem, the poet manages to utilize several strategies to indicate its alternate nature as one or more insular/Germanic metal objects. While the poet does not directly name the type of item or items constituting this dragon’s alternate physical nature, he associates this beast with four insular/Germanic metal objects in the world of the poem, with both ironwork and goldwork represented among these four items. Ultimately, the indeterminacy marking the worm’s alternate nature as an insular/Germanic metal object positions this monster to embody the moral darkness attendant to insular/Germanic smithwork in general.

In contrast to the smithwork monsters, the Exeter Book’s heavenly Panther and Phoenix serve as evidence that fabulous creatures in Old English writings alternatively could reflect positive Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the moral potentiality of metalwork. *The Panther*’s poet, as previously indicated, conflates the Panther’s coat with the biblical Joseph’s so-called coat-of-many-colors, in the process fundamentally identifying the divine beast’s body with fine insular metalwork in the form of ornaments and gold embroidery. The Panther’s depiction along these lines hence demonstrates that the poet, in addition to envisioning the Whale/Asp-Turtle as a
monster of morally-dark Roman metalwork, also conceived of a creature-object embodying the high moral worth sometimes attributed to high-status insular metalwork in Anglo-Saxon society (see below for discussion of the existing research on the moral attitudes of the pre-Conversion and post-Conversion Anglo-Saxons regarding wrought objects in general and specific types of craftwork in particular). *The Phoenix*’s poet, who possibly also was the Old English Physiologus’ poet, correspondingly offers a richly-detailed vision of his titular divine avian as an assemblage of different smithwork objects, including a gem-inset goldwork plate, which constitutes the holy bird’s eye, and an ornate metal shield, which forms its back. With recourse to the existing scholarship on Anglo-Saxon material culture, this dissertation will build a case that the smithwork of the Phoenix’s eye and back—and of other of this sacred beast’s body parts—appears consistent with the high-status products of insular goldsmiths, jewelers, and weapon-smiths. The widely divergent responses towards the moral worth of metalwork represented by the two heavenly beasts versus the monsters prompts us to consider that the smithwork creatures as a group speak to a larger ambivalence on the part of Anglo-Saxon society regarding the moral valuation of the products of insular and extra-insular smiths.

**1.1 The Influence of Key Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Material Culture on the Depictions**

Importantly, the existing scholarship on Anglo-Saxon material culture sheds light on a number of the above-outlined aspects informing insular writers’ and poets’ depictions of fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects. The aspects include the writers’ and poets’ inspiration to work with the theme of crafted objects’ moral worth in the first place; their tendency to engage the theme specifically by merging such material artifacts with fantastic
beasts and monsters, particularly the types of fantastic beasts and monsters here under investigation (i.e., serpents and dragons, a majestic bird, etc.); and their choice mainly to conflate the fabulous creatures with architectural works and/or smithwork, with occasional recourse to other types of craftwork. The existing scholarship furthermore offers insight into the cultural ambivalence in terms of smithwork’s moral worth indicated by morally-dark monsters and morally-elevated heavenly beasts both sharing a blurred line with metalwork, including high-status goldwork and ironwork, in insular narratives. (Note: When discussing the various fantastic beasts and monsters throughout its three chapters, I will regularly refer the reader back to specific parts of this section of the Introduction so as to reinforce a more comprehensive, contextualized, and unified understanding of the interplay of aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture directly informing each creature-object’s depiction.)

At the most basic level, the positive admiration for smithwork implied by the link of the Panther’s and Phoenix’s respective bodies to the exquisite products of insular smiths finds its reflection in the well-attested traditional Anglo-Saxon appreciation for fine objects in general, and items of insular metalwork in particular. As evidence of insular smithwork’s exceptional quality, scholars list and discuss the impressive material artifacts both from Sutton Hoo and the Staffordshire Hoard, describe the Fuller Brooch, and document the high regard for Anglo-Saxon swords and gold embroidery on the continent (Hinton 193; Webster 126; Coatsworth and Pinder 263-64, 274; Hyer and Owen-Crocker “Woven Works” 183). Scholars offer a number of reasons for the traditional esteeming of insular metalwork on the part of the Anglo-Saxons. First of all, the Anglo-Saxons inherited their regard from their Germanic forebears. *Beowulf*, depicting an idealized Germanic past, features an impressive array of superb objects, including fantastic weapons and singular items of treasure. The poem’s varied objects embodied the heroic ideals of
the Germanic peoples, a warrior society invested in a system in which retainers gloriously fought for rulers who, in turn, dispensed gold rings and other treasures to them (Owen-Crocker “Seldom … does” 210). The Anglo-Saxons’ respect for Weland, the legendary Germanic smith, further testifies to the larger Germanic culture’s traditional valuing of excellent smithwork (Dodwell 74; J. Bradley 45). Another reason for the traditional reverence paid to insular metalwork is that the Anglo-Saxons characteristically demonstrated a clear preference for sparkle, shine, gleam, and brightness over a number of other visual markers, an appreciation that found expression in a marked respect for metals (mainly gold) and gems, the prime materials used in a number of types of high-status objects (Dodwell 33-35; Wilson 10-11; Webster 8).

Although Anglo-Saxon England’s Christianization, which took place between 597 and 686 A.D. at the hands of Roman missionaries (Fulk and Cain 10), imported a number of new values that in many cases opposed the culture’s traditional values (see next paragraph), the Conversion in theory still allowed for an esteeming of excellent objects, including the types of items conflated with the Panther and Phoenix. In fact, the Anglo-Saxons’ exposure to descriptions of the revered, highly-wrought objects in Scripture imparted to them the sense that splendid items could partake of the heavenly realm’s moral exemplariness. For example, as one scholar explains, the New Testament’s account of the exquisite architecture of the new Jerusalem inspired a number of Anglo-Saxon poets, and the richly-detailed descriptions of the tabernacle of Moses and temple of Solomon with all of the two structures’ magnificent accoutrements gave the Anglo-Saxons a guiding vision for their own churches (Dodwell 30). The ability of Scripture’s objects to inspire insular poets certainly likewise resulted in the conflation of the Panther with the biblical Joseph’s coat-of-many-colors. The documented actuality that Christian devotees, as well as other individuals of means, in post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon England signaled their
affluence through ownership of high-status objects, including finery in the form of gold-embroidered clothes ornamented with jewels (Hyer and Owen-Crocker “Woven Works” 175-79), serves as a further indication as to why The Panther’s poet readily would associate the holy beast in question with a garment he depicts as a sumptuous insular article of clothing featuring jewels, gold embroidery, and other metalwork treasures in the Old English version of the original narrative. While none of the Phoenix’s body parts similarly exist as one of Scripture’s singular objects, the idea that items of metalwork and other types of craftwork could evidence a divine moral perfection in all probability influenced the poet in his conflation of the heavenly avian’s anatomy with the pieces of metalwork.

Despite the moral exemplariness at times attributed to highly-wrought objects, the existing scholarship on Anglo-Saxon material culture also demonstrates that post-Conversion insular religious authorities conversely warned against moral dangers they associated with finely-crafted items. The avowed existence of these moral dangers hence opens the door to an informed consideration of the creature-objects represented by the various monsters specifically in light of the documented attitudes informing Anglo-Saxon material culture. According to scholars, the perception that moral darkness could attend splendid objects largely arose from the culture’s assimilation of certain ideals from both Scripture and the writings of the Latin Church fathers. The Christian mindset basically stipulated that the proper use of any and all excellently-fashioned items was to elevate an onlooker’s consciousness to contemplation of the utter majesty of God and His own masterworks (Coatsworth and Pinder 264), an ideal clearly finding expression in the depictions of the Panther and Phoenix as creature-objects. Such highly-wrought pieces were not to be admired for their value in terms of a heroic or kingly society or for signaling personal grandeur or affluence. Thus, for example, homilists like the seventh-century
Aldhelm and the writer of the Blickling Homilies decried the high regard for sumptuous clothing when the person’s attention should have been focused upon key religious topics (Hyer and Owen-Crocker “Woven Works” 176, 179), and, regarding fine jewelry, C. R. Dodwell explains that homilists in the last couple of centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period might have “envisaged the life to come in remarkably bejeweled terms, but preferred these pleasures not to be anticipated” (189). These weighty concerns in terms of Anglo-Saxon men and women exhibiting a spiritually-dangerous predilection for luxury craftwork likely to some degree influenced the decisions of insular writers and poets to merge their monsters (particularly the three literally hellish ones) with the designated splendid objects in the narratives.

The above-outlined scholarly research on Anglo-Saxon material culture clearly indicates that, ultimately, post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon society at best demonstrated ambivalent viewpoints regarding the moral worth of crafted objects. Again, offering the general findings of the existing research as partial evidence, I consider the Exeter Book’s Panther and Phoenix essentially to embody craftwork’s potential of elevating the minds of Christian men and women to a contemplation of God and His own masterworks but the various monsters contrastingly to embody the moral dangers associated with too high a regard on the parts of Christians for the more worldly aspects of splendid items. As will forthwith become evident, scholarly research on Anglo-Saxon cultural views, both traditional and Christianized, towards the different types of insular metalworkers and their representative products stands to enable a broader and more nuanced understanding of the insular ambivalence in terms of the moral valuation of highly-wrought items. This scholarship on the attitudes towards smiths and their metalwork holds such promise regarding this ambivalence especially in light of the fact that metalwork, primarily ironwork and goldwork, features prominently in the depictions of both heavenly beasts and
monsters in insular narratives, a state of affairs signaling a particularly-conflicted mindset vis-à-vis metalworkers and the material artifacts fashioned by these artisans.

The contrasting Anglo-Saxon cultural views towards the moral status of goldsmiths, their skills, and their products versus that of blacksmiths, their skills, and their products together serve as one of the additional factors that in all probability significantly inform Old English literature’s various representations of fantastic beasts and monsters as items of metalwork. While scholars do comment upon Anglo-Saxon society’s general approbation for its many types of craftworkers, including its different kinds of metalworkers, insular goldsmiths and their trade ultimately bore quite different moral associations than the blacksmiths and their trade. Elizabeth Coatsworth and Michael Pinder, in the course of their discussion of the Fuller Brooch, remark upon the exceptional status of the former type of metalworker in Anglo-Saxon England (259-64). Dodwell explains that the Anglo-Saxons in fact respected the goldsmith more than all other insular artisans, smith or otherwise, and that this metalworker’s unparalleled prestige arose from him working with that most resplendent of metals, gold (44-48). In the typically male-dominated artistic world of the Anglo-Saxons, even the women who worked with gold notably commanded a rich level of esteem, a number of scholars demonstrating that Anglo-Saxon society and continental societies all considered the insular seamstresses’ gold embroidery to possess exceptional quality (Dodwell 57-58, 70; Hyer and Owen-Crocker “Woven Works” 176-83). As for an explicit indicator of the moral worth of goldsmiths, their skills, and their products in terms of the Christianized Anglo-Saxon mindset, James Bradley maintains that carvings connected with the Anglo-Saxon Church depict the titular legendary Germanic smith as a sort of “spiritual goldsmith” (J. Bradley 39-47). The above research clearly indicates the likelihood that Anglo-
Saxon England’s positive moral valuation of its goldsmiths and their trade finds expression in the
goldwork body parts of the Exeter Book’s heavenly Panther and Phoenix.

Correspondingly, Anglo-Saxon society’s negative stance regarding the moral worth of
blacksmiths, their skills, and their products in all likelihood constituted a significant influence
upon the insular writers and poets who conflated monsters’ body parts with iron objects. Despite
the interpretation by other scholars that a general insular respect had extended to all types of
metalworkers, David Hinton presents multiple strands of evidence in “Weland’s Work: Metal
and Metalsmiths” that blacksmiths endured marginalization and even abjection in Anglo-Saxon
England, the Anglo-Saxons typically viewing both them and their representative handiwork with
distaste, disrespect, distrust, suspicion, and, ultimately, fear. Before addressing the darkest of the
emotions and concerns the blacksmiths inspired, Hinton first builds a case for their inferior social
status in their communities. He begins by explaining that “smithing was anti-socially noisy …
and in addition created a fire hazard. These factors would have encouraged the placing of
smithies at the edges of settlements. […] The surveys of Winchester [accordingly] show that
most of the smithies were on the peripheries of the late Anglo-Saxon city” (192). He likewise
sees blacksmiths’ collective weak “standing” reflected in the fact that the average blacksmith in
late Anglo-Saxon England did not own any land, and he subsequently comments upon the
possibility that, “although farrier’s work extended the demand for ironsmiths, it may also have
tended to downgrade them, as it was coarse and heavy labour, leaving less opportunity for the
run-of-the-mill smith to show great skill.” Finally, he offers a piece of literary evidence in
support of the blacksmiths’ general lack of esteem in Anglo-Saxon society, maintaining that “the
bombast of the blacksmith in Aelfric’s Colloquy and the way in which he was put in his place
implies that he was not particularly respected” (197).
After making his cogent case for blacksmiths’ poor social standing in Anglo-Saxon England, Hinton next addresses a significantly deeper level of moral darkness allegedly tainting these particular metalworkers, their skills, and their products. The extreme moral danger supposedly posed by this type of smith and his trade was of a sufficiently high level as to be fitting for embodiment in the bodies of Old English literature’s deadly monsters. Specifically, Hinton establishes the likelihood that acute insular anxieties towards the blacksmiths and their handiwork arising from these metalworkers’ perceived ill intentions and darkly clever skills prompted the Anglo-Saxons to keep these craftworkers as far away from them as possible. To support his interpretation, he first points out that “the Tattershall Thorpe smith was in an isolated grave, as though to keep someone with his tricky skills away from the rest of society.” He offers as further evidence the fact that Weland’s depiction on the Frank’s Casket—an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon carved whalebone box—focuses upon the fabled Germanic blacksmith’s dark deeds while incarcerated far away from society rather than any of his more noble aspects or endeavors:

The legendary Weland was another whose skill placed him outside the norm—his captivity on an island kept him away from court. […] Weland’s revenge for his isolated imprisonment and other ill fortune is graphically carved into the Franks Casket, where he is shown offering poison to an unfortunate princess who does not know that he has fashioned the cup containing it from her brother’s skull. Clearly, his skills were admired even if he belonged to the old world and did not put them to proper Christian use . . . . (Hinton 200)

Unlike the critics who find Weland to have been an unequivocally-positive figure in Anglo-Saxon England, Hinton foregrounds the darker elements of the Weland story, with its themes of
“isolated imprisonment,” murder, trickery, and the use of smithcraft for a terrible revenge. For additional evidence of the moral debasement marking blacksmiths, Hinton mentions that “an Anglo-Saxon charm warns that some iron was the work of witches, and six smiths sitting making war-spears clearly offered mankind no good” (200).xi The range of dark associations borne by blacksmiths and their trade in Anglo-Saxon England—malevolence, trickery, isolation, imprisonment, ill fortune, murder, revenge, witchcraft, and evil—does clearly open the door to this range’s possible embodiment in the ironwork body parts of Old English literature’s rapacious, vengeful, malefic monsters.

While the existing criticism about the moral status of goldsmiths versus that of blacksmiths in Anglo-Saxon England potentially does shed needed light upon the ties of the Exeter Book’s two heavenly beasts to goldwork and several of Old English literature’s monsters to ironwork, this research does not account for why monsters’ anatomies in some instances feature goldwork, the product of Anglo-Saxon England’s most esteemed type of smith, or why the Phoenix possesses at least one body part conflated with ironwork, the product of this same society’s most feared and shunned type of smith. However, two additional lines of scholarship—one highlighting gold’s morally-problematic aspects arising from much of its typical usage during the classical age and the other documenting Anglo-Saxon society’s high regard for weapon-smiths—stand to offer reasonable explanations for the monsters’ goldwork and the heavenly avian’s ironwork. Regarding the moral danger attendant to gold objects, Dominic Janes, in *God and Gold in Late Antiquity*, explains that “possession of elite substances [during the classical era] marked power. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the pagan gods were often marked out by gold in the classical world. […] Palaces, temples and cult statues [hence] frequently came to be adorned with splendid displays of gold and other precious substances” (19-
Gold’s longstanding pagan associations from the classical era would have served as at least part of the inspiration for post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon writers and poets conflating their monsters’ bodies with gold items, especially in the cases of those monsters explicitly linked to the Devil and Hell. I will accordingly demonstrate the likely influence of goldwork’s perceived pagan darkness on the depictions of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon and *Beowulf*’s Grendel, literally-hellish monsters existing as particular types of gold objects.

Regarding the Phoenix’s potential ties to ironwork, Chapter One presents evidence supporting the likelihood that iron constitutes the entirety of the ornate shield conflated with the heavenly avian’s back. While Hinton compellingly argues that the Anglo-Saxons ultimately associated moral darkness with insular blacksmiths, their skills, and their products, the Anglo-Saxons’ overall negative outlook hence raising the question of why *The Phoenix*’s poet would seek to identify the divine bird’s body with an iron object, Dodwell explains that one particular subset of the insular blacksmiths—the weapon-smiths—actually enjoyed high prestige and acclaim in Anglo-Saxon society:

In an age of almost continuous warfare, the weapon-smith was especially respected and Wayland—the great weapon-smith of pagan mythology—was remembered in such poems as *Deor* and *Beowulf*. The Anglo-Saxon weapon-smith himself was celebrated in two Old English poems, one of which speaks of him shaping the helmet, the corslet, the gleaming blade and the round shield. In *Beowulf* the reader is especially aware of the Anglo-Saxon relish for the products of the weapon-smiths’ skills … (72-74).
The immense respect and admiration held by the Anglo-Saxons for insular weapon-smiths and the items forged by them would at least partly explain why *The Phoenix*’s poet would see fit to merge his morally-exalted bird’s back with ironwork specifically in the form of a shield (see my Chapter One for a more striking reason why the poet would have chosen to conflate this majestic avian with this very type of martial implement).

As for the Anglo-Saxons’ perception of the moral worth of Roman/extra-insular architectural works, structures which I argue are conflated with a number of Old English literature’s serpents and dragons, see the Introduction to Chapter Two for evidence in support of the Anglo-Saxons having been acutely aware of the pagan provenance of the Roman buildings existing as ruins within Anglo-Saxon England. This dissertation interprets that the moral darkness resulting from the buildings’ pagan provenance finds embodiment in the serpents and dragons discussed in Chapter Two. Based upon the existing criticism on the various aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture, a vivid picture emerges of the ambivalence coloring Anglo-Saxon society’s overall estimation of the moral worth of fine objects. Exquisite items in post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon England could elevate a person’s mind to the contemplation of God and His own masterworks, or the worldliness of such pieces could distract the person, placing his or her soul in jeopardy. Insular goldsmiths commanded high esteem in both the secular and the religious spheres, and yet gold still bore its pagan associations from when it had decorated pagan architectural works and statuary in the classical era. Insular weapon-smiths and their martial implements enjoyed immense cultural acclaim, but Anglo-Saxon England’s other ironworkers and their representative products invoked a remarkable degree of fear and disrespect. The sophisticated Roman ruins in Anglo-Saxon England continued to fascinate the Christianized Anglo-Saxons, and yet the structures’ pagan provenance remained problematic. In terms of this
dissertation’s specific interests, the fundamentality and complexity of the ambivalence towards crafted items likely did render it of sufficient cultural importance as to be ripe for literary expression in a number of insular narratives.

Existing scholarship on additional aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture indicates that, for a number of reasons, conflating fantastic beasts’ and monsters’ bodies with exquisite objects would have been a natural inclination on the part of insular writers and poets seeking to engage with Anglo-Saxon society’s complex relationship with its material artifacts. The most compelling possible reason for the writers’ and poets’ collective choice to mobilize fantastic beasts and monsters to perform the type of cultural work proposed by the current study directly involves the highly-stylized animal ornamentation appearing on various types of objects throughout the centuries in Anglo-Saxon England. Leslie Webster, in Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History, begins her comprehensive discussion of this well-attested insular motif with the following synopsis of its immense popularity both throughout time and among different types of insular craftworkers:

The long-lived Anglo-Saxon fascination with zoomorphic decoration is one of the most striking aspects of the art, unique in the early medieval period. The stylized formulaic creatures of early metalwork, the elegant animals of eighth-century manuscripts and sculptural inhabited vine scrolls, the quirky beasts of ninth-century brooches, and the birds and creatures that perch in the lush foliage of tenth-century strap-ends are all part of an unbroken tradition. (36)

The time-honored tradition represented by the zoomorphic decoration, along with this motif’s demonstrated influence across craftwork categories, would have provided generations upon
generations of Anglo-Saxons with the indelible sense of a blurred line between manmade objects of various kinds and the “creatures,” “elegant animals,” “quirky beasts,” and “birds” mentioned by Webster. The marked tendency of insular writers and poets to conflate their fantastic beasts and monsters with the range of crafted items (the gold objects, iron objects, architectural works, high-status garment, etc.) very clearly could have resulted from just such a well-established and fundamental imaginative identification of beasts and birds with the products of skilled artisans.

Scholars acknowledge two styles of Anglo-Saxon animal ornamentation, designated Styles I and II. Importantly, I will build a case that certain Anglo-Saxon writers and poets actually had specific aspects of either Style I or Style II directly in mind when depicting their fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects. According to Webster, Style I animal ornamentation developed in the southeast region of late-fifth-century Anglo-Saxon England, typically appearing on early metalwork such as brooches and buckles and eventually giving rise to several regional variants (56-57, 62). Describing Style I’s characteristic division of each animal into its separate body parts, or “dismembered elements,” she then explains that an animal “could be reduced to a few essentials—a head and a leg, for instance, or even just one representative part. It could be reassembled in an eye-teasing ‘animal salad’ of disconnected bits, in one writer’s happy phrase” (57). T. D. Kendrick similarly comments on this distinctive feature of insular Style I, referring to it as “that Dark Ages style in which the animal really does dissolve into a loose assembly of bits and pieces” (29-30). The Phoenix’s titular avian and Beowulf’s Grendel essentially likewise exist as “assembled” creatures, considering that a number of objects constitute their bodies. The assemblage of manmade items forming Grendel’s body notably loses its physical integrity over the course of the narrative as Beowulf forcibly detaches from Grendel proper the body-object consisting of the troll’s hand, arm, and shoulder and the one consisting of
his head. The troll’s effective dismantling calls to mind Webster’s above discussion of “dismembered elements” and a creature being “reduced to a few essentials—a head and a leg, for instance,” as well as Kendrick’s vivid description of the typical Style I animal’s “dissolv[ing] into a loose assembly of bits and pieces.” This dissertation will present evidence that additional features of Style I also inform the Phoenix’s and Grendel’s respective depictions.

Webster explains that Style II of Anglo-Saxon animal ornamentation “probably first developed in elite metalwork of the last quarter of the sixth century” (62). Considering the conflation of so many of Old English literature’s fabulous animals with exquisite metal objects, the likely genesis of Styles I and II in early high-status metalwork lends a significant degree of additional support to the overall interpretation that insular writers and poets had one or both styles of Anglo-Saxon animal ornamentation in mind when depicting their fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects. Regarding Style II’s specific features, Webster reveals that “the emphasis is on entire and clearly articulated animals in fluent, symmetrical structures, often interlaced” (62). Peggy A. Knapp, in her own discussion of the intimate link between insular interlace and zoomorphic ornamentation, comments upon the largely-ubiquitous appearance of serpents and dragons in interlace:

Interlace both creates patterns that tease the eye into following dizzying paths and in many cases represents the free ends of some strands as a stylized zoomorphic head, sometimes the body of a serpent, sometimes a serpent with legs. Dragons come to mind. Such interlaced images are found everywhere over a long period, in jewelry-making, the design of useful objects, and sculpture … (85).
George Speake similarly notes that serpents easily outrank all other creatures in Anglo-Saxon interlace in terms of frequency of occurrence: “In the Anglo-Saxon ornamental zoo, the serpent or snake is by far the commonest creature … […] More often than not the body is knotted or interlaced with another creature in the ornamental scheme” (85). I will build a case that the attested primacy of serpents and dragons in interlace finds its reflection in Old English literature’s many serpents and dragons with alternate natures as highly-wrought objects.

In addition to the likely influence of insular Style II and interlace, the Anglo-Saxons’ attested intense imaginative engagement with other cultures’ objects that they perceived to be serpentine or draconic also would have inspired insular writers and poets to envision the serpents and dragons in their narratives as manmade items. The society’s overall fascination with these objects in turn would have facilitated opening the door to these monsters performing the type of cultural work posited by the current study. From the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons inherited two types of highly-wrought objects with craftsmanship that, to them, suggested serpents or snakes. The so-called herringbone pattern walls left behind in pre-Migration England by the Romans constituted one set of these objects. According to Tony Millns, these surviving architectural pieces must have held a considerable mystique for the Anglo-Saxons, who probably imagined “the zig-zag patterns created by laying thin bricks or tiles along opposite diagonals on each alternate horizontal course” as serpents climbing the wall. Importantly, he establishes the likelihood that the striking visual effect with its markedly serpentine associations ultimately gave rise to the depiction of *The Wanderer*’s impressively-high, eminently-durable serpentine wall (434-36). Chapter Two will build a case that this perceived fusion of ophidians and wall in the herringbone pattern walls also had a role not only in influencing the Old English *Orosius*’ writer to conflate part of his dragon’s body with the walls of a castle/fortress, but furthermore in
leading other insular writers and poets to conflate their reptilian monsters’ bodies with additional types of architectural works and elements, including the prisons, doors, columns, and roof.

The so-called pattern-welded swords served as the second set of serpentine objects from the Romans that would have reinforced the merging of reptilian monsters with highly-wrought objects in the insular imagination. Hinton explains that the craftsmanship of the pattern-welded swords’ blades originated with the Romans but subsequently reached the Anglo-Saxons through Germanic lines of transmission, the blades’ “decorative technique … [specifically] involv[ing] welding strips of twisted and plain iron together” (194). H. R. Davidson reports that these weapons occupied a powerful place in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination, where they bore extensive associations with snakes and serpents by virtue of the craftsmanship. She explains that “the idea of a serpent creeping along the blade would arise naturally out of the serpentine appearance of the band of pattern running along a pattern-welded sword.” Furthermore, she reasons that “the use of poisonous acids in the process of manufacturing the blade” and the “satisfaction to be gained from the image of a gleaming, silvery sword darting like a snake to leave its deadly imprint on the victim” both likely contributed to the conflation of ophidian with sword in Anglo-Saxon poetry. She ultimately maintains that all of Beowulf’s notable swords probably are pattern-welded swords, with the adjective wyrmfah clearly referring to the “serpentine patterns” of the blade successfully wielded by the poem’s titular hero at the bottom of Grendel’s mere (166, 129-45). Citing a brief comment by Frederick Klaeber upon the parallelism linking the fate of this wyrmfah blade to the fate of the Sigmund Episode’s worm (Klaeber Beowulf 210, Endnote for line 1605bff), I will build a much larger case that the pattern-welded swords did fundamentally influence the poet’s depiction of the worm’s body and that the fundamental identification of the wyrmfah blade with the worm effectively signals the conflicted
Anglo-Saxon mindset vis-à-vis the moral worth of some of the heroic world’s most esteemed material artifacts, the high-status swords.

The Anglo-Saxons also encountered a set of explicitly-draconic Norse objects that would have encouraged insular writers and poets to envision the reptilian monsters in their narratives as crafted items. These objects were the magnificent Norse dragon-prowed ships, highly-wrought, visually-arresting constructions\textsuperscript{xiv} that directly influenced Old English literary representations and manuscript illustrations of nautical vessels. Importantly, critics comment upon two instances of the \textit{Beowulf}-poet blurring the line between dragon-prowed ship and living dragon. Shilton, concurring with Magennis and Leyerle that the \textit{Beowulf}-poet presents a vision of the fire-drake’s dead body as a northern longship, supports their shared interpretation with the fact that “longships were built to resemble dragons with a carved dragon’s head at the prow, and a carved tail at the stern” (for the relevant instance of parallelism informing this depiction of the fire-drake, see above and Magennis 125; Leyerle 91; Shilton 76). Owen-Crocker, while building her case that Scyld’s funeral ship is “personified” as “a lively and impatient beast, an incipient dragon” in \textit{Beowulf}, similarly cites the Norse dragon-prowed ships as a key part of her evidence (Owen-Crocker \textit{The Four Funerals} 24-27, 39). In terms of my interests, the critical research raises the distinct possibility that the dead fire-drake and Scyld’s funeral ship each respond to a general insular fantasy involving the awesome Germanic dragon-prowed ships possessing some degree of an actual animal existence.\textsuperscript{xv} Chapter Two’s Introduction will briefly consider the further possibility that the evocative draconic, nautical architecture of the Germanic dragon-prowed ships hence had a degree of influence on the insular literary tendency to conflate the Latin-influenced reptilian monsters with Roman-inspired, land-based architectural works.
Two Latin texts available to the Anglo-Saxons—*Alexandri ad Aristotelem* and the heretofore-undiscovered source text for Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s version of *The Life of Saint Margaret*—constitute a final set of important influences on the depictions under investigation in this dissertation. The Latin writer of *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, the source text for the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*, does fundamentally identify India’s massive serpents with ornate palatial columns. Similarly, the Latin writer of the one surviving account representing the Latin Casinensis version of the Saint Margaret legend—an account that Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis reason most likely serves as the closest existing analogue to the source text for the Old English version of *The Life of Saint Margaret* presently under consideration (Clayton and Magennis Introduction 17-18, 41-71)—does conflate his dragon with a highly-wrought pagan idol. In other words, the two Anglo-Saxon writers retain the link between reptilian monster and material artifact from the source texts for their respective narratives. The writers nonetheless bring insular aesthetic and/or literary sensibilities to bear upon their depictions of the reptilian monsters from the two Latin source narratives, specifically in terms of the monsters’ alternate natures as manmade items. For example, *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s writer significantly diverges from the Latin Casinensis version of the Saint Margaret legend (and from all other existing versions of the legend) when he additionally merges the dragon with a prison building. By means of this conflation, he effectively bring this dragon into line with the other serpents and dragons in Old English narratives with alternate natures as types of buildings (including prison buildings) and individual architectural elements. When investigating the cultural work performed by the monsters in the two Old English narratives, I will take into consideration all of the subtle changes undergone by these particular creatures when entering into the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition from the Latin literary tradition.\(^{xvi}\)
1.2 Chapter Summaries

This dissertation’s three chapters represent groupings designed to bring to light the significant, often-subtle connections between and among the different creatures with alternate natures as highly-wrought objects in Old English writings. The groupings furthermore will enable a nuanced consideration of the ways in which individual Anglo-Saxon writers and poets mobilize their various fantastic beasts and monsters as creature-objects to perform the cultural work investigated by the current study.

Chapter One focuses upon the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix; the creatures’ respective accounts all appear in the Exeter Book and possibly represent the work of one poet. This chapter details the various strategies at work to conflate the three beasts with highly-wrought objects. First of all, the Old English adjective *wretlic* features prominently in the beasts’ physical descriptions. By taking a close look at *wretlic*’s etymological origins, semantic range, and typical usage in the Old English corpus of writings and at the precise manner in which it tends to function in the Exeter Book Riddles, I build a case that its occurrences in connection with the three creatures’ bodies fundamentally signal the titular beasts’ alternate natures as the objects. Considering that *Beowulf* features two monsters with *wretlic* bodies, the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel, Chapter One’s investigation into this adjective’s signification in *The Panther, The Whale/Asp-Turtle*, and *The Phoenix* ultimately contributes to a larger examination in the current study of the cultural work performed by the *wretlic* or “excellently-fashioned” creature in Old English literature. This chapter also compares *The Phoenix* with its Latin source text and *The Panther* and *The Whale/Asp-Turtle* with close continental analogues to arrive at the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon poet(s) reworked the three creatures’ original depictions to conflate the creatures’ bodies with metal objects. Lastly, I present evidence both
that the Panther and Phoenix effectively bring to life the animals of Anglo-Saxon animal ornament and that the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix* together offer a vision of the Christian cosmos as the stage on which heavenly beasts embodying the work and skills of Anglo-Saxon England’s most esteemed types of smiths remain juxtaposed to the hellish monster embodying the work and skills of its most marginalized and feared type of smith.

Chapter Two examines Old English literature’s serpents and dragons with alternate natures as architectural works of various types. This group includes the deadly serpents of the Old English *Orosius* and *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*, the hellish dragon of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *The Life of Saint Margaret*, and the diabolical Whale/Asp-Turtle of the Old English Physiologus, a serpentine creature first discussed in Chapter One. The architectural works, all of which likely possess a Roman or at least extra-insular provenance, range from entire buildings (a fortress/castle and prisons) to individual architectural elements (walls, columns, and doors). While all of the above Old English accounts of serpents and dragons exist as insular translations of Latin accounts, only *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s source text merges its reptilian monsters with architectural works, the same ornate gold columns with which the Anglo-Saxon writer/translator conflates his serpents. In other words, the reptilian monsters’ alternate natures in the remaining three Old English narratives are innovations on the part of the writers/poets/translators, a fact appreciably supporting the interpretation that the Anglo-Saxon imagination fundamentally identified serpents and dragons with Roman/extra-insular architectural works. Chapter Two considers probable influences upon or reasons for this particular insular imaginative tendency. It also brings to light a number of remarkable connections between *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon and the Exeter Book’s Whale/Asp-Turtle, two monsters of the triad of which *Beowulf*’s Grendel is the third and final member and
whose inclusion and overall significance within the triad will be addressed in Chapter Three. Ultimately, I regard the literary depictions of serpents and dragons in the narratives as responses to a dark insular fantasy involving the moral danger and awesomeness of Roman/extra-insular architectural works enjoying a savage, predatory existence in the world’s landscapes.

Chapter Three focuses upon the two monsters of Beowulf’s Grendel Episode with alternate natures as manmade objects: the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel himself. Detailing the diverse range of strategies utilized to blur the line between the two monsters’ bodies and items of goldwork and ironwork, this chapter fundamentally argues that the worm and Grendel, as metalwork entities, speak to the potential moral dangers attending Anglo-Saxon society’s entrenched, unquestioning reverence for fine metalwork. During its discussion of the two monsters, Chapter Three effectively continues the investigation into Old English literature’s wraetlic creatures begun in Chapter One by looking at wraetlic’s likely significance in describing the worm and Grendel’s severed head in the world of the poem. Regarding the worm, I also importantly compare the Sigmund Episode to the account’s closest Germanic analogue, the Hürnen Seyfrid, to build a case that the Beowulf-poet substantially reworks the scene of dragons “melting” from the tale’s original traditionxviii to bring the “melting” into line with his overall depiction of the worm as a piece of splendid metalwork. Chapter Three concludes its treatment of the worm by arguing that the poet especially ties this monster to metalwork’s potential moral darkness by powerfully associating its body with the “serpentine” sword from Grendel’s mere. Vis-à-vis Grendel, I bring to light this troll’s links to Chapter Two’s architectural serpents and dragons, particularly Saint Margaret’s dragon and the Whale/Asp-Turtle. Examining two statements made by Beowulf indicating that he alone had been able to perceive Grendel’s true physical nature as an assemblage of manmade objects, I consider that the hero concretely reveals
this strange fact of Grendel’s constitution by dismantling Grendel proper and openly displaying the anatomy-objects to the view of the Geats and Danes. In the end, this chapter presents a case that Beowulf, as the revealer of Grendel’s true physical nature, unveils the veritable monstrousness of metalwork’s potential moral darkness.
CHAPTER 1: THE EXETER BOOK’S THREE SMITHWORK BEASTS

2.1 Introduction

The Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral 3501) is a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript featuring a number of medieval poetic genres. The manuscript “appears to have been wholly written in one hand” and is likely the result of one compiler, who seemingly demonstrates a “taste for bestiary material” (S. Bradley 201-02, 353; Fulk and Cain 26; McFadden “Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 334). Accordingly, four beast narratives appear in this rich poetic compendium: The Panther, The Whale/Asp-Turtle, The Partridge, and The Phoenix. The first three accounts, arising from the well-attested Greco-Roman bestiary tradition, constitute the so-called Old English Physiologus; scholars traditionally have attributed the authorship of the Old English Physiologus to Cynewulf, the Anglo-Saxon poet whose identity and time period remain elusive, or to someone in his school. The Phoenix serves as a translation—and significant reworking—of the Latin poem Carmen de Ave Phoenice; scholars usually consider the Latin account to be the work of Lactantius, who lived in the early part of the fourth century, and they frequently link the Anglo-Saxon translation to Cynewulf. While the text of The Partridge is a severely-corrupted fragment and may actually be parts of two different poems, the remaining three narratives exist in their entirety (Fulk and Cain 15, 98, 140-41; Malone and Baugh 76-77). The three complete accounts provide a substantial amount of information regarding the physical traits and behaviors of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix.

All three accounts deviate from the Latin analogues and source texts by imaginatively and explicitly linking the titular beasts’ bodies to particular highly-wrought objects. The objects in question specifically are items of smithwork, or these material artifacts at least possess a
number of ornate metal components. A simile blurs the line between the Panther’s exquisite coat and the biblical Joseph’s so-called coat-of-many-colors. Departing from the biblical and bestiary tradition, The Panther’s poet presents the coat-of-many-colors as a highly-wrought garment—expertly-dyed, interwoven with gold thread, and glittering with metal ornaments and treasures. None of the Latin analogues of The Panther mention the famed vestment or otherwise use craft-related imagery in connection with the great beast (with the possible exception of Isidore of Seville, who does hint at a crafted aspect to the Panther in Etymologies Book XII). An appositive essentially conflates the Whale/Asp-Turtle’s jaws with Hell’s highly-wrought, iron, grated prison doors in The Whale. Isidore does liken the Whale’s body to Hell, and a longstanding Latin tradition of whales as “hell mouths” existed, but the image of the Whale’s jaws as prison doors constitutes an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon translator. The Phoenix’s poet offers a grand vision of the titular bird’s body as a veritable assemblage of highly-wrought metal objects; to depict the creature in this way, the poet removes and/or replaces the prolific plant, vegetable, and floral imagery informing its counterpart’s body in the Latin Carmen de Ave Phoenice. From the three narratives, a collective sense hence ultimately arises of the titular creatures’ bodies as the handiwork of skilled smiths.

Considering the merging of the three beasts’ bodies with items of metalwork, Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward smiths, their skills, and their representative products likely had a degree of bearing upon the creatures’ physical descriptions. As discussed in my Introduction, the Anglo-Saxons held ambivalent views regarding the moral valuation of metalworkers, their expertise, and their handiwork. Goldsmiths commanded high esteem, whereas blacksmiths frequently met with distaste, disrespect, suspicion, distrust, and even fear—unless the ironworkers in question were the culturally-revered weapon-smiths (Dodwell 44-48, 57-58, 70, 72-74; Hyer and Owen-
Crocker 176-83; Coatsworth and Pinder 259-64; J. Bradley 39-47; Hinton 192, 197, 200). The post-Conversion assimilation of Christian ideals calling for a person to focus exclusively on heavenly concerns, not objects of worldly splendor, further complicated the moral valuation of metalwork and other items. However, the very same ideals allowed that the admiration of superb craftsmanship could elevate a person’s mind to the contemplation of the utter majesty of God and His own masterworks (Coatsworth and Pinder 264; Hyer and Owen-Crocker 176, 179; Dodwell 189). In short, evidence from the material culture of the Anglo-Saxons does suggest that insular men and women living in pre-Conversion and post-Conversion England would have been conflicted regarding their appreciation of fine metalwork and other types of manmade objects, the skills that went into crafting these items, and the smiths and other artisans who fashioned these items.

The conflicted mindset informs the representations of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix. Evidence of this influence comes to light when we consider the three beasts as a group. The Panther’s hide, by virtue of its fundamental identification with Joseph’s highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors, elevates a person’s mind to contemplation of the divine. Correspondingly, the esteem accorded to goldsmiths and their high-status products reflects and reinforces the Panther’s divine nobility, in light of the fine ornaments, treasures, and gold thread that appear to adorn the famed biblical vestment conflated with the heavenly beast in the Old English version of the account. A part of the heavenly Phoenix’s body similarly demonstrates ties to the esteemed work of skilled goldsmiths: the poet offers a vision of the marvelous bird’s eye as a bright gem that has been set into a gold plate by a master smith. The Phoenix’s body features at least one additional piece of sumptuous, high-status metalwork, the splendid shield constituting the avian’s back, the conflation between martial implement and anatomical part revealing the
majestic bird’s link to the work of the culturally-revered weapon-smiths. The Phoenix’s connection to products of Anglo-Saxon England’s most acclaimed types of smiths reflects and reinforces this heavenly creature’s particular allegorical status (see below) and the moral exemplariness attendant to this status. The Whale/Asp-Turtle’s body, on the other hand, conclusively demonstrates that not all of the Exeter Book’s smithwork creatures serve to elevate us morally and spiritually. The Anglo-Saxons’ negative views regarding blacksmiths, their skills, and their representative products directly align with the moral darkness of the iron prison doors constituting the alternate nature of the hellish monster’s incarcerating jaws.

Based upon the conflation of the three beasts with metalwork, the various pieces of existing research on Anglo-Saxon society’s viewpoints vis-à-vis the moral status of different types of smiths and their handiwork, and a number of additional considerations, I build a larger case that the Panther, Whale, and Phoenix—as a group—ultimately offer an arresting picture of the moral potentiality of fine metalwork (and other manmade items) in the highly-Christianized world depicted in the Exeter Book’s Old English Physiologus and The Phoenix. In this world, fine metal objects, granted beastly lives and creaturely agency by virtue of the objects’ conflation with the bodies of the three great beasts, exist at opposite ends of the continuum in terms of moral worth, serving either the purposes of God and Heaven or the Devil and Hell. Consequently, the creature-objects either will lead a man or woman to moral elevation or, conversely, put him or her on the path to debasement and damnation. This chapter further presents evidence that the Panther and Phoenix, as heavenly creature-objects, speak to Anglo-Saxon fantasies regarding the beloved, majestic animals of Styles I and II of insular animal ornament enjoying the indicated beastly lives and creaturely agency, whereas the Whale, as a hellish creature-object, reflects far darker insular fantasies in terms of the fearsome, sinister
craftsmanship of blacksmiths’ products being granted a terrifying, predatory body and veritable hunting ground in the oceans of man’s moral universe.

