

# MEDIEVAL CLOTHING AND TEXTILES



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Edited by  
Monica L. Wright

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# Medieval Clothing and Textiles

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# Medieval Clothing and Textiles

Volume 16

*edited by*

MONICA L. WRIGHT

*with the assistance of*

ROBIN NETHERTON

and

GALE R. OWEN-CROCKER

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## Contributors

MONICA L. WRIGHT (Editor) is the Granger and Debaillon Professor of French and Medieval Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her publications include the book *Weaving Narrative: Clothing in Twelfth-Century Romance* (2009) and many articles on the use of clothing in medieval French literature. She wrote a chapter on literary representations of clothing in literature for the “Medieval Age” volume of the six-volume *Cultural History of Dress and Fashion* (2016). Her most recent article in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* (in volume 14) examined the French literary sources for the term *bliaut*.

MELANIE SCHUESSLER BOND is Professor of Costume Design at Eastern Michigan University and author of *Dressing the Scottish Court, 1543–1553: Clothing in the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* (2019). Her scholarly work focuses on clothing in England, Scotland, France, and the Low Countries in the mid- to late sixteenth century. In addition to research and writing, she designs costumes for both academic and professional theatre. Professional costume design credits include shows for the Michigan Shakespeare Festival, Williamston Theatre (Williamston, Michigan), Tipping Point Theatre (Northville, Michigan), Crosswell Opera House (Adrian, Michigan), Skylight Opera Theatre (Milwaukee), and the Milwaukee Shakespeare Company.

JOHN BLOCK FRIEDMAN is a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Ohio State University and the author, editor, or associate editor of numerous books and articles. Recent scholarship includes (with Kristen Figg and Kathrin Giogoli) *Book of Wonders of the World: Secrets of Natural History, BNF MS fr.22971: Studies and Translation of the Facsimile Edition* (2018). His past articles in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* have addressed such topics as medieval hair removal, fashions for animals, and dagged clothing. He is currently exploring the topic of the mirror, especially carved ivory cosmetic mirrors, and Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*.

M. WENDY HENNEQUIN is Professor of English and Women’s Studies at Tennessee State University, where she teaches writing, women’s studies, and literature classes ranging from World Literature I to Medieval Literature to Shakespeare to *Harry Potter*. She has published frequently on Old English literature, particularly *Beowulf*, pedagogy, and medieval literature. Her current research projects include a pedagogical project on

## Contributors

*Harry Potter* and a study of Anglo-Norman power couple Earl Waltheof and Countess Judith, the last Anglo-Saxon earl and niece of William the Conqueror (collaborating with historian Elizabeth Dachowski). This is her first foray into textile studies.

CYNTHIA JACKSON is a professional embroiderer, international tutor, and independent researcher based in Ottawa, Canada. As a maker, her specialist interest is the investigation and reconstruction of sixteenth-century embroidery. Her research focuses on professional Tudor embroiderers and the impact of their craft on the material culture of early modern England.

MARK D. JOHNSTON is professor emeritus of Modern Languages at DePaul University in Chicago. His publications include numerous studies and translations of medieval conduct literature, the Catalan lay philosopher Ramon Llull, and the Spanish prelate Hernando de Talavera.

MAGGIE KNEEN is a professional illustrator with an M.A. in Graphic Design from the Central School of Art and Design (now Central St. Martin's) and an internationally known children's book illustrator and author. For her second Master's degree at the University of Manchester, she wrote her dissertation on the architectural structures of the Bayeux Tapestry. She now works principally as an illustrator for archaeologists and historians of art and architecture, reenvisioning earlier stages of Anglo-Saxon buildings such as Deerhurst Church and the structures at the seventh-century royal palace of Yeavinger.

ROBIN NETHERTON (Book Reviews Editor) is a costume historian specializing in Western European clothing of the Middle Ages and its interpretation by artists and historians. Since 1982, she has given lectures and workshops on practical aspects of medieval dress and on costume as an approach to social history, art history, and literature. Her published articles have addressed such topics as fourteenth-century sleeve embellishments, the cut of Norman tunics, and medieval Greenlanders' interpretation of European female fashion. A journalist by training, she also works as a professional editor.

