

Sisam, Kenneth, The Structure of Beowulf (Oxford at the Clarendon Press) 1965

p. 70 Footnote 2 Brodeur, The Art of 'Beowulf', p. 2. That Beowulf is the only long heroic ^{poem} ~~poem~~ to survive from the Anglo Saxon period is not really evidence of its superiority to all other poetry known at that time. Of course, survival depended on somebody ^{valuing} ~~valuing~~ it who was influential enough to secure the making of the first manuscript; and on others who had subsequent copies made. If, as seems probable, the manuscripts were made by / ^{p. 71} scribes employed in the scriptoria of churches, the elevated tone of the poem would be in its favour. The Christian colouring might help, though it was not essential: there is nothing Christian in either of the two tracts - Wonders of the East and Alexander's Letter to Aristotle - which the first hand of the extant manuscript copied immediately before Beowulf, and there is a good deal that is obtrusively heathen in the second of these. But the survival of any old manuscript in Anglo-Saxon would depend more on chance than on literary quality. From the twelfth century to the time of antiquarian collectors in the sixteenth, Beowulf was unintelligible; and if the contents of the codex rather than blind chance were a condition of survival in that period, the rude coloured illustrations to Wonders of the East were more likely to save it.