Relatively few studies discuss the three creatures, and not one of the critics considers the crafted aspect of the creatures’ marvelous bodies. Most critics simply refer to the beasts’ individual roles as Christian allegorical figures. S. A. J. Bradley, for example, briefly explains that, in the Exeter Book, the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix respectively represent “the nature of God,” “the nature of the devil,” and “regenerate humanity … [that] regains the lost paradise, in heaven” (285, 353). Brain McFadden does devote an entire article to a detailed consideration of the three beasts that goes beyond the creatures’ statuses as specific allegorical figures. Focusing exclusively upon the significance of the “sweet odors” issuing forth from the creatures’ bodies, he ultimately concludes that the insular poets mobilized their versions of the three beasts, alluring scents and all, to foreground post-Reform, Anglo-Saxon tensions regarding clergy rights (McFadden “Sweet Odors” 204). Similarly, while Carol Falvo Heffernan conducts a book-length study of The Phoenix and Carmen De Ave Phoenice, her investigation of the Phoenix’s “meaning” makes no mention of the marvelous bird’s alternate nature as an assemblage of highly-wrought items in the Old English account; she instead seeks “to demonstrate … that some of the Anglo-Saxon poet’s additions to and recrafting of the imagery are motivated by an intention to develop the Marian potential of the symbolism [of the Phoenix]” (102-103). I consider the Anglo-Saxon poet’s innovations in The Phoenix in a fundamentally different light.

The Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix remain in good company in the Exeter Book in terms of the three beasts’ ambiguous physical natures. The Exeter Book Riddles contain an array of manmade objects, natural elements, and animals that seem to be other things—until
the particular Riddle is solved, and the thing’s “true” identity is revealed. In a few cases, the obfuscation specifically involves a living animal of some sort and a fashioned item; for example, the suffering beast with the distended abdomen in Riddle 87 (or Riddle 35, depending on the critical edition) in actuality is a bellows that is being used by a servant (Murphy 217; Williamson 19-20, 95). While Brian McFadden perceives the connection between the two things in an Anglo-Saxon riddle solely to be one of “false comparisons,” Daniel Tiffany and Craig Williamson agree that, in the end, “the riddle produces a complex object—a ‘riddle-creature.’” Williamson briefly describes some of these “monsters [that] inhabit the world of the Old English riddles,” including “a bird that sings through her dangling foot” and “a circle of gold that preaches to men.” These “monsters” arise from “the crossing of categories” in each riddle (McFadden “Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 335; Tiffany 79; Williamson 26, 38, 41). The precise rules that govern the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix do not govern the “riddle-creatures”: the three beasts exist both as living animal and highly-wrought object, with neither aspect qualifying as false nor any monstrous hybridization of the two natures occurring. At the very least, however, the evidence from the Riddles lends support to the interpretation that the Exeter Book overall demonstrates a preoccupation with the blurring of conceptual boundaries between different things—including between manmade objects and living beings. Accordingly, I will refer to the existing research on the so-called “riddle-creatures” whenever the particular critical findings prove directly relevant to the investigation of the physical natures of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and/or Phoenix.

Another significant shared feature of the Riddles and the three beast narratives is one that will help to shed light on the crafted aspects of the bodies of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix. Specifically, the adjective *wrætlic* appears both in the descriptions of a number of the
Riddles’ manmade objects and in the descriptions of the bodies of the three beasts. As I will make apparent in the following section, a number of critics have commented upon the use of this adjective in the Riddles, but not in the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix*. A close look at *wraetlic*’s occurrences in the Riddles and a careful consideration of its precise semantic range will lend support to the argument that this adjective, when mobilized by the Anglo-Saxon poet to describe the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix, serves to conflate the three creatures’ respective anatomies with highly-wrought objects in general, and metalwork in particular. I will then resume discussion of *wraetlic*’s role in the physical descriptions of fantastic beasts and monsters in Chapter Three, regarding the adjective’s use in connection with the bodies of *Beowulf*’s Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel.

### 2.2 A Close Look at Old English Wraetlic and Its Usage in the Exeter Book

*Wraetlic*’s documented semantic range encompasses a number of the aesthetic qualities possessed by exquisite objects. Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller offer two definitions for this adjective: (I) “wondrous, curious” and (II) “of wondrous excellence, beautiful, noble, excellent, elegant.” *Wraetlic* arose from the noun *wraet*, which means “a work of art, a jewel, an ornament,” this noun’s senses directly and clearly informing Definition II of the adjective form. John Frow explains the reasoning behind Definition I of *wraetlic*: this adjective—by virtue of its relationship to *wraet*—“has the sense of something skillfully wrought, hence wondrous, curious, or rare.” McFadden argues that “the hint of strangeness” figures into *wraet*’s semantic range, as well, and H. R. Ellis Davidson similarly maintains that “*wraet* is a word which could be used of any curious or beautiful piece of craftsmanship” (Bosworth-Toller “wraetlic” I, II; “wraet”; Frow
The Bosworth and Toller definitions for *wrætlic* omit any explicit reference to highly-wrought objects, which results in a distancing of the adjective from its original connection to such fine items. In other words, the two definitions lead to the expectation that a *wrætlic* thing can be “wondrous,” “curious,” “of wondrous excellence,” “beautiful,” “noble,” “excellent,” or “elegant” in a way that might have very little if anything to do with exceptional craftwork items. However, in the Exeter Book, *wrætlic* frequently does invoke *wræt’s* specific signification (see below). This vital link will prove to be highly-pertinent to the consideration of the crafted aspects of the Panther’s, Whale/Asp-Turtle’s, and Phoenix’s respective bodies.

*Wrætlic* notably occurs a large number of times in the Exeter Book, describing an array of riddle-objects and providing a rich opportunity for an investigation of the way in which this adjective typically functions in the codex. In fact, the Exeter Book accounts for thirty-two of *wrætlic’s* forty-nine instances in Old English writings. Nineteen of its instances in this codex occur in sixteen of the Riddles; hence, the Riddles contain over one-third of this adjective’s total instances in Old English writings and more than half of its instances in the Exeter Book. The three beast narratives account for ten of *wrætlic’s* remaining instances in the Exeter Book—the adjective occurs three times in *The Panther*, once in *The Whale*, and six times in *The Phoenix*. In other words, one-fifth of the instances of *wrætlic* in Old English writings and just under one-third of its instances in the Exeter Book occur in connection with the three creatures (*Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* “*wrætlic*”). As I will demonstrate, *wrætlic* twice describes the Panther’s body, twice describes the Phoenix’s body, and links two of the Whale/Asp-Turtle’s remarkable physical capabilities in a comparative relationship; a close investigation of this word in the three accounts therefore holds considerable potential for shedding light on these wondrous
animals’ physical natures. No critic has commented upon the concentration of instances of *wraetlic* in the three beast narratives or investigated exactly what this word signifies regarding the animals’ wondrous bodies.

In contrast, a few critics have commented on *wraetlic’s* appearances in the Exeter Book Riddles. Emily Thornbury states that “the ic, the detached, bemused observer who finds all things *wraetlic*, is a common persona in the Old English riddles” (70). We may infer from Thornbury’s comment that a precise understanding of *wraetlic’s* meaning would contribute to a rich scholarly engagement with the Riddles. Although Thornbury does not further discuss this adjective, Frow mentions its high incidence in the Exeter Book Riddles and then proceeds to explain why he translates it as “curious thing” in one Riddle (see above for his discussion of the requisite senses of *wraetlic*). The “curious thing” is a key—the Riddle’s answer. Frow’s choice of “curious thing” for *wraetlic* (he supplies the implied noun, “thing”) in part arises from the Riddle’s focus upon “the material thingness of this object” (37). *Wraetlic*, in other words, constitutes an important part of the poet’s strategy in calling the reader’s attention to this particular item’s very existence and nature as a wrought object. This adjective likely serves a similar purpose in a number of the remaining Riddles; for example, in Riddles 53, 57, 24, 67, and 21, this adjective respectively describes a highly-wrought scabbard/cross, chalice, bible, shepherd’s pipe, and bow. Artfully-worked gold adorns the first three of these *wraetlic* objects, silver ornamentation also embellishes the scabbard/cross, and jewels bedeck the elegantly-shaped shepherd’s pipe (Williamson 228-30, 115, 119, 84, 129, 81). Clearly, the riddler displays the tendency to use *wraetlic* to describe the types of items signified by *wraet*. Frow’s interpretation of *wraetlic* in the one Riddle leads to the suggestion that the adjective’s occurrences
in Riddles 53, 57, 24, and 67 function specifically to foreground each item’s existence and nature as an exquisite item of smithwork. In fact, the key discussed by Frow also is just such an object.

For *wraetlic* to perform this foregrounding in these particular Exeter Book Riddles raises the possibility of it operating similarly when describing the very same codex’s Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix. The respective research of several critics opens the door to this adjective moreover actually indicating a conflation of highly-wrought metal object and living thing in the Riddles. As mentioned in this chapter’s Introduction, Tiffany and Williamson concur that “the riddle produces a complex object—a ‘riddle-creature.’” Williamson further discusses these “monsters [that] inhabit the world of the Old English riddles,” asserting that the “monsters” arise from “the crossing of categories” in each riddle (Tiffany 79; Williamson 26, 38, 41). McFadden looks at *wraetlic*’s role in depicting these so-called “riddle-creatures” and “monsters,” first explaining that *wraet* “includes both the idea of artistry as well as the hint of strangeness; the implication of artificially created wonder suggests the verbal manipulations that have elevated an ordinary object into something strange and unfamiliar.” McFadden then reasons that the oft-occurring phrase *wraetlic wiht* in the Riddles therefore denotes an “ornamental, artistic, or wondrous being” (McFadden “Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 335-36). By offering the translations “ornamental being” and “artistic being,” McFadden allows for the possibility that *wraetlic* specifically describes a riddle-creature that not only is marvelous, but also possesses a dual nature—simultaneously existing as an exquisite object and a living creature. If *wraetlic* conveys the idea of “artificially created wonder” and describes “ornamental beings” or “artistic beings” in the Exeter Book Riddles, then it likely denotes such qualities—artificiality, ornamentality, and artistic flourishes—in the bodies of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix, effectively indicating these bodies to be “created wonders” from the hands of highly-
skilled artisans. In other words, the three beasts, too, exist as “ornamental beings” and “artistic beings” in the larger world of the Exeter Book.

2.3 The Panther’s Hide/Coat as Joseph’s Highly-Wrought Coat-of-Many-Colors

*The Panther* is the first of the Exeter Book’s three Physiologus entries. The Anglo-Saxon poet admiringly describes the heavenly beast’s mountainous habitat, humility, beneficence, necessary and eternal opposition toward the venomous snake, arrestinglly-beautiful coloring, habit of retiring to caves and slumbering for three days after eating a satisfying meal, practice of rising from sleep with renewed vigor after the period of rest, joyous vocalizations, and divine fragrance that issues from its mouth after the mellifluous utterances. Subsequently, the narrative links the Panther to Christ by virtue of the ways in which the creature’s various qualities, behaviors, and capabilities reflect key aspects of Christ and his life; as Francesco Cordasco succinctly states, “the animal signifies Christ—the death, burial, and the resurrection” (351). Of fundamental importance to my larger arguments is the fact that the poet significantly blurs the line between the heavenly beast’s body and a specific highly-wrought object in lines 19-29:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ðæt is wrætic deor,} & \quad \text{wundrum scyne} \\
\text{hiwa gehwylces.} & \quad \text{Swa hæleð secgað,} \\
\text{gæsthalge guman,} & \quad \text{þætte Iosephes} \\
\text{tunece wære} & \quad \text{telga gehwylces} \\
\text{bleom bregdende,} & \quad \text{þara beorhtra gehwylc}
\end{align*}
\]
æghwæs ænlicra  oþrum lixte

dryhta bearnum,  swa þæs deores hiw,

blæc brigda gehwæs,  beorhtra ond scynra

wundrum lixeð,  þætte wrætlicra

æghwylc oþrum,  ænlicra gien

ond fægerra  frætwum bliceð,

symle sellicra.  […]xix

That is a *wrætlic* beast, it shines wonderfully in every one of its hues. So men say, those holy in spirit, that Joseph’s coat was dyed in all vibrating colors, each one there brighter and glittering more excellently than the others before the children of men, such were this animal’s hues, of all shining varieties, brighter and shinier each one gleams wondrously, it is *wrætlicra* than every one of the other colors, it still more excellently and more fairly glitters of decoration, it continually is more extraordinary.

Here, the poet offers the reader offers a dynamic vision of the Panther’s natural coat as Joseph’s so-called coat-of-many-colors, a singular garment of biblical renown. By means of simile, this Anglo-Saxon version of the famed vestment (the vehicle) lends its superlatively-beautiful, ever-competing colors to the divine beast’s body (the tenor). The Panther’s own hues therefore similarly dazzle, amaze, and spiritually uplift the onlooker.
The poet clearly infuses the description of the coat-of-many-colors’ exquisite craftsmanship with a high level of excitement. While the biblical account also presents the coat as a fine garment, it does so in a concise, straightforward, neutral way that betrays no overt regard for the intricacies of its craftsmanship. The esteemed vestment’s description—and the effect this piece had on Joseph’s envious brothers when Israel/Jacob bestowed it upon Joseph—reads as follows in the King James Version of the Bible: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Genesis 37.3-4). Here, The Panther’s poet exclusively focuses upon what Frow would phrase as “the material thingness of this object” (37) by imaginatively reworking and expanding the coat’s original description and omitting any reference to the garment’s larger context and role in key biblical events. He consequently foregrounds the coat’s astounding craftsmanship at the expense of any other considerations of this item. Unlike in the original biblical account, the famed vestment’s primary significance in The Panther is as a superb, highly-wrought item of treasure that commands awe and admiration with the amazing, otherworldly beauty of its excellent fashioning. The fact that none of The Panther’s analogue texts contain any reference whatsoever to Joseph’s coat serves as further evidence that the Anglo-Saxon poet intentionally emphasizes this garment’s existence as an exquisite, highly-wrought object by means of his detailed description of the coat’s fantastic material properties.

By virtue of the figurative relationship between the coat and the Panther, the abovestated focus upon the exemplary workmanship and “material thingness” of the coat also apply to the Panther’s body. Peter Clemoes and Gillian R. Overing individually build compelling cases that
Old English poetry’s various figurative relationships indicate a veritable fusion of vehicle and tenor. Clemoes explains that the vehicle of a particular metaphor or simile points to the presence of a much deeper “kinship” between the vehicle and tenor. This “kinship” involves a shared “active being”; the catalyzation of this “active being” into “narrative living” for an object—so that the object will perform actions within a given environment to reveal its essence and fulfill the purpose for which it was made—lies at the heart of Old English poetry’s overall purpose (68-116). Overing, exploring the so-called metonymic mode in Old English poetry, contends that the vehicle of a metaphor or simile—or a kenning or epithet that functions metaphorically—in actuality is another aspect or face of the tenor that is being revealed. The figurative expression thus effects “a moment of ‘seeing,’ a momentary fusion of a variety of aspects in combination, whether visual, spatial, emotional, or literal,” which results in the “immediate impact” characteristic of Old English poetry (Overing Introduction and Chapter One). For both Clemoes and Overing, the merging of vehicle and tenor in figurative relationships clearly remains a vital, indispensable element of Old English poetry’s machinery. Ultimately, the two critics’ interpretations enable a consideration of the Panther and esteemed vestment as a singular, merged entity—a “creature-object,” to parallel Johann Köberl’s concept of the “duck-rabbit” (1-9) (see this dissertation’s Introduction for further discussion of Köberl’s ideas on this subject).

The striking similarity between the coat’s particular artistic properties and the Anglo-Saxon interlace motif supports the interpretation that the poet effectively merges the Panther with the famed vestment. Critics variously describe the patterning of this pervasive, insular artistic style informing the workmanship of a number of kinds of items throughout the Anglo-Saxon period as “dizzying,” “baffling in its busyness,” “aesthetic[ally] discord[ant],” “vibrat[ing] with a nervous energy,” “seeth[ing] with vitality,” “restless,” and “complex.” These
characteristics contrast starkly with those of classical art, which is marked by a “comfortable naturalism” (Webster 14-25; Kendrick 1). Accordingly, the “colors” of the coat “vibrate” in a perpetual, high-energy, almost frenzied competition with each other. The vivid hues contrast so powerfully—with each color impossibly always in the winning position in relation to the remaining colors—that the dazzled onlooker witnesses a “wondrous” and “extraordinary” show of “glitter,” “gleam,” “shine,” and “brightness” (Bosworth-Toller “bleom” s.v. “bleo”; “bregdende” s.v. “bregdan” I; “wundrum” s.v. “wundor” II; “sellicra” s.v. “seldlic” I, II; “lixte” s.v. “lixan”; “scynra” s.v. “scin”; “beorhtra” s.v. “beorht”). Presumably, The Panther’s Anglo-Saxon reader would have readily recognized the hallmarks of the interlace motif in the depiction of the coat-of-many-colors’ riotous visual properties.

The reason that the coat’s connection to the interlace motif supports the interpretation that the poet effectively merges this garment with the Panther is that Anglo-Saxon zoomorphic ornamentation features prominently in this motif. A number of scholars have discussed the highly-stylized animal ornament in interlace. Peggy A. Knapp explains that “interlace both creates patterns that tease the eye into following dizzying paths and in many cases represents the free ends of some strands as a stylized zoomorphic head” (85). Other body parts of animals appear, as well, and the various depictions suggest high levels of beastly activity: Clemoes mentions that “zoomorphic art … represented the flowingness fundamental to all action by prolonging moveable members—jaws, tongues, ears, tails, limb-joints, legs, feet and ribbon-like bodies—into patterns of extended movement, curling, coiling, twining or whatever” (91). Knapp likewise comments upon the intense liveliness of these highly-stylized creatures, focusing more upon images of apparent savagery: “the zoomorphic forms … are also suggestive images, baffling in their entwinements and scary in their energetic rhythms; they appear to be eating or
biting each other or perhaps parts of themselves” (86). In his book-length study of Anglo-Saxon animal art, George Speake lists the types of highly-stylized yet ultimately “identifiable creatures” that constitute what he terms “the Anglo-Saxon ornamental menagerie”: “wild boars, predatory birds, snakes or serpents, fish, and miscellaneous quadrupeds capable of quite remarkable contortions” (77). Clearly, the poet’s vivid description of the perpetual, high-energy, intense competition among the coat-of-many-colors’ hues indicates the kind of energetic aliveness, movement, and competition typically evidenced by the wide array of interlace beasts.

Importantly, this intimation of animal ornament in the coat’s design ensures that the Panther finds its own beastly reflection in this garment’s artistry and craftsmanship. At the same time, the highly-wrought vestment finds its own exquisite reflection in the fantastic beast’s body, as indicated by the figurative relationship at its most basic level. To state this another way, the fantastic beast’s body at the very least resembles the sumptuous garment, the garment in turn probably featuring vivid and evocative representations of artistically-rendered fantastic beasts. The potent connection between the Panther and the coat consequently appears to be one of artistry and craftsmanship; in terms of Clemoes’ theories, the quality of artistry and craftsmanship hence serves as a likely candidate for the shared “active potential” underlying the “kinship” between the Panther and the coat—a “kinship” that was indicated in the first place by the use of the simile. The mutual mirroring causes the Panther and coat to blur into one another and become interchangeable, conflated. The space between the simile’s vehicle and tenor has collapsed, as Clemoes and Overing predict for figurative relationships in Old English poetry. The figure of the creature-object arises from this strange conflation. The vital, essential bond between Panther and biblical coat enables the fantastic beast to function as the coat’s animal ornament; after all, the Panther’s wondrous body combines the esteemed garment’s exquisite craftsmanship
and interlace motif with a living beast’s body. The incipient aliveness of the coat, with its 
vibrating, flashing, ever-competing, ever-winning hues, becomes fully actualized in the figure of 
the fully-alive Panther. Ultimately, the Panther stands revealed as a piece of animal ornament 
that has become fully actualized as a living beast.

The poet’s uses of the adjective *wraetlic* in the Panther’s description further support the 
interpretation that this fantastic beast enjoys an existence as a living piece of animal ornament. 
As discussed in this chapter’s previous section, McFadden aptly reasons that the oft-occurring 
phrase *wraetlic wiht* in the Exeter Book Riddles denotes an “ornamental, artistic, or wondrous 
being” (McFadden “Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 336). His interpretation that the phrase can 
indicate an “ornamental being” or “artistic being” is a logical one for two main reasons: 
*wraetlic*’s semantic range remains tied to *wraet*’s signification (“a work of art, a jewel, an 
ornament”), and the Exeter Book Riddles frequently conflate wrought objects with living 
creatures as part of the riddling mechanism, resulting in “a complex object—a ‘riddle creature,’” 
in the words of Tiffany and Williamson (Bosworth and Toller “wraet”; Frow 37; Davidson 133- 
34; Tiffany 79; Williamson 26, 38, 41). The Panther’s account likewise appears in the Exeter 
Book, and this fantastic beast also is part of a conflated, “complex object.” The similarities and 
connections between the Panther and the so-called “riddle creatures” point to *wraetlic* likewise 
indicating the Panther’s status as an “ornamental being” and/or “artistic being.”

The poet’s description of the Panther as a “wraetlic deor” initiates his discussion of the 
fantastic beast’s physical features: “That is a *wraetlic deor*, it shines wonderfully in every one of 
its hues.” Old English *deor* here can mean “an animal, any sort of wild animal, a wild beast.” 
*Wiht*—the word frequently modified by *wraetlic* in the Exeter Book Riddles—possesses a similar 
semantic range: “a wight, creature, being, created thing” (Bosworth-Toller “deor”; “wiht” I).
Considering the various links between the Panther and the Exeter Book’s “riddle creatures” and the similarities in *wiht’s* and *deor’s* respective semantic ranges, “wrætlic deor” likely serves a similar function as “wrætlic wiht”—namely, to indicate the fusion of living being and wrought object in the described entity. Consequently, the following translation of the first one and a half lines of the Panther’s physical description is enabled: “That is an *ornamental beast* (or *artistic beast*), it shines wonderfully in every one of its hues.” This translation of “wrætlic deor” clearly works very well contextually in the larger sentence. The fact that the poet figuratively links the highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors to the Panther’s body immediately after this lead-in significantly reinforces this initial evoked image of the Panther as a creature-object.

*The Panther*’s remaining two instances of *wrætlic* likewise describe the titular beast’s amazing body. “Wrætlicra,” the comparative form of the adjective, occurs seven lines after the Panther’s designation as a “wrætlic deor.” In its current context, it clearly signifies the coat’s exquisite, intricate workmanship—not simply the famed vestment’s status as a “wondrous” item (Bosworth-Toller “wrætlic” I). It specifically appears in the discussion of the fine garment’s—and thus the Panther’s—riot of ever-competing, ever-winning colors. The account states that each hue proves “wrætlicra”—i.e., “more *wrætlic*”—than every one of the others. The remarkable colors result from the famed vestment’s “dyes” (Bosworth-Toller “telga” s.v. “telg”). “Wrætlicra” also involves the fact that the coat “more excellently and more fairly glitters of *frætwum.*” Old English *frætwe* possesses the following semantic range: “ornaments, adornments, decorations, treasures” (Bosworth-Toller). In other words, “wrætlicra” here clearly refers to the masterful application of “dyes,” “ornaments,” and “treasures” to the exemplary textile. The comparative adjective hence indicates that each individual dyed color and ornament is “more *masterfully-wrought*” and “more *exceptionally-ornamental*” than the rest. This exquisite-object-
dependent sense of “wrætlicra” likely also informs the occurrence of “wrætlic” in “wrætlic deor.” Another way to state this is that “wrætlic” in “wrætlic deor” anticipates the imminent comparison of the Panther to the finely-fashioned garment with the myriad of “wrætlicra” hues.

The exquisite-object-dependent sense of *wrætlic* likely also informs the adjective’s first (and remaining) appearance in the narrative, when the poet attributes a “wrætlic[um] gecynd[e]” to the Panther in line 9. Old English *gecynd* in this context means “nature” (Bosworth-Toller I). Considering all of the other evidence, the poet appears to be indicating that this fantastic beast possesses an “ornamental nature” and/or “artistic nature.” Such a “nature” certainly would be in keeping with that of an “ornamental being” or “artistic being,” to refer back to McFadden’s interpretation of “wrætlic wiht” in the Exeter Book Riddles. Notably, the mention of the Panther’s “wrætlic[um] gecynd[e]” occurs when the poet introduces the Panther into the narrative in line 8 (right after he reflects upon the sheer number of birds and beasts in the world in lines 1-7). If he here does allude to the Panther’s alternate nature as a highly-wrought object, then he apparently wishes to establish this fact of the fantastic beast’s constitution from the moment the Anglo-Saxon reader first encounters this creature in the poem.

As discussed in the previous section, *wrætlic* tends specifically to describe items of smithwork in the Exeter Book Riddles. These exquisite items frequently possess ornamentation in the form of gold, silver, and gems. Certain indications point to such materials likewise constituting *The Panther’s* coat-of-many-colors’ sumptuous adornments, in addition to the dyes. Again, “frætwum bliceð” can signify that the famed vestment “glitters of ornaments/treasures” (Bosworth-Toller “frætwum” s.v. “frætw”, “bliceð” s.v. “blican” I). Documented aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture support such an interpretation of *frætwum* in its present context. Accounts demonstrate that the garments of the clergy’s and laity’s affluent men and women
often displayed an array of fine ornaments and treasures, including gems, pearls, silver, and gold. Regarding high-status clothing’s metal components, Dodwell explains that “it is significant that the richest attire was associated by the Anglo-Saxons themselves with gold and silver.” The gold most famously was in the form of gold embroidery, for which Anglo-Saxon women—the artisans—commanded a remarkably high level of esteem, both throughout Anglo-Saxon England and on the continent. In fact, a woman who was an “expert in gold embroidery” was the “female equivalent” of the goldsmith, according to Dodwell (Hyer and Owen-Crocker 175-79, 182-84; Dodwell 45-79, 170-79). The coat’s suggestion of these particular types of ornaments/treasures consequently links the Panther’s body to expertly-crafted jewels, silver, and gold—the provinces of the insular jeweler, silversmith, goldsmith, and gold embroiderer. I will demonstrate that the Whale/Asp-Turtle’s and Phoenix’s respective bodies also prove tied to metalwork, with the latter’s anatomy similarly featuring skillfully-cut and -inset jewels.

The merging of the Panther’s natural coat with Joseph’s highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors does appear to be an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon poet. Granted, as Mark C. Amodio explains, “which Latin manuscript served as the source for this group of animal poems [i.e., The Panther, The Whale/Asp-Turtle, and The Partridge] in the Exeter Book has so far not been determined. As Anglo-Saxon poets typically do, the poet draws heavily from his source, but, as is also typical, he freely departs from it as well” (Amodio The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook 296). None of the The Panther’s Latin analogue texts compare the fantastic beast to the famed vestment or otherwise refer to it. In his Preface to the Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon, Thomas Wright cites The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon as a key analogue of the Anglo-Saxon version: “Two very curious descriptions in Anglo-Saxon verse (of the Panther, and of the Whale) … bear a close resemblance to the corresponding articles in Philippe de Thaun, and … have
similar moralizations” (Wright Preface 5). Regarding the Panther’s hues, this thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman text simply states that the fantastic beast has “plusurs colurs” (“various colors”) (Wright “The Bestiary” 13). No references to crafted items of any sort appear in the account, indicating that this version of the creature has no ties to exquisite objects whatsoever. Only pronounced natural imagery (e.g., references to the Panther’s den and appetite for various types of meat) and a richly-detailed discussion of the fantastic beast’s signification as a Christ figure inform the narrative.

The various existing Latin versions of the medieval bestiary likewise refer to the Panther’s beautiful colors but do not link them to Joseph’s coat or to any other highly-wrought object. For example, the Aberdeen Bestiary (England, c. 1200) only states that the Panther proves “varium quidem colorem … et est speciosissimum nimis” (“indeed variegated in terms of color … and is beautiful beyond measure”) and that it being a “varium animal” (“multicolored animal”) means that it signifies Christ (“The Panther: 9R”). Moreover, as in the case of Philippe de Thaon, the entirety of the Panther’s entry in the Aberdeen Bestiary does not contain a single reference to the renowned coat-of-many-colors or to any other crafted item; it simply offers the standard natural imagery and discussion of the fantastic beast’s signification (“The Panther: 9R”; “The Panther: 9V”). The Panther here, like its counterpart in the Anglo-Norman account, strictly exists as an animal living in the natural world and as a Christ symbol—not a creature that resembles a particular type of highly-wrought object or much less becomes conflated with such an item.

Isidore of Seville’s discussion of the Panther in Book XII of *Etymologies*—a Latin encyclopedic text embraced by Anglo-Saxon England’s intellectual circles (Barney et al. 24-25)—makes no mention of the coat-of-many-colors or any other highly-wrought object.
However, the encyclopedist conceivably hints at a crafted aspect to this creature when he describes its colors and markings: “Bestia minutis orbiculis superpicta, ita ut oculatis ex fulvo circulis, nigra vel alba distinguatur varietate” (“The beast is painted over with small disks, or eyes, if you wish, that are made to peer from within gold-colored circles, shining black separated from non-shining white in variegation”). Latin superpicta means “to paint above or over”; hence, Isidore possibly indicates that a painter has given the Panther its lovely hues and shapes. These flourishes include gracefully-rendered shapes—the pleasingly diminutive minutis orbiculis (“small disks”) that also can be said to be stylized oculatis (“eyes”) set within circulis (“circular figures, circles”)—and the well-conceived color scheme consisting of the alternation of fulvo (“deep yellow, reddish yellow, gold-colored, tawny”), nigra (“shining black”), and alba (“white [properly dead white, not shining]”). Based upon Isodore’s Phoenix’s possible artistic associations, the encyclopedist’s account could have had a role in inspiring the Anglo-Saxon poet to depict his own Panther as a fashioned item, replacing the “paint” in the Latin account with “dyes” and referring to the Latin beast’s “disks”/“gold-colored circles” as “ornaments, adornments, treasures.”

Regardless of whether or not Etymologies Book XII actually had a role in inspiring the Anglo-Saxon poet to present his Panther as a highly-wrought object, the marked differences between the two versions of the Panther in terms of artistic decoration notably reflect the two writers’ distinct cultural aesthetic sensibilities. T. D. Kendrick, in a somewhat dated mode of expression, differentiates between what he calls the “mutually irreconcilable principles of the barbaric [i.e., Anglo-Saxon] and the classical aesthetic systems” as follows:

Put simply, the issue between them is, of course, that barbaric art … seeks to satisfy by means of dynamic abstract patterns and the statement of organic forms
in terms of inorganic or surrealist symbols; whereas classical art gives pleasure by means of a sympathetic and obvious naturalism. You were asked to decide, as it were, whether you wanted to look at the strange, glittering brilliance of the lively mosaic pattern seen through the kaleidoscope, or the familiar and friendly picture in a mirror held up to reflect the visible world. (1)

Isidore’s possible vision of the Panther’s body as an object painted with visually-pleasing yet static and precisely-executed shapes and colors accords with the kind of calm, amiable, naturalistic, classical tastes discussed by Kendrick. In contrast, the designs adorning the heavenly beast’s body in The Panther clearly demonstrate influence from the far more dynamic principles of Anglo-Saxon art (see above).

Just as significantly, the two versions of the Panther also differ in terms of the type(s) of craftwork constituting their respective bodies, and, as previously discussed, the blurred line between the Old English Panther and the items of smithwork (the ornaments, treasures, and gold thread) results from an Anglo-Saxon tendency to conflate amazing creatures with metal objects in insular narratives. Allowing both this insular tendency and the dynamic principles of Anglo-Saxon art thus to shape his physical depiction of the Panther enables the Anglo-Saxon poet to place his culture’s unique aesthetic stamp on a beloved biblical object (Joseph’s coat), divine objects in general (this version of the famed garment certainly qualifies as such an object, considering the miracle of each of its colors impossibly always assuming the winning position in relation to the remaining colors), and the Panther itself, an august beast in the Greco-Roman bestiary tradition. The fact that the Panther represents Christ—the figure deemed “the supreme artist, the ‘Craftsman and King’” in Anglo-Saxon poetry (Dodwell 44-48)—further supports the interpretation that insular artistic sensibilities are now God’s and Christ’s artistic sensibilities. By
appropriating the esteemed object and creature and God’s/Christ’s own artistic sensibilities for
the Anglo-Saxon people, the poet addresses any insular insecurities involving the Anglo-Saxons’
uncertain status in terms of Christian history and living in the cultural shadow of Rome.

Conflating the Panther with the highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors also allows the poet
to actualize the creaturely life depicted in the garment’s insular animal ornament, thus fulfilling
the imaginative vision of the Anglo-Saxons regarding the interlace beasts. The existing criticism
does indicate that the Anglo-Saxons enjoyed an intense imaginative engagement with the
zoomorphic forms in highly-wrought objects—even in cases when the forms simply happened to
be a byproduct of the type of craftsmanship. Tony Millns, for example, maintains that the
herringbone pattern walls left in pre-Anglo-Saxon England by the Romans held a considerable
mystique for the Anglo-Saxons, who imaginatively perceived the ornamentation as serpents
climbing the wall. This impression actually arose from “the zig-zag patterns created by laying
thin bricks or tiles along opposite diagonals on each alternate horizontal course.” The striking
visual effect likely inspired the depiction of the wyrmlicum fah wall in the original Old English
poem The Wanderer—with wyrm referring to serpents ornamenting the wall (434-36). Similarly,
H. R. Davidson, addressing the link between serpents and swords in the Anglo-Saxon poetic
imagination, explains that “the idea of a serpent creeping along the blade would arise naturally
out of the serpentine appearance of the band of pattern running along a pattern-welded sword”
(166, 129-45). Evidently, the Anglo-Saxons were quick to sense creaturely life and movement in
the highly-wrought patterning of crafted objects, whether or not the artisans had intended to
create stylized representations of beasts. Such a pronounced sensibility on their part hints at an
underlying fantasy regarding animal ornament coming to life. By virtue of the Old English
Panther and its narrative’s version of the coat-of-many-colors constituting a creature-object, the Panther proves rather uniquely suited to fulfill this fantasy.

Notably, a comparison of The Panther and its analogue texts demonstrates yet another defining aspect of the Anglo-Saxon poet’s insular artistic/literary sensibilities. In The Panther, the coat-of-many-colors represents the introduction of a specific highly-wrought object into what is, by tradition, the wholly-naturalistic habitat of the Panther: the heavenly beast’s landscape in Philippe de Thaun, the Aberdeen Bestiary, and Isidore’s Etymologies contains only natural features (e.g., depending on the particular narrative, the creature’s den, the subterranean caves frequented by a dragon, and/or the ground) and typical wildlife (all three texts generally refer to the animals that adoringly attend the Panther). The Panther likewise provides a naturalistic setting for the Panther, and this fantastic beast in many ways is a typical animal. But the unprecedented image of the esteemed biblical vestment intrudes upon this naturalistic landscape, drawing the Anglo-Saxon reader’s attention with the intrigue of the superb dyes and scintillating, intricately-fashioned ornaments and treasures. As will become apparent in my next section, two types of ingeniously-wrought metal objects infringe upon what is, by tradition, the completely naturalistic setting of The Whale. The evidence from The Panther and The Whale thus leads to the suggestion that an absence of highly-wrought objects, metallic or otherwise, in a literary landscape did not accord with this Anglo-Saxon poet’s artistic/literary sensibilities. The current chapter and Chapter Three will demonstrate that his sensibilities along these lines importantly accord with those of the poets of The Phoenix and Beowulf.
2.4 The Whale’s Jaws as Hell’s Grated Iron Prison Doors

The Whale occurs next in order in the Exeter Book’s Old English Physiologus. The poet presents us with a harrowing account of the horrifying physical capabilities and behavioral traits of a particular “miclan hwale” (“great whale”), one of “fiscal cynn” (literally, “fish-kind”) (Bosworth-Toller “micel” I; “hwæl”; “fisc”; “cyn” I). This monster possesses two diabolical tricks for the ruin of the unwary. First, it appears to be an island; when sailors unwittingly set up camp on its rocky back and build a fire, the terrible beast dashes them into the depths of the ocean. Second, it releases a delicious scent from its mouth, luring hungry fish; when the unfortunate creatures enter the mouth, the Whale’s jaws snap shut, trapping them. The narrative explicitly associates the beast and its wiles with the devil and his evil handiwork of snaring the souls of human beings; in Cordasco’s words, “the monster is emblematical of hell” (351). This link remains in accordance with the Whale’s traditional allegorical signification in the immensely popular Christianized versions of the Latin Physiologus that circulated throughout medieval Europe (S. Bradley 352-53). Clearly, The Whale offers a window onto the dark, sinister aspects and components of man’s moral universe according to medieval Christian belief.

The Whale likely represents a continuation of the poet’s creative vision from The Panther. Critics tend to attribute the whole of the Old English Physiologus to one poet, usually the elusive Cynewulf or someone in his school. They also argue for its larger unity. Fulk and Cain explain that “the Physiologus group begins with a general statement about the world’s creatures (Panther 1-8), and it ends with an eschatological passage (Partridge 5-16), followed by a finit (the only one in the Exeter Book) that has been taken by many to indicate the close of an abbreviated bestiary.” Accordingly, Cordasco, after carefully weighing the various strands of critical evidence, concludes that the Old English Physiologus “constitute[s] a small cycle
complete in itself,” and Kemp Malone and Albert C. Baugh perceive *The Panther, The Whale,* and *The Partridge* in fact to be one poem that is divided into three fits. Critics frequently point to the beasts’ elemental associations when addressing why the poet selected these particular animals, as part of a larger discussion of the interrelationship of the three narratives in the larger cycle: the Panther, Whale, and Partridge respectively represent land, sea, and air. S. A. J. Bradley posits another point of connection: the three Physiologus entries “treat, respectively, of the nature of God, of the nature of the devil, and of man’s choice between the two” (Fulk and Cain 98, 140-42; Malone and Baugh 76-77; Cordasco 351-55; S. Bradley 353). However, yet another point of connection occurs between *The Panther and The Whale:* the latter demonstrates the same tendency on the part of the former to conflate amazing creatures with highly-wrought metal objects. The Old English Physiologus’ single authorship and apparent larger unity hence ultimately lay the foundation for a nuanced consideration of a specific Anglo-Saxon poet’s rich imaginative engagement with the idea of fantastic beasts and monsters as such items.

The conflation in *The Whale* involves a different set of body parts than in *The Panther.* It also involves different highly-wrought objects; however, these objects prove as singular and evocative in terms of the medieval Christian imagination as Joseph’s coat-of-many-colors. Specifically, the poet offers a disquieting yet thrilling vision of this monster’s jaws as Hell’s highly-wrought prison doors. The link between the jaws and the infernal architectural pieces comes to light during the poet’s explication of the allegorical significance of the Whale’s second insidious trait—its ability to trap fish in its mouth after luring them with the amazing scent it produces. The poet lays the foundation for the figurative relationship by describing the Whale’s mechanism for confining the unfortunate fish in lines 58-62:

 […]                  Hi þær in farað,
unware weorude, oþþæt se wida ceafl

gefylled bið; þonne færinga

ymbe þa herehƿe hlemmeð togædre

grimme goman. […]

They [i.e., the fish] go in there, unaware band, until the wide jaws become filled; then suddenly about the spoil the grim jaws crash together.

After subsequently discussing the means by which the Devil corrupts human beings to obtain their souls, the poet performs the explication of the Whale’s ability to trap the fish, in lines 76-81:

[...]  

þonne he þa grimman goman bihlemmeð

æfter feorhcwale, fæste togædre,

helle hlinduru. Nagon hwyrft ne swice,

utsip æfre, þa [þe] þær in cumað,

þon ma þe þa fiscas, faraðlacende,

of þæs hwæles fenge hweorfan móten.

Then he slams fast together those grim jaws after the deaths [of the people], Hell’s grated prison doors. Not able to find a course for escape, never a going-out,
those who come in there, more than can the fishes, swimming, from this whale’s captivity might depart.

Old English *hlinduru*—translated here as “grated prison doors”—does specifically refer to highly-wrought prison doors. Regarding the architectural pieces’ sophistication and type of craftsmanship, Bosworth and Toller define *hlinduru* as “a door formed of lattice-work, a grated door.” The lexicographers then explicitly associate *hlinduru* with prisons in the following instance of usage for the term, from the Old English *Andreas*: “Geseh hé fore hlíndura hyrdas standan *he saw guards standing before the grated door [of his prison]*.” The semantic ranges of the other compound words containing *hlin* likewise prove tied to prisons: *hlínraeced* denotes “a place with grated doors, a prison,” and *hlinscua* refers to “the darkness of a prison” (Bosworth-Toller “hlínduru”; “hlínraeced”; “hlinscua”). The fact that the prison doors of Hell will last for eternity and perpetually prevent the escape of Hell’s inmates further attests to the superlative level of quality informing the architectural pieces’ craftsmanship.

The poet utilizes several strategies to collapse the conceptual space between the source domain (the Whale’s “grim jaws”) and the target domain (“Hell’s grated prison doors”) in this part of the allegory. For one thing, the parallel use of “grimme goman” (line 62) and “grimman goman” (line 76) greatly strengthens the connection between the discussion of the Whale’s jaws in lines 58-62 and the disquieting image of the infernal gates in lines 76-81. The fact that “helle hlinduru” (“Hell’s grated prison doors”) functions as an appositive modifying “grimman goman” (“grim jaws”) likewise merges the body parts with the objects: an appositive essentially renames the source domain. Moreover, the alliteration between “grimman” and “goman” (and “grimme” and “goman”) and between “helle” and “hlinduru” lends extra force for an immediate, wrenching impression of this beast’s jaws as the infernal grated doors. The sheer potency of the image
suggests the fusion of vehicle and tenor predicted by Clemoes and Overing for various types of figurative relationships in Old English poetry. As in the case of the Panther and the highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors, the Whale and the highly-wrought prison doors constitute a creature-object.

None of The Whale’s Latin analogue texts contain a reference to Hell’s prison doors (see below for a detailed discussion of the Latin accounts). However, this aspect of the creature-object likely still demonstrates influence from literary representations of prisons in Latin texts. First of all, the existing scholarship remains inconclusive at best regarding whether or not Anglo-Saxon prison buildings actually existed. Ralph B. Pugh reports that “imprisonment in England has no connected history before the end of the twelfth century.” Despite the lack of a coherent and sufficiently-detailed timeline, he does think that the Anglo-Saxons must have utilized some sort of prison structure:

Its [i.e., imprisonment’s] origins, however, are antique and certainly stretch back before the days of Alfred. Once private jurisdictions begin to emerge, and this was perhaps in the eighth century, some kind of ‘prison’ may be presumed to exist. […] … there is no doubt that the Normans found a number of prisons in the England that they invaded, particularly upon royal manors in the south ….