GALE R. OWEN-CROCKER is Professor Emerita of the University of Manchester. Her recent publications on dress and textiles include *Refashioning Medieval and Early Modern Dress: A Tribute to Robin Netherton*, with Maren Clegg Hyer (2019); *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe*, with Elizabeth Coatsworth (2018); *Making Sense of the Bayeux Tapestry: Readings and Reworkings*, with Anna Henderson (2016); articles on "Dress" (2014) and "Textiles" (2012) in Oxford Bibliographies Online: Medieval Studies, both with Elizabeth Coatsworth; The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing in Britain ca. 700–1450, a database available at <http://lexisproject.arts.manchester.ac.uk>; *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A*

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*Multilingual Sourcebook*, with Louise Sylvester and Mark Chambers (2014); *Encyclopedia of Dress and Textiles in the British Isles c. 450–1450*, with Elizabeth Coatsworth and Maria Hayward (2012); and *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers* (2012).

GIT SKOGLUND is a textile historian based in Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research focuses on ethnological and botanical aspects of textile production, with special depth on hemp and hops textiles. Her scholarship has been awarded funding from the Agnes Geijer Foundation for Nordic textile research.

JOHN SLEFINGER holds a Ph.D. in Medieval Literature and is a humanities teacher at the Derryfield School in Manchester, New Hampshire. After completing a dissertation on the relationship between material culture and allegory, he has focused on the ambiguity of Langland's representation of clothing in *Piers Plowman*. He is also interested in the theatricality of fifteenth-century mystery plays, focusing specifically on the tension between the moral valances attached to costume in the text and the audience members' dress.

## Preface

Volume 16 continues this journal's tradition of publishing a wide range of studies from a variety of disciplines, and this particular volume boasts an unusually large number of images. The seven essays extend chronologically from the tenth through the sixteenth century and cover a wide geography: Scandinavia to Spain, with stops in England and the Low Countries.

M. Wendy Hennequin provides a detailed examination of lexical items for banners in the Old English *Beowulf* and argues that the prevalence of such terms in the poem attest to the cultural importance of banners for the society, as well as their poetic significance.

Maggie Kneen and Gale R. Owen-Crocker propose a fascinating new theory about the composition of the Bayeux Tapestry: They present evidence that multiple embroiderers used curved templates to draw the tapestry's design, which contributed to the uniform appearance.

Git Skoglund's essay opens a previously under-studied line of inquiry into the cultivation of hemp for textile production in medieval Scandinavia and provides an overview of conditions for and practices involved in growing hemp and its transformation into textiles.

By reading the character of Lady Mede (*Piers Plowman*) in the context of costume history, John Slefinger brings new depth to our understanding of her allegorical clothing and how fourteenth-century English authors used allegory generally.

By placing Spanish *verdugados* (farthingales) in their historical context and analyzing their use as political propaganda, Mark D. Johnston illustrates how Juana of Portugal's detractors used her clothing to demean her and turned their derision to the article of clothing itself.

John Bloch Friedman and Melanie Schuessler Bond provide an analysis of the sartorial imagery on a Dutch tabletop painting (attributed to Bosch) depicting the Seven Deadly Sins, arguing that the specific styles shown offer a complex message that conveys at once desirability and outmodedness, which comments upon fashion's fickleness.

In her article on her reconstruction of a sixteenth-century ceremonial crown from one of the London livery companies, Cynthia Jackson furnishes rich details about materials and techniques that the embroiderers used during the period to produce such ceremonial objects.

Professor Monica L. Wright became the sole editor for the current volume as founding editors Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker assumed an advisory

## Preface

role, for which Monica remains extremely grateful. Monica will be joined by a new collaborator in 2020. Robin and Gale joined the journal's editorial board and remain General Editors of the affiliated book series *Medieval and Renaissance Clothing and Textiles* (see below).

The editor thanks the board members and the many other scholars who have generously devoted their time and expertise to review article submissions and consult with authors.

We continue to consider for publication in this journal both independent submissions and papers read at sessions sponsored by DISTAFF (Discussion, Interpretation, and Study of Textile Arts, Fabrics, and Fashion) at the international congresses held annually in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Leeds, England. Proposals from potential conference speakers should be sent to [robin@netherton.net](mailto:robin@netherton.net) (for Kalamazoo) or [gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com](mailto:gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com) (for Leeds). Potential authors for *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* should read our author guidelines at <http://www.distaff.org/MCTguidelines.pdf>, and send a 300-word synopsis to [mlwright@louisiana.edu](mailto:mlwright@louisiana.edu).

