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Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum
þēod-cyninga þrým gefrúnon,
 hü ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceapena þrēatum,
monegum mǣgþum meodo-setla oftēah;
egsode Eorle, sydān ērest weard
fēasceaf funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād:
wēox under wolcnun, weorð-myndum þāh,
oþbæt him Æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra
ofer hron-rāde hyran scoilde,
gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!
Dām eafera wæs æfter cennead
geong in geardum, þone God sende
folce tō frōfre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat,
þæt hie ēr drugon aldor-lēase
lange hwīle; him þæs Lif-frēa,
wuldres Wealdend, worold-āre forgeaf;
Bēowulf wæs brēme —blæd wīde sprang—
Scyldes eafera, Scede-landum in.

Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,
fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearne,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
So, the Spear-Danes in days gone by
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
We have heard of those princes’ heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,
the long times and troubles they’d come through
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.
Shield had fathered a famous son:
Beow’s name was known through the north.
And a young prince must be prudent like that,
giving freely while his father lives
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts
wil-gesīpas, þonne wīg cume, lēode gelǣsten; lof-dǣrum sceal in mǣgpa gehwære man geþēon.

Hī dā Scyld gewāt tō gescæp-hwīle, fela-hrōr, fēran on Frēan wǣre.
Hī hyne þā ætbrōron tō brimes farōde, swāse gesīpas, swā hē selfa bēd, þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga, lēof land-fruma lange āhte. Pēr æt hīde stōd hringed-stefna, īsig ond ūt-fūs, æþelinges fǣr; ālēdon þā lēofne þēoden, bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes, mǣrne be mǣste; þær wēs mādma fēla of feor-wegum, fǣtwa, gelǣded. Ne hyrde ic cīmlicor cēol geyrwan hilde-wæpnum ond heado-wǣdum, billum ond byrmum; him on bearne læg mādma mānigo, þā him mid scoldon on flōdes āht feor gewītan.

Nalēs hī hine lēsson làcum tēodan, þēod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon, þe hine æt frumsceafte forð onsendon ānne ofer yōde umbor-wesende. Ðā gyt hī him āsetton segend gyldenne hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran, gēafon on gār-secg; him wēs geōmor sefa, murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon secgan tō sōde, sele-rādende, hæleō under heofenum, hwā þēm hlæste onfēng. Ðā wēs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,
steadfast companions will stand by him
and hold the line. Behaviour that’s admired
is the path to power among people everywhere.

Shield was still thriving when his time came
and he crossed over into the Lord’s keeping.
His warrior band did what he bade them
when he laid down the law among the Danes:
they shouldered him out to the sea’s flood,
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,
laid out by the mast, amidships,
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures
were piled upon him, and precious gear.
I never heard before of a ship so well furbished
with battle tackle, bladed weapons
and coats of mail. The massed treasure
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far
on out into the ocean’s sway.
They decked his body no less bountifully
with offerings than those first ones did
who cast him away when he was a child
and launched him alone out over the waves.
And they set a gold standard up
high above his head and let him drift
to wind and tide, bewailing him
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran
knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.