When Pugh finds references to incarceration in Anglo-Saxon records, however, the physical structures involved are not prison buildings per se. According to him, “‘the stocks’ is probably our earliest ‘prison’” in Anglo-Saxon England. Also, he explains that when “in Alfred’s time the word ‘prison’ (carcerr) first makes its appearance in a code of laws,” the building it denotes in fact is “a royal manor.” Edward Peters likewise finds no direct evidence of Anglo-Saxon prison
buildings. He states that “prisons are occasionally mentioned among the few punishments indicated in the Germanic laws, but very rarely.” Among the medieval Germanic references to prisons that he cites by way of example, none involve Anglo-Saxon England (Peters 23-24; Pugh 1-3).

The lack of concrete evidence for the existence of prison buildings in Anglo-Saxon England suggests that The Whale’s poet turned to Latin accounts for his depiction of the *hlinduru*. Latin texts would have provided a number of detailed references to prison buildings, including the doors of such structures. Peters discusses the widespread accounts of Roman prison buildings that generally were available to medieval Europe:

The largest single group of Roman prisoners whose sources provide extensive detail for life in Roman prisons are the Christians, not only from accounts in the gospels, the epistles, and the Acts of the Apostles, all parts of the Christian New Testament, but also from a group of texts known generally as the ‘Acts of the Christian Martyrs.’ … accounts from different parts of the Empire are in considerable agreement concerning the prisons in which the Christians were held.

(22)

Philip Schaff describes the typical Roman prison building as follows: “In a Roman prison, there were usually three distinct parts—(1) the communiora, where the prisoners had light and fresh air; (2) the interiora, shut off by strong iron gates with bars and locks; (3) the tullianum, or dungeon” (431). Here, the description of “strong iron gates with bars and locks” aligns very well with *hlinduru*’s semantic range: “a door formed of lattice-work, a grated door” (Bosworth-Toller). The *hlinduru* constituting the Whale’s jaws consequently appear to be tied to Roman
prisons and hence in all likelihood are iron doors. The fact that insular blacksmiths fashioned “door-hinges, keys, locks, latches and latchlifters” of iron (Hinton 193) further supports the interpretation that the poet would have conceived of the *hlinduru* as items of ironwork.

This dissertation will demonstrate that the conflation of part of a monster’s body with prison-related metalwork occurs in two other Old English narratives. Along these lines, Chapter Two will feature further discussion of the Whale, specifically regarding its original nature in the Greco-Roman bestiary as a draconic/serpentine monster known as the Asp-Turtle. Subsequently, Chapter Two will build a case that the version of *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii likewise has ties to prison-related metalwork. Chapter Three will address the very same physical nature on the part of Grendel—a figure that, according to Francis E. Sandbach, is one “of two dragons” (the other dragon being the monster’s ferocious mother) by virtue of *Beowulf*’s exploits paralleling those of Siegfried (23). The striking similarities between these three monsters in terms of the monsters’ draconic/serpentine natures and body parts of prison-related metalwork ultimately will lend support to the interpretation that a specific Anglo-Saxon literary sensibility called for the merging of dragons and serpents with prison-related metalwork—and that this very same literary sensibility in fact informs the poet’s depiction of the Whale’s jaws in the narrative presently under consideration.

Chapter Two also will build a case that the serpentine Whale’s link to Roman architectural pieces in general puts this monster in good company with other serpents and dragons in Old English writings. When translating Latin source texts, Anglo-Saxon poets demonstrated a clear preference for conflating the serpents and dragons—in whole or in part—with specific architectural elements. These include highly-wrought doors, metal locks on doors, nigh-impregnable walls, sumptuous palatial columns, and entire buildings such as prisons,
castles, and fortresses. In all of the instances but one, the fundamental identification of reptilian monster with architectural element proves to be an innovation on the part of the particular Anglo-Saxon poet or writer. Chapter Two will discuss the likely origin for this specific literary/artistic sensibility on the part of insular poets who reworked Latin accounts of serpents and dragons for Anglo-Saxon audiences. It thereby further will contextualize the choices of *The Whale’s* poet in terms of insular fantasies tied to buildings and the individual architectural components of such structures.

*Wrætic* appears once in *The Whale*, and its occurrence likely does involve the presentation of the titular beast’s jaws as the highly-wrought iron doors. The narrative introduces the monster’s ability to lure and trap unsuspecting fish as follows: “He hafað oþre gecynd, / wæterþisa wlonc, wræticran gien” (“He [i.e., the Whale] has another natural trait, prideful water-rusher, yet *wræticran*) (lines 49-50). “*Wræticran*,” like “*wræticra*” in *The Panther*, is the comparative form of *wrætic*; thus, some aspect of the trait that the poet will now address will be marked by “yet more of the quality denoted by *wrætic*” than the previous trait. The previous trait involves the monster’s ability to deceive sailors into thinking that it is an island. The fact that the discussion of the new trait involves a conflation of the monster’s jaws with highly-wrought, iron prison doors—considered alongside *wraet*’s semantic range, *wrætic*’s link to items of smithwork in the Exeter Book Riddles, and *wrætic*’s appearances in connection with the Panther’s highly-wrought body (see above)—raises the possibility that the creature’s deadly camouflage possesses a connection of some sort to a highly-wrought metal object of some kind. In other words, “*wræticran*” very well might signal that the poet is—partly, at least—making a comparison between the craftsmanship of the iron prison doors and the craftsmanship of another item of smithwork. The poet in fact mentions just such an item: he likens the beast’s disguise to
when the Devil dons a “heolophelme” (line 45). Bosworth and Toller explain that this object is “a helm which conceals or makes invisible the wearer” (s.v. “heolophelm”). In its current context, “wrætlicran” therefore is in part indicating that the iron doors’ craftsmanship proves even more ingenious than that of the invisibility helmet, another infernal item of (presumable) smithwork in the world of the poem.

The conflation of the Whale’s jaws with Hell’s highly-wrought iron prison doors appears to be an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon poet. While The Whale’s source text, like The Panther’s, remains unknown, both Old English poems “bear a close resemblance to the corresponding articles in Philippe de Thaun and … have similar moralizations” (Amodio The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook 296; Wright Preface 5). The Whale’s entry in this thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman version of the bestiary contains no mention of the infernal doors. Nor does it link any kind of manmade object to the Whale’s ability to lure and trap fish. Instead, in lines 958-961, the narrative simply states that the fish

\[\ldots\text{ en sa buche enterunt,}\]

Ilores (sic) les ocirat, issi les transgluterat;

E Diable ensement strangluerat la gent,

Ki issi le amerunt, que en sa buche enterunt.

\[\ldots\text{ will enter into his mouth,}\]

and he will kill them, thus he will swallow them,

and similarly the Devil will strangle the people,
who shall love him so much that they will enter into his mouth. (Wright “The Bestiary” 36)

Clearly, Philippe de Thaun’s account of the Whale’s trapping and killing of fish and the Devil’s trapping and consuming of souls solely involves the naturalistic imagery of predator and prey.

Similarly, none of the existing Latin versions of the bestiary figure the Whale’s jaws as Hell’s doors or any other type of manmade object. Isidore of Seville does liken the belly of one infamous whale to Hell in terms of size, in Etymologies Book 12: “Qualis cetus exceptit Ionam, cuius alvus tantae magnitudinis fuit ut instar obtineret inferni, dicente Propheta (2, 3): ‘Exaudivit me de ventre inferni’” (“Such a cetus swallowed Jonah; its belly was so big that it resembled hell, as the prophet says [cf. Jonah 2:3]: ‘He heard me from the belly of hell’”).xxxiii The Anglo-Saxons did have access to Isidore’s Etymologies, and if the whale’s belly is like Hell, then the beast’s jaws logically would correspond to Hell’s doors or gates. Accordingly, Laura C. Lambdin and Robert T. Lambdin explain that the association between whales and so-called “hell mouths” proved so prevalent in medieval Europe that “many of the more common representations of hell mouths in later medieval iconography owe a great deal to the description of the whale in the bestiary tradition” (72). Though unprovable, Isidore’s account could have inspired the Anglo-Saxon poet to envision the Whale’s body as Hell’s prison, which would have been one step away from imagining the jaws as highly-wrought iron prison doors. The Panther’s physical description as an artistically-rendered beast in Isidore’s Etymologies does more closely resemble the physical description of the Old English version of the heavenly beast than do the descriptions in any of the existing analogues. If Isidore was a significant source for the Old English Physiologus, the Anglo-Saxon poet evidently chose to actualize to a far greater extent the Latin encyclopedist’s versions of the Panther and Whale as craftwork items.
Notably, only the Old English version of *The Whale* names or discusses any of Hell’s highly-wrought objects. The Exeter Book entry not only features the arresting image of the *hlinduru*, but also the equally-potent image of the *heolophelme*. The latter item, like the former, does not appear in the Whale’s account in *The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon*, Isidore’s *Etymologies*, or the other analogues—all of which present us with a completely-naturalistic landscape, informed only by naturalistic imagery. In the Anglo-Saxon poet’s imagination, *The Whale*’s Hell evidently becomes a land of impressive architectural pieces and amazing manmade objects, all from the forges of wondrously-skilled smiths. The poet demonstrates the same literary/artistic sensibility in *The Panther*, mobilizing the striking image of the highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors—with its vivid dyes and scintillating ornaments and treasures—to intrude upon the fantastic beast’s traditionally-naturalistic habitat, competing with the natural imagery for the reader’s attention. *The Whale* hence lends further support to the interpretation that a landscape devoid of masterfully-wrought, smithwork objects did not accord with the poet’s Anglo-Saxon literary/artistic sensibilities. My next section will build a case that the Anglo-Saxon poet of *The Phoenix* evidences the very same tendency, with him going so far as to not only present us with a highly-wrought smithwork Phoenix, but a highly-wrought smithwork landscape, as well.

Ultimately, moral darkness informs the high-quality craftsmanship of the creature-object represented by the Whale. The superb craftsmanship of *The Panther*’s creature-object, in contrast, commands great esteem. The probable unity of the Old English Physiologus—considered alongside certain key facts of Anglo-Saxon material culture—opens the possibility that Anglo-Saxon attitudes regarding different types of smiths and smithwork find expression in the depictions of the two smithwork beasts. As discussed in this chapter’s previous section, the
coat-of-many-colors—and hence the Panther’s body—likely features gold embroidery. The Anglo-Saxons accorded the insular artisans who worked with gold thread—all women—a very high level respect for their craft. People on the continent likewise greatly admired the skills of the insular, female, gold embroiderers. In fact, to the Anglo-Saxons, a woman who was an “expert in gold embroidery” was the “female equivalent” of the goldsmith, who himself was the most highly-regarded of the metalworkers (Hyer and Owen-Crocker “Woven Works” 175-79, 182-84; Dodwell 45-79, 170-79). The insular approval directed towards the female “goldsmiths” and their high-status craftwork would have helped to ensure that the highly-wrought coat-of-many-colors was a fitting object to conflate with the Panther, a creature signifying Christ. As a creature-object, the Panther enables the gold embroidery—and, consequently, the artisans’ skills that fashioned it—to share in this beast’s full and morally-virtuous life.

The type of metalworker who would have forged grated iron doors, however, did not command a high level of respect in Anglo-Saxon England. David Hinton presents multiple strands of evidence in “Weland’s Work: Metal and Metalsmiths” that blacksmiths endured marginalization and even abjection in Anglo-Saxon England, the Anglo-Saxons typically viewing both them and their representative handiwork with distaste, disrespect, distrust, suspicion, and, ultimately, fear. Before addressing the darkest of the emotions and concerns the blacksmiths inspired, Hinton first builds a case for their inferior social status in their communities. He begins by explaining that “smithing was anti-socially noisy … and in addition created a fire hazard. These factors would have encouraged the placing of smithies at the edges of settlements. […] The surveys of Winchester [accordingly] show that most of the smithies were on the peripheries of the late Anglo-Saxon city” (192). He likewise sees blacksmiths’ collective weak “standing” reflected in the fact that the average blacksmith in late Anglo-Saxon
England did not own any land, and he subsequently comments upon the possibility that, “although farrier’s work extended the demand for ironsmiths, it may also have tended to downgrade them, as it was coarse and heavy labour, leaving less opportunity for the run-of-the-mill smith to show great skill.” Finally, he offers a piece of literary evidence in support of the blacksmiths’ general lack of esteem in Anglo-Saxon society, maintaining that “the bombast of the blacksmith in Aelfric’s Colloquy and the way in which he was put in his place implies that he was not particularly respected” (197).

After making his cogent case for blacksmiths’ poor social standing in Anglo-Saxon England, Hinton next addresses a significantly deeper level of moral darkness allegedly tainting these particular metalworkers, their skills, and their products. Specifically, Hinton establishes the likelihood that acute insular anxieties towards the blacksmiths and their handiwork arising from these metalworkers’ perceived ill intentions and darkly clever skills prompted the Anglo-Saxons to keep these craftworkers as far away from them as possible. To support his interpretation, he first points out that “the Tattershall Thorpe smith was in an isolated grave, as though to keep someone with his tricky skills away from the rest of society.” He offers as further evidence the fact that Weland’s depiction on the Frank’s Casket, an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon carved whalebone box, focuses upon the fabled Germanic blacksmith’s dark deeds while incarcerated far away from society rather than any of his more noble aspects or endeavors:

The legendary Weland was another whose skill placed him outside the norm—his captivity on an island kept him away from court. […] Weland’s revenge for his isolated imprisonment and other ill fortune is graphically carved into the Franks Casket, where he is shown offering poison to an unfortunate princess who does not know that he has fashioned the cup containing it from her brother’s skull.
Clearly, his skills were admired even if he belonged to the old world and did not put them to proper Christian use . . . (Hinton 200)

Hinton here foregrounds the darker elements of the Weland story, with its themes of “isolated imprisonment,” murder, trickery, and the use of smithcraft for a terrible revenge. For additional evidence of the moral debasement marking blacksmiths, Hinton mentions that “an Anglo-Saxon charm warns that some iron was the work of witches, and six smiths sitting making war-spears clearly offered mankind no good” (200).

The range of dark associations reported by Hinton to be borne by blacksmiths and their trade in Anglo-Saxon England—malevolence, trickery, isolation, imprisonment, ill fortune, murder, revenge, witchcraft, and evil—would have helped to ensure that the iron prison doors were fitting objects to conflate with the Whale, a monster signifying the Devil and Hell. As a creature-object, the Whale enables the infernal architectural pieces—and, consequently, the disturbing skills and threatening ingenuity of the blacksmiths who forged these pieces—to share in this monster’s intense, active, morally-depraved life. Another way to state this is that the creature-object essentially brings to life the high level of danger posed by blacksmiths and their morally-questionable abilities, granting the dark and sinister artistry and craftsmanship a predatory, beastly body and veritable hunting ground in the world. In the Old English Physiologus, the poet thus juxtaposes a creature-object decorated by the most esteemed of smiths (the Panther) with one forged by the most problematic of smiths (the Whale), each creature-object exhibiting specific behaviors and experiencing specific drives in its habitat among the landscapes and seascapes of man’s moral universe. The dualistic Christian world effectively becomes one in which dark items of smithwork and esteemed items of smithwork—all granted an amazing level of creaturely agency—vie for the lives and souls of human beings, or at least
actively participate in this most fundamental of battles. The poet essentially figures the battle between Good and Evil, God and the Devil, and Heaven and Hell as the eternal conflict between the workmanship of different types of smiths. The poet’s choices along these lines hint that a regard for metalwork in its various manifestations—and for the insular judgements directed towards different types of smiths and their representative products—richly colored his sensibilities as an Anglo-Saxon, Christian poet. The next section will demonstrate that the Phoenix’s physical description probably represents a continuation of the very same creative vision on the part of this poet.

2.5 *The Phoenix as an Assemblage of Exquisite Items of Metalwork*

Although critics do not consider *The Phoenix* to be part of the Old English Physiologus, it, too, appears in the Exeter Book. Fulk and Cain refer to it as “the most explicit allegory in Old English.” It provides a richly-detailed account of its titular avian’s august existence and allegorical signification over the course of the poem’s 677 lines. In lines 1-380, the poet praisingly describes the creature’s paradisiacal habitat, majestic movements through air and water, beautiful singing, gradual decline into the decrepitude of old age, gathering of fragrant herbs and flowers for the nest that will serve as its funeral pyre, amazing rebirth into a worm by means of the fire that eventually consumes the nest, (re)growth into its former power and glory, exquisite body parts, and rightful assumption of kingship among all of the world’s birds. The level of detail greatly exceeds that allotted to the respective descriptions of the lives and bodies of the Panther and Whale. A “versified explication” of the Phoenix’s allegorical signification immediately follows the discussion of this creature’s remarkable physical and behavioral traits.
and life cycle, in lines 381-677. While critics have not determined the source text for the Old English Physiologus, they agree that the Anglo-Saxon poet’s direct source for lines 1-380 of *The Phoenix* was *Carmen de Ave Phoenice*, a Latin poem “attributed to the early fourth-century poet Lactantius.” Fulk and Cain explain that “the Old English poet treats the material freely” (140); in other words, the poet essentially demonstrates the same tendency to rework the original Latin content as does the Physiologus-poet.

A number of critics comment upon the significant connections between *The Phoenix* and the three poems of the Old English Physiologus. Malone and Baugh maintain that the Old English Physiologus “might well have been written by the author of *Phoenix*. Whether it was or not, it belongs to the same period and reflects a like taste” (77). S. A. J. Bradley cautiously attributes the poem to “a disciple of the poetry of Cynewulf … but probably not Cynewulf himself” (285), and, as mentioned above, critics likewise tend to associate the Old English Physiologus with Cynewulf or someone in his school. As also previously discussed, Malone and Baugh cite the traditional scholarly association of the Old English Physiologus’ Panther, Whale, and Partridge with, respectively, “land, sea, and air” (77). Bradley perceives the Exeter Book’s Phoenix as completing the four elements, explaining that the fantastic bird is “a creature uniquely associated with the fourth and last of the elements, fire.” In addition to fulfilling the elemental tetrad, the Exeter Book’s Phoenix very possibly plays a specific and crucial contextualized role in terms of its allegorical signification: Bradley finds that “the Panther, the Whale, and the Partridge … treat, respectively, of the nature of God, of the nature of the devil, and of man’s choice between the two” and that, accordingly, the Phoenix involves “the destiny of the righteous human soul” (S. Bradley 353). While evidence ultimately remains inconclusive regarding whether or not the same poet in fact wrote *The Phoenix* and the Old English
Physiologus, *The Phoenix*—like *The Panther* and *The Whale*—does offer a vision of its titular beast as a creature-object enjoying considerable creaturely agency in mankind’s moral Christian world. This particular aspect of the Phoenix’s physical description hence represents an additional, in this case heretofore-critically-unattested point of connection between the majestic bird’s narrative and the Panther’s and Whale’s respective narratives.

Unlike the Panther and Whale, the Phoenix is composed of more than one kind of exquisite object. First of all, lines 299-301 potentially depict the fantastic bird’s beak as the skilled handiwork of a jeweler/gemcutter or glassworker: “þæt nebb líxeð / swa glæs oþþe gim / geaflas scyne / innan ond utan” (“The beak glitters like glass or a gem, the jaws shine, inside and out”). The arts of the jeweler, gemcutter, and goldsmith explicitly inform the description of the Phoenix’s eye, in lines 301-304: “Iþ seó eagebyrd / stearc ond hiwe / stane gelicast, / gladum gimme, / þonne in goldfate / smiþa orþoncum / biseted weorþeð” (“The eye by nature is hard like a precious stone in appearance, a bright gem, when made to be set in a thin plate of gold by a highly-skilled smith”). These lines evoke the clear mental image of a gifted “smith” having shaped the ocular masterpiece, and the proximity of this description to that of the exquisite beak imparts the sense that a highly-skilled artisan likewise had a hand in fabricating that other body part (Bosworth-Toller “smiþa” s.v. “smiþ”). Regarding the two anatomical pieces in question, the artisans and craftwork associated with the beak and eye are in keeping with the Phoenix’s august allegorical status as a heavenly creature: as previously discussed, goldsmiths were the most esteemed of the metalworkers in Anglo-Saxon England, and jewelers also commanded great admiration for their skills and products (Dodwell 27, 44, 58, 74-75, 188; Coatsworth and Pinder 258-74). The morally-suspect art of the blacksmith in no way figures into the manufacture of the fantastic bird’s beak and eye.
Notably, the particular item of smithwork conflated with the Phoenix’s majestic eye remains consistent with actual examples of high-status jewelry from Anglo-Saxon England. David M. Wilson, for example, offers the following, general description of jewelry from the Sutton Hoo burial site:

Apart from the technical excellence of the craftsmanship, the use of colour is the most striking feature of the jewellery. It is all of gold and is inlaid with various materials. [...] The translucent materials are mostly backed with gold foil impressed with geometrical patterns which reflect light back through the garnets or glass to give a glittering and lively appearance to the surface … Here we encounter the glistening colour-brightness which so fascinated the Anglo-Saxon writers of a later period …. (25)

Wilson’s discussion indicates the likelihood that the Anglo-Saxon poet of *The Phoenix* brings an insular artistic sensibility to bear on his depiction of the Phoenix’s eye. In other words, the fantastic bird’s eye does not simply resemble an item of jewelry, but rather one that has been shaped according to insular tastes. The eye’s description hence serves as one piece of evidence that the poet mobilizes the creature-object represented by the Phoenix in order to place his people’s aesthetic stamp on the fantastic bird and all that it signifies (more on this point shortly).

The Phoenix’s body features another type of highly-wrought object, one that likely also is an item of smithwork or at least contains a number of metal components. Specifically, the poet presents the fantastic bird’s back as an ornate shield in lines 308-309: “Is se scyld ufan / frætwum gefeged / ofer þæs fugles bæc” (“The shield above is fashioned with ornaments, over this bird’s back”). Granted, the description of the “shield” (Bosworth-Toller “scyld” s.v. “scyld”)
does not explicitly mention the presence of metal in this particular implement, and Owen-Crocker states that, in Anglo-Saxon England, “shields were wooden, as reflected in the poetic name bord. […] According to literary tradition they were made of lime wood.” Shields nevertheless did possess some metal components: Owen-Crocker mentions that “often all that remains of the shield’s presence in a grave are the central iron boss and other metal parts including the hand grip and studs.” Furthermore, an Anglo-Saxon shield from the Sutton Hoo burial contains an abundance of sophisticated, gem-inset metalwork, as Owen-Crocker’s following description makes evident:

The Sutton Hoo shield, probably deposited in the earlier part of the seventh century, had a domed boss with a rim decorated with confronted and addorsed horses in stamped bronze foil. The boss was covered with tinned bronze sheets bearing zoomorphic designs and surmounted by a bronze disc mounted on a thick stem. The disc was decorated with garnet-filled cloisonné. […] The Sutton Hoo shield alone has a continuous metal edge binding, ornamented with twelve dragon heads and six rectangular panels covered in gold foil. (Owen-Crocker “Seldom … Does” 215-18)

Old English “frætwum” in the above description of the Phoenix’s exquisite shield very likely indicates the presence of such high-status ornamentation in the form of metalwork and gems: as previously discussed, Bosworth and Toller define frætwe as “ornaments, adornments, decorations, treasures,” and specific aspects of Anglo-Saxon material culture reinforce the likelihood of “frætwum” accordingly signaling the presence of metalwork and gems in the body of the creature-object represented by the Old English Physiologus’ Panther.
The interpretation that the ornate shield constituting the Phoenix’s back features metalwork notably receives additional support from the martial implement’s co-occurrence in the Phoenix’s larger body with the sumptuous item of jewelry merged with the majestic avian’s eye. As shortly will be demonstrated, the Anglo-Saxon poet eliminates the rich and varied vegetative imagery used in connection with the Phoenix’s body, including the bird’s two eyes, in his Latin source text and adds the striking, detailed image of the smithwork eye. The shield conflated with the Phoenix’s back also is an innovation on the Anglo-Saxon poet’s part (see below), and for this shield to be a splendid item of smithwork would be in keeping with his choices regarding the ocular organ. The current section further will build a case that Styles I and II of insular animal ornament inform the physical depiction of the Old English version of the great avian, this influence largely indicated by the very fact that the Anglo-Saxon poet conflates part of this creature with an ornate shield; considering the ties of both Styles I and II to early insular metalwork (see below), the Phoenix’s ties to the two styles by virtue of the shield constituting its back reinforce the link between the martial implement in question and insular metalwork.

The shield, as an insular martial implement, ultimately befits the Phoenix’s august allegorical status as a heavenly creature. Dodwell discusses the high prestige enjoyed by the weapon-smith in Anglo-Saxon England:

In an age of almost continuous warfare, the weapon-smith was especially respected and Wayland—the great weapon-smith of pagan mythology—was remembered in such poems as *Deor* and *Beowulf*. The Anglo-Saxon weapon-smith himself was celebrated in two Old English poems, one of which speaks of him shaping the helmet, the corslet, the gleaming blade and the round shield. In
Beowulf the reader is especially aware of the Anglo-Saxon relish for the products of the weapon-smiths’ skills … (72-74).

As previously indicated, Hinton builds a compelling case that the Anglo-Saxons tended to view blacksmiths and their products with disdain, suspicion, and fear, with the myth of Wayland containing quite a few problematic elements for the Anglo-Saxons (Hinton 185-200). The depiction of the Phoenix’s back draws from the more positive side of the conflicted insular mindset regarding blacksmiths and their products (at the very least, the shield in question contains “the central iron boss and other metal parts including the hand grip and studs” mentioned by Owen-Crocker), whereas the description of the Whale’s jaws borrows from the more negative aspects. The fact that a shield specifically comes from a weapon-smith likely accounts for its positive valuation in its current context.

Old English *wrætlic* appears in connection with two of the Phoenix’s remaining body parts, the head and the abdomen. Considering the passage’s rich smithwork imagery and the evidence from *wræt*’s semantic range and from *wrætlic*’s instances of usage in the Exeter Book Riddles and in the Old English Physiologus, *wrætlic*’s two occurrences here likely do serve to blur the line between the two body parts and fine metal objects of some unspecified type. The discussion of the exquisite head occurs in lines 293-294: “Is him þæt heafod / hindan grene, / wrætlice wrixled, / wurman geblonde” (“Behind his head is green, *wrætlice* varied, mixed with purple”). By means of the adverb “wrætlice,” the poet here conveys the sense that an artisan has skillfully applied and alternated the superb coloring, this description thus calling to mind the Panther’s own “wrætlicra” hues (see above). Lines 307-308a contain the account of the Phoenix’s splendid abdomen: “Wrætlic is seo womb neðpan, / wundrum fæger, / scir ond scyne” (“*Wrætlic* is the abdomen underneath, wondrously fair, brilliant and shining”). This description
of a “wrætlic” abdomen that is “brilliant and shining” (Bosworth-Toller “scir” I; “scyne” s.v. “scin”) clearly is more in keeping with the body part in question existing as a splendid item of smithwork rather than part of a living creature’s body, especially in light of the nearby imagery of metal objects.

The landscape’s depiction provides further evidence that *wrætlic* at least refers to superb craftwork in the world of the poem. Catherine A. M. Clarke deems the fantastic bird’s habitat a *locus amoenus* or “ideal landscape” (47). She further points out that the Creator has artfully fashioned this ideal landscape. Through recourse to S. A. J. Bradley’s translation of *The Phoenix*, she addresses one of the poem’s instances of *wrætlice* in the context of such a highly-wrought landscape (and of the Anglo-Saxon poet writing of this landscape): “The comment that the fruits hang on the trees ‘wrætlice’ (‘like a work of art,’ line 75b) emphasizes the grove as the product of God’s own craft and contrivance, yet at the same time it suggests a self-consciousness about the poet’s own artfulness and rhetorical contrivance to realize the *locus amoenus* in poetry” (43). In other words, the poet’s decision to use *wrætlice* here was a carefully-considered one in that he wanted the word to work on two levels—both of which have to do with highly-skilled artisans fashioning masterpieces. For *wrætlic* to function in this manner in the landscape’s description greatly increases the likelihood that its other instances in the narrative also directly involve the work of gifted artisans.

The Anglo-Saxon poet significantly reworks the imagery informing the Phoenix’s body in *Carmen de Ave Phoenice* to present the fantastic bird as the assemblage of metal objects. Not only does he supply the smithwork imagery in the cases of the avian’s eye and back, but he strikingly removes the Latin Phoenix’s pervasive connection to plant life. Lines 125-130 of
Carmen de Ave Phoenice—the Latin text’s introduction into the description of the Phoenix’s body—initiates the poem’s discussion of the fantastic bird’s vital link to plant life:

Primo qui color est malis sub sidere Cancri,

Cortice quae croceo Punica grana tegunt;

Qualis inest foliis, quae fert agreste papaver,

Cum pandit vestes Flora rubente solo:

Hoc humeri pectusque decens velamine fulget;

Hoc caput, hoc cervix summaque terga intent.xxvi

First, the face is a color like when beneath the constellation Cancer, the saffron-colored rind covers seeds, like plants which are in the manner of a poppy of the fields, when lonely Flora’s attire splits to red: on the shoulder and breast a becoming garment flashes; on the head, around the neck at the top of the back, the bird glitters.

Here, an abundance of plant-related Latin words and phrases indicate that the poet resolutely has turned to the plant kingdom for his similes and metaphors: croceo (“saffron-colored”), cortice (“the bark, rind, shell, hull”), grana (“a grain, seed, small kernel”), foliis (“of plants”), papaver (“a poppy”), agreste (“of the fields”), and Flora (“in Latin mythology, the goddess of flowers”) (Lewis and Short “croceo” s.v. “croceus” I, II; “cortice” s.v. “cortex” I; “grana” s.v. “granum” I; “foliis” s.v. “folium” I; “papaver” I; “agreste” s.v. “agrestis” I; OED “flora” 1). Notably, none of this imagery occurs in the depiction of the Old English Phoenix.
In lines 137-138, the Latin poet offers yet another striking floral image, specifically in the description of the Phoenix’s arresting eyes: “Ingentes oculi: credas geminos hyacinthos, / Quorum de medio lucida flamma micat” (“Enormous eyes that you would believe to be twin hyacinths, / In the middle of which brilliant flames flicker”). Here, Latin “hyacinthos”—the singular form of which denotes “the hyacinth, blue iris”—brings the reader’s attention back to flowers, thereby continuing the association of the fantastic bird’s body with flowers initiated when the poet likens the color of the face to that of a “papaver,” or “poppy” (Lewis and Short “papaver”; “hyacinthus” II). The Phoenix’s eyes—like its face, head, shoulder, breast, and back—remain fundamentally tied to the natural world’s plant life. In terms of a number of its august body parts, the fantastic bird does appear to be an emanation or outgrowth of the earth’s beautiful vegetation.

The Anglo-Saxon poet not only removes the reference to flowers in the depiction of the eyes, but also introduces the richly-detailed depiction of the Phoenix’s eye as an item of smithwork. Again, the poet’s description of the eye reads as follows, in lines 301-304: “Is seo eagebyrd / stearc ond hiwe / stane gelicast, / gladum gimme, / ṭonne in goldfate / smiþa orþoncum / biseted weorþeð” (“The eye by nature is hard like a precious stone in appearance, a bright gem, when made to be set in a thin plate of gold by a highly-skilled smith”). The words and phrases used in the description clearly place immense emphasis on the superb skill of and exquisite materials used by the metaphorical smith. Stane (“a precious stone”), gladum gimme (“a shining /bright gem or jewel”), and biseted (“to set”) foreground the art of the jeweler and/or gemcutter. Goldfate signifies “a thin plate of gold” or “a golden vessel,” the modifier of the endocentric compound denoting “gold” and the compound’s head referring to “a thin piece of metal, gold-leaf, ornament.” Smiþa is “a smith, a worker in metals,” and orþoncum—“skillfully,
ingeniously, cunningly, with art”—points to this artisan’s remarkably high level of ingenuity, skill, and knowledge (Bosworth-Toller “stane” s.v. “stan” II.f; “gladum” s.v. “glæd” I; “gimme” s.v. “gim” I; “bisetet” s.v. “bisettan”; “goldfate” s.v. “goldfæt”; “gold”; “fate” s.v. “fæt”; “smiþa” s.v. “smiþ”; “orþoncum” s.v. “orpanc” II). In the constructing of this intricate image of exquisite smithwork, the Anglo-Saxon poet clearly demonstrates the same keen attention to detail as the Latin poet when he invests the description of the Phoenix’s general coloring with a plethora of words and phrases signifying various aspects of plant life. The Anglo-Saxon poet consequently appears as focused on depicting his version of the Phoenix as an item of smithwork as the Latin poet does on depicting the fantastic bird as a magnificent plant.

One additional vegetable image informs the Latin poet’s description of the Phoenix’s body. In lines 139-140, he makes the following observation regarding the fantastic bird’s crest: “Aptata est not capiti radiate corona, / Phoebei referens verticis alta decus” (“A shining garland fits and marks the head, / announces the honor of Phoebus from high on the top of the head”). Latin *corona* denotes “a garland, chaplet, wreath,” which can consist “of natural or artificial flowers” (Lewis and Short I). A botanical garland or wreath proves entirely appropriate in *corona*’s current context, considering that Phoebus traditionally wears a laurel crown (Roman and Roman 77). The Anglo-Saxon poet omits the reference to Phoebus, and the circlet becomes a ring of feathers about the Phoenix’s neck in lines 305-306. In short, the Anglo-Saxon poet clearly has worked to remove any and all references to vegetation, fruit, and flowers in the description of the Phoenix’s body in his source text, rich and varied imagery that would have interfered with the unified vision he wishes to present of the fantastic bird as an assemblage of named and unnamed metal objects.
The Latin poet notably does utilize metal- and gem-related imagery in connection with certain of the Phoenix’s body parts. As shortly will become apparent, however, the overall impression he gives regarding the larger context of the metal and gems differs considerably from the sense conveyed by the Anglo-Saxon poet’s use of this type of imagery. The Latin poet depicts the fantastic bird’s beak as follows, in lines 135-136: “Albicat insignis mixto viridante zmaragdo / Et puro cornu gemmea cuspis hiat” (“Distinguished white intermingles with eminently-green emerald / And the pointed end stands open, pure horn with gems”). This description clearly inspired the Anglo-Saxon poet in his own description of the beak, probably because the idea of a bejeweled body part accorded with his insular sensibilities involving the conflation of fantastic beasts and monsters with exquisite, often gem-inset items of smithwork. Also, in the Latin account, the Phoenix’s tail and legs consist of metal. The description of the tail reads as follows, in lines 131-132: “Caudaque porrigitur fulvo distincta metallo, / In cuius maculis purpura mixta rubet” (“This creature spreads out a divided [or decorated] tail of gold-colored metal, in which purple spots intermingle with red”). Similarly, in line 141, the scales of the Phoenix’s legs are composed of this type of metal: “Crura tegunt squamae fulvo distincta metallo” (“Scales of divided [or decorated], gold-colored metal cover the legs”). Lewis and Short define distinguo, appearing as “distincta” in the descriptions of the tail and scales, as “to separate, divide, part” and, alternatively, “to set off, decorate, adorn.” While the ideas of “decoration” and “adornment” hint at a crafted aspect to the legs and scales, the fact that the counterpart to distincta in the Old English version is gedæled, the infinitive of which simply means “to divide, part, impart, separate, distribute, share, partake,” lends a degree of support to the interpretation that the Latin writer uses distincta here according to its sense of “divided”

More significantly, the veritable wealth of vegetable imagery informing the Latin Phoenix’s depiction suggests that the metal and gems here are contextualized within the natural world—not the material culture of a particular people. The Latin Phoenix’s overall physical description consequently conveys the sense that the “gold-colored metal”xxvii of the tail and legs is metal occurring in its natural, raw state, in the wilderness and unworked by skilled smiths. In this larger context, the gems of the beak accordingly exist as raw gems that have never been subjected to the art of the gemcutter or jeweler. The Old English Phoenix, in contrast, possesses body parts of fashioned metal in the forms of the exquisite insular piece of gem-inset, gold jewelry and ornate insular shield. As high-status manmade objects, the eye and back of this version of the fantastic bird have no context in the natural world. The two anatomical parts, by virtue of the parts’ alternate natures as the named insular items of craftwork, would appear solely to function in the milieu of Anglo-Saxon society, whose people consistently demonstrated a high regard for the high-status products of the skilled goldsmith, jeweler, and weapon-smith.

The interpretation that the metal and gems of the Latin Phoenix ultimately have a different context than those of the Old English Phoenix gains considerable support from Dodwell’s discussion of the contrasting views of classical writers and the Anglo-Saxons regarding gold’s social backdrop:

What divided them was the fact that—for reasons partly of culture and partly of climate—the classical writers had been much more conscious of the beneficence of nature than were the Anglo-Saxons. This means that, whereas the appreciation
of gold and sumptuous colors in classical times was presented in the context of
the wide-ranging palette of nature herself, and viewed, as it were, in the fresh air,
the same relish in the Anglo-Saxons lacks this open setting, and seems therefore
that much more enclosed and that much more intense. (25-26)

Regarding the points of Dodwell’s argument, the Latin Phoenix’s “gold-colored metal” and
gems—by virtue of these substances occurring in a body so heavily informed by botanical
imagery—do appear to be “presented in the context of the wide-ranging palette of nature herself,
and viewed, as it were, in the fresh air.” The Old English Phoenix’s gold, metal, and gems, in
comparison, fittingly remain “enclosed,” removed from “this open setting,” considering the clear
connection of these substances to the various enclosed spaces of the smithy and the tastes of the
status-conscious, Anglo-Saxon men and women living at a remove from nature in the cities and
monasteries. In the end, Dodwell’s discussion raises the possibility that the subjecting of the
Latin Phoenix’s gems and metal to the art of one or more types of metalworkers would have
been in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon poet’s insular sensibilities even if a poetic tradition of
conflating fantastic beasts and monsters with items of smithwork did not exist.

To sum my argument thus far regarding the The Phoenix’s titular avian, the evidence
lends support to the interpretation that a vision of the Phoenix as an assemblage of items of
smithwork guided the Anglo-Saxon poet. At least two of the objects, the exquisite item of
jewelry constituting the fantastic bird’s eye and the ornate shield conflated with its back, have
been fashioned according to insular artistic sensibilities. The eye’s depiction thereby hints that
the creature-object represented by the Phoenix bears the aesthetic stamp of the Anglo-Saxons,
just as does the creature-object represented by the Old English Panther. The latter beast—by
virtue of its implied connection to the Anglo-Saxon interlace motif—enjoys an existence as a
living, breathing piece of Anglo-Saxon animal ornament. The Old English Phoenix, too, appears potently linked to insular, zoomorphic ornamentation. First of all, the division of the fantastic bird’s body into a number of distinct items of smithwork calls to mind the so-called Style I animal ornament of the Anglo-Saxons. As discussed at considerable length in this dissertation’s Introduction, scholars Leslie Webster and T. D. Kendrick comment upon the fact that the insular version of Style I animal ornament typically separates an animal’s body into individual components while more or less still allowing the highly-stylized beast to retain its integrity as a unified being (Webster 57; Kendrick 29-30). This dissertation’s Chapter Three will build a case that Beowulf’s Grendel likewise embodies this particular feature of Style I, the chapter ultimately crafting a larger argument that the poem’s titular hero essentially dismantles the monster into the separate items.

Additional aspects of Style I further support the interpretation that the Old English Phoenix proves linked to this particular insular style of animal ornament. For one thing, Style I specifically originated in early insular metalwork. Webster explains that the Anglo-Saxon version of Style I began in the south-east part of England late in the fifth century xxviii, eventually giving rise to a large number of regional variants. During those initial years, it appeared on metalwork objects such as buckles and brooches. The merging of the fantastic bird’s body parts with insular smithwork likely reflects Style I’s link to insular smithwork. The very fact that the Phoenix is a majestic bird likewise serves to strengthen its connection to Style I: Webster, discussing the evolution of Style I’s highly-stylized animal bodies, mentions that “bird-of-prey elements became more prominent” (55-56, 62). Speake delivers a more comprehensive statement on the prime importance of majestic birds not only to Style I, but in particular to insular Style II:
The bird, or rather the stylized schema for a bird, is common in Anglo-Saxon and Germanic art. With a few exceptions the Anglo-Saxon bird is characterized by being depicted in profile and possessing a curved beak, and it seems clear that the intention was to depict a predatory bird. More often than not only the bird’s head is depicted, and it has been the predatory bird-head, with its associated angled-head surround, that has been one of the chief distinguishing features of so-called Style II animal ornament. In Anglo-Saxon ornament of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, exceptions to the predatory bird are rare. (81)

The Style II animal ornament referred to by Speake began in England toward the end of the sixth century, and it originated in early metalwork, just as did Style I (Webster 62). Clearly, insular animal ornament and insular metalwork shared an essential relationship starting from the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period. This fact, considered alongside the documented fact that majestic birds featured prominently in Style II for a number of centuries, suggests that an Anglo-Saxon reader of *The Phoenix* readily would have associated its titular bird—a majestic bird composed of exquisite metalwork—with animal ornament.

Yet another compelling link between the Old English Phoenix and the majestic birds of Anglo-Saxon animal ornament specifically involves the Phoenix’s back. As previously discussed, lines 308-309 refer to this body part as an ornate shield (“The shield above is fashioned with ornaments, over this bird’s back”), the depiction of the back as this particular type of object constituting an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon poet. According to Speake, the shield was the item on which the predatory bird of animal ornament most often appeared, and with the highest degree of quality in terms of its craftsmanship: “Certainly, a scrutiny of the archaeological material of the sixth and seventh centuries at least will show that
the finest and most frequent depictions of the predatory bird, whether raven or eagle, occur on fighting equipment, frequently on shields” (82). In other words, the Phoenix’s body contains the exact item which most regularly and splendidly featured the predatory bird of animal ornament. An Anglo-Saxon reader likely would have noted the parallelism between the Phoenix’s depiction and the insular shields bearing the sumptuous avian decoration.

By virtue of the Old English Phoenix embodying so many of the features associated with Styles I and II animal ornament, the line significantly blurs between it and the ornament. The Phoenix becomes an “ornamental or artistic being,” to borrow the phrase used by McFadden in reference to the creatures of the Exeter Book Riddles (McFadden “Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 336). The resulting creature-object serves a number of similar aims to The Panther’s own creature-object. First of all, the fantastic bird’s link to insular animal ornament—a uniquely Anglo-Saxon art form—and to esteemed insular items of smithwork enables the Anglo-Saxon poet to place his culture’s unique stamp on the Phoenix, an august beast in the Greco-Roman bestiary tradition. The Phoenix now reflects insular aesthetic tastes, not classical ones. The poet thereby essentially appropriates the classical bird and its rich, continental, literary lineage for the Anglo-Saxon people, in effect symbolically according his people an honored place in the West’s history, literature, and tradition. He thus addresses any insular insecurities arising from the Anglo-Saxons’ late conversion to Christianity and from them living in Rome’s cultural shadow.

