

A civilized society

Society



A Civilized Society What is the meaning of a society? A historian might say a society is a group of people living in an ordered community that has a hierarchy. An adult might say that a society is a community of people that have certain jobs and a community that has schools for their children to go to. A child might not even know what the meaning of society is. Their answers differ because there is not a book written in history that clearly defines what a society is. But when “ society” is narrowed down into “ civilized” society, it is here that agreements are distinguished.

Most people agree that the time and place they live in at this present moment is civilized, even though spirits are still believed in. This also means that time periods that are not considered “ civilized” in today’s terms, are considered civilized to the people living in that time period. In the book *Beowulf*, a book written in the seventh or eighth century by an anonymous author, there are two societies, the Danes, who reside in Denmark, and the Geats, who reside in southern Sweden.

This book is named after a person; not surprisingly, this person is named Beowulf, a Geat who later becomes the king of the Geats. The Anglo-Saxon society in the book *Beowulf* is civilized because they believe in monsters and their leaders and group members have clear expectations. One might be surprised that a civilized society believes in monsters, however, even societies today believe in monsters through television. Societies today create horror movies purely for entertainment; however, it is a known fact that the monsters in the horror movies are not real.

On that note, the anonymous author of *Beowulf* may have written the book purely for the entertainment of his people, all the while knowing that

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monsters do not exist, after all, it is probably the closest thing his society has to watching a horror movie. Grendel, the first monster Beowulf fights, is “conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain (105-106).” This is physically impossible because Cain is a human and Grendel is an actual monster in the book.

Another fact that Beowulf was written for entertainment purposes is the fact that the author uses suspension of disbelief, meaning that the readers believe things that are impossible in real for the sake of enjoying the book. For example, “[Beowulf] sank through the waves...(1495)” “for hours...(1495)” to fight Grendel’s mother, “the mighty water witch (1519).” This is an example of suspension of disbelief because it is physically impossible for a human to swim under water for hours without breathing.

The Anglo-Saxon society is a civilized society because while today’s society creates horror movies for entertainment, the author creates the book, Beowulf, for the entertainment of his people. As stated above, a society is a community of people that have certain jobs they must perform. This definition of a society is a factor of what a civilized society is. In Anglo-Saxon culture, a leader and his comitatus have clear expectations. In today’s society, a leader leads the country and commands his people through the office of the prime minister.

However, a leader in Anglo-Saxon culture does a little more than leading his country and commanding his people. In the book, Beowulf, there are two main leaders: Hrothgar (a Danish king) and Beowulf. These two leaders have the responsibility of bringing glory for their country. When Hrothgar took the throne after his father, he “led the Danes to such glory that comrades and

kinsmen swore by his sword (65-66). " Beowulf brings glory to his country by killing Grendel, the beast that has been haunting Herot for a long time, and by killing Grendel's mother, " the mighty water witch (1519). Then when Beowulf becomes the king of Geatland, he "...held it long and well (2208). " As a leader has responsibilities, group members also have their responsibilities. In today's society, they are responsible of helping each other, but sometimes they do not always carry out the task. However, a comitatus in Anglo-Saxon society have the responsibility of helping the leader when he needs help. There was only one comitatus in Beowulf and they are Beowulf's men. Beowulf's comitatus are by his side during his three battles. However, Beowulf's comitatus was readily available to help him in one out of the three battles.

During the battle with Grendel, " all of Beowulf's/Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral/Swords raised and ready...(795-796). " This is only battle that Beowulf's comitatus is readily available in to help. During Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, the Danes left the swamp thinking Beowulf had died, but " the Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,/Imagining they saw their lord but not believing/ They would ever see him again(1602-1603). " It is here that we start to see that the role of the comitatus start to change because the comitatus are at shore while Beowulf was under water, so, if Beowulf eeded their help, they would not be able to help him. In Beowulf's last battle, the battle against the dragon, " none of his comrades/ Came to him, helped him (2596-2597)" when Beowulf could not fight the dragon alone, they also ran away for their lives. At this point in the story, the role of a comitatus is no more. The Anglo-Saxon society is civilized only when the

leaders and team members, the comitatus, carry out responsibilities. The Anglo-Saxon society is civilized because they believe in monsters through stories, and their leaders and comitatus have responsibilities, although sometimes the comitatus do not perform their responsibility.

It is because they do not perform their duty in the battle with the dragon that the age of warriors ends. One can argue that the age of warriors is a civilized time period, however, when the comitatus ran away from the battle, it is there that signs of an uncivilized civilization is seen. Therefore, it can be said that “ now the giving of swords, of golden/ Rings and rich estates, is over,/ Ended for you and everyone who shares/ Your blood: when the brave Geats hear/ How you bolted and ran none of your race/ Will have anything left but their lives(2884-2888). ”