Authors of larger studies interested in submitting a monograph or collaborative book manuscript for our subsidia series, *Medieval and Renaissance Clothing and Textiles*, should apply using the publication proposal form on the website of our publisher, Boydell & Brewer, at [http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/authors\\_submit\\_proposal.asp](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/authors_submit_proposal.asp). We encourage potential authors to discuss their ideas with the General Editors, Robin Netherton ([robin@netherton.net](mailto:robin@netherton.net)) and Gale Owen-Crocker ([gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com](mailto:gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com)), before making a formal proposal.



It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Michelle (Shelly) Nordtorp-Madson on November 2, 2019, after a long illness. She was Professor Emerita and Chief Curator at the Department of Art History at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she taught in the Department of Art History. With a special interest in medieval Scandinavia, she worked on the medieval garments from Herjolfsnæs, Greenland, and on dress in Scandinavian literature and medieval art. She was a member of our Editorial Board since the inception of *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, wrote book reviews for us, and was active in advising the editors on submissions to the journal. She worked valiantly through illness and medical treatment to complete and revise her chapter “Dress, Disguise, and Shapeshifting in *Nibelungenlied* and *Volsunga Saga*,” which was published in *Refashioning Medieval and Early Modern Dress: A Tribute to Robin Netherton* (Boydell, 2019) just two weeks after her death.

# Anglo-Saxon Banners and *Beowulf*

M. Wendy Hennequin

The poem *Beowulf* is obsessed with treasures. The poet describes hoards in Hrothgar's hall Heorot, in Grendel's mother's underground hall, and in the dragon's hall under the mountain. Many episodes of the poem concern treasure exchange: Hrothgar builds Heorot in order to give treasures; he rewards Beowulf with magnificent treasures; Beowulf gives a sword to a coast guard; Beowulf and his king Hygelac exchange treasures; and the dying Beowulf gives treasures to his loyal thane Wiglaf and his people. Only a few treasures are specifically described, however, generally heirloom swords, and these descriptions usually concern their martial quality rather than their appearance: Hrunting, for instance, is decorated, but more importantly, has never failed in battle and Beowulf judges it to be a good sword, though it could not cut Grendel's mother.<sup>1</sup> Yet the *Beowulf* poet gives pointed time and attention to *segnas*—banners or military standards.<sup>2</sup> The first of these *segnas* is raised above Scyld Scefing's body on his funeral ship (47b). Hrothgar gives an heirloom banner to Beowulf as a reward for defeating Grendel; Beowulf later re-gifts this banner to his own king, Hygelac (1020–22a and 2152). Wiglaf finds the third prominent banner in the dragon's hoard (2767–71a). The poet mentions banners elsewhere briefly in important episodes of the feud between the Swedes and Geats (1202–07b; 2957b–60; 2500–2508a). In a poem that values treasures, but specifies very few, banners, like swords, are meant to be noticed.

This article is an expanded version of a paper presented in May 2018 at a DISTAFF session at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan. The author wishes to thank Robin Netherton for the suggestion to submit to this session; Monica Wright for her interest, encouragement, and feedback; and Elizabeth Dachowski, Sara Burdorff, and Sarah Barott for their feedback and suggestions.

- 1 *Beowulf*, in Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lines 1455–64 and 807–12. Subsequent references to the poem will be made parenthetically by line number. Translations of Old English texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, ed., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (1898, repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 857.



The pointed and repeated mention of these banners, their association with royalty and gift-giving, and the detailed description of the dragon's banner argue that banners carried some cultural weight and textual importance. Yet, while *Beowulf's* swords are often discussed in literary criticism, the banners have largely gone unstudied. Analyses of these banners, such as those by John Hill, Barbara Raw, and Cameron McNabb, consist of a few sentences in larger discussions of treasure.<sup>3</sup> I have found little analysis of Anglo-Saxon banners in archeological or textile research—again, a few sentences based on primary literary and historical sources. Derek Renn's discussion of flags in the Bayeux Tapestry and Robert W. Jones's studies of banners and pre-heraldic military identification offer more information, but these studies focus on post-Conquest sources.<sup>4</sup> Given their prominence, however, *Beowulf's* banners deserve the same sort of detailed examination that scholars have given to the poem's swords, for banners serve a similar function. Just as the swords in *Beowulf* indicate royalty and succession<sup>5</sup> and warrior prowess,<sup>6</sup> the banners in *Beowulf*—and in Old English texts generally—signal royalty, military might, and conquest, and like the swords, the giving, receiving, and finding of these banners indicate not only the recognition of prowess but royal succession.