Second of all, conflating the Phoenix with insular animal ornament allows the poet to actualize the creaturely life depicted in the ornament, fulfilling the Anglo-Saxons’ imaginative vision regarding such stylized beasts. Critical consensus indicates that the Anglo-Saxons had an intense imaginative engagement with zoomorphic forms in fashioned items and architecture—even in cases when the forms simply happened to be an incidental byproduct of the type of
craftsmanship. Such a pronounced sensibility on their parts likely points to an underlying fantasy regarding animal ornament coming to life. The idea that the majestic, predatory bird frequently decorating their fighting equipment in the sixth and seventh centuries could enjoy an actual creaturely life with beastly agency in the world presumably would have been particularly compelling. Itself a majestic bird, the Old English Phoenix proves uniquely situated to bring to life this long-admired ornamental avian. As a creature-object with an ornate shield for its back, the Phoenix even retains its original, vital link to the ornate shields bearing the predatory birds of animal ornament. The Phoenix’s overall depiction consequently affords a vision of this creature-object as one of those esteemed, insular, bird-ornamented shields, granted an actual animal existence in the world.

Its status as a creature-object furthermore enables the Old English Phoenix to participate in the rather unique version of the Christian universe inhabited by the Exeter Book’s Panther and Whale. I have argued that the poet of the Old English Physiologus juxtaposes the Panther—a creature-object that in all likelihood has been fashioned by the most esteemed of smiths, the goldsmith and gold embroiderer—with the Whale, a creature-object that has been forged by the most problematic of smiths, the blacksmith. Considering the two beasts’ respective allegorical significations, the dualistic, Christian world in effect becomes one in which the metalwork of morally-dubious smiths and that of highly-respected smiths vie for the lives and souls of human beings, or at least actively engage in this most fundamental of battles. In other words, the poet, to a greater or lesser degree, figures the battle between Good and Evil, God and the Devil, and Heaven and Hell as the eternal conflict between the workmanship of different types of smiths. The creature-object represented by the Phoenix also readily functions in this context. A positive Christian symbol, its wrought body not only displays the wares of Anglo-Saxon England’s most
esteemed smith—the goldsmith—like the Panther, but also those of two other highly-respected smiths, the jeweler and weapon-smith. If viewed as parts of a larger, unified narrative, the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix* thus offer us a grand vision of the Christian cosmos as the stage on which fantastic beasts embodying the work and skills of Anglo-Saxon England’s most esteemed smiths eternally remain juxtaposed to the monster embodying the work and skills of its most distrusted and feared smith.

2.6 Further Considerations

As discussed, the Panther and Phoenix possess ties to the products of insular artisans, while the Whale appears fundamentally to be linked to Roman craftwork items. The possibility therefore exists that the Anglo-Saxon poet (or possibly poets—see the Phoenix’s section) of the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix* also figures the battle between Good and Evil in this Christian universe as the eternal conflict between insular versus Roman wrought objects. In other words, the poet (or poets) possibly mobilizes the creature-objects represented by the three beasts to allow exquisite Anglo-Saxon pieces to act on the side of God and Heaven while granting impressive Roman items the creaturely agency to further the diabolical interests of the Devil and Hell. At the very least, such a vision would indicate a desire on the part of the poet (or poets) to cast insular products in a far more positive moral light than Roman ones and very well could reflect a general Anglo-Saxon distrust of Roman craftsmanship on moral grounds. Chapter Two will build a case that a high degree of ambivalence on the part of the Anglo-Saxons regarding the moral worth of Roman architectural works did influence the literary depictions of serpents and dragons in various Old English writings, both in original narratives and inspired insular
translations of Latin source texts. The Whale’s original nature as the so-called Asp-Turtle—a markedly serpentine beast—qualifies the Whale as one of these architectural serpents and dragons. In other words, the Whale is joined by a number of other architectural serpents and dragons in the Old English corpus that, together with this monster, potentially constitute the morally-dark, collective Roman shadow of the esteemed insular objects represented by the Panther and Phoenix.
3 CHAPTER 2: THE LATIN-INFLUENCED SERPENTS AND DRAGONS AS ROMAN-INSPIRED ARCHITECTURAL WORKS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented evidence for the conflation of *The Whale’s* titular beast with a Roman prison building, complete with highly-wrought prison doors of grated iron. This infernal monster is not alone in insular narratives in terms of its architectural associations. A number of the Latin-influenced serpents and dragons in Old English writings also possess alternate natures as Roman-inspired buildings and/or individual architectural pieces. The attack on the serpent from the River Bagrada becomes a military assault on the walls of a fortress or castle in the Old English *Orosius*. The line between deadly serpents and palatial columns blurs in the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*. The *Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii enjoys an existence as a prison, complete with locks, bars, and bolts. Similes link the reptilian monsters to the architectural works in the first two accounts; as discussed in my Introduction and Chapter One, Johann Köberl, Peter Clemoes, and Gillian R. Overing individually build cases for a fundamental collapse between vehicle and tenor in Old English figurative relationships. In the latter of the two accounts, the insular writer mobilizes additional strategies to conflate the serpents with the architectural pieces, including an instance of enigmatic diction and an instance of marked parallelism with another key part of the narrative in question. The Anglo-Saxon writer of the third account altogether avoids the utilization of simile, instead relying upon a metonymic relationship, pun, and peculiar manner of death for the dragon to conflate this beast with the particular architectural work. The current chapter looks closely at the individual narratives and physical depictions of the serpents and dragons to gain insight into
the evident tendency on the part of Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to imagine the reptilian
monsters from Latin source texts as the indicated types of Roman-inspired architectural works.

The Whale’s original nature in the Greek bestiary tradition as the Asp-Turtle—a
markedly-serpentine monster—further solidifies the kinship of the Exeter Book’s version of the
Whale with the other architectural serpents and dragons. xxix The Old English narratives
containing the accounts of the Latin-influenced, architectural serpents and dragons thus prove
diverse in terms of medieval genre. In addition to its vital link to the Greco-Latin bestiary
tradition, The Whale of the Exeter Book is also an allegory. The Old English Orosius is based
upon Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII, a history. Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem, the
direct source for Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle, is a work of the mirabilia genre. The Life of
Saint Margaret in Cotton Tiberius A.iii is an example of hagiography (no direct source for this
Old English version of the legend has been firmly established, as will be discussed). Also, The
Wanderer—an original Old English poem whose evocative depiction of a serpentine wall stands
to shed some light on the literary representations presently under consideration—is typically
classified as an elegy and sometimes an allegory (Fulk and Cain 64, 103, 140-141, 159, 181;
Clayton and Magennis The Old English Lives 17-18, 41-71). The architectural serpents and
dragons accordingly appear in the insular versions of the narratives whether these beasts exist as
creatures of the natural world, like the serpents of the Old English Orosius and Alexander’s
Letter to Aristotle, or entities from the pit of Hell, as in the cases of The Life of Saint Margaret’s
dragon and The Whale’s titular monster. In other words, a Latin-influenced serpent’s or dragon’s
origins, terrestrial or infernal, make no difference in terms of its susceptibility to representation
as an architectural creature-object by the Anglo-Saxon translator of the Latin source text.
Only one of the Latin source texts, *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, fundamentally identifies its reptilian monsters’ bodies with architectural works. The Anglo-Saxon writer preserves this intriguing connection, further embellishing it in a number of subtle ways that demonstrate the influence of an insular, artistic/literary sensibility. The remaining source texts (or closely-related analogues, if the Latin original has not been discovered or determined) do not in any manner link the serpents’ and dragons’ bodies to buildings or individual architectural pieces. Consequently, the conflation of reptilian monster with architectural work in the Old English versions appears to be an innovation on the part of the writers and poets. The shared provenance of the source and analogue texts as Latin texts opens the possibility that the very fact of the accounts’ Latin origins had a role in inspiring the Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to depict the reptilian monsters in this fashion. In other words, they perhaps specifically imagined the serpents and dragons from Latin narratives as buildings and individual architectural pieces. As I will demonstrate, the Roman/extra-insular provenance of the buildings and architectural elements leads to the further suggestion that the writers and poets moreover sought to present the reptilian monsters precisely as Roman/extra-insular architectural works. The conflation of the serpents with the palatial columns in *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* very well could have had a degree of influence in terms of this insular literary tendency. The likely connection found by Tony Millns to exist between *The Wanderer’s wyrmlicum fah* wall and the serpentine, herringbone-pattern walls left by the Romans in pre-Migration England points to another, compelling reason why the insular writers and poets would have made the choice to portray their versions of the Latin serpents and dragons in this way (see below and my next section for further discussion of the walls’ significance to the depictions presently under consideration).
Regarding the inclination on the part of Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to merge the
Latin-influenced reptilian monsters with Roman/extra-insular architectural works, scholarly
consensus does indicate that the Anglo-Saxons enjoyed a rich, intense imaginative engagement
with the pre-Migration, Roman architectural works in Anglo-Saxon England. Insular perceptions
of these buildings appear largely to have been positive. For example, Millns builds a case that the
herringbone-pattern walls left in pre-Anglo-Saxon England by the Romans held a considerable
mystique for the Anglo-Saxons, inspiring the depiction of the wyrmlicum fah wall in the original
Old English poem *The Wanderer* (434-36). Leslie Webster offers a detailed discussion of the
insular admiration and respect for the various ancient Roman constructions in Anglo-Saxon
England. After recounting that the Anglo-Saxons “encountered standing towns, monuments,
large estates and villas” in the lands in which they settled, she explains that “when Pope
Gregory’s Christian mission introduced a new vision of Rome and what it was to be a member of
the Roman Church, Anglo-Saxons readily acknowledged this Roman past, and its highly visible
monuments.” This approbation and intrigue for the Roman constructions left its mark in the Old
English poem *The Ruin* in that “its detailed physical description of the Roman city—its red-tiled
roofs, its plastered walls and its baths fed by hot springs—reveals a sharp awareness of the
Roman past that framed the Anglo-Saxon presence.” Webster ultimately reflects upon “the
powerful impression that grand Roman-style stone buildings had on a people who until recently
had known only single-story wooden halls” (47-48, 69). Accordingly, Graham Holderness
comments upon the immense appreciation evidenced by the respective poets of *The Ruin* and *The
Wanderer* for the ancient, decaying, Roman architectural works described in the poems (40-43).

The positive moral valuation of the ancient Roman structures indicated by the existing
criticism would seem to call into question if such architectural works would have been suitable
for conflation with reptilian monsters; after all, the Latin-inspired serpents and dragons are terrifying and deadly creatures, variously subjecting a king and his warriors, a general and his soldiers, a saint, and the souls of the damned to their horrible predations. However, additional pieces of evidence open the possibility that ambivalence colored insular attitudes towards the moral worth of the ancient Roman buildings in Anglo-Saxon England, to the point that the Anglo-Saxons frequently attached a significant degree of moral darkness to these structures. For example, the admiring poets of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* attribute the fantastic craftsmanship of the decaying Roman cities in the two original Old English poems to the giants, an ancient, pagan race of beings (*The Ruin* line 2b; *The Wanderer* line 87a). The amazing smiths who forged the exquisite serpentine sword utilized by Beowulf under the mere to slay Grendel’s mother and sever Grendel’s head similarly belonged to this race. According to Phyllis Portnoy, the sword’s hilt symbolically and effectively passes along the “strife” connected with the original sword throughout the untold ages of its existence (75-77, 85). The weapon’s pagan origins presumably constitute a primary reason for this tainted legacy, and the dangerous moral darkness informing its craftsmanship very likely also stains the decaying Roman structures of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* by virtue of the architectural works’ shared fabled provenance with the sword. God’s destruction of *The Wanderer*’s ancient Roman city (lines 85a-87b) further supports the interpretation that the poet foregrounds the architecture’s problematic, dark, pagan origins even as he admires the astonishing quality of the craftwork.xxx

The respective scholarship of two critics vis-à-vis the symbolic provenance of Heorot’s splendid gold roof in *Beowulf* further supports the interpretation that the Anglo-Saxons in general attributed moral darkness to Roman architectural works. Karl Wintersdorf maintains that Roman “gilded roof tiles” and “gilded gables,” the latter of which allegedly appeared on
buildings in Roman England, likely informed the majestic roof’s depiction in the poem (418-26). Peggy A. Knapp similarly perceives a connection between the noble Germanic mead-hall’s roof and Roman architectural works, furthermore noting the moral darkness thus attending the roof: “The golden roof [of Heorot], not typical of Anglo-Saxon building practices, signals the moral hazard of pride for its association with the palaces of the Germanic gods and the ‘ruthless’ Romans” (90). Here, Knapp clearly indicates that the exquisite roof, by virtue of its ties to Roman architectural structures (as well as to pagan Germanic architectural structures), evokes a sense of danger and moral debasement, both temporal and spiritual. In other words, while the poet obviously greatly admires the roof’s craftsmanship, his wonder and esteem ultimately appear to be tempered by his tacit acknowledgment of this Roman architectural piece’s fundamental, inescapable darkness, the very darkness argued by me to inform the depictions of the Latin-influenced serpents and dragons as creature-objects representing the conflation of living reptilian monsters with Roman-inspired architectural works.

Based upon this evidence in favor of the Anglo-Saxons having perceived moral darkness arising from the problematic moral status of the pre-Migration Roman buildings in Anglo-Saxon England and other key considerations, I will build a larger case that the Latin-influenced reptilian monsters, as creature-objects, represent a response on the part of the insular writers and poets to an underlying Anglo-Saxon fantasy regarding the awesome and mysterious Roman architectural works (and, by extension, any pagan, extra-insular architectural works) experiencing actual predatory lives with an immense level of savage, cruel, monstrous agency in the world. Chapter One considers the Exeter Book’s Panther and Phoenix as heavenly creature-objects that effectively bring to life the Anglo-Saxons’ beloved animal ornament. The architectural creature-objects result from a related but far-darker imaginative engagement with craftwork items, an
engagement in which the danger and moral debasement connected with the evocative Roman
buildings become enabled in the bodies of reptilian monsters to accost human beings and/or their
souls. Despite the serpents’ and dragons’ monstrous bodies and horrible acts, the reptilian
monsters as architectural creature-objects do retain their natures as skillfully-fashioned and, in
many cases, sumptuously-wrought items of craftwork, as the current chapter will demonstrate. In
other words, mobilizing the reptilian monsters as architectural creature-objects allows the writers
and poets to foreground insular anxieties vis-à-vis the darker aspects of the Roman buildings and
individual architectural elements while at the same time giving due expression and regard to the
superbness, wonder, and enticing mystery of the craftsmanship.

No critic has heretofore commented upon the inspiration on the part of Anglo-Saxon
writers and poets to present reptilian monsters as architectural works in Old English reworkings
of Latin source texts. The vast majority of the existing scholarship on Old English serpents and
dragons focuses exclusively upon *Beowulf*’s fire-drake, with critics tending to argue either that
this dragon represents an elemental force of chaos, acts as a devil or other agent of apocalypse,
personifies the dark side of human society, does not symbolize anything at all, or at best
possesses an indeterminant meaning. However, a few critics do agree upon an interpretation
of the fire-drake that technically indicates a link between this reptilian monster and a type of
architecture—in this case, the nautical architecture of the Germanic dragon-prowed ships rather
than Roman-influenced, land-based architecture. Specifically, these critics maintain that the
*Beowulf*-poet depicts the fire-drake as a launched Germanic dragon-prowed ship when the
surviving Geats release this monster’s slain body to the sea near the end of the poem. Their
evidence for this interpretation arises from parallelism between the account of the fire-drake’s
dead body and the much earlier account of Scyld’s funeral ship, and this same instance of
parallelism and additional considerations further prompt Gale Owen-Crocker to perceive Scyld’s funeral ship itself as “a lively and impatient beast, an incipient dragon” (see Magennis 125; Leyerle 91; Shilton 76; Owen-Crocker The Four Funerals 27, 39). In terms of this dissertation’s larger interests, the existing criticism raises the distinct possibility that the dead fire-drake and Scyld’s funeral ship each respond to a general insular fantasy involving the awesome Germanic dragon-prowed ships possessing some degree of an actual animal existence. The evocative draconic, nautical architecture of the Germanic ships hence conceivably had some degree of influence on the insular literary tendency to conflate the Latin-influenced reptilian monsters with Roman-inspired, land-based architectural works.

While Beowulf’s Grendel, like the poem’s fire-drake, has commanded a wealth of critical attention over the years (see Chapter Three for a synopsis of the existing research), no scholar has commented upon the conflation of part of this troll’s anatomy with one of noble Heorot’s constituent architectural elements. Specifically, Chapter Three builds a case that the Beowulf-poet fundamentally identifies the anatomical piece consisting of the monster’s hand, arm, and shoulder with the grand Germanic mead-hall’s gold roof. The anatomical piece’s alternate nature as the exceptional architectural element indicates that Grendel, like the reptilian monsters presently under consideration, possesses ties to land-based architecture. Considering the critical commentary by Wentersdorf and Knapp on the majestic gold roof’s links to Roman architecture, Grendel moreover shares a blurred line in particular with Roman-inspired, land-based architecture, precisely as in the case of these serpents and dragons. The interpretation that a fundamental kinship exists between this troll and these reptilian monsters gains even further support from Francis E. Sandbach’s argument that Grendel is one “of two dragons” (the other dragon being the monster’s ferocious mother) by virtue of Beowulf’s exploits paralleling those
of Siegfried (23). The vital connection between Grendel’s body and Roman-inspired, land-based architecture and this monster’s symbolic status as a dragon importantly raise the possibility that the basic insular literary tendency examined in the current chapter also significantly influenced the Beowulf-poet in his overall depiction of Grendel, despite the fact that the poem itself is not a translation or reworking of a Latin source text. During Chapter Three’s discussion of Grendel’s architectural associations, I further demonstrate that this troll possesses an alternate nature as a prison building, complete with prison-related metalwork. The present chapter will set the stage for Chapter Three’s discussion of this particular aspect of Grendel by exploring the similarities between the Whale and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon, reptilian monsters likewise conflated with prison buildings and the metal implements of such structures.

3.2 A Close Look at The Wanderer’s Serpent-Wall

The Wanderer is an original Old English composition. It appears in the Exeter Book, the Old English poetic compendium containing The Panther, The Whale/Asp-Turtle, and The Phoenix, the three narratives discussed in Chapter One. According to S. A. J. Bradley, the Exeter Book’s compiler demonstrates a “taste for bestiary material” (S. Bradley 353). While no instances of actual serpents or dragons occur in The Wanderer, this poem does feature a highly-wrought wall that merges architectural piece with living serpents. This particular wall’s larger context in terms of Anglo-Saxon material culture stands to shed light on the choice of Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to conflate the Latin-influenced serpents and dragons with Roman (or at least extra-insular), land-based architectural works. The current section hence will lay the foundation for a rich consideration of the insular attitudes and ideas likely informing the
depictions of the Old English Physiologus’ Whale/Asp-Turtle, Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s serpents, Old English *Orosius*’ serpent, and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii as Roman-inspired, land-based architectural works.

Utilizing a tone considered by a number of critics to be elegiac (Fulk and Cain 181), *The Wanderer*’s speaker laments the transitory nature of all earthly things. He in particular deeply regrets the ancient destruction of a marvelous city that had teemed with principled, prosperous, joyful inhabitants. Of all the city’s superb buildings, only one architectural piece remains intact and standing, the wall. The speaker’s brief, enigmatic description of the remarkable architectural piece reads as follows: “Stondeð nu on laste / leofre duguþe / weal wundrum heah, / wyrmlicum fah” (lines 97a-98b).XXXIII These lines may be translated as follows, for the moment leaving one key phrase in the original Old English: “Now amongst the old footsteps of the good, honorable, and dear people remains a wonderfully-high wall, wyrmlícum fah.” *Weal* specifically signifies “a wall that is made, a wall of a building, of a town,” *wundrum* means “wonderfully,” and *heah* denotes “high”; hence, “weal wundrum heah” essentially refers to “a wonderfully-high wall” (Bosworth-Toller Bosworth-Toller “weal” s.v. “weall” I; s.v. “wundrum” s.v. “wundor” III; “heah”). I will demonstrate that the Old English *Orosius*’ writer notably also uses the noun *weal* when depicting his version of the serpent from the River Bagrada as a fortress or castle, and the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s writer describes his version of the serpents fought by Alexander and the Greek army as *heah*, specifically when presenting these reptilian monsters as ornate columns. In other words, the physical descriptions of the serpents in the two narratives join the physical description of *The Wanderer*’s serpent-wall (see below for the evidence of this wall’s fundamental link to serpents) in bringing to light an association in the Anglo-Saxon
literary imagination between reptilian monsters and “walls” and other types of “high” (i.e., tall) architectural pieces.

Evidence for the wall’s link to serpents in The Wanderer arises from the enigmatic phrase “wyrmlicum fah.” Determining the precise meaning of this phrase has led to considerable scholarly debate because of the number of interpretive possibilities for the phrase’s first element, wyrmlicum. Bosworth and Toller define this word as “the body of a serpent or of a worm.” Accordingly, the first element, wyrm, either can signify “a reptile, serpent” or “a creeping insect, a worm,” and lic refers to “a body.” Fah possesses the following semantic range: “colored, stained, dyed, tinged, shining, variegated” (Bosworth-Toller “wyrmlic”; “wyrm” I, II; “lic”; “fah” s.v. “fag”). Based upon its semantic range and current context, fah indicates that the wall’s decoration in some way significantly involves wyrm-bodies. Scholars have disagreed both upon the type of creature the poet references here and which aspect of this creature’s body informs the wall’s exquisite craftsmanship. Tony Millns, in his article-length study of The Wanderer’s wall, discusses the various critical interpretations, demonstrating that the majority of scholars argue for a serpent-motif of some sort—not worm- or insect-related design elements—lending this architectural piece its noteworthy ornamentation (434-36). The likelihood of this interpretation constituting the correct one gains a degree of additional support from the fact that, as George Speake explains in his discussion of the serpent’s role in Anglo-Saxon aesthetic design, “in the Anglo-Saxon ornamental zoo, the serpent or snake is by far the commonest creature” (85-92). In other words, the link in Anglo-Saxon material culture between crafted items in general and “the serpent or snake” increases the probability that The Wanderer’s Anglo-Saxon poet intended for “wyrmlicum fah” to signal, at the very least, the presence of serpentine ornamentation on or in this architectural piece.
Millns concurs with the general consensus that *The Wanderer*’s mysterious wall features some type of serpent-motif. Even more importantly, Millns presents a convincing hypothesis regarding the poet’s possible influences in depicting such a “serpentine” wall, a hypothesis bearing considerable consequences for my investigation into the inspiration on the part of Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to blur the line between reptilian monsters and Roman/extra-insular, land-based architectural works. Specifically, Millns posits that *wyrmlicum fah* precisely refers to the kind of serpentine ornamentation found on “Roman herring-bone fabric walls, which other Anglo-Saxons obviously found striking and memorable.” The Anglo-Saxons would have been familiar with these intricate architectural pieces and the pieces’ distinctive craftsmanship from the pre-Migration Roman walls in Anglo-Saxon England. Stating that “there exists convincing independent evidence that herring-bone suggested serpents to the Anglo-Saxons,” he explains that the masonry involves “the zig-zag patterns created by laying thin bricks or tiles along opposite diagonals on each alternate horizontal course [which] resemble a series of snakes climbing the whole wall. The decorative motif is not on the wall, but more strikingly in the wall, part of its very fabric” (434-36). In other words, when the Anglo-Saxons viewed these particular Roman relics, they most likely imaginatively perceived the walls’ evocative craftsmanship as actual snakes or serpents slithering skyward over the walls’ surfaces.

In terms of this chapter’s larger interests, the imaginatively-perceived fusion of snakes or serpents and Roman architectural piece in each of the “striking and memorable” Roman herringbone-pattern walls raises the possibility that *The Wanderer*’s wall, as the literary representative of these structures, exists in the world of the poem as a conflated object-creature, restless in the undulating movements of its constituent ophidians while at the same time remaining a remarkably-durable architectural work from a people whose skills at architectural
design and masonry far exceeded those of the Anglo-Saxons. The wall’s link to the Roman herringbone-pattern walls (Millns 434-36) and status as an object-creature moreover open the door to this wall effectively responding to an Anglo-Saxon fantasy of the darkly-mysterious Roman architectural relics enjoying actual lives as robustly-energetic snakes. Importantly, the conflation of living, perpetually-moving serpents or snakes with Roman architectural piece in the figure of The Wanderer’s wall and the cultural work likely performed by this material artifact together potentially indicate a kinship between the wyrmlicum fah wall and the various dual-natured serpents and dragons under investigation in the current chapter. With respect to these other reptilian monsters, the wall simply presents itself to the world according to the opposite side of the dual nature shared by them all. To state this another way, The Wanderer’s wall appears in its narrative as a Roman architectural piece while at the same time betraying some evidence of its alternate nature as living nest of snakes or serpents. Inversely, the serpents and dragons of the other narratives appear as living creatures while at the same time offering subtle indications as to their alternate, inanimate natures as Roman/extra-insular buildings and/or individual architectural pieces (Chapter Three builds a case for a similar type of inverse relationship between Beowulf’s wyrmfah sword and Sigmund Episode’s worm).

Notably, the interpretation that the poet accords his wall such a significant and essential aliveness and does so to the specified ends gains an additional degree of support from this architectural piece’s probable link to Styles I and II of Anglo-Saxon animal ornament. As discussed in this dissertation’s Introduction and Chapter One, both styles routinely featured energetic depictions of a wide array of highly-stylized beasts (see Webster 14-25; Kendrick 1; Knapp 85-86; Clemoes 91), with Chapter One ultimately building a case that the Exeter Book’s Panther and Phoenix, as creature-objects, respond to an insular fantasy of the animal ornament’s
beasts enjoying actual beastly lives and a superlative degree of creaturely agency in the world. *The Wanderer’s* wall, as an object creature representing the conflation of exquisite wall with living ophidians, responds to similar insular fantasies vis à vis the animal ornament: Speake, as previously mentioned, attests to “the serpent or snake” appearing more frequently than any other creature in Anglo-Saxon animal ornament (85-92), and Millns’ description of the patterns of *The Wanderer’s* *wyrmlicum fah* wall as “a series of snakes climbing the whole wall” (434-36) calls to mind the attested kinetic wildness and visceral presence of insular animal ornament’s beasts (again, see this dissertation’s Introduction and Chapter One and Webster 14-25; Kendrick 1; Knapp 85-86; Clemoes 91). In other words, the wall’s probable ties to Anglo-Saxon animal ornament effectively reinforce the same sort of creaturely aliveness on the part of this architectural piece that arises from the connection Millns finds between it and the pre-Migration Roman herringbone-pattern walls in Anglo-Saxon England. The wall’s likely ties to the animal ornament thus support the wall in its performance of the cultural work involving the Anglo-Saxon fantasies directed towards the herringbone-pattern walls, further strengthening the wall’s kinship to the various serpents and dragons under investigation in the current chapter.

Ultimately, the imaginatively-perceived merging of living snakes or serpents with Roman architectural piece in each of the “striking and memorable” pre-Migration Roman herringbone-pattern walls in Anglo-Saxon England (Millns 434-36) raises the possibility that these particular material artifacts significantly influenced the Anglo-Saxon writers and poets of *The Whale/Asp-Turtle*, Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*, Old English *Orosius*, and Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *The Life of Saint Margaret* in their collective choice to conflate the serpents and dragons from their Latin source texts with Roman/extra-insular buildings and/or specific architectural elements of such buildings. In other words, these evocative architectural relics likely not only
inspired the depiction of *The Wanderer’s* wall (Millns 434-36), but also the depictions of the four narratives’ reptilian monsters as the indicated creature-objects. Of these reptilian monsters, the Old English *Orosius*’ serpent, by virtue of the conflation of parts of its body with the “walls” of a fortress or castle, evidences the most explicit direct influence by the Roman herringbone-pattern walls in terms of its overall depiction; accordingly, this serpent’s individual section will take a closer look at the connections between the respective depictions of this reptilian monster and *The Wanderer’s* wall. The next section will demonstrate that the serpents’ depictions in the Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s Latin source text potentially also had a role in originating or otherwise shaping the specific literary sensibility calling for reptilian monsters’ alternate natures as Roman-inspired, land-based architectural works in Old English translations/reworkings of Latin source texts.

3.3 *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle’s Serpents as Exquisite Columns*

The Old English *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*—a translation of the Latin *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*—occurs in the codex variously referred to as BL, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, the Nowell Codex, and the *Beowulf* Manuscript. Unlike the Exeter Book, which solely functions as a poetic compendium, this collection features both Old English poetic works (*Beowulf* and *Judith*) and Old English prose works (*The Life of Saint Christopher* and *The Wonders of the East*, in addition to the narrative currently under consideration). As mentioned in the previous section, S. A. J. Bradley maintains that the Exeter Book’s compiler seemingly demonstrates a “taste for bestiary material”; a number of critics similarly have posited that the selection criteria observed by the *Beowulf* Manuscript’s compiler in some way specifically
involved the presence of monsters in each of this codex’s individual narratives, with Bradley briefly discussing “the compiler’s interest in the fabulous, the exotic[,] and the monstrous” and Fulk and Cain stating that “Cotton Vitellius A. xv would appear to be a collection devoted to monsters” (S. Bradley 353, 407; Fulk and Cain 26, 161). The prime importance of the fantastic beasts and monsters to the Beowulf Manuscript as indicated by these critics supports the general interpretation that these creatures—like the Exeter Book’s Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix—have been positioned to perform important cultural work in terms of their respective literary representations.

The narrative presently under consideration, like its Latin source text, is in the form of a letter allegedly written to Aristotle by Alexander the Great, detailing the young Macedonian king’s adventures throughout India’s fabled wilds. Over the course of his travels, Alexander and his army encounter a multitude of strange beasts and monsters. A number of these creatures are humanoid, while others essentially exist as gigantic versions of normal animals. One of the Greek army’s most harrowing experiences with the continent’s bizarre fauna occurs when they set up camp by a river. After the men light campfires, terrible serpents descend upon them in two distinct waves, the account variously referring to these creatures as “nædran” (this noun’s singular form denoting “any kind of serpent, adder, viper”) and “wyrmas” (this noun’s singular form signifying “a reptile, serpent”) (Bosworth-Toller “nædran” s.v. “nædre”; “wyrmas” s.v. “wyrm” I). Alexander watches in amazement as his soldiers battle the two waves of deadly ophidians, the young Macedonian king avidly noting such details as the creatures’ anatomical oddities, strange manner of movement over the landscape, striking colors, monstrous sizes, and noxious breath.
Regarding this chapter’s specific interests, the Old English account blurs the line between the second-wave serpents’ bodies and particular architectural pieces. The relevant description by Alexander reads as follows in the original Old English: “Þa hæfdon tu heafdo & eac sume hæfdon þreo. Wæron hie wunderlicre micelnisse, wæron hie swa greate swa columnan ge eac sume uphyrran & gryttran …” (“They had two heads and some moreover had three. They were wondrously big in terms of size, they were as large and thick as columns and some moreover proved uphyrran and larger and thicker …”). In this description, a simile lends certain qualities of the vehicle—the “columns” (Bosworth-Toller “columnan” s.v. “columne”)—to the tenor, the serpents’ bodies. These second-wave serpents specifically prove as “greate” as columns. Bosworth and Toller document the following semantic range for this Old English adjective: “great, large, thick, coarse” (“greate” s.v. “great”). All of the listed senses denote either a degree of physical magnitude or type of texture that readily can fit the adjective’s present context, considering that the adjective is describing columns. The simile, at is most explicit level of figuration, clearly represents an indexical attempt on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer to impress upon us the amazing physical dimensions of the second-wave serpents’ massive, long, and thick bodies and, possibly, to indicate that the bodies additionally are coarse like certain of these architectural pieces.

The simile moreover signals an essential connection or relationship between the second-wave serpents and columns that exceeds modern expectations for this figure of speech. As discussed in this dissertation’s Introduction and Chapter One, Johann Köberl, Peter Clemoes, and Gillian R. Overing each build compelling cases for a collapsing of the conceptual space between vehicle and tenor in Old English figurative relationships. Two features of the narrative presently under consideration accordingly indicate additional strategies on the part of the Anglo-Saxon
writer to conflate the ophidians with the named architectural pieces. First of all, the writer subsequently uses the comparative adjective *uphyrran* to describe the second-wave serpents’ bodies. This comparative adjective’s uninflected form, *upheah*, possesses the following semantic range: “tall, lofty, upright.” The instances of usage provided by Bosworth and Toller for the nonfigurative senses of *upheah* specifically and explicitly do involve height, verticality, and perpendicularly to the horizontal plane of the ground. For example, the lexicographers include the following untranslated instance of usage for “upheah” as “tall, lofty”: “Da trio meahte beon hundteontiges fota upheah” (“The tree might be hundreds of feet tall”). Regarding *upheah*’s sense as “upright,” Bosworth and Toller provide this untranslated instance of usage, also connected with trees: “Dam treowum de him gecynde bǐp upheah to standanne” (“The nature of trees is to stand upright”) (Bosworth-Toller “upheah” I, III; “up” III; “heah”). Trees epitomize the qualities of height, verticality, and perpendicularity to the horizontal plane of the ground, while also being things that are fixed in terms of placement. By virtue of *upheah*’s semantic range and connection to items that remain fixed in place, *uphyrran* reinforces the image of the second-wave serpents as stationary, vertical columns.

This interpretation of *uphyrran* in its current context gains further support from *upheah*’s remaining two occurrences in *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*. In keeping with the instances of usage provided by Bosworth and Toller, it describes two marvelous trees, clearly signifying their incredible height, vertical orientation, and perpendicularity to the ground: “Ponne wæren đa halgan trio sunnan & monan on middum þæm oðrum treowum meahton hie beon hundteontiges fota *upheah*, & eac þær wæron ôþre treow wunderlicre heanisse ða hatað Indeos Bebronas” (“There were the sacred trees of the Sun and Moon in the middle of the other trees, they might have been hundreds of feet tall, and also there were other trees of wondrous highness that the
Indians call Bebronas”). Finally, *upheah* appears in connection with the unusually tall bishop who leads Alexander to the extremely tall Trees of the Sun and Moon: “Wæs he se bisceop X fota *upheah*, & eall him wæs se lichoma sweart buton þæm toþum ða wæron white” (“The bishop was ten feet tall, and all of his body was black except for the teeth which were white”). Once again, *upheah* denotes remarkable tallness, height, verticality, and perpendicularity to the plane of the ground, not length on the horizontal plane, an orientation and mode of measurement more readily applicable to serpents. While the bishop is not fixed in place like a tree or a column, the account notably does associate him with the poem’s phenomenally-*upheah* trees.

For Bosworth and Toller, *uphyrran* apparently does indicate that the second-wave serpents are “taller” or “loftier” than a number of the remaining ophidians in the wave: they include the description presently under consideration as one of the instances of usage for Definition I of *upheah*. Unfortunately, the lexicographers do not translate the original sentence so as to give us an idea of just how they think these incredibly-long creatures that glide over the horizontal plane of the ground could qualify as “tall” or “lofty.” One possibility is that the Anglo-Saxon writer is conveying that the anterior parts of the serpents’ sinuous bodies are thrust high into the air, suspended and ready to strike; in this way, a sizable percentage of the serpents’ bodies in effect would be “tall,” and their terrifying heads would occupy a “lofty” position. Potential support for such an interpretation arises from another, untranslated instance of usage for *upheah* by Bosworth and Toller, but for Definition II, which involves this word’s figurative senses of “lofty, noble”: “Đa genam Sanctus Martinus hine be his handa and *upheah* aræde” (“Then Saint Martinus took him by his hand and raised him *upright*”). If a man can be said to have been pulled gently *upheah* (“upright”), a serpent could be said to pull part of its own length *upheah* (“upright”). Whether or not this is the case with the second-wave serpents, the fact
remains that *uphyrran* reinforces the image of these reptilian monsters as stationary, vertical, tall columns, thereby momentarily superseding or suspending the expected image of them as long, sinuous ophidians.

The other feature of the narrative indicating an additional strategy on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer to conflate the ophidians with the named architectural pieces is the marked parallelism between the account of the serpents and that of the amazing treasures of King Porus’ palace. The acquisitive Alexander enters the palace and sees its myriad of masterfully-wrought items earlier in the narrative. Amid all of the exquisite objects, the young Macedonian king immediately finds his attention drawn to the grand presence of a large number of ornate gold columns. The description of the columns reads as follows in the original Old English:

> Þær wæron gyldene columnan swiðe micle & trumlice & fæste, ďa wæron unmetlice greate heanisse upp, ðara wæs þe we gerimdon be þæm gemete CCCC.” […] … þa geseah ic gyldenne wingeard trumlicne & fæstlicne, & þa twigo his hongodon geond þa columnan.

There were golden columns exceedingly great, firm, solid, and stable; they were immensely great in height; we determined them to be four hundred in number. […] … then I saw a stable and firm golden vineyard, and then that the branches hung about the columns.

Here, Old English *columnan* twice signifies the columns. The two occurrences constitute the only other instances of this word in any of its inflected forms in the narrative, which points to a connection between the second-wave serpents and King Porus’ sumptuous architectural pieces.
Additional, striking similarity of diction and phrasing between the two accounts supports the interpretation that parallelism links the accounts. The palatial columns qualify as “micle” (“great”), just as “micelnisse” (“greatness”) marks the columnar serpents. Also, the architectural pieces and monstrous ophidians all are “greate” (“great, large, thick, coarse”). Finally, in the same manner that the second-wave serpents prove “uphyrran,” the palatial columns are “heanisse upp.” Heanisse means “highness, height,” and upp signifies “up”; hence, in heanisse upp appear the lexical and semantic components of upheah, simply with a different ordering (Bosworth-Toller “micle” s.v. “micel” I, III; “micelnisse” s.v. “micelness”; “greate” s.v. “great”; “heanisse” s.v. “heah-”; “upp” s.v. “up”). All of the Old English words—columnan, micle/micelnisse, greate, and uphyrran/heanisse upp—even occur in the same sentence in each account, delivering such an immediate, specific image that the description of the columnar serpents virtually could be substituted for that of the columns, and vice versa. The two sentences follow, for a ready comparison:

“Wæron hie wunderlicre micelnisse, wæron hie swa greate swa columnan ge eac sume uphyrran & gryttran. …” (The columnar serpents)

“Þær wæron gyldene columnan swiðe micle & trumlce & fæste, ða wæron unmetlice greate heanisse upp. …” (The palatial columns)

The blurred line between the second-wave serpents and the ornate gold columns of King Porus’ palace becomes apparent when we consider the two accounts alongside one another. The following description of a number of the deadly serpents accordingly hints at a link to gold on the part of the reptilian monsters: “sumum þonne scinan þa scilla & lixtan swylce hie wæron
gyldne þonne mon onlocode” (“on some the scales shone and glittered as if they were golden when men looked upon them”) (Bosworth-Toller “gyldne” s.v. “gylden”).

The Anglo-Saxon writer’s source text—Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem—likewise figuratively links the serpents to columns and features specific strategies to conflate the deadly ophidians with the architectural pieces. While the merging between serpent and column in Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle does not qualify as an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer, the fine details of the two writers’ overall strategies ultimately differ in certain subtle yet key ways that reflect the writers’ particular cultural sensibilities regarding the qualities of fine craftsmanship. The description of the columnar serpents in Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem reads as follows: “Tum ad horam noctis tertiam aliquam uobis sperautibus requiem binorum ternorumque capitum cristati serpentes Indici yenerunt columnarum crassitudine consimiles, aliquanto proceriores” (“Then in the third hour of the night we wanted to rest somewhat when serpents of India with two or three crested heads came, similar to columns in thickness and density, rather long”). Here, columnarum signifies “columns,” and crassitudine (“thickness, density”) clearly corresponds to Old English greate (“great, large, thick, coarse”) (Lewis and Short “columnarum” s.v. “columen” I.A; “crassitudine” s.v. “crassitudo” I).

The Latin word that corresponds to Old English uphyrran/upheah (“tall, lofty, upright”) in the above sentence is procerus, which possesses the following semantic range: “high, tall, long, extended, large” (Lewis and Short “proceriores” s.v. “procerus” I, II). Procerus’ semantic range aligns closely with—but is not identical to—that of Old English upheah, the two words diverging in that the Latin adjective can signify length while its counterpart appears limited to denoting vertical spans. Upheah’s stricter semantic range does suggest that the Anglo-Saxon translator has chosen to distance the serpents from the concept of length or span along a
horizontal axis in order to actualize these reptilian monsters more fully as columns. This interpretation gains further support from the fact that the writer would have had ready recourse to Old English *lang*, an adjective with a semantic range aligning more fully with that of *procerus* and that commonly was used in Old English writings: *lang* can mean both “long” and “tall” (Bosworth-Toller). In other words, the translator could have used an adjective that would have allowed him to follow the source text’s lead by leaving a bit of ambiguity regarding whether or not the serpents are long or upright/tall, but he seemingly wanted firmly to establish the dire ophidians as the latter.

The account of Porus’ palace with its golden columns likewise appears in *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, and the parallelism between this account and that of the columnar serpents does blur the line between the exquisite architectural pieces and the reptilian monsters. Unlike in the Old English version of the narrative, the adjective denoting the golden columns’ spans is not part of the parallelism. Alexander’s description of the exquisite architectural pieces reads as follows in the original Latin: “Ipsam regiam urbem Pori domumque armis invasimus, in qua columnas aureas solidasque ingenti crassitudine atque altitudine cum suis capitellis admodum triginta numeravimus …” (“I entered Porus’ royal palace in which there were great solid gold columns thick and high with capitals numbering as much as thirty …”). The word corresponding to Old English *heanisse upp* is not a derivative of *procerus*; instead, the Latin writer uses *altitudine*, which means “height, altitude,” its semantic range aligning perfectly with that of *heanisse upp* (Lewis and Short “altitude” I). That *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* does not utilize versions of the same word to signify the columns’ and serpents’ respective spans results in a less powerful connection between the architectural pieces and the deadly ophidians than is evident in the Old English text, specifically regarding the descriptions of the spans.
The Latin writer, however, ultimately does conflate the serpents with the palatial columns in a striking way, one that the Old English translation does not preserve. As mentioned above, the golden columns have “capitellis admodum triginta numeravimus” (“capitals numbering as much as thirty”). Regarding architecture, Latin capitellum signifies “the capital of a column”; a “capital” is “the head or top of a column or pillar” (Lewis and Short “capitellis” s.v. “capitellum” II; OED “capital” sb.1.1). In other words, Porus’ columns have up to thirty decorative “heads” or “tops” apiece. The columnar serpents in turn possess “binorum ternorumque capitum cristati serpents” (“two or three crested heads”). Capitum refers to “the head, of men and animals” and shares the same root with capitellum, which also can be “a small head” (Lewis and Short “capitum” s.v. “caput” I; “capitellum” I). The Latin text thus presents the reader with an image of exquisite columns and columnar serpents, all with “heads.” That the serpents have as many as “three each” of these heads makes for an even stronger connection between reptilian monster and architectural piece, considering that the golden columns possess up to “thirty” heads apiece, thirty of course being a multiple of three (Lewis and Short “ternorumque” s.v. “terni” I; “triginta”). The Old English Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle does not mention the capitals or heads of Porus’ columns.