BANNERS IN ANGLO-SAXON DICTION, LITERATURE,  
AND MATERIAL CULTURE

*Beowulf* uses three words for banners: *segn*, *cumbol*, and *beacen*. *Segn* occurs most commonly, seven times, once in the kenning “eaforhæafodsegn” [boar's-head banner] (47b, 1021a, 1204a, 2767b, 2776b, 2958b, and 2152b). *Cumbol* occurs twice, once in

3 John M. Hill, “Beowulf and the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture,” *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 11 (1982): 177–97, at 183–92; Barbara Raw, “Royal Power and Royal Symbols in *Beowulf*,” *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. M. O. H. Carter (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1992), 167–74, at 172–73; Cameron Hunt McNabb, “Eldum Unnyt: Treasure Spaces in *Beowulf*,” *Neophilologus* 95, no. 1 (2011): 145–64, at 152–56.

4 Derek Renn, “Burhgeat and Gonfanon: Two Sidelights from the Bayeux Tapestry,” in *Anglo-Norman Castles*, ed. Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003), 69–90; Robert W. Jones, “Identifying the Warrior on the Pre-Heraldic Battlefield,” *Anglo-Norman Studies XXX* (2008), 154–67; Robert W. Jones, *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2015).

5 M. J. Swanton, *Crisis and Development in Germanic Society 700–800: Beowulf and the Burden of Kingship* (Göppingen, Germany: Kümmerle Verlag, 1982), 115; Hill, “Beowulf and the Danish Succession,” 183–85, 192–93; Robert Payson Creed, “*Beowulf's* Fourth Act,” in *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*, ed. John Miles Foley, J. Chris Womack, and Whitney A. Womack (New York: Garland, 1992), 85–109, at 194.

6 Swanton, *Crisis and Development*, 99; J. D. A. Ogilvy, “Unferth: Foil to *Beowulf*?” *PMLA* 79, no. 4 (1964): 370–75, at 372; Judy King, “Transforming the Hero: *Beowulf* and the Conversion of Hunferth,” in *The Hero Recovered: Essays on Medieval Heroism in Honor of George Clark*, ed. Robin Waugh and James Weldon (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2010), 47–64, at 50.

line 1022a in the kenning “hildecumbor” [war-banner], and once in 2505b, where the Frisian champion Dæghrefn is designated as the “cumbles hyrde” [banner’s guardian]. *Beacen* occurs only once, in reference to the banner in the dragon’s hoard (2777a). *Segn*, *cumbol*, and *beacen* also occur as variations, or poetic appositives, of each other. The “segn” that Hrothgar gives Beowulf (1021a) is called “hildecumbor” in the next line (1022a) and the “segn” that Wiglaf finds in the hoard (2767b) is the “beacna beorhtost” [brightest of banners] a few lines later (2777a). The poet’s use of these three words as variations shows that the words at least denote the same objects or class of objects and that the audience would have recognized these words as synonyms, probably bearing different connotations.

*Segn*, *cumbol*, and *beacen* denote banners elsewhere in Old English, but Anglo-Saxon writers also use several other words to signify banners: *þuf*, *fana* (also spelled *fane* and *fanu*), and *tacn*. All six of these words occur both alone and in kennings such as “eaforhæafodsegn,” “hildecumbor,” “sigepuf” [victory-banner], “guðfana” [battle-banner], and “tacnberend” [banner-bearer or standard-bearer]. These banner words occur commonly: A search of *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* for these words and their kennings initially yielded 238 pages of results.<sup>7</sup> These results were artificially inflated; duplicates were common, as a search for *segn* would also include its kennings, and several of the banner words have other meanings. *Segn*, *tacn*, and *beacen* can all mean “sign” or “token” or even “miracle” as well as “banner,” and *beacen* can also denote “beacon” in the modern sense; in its kenning *herebeacen*, it may mean “signal fire” as well as “army-banner.”<sup>8</sup> To further confuse the matter, *segn* and *tacn*, with appropriate verbal endings and/or in variant spellings (*segen* and *tacen*), form part of the conjugations of common verbs *seon* (to see), *tacan* (to take), and *tacnian* (to betoken). Still, after eliminating the duplicates and the irrelevant instances, we are left with enough occurrences of these six banner words and their kennings to draw some conclusions about the use of these words, the objects they signified, and the cultural importance of those objects.

The first conclusion that we can draw is that all six of these words—*segn*, *cumbol*, *beacen*, *þuf*, *tacn*, and *fana*—denote the same object and class of objects. We have seen that *segn*, *beacen*, and *cumbol* refer to the same objects in *Beowulf*, and this pattern is borne out elsewhere. In *Exodus*, for instance, *segn* and *beacen* both refer to the banner of the tribe of Judah: “Hæfdon him to segne, þa hie on sund stigon, / Ofer bordhreoðan beacen aræred” [They had as their banner, when they rose to the sea, / Over the shield-phalanx, a banner raised up].<sup>9</sup> Also in *Exodus*, *segn* and *cumbol* both refer to the Pharaoh’s banners:

7 Antonette diPaolo Healey, John Price Wilkin, and Xin Xiang, eds., *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009; hereafter *DOE Corpus*), <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus>.

8 Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 532.

9 *Exodus*, in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George Phillip Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 91–107, at lines 319–20. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically by line number.

Him þær segncyning wið þone segn foran,  
manna þengel, mearcþreate<sup>10</sup> rad;  
guðweard gumena grimhelm gespeon,  
cyning cinberge, (cumbol lixton),  
wiges on wenum ... (172–76a)

[There the banner-king, with the banner before him,  
The prince of men, rode with the border-troop,  
The battle-guardian of warriors fastened his helmet,  
The king his chin-strap; the banners shone  
In expectation of battle.]

Once again, we have these three words denoting the same objects; the vocabulary varies to fulfill the alliteration. Furthermore, *þuf*, *fana*, and *tacn* also refer to these objects. In *Exodus*, the Pharaoh's banners signified by *segn* and *cumbol* in lines 172b and 175b are called *þufas* earlier: “þufas þunian” [Banners crashed] (159a). *þuf* and *segn* are used in variation in Cynewulf's *Elene*: “þa pæs þuf hafon, / Seʒn for speotum, sigeleoð ʒalen”<sup>11</sup> [Then was the banner lifted, / The banner before the troops, the victory-song sung]. This variation shows clearly that *segn* and *þuf* refer to the same object—in this case, a representation of the cross, probably on a banner.<sup>12</sup> In the Old English *Judith*, the “sigepufas” [victory-banners] which the Hebrews bear to battle are called “guðfanum” [battle-banners] less than ten lines later:

Stopon cynerofe,  
secgas ond gesiðas, bæron sigepufas<sup>13</sup>  
[The royally brave ones advanced,  
Warriors and companions bore victory banners]  
...  
syððan Ebreas  
under guðfanum gegon hæfdon  
to ðam fyrdwicum. (218b–20a)  
[... after the Hebrews  
Under battle-banners had gone forth  
To the army-dwelling.]

10 Bosworth and Toller (*Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 673) gloss *mearc* not only as “limit,” “boundary,” and “territory,” but also as “mark, ensign.” Possibly “mearcþreate” here means “banner-troop,” but I have not found other instances where “mearc” may mean banner.

11 Cynewulf, *Cynewulf's Elene*, ed. P. O. E. Gradon (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1977), lines 124b–25. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically by line number.

12 In *Elene* (99–104), Constantine orders that a “tacn” be made of the “beacen” he saw in his dream of the cross. In other versions of the story, Constantine has the cross painted on shields, but Cynewulf does not specify in his version what form the “tacn” takes. Given the diction here, the implication may be that Constantine is not only *constructing* a banner (*tacn*), but that the cross in his dream was presented as a banner (*beacen*); in line 123b, this object with the cross is later called a “þuf.”

13 *Judith*, ed. Mark Griffith (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997), lines 200b–201. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically by line number.

So *guðfana*, a compound of *fana* and *guð* [battle], evidently also denotes the same objects as *þuf*, *segn*, *cumbol*, and *beacen*. *Tacn*, too, can signify these objects, as we find in the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*:

It ðæt sægd, ðæt in ða tid swa micel sib wære in Breotone æghwyder ymb, swa Eadwines rice wære .... Swelce he hæfde swa micle heannisse in þæm cynerice, þætte nales þæt aan þæt heo segn fore him bæron æt gefeohhte, ac eac swylce in sibbe tiide, þær he rad betweoh his hamum oðþe be tuunum mid his þegnum, ge þeah he eode, þæt him mon symle þæt tacn beforan bær.<sup>14</sup>

[It is said that in those times, there was such great peace in Britain, anywhere Eadwine's rule was .... He had such great highness in the kingdom, that not only did they bear a banner before him in battle, but also in peacetime, wherever he rode, among his villages or towns with his thanes, and even if he walked, someone always bore the banner before him.]