Cultural differences in aesthetic tastes regarding the qualities of fine architecture account for the subtle differences in terms of strategy on the parts of the two writers when conflating the serpents with columns. In line with Alexander’s descriptions of the serpents and the palatial columns in Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle, immense height in architectural works evidently greatly impressed the Anglo-Saxons. As previously mentioned, The Wanderer’s speaker admires the fact that the serpent-wall is “wundrum heah” (“wonderfully-high”). The adjective denoting the serpent-wall’s tallness—heah—notably is the same one featured in the serpents’ description
(uphyrran) and golden columns’ description (heanisse upp) in *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*. Gale Owen-Crocker, when discussing Scyld’s funeral ship in *Beowulf*, also attests to the importance the Anglo-Saxons placed on height in architectural works of various kinds: “The standard towers ‘high’, and so, by implication, does the mast, in a visible manifestation of Scyld’s earthly magnificence; Hrothgar’s hall and Beowulf’s barrow will also tower splendidly high” (Owen-Crocker *The Four Funerals* 27). The evidence from *The Wanderer* and *Beowulf* lends considerable support to the interpretation that *uphyrran*, when describing the second-wave serpents, attributes a culturally-esteemed quality of fine architecture to these creatures. The Latin writer of *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* borrows from his culture’s aesthetic tastes by paralleling the serpents’ heads with the “heads” or “tops” of the palatial columns: according to T. D. Kendrick, a “contribution of Roman provincial art to the decorative systems of the Dark Ages was the animal-head terminal” (30).

Despite the Anglo-Saxon writer’s foregrounding of the serpent-columns’ tallness, loftiness, and uprightness and his removal of the source text’s oblique references to the so-called animal-head terminal, he refrains from imposing any explicit Anglo-Saxon design elements onto the reptilian monsters’ bodies. The second-wave serpents in *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle* consequently remain linked to extra-insular gold columns. The writer’s approach contrasts with that of the poets (or possibly singular poet xxxvi) of *The Panther* and *The Phoenix*, who accord the bodies of the Panther and Phoenix specific qualities of Styles I and II of insular animal ornament and ultimately conflate the two amazing animals with exquisite insular objects. The poets, by doing so, appropriate the two classical beasts, along with the beasts’ positive allegorical symbolism, for the Anglo-Saxon people (see Chapter One). The second-wave serpents of *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle* are monsters, not holy, benevolent beasts like the Panther and
Phoenix. By virtue of these reptilian monsters appearing in an insular translation of a Latin narrative and demonstrating ties to extra-insular architectural pieces, the serpents’ representation probably is informed by the problematic moral status of the pre-Migration Roman buildings existing in Anglo-Saxon England. Accordingly, these creature-objects speak to an underlying insular fantasy regarding the awesome, compellingly-mysterious, and yet morally-dubious Roman architectural works enjoying actual predatory lives with an immense level of savage, creaturely agency in the world. Considering that the Latin source text also offers a vision of the serpents as architectural creature-objects, it conceivably had a role in inspiring the insular writers of the Old English Orosius, The Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret to originate their own conflations of Latin-influenced serpents and dragons with Roman/extra-insular land-based architectural works.

3.4 The Old English Orosius’ Serpent as a Fortress or Castle

The Old English Orosius is an insular translation and significant reworking of Paulus Orosius’ Historia adversum paganos, which, as Janet Bately explains, itself was “written in the second decade of the fifth century at the suggestion of St. Augustine” and “achieved very great popularity in the Middle Ages.” William of Malmesbury cites King Alfred as the author of the Old English version, but recent scholars dispute this claim on a number of grounds. Fulk and Cain do agree that “the method of translation is nonetheless similar to Alfred’s” (Fulk and Cain 64-65; Bately Introduction lv, lxxiii, lxxxvii, xciii). In keeping with Book IV of his seven-book Latin source text, the Anglo-Saxon writer relates the story of the fight to the death between a monstrously-long, nigh-invulnerable “serpent” (Bosworth-Toller “nædre”; “wryma” s.v.
“wyrm” I) and the Roman army under General Regulus near the banks of Africa’s River Bagrada. After learning that arrows cannot penetrate the nightmarish creature’s scales, Regulus commands his men to utilize a ballista, which is “an ancient military engine, resembling a bow stretched with bows and tongs, used to hurl stones and other missiles” (OED). The soldiers manage to immobilize the serpent by using the weapon and subsequently slay it. The men then remove the dead ophidian’s 120-foot-long hide, transport the hide to Rome, and display it there as a trophy.

The Anglo-Saxon writer diverges from his Latin source text by conflating the serpent with a specific type of building, complete with nearly-impenetrable walls. The relevant sentences from the Old English account read as follows:

\[ \text{Þa het he mid Þæm palistas, mid Þæm hie weallas bræcon, Þonne hie on fæstenne fuhton, Þæt hie mon mid Þæm Þwyres on wurpe. Þa wearð hie mid anum wirpe an rib forod, Þæt hio siðan mægen ne hæfde hie to gescildanne, ac raðe Þæs hio wearð ofslagen. …} \]

Then he [i.e., Regulus] commanded the men to utilize the ballistas, with which they break through walls when they fight their way into a fortress (or castle), and cast against it [i.e., the serpent] from an angle. Then it happened that, with one cast, one rib was broken, so that it afterwards it [i.e., the serpent] did not have the power to defend itself, but quickly was slain. …

Here, the writer utilizes an implicit simile to merge the deadly serpent with a “fæstenne” (see this dissertation’s Introduction for discussion of Köberl, Clemoes, and Overing regarding the veritable conflation of vehicle with tenor signaled by figurative relationships in Old English
writings). Bosworth and Toller document the following semantic range for *faestenne*: “a fastness, fortress, bulwark, place of strength, a castle, wall.” Either *fortress* or *castle* clearly qualifies as the intended sense of the Old English word in its present context considering that, according to the narrator, the soldiers typically use ballistas to “weallas bræcon” (“break the walls”) of a “fæstene.” The *faestenne*, as the implicit simile’s vehicle, lends to the tenor, the serpent’s body, the massive size and powerful resistance to damage of a fortress or castle. The serpent’s scales and/or hide in turn become likened to *weallas* (“walls”) (Bosworth-Toller “faestenne” s.v. “faesten” II; “bræcon” s.v. “brecan” I; “weallas” s.v. “weall” I). Just as the army has been able to overcome fortresses and castles by means of the ballistas, so are the soldiers able to breach the reptilian monster’s defenses and destroy the creature. In other words, the serpent essentially suffers the fate of a besieged building. I will demonstrate that *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A. iii likewise undergoes destruction in the manner of a building and that this feature of the narrative also is an innovation on the part of the particular Anglo-Saxon writer.

The Latin version of the Roman army’s battle with the serpent in Book IV of *Historia adversum paganos* does not include mention of a fortress or castle or any other type of building. The account does feature a wall, but the Latin writer clearly does not conflate this architectural piece with the deadly ophidian. Instead, Regulus orders that a stone be taken from a nearby wall and hurled by the ballista at the monster: “… balistas deferri imperavit, per quas murale saxum spinae …” (“… he commanded them to bring the ballistas, with the objective of dashing a large stone from a nearby wall into the creature’s backbone …”). The “murale” (“wall”) here is not the wall of a fortress or castle under siege: it is the source of the “saxum” (“large stone”) that the men hurl at the serpent with the military engine (Lewis and Short “murale” I; “saxum” I). Only
in the Anglo-Saxon writer’s imagination does the original wall become the “weallas” (“walls”) of a “fæstenne” (“fortress” or “castle”) under siege, not the source of ammunition for the siege itself. Also, only in his conception does the original wall essentially become a part of the beast’s anatomy; the wall shares no blurred line whatsoever with the reptilian monster’s body in the Latin account, especially considering that a stone from it proves to be the instrument of the creature’s demise. In short, the Anglo-Saxon writer essentially has merged the wall from the Latin account with the serpent’s body, effectively creating a creature-object where one previously did not exist.

A creature-object representing the conflation of a *wyrm* (“serpent”) with a building that has *weallas* (“walls”), the Old English *Orosius*’ reptilian monster finds its reflection in *The Wanderer*’s wall, an architectural piece similarly merging *wyrm*-bodies with a *weal* (“wall”). Kindred entities in Old English literature, the serpent of the River Bagrada and *wyrmlicum fah* wall with respect to each other simply foreground the alternate aspect of the dual-natured entity represented by the formula ROMAN ARCHITECTURAL WORK + REPTILIAN MONSTER = CONFLATED CREATURE-OBJECT, while still signaling the existence of the unforegrounded aspect. In other words, the Old English *Orosius*’ serpent likely presents itself as a serpent while betraying a hint of its alternate nature as a walled building, whereas *The Wanderer*’s wall inversely presents itself as the named architectural piece while displaying clear evidence of its alternate nature as a den of snakes. By virtue of this inverse relationship, the Old English *Orosius*’ serpent probably responds to an insular fantasy of the perceived serpents of the pre-Migration Roman herringbone pattern walls in Anglo-Saxon England enjoying actual beastly lives with a high degree of creaturely agency in the landscapes of the world. Notably, such a link between the Old English *Orosius*’ reptilian monster and the Roman herringbone-pattern walls
would indicate that the insular fantasies directed towards these pre-Migration architectural pieces proved most dark.

3.5 *The Life of Saint Margaret’s Dragon as a Splendid Idol and Prison Building*

Despite its obscure origins, the Saint Margaret legend enjoyed immense popularity throughout the medieval period, with Greek and Latin versions circulating widely (Clayton and Magennis 3). Consequently, a total of three Old English versions of the tale have survived to the modern day: the rich accounts in Cotton Tiberius A.iii and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303, along with *The Old English Martyrology*’s brief synopsis of this saint’s life. The two extensive Old English versions accord with the various Latin and Greek accounts by introducing and subsequently discussing the horrific dragon—in reality, a transmogrified devil—that accosts the titular heroine in a prison at the behest of another devil (Clayton and Magennis Introduction 4-6). A key way in which the dragon’s depiction in Cotton Tiberius A.iii differs from that in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 is that the writer mobilizes a number of strategies, subtle and overt, to present the infernal dragon as a conflated creature-object. Specifically, the writer in Cotton Tiberius A.iii offers a joint vision of this hellish beast as a splendid idol, fashioned from separate smithwork parts, and a prison building. As shortly will become evident, the writer’s inspiration for merging his dragon with a sumptuous “heathen” idol clearly arose from this dragon’s representation in texts in the line of transmission posited by Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis for Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s version of *The Life of Saint Margaret*. However, the Anglo-Saxon writer apparently innovates when he brings architectural associations to bear on his portrayal of the dragon, considering that the texts in the posited line of transmission—as well
as those in other lines—do not in any manner conflate the monster with an architectural work. xxxix

When he introduces the dragon into the narrative, the Anglo-Saxon writer utilizes a series of similes that serve to conflate the different parts of the deadly creature’s head with specific items of smithwork. The monster’s teþ, or “teeth,” therefore have an existence as objects of “asniden isen,” or “cut iron,” the image of worked, sharp iron immediately calling to mind the blacksmith’s art. Likewise, “searagym”—“skillfully-cut and -set gems”—constitute the entirety of the beast’s “egan,” or “eyes.” While Bosworth and Toller simply define searugim as “a curious gem, precious stone,” the lexicographers establish the following semantic range for searu, the modifier that limits the meaning of gim (“a gem, jewel”) in this endocentric compound: “device, design, contrivance, art, skill” and “that which is contrived with art, a machine, engine, fabric” (Bosworth-Toller “isen”; “teþ” s.v. “toþ”; “asniden” s.v. “a-sniðan”; “searagym” s.v. “searugim”; “egan” s.v. “eage” I; “gym” s.v. “gim” I; “searu” I, IV). A number of the other endocentric compounds formed from searu accordingly do signify items that have been skillfully-fashioned.xl The evidence hence points to “searagym” in the present account denoting gems that in some way have been expertly worked, which logically can apply both to the gems’ cutting and setting by a skilled smith/gemcutter. (Further discussion of Old English searu notably appears in this dissertation’s Chapter Three, in connection with one of Grendel’s body parts.) In the context of the monster’s teeth and eyes, the description of the loccas (“hair”) and beard (“beard”) as gylden (“golden”) suggests the presence of spun gold, a material that Anglo-Saxon England produced and utilized (Bosworth-Toller “loccas” s.v. “loc”; “beard” I; “gylden” s.v. “gold”; Hyer and Owen-Crocker 178; Dodwell 44).xli
By virtue of this beast’s constituent splendid items of smithwork, the line between living dragon and an exquisite statue of a dragon significantly blurs. This monster hence calls to mind *The Phoenix*’s titular avian, a fantastic creature enjoying an existence as a sumptuous, crafted representation of a phoenix in the world of the Exeter Book (see Chapter One). While the Phoenix’s expert fashioning and costly constituent materials elevate a person’s mind to a contemplation of God the supreme artisan and His divine masterworks (a feat constituting the proper use for all superb items of craftwork, according to a number of Anglo-Saxon religious writers—see my Introduction and Chapter One for an outline of the relevant scholarship), the ornate object represented by *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s infernal dragon obviously must be one designed for debased, evil purposes. A highly-wrought statue of a dragon directly linked to devils and Hell suggests a so-called “heathen” idol, especially considering that other Old English accounts influenced by Latin narratives feature a connection between dragons and such idols. For example, the entry for Saint Erasmus in *The Old English Martyrology* virtually conflates the dragon with a particularly-magnificent example of this type of dark object:

Ða het Maximianus se casere hine lædan to his deofolgelde, þæt he þæm gulde.
Þa stod þær gyldenu onlicnes, twelf elna heah, ond of þære com gan micel draca ond abat ðone þriddan dæl ðæs hæðnan folces beforan ðæm bioscope.<sup>xlii</sup>

Then the emperor Maximianus commanded that they lead him (i.e., Bishop Erasmus) to his idol, so that he (i.e., Bishop Erasmus) could make an offering to it. There stood a golden image, twelve cubits high, and out of it came a great dragon that ate a third of these heathen people in front of the bishop.
Here, the *deofolgelde*, or “idol,” houses a deadly *draca*, or “dragon” (Bosworth-Toller “deofolgelde” s.v. “deofulgild”). In turn, the dragon serves as the means by which humans are sacrificed. The interdependence of dragon and idol—the *deofolgelde* providing a lair for the *draca*, the *draca* acting as the instrument of slaughter for the *deofolgelde*—calls to mind the more perfect merging of monster and idol in the figure of The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon. The fact that the *deofolgelde* specifically is *gyldenu* (“golden”) finds its direct parallel in the *gylden* (“golden”) hair and beard of the transmogrified devil.

The interpretation that The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon enjoys an existence as a sumptuous idol granted a beastly life and predatory agency in the hellish prison notably gains considerable support from the precise manner in which the monster undergoes destruction in the narrative. The text states that “seo hine toslat on twæigen dælas.” Bosworth and Toller define *toslean*, according to its non-abstract senses, as follows: “to strike to pieces, knock to bits; of material objects, to demolish, knock down a building; to divide in two by a blow or stroke.” The lexicographers provide the following examples of usage for these senses of *toslean*: “þunor toslog heora hiehstan godes hu” (“thunder demolished their highest house of God”); “swiðlic wind tosloh δæt hus æt δam feower hwemmum” (“a strong wind broke down the house at the four corners”); “Ða hæþenan weras toslogon his glæsenne calic” (“then heathen men shattered his glass chalice”); and “gif hit (an egg) ne tocine, tosleah hwon” (“if it (an egg) will not crack, break it slightly with a blow”). Evidently, *toslean* typically signifies the breaking of fashioned items such as houses and a glass chalice, not the slaying of living creatures. The phrase “on twæigen dælas” in the relevant sentence from The Life of Saint Margaret translates as “in two parts” (Bosworth-Toller “toslean” 1.a-b; “dæl” 1); thus, “seo hine toslat on twæigen dælas” essentially indicates that “she (i.e., Saint Margaret) broke him (i.e., the dragon) as a wrought
object into two parts.” In the context of the narrative’s vivid description of the dragon’s smithwork body parts, the image of this monster getting “broken (or knocked) … into two parts” suggests the smashing of an idol or other type of dark craftwork item.

The conflation of dragon with idol does not constitute an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer. Regarding the Latin source text for Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s version of The Life of Saint Margaret, Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis convincingly argue against “the higherto accepted identification of the source as a copy of BHL no. 5303”—i.e., a Mombritius version—and build a compelling case for one in the Casinensis tradition (Clayton and Magennis Introduction 17-18, 41-71). The Latin writer explicitly merges the dragon’s features with specific items of smithwork in the existing Latin Casinensis version of the legend: the hellish beast appears to be “gilded”/“overlaid with gold” in terms of its coloring, and its deadly teeth resemble “an iron saw.” Moreover, in term of shine, the creature’s eyes suggest “pearls,” one of antiquity’s most exquisite and expensive materials (Lewis and Short “deauratus” s.v. “deauro” I; “auro” I; “ferreae” s.v. “ferreus” I; “serre” s.v. “serra” I; “margaritae” s.v. “margarita” I). While the “pearls” figuratively linked to the eyes simply could be unworked, raw specimens, the mentioning of “pearls” in the context of the “gilding”/“gold overlay” and “iron saw” do support the overall image of the dragon in question as a superb and costly object. In short, the dragon’s physical description in the existing Latin Casinensis version of the legend ultimately proves similar to its counterpart’s description in the Old English version, vis-à-vis the smithwork imagery informing the creature’s body. The marked parallels in terms of the reptilian monster’s features in the two narratives hence support Clayton and Magennis’ assertion that Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret is modeled upon a text in the Casinensis tradition. When crafting his own version of the dragon, the Anglo-Saxon writer preserved the essence of
the dragon’s depiction as a splendid idol from the original Latin text, simply altering some of the
particular details.\textsuperscript{xliv}

Notably, the Anglo-Saxon writer, unlike the writer of the existing Latin Casinensis
version of the legend, explicitly acknowledges that the dragon’s eyes are the handiwork of an
artisan: as indicated, he fundamentally identifies the two organs with “skillfully-cut and -set
gems,” whereas the Latin writer simply links the beast’s eyes to “pearls.” The difference between
the respective descriptions of this reptilian monster’s eyes in the two narratives calls to mind the
difference between the respective descriptions of the Phoenix’s eyes in \textit{The Phoenix} versus the
Latin \textit{Carmen de Ave Phoenice}. Chapter One demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxon poet replaces
\textit{Carmen de Ave Phoenice}’s floral image of the Phoenix possessing “enormous eyes that you
would believe to be twin hyacinths” with the following description representing the complete
removal of the august avian’s eye from the context of the natural world and its attendant
placement into the world of high-status insular smithwork: “The eye by nature is hard like a
precious stone in appearance, a bright gem, when made to be set in a thin plate of gold by a
highly-skilled smith.” The collective evidence arising from the comparison of the two Old
English narratives with the Latin narratives enables the interpretation that a pronounced and
specific Anglo-Saxon literary sensibility led to the imaginative perception of the eyes of fantastic
beasts and monsters as the products of master jewelers and smiths. In a larger sense, the changes
made by the two Anglo-Saxon translators corroborate the interpretation that insular writers and
poets preferred smithwork imagery to natural imagery (and other types of imagery) when
crafting literary representations of fantastic beasts and monsters, this cultural predilection
prompting them to make the types of substitutions highlighted here when translating and
reworking Latin accounts of such creatures.
While the Anglo-Saxon writer essentially preserves the conflation of dragon with sumptuous idol occurring in the existing Latin Casinensis version of the Saint Margaret legend, he significantly diverges from the Latin narrative by additionally offering a vision of this hellish beast as a prison. He does not explicitly blur the line between this reptilian monster and any type of architectural work, but subtle details in the narrative do open the door to the dragon possessing an alternate nature as the specified type of building. First of all, the dragon accosts Saint Margaret in a “cærcere,” or “prison,” this setting for the dragon’s attempted predation of Margaret at least raising the possibility of a metonymic link existing between the hellish beast and the forbidding structure. The fact that the creature subsequently “hi forswealh” (“swallow[s] her”), momentarily confining her entire, unharmed body “innan [hæs] dracan innoþe” (“in the inner part of the body of this dragon”), an event clearly paralleling when she, earlier, was “on þystrum carcerne betynan” (“shut up in the dark prison”), supports the interpretation that the dragon bears a metonymic relationship to the prison. Furthermore, Old English toslean, the verb signifying the manner in which the dragon’s body undergoes destruction, is strongly associated with the destruction of buildings (see above). The heroine accordingly “demolishes” the monster to escape her incarceration within its massive body, effectively “knocking it down, as a building,” so that it ends up “in two parts” (Bosworth-Toller “cærcere” s.v. “cærc-ærn”; “forswealh” s.v. “forswelgan”; “innan”; “innoþe” s.v. “innoþ”; “carcerne” s.v. “cærc-ærn”; “betynan” I; “toslean” 1.a). After the quick and efficient demolition, Saint Margaret walks from the two massive chunks of debris, unscathed.\textsuperscript{xlv}

The merging of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon with a prison building moreover raises the likelihood that “loccas” functions as a prison-related pun. Old English locc signifies “the hair of the head, a hair, a lock of hair, a curl, ringlet” and explicitly
denotes the dragon’s “golden locks,” or golden hair. However, Old English *loc* possesses the following semantic range: “a lock, bolt, bar, that by which anything is closed, an enclosed place.” Similarly, *loca* is “that which closes or shuts, a bar, bolt, lock, an enclosed place, locker” (Bosworth-Toller “locc”; “loc” I; “loca”). “Loccas” in its current context therefore probably punningly refers to the “enclosed place” within the prison building of the reptilian monster’s body and/or even the metal “bars,” “bolts,” or “locks” constituting part of this creature’s prison architecture. Regarding the interpretation that “loccas” punningly indicates the presence of prison-related “locks” in the creature-object represented by this dragon, the account presently under consideration significantly would not be the only instance of a reference to the “locks” of Hell’s prison in Old English writings. For example, the following three sentences mention these very items: “ealle ða ísenan scyttelas helle loca wurdan tobrocene” (“all of the iron bars/bolts of hell’s locks were broken”) (from the *Blickling Homilies*, qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “loc” I); “hwylc manna is ðæt his agene sawle fram helle locum generige” (“this is the kind of man that his very soul is set free from the locks of hell”) (from the Old English *Paris Psalter*, qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “loc” I); and “to helle locum gelæded beo sceolde” (“he should have been led to hell’s locks”) (from Bede, qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “loc” I). These examples clearly demonstrate that the idea of Hell as a prison with enclosed cells, locks, bars, and bolts was a commonplace in Anglo-Saxon literary culture. The concept of this dragon possessing such architectural elements by virtue of a pun on “loccas” would be perfectly in keeping with this beast having an alternate existence as Hell’s prison.

The fact that the dragon’s “loccas” (“locks”) are “gylden” (“golden”) lends an additional degree of strength to the interpretation that “loccas” in its present context in Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *The Life of Saint Margaret* punningly refers to the metal “bars,” “bolts,” and/or “locks” of
prisons. Further support for this interpretation arises from the fundamental identification of two of Old English literature’s remaining reptilian monsters with prison metalwork. Chapter One demonstrates that *The Whale*’s Anglo-Saxon poet, in a departure from the larger medieval bestiary tradition, conflates his titular beast’s jaws with Hell’s highly-wrought iron prison doors; correspondingly, the Whale’s original identity in the bestiary tradition as the Asp-Turtle, a markedly-serpentine creature, indicates the Whale’s fundamental link to reptilian monsters.\(^{xlvi}\) Chapter Three, citing both Francis E. Sandbach’s assertion that *Beowulf*’s Grendel is one “of two dragons” (the other dragon being the monster’s ferocious mother) by virtue of Beowulf’s exploits paralleling those of Siegfried (Sandbach 23) and Jacob Grimm’s findings that Grendel’s name ties this troll to the metal “bars” and “bolts” of prisons (Elliott et al. 69), builds a larger case that Grendel, too, effectively exists as a reptilian monster with particular body parts of prison metalwork. By virtue of the relationship of *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon to the Old English Physiologus’ Whale/Asp-Turtle in this triad of reptilian monsters in Old English literature, the former creature’s “cut iron teeth,” the items of smithwork through which Margaret is forcibly passed to be incarcerated in this dragon’s body, likely serve as an analogue to the iron prison doors constituting the Whale/Asp-Turtle’s jaws.

The existing Casinensis-version of the Saint Margaret legend does not in any way offer the reader a vision of the dragon as a prison building or other architectural work. The infernal beast does not swallow the heroine, effectively imprisoning her; instead, this transmogrified devil simply menaces her with its imposing physical presence and verbal threats to devour her.\(^{xlvii}\) No Latin words, in the form of puns or otherwise, suggestive of locks, bolts, or bars, occur in connection with the dragon’s physical features. The Latin verb signifying the manner in which the dragon finally undergoes destruction, *divido*, sometimes is associated with the
demolishing of walls in Latin texts, but it just as readily signifies the dismemberment of animal’s bodies, as is evident in the following example of usage from the Lewis and Short entry for this word: “si omne animal secari ac dividi potest, nullum est eorum individuum” (“if every animal can be cut up and divided, none of them are indivisible”) (Lewis and Short “divido” I.A). The animal-related sense of *divido* well accords with this word’s precise context in the account presently under consideration from the existing Casinensis-version of the Saint Margaret legend: the narrative states that “Beatissima Marina, facto signaculo sanctae cruces, diuisit eum in duabus partibus” (“Blessed Marina, making the sign of the holy cross, divided him in two pieces”). This concept of “dividing” an animal’s body by “cutting” it into pieces is missing from *toslean*’s semantic range, which appears more or less exclusively tied to the destruction of material objects, primarily buildings, by means of the “blows,” “strokes,” and “strikes” (Bosworth-Toller “toslean” I.a-b).

### 3.6 Further Considerations

Chapter One argues that the Exeter Book’s Panther and Phoenix, as smithwork creature-objects, constitute a response on the part of the Anglo-Saxon poet(s) to a long-standing insular fantasy involving Anglo-Saxon animal ornament’s highly-stylized beasts—unique design elements which adorned early insular metalwork—enjoying actual beastly lives with a considerable level of creaturely agency throughout the landscapes of the world. The current chapter maintains that Old English literature’s Latin-influenced serpents and dragons, as architectural creature-objects, speak to a related but far darker imaginative engagement with craftwork items, one in which the danger, moral debasement, and dark mystery connected with
Roman buildings become enabled in the bodies of reptilian monsters to accost human beings and/or their souls. However, as I also demonstrate, the Old English versions of The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon and The Whale’s titular monster possess ties not only to prison buildings, but also to the metalwork implements particular to such structures. The Old English Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle’s serpents, by virtue of their essential link to the narrative’s ornate gold palatial columns, likewise represent specific architectural pieces and the high-status products of another type of metalworker, the goldsmith. The associated metalwork components must share in the predatory lives granted to the Roman buildings by means of the insular writers’ literary depictions of the serpents and dragons as creature-objects. Consequently, the possibility exists that this Roman metalwork effectively represents the evil shadow of the heavenly insular metalwork conflated with the Exeter Book’s Panther and Phoenix. In other words, Old English accounts of fantastic beasts and monsters, considered as a group, potentially offer a larger, contrastive vision of esteemable insular smithwork objects working at cross-purposes to morally-dark Roman smithwork objects in the various landscapes of man’s moral universe. My next chapter will complicate the proposed vision by building a case that, at least for the Beowulf-poet, an inescapable moral darkness likewise forever taints exquisite insular metalwork.
4 CHAPTER 3: TWO OF BEOWULF’S GRENDEL EPISODE’S MONSTERS AS EXQUISITE OBJECTS AND THE HERO AS THE REVEALER OF THEIR ALTERNATE NATURES

4.1 Introduction

The oft-studied Old English poem Beowulf appears in the same manuscript as the Old English Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle, a work discussed in Chapter Two because of the conflation of the narrative’s serpents with specific architectural pieces. The codex itself is variously referred to as BL, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, the Nowell Codex, and, by virtue of the rarified air occupied by Beowulf in terms of the sheer amount of scholarship that it has commanded over the centuries, the Beowulf Manuscript. The collection also features another Old English poem, Judith, and two additional Old English prose works, The Life of Saint Christopher and The Wonders of the East. A few critics have posited that the selection criteria observed by the Beowulf Manuscript’s compiler specifically involve the occurrence of monsters in each of this codex’s individual narratives: S. A. J. Bradley mentions “the compiler’s interest in the fabulous, the exotic and the monstrous,” and R. D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain similarly maintain that “Cotton Vitellius A. xv would appear to be a collection devoted to monsters” (S. Bradley 407; Fulk and Cain 26, 161). While the compiler perhaps simply was excited by accounts of fantastic beasts and monsters, the attested importance of the various fantastic beasts and monsters to the Beowulf Manuscript as a whole document supports the basic interpretation that the Anglo-Saxon writers and poets whose works are represented in the manuscript mobilize these amazing creatures to perform some type of key cultural work.
The close relationship determined by Andy Orchard to exist between *Beowulf* and *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*, “particularly with regard to the monstrous creatures that both Beowulf and Alexander encounter” (Orchard 28), lends a degree of support to the interpretation that *Beowulf*’s monsters serve the same basic cultural function that I find for India’s deadly serpents. I will build a case that two of *Beowulf*’s Grendel Episode’s monsters, like *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*’s serpents, as well as the other Latin-influenced serpents and dragons discussed in Chapter Two and the three Exeter Book beasts examined in Chapter One, ultimately respond to insular fantasies and fears connected with the moral statuses of highly-wrought objects in Anglo-Saxon England. These enigmatic creatures in the world of the poem can perform such cultural work because the *Beowulf*-poet utilizes several strategies to blur the line between the creatures’ bodies and types of fashioned items. The Sigmund Episode’s deadly worm thus possesses an alternate nature as an unidentified fine piece of metalwork. Evidence for this dragon’s alternate nature arises in part from specific details relating to this worm’s body in the Sigmund Episode—the use of the adjective *wretlicne* to describe the worm and the fact that the worm “melts from heat” after Sigmund slays it. Also, the beast demonstrates a mysterious link to two esteemed items of metalwork in the world of the poem, the *wyrmfah* sword utilized by Beowulf under the mere’s waters to slay Grendel’s mother and decapitate Grendel’s corpse and, to a lesser degree, the *wretlicne wundurmaððum* or priceless necklace showcased in two gift-giving ceremonies. No critic has heretofore commented upon any aspects of this worm’s strange existence as a high-status product of the forge.

Grendel likewise is a product of the forge—or, more precisely, an assemblage of different items of metalwork that Beowulf effectively dismantles into its individual components over the course of the Grendel Episode. Relevant existing criticism on Grendel will inform the
investigation into this alternate nature on the part of this troll. The trophy consisting of the monster’s arm, hand, and shoulder possesses an alternate nature as a sharp iron tool or implement or piece of prison-related ironwork in the form of bars, bolts, or a grate. Evidence for this trophy’s crafted aspect arises in part from searowundor, the enigmatic kenning referring to the anatomical piece in question once Beowulf displays it within Heorot; the poet’s figuring of Grendel’s nails on the detached body part as steel-like spurs; and one likely set of meanings for the name Grendel as noted by Jacob Grimm (Elliott et al. 69). The trophy represented by the monster’s detached head, in contrast, has an existence as an unidentified yet exquisite and ornamented piece—likely one of gem-inset, high-status goldwork. The evidence for this interpretation involves the equally-enigmatic kenning wîlteseow wretlic, the apposition of the head with the wrymfaez sword’s hilt, and the collocation of the first trophy, the hand-arm-shoulder assembly, with Heorot’s superb gold roof; no critic has commented upon any of these elements as pertaining to a crafted aspect on the part of the head. Yet another fashioned item constituting a portion of Grendel’s anatomy is the monster’s glove that Beowulf later claims to have been on the monster’s person at Heorot. Seth Lerer and Andrew M. Pfrenger build individual cases fundamentally linking this item to Grendel’s stomach (Lerer 735; Pfrenger 210). I will demonstrate that the glove, while sewn from dragon-skins, likely does contain metalwork components in the form of the ingenious clasp used to trap human victims within the horrid sack. The glove hence essentially completes Grendel’s smithwork body.

Chapter One builds a case that the Exeter Book’s Panther, Whale, and Phoenix possess body parts conflated with items of smithwork, this aspect of the three beasts’ respective anatomies suggesting that the narratives’ Anglo-Saxon poet(s) wrote under the influence of an insular literary sensibility calling upon them to imagine fantastic beasts and monsters as
highly-wrought products of the forge. While Chapter Two explores the conflation of Latin-influenced reptilian monsters with Roman-inspired land-based architectural works in Old English writings, that chapter demonstrates that the reptilian monsters’ bodies in two of the narratives in question evidence ties to architecture-related smithwork. For the *Beowulf*-poet to merge the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel with items of fashioned metal indicates that the insular tradition of imaginatively viewing fantastic beasts and monsters as this general type of craftwork heavily informed the *Beowulf*-poet’s choices in terms of the literary representations of the two monsters. My investigations in the current chapter hence will offer a window onto the imaginative engagement of yet another Anglo-Saxon poet—arguably, the preeminent Anglo-Saxon poet—with the idea of the smithwork creature-object.

This chapter’s discussion of the crafted aspects of the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel will bring to light several connections existing both within the world of the poem and between this poem and other Old English writings. One such connection on the part of the worm is its link to the *wyrmfah* sword, a grand object appearing later in the narrative that has drawn a considerable amount of critical attention. I will build a case for strong parallelism between the worm’s description and that of the exquisite artifact. Key points of correspondence include the poet’s use of Old English *wyrm* to refer to both the monster and the object, its occurrence in the compound word *wyrmfah* likely signaling the presence of serpentine ornamentation on the fine weapon, according to H. R. Davidson (166, 129-45). Also, the sword’s blade “melts,” calling to mind the fact that the worm “melts from heat” after Sigmund slays it, a subtle connection noted by Frederick Klaeber, without any subsequent discussion by him on the possible significance of the parallel (Klaeber *Beowulf* 210, Endnote for line 1605ff). The mysterious kinship between the Sigmund Episode’s worm and the *wyrmfah* sword serves to associate the two entities with
one another, likely even conflating them, thus recalling when the writer of the Old English
*Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle* fundamentally identifies India’s deadly serpents with the
exquisite gold columns of King Porus’ palace and the writer of the Old English version of *The
Life of Saint Margaret* in Cotton Tiberius A.iii essentially merges the dragon in that narrative
with the prison housing this hellish creature (see Chapter Two). The strange link between worm
and sword furthermore finds its reflection much closer to home in the critically-attested
parallelism tying the fire-drake to Scyld’s funeral ship in *Beowulf* (see below).

I will consider the consequences of this fundamental relationship between the Sigmund
Episode’s worm and the *wyrmfah* sword for the two entities and for the poem at large. One such
consequence for the two entities is that the two entities effectively share a type of inverse
relationship in the world of the poem. According to this reasoning, the sword proves to be just as
much of a serpent as the terrible worm, the artifact simply foregrounding its crafted aspect at the
expense of its alternate aspect as a living ophidian, while nonetheless betraying evidence of this
alternate aspect. Inversely, the worm takes dynamic action in the narrative as a savage creature,
the worm’s less obvious or explicit alternate nature as a piece of fine metalwork ultimately
making its presence known through subtle signals or cues. By virtue of this inverse relationship,
the sword stands revealed as one of the Grendel Episode’s dual-natured monsters—in this case,
an object-creature, paralleling the existence of the other monsters as creature-objects. This
weapon finds its reflection in *The Wanderer*’s serpent-wall, an architectural wonder
foregrounding its existence as a highly-wrought wall while providing an indication of its
alternate nature as a den of undulating snakes (see Chapter Two). The sword’s link to the
Sigmund Episode’s worm hence serves as a further piece of evidence that the Anglo-Saxon
literary mind perceived little to no difference between reptilian monsters and highly-wrought
objects, to the point that the serpentine and draconic objects in Old English writings qualify as living serpents and dragons just as much as the living serpents and dragons in the narratives possess existences as the indicated exquisite items.

Regarding Grendel’s connections to amazing creatures in other Old English writings, I build upon the ongoing argument in Chapters One and Two involving this troll forming a triad with The Whale’s titular beast and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii. The two creatures possess ties to prison buildings and the associated metalwork components of these structures, the grated doors, locks, bars, and bolts that prevent the escape of inmates. Another noteworthy point of connection between the two creatures is that the Whale, like The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon, is a reptilian monster, or was originally was such a creature in the Greek bestiary tradition, where the ancients knew it as the Asp-Turtle, a markedly serpentine monster (S. Bradley 355; Cook lxxii-1xxv). In terms of prison metalwork, Jacob Grimm likewise links Grendel to metal “bars” and “bolts” by virtue of the similarity of the fiend’s name to Old English grindel (Elliott et al. 69). Edwin Guest further discusses the particular type of object signified by grindel, explaining that it appears to have been “a kind of heavy iron grating, which rather encumbered the prisoner by its weight, than fixed him in its grasp” (qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “grindel”). Grendel, in other words, possesses ties to the exact types of prison-related items of smithwork as the two beasts. Grendel also joins the two beasts as a reptilian monster: Francis E. Sandbach asserts that Grendel is one “of two dragons” (the other dragon being the monster’s ferocious mother) by virtue of Beowulf’s exploits paralleling those of Siegfried (Sandbach 23). I will demonstrate that, at the very least, Grendel does bear a clear kinship with serpents and dragons, this kinship and Sandbach’s interpretation of Grendel and his mother thus opening the door to us considering this troll a veritable dragon.
Chapters One and Two further argue that the prison buildings conflated with the Whale/Asp-Turtle and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon are Roman prison buildings, not insular structures. Grendel’s kinship to the two monsters by virtue of his prison metalwork anatomy and status as a veritable dragon indicates that he, too, proves specifically linked to Roman architecture. The collocation of the trophy consisting of the monster’s hand, arm, and shoulder with Heorot’s splendid golden roof further supports this interpretation. While Heorot undeniably is the Germanic mead hall par excellence, Karl P. Wentersdorf maintains that Roman “gilded roof tiles” and “gilded gables,” the latter of which allegedly appeared on buildings in Roman England, likely informed the majestic roof’s depiction in the poem (418-26). Peggy A. Knapp similarly perceives a connection between the grand hall’s roof and Roman architectural works, additionally noting an attendant moral darkness to the involved structures: “The golden roof [of Heorot], not typical of Anglo-Saxon building practices, signals the moral hazard of pride for its association with the palaces of the Germanic gods and the ‘ruthless’ Romans” (90). At the same time that the poet associates Grendel with Roman architecture, this monster is in fact a Germanic troll. Based upon these and additional considerations, I will build a case that Grendel, as an assemblage of various craftwork items, ultimately exists as a complex figure lying at the intersection of Germanic, insular, and Roman craftwork traditions.

Further regarding Grendel, I will build a case that Beowulf acts as the perceiver and subsequent revealer of this monster’s existence as an assemblage of highly-wrought objects, thereby calling attention to a heretofore-unexplored role for the hero. Beowulf demonstrates the fact of Grendel’s alternate nature by effectively dismantling this fiend into his constituent objects and offering the discrete items to the view of the Geats and Danes. Support for this interpretation arises from several details pertaining to Grendel’s body in the narrative. For one thing, aside
from the evidence contributed by Grendel’s name, the epithets, kennings, parallels, appositions/collocations, and other strategies utilized by the poet to merge the monster’s various body parts with the highly-wrought objects exclusively come into play only after Beowulf has forcibly detached a particular anatomical piece from the monster. Before the dismantling, the poet unequivocally depicts each body part as organic by only using words and imagery underscoring Grendel’s status as a living creature. While the shift might be seen as suggesting that Grendel’s body parts have undergone a change from organic material to craftwork items after the parts’ removal from Grendel proper, an enigmatic statement made by Beowulf constituting a long-standing scholarly crux indicates that the hero had perceived that this monster was an assemblage of highly-wrought objects before any dismemberment occurred: “Úþe ic swiþor / þæt ðu hine selfne / geseon moste, / feond on frætewum / fylwerigne” (lines 960b-962). I will show that interpreting the statement as the hero boasting that he alone could perceive Grendel’s craftwork nature will resolve the crux. Beowulf’s later account of Grendel’s highly-wrought glove further supports the argument that only he could see the monster’s true physical nature: throughout the entirety of the Grendel Episode, the narrator does not mention or otherwise indicate the existence of this ingenious sack conflated with Grendel’s abdomen.

Over the course of his effective dismantling of Grendel’s craftwork body, the hero retains the discrete, highly-wrought objects instead of leaving the objects behind or otherwise disposing of the items. He displays the ingeniously-fashioned *searowundor* constituting the troll’s hand, arm, and shoulder in Heorot near the wondrous hall’s fine gold roof. The Geats and Danes similarly exhibit the monster’s exquisite head in the sumptuous building after Beowulf brings it to the mere’s surface in tandem with the hilt. This keeping of the two anatomical pieces and subsequent finding of new contexts for the pieces in terms of civilized society point to a larger
movement in the world of the poem involving the finding of societal uses for the objects conflated with monsters’ bodies after heroes slay the terrible creatures. Additional support for this interpretation arises from the worm’s fate in the poem’s Sigmund Episode. I will build a case that, by melting, the worm once again becomes molten, malleable metal, mirroring its original state in the smithy before a master artisan cast it as an exquisite creature-object. The material may now be recycled and recast into other fine objects, meaning that the worm’s substance is retained in the world of the poem for future uses in that world’s material cultures. Borrowing from Phyllis Portnoy’s helpful insights regarding the similar melting of the *wyrmfab* sword’s original blade and the surviving hilt’s problematic moral status as one of the so-called “remnants” in Old English verse, I will suggest that any such subsequent uses of the worm’s substance inevitably will result in the sort of “future renewal of strife” that Portnoy predicts forever will attend the hilt (75-77, 85-86). I will subsequently argue that the two objects forcibly removed from Grendel proper similarly will carry into Danish society’s future the moral darkness embodied by this troll.