Here, the *segn* becomes not a *cumbol* or a *fana* or *guðfana*, but a *tacn*, a word that can also mean "token" or "sign."<sup>15</sup> Oddly enough, the Anglo-Saxon translator of Bede uses the word *tacn* here to translate *tufa* from the original Latin text:

... semper antecedere signifer consuesset; nec non et incedente illo ubilibet per plateas, illud genus uexilli, quod Romani tufam, Angli appellant thuuf, ante eum ferri solebat.<sup>16</sup>

[... the royal standard was always borne before him. Even when he passed through the streets on foot, the standard known to the Romans as a *Tufa* and to the English as a *Tuf*, was carried in front of him.]<sup>17</sup>

In Latin, the *signifer* of the first clause becomes a *uexilla* in the second, and then a *tufa*, which Bede specifically informs us, is called a *thuuf* (transliterating *þuf*) in English. Yet the Anglo-Saxon translator renders the *tufa* not as *þuf*, but as *tacn*. We can therefore add *tacn* to our list of Old English words referring to banners and standards. Table 1.1 shows the relationships between these Old English words, but to use mathematical shorthand, *segn* = *cumbol* = *þuf* = *fana* = *beacen* = *tacn*.

An examination of Latin glosses, as appears in table 1.2, confirms that these six Old English words indeed refer to the same objects or class of objects. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* and the *DOE Corpus* both give multiple examples of *segn* glossing the Latin *vexilla* (also spelled *uexilla*) and *labarum*.<sup>18</sup> But these two sources and the Bosworth-Toller

14 Thomas Miller, ed., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: N. Trübner, 1890), 144–46; available online at the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/oldenglish-versio01bede>, accessed May 1, 2018.

15 Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 966–67.

16 Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, ed. Charles Plummer (1898), book 2, chap. 16; available online at The Latin Library, [www.thelatinlibrary.com/bede.html](http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/bede.html), accessed March 19, 2018.

17 Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin, 1968), 132.

18 Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 857; *DOE Corpus*.

Table 1.1: Banner words and sample variations in Anglo-Saxon texts

This table represents a sampling of poetic variations and translations and is by no means comprehensive or complete. Poetic compounds are listed under the main word (e.g., *sigepuf* is listed under *puf*).

Word for banner	Occurrences, including kennings	Variations, including kennings
segn	Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> 144, 184 <i>Beowulf</i> 47b, 1021a, 1204a, 2152b, 2767b, 2776b, 2958b <i>Elene</i> 124a <i>Exodus</i> 172a, 172b, 302a, 585b <i>Poetical Dialogues of Salomon and Saturn</i> 444a	tacn (Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> 146) hildecumbor ( <i>Beowulf</i> 1022a) hondwundra mæst ( <i>Beowulf</i> 2768b) beacna beorhtost ( <i>Beowulf</i> 2777a) þuf ( <i>Elene</i> 123b)
cumbol	<i>Andreas</i> 4b, 1204a <i>Beowulf</i> 1022a, 2505b <i>Elene</i> 25a, 76a, 107a, 259a <i>Exodus</i> 175b <i>Judith</i> 332a	segn ( <i>Beowulf</i> 1021a, <i>Exodus</i> 172b) beacen ( <i>Elene</i> 109a)
þuf	<i>Elene</i> 123b <i>Exodus</i> 160a, 342a <i>Judith</i> 201b	segn ( <i>Elene</i> 124a)
fana / fanu	<i>Exodus</i> 249b <i>Prose Dialogue of Salomon and Saturn</i> 170	beama ( <i>Exodus</i> 250a)
guðfana	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> MS B 879 <i>Judith</i> 219a Orosius, <i>History</i> 84, 136	
beacen	<i>Beowulf</i> 2777a <i>Elene</i> 109a, 162b, 168b, 974a <i>Exodus</i> 320b	segn ( <i>Beowulf</i> 2776b, <i>Exodus</i> 319a) tacn ( <i>Elene</i> 164a)
tacn	Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> 146 <i>Elene</i> 164a	beacen ( <i>Elene</i> 162b) segn (Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> 144)

Sources: Poetic works are cited by line number. Prose works (Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; Orosius, *History*; and *Prose Dialogue of Salomon and Saturn*) are cited by page number of the editions referenced in the accompanying article (see notes 14, 29, 30, and 34, respectively).

*Supplement* also tell us that *guðfana* and *fana* also translate these two Latin words.<sup>19</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* lists *vexilla* as a Latin gloss for *tacn*, *beacen*, and *þuf* as well.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the *DOE Corpus* gives multiple examples of *tacnberend*, *tacnboran*(n), and *segnboran*(n) [banner-bearer or standard-bearer] glossing the Latin *uexillarii* and *signif-*

19 *DOE Corpus*; T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of Joseph Bosworth: A Supplement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 490.

20 Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 69, 966, 1075.

## Banners and Beowulf

Table 1.2: Latin glosses for banner words in Anglo-Saxon texts

These are examples of words used by Anglo-Saxon writers to gloss or translate Latin texts. This list is by no means comprehensive or complete.

<i>Latin text</i>	<i>Old English glosses</i>
labarum <sup>a</sup>	fana (DOE “fana”) guðfana (BT Supp 490, DOE “guðfana”) segn (BT 857, DOE Corpus)
signa	guðfana (BT 493)
signum militare	cumbol (BT 174)
tufa <sup>b</sup>	tacn (Bede 146)
uexilla, vexilla <sup>c</sup>	beacen (BT 69) fana (BT 270, DOE “fana”) guðfana (BT Supp 490, DOE “guðfana”) segn (BT 857, DOE Corpus) tacn (BT 966) þuf (BT 1075)

- a The *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* entry for *guðfana* and *BT Supp* (490) note several instances where *labarum* glosses both *segn* and *guðfana*.
- b The Latin version of the *Ecclesiastical History* says this is a kind of banner called *thuuf* in English.
- c The *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* also gives examples of glosses of *tacnboran/tacnberend* and *segnboran/segnbora* for *uexillarii* and *signiferi*.

### Sources:

*Bede*: Thomas Miller, ed., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: N. Trübner, 1890); available online at the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/oldenglishversio01bede>, accessed May 1, 2018.

*BT*: Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, ed., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (1898, repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

*BT Supp*: T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of Joseph Bosworth: A Supplement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

*DOE*: Angus Cameron et al., eds., *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, online ed. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe>.

*DOE Corpus*: Antonette diPaolo Healey, John Price Wilkin, and Xin Xiang, eds., *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus>.

*eri* [standard-bearer].<sup>21</sup> *Cumbol* is glossed as *signum militare*,<sup>22</sup> another Latin synonym for a banner or standard. As these words are used interchangeably in Old English and render synonymous Latin words into Old English, it follows that *segn*, *beacen*, *cumbol*, *þuf*, *fana*, and *tacn* are referring to the same object or class of objects.

<sup>21</sup> *DOE Corpus*.

<sup>22</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 174.

These words probably bore different connotations, but the nuances in meaning are difficult to determine. Despite the high number of results in the *DOE Corpus*, we generally do not have enough evidence to determine why one banner word is used instead of another. Often, the banner words used in poetry are determined by alliteration; in *Beowulf*, for instance, the banner words always alliterate, and in the cases of “eāforhēafodsegn” in line 2152b and “hildecumbor” in line 1022a, the poet forms kennings in order to include the banner words in the alliterative structure. Indeed, Anglo-Saxon poets often form kennings of the banner words, often combining the nouns with words for victory, armies, and battle, which add to their connotations in ways accessible to a modern reader. For instance, Judith’s army bears “sigeþufas” [victory-banners] in line 201b of *Judith* before the battle even begins, thus signaling the eventual triumph of the Bethulians over the invading Assyrians.

Still, we can see a few connotative patterns. What we can tell about *segn*, *þuf*, *tacn*, and *beacen* comes mostly from context. *Segn* seems to be the most commonly used word for banner and is therefore probably the most generic term. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* posits that a *þuf* bore a tuft of feathers on the top;<sup>23</sup> Michael D. J. Bintley theorizes that this tuft might have been not feathers, but tree branches.<sup>24</sup> Some archaeologists believe that the iron stand at the Sutton Hoo burial might have been a *þuf*.<sup>25</sup> Whatever its configuration, *þuf* clearly designated a particular type of banner, but one that could also be called a *segn*, since, as we have seen, the words are used as appositives. The translation of Bede quoted above indicates that a *þuf* could also be a *tacn*, but given the more common definitions of *tacn* as a sign or a symbol,<sup>26</sup> *tacn* may suggest identification. In the quotation from Bede cited above, Eadwine’s banner always travels with him and precedes him in his travels; it is his symbol and part of his royal iconography, as are objects such as the whetstone scepter found at Sutton Hoo.<sup>27</sup> The connection of a banner to a particular person is consistent with Jones’s assertion that banners were used as identification before the advent of heraldry.<sup>28</sup> *Beacen*, on the other

23 *Ibid.*, 1075.