This chapter importantly will demonstrate that the critically-attested connection between the fire-drake’s dead body and Scyld’s funeral ship in the poem lends a significant degree of support to several the above interpretations vis-à-vis the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel. Regarding the specific link between the two entities, Hugh Magennis and John Leyerle individually comment upon the parallelism linking the account of the launching of Scyld’s funeral ship to that of the fire-drake’s dead body being put out to sea. Magennis calls attention to the similarity of phrasing between the two accounts, specifically in terms of how the surviving Geats “let the sea carry … away” both the craft and the dragon’s body (125). Leyerle concludes that the poet might have “imagined the end of the dragon in terms of a ship funeral,” citing the
draconic motif informing a typical “northern longship” as further evidence of such a vision on
the part of the poet (91). Howard Shilton acknowledges the likelihood of the poet’s vision of this
dragon as a northern longship, similarly pointing out that “longships were built to resemble
dragons with a carved dragon’s head at the prow, and a carved tail at the stern” (76). Based upon
the three critics’ interpretations, Gale Owen-Crocker builds a compelling case that Scyld’s
funeral ship itself is “personified” as “a lively and impatient beast, an incipient dragon” by virtue
of the parallelism and other subtle touches by the poet (Owen-Crocker The Four Funerals 27, 39).
This existing criticism, by indicating a blurred line between the fire-drake’s dead body and a
northern longship and between Scyld’s funeral ship and a living dragon, clearly provides
additional evidence that the literary sensibility calling for the conflation of amazing creatures
with highly-wrought objects did influence the Beowulf-poet. Ultimately, the critical finding that
the surviving Geats launch the fire-drake’s dead body as a northern longship supports my
interpretation that the poet demonstrates a preoccupation with the establishing of new societal
contexts for the particular objects conflated with monsters’ bodies after heroes slay the creatures.

The final scholar with findings relevant to this chapter’s interests is Thomas E. Hart, who
shortly discusses a vital link he perceives between the Sigmund Episode’s worm, wyrmfah
sword, trophy consisting of Grendel’s head, and fire-drake—in other words, many of the objects
and entities upon which I focus. This connection specifically involves the idea of the “writing” of
a text, subsequent “cutting” of it into “formal divisions, topical cuts, and word patterns, including
the musical ‘cuts’ like the diapason,” and final “bind[ing]” of it into an aesthetically pleasing
final product. According to him, imagery relating to this overall process and its final product
informs the depictions of the four objects and entities. Referring to a larger argument regarding
the phrase wrætta m gebunden in the poem, an argument featuring his current set of comments as
a footnote, he makes a brief case for Old English *wrætlic* indicating the membership of the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel’s decapitated head in this four-member group. He similarly maintains that the verb *writan/written* serves this purpose for the hilt and fire-drake. Hart concludes his discussion of the four-member group with the following statement regarding acts of “writing,” “cutting,” and “bind[ing]”: “the task is literally ‘draconic’: to create, measure, beautify and bind one’s own personal *wrætlicne wyrm*” (Hart 195, Footnote 24). Although he does not explicitly state that the *Beowulf*-poet effectively merges the group’s members with the exquisite, highly-wrought objects represented by skillfully-fashioned Anglo-Saxon texts, his findings clearly do enable such an interpretation. I will consider the poem’s description of Grendel’s severed head as a *wliteseon wrætlic* in light of Hart’s interpretation of this epithet.

This criticism on the fire-drake (Magennis, Leyerle, Shilton, and Owen-Crocker) and Grendel (Grimm, Lerer, and Pfrenger) constitutes the only research I have found that in any way points to a fundamental identification of the bodies of *Beowulf*’s monsters with crafted items. While Grendel and the fire-drake have commanded a veritable wealth of scholarship over the years, the critics typically arrive at different types of understandings concerning the two entities’ individual natures and/or symbolism than the understandings detailed here. R. D. Fulk et al. explain that, “most frequently, scholarship has explored Grendel’s close relation to humans, interpreting him as representing the dark side of humanity or the anti-thegn, a dualistic creature who is intimately tied to the society he attacks and who becomes more human as he approaches human habitations and more monstrous as he retreats toward his own” (xliv). Critics tend to argue that the fire-drake represents an elemental force of chaos, a devil or other agent of apocalypse, or, like Grendel, the dark side of human society; does not symbolize anything at all; or at best possesses an indeterminant meaning. J. R. R. Tolkien himself has much to say
regarding the significance of the poem’s monsters, including the Sigmund Episode’s worm, to the poem as a whole, and the worm’s section of this chapter will consider his interpretations. None of his interpretations involve the poem’s monsters possessing alternate natures as craftwork items.

Over the course of my investigation into the alternate physical natures of the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel, I will take a close look at relevant instances of Old English *wraetlic*. As discussed in Chapter One, this adjective describes the Exeter Book’s Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix, along with a number of the conflated entities of the Exeter Book Riddles. Chapter One carefully builds a case that *wraetlic* actually signals the existence of the highly-wrought objects constituting the alternate natures of the Panther, Whale/Asp-Turtle, and Phoenix and moreover likely indicates that the objects specifically are items of smithwork. This adjective maintains an identical signification for the two monsters presently under consideration. The poet uses it to describe the Sigmund Episode’s worm in the alliterative phrase *wraetlicne wyrm*. He also depicts the trophy consisting of Grendel’s head through recourse to this adjective in the similarly-alliterative *wliteseon wraetlic*. In the poem, *wraetlic* appears only three additional times. As I will demonstrate, the three items it describes are items of smithwork: an exquisite necklace, intricately-wrought sword, and iron shield forged to protect the hero from the fire-drake’s fiery attack. Clearly, *wraetlic* possesses a link to metalwork in the world of the poem. The poet likely intended its occurrence in the respective descriptions of the worm and Grendel’s head to merge the two monsters with items representing this type of craftwork, an interpretation gaining considerable support from the myriad of additional strategies mobilized by the poet to conflate these creatures with metal objects.
4.2 *The Wrætlicne Wyrm as an Exquisite Piece of Gem-Inset Metalwork*

Following Beowulf’s titanic confrontation with Grendel at Heorot and the terminally wounded ogre’s retreat to his mere, a number of King Hrothgar’s retainers travel on horseback, praising their deliverer throughout the surrounding area. One of the retainers, a man versed in old stories, sings a particular tale about the great Germanic hero Sigmund. In this tale selected by the retainer to honor Beowulf by virtue of an implicit comparison of the Geatish hero to the legendary dragon-slayer, Sigmund battles a monster that guards its subterranean hoard. The narrative three times refers to this terrible creature as a “wyrm” (“a reptile, serpent”) (lines 886b, 891a, 897b) and once as a “draca” (“a dragon, a serpent”) (line 892b) (Bosworth-Toller “wyrm” I; “draca” I, II), thus indicating that Sigmund specifically is dealing with a dragon or serpent. The hero eventually slays the draconic/serpentine worm with his sword and subsequently removes the worm’s treasures to his ship. The worm’s dead body then melts from an unspecified heat source. The account of this reptilian monster covers only fourteen lines (lines 884-897) of the 3182-line poem. In contrast, more than 2000 lines comprise the entirety of the Grendel Episode. Despite the worm’s short appearance in *Beowulf*, its depiction, like Grendel’s significantly more detailed one, demonstrates influence from the insular literary convention investigated by this dissertation, the tendency of Anglo-Saxon writers and poets to present fantastic creature’s bodies as highly-wrought objects from the hands of master artisans. Specifically, this section will build a case that the worm possesses an alternate nature as an unnamed yet splendid piece of high-status, insular metalwork.¹

Traditionally, the worm has commanded a scant amount of critical attention, scholars tending only to mention this creature in the context of a larger discussion of the parallels linking the poem’s Sigmund Episode to the tale’s Germanic analogues (for example, see Klaeber
Beowulf 167-68, Endnote for lines 875-900; and Rauer 48-49). J. R. R. Tolkien—the scholar who singlehandedly opened Beowulf’s monsters to serious critical inquiry by means of his highly-influential 1936 essay “The Monsters and the Critics”—in some instances briefly does include the worm in his weighty considerations. For example, in his landmark essay, he asserts that this particular dragon possesses the same grand purpose in the poem as the fire-drake and Grendel: to give the greatest of heroes a fitting and worthy adversary (Tolkien “Beowulf: The Monsters” 12). Tolkien discusses this worm once more in the 2014 critical edition of Beowulf edited by Christopher Tolkien, this time focusing exclusively upon the “irony” arising from the retainer presenting the tale of Sigmund and the worm as a way of honoring Beowulf by implicitly comparing the Geatish hero to that legendary dragon-slayer when, unbeknownst to all of the poem’s various characters, Beowulf ultimately will perish from a future encounter with a dragon. Tolkien offers two possibilities regarding this specific instance of “irony” in the poem: the poet relished being privy to the narrative’s future events when his readers were not; or his readers actually did know of the forthcoming battle with the fire-drake because this event constituted a well-attested feature of the preexisting Beowulf legend in Anglo-Saxon England (Tolkien Beowulf: A Translation 286-87).li

The adjective *wrætlicne* used to describe the Sigmund Episode’s worm in the phrase “wrætlicne wyrm” (line 891a) constitutes the first piece of evidence that this creature possesses an alternate nature as an exquisite item of metalwork. As discussed in Chapter One, the adjective *wrætlic* features prominently in the descriptions of the Exeter Book’s Panther, Whale, and Phoenix, as well as in those of a number of the conflated entities of the Exeter Book Riddles. Utilizing the nuanced interpretations of *wrætlic*’s semantic range offered by a number of critics and taking a close look at *wrætlic*’s appearances and subtle functions in the three beast narratives
and the various Riddles, Chapter One carefully builds a case that *wraetlic* signals the existence of the Panther, Whale, and Phoenix as specific highly-wrought items of smithwork. Chapter One thus demonstrates that this interpretation accords *wraetlic* a considerably richer degree of signification than explicitly allowed for by this word’s definitions in the various Old English dictionaries, including the two-part definition listed by Bosworth and Toller. According to this line of reasoning, when the poem’s speaker in *The Panther* attributes a “*wraetlic[um] gecynd[e]*” (line 9a) to the titular beast and subsequently exclaims that it is a “*wraetlic deor*” (line 19a), he is anticipating the imminent conflation of this majestic creature with Joseph’s coat-of-many-colors (lines 19-29), which in this poem is a high-status Anglo-Saxon garment displaying the sumptuous handiwork of the insular jeweler, goldsmith, and gold embroiderer. The merging of the Panther with the garment and the poet’s use of the narrative’s remaining instance of *wraetlic* (line 27) to describe a specific aspect of the wondrous animal’s craftwork body point to the likelihood that “*wraetlic[um] gecynd[e]*” refers to the Panther’s “nature as an exquisite piece of smithcraft” and “*wraetlic deor*” indicates that the Panther is “a splendid, highly-wrought, smithwork beast.” Chapter One crafts similar arguments for the instances of *wraetlic* in the remaining two beast narratives.

In *Beowulf*, *wraetlic* appears a total of five times. It describes the Sigmund Episode’s worm and, as I will discuss in the next section, one of the body parts forcibly removed from Grendel by Beowulf—the monster’s severed head, deemed a “*wliteseon wraetlic*” (line 1650a) by the poem’s narrator. The poet utilizes the narrative’s remaining three instances of *wraetlic* to describe three prominent highly-wrought objects in the world of the poem. The three items unsurprisingly are skillfully-fashioned pieces of metalwork, demonstrating that the poet, like the poet(s) of *The Panther, The Whale*, and *The Phoenix* and the writers of a number of the Exeter
Book Riddles, did associate *wrætlic* with this type of material product. A close look at each of the three objects will help to shed light on the subtleties of the *wrætliche wyrm*’s depiction in the Sigmund Episode.

One of the three pieces is the “*wrætliche wundurmaððum*” (line 2173a), a fantastic item of jewelry that Queen Wealhtheow of the Danes bequeaths to the victorious Beowulf in a gift-giving ceremony and that the hero in turn presents to Queen Hygd of the Geats during a second such event. Bosworth and Toller define *wundurmaððum* as “a wondrous treasure.” The poem also refers to the sumptuous piece in question as a “healsbeah” (line 2172a), which is “a ring for the neck, necklace.” This exquisite item of jewelry clearly qualifies as a material masterpiece of the highest order considering that it is featured in two royal gift-giving ceremonies. The words used to describe the splendid object furthermore indicate that intricate, probably gem-inset metalwork constitutes it. Old English *maððum*, the head of the compound noun *wundurmaððum* of the above epithet, can signify a “jewel,” as well as “a precious or valuable thing, a treasure, ornament.” The head of the compound noun *healsbeah, beah*, denotes “metal made into circular ornaments, as a ring, bracelet, collar, garland, crown” (Bosworth-Toller “*wundurmaððum*” s.v. “*wundormaþðum*”; “healsbeah” s.v. “healsbeag”; “*maððum*” s.v. “*maðum*”; “beah” s.v. “beag”).

While *wrætlic* appears a total of five times in the poem, the adjective’s inflected form *wrætliche* only occurs twice—in the phrases *wrætliche wyrm* and *wrætliche wundurmaððum*. This limiting of *wrætliche* to the two instances hints at parallelism between the two accounts. The fact that the two words within each phrase alliterate adds further degree of support to this interpretation. By virtue of the arguable parallelism, the line between the worm and the fine neckpiece blurs, giving an immediate impression of this particular dragon as an item of intricate, jewel-inset, high-status metalwork. Considering the poem’s ties to an idealized Anglo-Saxon past and the larger
Germanic culture, the impression moreover is of the worm as an insular, or at least Germanic, object (more on this particular point shortly).

*Wraetlic* describes extraordinary metallic implements of warfare in its remaining two occurrences in the poem. One of the items in question is the ancient sword inherited and subsequently wielded by Beowulf during his adventures antedating the poem’s current events. It changes hands in one of the poem’s gift-giving ceremonies, in this instance passing from its proud owner to his detractor, a courtier of Hrothgar named Unferth who calls into question Beowulf’s past effectiveness as a hero. Beowulf proclaims his fine weapon a “wrætlic wægsweord” (line 1489a) before the assembled Geats and Danes at the ceremony. The descriptive phrase indicates that superb craftsmanship and decorative detail inform the sword’s fashioning: “wægsweord” signifies “a sword with wavy ornamentation,” the compound noun’s modifier, “wæg,” accordingly denoting “a wave,” “water,” and/or “sea.” The adjective *wraetlic*, by virtue of its documented semantic range, reinforces and/or underscores the fact of the sword’s excellence, as does Beowulf when he further credits the ancient weapon as forever proving “heardecg” (line 1490a) (“hard of edge”) (Bosworth-Toller “wægsweord”; “wæg” II; “wrætlic” II; “heardecg”). The shield forged to protect Beowulf from the fire-drake’s fiery attack constitutes the second of the *wraetlic* metallic martial implements. The poem’s narrator refers to this item as a “wigbord wrætlic” (line 2339a), “wigbord” signifying “a shield.” The narrator explains that the hero commissions this item to be “eall irenne” (line 2338a) (“all of iron”), because wood would not be able to withstand the fire-drake’s flame (Bosworth-Toller “wigbord”; “eall irenne” s.v. “ealliren”). A shield completely composed of iron would have been a wonder in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons: wood of various kinds was the primary constituent of insular shields (Biggam 44; Owen-Crocker “Seldom … does” 215-16). In other words, the
wrætlic shield, like the similarly-wrætlic necklace and sword, proves to be an exceptional, singular piece of smithcraft in the world of the poem.

The fact that exquisite metalwork constitutes all three of the poem’s wrætlic objects serves to blur the line between the worm and an unspecified object of this type (more on this indeterminacy shortly). According to this reasoning, the worm’s smithcraft body displays a level of quality in terms of form and function comparable to the highly-wrought necklace, sword, and shield. The interpretation that the wrætlicne wyrm, wrætlicne wundurmaððum, wrætlic wægsweord, and wigbord wrætlic form a conceptual group in the poem gains a degree of additional support from the alliterating w between the premodifier and head in each of the noun phrases and the exclusive occurrence of these noun phrases by themselves in the a-verse of the long line. The epithet wîteseon wrætlic for Grendel’s severed head observes these exact conditions, marking this trophy as the final member of the posited conceptual group (see my next section for further consideration of the highly-wrought head’s inclusion among the poem’s wrætlic items and entities). Regarding the worm’s arguable link to the wrætlic wægsweord, I will build a case that the poet also fundamentally identifies this creature with yet another fantastic sword in the world of the poem, the wyrmfah sword discovered and subsequently wielded by Beowulf under the mere’s waters. The worm’s subtle yet compelling ties to the two swords serve as one piece of evidence that this dragon’s alternate nature as a piece of unnamed metalwork closely relates the monster to this particular type of material object. As shortly will become apparent, additional evidence for this interpretation arises from specific associations that the so-called pattern-welded swords held for the Anglo-Saxons.

The physical process immediately undergone by the worm’s dead body further supports the interpretation that the poet intentionally merges this dragon with a piece of metalwork. The
retainer specifically relates to his audience that the “wyrm hat gemealt” (line 897b) after Sigmund slays it. Old English gemeltan means “to melt,” and hat signifies “hot” and “heat,” as an adjective and a noun, respectively (Bosworth-Toller “ge-meltan”; “hat”). The phrase “wyrm hat gemealt” thus indicates that “the worm melted from heat.” This creature’s carcass clearly does not behave as if it is composed of organic material, which would roast, char, and eventually be reduced to ashes from the sustained application of intense heat. The fate of this dragon instead proves far more consistent with, for example, a metallic object being melted down by a smith in a forge. The account contains no additional details regarding this instance of melting, including ones that potentially could offset the overall impression that this wraetlic creature exists as an item of smithwork that now is being reduced to a molten state. Furthermore, no other scenes of a dragon melting occur in Beowulf or any other Old English narrative to provide a larger context for this particular detail of the Sigmund Episode and consequently threaten to disrupt the aforementioned impression.

Importantly, a Germanic analogue to the Sigmund Episode—the Hürnen Seyfrid—does feature a scene of dragons melting, this account proving detailed and explanatory in terms of this physical process. Seyfrid (or Siegfried), the titular hero and counterpart to Beowulf’s Sigmund, slays a number of dragons and subsequently sets fire to the dragons’ carcasses. While the bodies burn, the so-called “horn” of the dragons’ scales melts from the heat and issues forth from the flames. K. C. King narrates that “Siegfried dips his finger into the stream of molten horn … out of curiosity, and when he finds that the finger when it cooled was covered with a layer of horn, he smears his whole body as far as he can reach, which excludes the area between the shoulders.” The protective covering confers invulnerability to the hero, with the exception of the one stretch of inaccessible anatomy (King 57-58, 63). Francis E. Sandbach accordingly explains
that *Hürnen Seyfrid* means “Horny Siegfried,” this appellation referring to the hero’s imperviousness to harm from the horn (16).\footnote{iii} King further finds that the hero’s invulnerability in the other German analogues arises from him simply bathing in the blood of the dragons or smearing it all over his body, the critic concluding that “the molten horn of the *Hürnen Seyfrid* is clearly a rationalization of the blood” in those narratives (57-58). The melting and other points of “remarkable agreement” between the *Hürnen Seyfrid* and *Beowulf*’s Sigmund episode lead Sandbach to agree with critic J. Goebel that, in Sandbach’s words, “this Beowulf passage and the *Hürnen Seyfrid* represent with the greatest authenticity the original form of the tradition” (Sandbach 120). In short, the worm’s melting does have a logical explanation when contextualized within the original tradition.

By virtue of his Sigmund Episode’s context within the larger Germanic tradition, the likelihood exists that the *Beowulf*-poet assumed that his learned Anglo-Saxon audience would be privy to the details he omits regarding the melting. However, such an interpretation of the poet’s motives need not preclude the rich possibility that he at the same time purposefully crafts an image of the worm as possessing a smithwork body that becomes reduced to a molten state. According to this reasoning, the poet strips away nearly all of the original detail and intentionally words his description of the melting to convey the impression that the entire dragon melts (“the worm melted from heat”), not merely a specific part of the creature as in the *Hürnen Seyfrid* and, presumably, “the original form of the tradition” (Sandbach 120). The image of the complete body undergoing this particular physical process is perfectly in keeping with the idea of the body belonging to a *wraetlic* entity in the world of the poem: the *wraetlic* necklace, sword, and shield are objects that began as molten metal in a forge and remain susceptible to being melted down once again.\footnote{liv}
An additional piece of evidence, in this case arising from an instance of critically-attested parallelism in the poem, supports the interpretation that the worm meets its end as a splendid item of smithcraft reduced to a molten state. The parallel links the worm to an exquisite object that likewise represents the conflation of fine metalwork with reptilian monster: the sword discovered by Beowulf in the dwelling under the mere’s waters and subsequently utilized by him to slay Grendel’s ferocious mother and decapitate Grendel’s corpse. The fact that the sword’s blade soon “gemealt” (“melted”) (lines 1608a, 1615b) from “hat” (“heat”) (line 1616b) serves as the first indication of a connection between the Sigmund Episode’s dragon and this marvelous weapon. The worm also specifically “gemealt” (“melted”) from “hat” (“heat”) (line 897b), the same two words featuring prominently in the description of the physical process. Frederick Klaeber does note this basic correspondence between the fate of the dragon and the blade: “The singular incident of the sword blade dissolving in the hot blood recalls the melting of Sigemund’s dragon” (Klaeber Beowulf 210, Endnote for line 1605b ff). He does not comment upon any potential significance of the parallel or mention other points of comparison between the worm and sword.

An adjective used to describe either the sword’s remaining hilt, the original blade, or the entire sword several lines after the account of the blade’s melting points to an additional significant point of connection between the Sigmund Episode’s worm and the weapon, further associating the two entities and hence reinforcing the likelihood that the former “melts” as a piece of fine metalwork. After the triumphant Beowulf brings the hilt with him to the mere’s surface and subsequently presents it to a solemn Hrothgar, the poem’s narrator refers to the sumptuous artifact, blade, or whole sword as being “wyrmfah” (line 1698a) in terms of its design and artistic properties. The compound adjective consists of the noun wyrm and adjective fah. As
previously mentioned, the poem’s narrator likewise refers to the Sigmund Episode’s worm as a *wyrm*, a total of three times (lines 886b, 891a, 897b). *Wyrm* possesses the following semantic range: “a reptile, serpent; a creeping insect, a worm.” *Fah*, in its present context, clearly is utilized through recourse to one or more of its following senses: “colored, stained, dyed, tinged, shining, variegated” (Bosworth-Toller “wyrm” I, II” “fah” s.v. “fag”). The definitions of the two words composing *wyrmfah* lead to the understanding that this adjective at the very least indicates the presence of *wyrm*-related decorative detail in the impressive craftsmanship of the hilt, blade, or entire sword. Critics have offered a number of interpretations regarding the specific type of features signified by *wyrmfah* in its current context, which is the word’s only attested occurrence in the existing corpus of Old English writings (*Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* “wyrmfah”). The lack of scholarly consensus arises from the several possibilities for *wyrm*’s specific meaning in the compound adjective.

Despite *wyrm*’s somewhat diverse semantic range, the most compelling scholarly evidence supports the interpretation that this word refers to a “serpent” or “serpents” in *wyrmfah*. In other words, *wyrm* here observes the same signification that it does in the Sigmund Episode in that it denotes the type of entity represented in the Anglo-Saxon mind by a serpent/worm/dragon. *Wyrmfah* hence intensifies the parallelism first signaled by the fact that the dragon and the sword’s blade “melt” in their respective accounts. Regarding *wyrmfah*’s specific ties to the idea of monstrous ophidians, Bosworth and Toller define *wyrmfah* as “having serpentine ornamentation,” their interpretation supported by the research of certain critics on the marked serpentine associations held by the Anglo-Saxons for the so-called pattern-welded swords, the type of weapon of which the current sword evidently is a representative. H. R. Davidson, in *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature*, explains that “the idea of a
serpent creeping along the blade would arise naturally out of the serpentine appearance of the band of pattern running along a pattern-welded sword,” which was one reason for “the continual association in poetry between swords and serpents.” Other possible reasons include “the use of poisonous acids in the process of manufacturing the blade” and the “satisfaction to be gained from the image of a gleaming, silvery sword darting like a snake to leave its deadly imprint on the victim.” Davidson further maintains that all of Beowulf’s notable swords probably are pattern-welded swords, with wyrmfah clearly referring to the “serpentine patterns” of the particular sword presently under consideration (129-45, 166). Tony Millns concurs with Davidson that the pattern-welded swords likely evoked the idea of serpents for the Anglo-Saxons, ultimately building a case that wyrmlicum fah—a closely-related phrase to wyrmfah—in The Wanderer refers to the craftsmanship of the Roman herringbone-pattern walls, which the Anglo-Saxons would have perceived as similarly serpentine (434-36).

The wyrmfah sword’s connection to serpents reinforces the parallelism noted by Klaeber, effectively rendering the sword and Sigmund Episode’s worm kindred entities with nigh-identical natures in the world of the poem. First of all, “the continual association in poetry between swords and serpents” mentioned by Davidson, her further interpretation that the sword from the mere is one of the serpentine pattern-welded swords, and Millns’ discussion of the tendency of the Anglo-Saxons to perceive different types of craftsmanship as highly evocative of serpents together indicate that the wyrmfah sword metaphorically is a serpent or snake. Critics build compelling cases for a fundamental collapsing of space between vehicle and tenor in the metaphors of Old English poetry (Köberl 1-9; Clemoes 68-116; Overing Introduction and Chapter One), their findings hence suggesting that the wyrmfah sword does not merely qualify as serpent-like, but rather is a reptilian monster in its own right. An object-creature representing the
conflation of reptilian monster with exquisite item of metalwork, the *wyrmfah* sword possesses virtually or even precisely the same dual nature as the creature-object represented by the Sigmund Episode’s worm. Arguably, the only significant difference between the object-creature (*wyrmfah* sword) and creature-object (worm) lies in the particular face that each shows to the world. In other words, each entity with respect to the other simply foregrounds the other of the two natures shared by them while subtly signaling the presence of the alternate, unforegrounded nature. By virtue of the shared dual nature, the instance of the blade “melting from heat” potently recalls that of the dragon “melting from heat,” with the poem in each case offering us the clear and specific image of an exquisite, highly-wrought, serpentine/draconic item of metalwork being reduced to its original molten state lvii

The blade’s destruction consequently offers a valuable clue as to the future of the Sigmund Episode’s worm’s molten remains in the world of the poem. Phyllis Portnoy, focusing upon the poem’s particular image of the blade melting “ise gelicost” (line 1609b), or “most like ice” (Bosworth-Toller “ise” s.v. “is” I; “gelicost” s.v. “gelic”), unpacks the metaphor, pointing out “that the ‘icicle’ melt[ing] does not mean that it disappears, only that it changes state” (86). With recourse to her own larger argument regarding the so-called “remnants” or ancient heirlooms featured in Old English verse, Portnoy explains that the *wyrmfah* sword links the present not only to the terrible, distant past, but also the present and past to the inevitably-dark future. The *wyrmfah* sword maintains this disastrous continuity by repeatedly passing hands over the ages, effectively passing along the “strife” represented by this weapon, so that a “future renewal of strife” always will result. The hilt, by having survived the destruction of the sword and having been carried to the mere’s surface and presented to Hrothgar, demonstrates that the sword and its attendant strife are continuing through the ages, changing shape (now existing only
as the hilt), finding new owners, and functioning in new contexts (75-77, 85). If the serpentine sword/hilt serves these dark purposes, then the smithwork dragon essentially constituting its reflection in the poem also is in the position to actualize such a “future renewal of strife.” In fact, the Sigmund Episode’s worm occupies the perfect position to pass on this dark legacy, considering that, as molten metal, it proves uniquely suited to appear in a variety of new shapes, specifically those of different types of metallic objects forged from its raw material. The metallic objects with their array of different uses in turn quite literally would allow the worm’s raw material to function in a number of new contexts. lviii

The interpretation that the *Beowulf*-poet blurs the line between the Sigmund Episode’s worm and the *wyrmfah* sword in such a powerful and significant way, in the end associating the worm’s fate with that of the weapon, notably gains support from the similarly-potent link found by a number of critics to exist between another of *Beowulf*’s dragons and another highly-wrought object in the world of the poem, namely the fire-drake and Scyld’s funeral ship. Hugh Magennis, John Leyerle, Howard Shilton, and Gale Owen-Crocker all individually comment upon the parallelism connecting the two entities to one another. According to all four critics, the elements informing this particular instance of parallelism essentially render the fire-drake a “northern longship,” with Owen-Crocker further maintaining that Scyld’s funeral ship itself is “personified” as “a lively and impatient beast, an incipient dragon” by virtue of this relationship (Magennis 125; Leyerle 91; Shilton 76; Owen-Crocker *The Four Funerals* 27, 39). In keeping with the similarity of fate proposed by me for the worm’s dead body and the sumptuous *wyrmfah* sword, the fire-drake’s dead body and exquisite funeral ship—as a draconic creature-object and object-creature, respectively—ultimately undergo exactly the same trajectory as one another in the narrative: as Magennis explains, the Geats “let the sea carry … away” both entities in the
precise manner of the launching of ships (125). The next section will build a case that the fate of Grendel’s various body parts further supports the interpretation that the raw material of the Sigmund Episode’s worm in effect is retained in the world of the poem, eventually to be utilized in new forms by human society.

By virtue of the considerable range of objects linked to the worm, the specific type of high-status metalwork constituting this creature’s alternate nature ultimately remains elusive and ambiguous. This dragon clearly possesses ties to swords, considering its fundamental identification with the wyrmfah sword and the dragon’s notable link to the wrætlic sword bequeathed by Beowulf to Unferth. However, the poet also utilizes subtle strategies to conflate the worm with the fine necklace that changes hands in two royal gift-giving ceremonies and with the remarkable shield fashioned to protect Beowulf from the fire-drake’s fiery attack. The commonality binding the four objects is that each is an excellent item of smithwork; hence, the sense emerges that the Sigmund Episode’s worm enjoys an existence as a generalized or abstracted “exquisite item of smithwork” rather than simply as one and only one of the named objects. The next section will build a case that this basic indeterminacy informs the depictions of two of Grendel’s body parts, with one of the pieces representing a generalized or abstracted “iron implement.” Notably, at least three of the four objects linked to the Sigmund Episode’s worm also consist of highly-wrought iron: as literary representations of the pattern-welded swords, the wyrmfah sword and wrætlic sword both necessarily feature a “decorative technique … involv[ing] welded strips of twisted and plain iron together” (Hinton 194), and the shield in question proves exceptional in kind specifically because it is composed entirely of iron instead of wood, the primary constituent of Anglo-Saxon shields (Owen-Crocker “Seldom … does” 215-18). The collective evidence from the respective depictions of the worm and Grendel therefore
points to a connection between ironwork in the abstract and monsters in the Beowulf-poet’s imagination, an interpretation I will further explore in the next section.

The poet, however, also merges the two monsters with types of metalwork other than ironwork. The wretlicne necklace with which the worm shares a relationship is an exquisite piece of jewelry, hence displaying the esteemed handiwork of the Anglo-Saxon worker in precious metals (i.e., the insular goldsmith, silversmith, etc.) and jeweler. Moreover, the poem’s narrator explicitly states that the hilt of the wyrmfah sword to which the worm proves so vitally and fundamentally linked is “gylden” (line 1677a) (“golden”), thus indicating a tie to fine goldwork on the part of this dragon. The next section will demonstrate that Grendel’s “iron implement” body part likewise demonstrates a link to a prominent piece of high-status goldwork in the poem, Heorot’s sumptuous golden roof, and that yet another of the monster’s body parts exists as an item of treasure featuring gold and precious gems. The appreciable variety of associated types of smithwork objects for the worm and Grendel increases the range of indeterminacy for both creatures’ alternate natures. This rich level of indeterminacy, when considered both in light of the evidence for the retention and assigning of new contexts for the two creatures’ respective craftwork bodies in the world of the poem and Portnoy’s findings concerning the moral darkness infecting the so-called “remnants” in Old English poetry, in turn supports the overall interpretation that the poet mobilizes the worm and Grendel as creature-objects to make a nuanced cultural statement regarding the ongoing, ever-present moral danger posed by all types of smiths (and, in a larger sense, all types of artisans) and their products to a given society.
4.3 Grendel's Body as an Assemblage of Highly-Wrought Metal Objects

The poem’s main storyline begins as Beowulf arrives at Heorot with his fellow warriors, the Geatish hero eager to achieve glory by combating Grendel, an incredibly-strong humanoid monster that has repeatedly subjected the great hall and its Danish inhabitants to his horrible predations because the hall’s rejoicing perpetually enrages him. Beowulf confronts Grendel after lying in wait for him among the sleeping warriors in Heorot, surprising the fiend by seizing his arm in his own powerful grip; as Grendel struggles to free himself, the mass consisting of his hand, arm, and shoulder rips free from his body, soon to be displayed by the triumphant hero as a trophy in the hall where spectators can view it under the hall’s exquisite golden roof. When Beowulf later encounters Grendel’s mangled corpse in the monster’s underwater dwelling, the hero uses the wyrmfah sword to decapitate the body, subsequently hauling the head with him to the mere’s surface in tandem with the wyrmfah sword’s surviving hilt; several warriors then use their combined strength to transport the head to Heorot and exhibit it as a trophy within the hall, an event recalling when the hero similarly placed the hand, arm, and shoulder to the view of the Danes and Geats in the noble building. In short, Beowulf effectively dismantles this monster’s body over the course of the narrative, retaining the anatomical pieces and providing new contexts for them that immediately involve Heorot’s magnificent architecture and the wyrmfah sword’s excellent hilt. I will build a case that the poet utilizes a number of strategies to merge the two anatomical pieces with particular types of metal objects and that he ultimately offers a vision of Grendel as an assemblage of such items.

As discussed in this chapter’s Introduction, the research of a few critics does support the interpretation that the poet conflates specific body parts belonging to Grendel with certain types
of fashioned items. I will consider these critical findings when the individual item of scholarship proves applicable to the particular body part under consideration at that point in time. Regarding Grendel’s physical nature, scholars typically link this monster to the Germanic troll, a terrible creature featured, for example, in the Grettis saga, this Icelandic saga’s battle between the hero Grettir and the troll considered by critics to be the closest analogue to the events in Beowulf involving Grendel (Fulk and Cain 202-03). Scholars also regularly note that Beowulf-poet situates Grendel within the Christian tradition and even into the human race, specifically by inserting the monster into Cain’s lineage (for example, see Klaeber Beowulf 121, Endnote for lines 86-114; Williams 3-110; Tolkien “Beowulf: The Monsters” 19; Holderness 29-30). R. D. Fulk et al. comment upon the large amount of critical attention the monster’s human aspect has received, observing that, “most frequently, scholarship has explored Grendel’s close relation to humans, interpreting him as representing the dark side of humanity or the anti-thegn, a dualistic creature who is intimately tied to the society he attacks and who becomes more human as he approaches human habitations and more monstrous as he retreats toward his own” (xliv). In short, critics tend to perceive Grendel as a troll and/or the disturbingly human embodiment of the collective human shadow, heir to the moral darkness of his infamous ancestor.

Despite Grendel’s established connections to trolls and humans, a number of critics find that the Beowulf-poet refrains from providing the reader with a clear view of this monster. This perceived indeterminacy in particular opens the door for the interpretations put forth in this section, namely that a wealth of evidence exists in support of this creature’s body constituting an assemblage of discrete metal objects and that a much clearer picture of Grendel begins to emerge once we recognize and consider the various, often subtle indicators of the monster’s smithwork nature. Regarding Grendel’s overall vagueness in the narrative, this monster’s description as a
feond on helle prompts J. R. R. Tolkien to assert that “there is evidently a confusion or twilight in the thought of the poet (and his age) about these monsters [of the poem], hostile to mankind. They remain physical monsters, with blood, able to be slain (with the right sword). Yet already they are described in terms applicable to evil spirits …” (Tolkien Beowulf: A Translation 159).

In other words, a blurred line exists between living creature and discarnate entity in the figure of Grendel (and in those of the poem’s other monsters), with no resolution to the indeterminacy forthcoming from the poet. On a similar note, Eugene Green explains in his own words that, for critic Michael Lapidge, “Grendel attacks relentlessly yet remains a mysterious figure until his death. The poet’s initial words for the monster carry uncertain meanings, or relate nothing visual. The name Grendel itself is opaque …” (Green 84). Mark C. Amodio comparably argues that “because the poet provides little concrete detail [for both Grendel and the fire-drake], the audience must participate in the narrative process … by fleshing out the creatures in idiosyncratic and terrifying detail” (Amodio “Affective Criticism” 66-67).

I will build a case that the persistent smithwork imagery used in connection with Grendel’s anatomy enables us to begin “fleshing out” (to use Amodio’s words) the monster’s indeterminate body to reveal its nature as a collection of various types of metal objects.

The troll’s “hond …, / earm on eaxle” (lines 834b-835a)—in other words, his “hand, arm, and shoulder”—constitutes the first piece of anatomy forcibly removed from Grendel proper by Beowulf. Once the hero proudly displays this trophy in the great hall, the Beowulf-poet offers the reader a compelling clue that the body part is a highly-wrought object by referring to it as a searowundor: “Eode scealc monig / swiðhicgende / to sele ðam hean / searowundor seon” (lines 918b-920a) (“Many warriors came / strong of purpose / to the high hall / to see the searowundor”). Bosworth and Toller define searuwundor as “a wonderful thing in implements
or engines,” the epithet’s semantic range thereby indicating that Grendel’s detached anatomy somehow exists as an implement, part of an implement, engine, or part of an engine (Bosworth-Toller “hond” s.v. “hand”; “earm” I; “eaxle”; “eode” s.v. “gan”; “scealc” III; “monig” s.v. “manig” I; “swiðhicgende” s.v. “swiðhpycgende”; “sele”; “hean” s.v. “heah”; “seon” I; “searowundor” s.v. “searuwundor”). No additional instances of searuwundor appear in the Old English corpus to lend insight regarding the likely connection between this piece of the monster’s anatomy and such fashioned items and/or mechanisms (Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus “searowundor”; “searuwundor”). For further information on searuwundor, Bosworth and Toller direct us to Def. IV of searu, the first of the epithet’s two heads: “that which is contrived with art, a machine, engine, fabric.” The instances of usage offered by the lexicographers for this particular sense of searu all involve intricate machines, including both the ancient military engine known as the ballista and a machine with a spinning part that grinds with the use of gravel (“searu” IV). Searowundor hence likely points to a fundamental identification of Grendel’s detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly with such tools and apparatus in general.

While Defn. 4 of searu does potentially link Grendel’s disconnected appendage to some forms of metalwork (for example, Roman ballistas frequently featured iron plates and nails—see Ramsey), further investigation of searuwundor’s entry uncovers the hint of a far more immediate connection of this epithet to smithwork. The lexicographers specifically indicate a close correspondence between this epithet and the compound noun searupil, which they define as “an implement with a point,” the idea of an “implement” clearly representing the point of intersection between the respective semantic ranges of searupil and searuwundor. Searupil only appears in Exeter Book Riddle 33, in the following statement from the Riddle’s speaking object: “Min heafod is homere gepuren, searopila wund, sworfen feole” (“My head is beaten with a
hammer, wounded by pointed implements, scoured by a file”). “Key” is the generally-accepted answer to this particular riddle (Bosworth-Toller “searuwundor”; “searupil”; Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus “searupil”; “searopil”; Bosworth-Toller “heafod”; “homere” s.v. “hamer”; “geþuren” s.v. “geþruen”; “wund” s.v. “wundian”; “sworfen” s.v. “sweorfan”; “feole” s.v. “feol”; Baum “Riddle 33”). Here, the searopilas (“pointed implements”) clearly are a type of metalworking tool, as is a homere (“hammer”) and feole (“file”). The “pointed implements” must be pieces of metalwork themselves, considering that they enable the key’s maker to work with metal in the designated way (metaphorically “wounding” it) in the fashioning of the specified final product; David Hinton accordingly explains that an Anglo-Saxon blacksmith’s tools typically had iron as a or the primary constituent (186-97). In short, evidence from searupil’s link to searowundor indicates the likelihood that the epithet in question merges Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly with an unspecified type of sharp, pointed, metallic tool or instrument, likely in the form of ironwork (more on this last point shortly).

The linguistic evidence in favor of a type of metalwork constituting the searowundor that is Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly gains additional support from the fundamental link found by Paul Beekman Taylor to exist between Old English searo and metalwork in insular writings. After briefly discussing the challenges involved in establishing searo’s exact semantic range, he concludes that “for the most part … searo in Old English signals three things—treasure, armor, and the artifice which produces them” (114-15, 122). In other words, the noun does primarily prove linked to metalsmiths and their products. Notably, the semantic ranges of a number of the other compound nouns with searo as the first head bear out Taylor’s finding that searo frequently “signals … the artifice which produces” the indicated types of items; for example, in the lexicon appear searubend (“a cunning, curious clasp or fastening”), searuceap
(“an ingenious piece of goods, a curious implement”), and searunet (“an armor-net, or a net ingeniously wrought, a coat of mail”) (Bosworth-Toller “searubend”; “searuceap”; “searunet”).

Of these three compound nouns, searobend and searonet occur in Beowulf (in lines 2086b and 406a, respectively), and Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly, by virtue of its designation as a searowundor in the world of the poem, likely similarly exists as a “cunning,” “ingeniously wrought” object. Taylor’s research, considered alongside the other compound nouns containing searo, thus suggests that this detached piece of Grendel’s anatomy not only is an item of metalwork, but moreover qualifies as a cleverly-fashioned one, its craftsmanship at such a high level that the object immediately calls to mind the exceptional skills of the smith who forged it.