24 Michael D. J. Bintley, “Recasting the Role of Sacred Trees in Anglo-Saxon Spiritual History: The South Sandbach Cross ‘Ancestors of Christ’ Panel in Its Cultural Contexts,” in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 211–27, at 223–24.

25 Angela Care Evans, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* (London: British Museum Press, 1986), 85; Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 27, 169. It is important to note, however, that the function of the stand has not been conclusively determined; the British Museum website identifies this object only tentatively as “standard?”; “The Sutton Hoo Standard,” [www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=88889&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=88889&partId=1), accessed June 30, 2019. Evans reports several other theories about its function, but concludes that “with no direct documentary evidence, and no parallels, the interpretation of the stand can never be more than theoretical” (85).

26 Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 966–67.

27 Evans, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, 83–85; Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground*, 170.

28 Jones, “Identifying,” 157–58, 166; Jones, *Bloodied Banners*, 38.

hand, probably suggests brightness, a connotation often underscored by surrounding adjectives. In *Beowulf*, for instance, the *segn* found in the dragon's hoard is the "bēacna beorhtost" [Brightest of banners] (2777a), and in *Elene*, in which the cross becomes a banner or a standard, it is associated with "leoht" [light] (163a). This brightness may be connected with the golden materials used for banners, which I discuss below.

Two of the banner words, *guðfana* and *cumbol*, seem to carry specifically military connotations. *Guðfana* is often used for banners taken as military trophies. In *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, year 879, for instance,

7 þæs ilcan wintres wæs Inweres broðor 7 Healfdenes on Westsexna rice mid .xxiii. scypa, 7 hine man þær ofsloh 7 .dccc. manna mid him 7 .lx. manna his heres, 7 þær wæs se guþfana genumen ðe hie Hrefn heton<sup>29</sup>

[And that same winter was Ivar's brother and Halfdan's in the kingdom of the West Saxons with twenty-three ships, and someone slew him there, and eight hundred men with him and sixty men of his army, and there the banner which they called the Raven was taken].

Similarly, in the Old English translation of Paulus Orosius's *History*, seven hundred "guðfonena" are seized after one battle, a fact reported with a high casualty count and clearly meant to emphasize the Romans' complete defeat.<sup>30</sup> Since the use of *guðfana* in the *History* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* do not depend on alliteration, we can conclude that the kenning *guðfana* is used for military banners specifically—and prestigious ones at that, since their capture is recorded. *Cumbol*, too, seems to have some military associations, though it is only used in poetry.<sup>31</sup> Most instances of *cumbol* appear in military contexts, such as in *Beowulf* in lines 1022a and 2505b, where Beowulf receives a battle-standard and later kills a standard-bearer; in *Andreas*, where the apostles' spiritual battles and warriors' armies are both accompanied by the *cumbol*,<sup>32</sup> and in *Judith* and *Elene*, where the armies carry *cumbol* (*Judith*, 332a; *Elene*, 25a, 75, 107a, 259a, all in kennings). The examples of *cumbol* are so few, however, that it is difficult to determine anything more specific.

While the connotations of these words are obscure, we can deduce a few important points about the appearance and construction of the banners that *segn*, *cumbol*, *tacn*, *beacen*, *þuf*, and *fana* designated. Granted, there is little discussion of Anglo-Saxon banners in archeological or textile research, and we have no extant examples of these objects. Yet we have several descriptions of banners in the surviving corpus of Old

29 "Manuscript B: Cotton Tiberius A.VI," *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Electronic Edition*, ed. Tony Jebson, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/b/b-L.html>, accessed July 18, 2018.

30 Janet Bately, ed., *The Old English Orosius*, Early English Text Society, supp. ser. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 84.

31 *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, ed. Angus Cameron et al., online ed. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doi>, s.v. "cumbol."

32 Kenneth R. Brooks, ed., *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), lines 4b and 1204a.