The interpretation that the metalwork constituting the alternate nature of Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly specifically is in the form of a sharp, pointed, metallic implement, probably of iron, in turn gains support from an additional front in Beowulf. Once the Geats and Danes gaze wonderingly upon the trophy, the poet metaphorically links Grendel’s “nægla” (“nails”) to a “hæþenes handsporu” (“heathen’s hand-spurs”), the nails accordingly proving “style gelicost” (“most like steel”) (lines 984b-987a) (Bosworth-Toller “nægla” s.v. “nægel” I; “hæþenes” s.v. “hæðen”; “handsporu” s.v. “hand” + “spora”; “style” s.v. “stele”; “gelicost” s.v. “gelic”). The research by Johann Köberl, Peter Clemoes, and Gillian R. Overing on metaphorical relationships in Old English poetry opens the possibility that the figurative space between Grendel’s nails and such steel-like spurs collapses, resulting in a conflation of body part and sharp, pointed object. Notably, C. R. Dodwell documents that the insular spurs used for horses frequently were composed of “precious metals,” with Michael Lewis et al. further specifying that “the body of the spur appears to have been of iron” (Dodwell 190; Lewis et al. 257); in other
words, the poem’s description of the nails as “spurs” serves as another piece of evidence that the monster’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly has an existence as an item of ironwork. The statement that the nails prove “most like steel” actually lends an additional, significant degree of support to this interpretation: David A. Hinton explains that “the careful use of steel-like iron … was widely practiced” in the crafting of knife blades in Anglo-Saxon England (194). Arguably, the image of knife blades composed of “steel-like iron” finds its reflection in the literary image of spurs that are “most like steel.” Of further note is that nægel here probably functions as a pun, with Grendel’s steel-like fingernails specifically figured as “iron nails” (Bosworth-Toller “nægel” I, II).lxiii

I have thus far argued that various strands of evidence point to the existence of Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly as a sharp, pointed, iron implement; the unnamed ferrous object in turn bears a relationship to such items as spurs, nails, and the tools used in the fashioning of intricate ironwork such as keys. However, a compelling piece of linguistic evidence arising from the name “Grendel” indicates that the item conflated with this body part also proves linked to a different type of iron implement. According to A. Marshall Elliott et al., “[Jacob] Grimm connected the name Grendel with OE. grindel, OHG. krintil, MHG. gritel, ‘bolt, bar, riegel’ … Grendel would, according to this view of his name, be a being which ‘shuts in, incloses’” (69).

Satan’s description of the device that restricts his movements in Hell in Genesis B demonstrates that forged iron would have constituted a grindel: “Licgað me <ymbe> / heardes irenes / hate geslægene / grindlas greate. Mid þy me god hafað gehæfted be þam healse …” (lines 382-84) (“About me lie great bars (or bolts) of hard iron forged with heat. With these God has bound me by the neck …”). Bosworth and Toller offer additional commentary on the probable form and function of this device in their entry for grindel, defining this word as “a bar, bolt; in pl. lattice-
work, hurdle; crates” and translating “geslægene grindlas greate” from Genesis B as “forged large gratings.” They further include the following quoted explanation of the grindel from A History of English Rhythms by Edwin Guest: “As far as we can judge from the drawing which accompanies the description, the grindel was a kind of heavy iron grating, which rather encumbered the prisoner by its weight, than fixed him in its grasp” (qtd. in Bosworth-Toller “grindel”). In short, Grendel’s very name serves to merge this monster with particular types of prison-related ironwork.

This sense of Grendel as the iron implements of prisons in turn informs the depiction of the anatomical piece presently under consideration, which, as discussed, proves linked to other types of iron implements by virtue of the epithet searowundor and the description of the creature’s fingernails. In other words, the poet links the monster’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly to most or all of the various ferrous implements thus far mentioned: spurs, intricate metalworking tools, nails, bars, bolts, gratings, and latticework. The body part further bears a relation to intricate machines such as the ballista and unnamed grinding machine with a spinning part. This competing range of possibilities for the identity of the item constituting the trophy’s alternate nature indicates that the indeterminacy perceived by critics to inform Grendel’s overall depiction in Beowulf likewise informs the depiction of the body part as a highly-wrought object. The large number of possibilities, ensuing and fundamental inconclusiveness, and fact that the majority of items connected with the body part specifically feature ironwork in turn enable a gradual picture to emerge of the anatomical piece as a sort of generalized or abstracted “iron implement” rather than simply as one and only one of the named iron implements. This chapter’s previous section presents evidence that the Sigmund Episode’s worm similarly possesses an alternate nature as a generalized or abstracted iron object. The poet’s decision to represent two of
his monsters in this particular way indicates that he is using the depictions to make a nuanced cultural statement of some sort regarding insular ironwork in general.

The Anglo-Saxons’ ambivalence in terms of the moral status of blacksmiths and their iron products offers one likely explanation as to exactly why the Beowulf-poet would seek to mobilize Grendel and the Sigmund Episode’s worm as creature-objects representing the conflation of deadly monster and generalized or abstracted iron object. David Hinton, in “Weland’s Work: Metal and Metalsmiths,” builds a case that, despite the high esteem enjoyed by workers in other types of metal (for example, the goldsmiths, gold embroiderers, and silversmiths), insular blacksmiths frequently suffered marginalization and/or abjection within Anglo-Saxon society, their fellow countrymen and countrywomen viewing both them and their skills with distaste, disrespect, suspicion, distrust, and even fear. The ironwork fashioned by them accordingly often bore dark associations; for example, Hinton specifically mentions that “an Anglo-Saxon charm warns that some iron was the work of witches, and six smiths sitting making war-spears clearly offered mankind no good” (192-200) (see this dissertation’s Introduction for a survey of the existing research on the esteem commanded by the other types of metalworkers and for an outline of the various components of Hinton’s well-reasoned argument).

By virtue of the fundamental identification of Grendel and the Sigmund Episode’s worm with ironwork, the two monsters, as creature-objects, enable the poet to give vivid literary expression to the high level of moral danger posed by blacksmiths, their morally-questionable abilities, and their iron products. These literary depictions allow the poet to foreground the moral danger specifically by granting predatory, beastly bodies and an alarming amount of creaturely agency to the potentially-sinister artistry and craftsmanship. Considering the variety of types of ironwork linked to Grendel and the Sigmund Episode’s worm, this effective bringing to life of
the blacksmith’s dark ironwork in the figures of the two monsters permits an appreciable range of iron objects to experience such an animal existence. Thus, the indeterminacy informing the two monsters’ ironwork bodies equips Grendel and the worm to perform the cultural work of representing the moral danger inherent to all types of ironwork, from the esteemed pattern-welded swords to the significantly less noble spurs and nails, on down to the dark ironwork of prison buildings.

Chapter One builds a case that the Exeter Book’s rapacious, infernal Whale—like Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly and the Sigmund Episode’s worm—embodies the moral darkness infecting blacksmiths, their skills, and their ironwork products. For two poets to have been inspired to craft such vivid literary representations foregrounding insular concerns regarding this specific type of artisan and his craftwork indicates that Anglo-Saxon culture did find this moral darkness particularly troubling. Of course, the effective bringing to life of the moral darkness in the figures of the three awesome monsters also suggests that Anglo-Saxon culture found the problematic aspects of blacksmiths and of the iron objects they fashioned to be compelling and even thrilling. In other words, Grendel, the Sigmund Episode’s worm, and the Whale respond to both the sense of danger and dark sense of excitement that blacksmiths, their skills, and their ironwork products would have elicited from the populace in Anglo-Saxon England. After all, a comparable level of dark excitement does infuse the descriptions noted by Hinton of the sinister ironwork created by witches and negatively-portentous ironwork forged by smiths in the one Anglo-Saxon charm.

As also indicated in Chapter One, additional points of correspondence exist between Grendel and the Whale, and Chapter Two furthers the discussion by building a case that the dragon in the version of The Life of Saint Margaret in Cotton Tiberius A.iii effectively joins the
two monsters to compose a veritable triad in the existing corpus of Old English writings. On Grendel’s end, the most compelling link among the three creatures directly involves the alternate nature of his hand-arm-shoulder assembly as a piece of prison ironwork. A brief look at the general characteristics of this three-member group of monsters will prove instrumental in setting the stage for a consideration of the underlying significance of this body part’s collocation or conceptual pairing with an exquisite architectural piece in the poem, Heorot’s goldwork roof. (Refer to the appropriate sections in Chapters One and Two for a detailed examination of the evidence supporting the various interpretations put forth below regarding the Whale and Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon.)

As in the case of Grendel and his hand-arm-shoulder assembly, the Whale and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon both evidence ties to prison metalwork. The iron grated prison doors serve as the Whale’s jaws, and gold prison locks, bars, and bolts constitute part of the body of the dragon in question. The Life of Saint Margaret’s insular writer moreover utilizes a number of strategies to conflate the dragon with a prison, and the Whale’s depiction suggests that the poet likewise figures this beast’s massive, inescapable, gated body as this type of building. Grendel already demonstrates a connection to prison architecture by virtue of his anatomical piece’s link to the different types of iron prison implements, and his association with the other two monsters, both of which represent the conflation of living creature with prison, effectively reinforces this connection. Furthermore, Grimm’s interpretation regarding Grendel’s name indicating that he is “a being which ‘shuts in, incloses’” (Elliott et al. 69) proves perfectly in keeping with the emerging view of this troll as possessing an aspect specifically involving prison architecture. For a blurred line to exist between Grendel and this particular type of building in turn hints at a specific relationship to Roman versus insular architecture on this troll’s part (see Chapter One for
an outline of the relevant scholarship on medieval prisons), an interpretation which will feature prominently in the discussion of the poem’s collocation or conceptual pairing of Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly with Heorot’s gold roof.

The interpretation that Grendel’s relationship to the Whale and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon reinforces a link on the part of the hand-arm-shoulder assembly to Roman architecture gains further support from Grendel sharing two additional key traits with those creatures; after all, for the three monsters to demonstrate a pronounced range of common attributes lends support to the interpretation that the same precise insular imaginative lens influenced their respective depictions, an imaginative lens explicitly involving prisons and hence Roman architecture in the cases of the Whale and the named dragon. First of all, like the two other monsters, Grendel possesses expressly-stated ties to Hell; for example, the epithet *feond on helle* refers to him, and this monster furthermore is Cain’s descendent. Secondly, in keeping with *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon’s existence as a dragon and the Whale’s original identity in the Greco-Roman bestiary tradition as the serpentine monster known as the Asp-Turtle, the line between Grendel and reptilian monsters repeatedly blurs throughout the entirety of the poem’s Grendel Episode, despite him being a representative of the Germanic trolls. For one thing, as Francis E. Sandbach explains, Grendel is one “of two dragons” (the other dragon being the monster’s ferocious mother) by virtue of Beowulf’s exploits paralleling those of Siegfried (23). Also, various types of serpents and dragons infest his mere, stylized serpents adorn the sword Beowulf retrieves from Grendel’s dwelling, and, according to Beowulf, Grendel had carried on his person a glove fashioned from the skins of dragons. In short, Grendel’s association with so many serpents and dragons—living, dead, and artistically-rendered—undergirds the interpretation that he, symbolically at least, is a dragon.
As a literally-hellish, veritable dragon with ties to prison-related implements by virtue of his hand-arm-shoulder assembly and his name, Grendel takes his place within the triad of identically-natured monsters. He thereby shares the other two monsters’ potent, fundamental link to Roman prisons arising from the conflation of their bodies with this type of building in their respective narratives. Additional, compelling evidence for an architectural aspect to the anatomical piece presently under consideration—and, more specifically, for the fundamental identification of this anatomical piece with a part of a Roman building—occurs in the poem’s description of King Hrothgar solemnly viewing the displayed trophy. Before Hrothgar arrives on the scene to contemplate the body part and make a speech, the poem’s narrator provides the following account of the actual displaying of the trophy by the victorious Beowulf within noble Heorot: “… syþan hildedeor / hond alegde, / earm ond eaxle / —þær wæs eal geador / Grendles grape— / under geapne hr(of)” (lines 834-836) (“… the brave warrior set into place the hand, arm, and shoulder; there was Grendel’s grasp, all three parts of it still connected, under the wide roof”) (Bosworth-Toller “hildedeor”; “alegde” s.v. “alecgan”; “eal” I; “geador”; “grape” s.v. “grap”; “geapne” s.v. “geap”; “hrof”). Here, the first indication of a significant contextual relationship between the body part and the great hall’s “hrof” (“roof”) takes place.

The Beowulf-poet, in the account of Hrothgar’s subsequent contemplation of the veritable tableau constituted by the anatomical piece and roof, further merges the two seemingly-disparate items: “Hroðgar maþelode— / he to healle geong, / stod on stapole, / geseah steapne hrof, / golde fahne, / ond Grendles hond” (lines 925-927) (“Hrothgar made a speech, went to the hall, stood on a step, saw the lofty roof of shining gold, and Grendel’s hand”) (Bosworth-Toller “maþelode” s.v. “maðelian”; “healle” s.v. “heall”; “geong” s.v. “geongan”; “stod” s.v. “standan”; “stapole” s.v. “stapol” II; “geseah” s.v. “geseon”; “steapne” s.v. “steap” I, II; “golde” s.v. “gold”; “fahne”
s.v. “fag”). Here, the trophy’s collocation with the architectural piece both in the tableau’s description and in the Danish king’s line of sight and weighty consideration at the very least renders the two items a conceptual pair, significantly deepening the connection between them originally established in lines 834-836. Nicholas Howe’s findings regarding apposition in Beowulf support the interpretation that the account in question goes so far as to conflate the two objects forming the conceptual pair: building upon his own assertion that “the language of Beowulf is characteristically appositive,” Howe maintains that “at a lexical level, apposition forces listeners to hold two meanings at the same moment; at an interpretive level, it forces listeners to accept ambiguity …” (78). Granted, the presence of the coordinating conjunction “ond” (“and”) technically prevents “Grendles hond” (“Grendel’s hand”) from serving as an appositive for “steapne hrof, / golde fahne” (“the lofty roof of shining gold”); but for apposition to inform the poem’s overall composition to the degree indicated by Howe does suggest that apposition to some extent colors the relationship of the conceptual pair’s constituent items.

The collocation/apposition of Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly with the named golden architectural piece indicates that Grendel, like all of the reptilian monsters discussed in Chapter Two, including the two reptilian monsters with which this veritable or symbolic dragon forms the triad, does possess an existence as land-based architecture. Moreover, the specific architectural element with which the poet conflates Grendel demonstrates Roman influence, just as do the architectural works conflated with the other serpents and dragons. Despite the fact that Heorot is a Germanic royal hall rather than a Roman prison or other type of Roman building, Karl P. Wentersdorf explains that Roman “gilded roof tiles” and “gilded gables,” the latter of which allegedly appeared on buildings in Roman England, likely informed the majestic roof’s depiction in the poem (418-26), and Peggy A. Knapp similarly perceives a connection between
the grand hall’s roof and Roman architectural works, additionally noting a moral darkness to the involved structures: “The golden roof [of Heorot], not typical of Anglo-Saxon building practices, signals the moral hazard of pride for its association with the palaces of the Germanic gods and the ‘ruthless’ Romans” (90). The moral darkness mentioned by Knapp well-accords with Chapter Two’s findings regarding the mergings of reptilian monsters with Roman architecture in several literary depictions of serpents and dragons: Chapter Two specifically argues that insular writers and poets mobilize the Latin-influenced serpents and dragons as creature-objects in response to an underlying dark Anglo-Saxon fantasy involving the granting of actual predatory lives, with a high level of savage, creaturely agency in the world, to the morally-questionable Roman architectural structures. Grendel, by virtue of his hand-arm-shoulder assembly possessing an alternate nature as a sumptuous Roman-inspired roof, responds to the same insular fantasy.

My argument vis-à-vis Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly’s conceptual pairing with Heorot’s exquisite gold roof thus far contends that the fundamental identification of the body part with the architectural piece, considered alongside other key details of the narrative, leads to the suggestion that the insular tendency to imagine serpents and dragons as Roman/extra-insular land-based architectural works significantly colored the Beowulf-poet’s depiction of the displayed trophy. The conflation of the anatomical piece in question with the Roman-inspired roof moreover lends an additional degree of support to the interpretation that Grendel forms a veritable triad in Old English literature with the Whale/Asp-Turtle and Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon by virtue of the three monsters’ evident serpentine/draconic natures and potent ties to Roman prison buildings and the associated metal implements of these particular structures. Grendel’s multifaceted link to the Whale/Asp-Turtle and The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon and his more basic link to the serpents of the Old English Alexander’s Letter
to Aristotle and Old English Orosius ultimately enable him to perform the same basic cultural work as these various reptilian monsters: to give vivid literary expression to the Anglo-Saxon ambivalence and dark fantasies directed towards those architectural works whose provenance lay outside of the larger Germanic culture.

The merging of Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly with Heorot’s splendid gold roof further allows for the inclusion of the roof, an architectural work, within the competing range of possibilities for the identity of the item constituting the trophy’s alternate nature. To state this another way, the trophy ties Grendel to the named architectural element as well as to the various items of ironwork, the marked influence of the two craftwork categories (architecture and ironwork) on the anatomical piece’s depiction thereby lending additional support to the interpretation that Grendel’s critically-attested indeterminacy likewise significantly informs the body part’s depiction as a material artifact. As for my larger argument that the Beowulf-poet specifically offers an overall vision of Grendel as an assemblage of discrete items of smithwork, the fundamental identification of the trophy with Heorot’s sumptuous roof clearly indicates a fundamental link between the trophy and exquisite goldwork. In other words, the hand-arm-shoulder assembly’s conceptual pairing with the roof not only ties Grendel to architecture, but necessarily also to the goldwork actually composing the architecture. The anatomical piece’s conflation with goldwork permits the roof to join the various iron objects as one of the many items of smithwork sharing a blurred line with the trophy. This inclusion of the gold roof within the range of interpretive possibilities for the hand-arm-shoulder assembly in turn enables the emergence of a sense of this anatomical piece as a generalized or abstracted “highly-wrought item of smithwork” rather than as only the previously-discussed generalized or abstracted “iron implement.”
Notably, my interpretation that the *Beowulf*-poet effectively presents the esteemed gold object represented by noble Heorot’s roof as one of the items potentially constituting the alternate physical nature of this anatomical piece which itself embodies the moral darkness attributed to blacksmiths and their handiwork would appear to conflict with the cultural esteem that Anglo-Saxon society typically extended towards insular goldsmiths and their handiwork. This dissertation’s Introduction and Chapter One feature scholarship detailing the high status enjoyed by the goldsmith in Anglo-Saxon England (see Dodwell 44-48 and Coatsworth and Pinder 259-64), the regard paid to him sharply contrasting with the distrust, disrespect, contempt, and fear commonly directed towards the insular blacksmith (again, see Hinton 192-200). The culture at large even held in high esteem the gold embroideress, the worker in gold thread who essentially was the goldsmith’s female counterpart (see Dodwell 57-58 and Hyer and Owen-Crocker 176-83). Chapter One accordingly builds a case that the Exeter Book’s heavenly Phoenix and Panther, as creature-objects, respond to insular fantasies involving the greatly-admired work of the goldsmith and gold embroideress being granted actual creaturely lives and that the Christian world of the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix* essentially becomes one in which these two creature-objects with bodies forged and/or decorated by the most-esteemed of smiths stand juxtaposed with that creature-object (i.e., the Whale) whose body has been fashioned by Anglo-Saxon England’s morally-problematic smith, the blacksmith. In other words, the composite worldview of the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix* presupposes that blacksmiths and goldsmiths, along with their representative metalwork, do remain fundamentally polarized in terms of moral worth.

Considering the conflation of both Grendel’s hand-arm-shoulder assembly and the Sigmund Episode’s worm with high-status goldwork, the *Beowulf*-poet presents the reader with a
world in which goldwork proves as morally suspect as ironwork. By implication, the culturally-
estee`ned goldsmith and his skills inevitably share in the perceived moral darkness of the
distrusted and marginalized blacksmith and his skills. Such a worldview clearly contrasts with
the composite worldview offered by the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix*, the
difference between the two worldviews ultimately leading to the suggestion that the *Beowulf-
poet, unlike the poet(s) of the *The Panther, The Whale, and The Phoenix* vis-à-vis the three
narrative’s titular beasts, mobilizes Grendel and the Sigmund Episode’s worm as creature-objects
largely in response to an underlying insular wariness regarding Anglo-Saxon society’s
fashioning and subsequent use of all types of smithwork, not simply ironwork. To state this
another way, the *Beowulf*-poet utilizes the two creature-objects represented by Grendel and the
worm according to the same basic purpose as the other poet(s), namely to make a statement
about the moral status of fashioned metal objects; but he invests each of the two creature-objects
with the high degree of indeterminacy to expand the creature-object’s range of signification in
order to point a finger at the morally-problematic aspects of a wide range of metalworkers and
metalwork types.

The second body part forcibly removed from Grendel by Beowulf—the troll’s massive
head—provides further evidence both that a number of discrete objects compose the monster’s
body and that high-status goldwork figures prominently in this creature’s physical constitution.
Certain details of the trophy’s depiction furthermore open the possibility that this anatomical
piece’s exquisite goldwork is inset with precious gems. As discussed, Beowulf utilizes the
*wyrfah* sword that he discovers in Grendel’s underwater dwelling to decapitate Grendel’s
corpse, subsequently carrying both the monster’s head and the weapon’s surviving hilt with him
to the mere’s surface. The hilt possesses the material property of being “gylden” (line 1677a)
(“golden”), and the following account of the hero’s personal conveyance of the head and the golden artifact demonstrates that the Beowulf-poet collocates the two items in the narrative, conceptually pairing the items so that we get the distinct sense that the head shares the hilt’s material properties: “Ne nom he in þæm wicum, / Wedergeata leod, / maðmæhta ma, / þeh he þær monige geseah, / buton þone hafelan / ond þa hilt somod / since fage …” (lines 1612-1615a) (“Nor did he take from that place, the man of the Weder-Geats, more treasure, however many items of such he saw there, except the head and the hilt together glittering with jewels”). The syntax and overall description clearly enable—and moreover encourage—the interpretation that the “hafelan” (“head”) and the “hilt” (“hilt”) both qualify as “maðmæhta” (“costly possession[s], valuable[s], treasure”). The same syntax, informed by the adverb “somod” (“together”), confers the related sense that the head, “together” with the hilt, is “since fage” (“glittering with gold, silver, and/or jewels”); here is one hint, then, that the severed anatomy features “jewels.” That “somod” can “mark association of similar objects” lends even further support to the interpretation that the head remains endowed with the golden and potentially-bejeweled hilt’s material properties (Bosworth-Toller “hafelan” s.v. “heafod”; “maðmæhta” s.v. “maðumæht”; “since” s.v. “sinc”; “fage” s.v. “fag”; “somod” s.v. “samod” I.b, III).

The poet further hints at a blurred line between the severed head and smithwork in general in the description of this body part’s exhibition within Heorot: “Þa wæs be feaxe / on flet boren / Grendles heafod, / þær guman druncon, / egeslic for eorlum / ond þære idese mid, / wliteseon wrætlic …” (lines 1647-1650a) (“Then was Grendel’s head brought by the hair of the head into the hall, where men drank; terrible for the earls and the ladies there with them was the wliteseon wrætlic …”). Here, the epithet “wliteseon wrætlic” refers to “Grendel’s heafod” (“Grendel’s head”). Bosworth and Toller define the noun *wliteseon* as “a sight to gaze on, a
spectacle,” the compound noun’s second head deriving from the verb seon, “to see with the eyes.” The “sight” or “spectacle” signified by wliteseon apparently proves to be an aesthetically pleasing one: the compound noun’s first head, wlite, possesses the sense of “beautiful appearance, beauty, ornament” (“wlite” II), accordingly appearing in such Old English words as “wliteandett” (“a confession of splendor”), “wlitebeorht” (“of splendid beauty, beautiful”), “wlitescine” (“of brilliant beauty, splendid, beauteous”), and “wlitigness” (“beauty, comeliness, adornment”), to list but a few of the words containing wlite directly informed by the related ideas of beauty, splendid/splendor, brilliance, ornament, and adornment. Wætlic further emphasizes the beauty and splendor of the “sight” or “spectacle” constituted by the severed head: Bosworth and Toller document a sense of this adjective as “of wondrous excellence, beautiful, noble, excellent, elegant” (“wætlic” II). Even more importantly, this adjective signals the merging of the trophy in question with an unidentified item of exquisite smithwork (see this chapter’s previous section and Chapter One for a detailed discussion of wætlic’s larger significance in describing monsters in Beowulf and fantastic creatures in the Exeter Book). This link to exquisite smithwork would well-accord with the senses of wlite as brilliance, ornament, and adornment.

The noun wæt, from which wætlic derives, possesses the following semantic range: “a work of art, a jewel, an ornament.” By virtue of wæt’s semantic range, wætlic very possibly both emphasizes wlite’s sense as an “ornament” and joins the phrase since fage in hinting at the presence of jewels in the severed head’s craftsmanship. The various threads of linguistic evidence, along with the other named considerations, therefore permit a nuanced translation of the epithet wliteseon wætlic as, for example, “the beautiful and amazing sight constituted by the exquisite, begemmed, shining metal ornament.” Thomas E. Hart offers a related interpretation of wliteseon wætlic, translating the phrase as “something beautiful to behold in its dazzling
patterning” (Hart 195, Footnote 24), Hart’s description clearly proving more readily applicable to a splendid fashioned item than a troll’s massive, waterlogged, grotesque, bloody, lifeless, bodiless head. In other words, just as the epithet *searowundor* indicates that Grendel’s detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly is some type of highly-wrought metal object, the epithet *wliteseon wraetlic* likely points to a similar nature for the same monster’s severed head. The epithet in question hence does constitute evidence of an intention on the *Beowulf*-poet’s part to reinforce this particular anatomical piece’s link to smithwork that he first establishes in the account of Beowulf bringing both Grendel’s head and the *wyrmfah* sword’s golden, presumably-bejeweled hilt to the mere’s surface. Moreover, this epithet, considered alongside *searowundor*, supports the interpretation that the poet provides hints of Grendel’s alternate nature as an assemblage of metal objects by means of epithets for this monster’s body parts, epithets that initially register as enigmatic and even opaque according to modern sensibilities.

Notably, vis-à-vis the severed head’s specific link to goldwork, the rich association between the body part in question and the golden hilt plays an important role in two instances of parallelism in the poem, both of which emphasize the fact of this monster’s goldwork aspect. First of all, the collocation and conceptual pairing of this artifact with the anatomical piece clearly serves as a close parallel to the earlier collocation and conceptual pairing of this monster’s detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly with Heorot’s golden roof. Approximately 700 lines separate the two accounts linked by this striking instance of parallelism in the poem, the considerable distance between the accounts supporting the interpretation that the *Beowulf*-poet diligently and thoughtfully works to present an ongoing, consistent vision of Grendel as a monster embodying the moral danger attending even Anglo-Saxon England’s most valued type of metalwork, the high-status products of the esteemed goldsmith. Further evidence for a
persistent link to goldwork on Grendel’s part arises from a second instance of parallelism involving the golden hilt: the poet also blurs the line between this object and the Sigmund Episode’s worm. The worm’s resultant ties to goldwork, considered alongside Grendel’s similar associations by virtue of his own relationship with the hilt, demonstrate that the poet subtly and repeatedly foregrounds images of goldwork monsters throughout the part of the poem allotted to the overall Grendel Episode.

This preoccupation with the idea of goldwork monsters on the part of the Beowulf-poet likely arose from two, related quarters. First, the attested post-Conversion insular ambivalence regarding the questionable moral status of splendid objects in general probably served as a significant part of the inspiration for the depictions of Grendel’s severed head, the same monster’s detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly, and the Sigmund Episode’s worm’s entire body as gold objects. As discussed in this dissertation’s Introduction, a number of scholars comment upon the Christianized Anglo-Saxons’ expressed concerns over the perceived moral danger posed by exquisite items. The fears and misgivings informing their conflicted mindset directly involved the simple fact that the Anglo-Saxons for centuries had admired sumptuous pieces of craftsmanship both for the objects’ value in terms of the Anglo-Saxons’ traditionally heroic and kingly society and for the objects’ signaling of personal grandeur or affluence, whereas the culture’s post-Conversion assimilation of certain ideals both from Scripture and the writings of the Latin Church fathers now stipulated that the proper use of exquisite items was to elevate an onlooker’s consciousness to contemplation of the utter majesty of God and His own masterworks. The specific problem was that, despite the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England and the new ideals, highly-wrought material masterpieces retained their centuries-old dark power to seduce men and women with worldly fancies, when the people’s thoughts instead
should have been unerringly focused upon God and the various aspects of a proper, well-ordered Christian life (Coatsworth and Pinder 264; Hyer and Owen-Crocker 176, 179; Dodwell 189). This luring of the mind towards such worldliness placed people’s souls in jeopardy, and the resulting moral danger finds suitable expression in the monstrous, deadly, goldwork bodies of Grendel and the worm.

Goldwork’s close association with so-called heathen idols, together with the diabolical objects’ link to dragons, likely also played a sizable role in inspiring the depictions of goldwork monsters throughout Grendel’s part of the poem. Regarding gold’s ties to pagan objects, Dominic Janes, in God and Gold in Late Antiquity, explains that “possession of elite substances marked power. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the pagan gods were often marked out by gold in the classical world. […] Palaces, temples and cult statues [hence] frequently came to be adorned with splendid displays of gold and other precious substances” (19-20). Such pagan objects furthermore often shared an intimate relationship with dragons; for example, the Anglo-Saxon writer/translator of Saint Erasmus’ entry in The Old English Martyrology essentially merges his account’s sumptuous gold idol with a deadly dragon, the item in question serving as the reptilian monster’s lair and the creature in turn constituting the means by which the evil, pagan, gold structure obtains its sacrificial human blood. As discussed in Chapter Two, the account’s veritable idol-dragon assembly finds its reflection in a number of fundamental ways in the body of The Life of Saint Margaret’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii, considering that this particular dragon also bears explicit ties to Hell, likewise is conflated with an architectural work, and moreover possesses an alternate aspect as a sumptuous idol that, as an exquisite statue of a dragon, possesses spun gold for its hair and beard, as well as the work of other types of artisans for the remaining parts of its highly-wrought head. The various stated connections together
enable the interpretation that pagan goldwork’s draconic moral darkness effectively (and fittingly) enjoys a monstrous, predatory life in the figure of The Life of Saint Margaret’s hellish dragon. The same moral darkness likely finds similar expression in the goldwork bodies of the draconic Grendel and the Sigmund Episode’s worm.

The findings of two critics regarding the highly-wrought “glove” (line 2085b) (Bosworth-Toller “glof”) that Beowulf later alleges Grendel had carried on his person during his terrible incursions into Heorot and within which he purportedly had confined live human prey from the raids enable the interpretation that this troll boasts an additional piece of craftwork anatomy. Specifically, the critical research discusses the ingenious glove’s fundamental identification with the monster’s abdomen/organs of digestion, with Seth Lerer determining that the item in question functions “as the figurative version of the hand and mouth assembly that defines the monstrous” in the German tradition and hence “stands for the gross processes of digestion that lie at the center of … the Grendel … stor[y]” (735) and Andrew M. Pfrenger accordingly putting forth the possibility that “the term glof may not be employed as an out of place reference to a physical artifact, but as a figurative description of Grendel’s hanging belly, now swollen with the recently ingested Hondscioh” (210). Considering the cases built by Köberl, Clemoes, and Overing for a fundamental collapsing of the space between vehicle and tenor in the metaphors of Old English poetry and my findings vis-à-vis Grendel’s two trophies, we may view the anatomical piece in question as possessing an actual existence as the named object. The fact that “Grendel is notoriously not armed and unadorned” (Liuzza 113, Footnote 1) constitutes even further evidence that the Beowulf-poet conflates the glove with a part of Grendel’s body, a point to be discussed in the next section’s investigation of Beowulf’s role as the revealer of monsters’ alternate natures as crafted items.
By virtue of the glove’s conflation with Grendel’s abdomen/ organs of digestion, the anatomy in question shares in the accoutrement’s sinister yet exemplary craftsmanship, the fundamental identification moreover indicating that the *Beowulf*-poet here associates Grendel with an additional type of insular craftwork to the ironwork, goldwork, and fine architecture. Beowulf himself provides the following detailed, clearly-appreciative description of the darkly-impressive glove: “Glof hangode / sid ond sylic, / searobendum fæst; / <sio> wæs orðoncum / eall gegyrwed / deofles cræftum / ond dracan fellum” (lines 2085b-2088) (“The glove hung, spacious and of unusual excellence, securely fastened with a set of cunning clasps; it was skillfully contrived, entirely fashioned with a devil’s craft and the skins of dragons”) (Bosworth-Toller “hangode” s.v. “hangian”; “sid” I; “sylic” s.v. “seldlic” I, II; “searobendum” s.v. “searubend”; “fæst”; “orðoncum” s.v. “orðanc” I, II; “gegyrwed” s.v. “gegerwan”; “deofles” s.v. “deofol”; “cræftum” s.v. “cræft” II; “dracan” s.v. “draca” I; “fellum” s.v. “fell”). As a sack expertly sewn from “dracan fellum” (“the skins of dragons”), the glove effectively situates insular leather goods within the already wide array of fashioned items to which Grendel’s body proves fundamentally linked, further extending this troll’s range of signification as a creature-object. lxviii Consequently, in the figure of Grendel, insular leatherwork joins insular and Roman ironwork, goldwork, and architecture as a type of morally-questionable craftwork from the hands of skilled artisans.

Importantly, the glove’s “searobendum” probably constitute yet another tie on the part of this monster’s anatomy to metalwork in the form of ironwork. Old English *searubend* denotes “a cunning, curious clasp or fastening” (Bosworth-Toller), this noun’s plural form in the glove’s description thus indicating the presence of “cunning clasps” or “cunning fastenings” on the highly-wrought accoutrement to ensure the containment of Grendel’s victims. Although not
explicitly stated, the glove’s intricate *searobendum* would probably have been composed of metal, in all likelihood iron: Taylor principally connects Old English *searu* to metalwork (Taylor 114-15, 122), and, according to Esther Cameron and Quita Mould, different types of items of so-called “Anglo-Saxon skin craft” possessed metal components, including components specifically of iron (93-115). The glove, by means of its clasps, therefore likely joins the detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly as an “iron implement” and, along with the hand-arm-shoulder assembly and severed head, effectively completes the troll’s smithwork body.

The glove’s craftsmanship moreover serves as further evidence of Grendel’s fundamental kinship to the Exeter Book’s Whale and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon in Cotton Tiberius A.iii, this material artifact’s depiction thus also reinforcing the link between Grendel and Roman prison architecture. First of all, the interpretation that Grendel’s abdomen/organs of digestion, by virtue of the anatomical parts’ conflation with the highly-wrought glove, largely consist of dragon-skin in turn lends an additional degree of support to Francis E. Sandbach’s assertion that Grendel essentially is a dragon (23); as discussed, the Whale and *The Life of Saint Margaret*’s dragon both similarly exist as reptilian monsters. The glove’s use as a place of confinement for live human beings, with the metallic *searobendum* functioning as the locking mechanism, potently reinforces Grendel’s body’s ties to prison buildings and the metalwork components of these structures, associations shared by the remaining two reptilian monsters in their respective narratives. Finally, the glove’s markedly-diabolic aspect arising from the “deoefles cæraftum” (“devil’s craft”) that went into its fashioning clearly parallels the other two reptilian monsters’ similarly-explicit diabolic aspects. In summation, evidence both from the glove’s material properties and the blurred line that this highly-wrought accoutrement shares with part of Grendel’s body ultimately does support the interpretation that a remarkably-coherent vision of
this monster as a work of Roman prison architecture continued to guide the *Beowulf*-poet throughout his overall depiction of Grendel as an assemblage of different items of craftwork over the course of the poem’s larger Grendel Episode.

From the fundamental identification of Grendel’s various body parts with the wide range of objects, a sense emerges of this monster as a complex figure lying at the intersection of Germanic/Anglo-Saxon and Roman craftwork traditions. Despite its subtle connection to the Roman architecture of prisons, the glove itself remains a product of the larger Germanic culture; after all, as a representative of the Germanic trolls, Grendel himself effectively possesses a Germanic provenance (Fulk and Cain 202-03), and Cameron and Mould maintain that the glove’s depiction in *Beowulf* “help[s] to create a picture of Anglo-Saxon skin craft” (95).\(^{lxx}\) This multivalence or indeterminacy in terms of craftwork traditions likewise informs the alternate nature of the detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly, this trophy simultaneously demonstrating ties to insular ironwork (for example, the spurs and other named tools and implements) and to the Roman architecture that critics directly have linked to Heorot’s gold roof, notwithstanding the status of Heorot itself as the literary representative of the Germanic royal hall par excellence. Grendel’s severed head, by virtue of its likely relationship to the other similarly-*wætlic*, Germanic objects in the world of the poem and its conceptual pairing with the golden, probably-bejeweled hilt of the Germanic sword utilized by Beowulf beneath the mere’s waters, reinforces this troll’s fundamental association with insular material artifacts. Embodying both Germanic/Anglo-Saxon and Roman craftwork traditions enables Grendel to perform the cultural work of personifying the moral danger attending all types of highly-wrought objects irrespective of the culture producing the particular items.
Grendel’s existence as an assemblage of different items of metalwork notably in turn raises the likelihood that this troll effectively serves as the dark counterpart to *The Phoenix*’s titular smithwork avian. Chapter One presents evidence that the body of the Exeter Book’s magnificent, heavenly bird consists of an array of discrete, exquisite, high-status metal objects, including a gem-inset, thin gold plate and a splendid metal shield, products of the esteemed Anglo-Saxon goldsmith, jeweler, and weapon-smith. The depiction of the Phoenix’s body as a collection of fine pieces of insular smithwork from Anglo-Saxon England’s most respected types of metalworkers proves fitting in terms of this divine creature’s positive allegorical status considering that, according to post-Conversion, insular ideals, the admiration of items of superb craftsmanship rightly could elevate a person’s mind to the contemplation of the utter majesty of God and His own masterworks (Coatsworth and Pinder 264). With respect to the Phoenix and by virtue of his Germanic/insular provenance as a Germanic troll, literally-hellish nature, and the different types of terrible iron implements and contrivances composing his anatomy, Grendel effectively embodies insular metalwork’s evil shadow. The moral darkness informing his composite, smithwork body stands in marked contrast to the moral exemplariness informing the Phoenix’s own composite, smithwork body, and, accordingly, his goldwork constitutes the corrupt reflection of the Phoenix’s own, morally-elevating goldwork.

Chapter One further builds a case that the so-called Style I animal ornament of the Anglo-Saxons influenced the poet’s depiction of the Phoenix as an assemblage of highly-wrought items of smithwork, and this motif had a similar role in inspiring the *Beowulf*-poet’s vision of Grendel as just such an assemblage. One likely point of correspondence between the two creatures and the distinctive insular Style I is that this motif commonly appeared on early insular metalwork (Webster 55-56, 62), the effective merging of representations of beasts and
metalwork in the objects finding a related form of imaginative expression in Grendel’s and the Phoenix’s metalwork anatomies. An additional, particularly-striking point of correspondence involves Style I’s tendency to separate an animal’s body into individual components while more or less still allowing the highly-stylized beast to retain its integrity as a unified being. Leslie Webster examines this particular characteristic of the style, referring to the discrete anatomical pieces as “dismembered elements” and explaining that the animal “could be reduced to a few essentials—a head and a leg, for instance, or even just one representative part. It could be reassembled in an eye-teasing ‘animal salad’ of disconnected bits, in one writer’s happy phrase” (57). T. D. Kendrick accordingly notes the occurrence of “that Dark Ages style in which the animal really does dissolve into a loose assembly of bits and pieces (29-3).” Webster’s and Kendrick’s respective descriptions of Style I appear particularly applicable to Grendel’s fate, considering that this troll’s smithwork body essentially ends up as “dismembered elements” and “disconnected bits,” whereas the Phoenix remains intact despite the discrete metal objects composing its body. Grendel’s smithwork body hence in a sense completes the trajectory of disintegration so frequently depicted on the early insular metalwork featuring Style I.

Further regarding the Phoenix’s link to insular Style I, Chapter One argues that this fantastic bird essentially is one of insular metalwork’s highly-stylized, majestic birds-of-prey (which frequently appeared in both Styles I and II animal ornament—see Webster 55-56 and Speake 81) granted an actual, noble, animal life, complete with an abundant level of creaturely agency in the landscapes of the world. According to Webster, Style I sometimes also featured “human/animal hybrids” (55-56), and the possibility exists that these highly-stylized, savage, semi-humanoid creatures adorning insular metalwork find their reflection to some degree in the Style I-informed, smithwork body of the savage, humanoid Grendel. This possibility gains a
significant level of support from the depictions of and imagery surrounding Grendel’s two forcibly-removed smithwork body parts, the head and hand-arm-shoulder assembly. Webster explains that although “semi-naturalistic representations of the human (or divine) image are extremely rare in the earliest Anglo-Saxon art … highly schematized depictions of masks, profiles, hands and limbs do occur in early metalwork” (8). Grendel’s detached smithwork head very likely correlates to these human “masks” and “profiles” of early metalwork, and his detached smithwork hand-arm-shoulder assembly probably similarly serves as a match to the human “hands and limbs.” By virtue of these associations, the two trophies’ respective exhibitions within Heorot, showings which allow spectators to enjoy the trophies’ exemplary craftsmanship as highly-wrought metal objects, in a sense parallel the displays effectively constituted by insular metalwork’s “masks, profiles, hands and limbs” for the admiring Anglo-Saxon onlooker. In other words, Grendel’s discrete anatomical pieces, like the pieces’ direct counterparts in early metalwork, ultimately exist for the viewing pleasure of men and women with Anglo-Saxon aesthetic/artistic sensibilities.

By virtue of Grendel’s fundamental moral darkness (he is the fratricidal Cain’s descendent and relentlessly acts as civilization’s hateful, deadly enemy), the exemplary craftwork of his forcibly-detached body parts presumably constitutes a threat and one day will exact a terrible price from the society foolishly admiring these exhibited items. In other words, even though Beowulf permanently ends Grendel’s murderous forays into Heorot by killing him, the moral danger posed by this smithwork troll carries on into the future by means of the displayed anatomical pieces, highly-wrought metal objects that the Danes and Geats showcase within the noble hall among the grand structure’s other fine treasures. This interpretation receives a significant degree of support from the final fate of the Sigmund Episode’s worm’s
exquisite body, this chapter’s previous section building a case (with recourse to specific research by Phyllis Portnoy) that the *Beowulf*-poet utilizes one of the poem’s attested instances of parallelism to convey the subtle sense that future items of metalwork fashioned from the slain worm’s molten raw material will convey into the future the moral darkness that had infected this monster’s original, intact, smithwork body. Considering that the retainer sings/recites the account of Sigmund’s battle with the worm as a way to honor Beowulf in his fight with Grendel by means of an implicit comparison of Beowulf with the renowned Germanic hero, Grendel himself serves as viable candidate for the worm’s counterpart in terms of the tale, and this blurred line existing between Grendel and the worm in turn lends additional support to the interpretation that both the respective physical natures and fates of Grendel’s body and the worm’s body prove thus connected.

Notably, the criticism by Magennis, Leyerle, Shilton, and Owen-Crocker vis-à-vis the description of the final trajectory of the fire-drake’s dead body potentially lends a degree of additional support to the interpretation that a general vision of human society retaining and utilizing the highly-wrought objects constituting monsters’ dead bodies guided the *Beowulf*-poet in his respective depictions of Grendel’s and the worm’s physical remains in the world of the poem. While the Geats who survive the fire-drake’s terrible rampage permanently relinquish this dragon’s dead body to the sea instead of keeping it, the criticism enables the interpretation that the lifeless anatomy in its final moments in the narrative fulfills its purpose as a northern longship operating as a sort of funeral ship. Considering that the proper use of a funeral ship fundamentally involves the ship’s permanent departure from the society that launches it, the Geats in effect do not simply discard this creature-object representing the conflation of dragon and dragon-prowed ship, even though they never again will encounter it. In other words, the
likelihood that the fire-drake’s dead body does move into the immediate future as a highly-wrought object granted a new and meaningful, if brief, context within Geatish society emerges from the criticism. The poem’s narrator’s assertion that, with respect to the launching of Scyld’s funeral ship, “men ne cunnon … hwa þæm hlæste onfeng” (lines 50b-52) (“men cannot know … who will take [or receive] that freight”) (Bosworth-Toller “hlæste” s.v. “hlæste”; “onfeng” s.v. “onfon” I, II) leaves open the further possibility that the highly-wrought object represented by the fire-drake’s body, a body which the critics maintain is linked to Scyld’s funeral ship through parallelism, could well be appropriated by another people at some future date, leading to new contexts for this object as in the cases of the surviving objects and materials from the bodies of Grendel and the worm.

4.4 Beowulf as the Perceiver and Revealer of Grendel’s Craftwork Nature

Two pieces of evidence from the poem support the interpretation that Beowulf alone had been able to discern that the living, physically-intact Grendel had possessed an alternate physical nature as an assemblage of highly-wrought objects. Both pieces of evidence notably arise from Beowulf’s own recounting of key events of the Grendel Episode, not from any narration of these events by the poem’s speaker. For Beowulf and not the poem’s speaker to indicate that Beowulf had been able to perceive the living Grendel’s crafted aspects heightens the sense that he proved uniquely capable of apprehending this particular facet of the deadly troll’s physicality. Regarding the first piece of evidence, the hero, in lines 960b-962, likely directly informs the throng of awestruck Geats and Danes gazing wonderingly upon the searowundor that he had been able to see through to the obscured fact of Grendel’s craftwork nature during his initial confrontation
with the troll. This statement from Beowulf, which introduces a heretofore-critically-unresolved aspect of Grendel’s physicality, reads as follows in the original Old English: “Uþe ic swiþor / þæt ðu hine selfne / geseon moste, / feond on frætewum / fylwerigne” (lines 960b-962). As will become clear, the various interpretations put forth in this chapter vis-à-vis the precise nature of Grendel’s anatomy stand to offer a viable resolution to this long-standing scholarly crux.

The following Modern English translation of the lines in question for the moment leaves the problematic phrase in the original Old English for subsequent consideration in light of this chapter’s evidence in favor of Grendel possessing an alternate nature as an assemblage of highly-wrought objects: “I very much wish that you had been able to see Grendel himself, the slaughter-weary fiend on frætewum” (Bosworth-Toller “uþe” s.v. “unnan” II, III; “geseon”; “feond”; “fylwerigne” s.v. “fylwerig”). R. M. Liuzza translates on frætewum here as “decked in his [i.e., Grendel’s own] finery,” but then, in a footnote, explains that frætewum means “literally ‘in his adornments,’ [which is] a peculiar phrase since Grendel is notoriously not armed and unadorned. Perhaps Beowulf means ‘covered in a garment of blood’?” (Liuzza 113, Footnote 1). In other words, the scholarly crux results from the hero describing his adversary as having worn or carried crafted items, when this troll by all accounts eschewed civilization’s various accoutrements. Frederick Klaeber likewise comments upon this ongoing crux represented by lines 960b-962 in Beowulfian criticism: “On frætewum is generally assumed to mean ‘in his trappings’ or ‘in full gear,’ even though this stereotyped expression is not particularly apposite to a fighter who is unarmed” (Klaeber Beowulf 174, Footnote for line 962). Seth Lerer accordingly remarks upon the complete lack of manmade objects on Grendel’s person (as well as on the bodies of Beowulf’s other monsters) underpinning the respective arguments of Liuzza and
Klaeber: “The body of the beast is always, it would seem, just that: pure body, unadorned and unprotected by the workings of craft” (75).

The evidence presented in this chapter for Grendel’s alternate nature as an assemblage of highly-wrought objects, considered alongside fraetwe’s full semantic range, opens the possibility that the fraetwum that have confounded scholars are Grendel’s smithwork body parts rather than, for example, Liuzza’s conjectured “garment of blood.” Fraetwe not only can denote “adornments,” the sense of fratwe chosen by Liuzza for fraetwum’s present context, but also “ornaments” and “treasures.” Fraetwe’s semantic range thus intersects with that of searu—the first component of searuwundor, the epithet for Grendel’s detached hand-arm-shoulder assembly—in terms of “treasure.” Fraetwe also semantically aligns with wræt—the noun forming the basis of wrætlic, the adjective describing Grendel’s severed head—in that wræt can denote both “a jewel” and “an ornament” (Bosworth-Toller “fætewum” s.v. “frætwe”; “wræt”; Taylor 114-15, 122). In short, the semantic ranges of the three Old English words overlap in that the words frequently signify exquisite products of smiths. By virtue of its larger context in terms of the searuwundor/hand-arm-shoulder assembly and wliteseon wrætllic/head in the overall Grendel Episode, the phrase on fraetwum applied to Grendel’s body in line 962a likewise signals the existence of the monster’s anatomy as fine metalwork. Considering that fraetwum is a plural form of fætwe, the phrase on fraetwum would be appropriate to indicate that a number of discrete metal objects compose the troll’s living, physically-intact body, the larger argument put forth by me regarding this monster’s anatomy.

The linguistic evidence from fraetwum/fraetwe and the hand-arm-shoulder assembly’s and head’s additional links to exemplary metalwork together enable the interpretation that Beowulf essentially is delivering the following statement, or one like it, to the Geats and Danes
in lines 960b-962: “I very much wish that you had been able to see Grendel himself, the
slaughter-weary fiend, as pieces of smithwork.” This interpretation of Beowulf’s comment
clearly supposes that the hero here is boasting or otherwise explaining that he alone had been
able to perceive the living, physically-intact Grendel’s alternate existence as an assemblage of
metal objects. The idea of Beowulf as not only the perceiver but also the revealer of Grendel’s
alternate nature as a collection of such items gains a degree of additional support from the fact
that, with the exception of Grendel’s name and its associated linguistic evidence (Elliott et al.
69), the poem does not feature descriptions of any of the troll’s body parts as highly-wrought
objects until Beowulf and the Geats and Danes place the two body parts on display in Heorot,
after the hero has removed the trophies from Grendel proper. In other words, the two acts of
exhibition in the great hall serve as unveilings of sorts in terms of Grendel’s previously-obsced
alternate nature. By means of the two displayings and his words to the Geats and Danes in lines
960b-962 (a statement which he notably delivers while the Geats and Danes are gazing upon the
first of the trophies), Beowulf leads his heretofore-unaware audience to a deeper realization
regarding this monster’s physicality. For us, Beowulf effectively collapses the field of
indeterminacy noted by a number of critics to surround Grendel’s body.

Later in the poem, Beowulf’s account to King Hygelac of Grendel’s glove (lines 2085b-
2091a) lends a further degree of support to the interpretation that the hero alone had been able to
perceive the living, physically-intact troll’s alternate nature as an assemblage of highly-wrought
objects. The reason that Beowulf’s report of the glove potentially serves as additional evidence
that he had been the sole witness to Grendel’s alternate nature is that this particular artifact’s
existence otherwise is unattested in the poem. Lerer comments upon the narrative’s former
silence regarding the glove, immediately before building his case for a figurative relationship
between this enigmatic item and the specific parts of the troll’s anatomy: “Beowulf proffers information [i.e., the fact of the glove’s existence] that neither we nor they [i.e., the poem’s various characters] have heard before” (Lerer 63). Klaeber likewise notes the narrative’s former silence, but ultimately attributes Beowulf’s words to King Hygelac as “narrative embellishment rather than inconsistency” (Klaeber 233, Endnote for line 2085b); in other words, for Klaeber, Beowulf’s account of the glove results from him exaggerating his earlier exploits to the Geatish king. However, Beowulf’s revelation of the glove’s prior existence, considered alongside the critical evidence for the glove’s conflation with specific body parts of the living Grendel, opens the possibility that—once again—Beowulf was capable of perceiving an aspect of the living Grendel that no one else in the poem at the time was able to apprehend, an aspect—once again—directly involving the fundamental identification of one of the monster’s anatomical pieces with a highly-wrought object.

4.5 Further Considerations

From the various strands of evidence presented in this chapter, a picture emerges of two of the Grendel Episode’s monsters—the Sigmund Episode’s worm and Grendel himself—ultimately speaking to the moral dangers associated with Anglo-Saxon society ever continuing to follow the dark path of holding on to its age-old, heedless fascination with and unquestioning esteeming of fine insular metalwork. To state this another way, the attested, unresolved concerns regarding the broader role of the exquisite products of Anglo-Saxon/Germanic smiths in Anglo-Saxon society weighed on the Beowulf-poet’s mind as these concerns did on the minds of a number of his contemporaries, ultimately finding expression in the two monsters’ depictions as
creature-objects representing the conflation of living monster with item(s) of metalwork. As further discussed, the poet mobilizes Beowulf not only to slay monsters, but also to call the attention of the Danes and Geats to the problematic aspects of insular smithwork, specifically by having the celebrated hero perform the vital function of exposing the amazed, unsuspecting men and women to the fact of Grendel’s alternate nature as an assemblage of Germanic metal objects. Through his various acts of disclosure regarding this fundamental aspect of the troll’s physical body, Beowulf reveals and/or emphasizes to the Geats and Danes that such items in effect can be “monstrous” in terms of moral darkness.

Notably, one of the Grendel Episode’s remaining monsters, Grendel’s mother, does not join her malevolent son and the Sigmund Episode’s worm in embodying the moral darkness of fine smithwork: the poet not once fundamentally identifies her body with a metal object or any other type of crafted item. She thus stands as the only one of the poem’s three primary monsters (her, Grendel, and the fire-drake) without an alternate nature as some variety of manmade artifact. The poet’s repeated focus upon her “womanly” aspects potentially offers some indication as to why the poet does not mobilize her to perform the particular kind of cultural work investigated by this dissertation: as James Paz explains, “… she is both a noble lady (OE īdes) and a monstrous or warrior woman (OE aglæcwif); she is of the kin of Cain and linked to a race of giants, but is still in the likeness of a woman (OE idese onlicnes) and dwells in a roofed hall (hrofsele)” (232). In other words, these pronounced “womanly” aspects discussed by Paz perhaps effectively blur the line between her and a human woman to such an extent that she cannot readily be caught up in Old English literature’s well-oiled machinery that conflates the bodies both of heavenly beasts and the most deadly of monsters with highly-wrought objects.
ENDNOTES

i For a general discussion of these genres, including the genres’ representative works in the Old English corpus, see R. D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain (64-65; 92-97; 141-42; 159-61).

ii See Fulk and Cain (181) for commentary upon The Wanderer’s critically-attested elegiac tone.

iii John Leyerle explains that he is responding to unpublished comments by Jess. B. Bessinger, Jr. (91).

iv See Ursula Schaefer (115-24) for discussion of the existing criticism on Anglo-Saxon poets’ frequent use of parallelism in their narratives resulting from the general influence of “epic style” on Old English poetry as a whole. According to her, “parallelism has long been identified as a feature in Old English poetry in general and of Beowulf in particular” (116).

v Schaefer (110-15) discusses the existing criticism on Beowulf’s large number of collocations. She focuses upon the collocations as instances of “lexical repetitiveness” constituting the “doubling of expressions” in the poem (110). However, as will become clear in Chapter Three, I consider as collocations the instances in which the Beowulf-poet conceptually pairs Grendel’s detached body parts with exquisite manmade objects.

vi Regarding apposition and ambiguity, Peggy Knapp explains that “Nicholas Howe argues that ‘at the lexical level, apposition forces listeners to accept ambiguity’ …” (95). On a more general note vis-à-vis the characteristic ambiguity of items and entities in Old English writings, Paul Beekman Taylor maintains that “the Old English language is, after all, more semantically real than nominal, more denotive than connotative, more effective than affective. It is imperative as well as optative, and as much makes things or actions as names them. It is, to borrow from the language of William Gass, a linguistic system of ontological transformation whose utterances transform qualities into essences” (109-110). Regarding Grendel, he explains that “when Beowulf calls Grendel a þyrs (426), he seems to be indicating an essential characteristic of the monster, thus providing himself with some magical advantage in the coming battle” (Taylor 110, Footnote 3).

vii Regarding Beowulf’s fire-drake, see Chapter Two’s Introduction for discussion of this dragon’s possible alternate nature as a work of nautical architecture.

viii Kemp Malone and Albert C. Baugh (77) and S. A. J. Bradley (S. Bradley 285) consider the possibility that the same poet was responsible for both the Old English Physiologus and The Phoenix. My Chapter One briefly recounts the informed perspectives of the three critics.

ix C. R. Dodwell (whose extensive research on the artisans of the day focuses exclusively upon contemporary written accounts and literary representations) discusses the general cultural appreciation for all types of artisans and their representative products on the part of Anglo-Saxon society. He states that “even though certain categories of artists attracted a special prestige, all had a respected place in their communities,” additionally revealing that the honor accorded craftspeople in general is reflected in Old English poetry, “where Christ Himself is seen as the supreme artist, the ‘Craftsman and King’” (44-48). Specifically regarding smiths and their representative products, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Michael Pinder maintain that Anglo-Saxon society probably positively viewed all metalworkers. The two scholars point to Alfred’s close work with his craftsmen in executing his own designs as evidence of such a general approbation on the part of Anglo-Saxon society, further explaining that Isidore of Seville’s association of
metalwork with the liberal arts opened the door so that “metalworkers themselves could be highly conscious of the status of their work” (259-264).

x See Fulk and Cain (2, 47) for this material artifact’s physical description and provenance.

xi While building his case for Anglo-Saxon society’s negative views towards blacksmiths and their trade, Hinton also points out that Luda, “the first smith who was not legendary to be recorded by name,” was an anchorite, which suggests that he was “slightly distanced from the rest of the community” (200).

xii See Webster (55-67) for a comprehensive discussion of the origins, development, and hallmarks of insular Styles I and II animal ornament.

xiii Webster additionally explains that this region apparently had developed its “distinctive Anglo-Saxon version of Style I” from animal designs on Scandinavian metalwork imported into the region. Scandinavia, in turn, had developed its version of the style in question from the late Roman chip-carving tradition (55-56).

xiv See Dodwell (191-92) for a description of the sumptuous craftsmanship of the dragon-prowed ships possessed by Edward the Confessor and King Cnut.

xv Arguably, the blurred line between living dragon and nautical vessel indicated by the four critics likewise significantly informs the pictorial representation of Noah’s Ark in Genesis A of the Junius Manuscript. The dragon’s head of the ark’s prow, an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon illustrator, rears dramatically on the beast’s sinuous neck. The creature’s one visible eye is thrust wide open, and its massive jaws gape, with the robust tongue far extended. In other words, the dragon appears as if it, exulting in its utter wildness and savage power, issues an ear-splitting roar into the air. See Fulk and Cain (111) for a facsimile of this manuscript illustration.

xvi Throughout the entire text of How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics, Calvert Watkins notably never mentions a fundamental identification of reptilian monsters with highly-wrought objects in Anglo-Saxon or any other European narratives. He mainly finds the dragon to be the embodiment of chaos, maintaining that “the Chaos which the dragon symbolizes may take many manifestations in the different traditions” (300). None of these “manifestations” of “Chaos” directly or indirectly involve dragons’ alternate natures as manmade items.

xvii Scholars frequently have attributed the authorship of both the Old English Physiologus and The Phoenix to the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf; see Fulk and Cain (15, 98, 140-41) and my Introduction to Chapter 2.

xviii See Chapter Three for discussion of Francis E. Sandbach’s informed conclusion that “this Beowulf passage [i.e., Beowulf’s Sigmund Episode] and the Hürnen Seyfrid represent with the greatest authenticity the original form of the tradition” (Sandbach 120).

xix The original Old English text of The Panther used here is from the edition of the Exeter Book by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie. See The Panther’s entry on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information. All translations of the Old English are mine throughout this dissertation.

xx All translations of the Latin are mine throughout this dissertation.

x (Lewis and Short “minutis” s.v. “minuo” II; “superpicta” s.v. “superpingo” I; “orbiculis” s.v. “orbicus” I; “oculatis” s.v. “oculatus” I; “circulis” s.v. “circulus” I; “fulvo” s.v. “fulvus” I; “nigra” s.v. “niger” I; “alba” s.v. “albus” I; Bosworth-Toller “telga”; “fræwe”). The original Latin text of Etymologies Book XII used here is from the edition of Etymologies by W. M.
Lindsay. See the entry for Isidore of Seville on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

The original Old English text of *The Whale* used here and in the remainder of this section is from the edition of the Exeter Book by Krapp and Dobbie. See *The Whale*’s entry on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

The original Latin text of *Etymologies* Book XII used here is from the edition of *Etymologies* by W. M. Lindsay. See the entry for Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* Book XII, on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information. The Modern English translation of this line is taken from Barney et al. (260).

The original Old English text of *The Phoenix* used here and in the remainder of this section is from the edition of the Exeter Book by Krapp and Dobbie. See *The Phoenix*’s entry on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

The descriptions of a number of the Phoenix’s remaining body parts also suggest that this fantastic bird is an assemblage of superb smithwork objects, even though no additional items are specifically named. For example, lines 295-297 point to decorative flourish in the creature’s tail: “Þonne is se finta / fægre gedæled, / sum brun, sum basu, / sum blacum splottum / searolice beseted” (“Then the tail is divided in a comely way, part dark, part purple, part skilfully set with shining spots”). Old English *besettan* can mean “to beset, to place,” and the examples of usage by Bosworth and Toller demonstrate that this verb typically signifies the constructing of material masterpieces by metalworkers and jewelers: “Seo cwen ða rode heht mid eorcnanstanum besettan” (“The queen commanded them to beset the cross with jewels”) and “wæpna smið besette swinlicum hine” (“the armor-smith beset it with figures of swine”). This image of setting jewels or images into fine metal becomes reinforced by the use of *bisettan* (“to set, beset”) in the discussion of the Phoenix’s exquisite eye (see above). The adverb *searolice* likewise applies to the refined actions of the consummate craftsman: Bosworth and Toller define this word as “ingeniously, cunningly, cleverly, with art or skill” (Bosworth-Toller “besettan”; “bisettan”; “searolice” s.v. “searulice”). Chapter Three will consider the larger significance of the Old English noun *searu* constituting part of the epithet for one of Grendel’s detached body parts, the so-called *searowund* signifying the monster’s arm, hand, and shoulder.

The original Latin text of *Carmen de Ave Phoenice* used here and in the remainder of this section is from the edition by Samuel Brandt and Georgius Laubmann. See Lactantius’ entry on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

The full semantic range for Latin *fulvo*, here translated as “gold-colored,” is as follows: “deep yellow, reddish yellow, gold-colored, tawny” (Lewis and Short “fulvo” s.v. “fulvus” I).

Anglo-Saxon England had put its unique stamp on Style I, inherited from Scandinavia, who, in turn, had developed this style from the late Roman chip-carving tradition. See Webster (55-57).

The poet specifically refers to this terrifying beast that appears to enjoy an existence as a work of Roman architecture as a “miclan hwale” (“great whale”), one of “fisca cynn” (“fish-kind”) (Bosworth-Toller “miclan” s.v. “micel” I; “hwale” s.v. “hwæl”; “fisca” s.v. “fisc”; “cynn” s.v. “cyn” I). However, S. A. J. Bradley points out that “strictly, the creature described [in *The Whale*] is a fictitious beast sometimes called the asp-turtle but it has always been popularly confused with the whale” (S. Bradley 355). Investigating the probable nature of the asp-turtle in the original Greek accounts of this creature, Albert Stanburrough Cook meticulously and convincingly builds a case that this entity in fact is a serpentine creature. He offers linguistic evidence that the name of the beast in the original Greek either means “shield-turtle” or “asp-
turtle,” subsequently combs Greek accounts to determine the characteristics of this type of creature, and ultimately concludes that “from the evidence, then, there would seem to be no doubt that the monster is conceived [in Greek accounts] as possessing the qualities of a serpent—which the turtle of course is—often designated as an ‘asp’; and that where it is denominated [Cook inserts the original Greek word here] we should translate ‘asp-turtle,’ and not ‘shield-turtle’” (lxxii-lxxv).

Responding to Cook’s interpretation, Michael J. Curley argues that “Bestiary illustrations, however, leave no doubt that later tradition regarded the animal as a sea-monster [i.e., a fish rather than a serpent]. He is called the whale (cetus) … in some Latin bestiaries … possibly because the Greek term and its variants signified nothing to a Latin scribe or his audience” (83). Despite Curley’s assertion, the possibility certainly exists that there were Latin versions of this bestiary entry informed by the translators’ knowledge of the reptilian roots of the so-called Aspidochelone. One manuscript illustration that very well might indicate such knowledge on the part of the illustrator is in Merton College Library, MS. 249 (Folio 8r), a version of the Anglo-Norman Bestiaire of Philippe de Thaon from the thirteenth century. The illustration is of a four-legged, scaly sea-beast with fish swimming into its cavernous mouth, a ship of sailors floating nearby. David Badke offers the following explanation of this scene: “A four-footed whale catches fish, while a boat load of men waits to land on its back. This image may represent an attempt by the artist to show that the beast is a sea turtle; the Latin names ‘Aspidochelone’ and ‘Aspido testudo’ mean ‘asp-turtle.’” As discussed in my Chapter One and mentioned above, The Panther and The Whale of the Exeter Book “bear a close resemblance to the corresponding articles in Philippe de Thaun and … have similar moralizations” (Wright 5).

Based upon the evidence from the illustration and the established connections between this thirteenth-century, Anglo-Norman version of the bestiary and the Old English Physiologus, the possibility clearly exists that the Whale in the Anglo-Saxon translator’s undetermined source text preserved some aspect of this creature’s original nature as a serpentine turtle.

xxx Fulk and Cain explain that “referring to stone ruins as the ‘old work of giants’” is one of the “conventions … [that] illustrate the formulaic nature of verse not just in its diction but also in the very attitudes that it adopts toward human experience” (32). While references to these fantastical artisans undoubtedly constitute a poetic convention in Old English verse, the pagan associations do likely still color the moral valuation of the original buildings.

xxxi Regarding the interpretation of the fire-drake as an elemental force of chaos, see the following pieces of scholarship: J. R. R. Tolkien, “The Monsters and the Critics” (32); Jennifer Neville, Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry (82); Calvert Watkins, How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics (300). For the fire-drake as a devil or other agent of apocalypse, see the following pieces of scholarship: Edward L. Risden, Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf (Risden Introduction); Fred C. Robinson, “Elements of the Marvelous in the Characterization of Beowulf: A Reconsideration of the Textual Evidence” (79-81). For the interpretation that the fire-drake represents the dark side of human society, see the following pieces of scholarship: Peggy Knapp, “Beowulf and the Strange Necessity of Beauty” (93-94); Hugh Magennis, Images of Community in Old English Poetry (71). For the interpretation that the fire-drake does not symbolize anything at all, see the following pieces of scholarship: Adrien Bonjour, “Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant: Or the Beowulf Dragon Debated” (306). For the interpretation that the fire-drake at best possesses an indeterminate meaning, see the following pieces of scholarship: Mark C. Amodio, “Affective Criticism, Oral Poetics, and
Beowulf’s Fight with the Dragon” (67); Kenneth Sisam, “Beowulf’s Fight with the Dragon” (129-140); James W. Earl, Thinking about Beowulf (74-76).

xxiii See Dodwell (191-92) for detailed descriptions of the sumptuous dragon-prowed ships of both King Cnut and Edward the Confessor and the “splendid ships with gold or gilded beaks” of the Anglo-Saxon Kings Athelstan and Harthacnut.

xxiv The original Old English text of The Wanderer used here is from the edition of The Wanderer by Anne L. Klinck. See The Wanderer’s entry on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

xxv The original Old English text of Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle used here and throughout the remainder of this section is from the edition of Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle by Stanley Rypins. See the entry for “Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle” on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

xxvi The original Latin text of Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem used here is from the edition of Epistola Alexandri by Stanley Rypins. See the entry for “Epistola Alexandri” on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

xxvii The only body part of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303’s dragon likened to a wrought object is the monster’s teeth: “And of his toþan leome ofstod, ealswa of hwiten swurde …” (“And from his teeth came a radiance, as if off of a whitish/bright sword”). This image presumably finds its reflection in the following description of the devil-dragon from the Latin Casinensis-version: “Gladius candescens uidebatur in manus eius …” (“A whitish sword it seemed was in his hand …”). (NOTE: See below for directions to the bibliographic information for the editions used here of the two narratives).

xxviii The original Old English text of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s version of The Life of Saint Margaret used here is from the edition of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s The Life of Saint Margaret contained in Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis’ The Old English Lives of Saint Margaret. See “The Old English Life of Saint Margaret in Cotton Tiberius A.iii” on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information. Similarly, the original Old English text of Cambridge, Corpus Christie 303’s version of The Life of Saint Margaret used here is from the same edition. See “The Old English Life of Saint Margaret in Cambridge, Corpus Christi 303” on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information.

xxix Examples include searubend (“a cunning, curious clasp or fastening”), searuceap (“an ingenious piece of goods”), searucraft (“an engine, machine”), searugeþræc (“a store of things in which art is displayed”), and searunet (“a net ingeniously wrought”) (Bosworth-Toller “searubend”; “searuceap”; “searucraft” III; “searugeþræc”; “searunet”).

x Incidentally, the golden hair and beard do not appear to be an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer/translator. The Latin Passion S. Margaretae in Paris, BN, lat. 5574 likewise presents the devil-dragon’s hair and beard as golden: “… capilli et barba eius aurea.” (See Clayton and Magennis “The Latin Passio” on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information for the Latin text in question.)
The original Old English text of Saint Erasmus’ entry in the *Old English Martyrology* used here is from the edition of *The Old English Martyrology* by Christine Rauer. See “2 June: Erasmus” on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information.

According to Lewis and Short, Latin *serra* specifically signifies “a saw, the invention of Daedalus” (“*serra*” I). The fact that this particular tool was considered “the invention of Daedalus” must have provided a Roman reader of this text with a sense of the teeth as a masterwork: the word *Daedalus* in Greek means “skillfully wrought,” and, accordingly, Daedalus is the “mythical Greek architect and sculptor … who was said to have built, among other things, the paradigmatic Labyrinth for King Minos of Crete” (See “Daedalus” on my Works Cited page for the current source’s full bibliographic information.)

The original Latin ‘Casinensis’ text used here is taken from the edition of this text in Clayton and Magennis’ *The Old English Lives of Saint Margaret*. See Clayton and Magennis Appendix 3 on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information.

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303’s dragon does not swallow Saint Margaret and subsequently imprison her in its body. Also, instead of getting “struck to pieces, knocked to bits, or demolished” as a building or other type of wrought object (Bosworth-Toller “toslean” 1, 1.a), the dragon’s body suffers the following, very specific fate: “And eall sticmælum toðwan se draca ut of þan carcerne …” (“And the dragon burst all in pieces and vanished out of the prison …”). Old English *todwinan*—this account’s counterpart to *toslean*—means “to vanish away, to burst and vanish” (Bosworth-Toller “toðwan” s.v. *todwinan*). This “vanishing” does not accord with a vision of this dragon as a wrought object or, for that matter, a living animal. (Again, see “The Old English Life of Saint Margaret in Cambridge, Corpus Christi 303” on my Works Cited page for the full bibliographic information.)

See Endnote xxxix above for the relevant scholarship vis-à-vis the Whale’s original identity as the serpentine Asp-Turtle, including a brief outline of the critical debate regarding whether or not the Old English Physiologus’ Anglo-Saxon poet would have been familiar with the infernal monster’s original identity.

Clayton and Magennis explain that “the grotesque and appalling image of Margaret being swallowed by the dragon … is omitted in Casinensis but present in all manuscripts of the Mombritius version and in the Turin version” (Clayton and Magennis Introduction 36). In other words, the monster’s act of swallowing the heroine is not likely an innovation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon writer of Cotton Tiberius A.iii’s *Life of Saint Margaret*.

See Chapter One for discussion of the existing scholarship on whether or not the same poet likely was responsible for both the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix*.

See Endnote xxx above for a synopsis of the existing scholarship on the fire-drake.

1 The original text of *Beowulf* used here and in the remainder of this chapter is from the edition of *Beowulf* by Frederick Klaeber. See the entry for Frederick Klaeber *Beowulf* on my Works Cited page for the bibliographic information.

Adrien Bonjour notes the same irony but assumes that the audience would have been aware of Beowulf’s fated, fatal struggle with the fire-drake (Bonjour *The Digressions* 46-48).

Again, see Malone and Baugh (77) and S. A. J. Bradley (S. Bradley 285) for discussion of whether or not the same poet was responsible for the Old English Physiologus and *The Phoenix*.

Francis E. Sandbach accords the original tale of the *Hürnen Seyfrid* a probable thirteenth-century provenance, though the oldest surviving manuscripts are from the sixteenth century (16).

Notably, in the *Hürnen Seyfrid*, a smith and his smithy are causally related to the melting of the dragons. The young hero entered into the service of the smith after being made to leave his
home for his willful behavior, but he had such immense strength that “he broke the hammer and drove the anvil into the earth.” When the smith complained, the boy physically accosted both him and another worker. The smith therefore decided to send him to his death by ordering him to retrieve fuel from a forest in which dragons lived—the very dragons that the young hero ended up roasting so that he could apply the melted horn from their scales over his body (Sandbach 16). In short, the hero’s path to the dragons specifically involves a smith, hammer, anvil, and fuel for the smithy.

H. R. Ellis Davidson argues that “the adjective wyrmfah … must refer either to the blade or to the sword as a whole, and not to the hilt as some have thought, since the words sweord and iren are used in agreement with it, and these can hardly apply to the hilt alone” (136). C. R. Dodwell evidently perceives wyrmfah as describing the blade, considering that he refers to Beowulf’s “‘spiral-hilted, serpentine-bladed sword, made by ‘marvellous smiths’” (74).

For example, Tony Millns paraphrases G. V. Smithers’ argument that wyrmfah “refer[s] to the magically-significant red colouring or painting of runes after they had been carved or engraved” and hence to “the shell-fish from which a scarlet/red/purple dye was obtained” (Millns 431 and 431, Footnote 7).

In keeping with the semantic range and larger associations of wreætlic, the adjective used to describe the worm, the serpentine sword indisputably is a highly-wrought, superb piece of smithwork. Beowulf refers to this weapon as “enta ærgeweorc” (“the ancient work of giants”) (line 1679a), meaning that the smiths who fashioned it were the legendary beings credited as master artisans in a number of Old English narratives. The giants proved so phenomenally skilled at that Beowulf subsequently deems the sword in question as having been “wundorsmiþa geweorc” (“the work of wonder-smiths”) (line 1681a). The item’s excellence extended to both form and function. First of all, the hilt’s composition includes priceless materials: Beowulf describes it as a “gylden hilt” (“golden hilt”) (line1677a), and the narrator earlier states that it is “since fage” (“glittering with jewels”) (line 1615a). The giants furthermore had invested the sword with intricately-wrought decoration: the narrator explains that the sword-guard bears engraved “runstafas” (“runes”) (line 1695a) that relate a fantastic tale and that the blade was “hringmæl” (“ornamented with inlaid rings”) (line 1564b) and “brogdenmæl” (“turned or marked with a spot or sign”) (line 1616a). Finally, the weapon previously had demonstrated its superior craftsmanship through its performance in battle: the narrator relates that it always was “ecgum þyhtig” (“strong in terms of its edges”) (line 1558b) and “sigeeadig” (“blessed with victory”) (line 1557 b), thereby earning from the narrator the designation “wæpna cyst” (“the choice of weapons”) (line 1557 b) (Bosworth-Toller “enta” s.v. “ent”; “Ærgeweorc”;


Notably, the Anglo-Saxons did melt down preexisting items of metalwork to serve as raw material for new objects. For specific examples of such recycling on the part of insular smiths, see Maren Clegg Hyer (6) and David A. Hinton (185, 193, and 196).

Amodio does add that, unlike the fire-drake, “Grendel undergoes a steady process of familiarization as the narrative progresses,” which involves the reader learning about “his habits … his limitations … and his unvarying destination and time of arrival,” as well as about his mother’s existence and drives and certain details regarding their shared existence in the dwelling
on the bottom of the mere (Amodio “Affective Criticism” 66-67). For Amodio, this “familiarization” apparently has little to nothing to do with any fundamental aspects of Grendel’s physical nature.

Taylor notably offers a fourth possibility for searu, one that is marked by intriguing implications for the consideration of Grendel’s torn-off parts as a searowundor. After providing evidence that searo “entered the language as a designator of interlaced parts of armor [before] … widen[ing] its contexts” (115), he suggests that searu can be specifically associated with certain wrought animals—including wrought serpents—in Old English by virtue of this original sense. His thoughts on this aspect of the topic follow:

[To the aforementioned three things signaled by Old English searo] I might add a fourth—the natural life that armor and treasure could figure. The linking image that resides in the word [from it originally having referred to interlaced parts of armor] also pertains to other properties of Anglo-Saxon art. I am thinking, for example, of the interlace patterns in both Anglo-Saxon and Nordic art, particularly in animal designs. Both the Oseberg ship find and the Sutton Hoo find illustrate Boar and Wolf patterns. The Sutton Hoo belt buckle has a serpent motif in such a design. (Taylor 122)

In short, searu invokes Germanic interlace patterns and the types of creatures rendered according to this motif, including reptilian monsters. Unfortunately, Taylor does not provide evidence for or otherwise elaborate on this point. One may infer from his comments, however, that this Old English word can signify a stylized beast or even an actual beast, as long as the flesh-and-blood creature is one that shows up in artistic renderings from interlace patterns, as a part of the ornamentation of crafted objects. Another way to look at this is that searu points to a blurred line between actual beast and consummately-wrought piece. The implication, then, is that the torn-off body part of the eminently draconic Grendel—by virtue of being a searowundor—could very well represent the intersection of exquisite object and flesh-and-blood dragon (or at least the intersection of exquisite object and flesh-and-blood monster).

Seth Lerer importantly notes that searu in searowundor and the other compound words in which it appears in Beowulf links the epithet to the idea of “human works of skill” (734).

Notably, the searobnet in Beowulf, worn by the titular hero, is “seowed / smiþes orþancum” (line 406) (“sewn with a smith’s ingenuity and skill”), thereby explicitly indicating the exceptional ability of the smith who crafted it (Bosworth-Toller “seowed” s.v. “seowian”; “smiþes” s.v. “smiþ”, “orþancum” s.v. “orþanc” I, II).

J. R. R. Tolkien accordingly explains that “Grendel’s nails have been likened … probably to iron spikes fixed in a wooden post” (Tolkien Beowulf: A Translation 300, commentary for lines 803-05).

The research of additional critics indicates that insular poets indeed intended rich associations to accompany a particular literary character’s name. Peter Clemoes explains that “names were not unique in acting … on a poet’s imagination: they took their place within a range of similar inherited linguistic stimuli. They were but a normal working part of the basic apparatus of Old English poetry” (4). Paul Beekman Taylor, in discussing the so-called “logokinetic magic” at work in literary characters’ names, maintains that, for example, “the name Beowulf indicates a force as it designates a person,” and that “when Beowulf calls Grendel a þyrs (426), he seems to
be indicating an essential characteristic of the monster, thus providing himself with some magical advantage in the coming battle” (109-10).

[xxv] Regarding Grendel’s status as a symbolic dragon, Sandbach specifically states that Beowulf “delivered the court of Hroðgar from the devastations of two dragons” (23).


[xxvii] Wentersdorf investigates the likelihood that the Beowulf-poet means that this roof literally is made from the metal gold. Despite the fact that this would not have been a “remarkably realistic” component of Heorot’s architecture, Wentersdorf maintains that a gold-forged roof would suit the Anglo-Saxon poet’s “metaphorical and didactic” purposes quite nicely (411, 415, 418-26). On this same basic subject, Dodwell explains that, “if, in Beowulf, there are references to a gold-plated hall, we are told that, in the eleventh century, the domed architectural canopy that surrounded the high altar at Waltham was gold-plated and had columns, bases and arches also embellished with gold … ” (30). Leslie Webster accordingly states that, “of decorated wooden halls, such as Heorot, imagined in Beowulf, with its gold-adorned roof and its lavish hangings, not a plank survives, yet such descriptions assume the audience’s familiarity with such things” (9).

[xxviii] Esther Cameron and Quita Mould point to a connection between Grendel’s glove and insular leatherwork in the chapter of The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World entitled “Devil’s Crafts and Dragon’s Skins? Sheaths, Shoes and Other Leatherwork” (93-115): “It can be supposed that animal skins were similarly utilized by the Anglo-Saxons and, indeed, there is a hint of this in Beowulf. Grendel the monster is described as carrying a glove devised from devil’s crafts and dragon’s skins when the grasps the hero in the hall … Grendel does not use conventional weapons in his fearsome attacks but teeth and claws, and mention of the special glove, perhaps cunningly crafted from animal skin, vividly evokes a sense of theatre” (95).

[xxix] Cameron and Mould accordingly mention that among the contents of a particular Sutton Hoo grave were “fragments of a purse consisting of an iron mount and cloth-lined calfskin pouch with a layer of wood between two layers of leather” (99).

[xxx] As to whether or not this particular glove has its roots in Germanic folklore, critics disagree. According to Andrew M. Pfrenger, most critics accept E. D. Laborde’s assertion that “a large glove was a characteristic property of trolls,” this motif thus accounting for the glove’s appearance in Beowulf. Pfrenger, however, contests this interpretation, maintaining that “there is … surprisingly little support for the notion that the Beowulf-poet had Laborde’s folk motif in mind or that such a motif even exists” (Pfrenger 209-10; Laborde 202).

[xxxi] On a related note, Peter Clemoes explains that “in visual art Germanic convention was to represent a being as an ensemble (or selection) of its members for eating, hunting or moving—jaws, beak, eyes, ears, wings, tail, legs, joints or feet, as the case may be” (74).
As previously mentioned, J. R. R. Tolkien assumes that the worm’s counterpart in terms of the retainer’s song/tale actually is the fire-drake (Tolkien *Beowulf: A Translation* 286-87); however, *Beowulf*’s critically-attested fundamental indeterminacy opens the door to the worm having more than one counterpart.

During the time that Grendel is an anatomically-complete monster, the poem notably provides no indication (other than his name) that he has an alternate nature as any type of wrought object. Epithets for him typically involve his hellish, cursed, wretched, solitary, adversarial, predatory, and murderous aspects; for example, he is described as “feonde on helle” (line 101b) (“a fiend from hell”), “mære mearc-stapa” (line 103a) (“wanderer of the desolate marshes”), “fifel-cynnnes eard” (line 104b) (“native of the monster race”), “wergan gastes” (line 133a) (“enemy-stranger”), “æglaca” (line 159a) (“miscreant”), “deorc deaþ-scau” (line 160a) (“the dark shadow of death”), etc. Regarding his intact, living body’s various parts, no words, phrases, or odd facts point to them having an existence as fashioned items. The poem simply refers to the malevolent figure’s “folmum” (line 722b) (“hands”), for example, when Heorot’s door opens at his touch. And though Grendel’s “eagum” (“eyes”) do prove unusual in that they contain “ligge gelicost leoht unfæger” (“a horrid light most like that of flames”) (lines 726b-727), they do not resemble, say, expertly-cut jewels set into fine metalwork, as in the case of the Exeter Book’s Phoenix. Similarly, the poem offers no sense that the anatomical mass consisting of the monster’s hand, arm, and shoulder, after the hero rips this mass from Grendel proper but before he displays it in Heorot, shares a blurred line with a highly-wrought object of some type. For one thing, the description of the brutal tearing seemingly demonstrates that the monster’s organic nature is at the fore during this act: “Licsar gebad atol æglæca; him on eaxl e wearð syndolh sweotol, seonowe onsprungon, burston banlocan” (lines 815b-818a) (“The loathsome miscreant being met with a terrible body-wound; a very evident and grave wound came to be on his shoulder, sinews ripped, the bone-structure burst”) (Bosworth-Toller “helle” s.v. “hel”; “mære”; “mearc-stapa”; “fifel”; “eard” I; “wergan” s.v. “wergenga”; “gastes” s.v. “gæst” II; “æglaca” s.v. “agleca”; “deorc”; “deaþ-scau”; “folmum” s.v. “folm”; “eagum” s.v. “eage” I; “ligge” s.v. “lig”; “leoht”; “unfæger”; “licsar”; “gebad” s.v. “gebidan”; “atol”; “weard” s.v. “weorþan” I; “sindolh” s.v. “sindolh”; “sweotol” I; “seonowe” s.v. “seonu”; “onsprungon” s.v. “onspringan” I; “burston” s.v. “berstan” I; “banlocan” s.v. “banoca”). This account clearly depicts the monster’s tissues as the expected biological ones for a living creature (sinew and bone), with the tissues behaving in a predictable way when subjected to powerful opposing forces (i.e., they rip, burst, and suffer wounding). For the poem to present the living Grendel and the two anatomical pieces removed from him by Beowulf (i.e., the hand-arm-shoulder assembly and the head) as organic before the displaying of the pieces in Heorot but then to conflate the pieces with manmade objects after the displaying arguably reinforces the overall sense of Beowulf as the revealer of Grendel’s craftwork nature.
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